

LAUDATO SI' AT 5: RECEPTION IN AFRICA AND DECADE-LONG ACTIONABLE GOALS

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Abstract

This work presents Laudato Si in such a manner that increases our awareness that we co-belong with the earth. Laudato si' calls us to consider what will happen if the earth reaches an irreplaceable level of damage and crises, knowing full well that the earth is a planetary island with no outside help. In an increasingly interconnected world, the discernment of choices before us to creatively discover how we can reconstruct a new world built on holistic co-belonging must be done collegially with scientists, theologians, politicians, and people at the fringes working together. Five years on, the Interdicasterial Working Group of the Holy See on Integral Ecology followed up with Journeying Towards Care For Our Common Home. It submits that we need to collaborate among ourselves to cope with present-day ecological concerns. The expository and analytical methods were employed.

Keywords: Pope Francis, Laudato Si, Africa, Actionable Goals, Ecology, Environment

Introduction

On May 24, 2015, Pope Francis issued the Encyclical letter Laudato si', on the care of the common home.¹ Laudato si' proposes to offer adequate medical care for all, to feed

¹Francis, Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home (Encyclical Letter - includes Discussion Questions) (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., 2015).

international solidarity, to fight the culture of waste, to study, to build together new more equitable economic and financial systems, to commit ourselves to dialogue, peace, and the rejection of violence and war. On May 31, 2020, the Interdicasterial Working Group on Integral Ecology published a document for the commemoration of the fifth anniversary of the encyclical² The document offers the methods and means of implementing the Holy Father's vision of integral ecology. The document is the fruit of "collaboration across all Vatican departments."³ These first-ever guidelines are intended to be operational. The document suggests concrete ways for the Church to implement Pope Francis' encyclical on the care of our common home.

Despite Pope Francis' passionate intervention since *Laudato si'*, the ecological crisis persists, and the state of the earth becomes more precarious. Indeed, as Mark Graham says in *America: The Jesuit Review*, "*Laudato si'* was not enough. The Vatican needs to prioritize climate change."⁴ Therefore, the Interdicasterial Working Group on Integral Ecology offers clearly and concretely what we can do to stimulate conversion, and the action plans we can execute. If we must overcome the ecological crisis, we must embrace interdisciplinary and operational dialogue at all levels, from the most local to the international. Additionally, we must develop an educational process that leads to an integral formation of conscience.⁵

²*Tavolo Interdicasteriale della Santa Sede sullecologia Integrale, In Cammino Per La Cura Della Casa Comune: A cinque anni dalla Laudato si' Celebrazione del V Anniversario dell'Enciclica Laudato si' (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2020).* English edition: "—" Interdicasterial Working Group of the Holy See on Integral Ecology, *Journeying Towards Care For Our Common Home: Five Years after Laudato Si' Celebration of the Fifth Anniversary of the Encyclical Laudato si' (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2020).* I will be referring to the English edition.

³"Vatican issues sweeping new environmental guidelines," Global Catholic Climate Movement, June 18, 2020, accessed November 13, 2020, <https://catholicclimatemovement.global/vatican-issues-sweeping-new-environmental-guidelines/>.

⁴Mark Graham, "Laudato Si was not enough. The Vatican needs to prioritize climate change," *America: The Jesuit Review* (May 18, 2020), <https://www.americamagazine.org/politics-society/2020/05/18/laudato-si-was-not-enough-vatican-needs-prioritize-climate-change>.

⁵Interdicasterial Working Group of the Holy See on Integral Ecology, *Journeying Towards Care*, 6-7.

1. THE RECEPTION OF LAUDATO SI' IN AFRICA

Does it not seem that *Laudato si'* is sounding like a distant echo just five years after, especially in the wake of *Amoris Lætitia*? Although the environmental challenge poses immediate and longstanding dangers, we seem to be responding more vociferously to the dangers spotted in *Amoris Lætitia*. Why? There is an argument from a Harvard psychologist that seems to make sense to me as I ponder on the fate of *pard fs28 Laudato si'* because of *Amoris Lætitia*.

Daniel Gilbert offers four reasons for human inertia and why certain issues provoke decisive moral outrage, while some human-made and structural challenges do not.⁶ First, to be provoked into action, threats must be perceived to be deliberate, aimed at harming the one who feels threatened. Second, the threat must be perceived as an affront to one's moral framework and honour code. Third, the threat must be felt as imminent because of the configuration of the human brain, which is "structured to care more about things occurring today than sometime in a hazy future."⁷ Fourth, following from the previous three conditions, the threat that will elicit swift reactions must be seen to be instantaneous as opposed to a danger that is perceived to be occurring over some time. Prime examples are our reactions between terrorist acts and structural poverty: terrorism provokes emotions that urge one to immediate and decisive actions. On the contrary, more globally impacting threats like ecological crises do not command the same reaction and decisiveness because their effects and dangers are spread over a long period.⁸ Inferred from Gilbert's thesis, the central problem *Laudato si'* addresses does not appear to be as pressing and

⁶Dambisa Moyo, *Winner Take All: China's Race for Resources and What It Means for Us* (London; New York, NY: penguin Books, 2012), 212-13.

⁷*Ibid.*, 212.

⁸*Ibid.*, 213.

dangerous to the Church as the perceived moral ambiguities in *Amoris Lætitia*. While *Amoris Lætitia* is enjoying springtime of theological and pastoral reception all over the world, with several dioceses and Episcopal conferences issuing guidelines for the application of the document, *Laudato si'* appears to be a spent force already before it is even theologically and pastorally received.

As of August 12, 2021, a Google check on *Laudato si'* reveals a news report on *Laudato si'*'s fifth-anniversary commemoration by the Network of Young Catholic Carers for the Environment in Nigeria (NYCCEN) in collaboration with the Nigerian Conservation Foundation (NCF). By jointly hosting a webinar on June 11, 2020, NYCCEN and NCF commemorated the 2020 World Environment Day (WED) and the 5th anniversary of *Laudato si'*⁹. I should say a word about the Network of Young Catholic Carers for the Environment in Nigeria (NYCCEN). This network of young Catholics, who are passionate about the environment, is an initiative of the Catholic Archdiocese of Lagos to domesticate the demands of *Laudato si'*, especially with the youths. Archbishop Alfred Martins officially launched the Network on December 6, 2019.

There is a Facebook page called '*Laudato si* Circle Nigeria'. It has the following as its objective: ¹⁰“This page stands to promote events on every aspect of Pope Francis' encyclical.

⁹“More NGOs to Work with the Youth in Restoring Nature Catholic Archbishop of Lagos,” Nigerian Conservation Foundation, accessed November 13, 2020, <https://www.ncfnigeria.org/component/k2/item/404-more-ngos-to-work-with-the-youth-in-restoring-nature-catholic-archbishop-of-lagos>.

¹⁰Catholic Archdiocese of Lagos, “Circular Letter to All Priests and Religious Working in the Archdiocese of Lagos, and the Lay Faithful (No. 087),” news release, December 2019, <https://lagosarchdiocese.org/newslet/g86.pdf>.

Care for our common home. lifestyle, environment, soil, plants etc.¹¹” This Facebook page belongs to the Global Catholic Climate Movement Nigeria, a member of the Global Catholic Climate Movement’s network, which was established in 2015 to promote the vision of *Laudato si’*. There are officially five member organisations in Nigeria: Climateaid Initiative (Lagos), St. Elizabeth of Hungary Fraternity of Ordo Franciscanus Saecularis (Enugu), and Fr. Christopher Amaubosi (Port Harcourt).¹² Others are Caritas Gboko, Catholic Institute of Development Justice and Peace (Nigeria).¹³ This is quite instructive. The Global Catholic Climate Movement had a modest beginning:

Starting as a small online network of Catholic organizations and leaders from all continents, founded during the Pope’s visit to the Philippines, it has grown into a global movement that brings together a diverse group of over 700 Catholic organizations (religious orders, lay movements, youth groups, Caritas agencies, diocesan offices, etc) and thousands of *Laudato si’* Animators who lead parishes, schools and other communities to ‘Live *Laudato si’*’¹⁴.

Global Catholic Climate Movement has become a global network of 737 Catholic organizations working together to

¹¹ "Laudato Si Circle Nigeria," accessed November 13, 2020, <https://web.facebook.com/Laudato-Si-Circle-Nigeria-108000344410278/about>.

¹² "Movement Map," Global Catholic Climate Movement, accessed November 14, 2020, <https://catholicclimatemovement.global/movement-map/>.

¹³ "Member Organizations," Global Catholic Climate Movement, accessed November 14, 2020, <https://catholicclimatemovement.global/member-organizations/>.

¹⁴ "Intervento del Signor Tomás Insua," in --"---"Holy See Press Office, "Conferenza Stampa di presentazione del Documento dal titolo 'In cammino per la cura della casa comune A cinque anni dalla *Laudato si'*, elaborato dal Tavolo Interdicasteriale della Santa Sede sullecologia integrale," news release, 18.06.2020, <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2020/06/18/0345/00782.html>.

respond to Pope Francis' words: "Hear the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor".

- 1. Ecological Conversion:** Catalyzing a change of heart of the Catholic faithful, to motivate more passionate care for our common home.
- 2. Sustainability:** Working towards greater sustainability in our homes, communities, and institutions to lead by example and demonstrate that change is possible.
- 3. Prophetic Advocacy:** Advocating within and beyond our Church to encourage leaders to care for our common home and those hit first and worst by the climate crisis.

Member Organisations bring *Laudato si'* to life in the following ways:

- Promoting and participating in major annual initiatives such as Earth Day, *Laudato si'* Week, and the Season of Creation along with their networks.
- Supporting outreach efforts by sending emails and by sharing social media posts and blogs.
- Joining online meetings in the lead-up to major initiatives.
- Participating in optional strategy meetings, special projects, or working groups.¹⁶

Only 5 entities and persons from Nigeria are part of this primary Church initiative (movement) to realise the vision of *Laudato si'*. Even Caritas Nigeria is not listed, while several Caritas organisations of other nations have keyed into it. There

¹⁶"Laudato Si Circle Nigeria," accessed November 13, 2020, <https://web.facebook.com/Laudato-Si-Circle-Nigeria-108000344410278/about>

is none in the Federal Capital Territory; none within the Abuja Archdiocese. Caritas Gboko is the only one in the whole of Northern Nigeria. Surely, we can do better. Our reception of this encyclical must be more convincing, practical, and inspiring in the Archdiocese of Abuja, Nigeria's seat of Government. However, the latest entries on Laudato si' and Nigeria, as of August 12, 2021, includes the celebration of Laudato si week by Sisters of St Louis, Nigeria Province, and the latest update on the celebration of the Laudato si week among its members in Africa, including Nigeria.

Still, on my Google search, I found an intervention by Cardinal John Onaiyekan, Archbishop of Abuja, wherein the emeritus Archbishop of the Archdiocese avers that Laudato si is an encyclical for Africa. While several African prelates have been active at conferences before and after the two synods of bishops that led to *Amoris Lætitia*, voicing in strong terms the dangers posed by certain movements regarding church doctrine and discipline at stake, I am not sure we have had the privilege of having the same organisation, articulation and public advocacy regarding the dangers posed by the environmental challenge as developed in *Laudato si'*. If those who live far away from the FCT want to assess the *Laudato si'*'s reception and impact, they will simply do a Google search.

On August 12, 2021, I did a Google search on '*Laudato si* Catholic archdiocese of Abuja'. It yielded just two entries. There is little evidence online that the Archdiocese as a particular church or its various parishes and organisations has done anything in the last five years to promote and realise the vision of *Laudato si'*. Yet, the Archdiocese has done some

things.¹⁹ Of course, some parishes have done one or two things based on anecdotal evidence, or eyewitnesses' accounts. However, these are not known. This shows a weak area that needs to be strengthened going forward. Our parishes do not make sufficient use of cyber technology. How many parishes have functional and interactive websites? How many have ICT units that push out the various activities going on in the archdiocese? It is not too late to restart an active reception of *Laudato si'* in Nigeria and Africa. In the rest of this contribution, I shall present, in broad strokes, the action plans offered by the Working Group of the Holy See on Integral Ecology.

2. The Importance of Networking and Actionable Goals

As stated in the beginning, the Interdicasterial Working Group of the Holy See on Integral Ecology's *Journeying Towards Care For Our Common Home* programmatically sets out to make the Catholic Church and her 1.2b members walk the talk of *Laudato si'*. Vision without strategy is empty. Furthermore, in the spirit of *Fratelli tutti*,²⁰ the five-year plan laid out in this document impresses upon us that it is impossible to carry on with indifference without responding to the sufferings of the poorest of the poor and the exploitation of the common home. The vision laid out in *Laudato si'* and *Journeying Towards Care For Our Common Home* offers "a comprehensive framework for understanding and responding to today's great challenges such as the Covid-19 pandemic and the other environmental, human and socio-economic challenges of our time."²¹ However, to tackle those ecological problems today, the Church accepts that she does not have all the answers. The Church, equally, does not impose its visions and insights. On

the contrary, she always seeks the path of dialogue:

The Church does not have a ready-made list of solutions to provide, much less to impose. Rather, she offers her experience over the centuries and in various geographic contexts, a body of social teachings, contents and principles worked out over time, and a methodology for reflecting together on these solutions: the methodology of dialogue. Genuine willingness to dialogue requires that, without losing their own specific identity, individuals do not insist blindly on their own point of view, no matter how positive or constructive it may be. It is necessary to enter into a conversation with all those men and women, organizations and institutions that share responsibility for the care of our common home, blending different and complementary perspectives: the richness of faith and spiritual traditions, the demands of scientific research, activism and concrete efforts to achieve a fair and sustainable integral human development.¹⁷

Hence, we are called to seek out “COOPERATION BETWEEN CHURCH, GOVERNMENT AND CORPORATE ENTITIES TO IMPROVE THE LIVES OF THE POOR AS INHABITANTS OF THE EARTH”. THERE ARE TWELVE MAJOR AREAS WE MUST SEEK COOPERATION, PARTICULARLY IN THE NEXT FIVE YEARS. The twelve ecological challenges outlined in Journeying Towards Care For Our Common Home¹⁸ were developed from what the Holy Father articulated about the state of our common home in Laudato si’s chapters one and three. These challenges have to do with the kind of choices we make today and for tomorrow. It is about letting go of some things because some other things are very important

¹⁷Ibid., 11-12.

¹⁸Ibid., part II, chaps 1-12.

due to love, just like God gave up his Son out of love for humanity (cf. John 3.16).

Of course, this raises the whole challenge of (re)distribution of the earth's resources and the burdens of cleaning up the earth. Who lets go of what? What are the criteria for letting go? These are tough questions, which no one group or single approach can settle. Yet, Pope Francis in *Laudato si'* has courageously tackled these questions (chapters 5 and 6). He wraps up his proposals with a suggestion about mystical spirituality. This spirituality seeks to articulate what God means for us in this resilient but fragile earth (LS 216-245). This spirituality challenges us to question some of the religious traditions and narratives that have prevailed in our worldview and structures (e.g. a certain interpretation of Judaeo-Christian's 'subdue the earth and conquer it'). We need to collaborate among ourselves from various religions to develop an inter-religious mystical spirituality, which can and should, in turn, inform the kinds of structural changes and social-cultural values to cope with present-day ecological concerns. How should we see the urgency of these crises? It is through the face of Christ in the suffering (the poorest of the earth) due to these ecological problems – these range from kids sacrificed on the altar of progress to indigenous peoples and their cultures that are destroyed like the Amazonians of Brazil and Bushmen of Kalahari desert in Botswana.

Hence, the Holy Father calls for 'ecological conversion' (LS 219). Beyond personal conversion, the question and task are how to target this class or other culpable categories for social and ecological conversion. There appears to be a leeway for

this when LS 219 states that community networks must address social issues rather than individuals. Hence, “ecological conversion needed to bring about lasting change is also a community conversion” (LS 219).

3. TWELVE AREAS OF COOPERATION AND ACTION GOALS

The Twelve areas are power supply, water, energy, ecosystems, deforestation, desertification, land use, and seas and oceans. Others are the circular economy, work, finance, urbanisation, institutions, justice, and public administration, health, and climate.

1. Food and Nutrition

Some of the action plans which we can look at include strengthening the right to food and a balanced diet; contributing to food security; promote adequate access to methods of farming especially for women and young people. Others include training in increased farm production skills, community organisation, especially in rural areas. Cooperate at the level of the production of organic fertilisers and pesticides. Promote inclusive debate of all stakeholders on the subject of innovations in food products deriving from genetic research (GMOs - genetically modified organisms) and fund various lines of independent and interdisciplinary research that can bring new light.

- a) Give particular concern to the areas affected by natural disasters, conflicts, large migratory flows, favouring access to seeds and food, and ensuring the transition between care and rehabilitation to support the recovery

of rural areas after the crisis.

- b) Adopt and disseminate awareness programs, education, and cooperation to avoid food waste, also affecting production chains, distribution, and catering, including post-harvest losses.
- c) Educate the awareness that a diet inadequate, especially during pregnancy and moles first years of life, has repercussions for the entire human development, encouraging a nutritional style quantitatively and qualitatively nutritious, healthy and balanced, based on the best knowledge of the products, their origin, their properties, and the various food traditions.¹⁹

2. Water

There is a growing water shortage around the world today. This is because the population of the world has increased. Also, climate change and pollution have become serious challenges for the poor of the earth getting clean water.²⁰ Accordingly, we are presented with 13 action plans. I will highlight some. These include:

- a) Education and awareness programs about the preciousness of water, so that we are more careful about how we consume water, and promote recycling of water.
- b) We must ensure broader access to water including for farming.
- c) Teach communities how to adequately manage and monitor high-quality rainwater, for irrigation, domestic use, and toilet use.

¹⁹Ibid., 119-23.

²⁰Ibid., 125.

- d) Put pressure through advocacy on the state for a regular and constant supply of economically accessible and affordable water.
- e) Minimise the use of disposable plastics.
- f) Work with various organisations to ensure that access to water is a fundamental and universal human right.
- g) Work towards having water tariffs such that water supply is guaranteed to everyone, even those who are unable to pay it.
- h) Promote "drop by drop" irrigation which allows you to avoid a large waste of water.
- I) Combat the water pollution it reaches rivers, oceans, and groundwater.²¹

3. Energy

yJourneying Towards Care For Our Common Home notes that many people in Africa and their functional buildings like schools and hospitals are still without electricity; they are still using kerosene lamps²². Consequently, we are presented with 13 possible areas of cooperation for action. These include:

- a) Advocacy on behalf of the poor for clean energy, which does not harm the environment.
- b) Promote more clean energy by setting up, for instance, "Diocesan Green Energy Procurement Project...equip all parishes with solar panels...phase out fossil fuels completely and to purchase certified green electricity."²³
- c) "Encourage daily choices, in the styles of life, aimed at decreasing energy consumption, especially in the richest regions of the planet."²⁴

²¹Ibid., 129-31.

²²-Ibid., 134.

²³-Ibid., 136.

²⁴Ibid., 138-41.

4. Ecosystems, Deforestation, Desertification, Land Use

Humans have hurt our common home so much in the last 100 years especially. To turn things around, we need some action plans. We are offered 8 action plans:

- a) Promote lifestyles and consumption patterns, which respect ecosystems and limitations of natural resources.
- b) Promote a widespread education in ecological citizenship.
- c) Encourage non-polluting production systems and based on solidarity and promote reforestation (tree-planting) projects.
- d) Seek ways to indigenous peoples, their human rights, and protect against the abusive exploitation of their territories and the destruction of their habitat.
- e) Address the problem of wastewater management.
- f) Education initiatives for proper soil management, like those promoted by the Namibian Bishops' Conference or in some dioceses of Sierra Leone.²⁵
- g) Protect biodiversity.

5. Seas and Oceans

Out of 12 action plans, under the care of seas and oceans, I shall highlight the following five:

- a) Reduce the amount of polluted water and plastic in the oceans, avoiding using the seas and oceans as a landfill.
- b) Avoid intensive fishing that does not allow regeneration

²⁵Ibid., 146.

and which is uneconomical and destructive, as well as fishing for endangered species.

- c) Adopt rhythms and fishing methods that respect biodiversity, in particular by avoiding fishing trawl, where it can damage the seabed, and
- d) Creating the conditions for traditional fishermen to have access to sufficient fish resources to live on with dignity.
- e) Organise beach/river cleaning activities or in the construction of walls (mangrove plantations, fences, sandbags) to stem the tide of rising sea levels in riverine areas.²⁶

6. Circular Economy

The world today runs an economic system that is based on social exclusion and environmental devastation. It is a system where the richer gets richer and the poor get poorer; and when the poor cry for their right, the rich use the power of the state to crush the poor²⁷. To reverse this unchristian kind of economic model, there are nine (9) action plans. Some of these are:

- a) Ensure a person-centred approach, attentive to the dignity of work, and a just transition of the employment sectors for workers and community.
- b) Promote the reuse and recycling of resources natural already in the economic circuit, encourage reuse of the various organic waste
- c) Stimulate beach and beach cleaning activities.
- d) Aim for the adoption of easy recyclable or biodegradable packaging.
- e) Encourage vehicle sharing (for example with car-sharing

²⁶ "Ibid., 154, 55-57.

²⁷ "Ibid., 159-60.

systems) or other equipment, as well as the second-hand markets.

- f) Promote the process of reforming subsidies to fossil fuels and to taxing the emissions of carbon dioxide (Co²).²⁸
- g) Education activities and collaboration with government agencies” on waste management and pollution.²⁹

7. Work

Work is a significant way “to preserve what has been given us and to cultivate it by cooperating with God.³⁰” Based on this, there are 14 action plans to promote and protect this God-given vocation of work.

- a) Promote decent work and respect workers, rejecting any discrimination, acknowledging the equal dignity of women.
- b) Guarantee a fair salary, adequate to the needs integral of families, countering child labour.
- c) Creating jobs in the most backward countries whose population tends to emigrate and guarantee conditions for these people to live working with dignity.
- d) Promote the social and economic value of motherhood. It can then be better protected.
- e) Allow workers to organise and do hear their voices with spaces for free and respectful discussion.
- f) Prevent and eradicate new forms of slavery, especially human exploitation, human trafficking, and prostitution.
- g) Reaffirm and protect the primacy of the person about machines and new technologies³¹. Create occupational

²⁸ "Ibid., 163-64.

²⁹ "Ibid., 163.

³⁰ "Ibid., 165 [italics original].

³¹ "Ibid., 170-72.

opportunities (especially cooperative and thrift societies) and jobs especially in economically disadvantaged areas, or areas with a high crime rate.³²

- i) Replicating The Future of Work After Laudato Si'. This project “brings together various institutions to strengthen

of cooperation and networking between ecclesial institutions as a means of improving cooperation and knowledge-sharing; 2) reflection and research into current and future challenges so as to develop specific responses in the field of work; 3) skills training for active participation in dialogue on labour issues³³.

8. Finance

We have a financial system that is hooked on short-term profit; it sees profit as an end in itself. Thus, this system excludes proper consideration of the human person, especially the workers. Accordingly, there are possible action plans. Notable among them are the following:

- a) Spread the use of criteria for investments ethical, avoiding the support to companies harmful to human or social ecology (example abortion and weapons), and for environmental ecology (e.g. fossil fuels).
- b) Strengthen awareness through networks and universities to ethics, the common good, and responsibility in the banking and financial intermediation sector.
- c) Increase investment in infrastructure functional to the real economy by banks development multilateral and other financial institutions development, paying

³²Ibid., 168.

³³Ibid., 169.

particular attention to social inclusion and environmental protection.

- d) Reorganize financial institutions and markets because of the common good and integral human development, providing appropriate and effective forms of a supervisory authority.
- e) Adopt investment evaluation criteria more “integral” financials; that is, taking into account the dimensions of environmental sustainability and not just the expectations of future returns (ESG criteria).
- f) Promote responsible investment in terms of social and environmental, evaluating for example the progressive divestment from the fossil fuel sector.
- g) Examine carefully and according to ethical criteria the proposals put forward by civil society and the private sector about crypto-currencies (e.g. the BitCoin) and alternative currencies with local validity.
- h) Bridging the gap between those with access to credit, especially through micro-credit schemes.
- I) Promote the management of the assets of the Church inspired by transparency, coherence, and courage.³⁴
- j) Organise conferences and enlightenment programmes on ethical investments and religious beliefs.³⁵

9. Urbanisation

For years to come, people will keep migrating from the rural areas to the cities and large towns. Unfortunately, these urban centres continue to have limited resources to keep up with rapid growth. To counter the hard life of the cities, there are at least 10 action plans. Some of these are:

³⁴Ibid., 178-80.

³⁵Ibid., 177.

- a) Promote adequate construction to encourage social and economic inclusion and a better connection to the job market, the creation of affordable housing in the cities.
- b) Encourage policies that promote access to clean energy in cities.
- c) To develop an ecological and economically efficient transport system that offers access to the opportunities for everyone (including pedestrians and cyclists), and the strengthening of public transport.
- d) Take into account, in the planning of cities, the increase in public parks, green areas, and urban gardens for social purposes.
- e) Carrying along all the inhabitants, in particular of poor neighbourhoods, in matters that affect the rehabilitation and development of their neighbourhood projects.³⁶
- f) Launching something like Ecological Penance Movement. This asks anyone taking air travel to contribute a small fraction to a special fund. This fund is used to create and maintain green areas by some parishes, especially in cities. This takes inspiration from the action of an Archdiocese of Jakarta (Indonesia) in 2016 as part of its response to *Laudato si'*.³⁷
- g) Design and architectural innovation used for Church buildings that are eco-sustainable, like the Apostolic Nunciature in Malaysia.³⁸

10. Institutions, Justice and Public Administration

If *Laudato si'*'s vision will be realised, then all organs of the state and the civil society must be so organised that they carry

³⁶Ibid., 184-86.

³⁷Ibid., 183.

³⁸Ibid., 184.

out their fundamental service to the common good³⁹. Our primary text offers us at least 12 action plans. Some of these are:

- a) Spread the Message every year for World Peace Day.
- b) Organise special training moments for political, economic, industrial, and military leaders and associations, with particular attention to principles, values, and methods of integral ecology.
- c) Train all citizens to understand democratic mechanisms and their contribution to decision-making processes.
- d) Promote the work of the various agencies in the Church that work with the most marginalised and isolated people.
- e) Promote dialogue between local Churches and legislative bodies, so that laws can be studied that promote the common good and human rights rooted in Christian anthropology.⁴⁰
- f) Catholic Episcopal Conferences of individual states or regions with local authorities on legislative safeguard for “integral ecology, air quality, access to water, environmental health, response to natural disasters, energy efficiency, and response to pollution.”⁴¹
- g) Establishing at national levels a good practice like “the European Laudato Si’ Alliance (ELSi’A), for the purpose of adapting the approach of Laudato Si’ to the European context and in particular to the institutions of the European Union.”⁴²

³⁹Ibid., 187-88

⁴⁰Ibid., 192-93.

⁴¹Ibid., 190.

⁴²Ibid., 191.

11. Health

Health is wealth. Without systemic health, we cannot help ourselves; talk less of helping the poor. Systemic health refers to being anchored on “a human ecology that pursues the integral well-being of the human being.”⁴³ There are at least 12 areas of collaborative actions to achieve systemic health.

- a) Invest in the diagnosis and treatment of malformations and diseases already identifiable in the womb, instead of promoting the diagnosis because of the selection and elimination.
- b) Educate health care workers to a good conscience, starting from the medical faculties and courses for nurses, taking care of a human formation, moral, pastoral, spiritual, and religious.
- c) Raise awareness about the risks of addiction, too from IT devices, starting with the accompanying medical and spiritual assistance.
- d) Submit projects in advance to an environmental impact assessment concerning the working conditions and possible health effects physical and mental of people, on the local economy, on safety.
- e) Promote palliative care as a system of integrated assistance to the human person in illness, as well as the training of health professionals to medical, human, and spiritual accompaniment always respectful of human life from conception to natural death.
- f) Promote inclusive access to healthcare primary as a fundamental human right, since it is closely connected with the right to life and human dignity.⁴⁴
- g) Organise something like the “Medical Student and Resident Boot Camp” programme. It offers “an integral

⁴³Ibid., 195.

⁴⁴Ibid., 199-201.

ecology standpoint with the challenges that young Catholic medical students face while studying and practising modern medicine.⁴⁵”

12. Climate: Challenges, Responsibilities, Opportunities

The poorest of the earth are most affected by climate change, because “they have the least adaptive capacity (possessing fewer resources).⁴⁶”

- a) Promote the kindergarten level awareness of caring for our common home and its climate, with emphasis on some concrete examples through which children could help protect creation for the present generation and the future one.
- b) Promote teaching at school level interdisciplinary based on integral ecology, on how to solve the problems of climate change and sustainability.
- c) Promote teaching at the university level on the problems of climate change and environmental degradation.
- d) Encourage the private sector and other realities non-state to transition to more environmentally friendly economies sustainable, for example by promoting activities to promote renewable energy sources and strategies for climate-resilient development; improve energy efficiency; reduce waste; promote a culture sharing, recycling, and reuse.
- e) Support the international process, aimed to jointly address the problem of change climate, striving for effective implementation of existing international instruments on that theme.⁴⁷
- f) Publish resource materials for “*Climate Action for the Common Good*”. *This resource should help*

⁴⁵Ibid., 198.

⁴⁶Ibid., 204.

⁴⁷Ibid., 208-10.

“governments and other stakeholders to reflect on how they should respond to the challenges of climate change in light of *Laudato Si’*.”⁴⁸

4. LAUDATO SI’: SPECIAL ANNIVERSARY YEAR (24 MAY 2020 – 24 MAY 2021)⁴⁹

The Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development published a year-long programme to celebrate 5 years of *Laudato Si’*. It laid out plans for a 7-year journey to total sustainability in the spirit of *Laudato Si’* for various institutions in the Church. Some of the programmes can offer us some inspiration.

- Read the Bible Contest (Contest on Social Media about the Bible, with special focus on *Laudato Si’*)
- *Laudato Si’* Awards: Conferment of annual *Laudato Si’* Awards

1. Outstanding *Laudato Si’* Leader

- Outstanding *Laudato Si’* Global Leader
- Outstanding *Laudato Si’* Local Animator

2. Outstanding *Laudato Si’* Family

3. Outstanding *Laudato Si’* Educational Institution

- Outstanding *Laudato Si’* School
- Outstanding *Laudato Si’* University/College

4. Outstanding *Laudato si’* Faith Community

- Outstanding *Laudato Si’* Parish
- Outstanding *Laudato Si’* Diocese
- Outstanding *Laudato Si’* Religious Community

⁴⁸Ibid., 206.

⁴⁹Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, *Laudato Si’: Special Anniversary Year (24 May 2020 – 24 May 2021)* (Vatican City, May 16, 2020), accessed November 18, 2020, from <http://www.humandevlopment.va/content/dam/sviluppoumano/documenti/FINAL%20EN%20-%20Laudato%20si%20Anniv%20Year%202020-2021.pdf>

5. Outstanding Laudato si' Action Initiative

- Outstanding Laudato Si' People's Movement
- Outstanding Laudato Si' Youth Initiative

6. Outstanding Laudato

si' Economy/Finance/Business/Health/Labour/Agriculture Initiative

- in the area of the circular and shared economy, regenerative farming, holistic health practices, etc.

7. Outstanding Laudato si' Communication Initiative

- Academic publication, artistic production, etc

Measuring Integral Ecology in the Spirit of Laudato Si

1. Response to the *Cry of the Earth* (greater use of clean renewable energy and reducing fossil fuels to achieve carbon neutrality, efforts to protect and promote biodiversity, guaranteeing access to clean water for all, etc.)
2. Response to the *Cry of the Poor* (defence of human life from conception to death and all forms of life on Earth, with special attention to vulnerable groups such as indigenous communities, migrants, children at risk through slavery, etc.)
3. Ecological *Economics* (sustainable production, Fair-trade, ethical consumption, ethical investments, divestment from fossil fuels and any economic activity harmful to the planet and the people, investment in renewable energy, etc.)
4. Adoption of *Simple Lifestyles* (sobriety in the use of resources and energy, avoid single-use plastic, adopt a

more plant-based diet and reduce meat consumption, greater use of public transport and avoid polluting modes of transportation, etc.)

5. Ecological *Education* (re-think and re-design educational curricula and educational institution reform in the spirit of integral ecology to create ecological awareness and action, promoting the ecological vocation of young people, teachers, and leaders of education, etc.)
6. Ecological *Spirituality* (recover a religious vision of God's creation, encourage greater contact with the natural world in a spirit of wonder, praise, joy, and gratitude, promote creation-centred liturgical celebrations, develop ecological catechesis, prayer, retreats, formation, etc.)
7. Emphasis on *Community involvement and participatory action* to care for creation at the local, regional, national, and international levels (promote advocacy and people's campaigns; encourage rootedness in local territory and neighbourhood ecosystems, etc.)

5. THE CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF ABUJA'S 7-YEAR PLAN

On November 19, 2020, the Catholic Archdiocese of Abuja organised a conference on the theme, "Co-operation between Church, Government and Corporate Entities to Improve the Lives of the Poor as Inhabitants of the Earth". The Conference had three objectives:

1. To assess the reception and impact of Laudato Si' in Nigeria/Abuja Archdiocese;
2. To articulate the cooperation between the Church, Government and Non-State Actors on Laudato Si's vision;
3. To develop actionable paths for improving the lives of the poor as entitled to universal goods of the earth, as inspired by Journeying Towards Care For Our Common Home (2020).

The conference had participants and interventions from the Church (the Archdiocesan prelates, the plenary speakers), the State (the Minister for Women Affairs, the National Environmental and Standard Regulatory Enforcement Agency), and the Non-State Actors (Catholic Relief Services). The Conference had two plenary papers, panel discussions, and general discussions leading to suggestions and recommendations on the way forward. At the end of the Conference, an initiative of the Abuja Archdiocesan Theological Commission, the People of God resolved to begin its 7-year journey of integral ecology in the spirit of Laudato Si'. They resolved to adopt some of the Church's plans and programmes for the care of the earth, our common home, and for the poor of the earth. On June 19, 2021, the Archdiocese gathered again for the conclusion of the year-long celebration of Laudato Si'. During the Mass at the Church of the Archangels, Lugbe Abuja, the Local Ordinary, Most Revd Ignatius Kaigama, unveiled the *Actionable Goals for the Implementation of Laudato Si in the Catholic Archdiocese of Abuja*.⁵⁰ The following paragraphs outline this programme, as

⁵⁰See Evans Kipkura, "Nigerian Archbishop Seeks Government Partnership in Environmental Conservation," *ACI Africa*, June 25, 2021, <https://www.aciafrica.org/news/3714/nigerian-archbishop-seeks-government-partnership-in-environmental-conservation> (accessed 12.08.2021).

an example of how various particular churches should approach the adaptation of Pope Francis' deep ecology.

'Deep ecology' refers to the perspective that in confronting ecological issues, one goes beyond the symptoms. One has to unearth the layers of ecological issues to discover the roots of the problem if we must heal the problem from the root. This is a holistic approach. Deep ecology, therefore, goes beyond the binary ethical division of relativism vs. deontology. Deep ecology is based on a metaphysical conception of the world which demands a thick ethical approach. This is what we see in *Laudato si'* from a Catholic perspective. This helps us to appreciate that *Laudato si'* is based on solid multidisciplinary research following the genealogy of deep ecology from Aldo Leopold⁵¹. The distinctive accent of *Laudato si'* is its emphasis on the connection between human moral and cultural decline, seen in the way the structures of the world mass produces an economy of exclusion, thus producing more victims of a cruel economy. These victims of human moral decline are called the poor (humans and the environment) (LS 162).

The Archdiocese has committed itself to develop a studied approach to *Laudato Si'* on the journey towards care for our common home at various levels. It committed itself to capture current thinking about the social fraternity, civic friendship, environmental justice, and the role of the Church. The

⁵¹In his *A Sand County Almanac: And Sketches Here and There* (1949), Leopold included a chapter, titled "The Land Ethic". Leopold argues that an emerging argument for earth conservation in the forties was not thoroughgoing enough. Leopold proposed an ethic of the land, which affirmed thinkers since Ezekiel and Isaiah that "the despoliation of land is not only inexpedient but wrong." Cf. "Our Relationship to the Environment: Aldo Leopold, *The Land Ethic*," in *Western Philosophy: An Anthology*, ed. John Cottingham (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 585-590, quotation on 586.

Actionable Goals for the Implementation of Laudato Si in the Catholic Archdiocese of Abuja has eleven focal points, taking its cue from the twelve areas of cooperation and action goals that the Interdicasterial Working Group of the Holy See on Integral Ecology's Journeying Towards Care For Our Common Home: Five Years after Laudato Si' outlined. The Actionable Goals for the Implementation of Laudato Si in the Catholic Archdiocese of Abuja has a tripartite division. Each of the focal points is stepped down from the Archdiocesan level to Deanery/Parish and Educational Institutions levels respectively. In each case, the Archdiocese identifies each action to be undertaken and the statutory body/agency responsible for ensuring implementation. At the Archdiocesan level, the following are the twelve focal points:

Archdiocesan Celebration of World Day for the Care of Creation: Annual celebration in the calendar of archdiocesan events, etc.

Archdiocesan Commission for the Care of Creation: To draw up actionable plans and programmes for the ongoing domestication of LS in our archdiocese

Promulgation of Ecological Week: Ecology-themed activities

Food & Water Policy: Biodegradable disposable products only in Archdiocesan functions, Care/Feeding of the Poor (mandating one Sunday in the month in all Archdiocesan parish communities)

Energy Policy: Diocesan Green Energy Procurement Project; Annual Award for Best 'Green Catholic School'

Ecosystem Policy: Wastewater management initiatives and innovations

Work & Labour Policy: Archdiocesan policy on the decent and

fair work environment, equal work and equal pay for women and men; Archdiocesan minimum wage policy

Urbanisation & Ecological footprint Policy: Policy on Eco-sustainable architectural innovation used for Church buildings

Policy on Institutions, Justice and Public Administration: Mandate to read on a particular Sunday the Holy Father's Message for World Peace Day; Translation of the Holy Father's Message for World Peace Day into the languages spoken in the Archdiocese

Health Policy: Constitute Archdiocesan Environmental Impact Assessment Team

Climate Policy: Periodic interface with the private sector and other non-state actors on transitioning to more sustainable and environmental-friendly economies

Special Laudato Si Archdiocesan Initiatives: Read the Bible Contest; *Laudato Si'* Awards

- A. At the deanery/parish levels, the following are domesticated: Food & Water Policy, Energy Policy, Ecosystem Policy, Work & Labour Policy, Urbanisation & Ecological footprint Policy, Policy on Institutions, Justice and Public Administration, and Special *Laudato Si* Archdiocesan Initiatives.
- B. At the church levels, the following are domesticated: Food & Water Policy, Energy Policy, Policy on Institutions, Justice and Public Administration, and Special *Laudato Si* Archdiocesan Initiatives.
- C. At the Archdiocesan schools (Primary and Secondary) levels, the following are domesticated: Food & Water Policy, Energy Policy, Ecology and Climate Policy, and Special *Laudato Si* Archdiocesan Initiatives.

- D. At the Catholic Chaplaincies of Secular Tertiary institutions level, the following are domesticated: Food & Water Policy, Energy Policy, Ecosystems Policy, Ecology and Health Policy, Ecology and Climate Policy, and Special *Laudato Si* Archdiocesan Initiatives.
- E. At the Church-owned tertiary institutions' levels, the following are domesticated: Food & Water Policy, Energy Policy, Ecosystem Policy, Ecology and Health Policy, Ecology and Climate Policy, and Special *Laudato Si* Archdiocesan Initiatives.

A PROPOSAL FOR A COMPENDIUM ON CATHOLIC CHURCH'S INTERVENTIONS ON ECO-RELATED ISSUES IN NIGERIA

The final instalment of this contribution relates to a challenge to theological/research institutes in Nigeria. I restate what I pointed out in a previous contribution:

We are busy recycling other people's intellectual endeavours. Recycled goods are what we are proudly displaying as what we are producing. Several works on Christian eco-theology that we are copying from today are compilations or compendium of what churches in several locations around the world have said about ecological challenge. Do we have one yet?⁵²

Let me give an instance. Some years ago, precisely in March 2016, I took delivery of some copies of a festschrift for Most Revd Lucius Ugorji⁵³. As I flipped through this big volume, I came across an entry titled "Bishop Ugorji's Moral Theology

⁵²"Raymond Olusesan Aina, "Laudato si on Ecological Crisis: What Manner of Theological Ethical Reasoning?," in *Theology and Ecological Issues*, ed. Luke Ijezie, Stephen Audu, and Agnes Acha (Port Harcourt: CATHAN Publication, 2017), 317-34.

⁵³Uzochukwu Jude Njoku and Simon O. Anyanwu, eds, *Shepherd and Teacher: Celebrating Lucius Ugorji's Episcopal Silver Jubilee* (FS Lucius Ugorji) (Owerri: APT Publications, 2015).

of Environmental Stewardship”. It is an extensive commentary of Bishop Ugorji’s 1995 Pastoral Letter Care for the Environment.⁵⁴ Bishop Ugorji was ahead of his time. As far as 1995, he already saw that the context of our faith was changing. Hence, we are not just “concerned with the salvation of souls but also of the sustainability of the ecosystem.⁵⁵” The point here is that if this festschrift had not been published and Igboanusi’s article included I may not have known that we have a bishop with far-seeing eyes that saw the ineluctable connection between human fate and the state of the earth. As far back as 1995, when many scientists, politicians, and religious leaders all over the world were still in denial of ecological crisis, there was a Nigerian bishop that devoted a whole pastoral letter awakening human responsibility to caring for and preserving our common home, the earth.⁵⁶ His position, which is a combination of teleological ethical approach and transcendental natural law approach, yielded an integral ecology perspective that can conveniently fall under the ‘deep ecology’ school of thought.

Various research institutes in Nigeria can take up the challenge earlier thrown to the Catholic Theological Association of Nigeria since nothing is happening from that angle. They can institute “a research grant for commissioned original research among scholars. For instance, research should be commissioned with a full or partial grant for the compilation and publication of a compendium of the Catholic Church’s interventions on ecological issues and environmental problems in Nigeria.⁵⁷” This present volume, by the

⁵⁴Edmund Igboanusi, “Bishop Ugorji’s Moral Theology of Environmental Stewardship,

⁵⁵” in *Shepherd and Teacher: Celebrating Lucius Ugorji’s Episcopal Silver Jubilee* (FS Lucius Ugorji)

⁵⁶, ed. Uzochukwu Jude Njoku and Simon O. Anyanwu (Owerri: APT Publications, 2015), 109-133.

⁶¹Kekong Bisong, “Anthropocentric Castles and the Imperative of Ecotheology,” in *Shepherd and*

Teacher: Celebrating Lucius Ugorji’s Episcopal Silver Jubilee (FS Lucius Ugorji), ed. Uzochukwu

⁵⁷Jude Njoku and Simon O. Anyanwu (Owerri: APT Publications, 2015), 165-181, at 166.

Igboanusi, “Bishop Ugorji’s Moral Theology,” 126.

Augustinian Province in Nigeria, is a step in the right direction.

CONCLUSION

To our deflated ego, we are becoming increasingly aware that we co-belong with the earth. *Laudato si'* calls us to consider what will happen if the earth reaches an irreplaceable level of damage and crises, knowing full well that the earth is a planetary island with no outside help. In an increasingly interconnected world, the discernment of choices before us to creatively discover how we can reconstruct a new world built on holistic co-belonging must be done collegially with scientists, theologians, politicians, and people at the fringes working together. Pope Francis in *Laudato si'* has courageously offered us some (chapters 5 and 6). Five years on, the Interdicasterial Working Group of the Holy See on Integral Ecology followed up with *Journeying Towards Care For Our Common Home*. We need to collaborate among ourselves to cope with present-day ecological concerns. May the various levels of the Catholic church in Nigeria, and in Africa, take a cue from the Catholic Archdiocese of Abuja, and begin a studied and programmatic approach to a decade-long journey of integral ecology in the spirit of *Laudato Si'*.

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