



**Environmental Social Engagement Praxis: Exploring the Implementation of Socio-ecological Documents by the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon**

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## DECLARATION ON PLAGIARISM

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Theology (Theology and Development), in the Graduate Programme in the School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa,

I, Gilbert KAMTA TATSI, declare that study reported in this thesis, except where otherwise indicated, is my original research.

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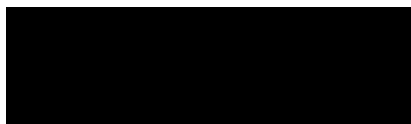
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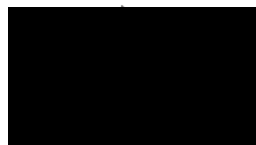
Gilbert KAMTA TATSI



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Signature

Dr. Mfazo Clifford Madondo



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Signature

Date: June 2025

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this thesis to my mother, Akwen Veronica who, in addition to giving birth to me, has educated me through her example of the love and practice of determination and hard work, the sense of resilience, and by paying for my school fees during my primary, secondary and higher education with her meagre financial means.

## **ABSTRACT**

From Pope Pius XII (1948) to Pope Francis (2023), the Catholic Church has issued socio-ecological documents emphasising the common good, ecological preservation, sustainable development, and human dignity, paralleling global initiatives such as the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and COP29 in addressing sustainability, inequality, poverty, health, human rights, and food security. Despite this, theological perspectives on how the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon (NECC) implements these documents remain underexplored, particularly concerning environmental and social engagement praxis at the community level. This study aimed to propose a socio-ecological (SET) framework to support the implementation of socio-ecological documents within the NECC and beyond the wider Catholic Church. Adopting an interpretivist philosophy and qualitative exploratory design, semi-structured interviews were conducted with twenty participants engaged in social justice, peace, and ecological action within the NECC. Findings reveal blocked projects, limited institutional support, absent ecological awareness in pastoral letters, weak grassroots connections, and poor dissemination of documents, highlighting the urgent need for a guiding framework. Accordingly, the study recommends integrating the SET framework into pastoral practice and training, including diocesan ecological zones, interfaith collaboration, eco-catechesis, and the inclusion of creation care in seminarian, religious, and lay formation. This study advances theological and ecological scholarship by introducing the SET framework as a novel foundation for understanding and guiding socio-ecological pastoral engagement within and beyond the Catholic Church in Cameroon.

**Key Words:** Cameroon, Conference, Documents, Ecological, Environmental, Episcopal, Implementation, Socio-eco-theological (SET) framework, Social Engagement, Praxis

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACE	<i>Action Catholique Pour l'Enfance</i> (Catholic Action for Children)
A F	<i>Agenzia Fides</i>
ASD	Agenda for Sustainable Development
BCC	Basic Christian Community
BEP	Bamenda Ecclesiastical Province
BEC	Basic Ecclesial Community
CAQDAS	Computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software
CCC	The Catechism of the Catholic Church
CELAM	Conference of Latin American Bishops
CIPCRE	<i>International Circle for the Promotion of Creation</i> (International Circle for the Promotion of Creation)
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
ECC	Ecumenical Council of Churches
EFTA	European Free Trade Association
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
GDC	General Directory for Catechesis
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
G S	<i>Gaudium et Spes</i>
GTS	Geological Time Scale
ICCSS	International Conference Circuit System and Stimulation
J & P C	Justice and Peace Commission
LEC	Living Ecclesial Community
LEBC	Living Ecclesial Basic Community
MD	Millennium Declaration
MDG7	Millennium Development Goal 7
MINFOR	<i>Ministère des Forêts et de la Faune</i> (Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife)
MRS	Migrant and Refugee Section
MS	Microsoft
NCJP	National Commission for Justice and Peace
NDC	New Directory for Catechesis
NECC	National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation

NSJP	National Service for Justice and Peace
PAEPEN	<i>Programme Agro Ecologie et Préservation de l'Environnement</i> (Agro Ecological and Environmental Preservation Programme)
PCJP	The Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace
PI	Principal Investigator
PWR	Parliament of the World's Religions
RCC	Roman Catholic Church
SA	South Africa
SACBC	Southern African Catholic Bishop's Conference
SCC	Small Christian Communities
SCM	Student Christian Movement
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
UKZN	University of KwaZulu-Natal
UN	United Nations
WCC	World Council of Churches
WPD	World Population Day

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

#### 1.1. Introduction

The scope of this study is the socio-ecological documents of the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) and the implementation by the NECC to enhance environmental preservation at the Christian community level. This thesis addresses the problem of theological research concerning the environmental social engagement praxis and the implementation of the socio-ecological documents of the RCC by the NECC, at the grassroots level. The aim is to suggest a framework for the implementation of socio-ecological and economic transformative engagement by the leadership of the RCC in Cameroon.

This chapter is the introduction to the entire study. The chapter outlines the background of the study, the academic significance of the study, and the statement of the research problem. The study has the societal, environmental and theological contribution. It further delineates the key research question and sub-questions, alongside the research's main objective and sub-objectives. The chapter further presents a brief overview of the literature that situates the study in connection with previous research or existing academic discourses. The location of the study, the methodology, and its limitations and scope are succinctly identified. Finally, the organisational plan of the study is sketched out.

#### 1.2. Background to the Study

For decades, discourses on ecological crisis have increasingly occupied the academic arena and governmental and non-governmental organisations globally. Boff (1997:107) and Pope Francis (2015, n.2, 16 and 49) describe the ecological crisis of our planet as the “Cry of the earth, the cry of the poor and oppressed” to which humanity can no longer painfully and progressively continue to lend a deaf ear. Cunsolo and Ellis (2018:279) single out climate change that is growingly impacting “mental health through multiple pathways of risk, including intense feelings of grief as people suffer climate-related losses to valued species, ecosystems and landscapes”. This ecological affliction is exacerbating species' extinction, deforestation, and extreme weather conditions such as “rising sea levels”, hurricanes, drought, and inundations, to mention a few (Holl, 2020). To face the current ecological crisis, humanity needs prophetic voices that cannot only courageously point to the root causes of this eco-malaise, but also, and above all, to embark on a multidimensional network of relationships for a common purpose. Pegoraro (2024:1) argues that “The rebuilding of our common

home and our common human and biotic family calls for an alliance of all members of our household cutting across all segments of society”. Étienne (2023) follows Boff’s environmental disconcertment when she shows concern about the climatic and ecological disruption which threatens the universe, and in the face of which the powerful who hold the rudder of the world openly confess their powerlessness. Moreover, this environmental crisis is an upheaval leading to worldwide instability with threats to millions of lives and leaving no nation unconcerned. In this prospect, the United Nations (UN, 2000), in the fifth article of its “Millennium Declaration (MD)”, engaged to ensuring sustainable development through prudence in the management of all living species and natural resources. In its “Millennium Development Goal 7” (MDG), the UN (2005) recognised that the awakening of ecological awareness remains a long-term task, despite considerable efforts already made in the protection of the ozone layer, land and sea areas, in the supply of drinking water, access to decent housing and improved sanitation. In its *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (ASD)* (2015, n.14), the same UN decries that the world is facing challenges of “natural resource depletion and adverse impacts of environmental degradation including desertification, drought, land degradation, freshwater scarcity and loss of biodiversity, add to an exacerbated the list of challenges which humanity faces”<sup>1</sup>. While acknowledging the threats caused by the environmental degradation, the UN also calls for a “global response to climate change” through international solidary cooperation to reduce gas emission (ASD 2015, n.31, 39). Moreover, the COP29 held in October 2024 in Baku, Azerbaijan, underscored an engagement in global initiatives for ecological preservation.

Any attempt to resolve the ongoing ecological crisis lies in the quality of the relationship human beings have with nature, and also their non-exploitative vision of it. In this perspective, White (1967:8) observes that “What we do about ecology depends on our ideas of the man-nature relationship”. Watson (2010) argues that discourses in line with adequate and appropriate solutions to the environmental crisis seem not to be the sole realm of specialists, technocrats, politicians, and activists, but also that of philosophers, theologians, and faith leaders imbued with the love of the Creator and the creatures. For the discourse of religious leaders to be effective, there needs to be a mechanism or dynamism of conversion from theory to practice, from thinking to doing. In this prospect, the Parliament of the World’s Religions (PWR) (2020) pertinently underpins the interconnectedness of reasoning and implementation when they argue that the “Earth cannot be changed for the better unless the individual’s consciousness is first changed”. In other words, conversion of individual mentalities (*metanoia*) is key to socio-ecological transformation. This

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<sup>1</sup> See also Andrade (2020).

change of mentality passes through formation to consideration of the common good, which Vatican Council II (*Gaudium et Spes* 1965, n.26) considers as “the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfilment”. This leads to argue on theology as an agent/actor of societal transformation.

Scholars have raised concerns about the alarming and increasing degradation of the ecosystem globally. Studies have established the concepts of social engagement, environment, social ecology, and ecological theology. For instance, Conradie (2005), De Gruchy (2009), Ecklund (2020), Lane (2020), and Gardner (2021), argue that environmental social engagement has become a global concern that which the driving force aims to take care of our “common home” (the earth). However, research on the applicability of the discourse on environmental care or the preservation of the ecosystem leaves something to be desired. As humanity is grappling with the universal socio-environmental crisis, the contribution of faith communities proves to be of considerable relevance in raising ecological awareness. The healing of the common home by Christian communities appears to be imperative to make the river of justice and peace flow (cf. the Prophet Amos 5:24)<sup>2</sup>. A glance at the encyclicals<sup>3</sup> of various Popes<sup>4</sup> gives evidence that it was in 1948 that the RCC explicitly set the tone for environmental consciousness by issuing documents of a socio-ecological nature (Christie *et al.*, 2019; Lai and Tortajada, 2021).

The socio-ecological documents span from Pope Pius XII (1948) to Pope Francis (2013, 2014, 2015, 2020 and 2023). These ecological articulations include Popes John XXIII (1959, 1961 and 1963), Paul VI (1965 and 1970), John Paul II (1981, 1985, 1987 and 1990), and Benedict XVI (2006 and 2008). An evaluation of the various discourses of the abovementioned leaders of the RCC suggests that they each raise awareness and inform on ecological preservation, sustainable development, and promotion of human dignity according to the demands of their time and the guiding principle of the common good. Socio-economic concerns such as poverty, health, equality, promotion of human rights, and food security are the common thread that runs through their ecological discourses (Lai and Tortajada, 2021).

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<sup>2</sup> See also Pope Francis (2023).

<sup>3</sup> Encyclicals are a body of pastoral letters addressed by the Pope to the whole Roman Catholic Church and people of goodwill. These letters generally address matters of faith or morals, social teaching, encourage a particular commemoration or pious devotion or deal with matters of church discipline which are to be observed in the entire Roman Catholic Church.

<sup>4</sup> As the Bishop of Rome, the Pope is the Head of the Holy See, the Roman Catholic Church’s central government. He thus makes decisions on issues of faith and morality for Catholics around the world.

Pope Pius XI (1948 and 1953), in his speech to the leaders of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), advocates a sustainable development and promotion of human dignity through balanced socio-ecological development to prevent communities in rural areas from being affected by the consequences of drought; Pope John XXIII (1959; 1963) insists on an equitable management and distribution of the earth's resources to promote self-sufficiency at the level of each nation of the globe. This line of social teaching on ecology will be taken further by Pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul II.

Popes Paul VI and John Paul II followed the teaching thread initiated by their predecessors, but with more energetic standpoints. For instance, at the summit of the UN, Pope Paul VI (1965), sounded the alarm on disproportional scientific and technological progress and its harmful effects on the environment and the socio-economic conditions of the poor. Furthermore, Pope Paul VI (1971; 1972) condemns the abusive exploitation of nature, which causes the degradation of the environment with pollution that generates new diseases in human beings. Pope Paul VI (1972) not only denounces but suggests interdependence between human beings and the natural environment. This line of interrelationship between various creatures of the earth is taken further by Pope John Paul II (1981), seemingly in a more “concrete” way (Lai and Tortajada, 2021:6). As Lai and Tortajada (2021:6-7) argue, Pope John Paul II deals with the emerging environmental issues, considering his personalistic and humanitarian philosophy. Pope John Paul II (1981a) brings forth a threefold suggestion aimed at mitigating the global socio-ecological crisis. First, he insists that the financial aid from the rich nations should be directed towards the economic self-sufficiency of developing countries; second, he urges that the irreducible dignity of the human person and their role of stewardship over creation should be central to the ecological preservation (Pope John Paul II, 1981b; 1985; 1989; 1995); and third, he contends that the interconnectedness of sovereign nations is key to solving environmental issues (Pope John Paul II, 2001). Pope John Paul II (1990, n.1) further asserts that “[...] not only arms race, regional conflicts and continued injustices among peoples and nations” are threatening global peace but also leading to the lack of respect for nature and widespread destruction of the environment. The historical evolution of the ecological thought of the RCC took considerable shape with Pope Benoit XVI and Pope Francis.

Unlike John Paul II, who emphasised the person in addressing the preservation of the environment, Pope Benedict XVI (2006) focuses on communities and the place of society in the natural order of creation. In this perspective, he dwells on emigration and conflicts as some of the effects of climate change (Pope Benoit XVI, 2008). Echoing Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict's socio-

environmental concerns, underscored by the notion of the common good, Pope Francis (2013a-b; 2014) argues that global environmental caring efforts must always take into consideration the promotion of the participation of rural communities in decision-making for the more effective implementation of those decisions. Pope Francis pays attention to the relevance of grassroots communities in environmental decision-making. He (2015) further decries that in the 21st century and more than ever, Mother Earth is crying because of abuses inflicted on her by those who have selfishly and dominantly lorded over her as masters. Pope Francis (2015) holds that the cries of the earth include pollution as a result of waste and the throwaway culture, the climate change which is a sign that our common good is being disturbed by global warming (which affects the earth's water system and agricultural production to which the poor are paying the heaviest price), the loss of our biodiversity due to short-sighted and selfish economic approaches, the decline of quality of human life and survival of human society due to environmental degradation and consequently, most of the cities around the globe have become unhealthy to live in. Furthermore, Pope Francis (2023:2) pleads for “an integral approach to respect for the [healing of the] environment [which] involves four relationships: with God, with our brothers and sisters of today and tomorrow, with all of nature, and with ourselves”<sup>5</sup>. Failure in one of these relationships automatically upsets the others.

It can be argued that, alongside the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church, other church leaders and Christian bodies are equally concerned about the environmental crisis facing humanity. The World Council of Churches (WCC<sup>6</sup>), for instance, has prominent records in their discourses on ecological issues. As McFee (2009) asserts, for nearly twenty years, the WCC has been critically addressing the ecological question using three specific tool-paradigms. First, the prophetic language that has impelled Christian organisations to constantly, courageously, and tirelessly denounce the spoliation of the ecosystem; second, it has used its public policy expertise to urge the United Nations to engage more and appropriately on environmental issues by applying scientific research on the topic and; third, the ethical advocacy of the WCC has been instrumental in enhancing “praxis” or action through its engagement in “supporting regional indigenous activism and sustainable efforts” (McFee 2009:457). The ecological engagement of the WCC took a more concrete phase in 2015 through the pilgrimage for climate and ecological justice it organised in several countries as “a complementary dimension of peace with the earth” (WCC, 2016: vii). In the context of Cameroon, actions for environmental preservation are carried out within the framework of the Ecumenical Council of

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<sup>5</sup> See also Sisters of Providence (2023).

<sup>6</sup> “Founded in 1948, the WCC promotes Christian unity in faith, witness and service for a just and peaceful world. As a global fellowship, the WCC brings together 345 Protestant, Orthodox, Anglican and other churches representing more than 550 million Christians in 110 countries and works cooperatively with the Roman Catholic Church” (WCC 2016: i).

Churches (ECC). It is in this perspective that the Evangelical Church works in synergy with other churches (including the Roman Catholic Church) for the safeguarding of creation in the country.

The International Circle for the Promotion of Creation (CIPCRE<sup>7</sup>) is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) and ecumenical<sup>8</sup> structure promoted by the Evangelical Church of Cameroon. It has been working since 1990 for ecology and the holistic or integral development of the human person. Based on the See-Judge-Act principle and method, CIPCRE's mission is to seek human and environmental transformation in the light of the Christian faith lived in concrete action within society. Justice, peace and the preservation of creation are central to CIPCRE's engagement. Through its agroecology and environmental preservation programme (PAEPEN<sup>9</sup>), CIPCRE works with Christian communities whose members reflect on, and recount their lived experiences of faith through the attempt to resolve the "problems of peace, justice and the preservation of creation" (Ka Mana 2002:9). In the city of Bafoussam and its surroundings, for instance, CIPCRE reflection and action groups have been created in parishes and local communities. As Gmunder and Ngueugam (2002) testify, the interventions of these groups in the context of environmental degradation have resonated nationally and internationally. Aware of their mission as co-responsible in the protection of ecology, the members of the said groups endeavour to respond to their Christian vocation by working in favour of a society that "respects God's creatures: humans, animals and plants" (Gmunder and Ngueugam, 2002:31). In this line of thought, the ecological mission of Christians becomes an act of faith. This is why they begin their activities with a prayer addressed to God, the Creator of the universe. Gmunder and Ngueugam (2002) disclose that the responses to a survey questionnaire for the preparation of a seminar organised by CIPCRE on the protection of the environment revealed that the populations of the city of Bafoussam suffer from anarchic urbanisation, hygiene and sanitation issues, atmospheric and acoustic pollution with music at unbearable volume and cars' hooting. The accumulation of know-how in environmental preservation has enabled CIPCRE members to take concrete ecological actions in specific locations.

The CIPCRE's (2021) annual report highlights some concrete actions carried out as part of its mission. These pro-environmental actions include, among others, ecological and prophetic *diakonia*

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<sup>7</sup> CIPCRE is the French acronym for *Cercle International pour la Promotion de la Création* (International Circle for the Promotion of Creation).

<sup>8</sup> In Cameroon, the CIPCRE englobes the Ecumenical Council of Churches (ECC), which includes the Protestant Churches, the Anglican Church, the Orthodox Church, and the Roman Catholic Church.

<sup>9</sup> PAEPEN stands for *Programme Agro Ecologie et Préservation de l'Environnement* (Agro Ecological and Environmental Preservation Programme).

which consists of the courageous denunciation of abuses done to the environment and the entire ecosystem; sustainable agriculture, entrepreneurship and community hygiene, with the main objective of self-employment and self-management, improvement of the quality and quantity of agricultural production, the preservation of the environment and the people's life (CIPCRE 2021)<sup>10</sup>.

CIPCRE's efforts to preserve creation are commendable in Cameroon. However, it should be noted that this ecological organisation records a deficiency in terms of its collaboration with traditional religious leaders. As noted by Osuiji (2018), traditional religious leadership in Cameroon has a model and method of ecological preservation that is worthy of special attention for the acquisition and implementation of knowledge. In the Western and Northwestern regions of the country, for instance, there is the ecological notion of "sacred forests", which are places where sacrifices are permanently offered to ancestors to plead for their intercession, to appease their wrath, or to thank them for their beneficence<sup>11</sup>. Fonjong (2006) observes that hunting, logging, farming and fire-burning are strictly prohibited in these sacred ecological zones of the traditional cradle. Osuiji (2018:187) further considers these traditional eco-zones as an emblematic "cosmic harmony" of the symbiotic relationship between the living and the dead<sup>12</sup>. The collaboration of CIPCRE with traditional religion in the context of Cameroon would allow it to acquire more knowledge and soundness in its engagement in safeguarding ecology.

From the above background and context, it is obvious that the Roman Catholic Church, the WCC and the Evangelical Church in Cameroon all converge in their prophetic approach, which consists of courageously denouncing the abuses inflicted on ecology and of urging the United Nations to commit itself more firmly to applying its regulations to preserve the ecosystem. However, the two ecclesial bodies appear to be divergent when it comes to the implementation of their directives. While the WCC is more committed to the practical line, the Roman Catholic Church seems to have remained on the theoretical angle. The WCC mentions "praxis" at the grassroots level through the leadership support of efforts at the indigenous community level, which is not explicitly the case for the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> These actions are included in the 2021-2023 three-year plan of CIPCRE.

<sup>11</sup> Siwila (2022:65, 77) argues that, in the context of Zambian "indigenous knowledge systems", the sacred forest "is believed to be the dwelling place of the ancestors".

<sup>12</sup> The traditional and cultural evidence of ecological protection is also examined and demonstrated by Barron (2024:24, 26) in the context of Kenya with the "Maasai indigenous knowledge" through their songs, dances, and the reading of the signs in the weather. On her part, Siwila (2022:65) claims that "African societies have rich indigenous knowledge that has not been fully utilised" on the "issues of climate change".

<sup>13</sup> This assertion will be elaborated further in a later stage of this work.

It is appropriate, however, to point out certain shortcomings in the socio-ecological documents of the Roman Catholic Church. These gaps include, first, consideration given to the contribution of ecofeminism in the preservation of the environment, especially in the context of Africa (*Laudato Si'*, for instance), and second, the indication of clear guidelines for the implementation of socio-ecological documents.

Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'* has been received as a compendium of the RCC socio-ecological engagement. However, critics have pointed out the silence of *Laudato Si'* on eco-feminist contributions to ecological preservation. Schlichten (2017) observes that the encyclical fails to acknowledge the work of Wangari Maathai, the founder of the Green Belt Movement in the 1970s in Kenya. Maathai won the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize for her “fight for sustainable development, democracy and peace” (Schlichten, 2017:162).

Furthermore, Simkins and O'Keefe (2013) note that the leadership of the RCC appears not to have provided clear guidance for the enactment of their socio-ecological documents at the level of local churches, such as Dioceses and national episcopal conferences. This breach can lead to the possibility of deficiencies both in terms of the practicality of these documents and the impact of their scope, which is human development and the social transformation of the people, especially the poor and the marginalised who live at the “existential peripheries” (Pope Francis, 2014). One of the objectives of this study is specifically to minimise the abovementioned gaps as spelt out below in the research problem statement. The political and postcolonial exploitation constitutes another backdrop that gives rise to an obstruction of environmental preservation in Cameroon.

The political and socio-economic crisis and the postcolonial exploitation in the African continent have been contributing to the exacerbation of environmental degradation faced by humanity and leading to a hindrance to the implementation of ecological documents in most countries (Egbetokun *et al.*, 2019). Cameroon is one of these countries, gaining its “independence” from the French colonial power in 1960, and Ahmadou Ahidjo became its first President. On November 6, 1982, Paul Biya<sup>14</sup> came to power through the resignation of the former President (Ahmadou Ahidjo). Since then, there have been elections in the country, but won by the same candidate. There have been modifications to the country's Constitution through the Parliament, most of whose members are from the ruling party

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<sup>14</sup> Paul Biya is 92 years old (he was born on February 13, 1933). Having been President of the Republic for 43 years, he remains one of the African heads of state who has broken the record for longevity in power.

(the party of the President of the Republic). The modification of the Constitution aims either to extend the number of years of the Presidential Mandate, or to allow the President to stand for elections as many times as he lives. This political hold-up orchestrated by the governing body in Cameroon is a barrier to the implementation of socio-ecological documents in the country and calls on the Catholic Church to a prophetic mobilisation (Mbih, 2020).

## **1.2. Significance of the Study**

Given the background, this study is deemed relevant. It generates and shares new knowledge on the socio-ecological theology. The thesis brings about the discourses on the implementation performance of the socio-ecological documents by the NECC. In this vein, the study is a contribution towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 13), whose objective is to “take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts”. Furthermore, the study is important to the vision of *the Theology and Development* programme. It advances the church leadership engagement in social transformation with particular attention to ecological preservation and responsiveness. Additionally, the study is of value to the people of Cameroon for ecology and environmental preservation and the common good.

## **1.3. Research Problem Statement**

As elaborated above, for several decades, the leadership of the RCC (various Popes) has issued a range of documents on environmental degradation. These documents invite Catholic Christians and people of goodwill for ecological awareness to mitigate natural disasters and make the planet earth more liveable for all. Kamga *et al.* (2018) observe that Cameroon remains exposed to environmental challenges which include drought in the Northern part of the country, erosion, floods, air pollution, the dislocation of the Pygmies, famine, the imbalance of the ecosystem, the decrease of biodiversity due to the destruction of habitat through deforestation, and littering caused by the deficiency of waste management policy. The background highlighted the scale of the ecological crisis both in Cameroon and globally, and the urgency of an interdisciplinary network to address this upheaval. Yet, a deficiency in theological research exists regarding the environmental-social engagement praxis towards the implementation of the socio-ecological documents of the RCC by the NECC at the grassroots level. The Bishops of the RCC in Cameroon have not taken a strong stand in addressing

ecological challenges in the country. This assertion can be verified, for instance, through a lack of pastoral letters addressing the issue of environmental deterioration in Cameroon.

#### **1.4. Research Question and Sub-questions**

##### **1.4.1. Main Research Question**

The study answers the following main question:

What theological perspectives are available to understand the environmental social engagement praxis towards the implementation of the socio-ecological documents of the RCC by the NECC?

##### **1.4.2. Research Sub-questions**

The sub-questions for the study are:

- What are the theories underlying social engagement praxis and socio-ecological theology?
- What theological studies have been carried out on the implementation of the ecological documents of the Roman Catholic Church by the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon at the community level?
- What theological evidence can be found, that the NECC is implementing the Roman Catholic Church's socio-ecological documents at the grassroots/community level?
- What theological interventions can be proposed for the effective implementation of the Roman Catholic Church's socio-ecological documents in addressing environmental and social engagement in Cameroon?

#### **1.5. Research Objective and Sub-objectives**

##### **1.5.1. Main Research Objective**

The main objective is:

To explore the theological perspectives which underline the environmental social engagement praxis towards the implementation of the socio-ecological documents of the Roman Catholic Church by the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon.

##### **1.5.2. Research Sub-objectives**

The sub-objectives are:

- To explore theories underlying social engagement praxis and socio-ecological theology.
- To investigate theological studies carried out on the implementation of the ecological documents of the Roman Catholic Church by the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon at the community level.
- To establish theological evidence that the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon is implementing, or not implementing, the Roman Catholic Church's socio-ecological documents at the grassroots/community level.
- To propose theological interventions and actions for the effective implementation of the Roman Catholic Church socio-ecological documents in addressing environmental and social engagement in Cameroon.

## 1.6. Scope of Literature

The review of literature in this study is framed within social science and theology and social engagement praxis (Johnson 2018, Borghi *et al.* 2022), the environment (Kumar, 2018, Shapiro *et al.* 2022) and social ecology (Ngirinshuti, 2018, Ruppel and Tchunte, 2018). Central to sociology on ecology is the interconnection between the ecosystem and the human socio-transformational wellbeing. Ecological theology revolves around a threefold paradigm of relationships of humans with the rest of creation. These paradigms include dominion (Zalasiewicz *et al.*, 2011 and Cavedon, 2015), stewardship (Rhoads, 2009; Conradie, 2005; DeWitt, 2016) and community of creation (De Gruchy, 2009; Lane, 2020). The dominion model of creation capitalises on “rule over” nature. The stewardship model argues for a human caretaking role over creation. The communion of creation differentiates from dominion and stewardship by its consideration of the interdependence and interconnectedness of human beings with the entire creation. In connection with ecology, the common good (Argandoña, 2011; Pope Francis, 2020) and servant leadership (Siregar *et al.*, 2022; Augusta and Azmy, 2023) are discussed in theological perspectives. In light of this, the fragility of human beings vis-à-vis the omnipotence of God and the altruistic service of fellow humans and nature. The review of literature is presented in Chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis.

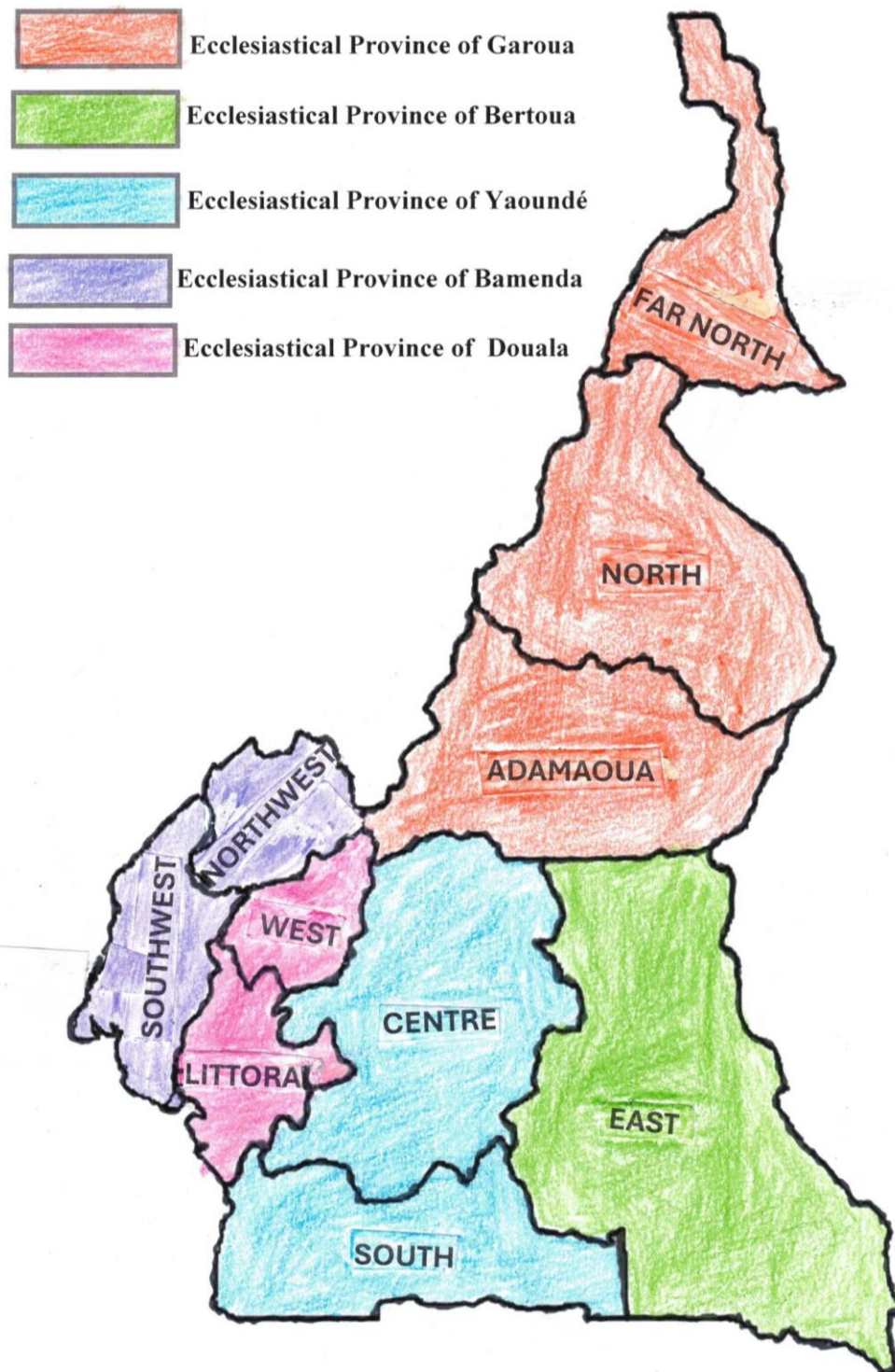
## 1.7. Context of the Study

This study targeted the NECC, which is the Catholic ecclesiastical body that includes all the bishops of twenty-six Dioceses of all ten regions in Cameroon. Figure 1.1 shows the location of NECC and the context of this study<sup>15</sup>. The bishop is the Head Pastor of the Diocese. The archdioceses<sup>16</sup> are under the leadership of Archbishops. In some Archdioceses, the Archbishop can be assisted by an auxiliary or coadjutor Bishop. The assignment of an Assistant Bishop to an Archbishop depends on the magnitude of pastoral activities to be carried out in the specific Archdiocese. For more proximity, Dioceses and Archdioceses in Cameroon are grouped under five Ecclesiastical Provinces or Conferences, at the head of which are Presidents. An ecclesiastical province is a group of more than three Dioceses. At the national level, this body of bishops (the NECC) is headed by a President, one of the bishops elected for a five-year term, non-renewable. The General Secretariat is the primary executive body of the NECC. The General Secretary is appointed for four years by all the bishops during their plenary assembly. Being at the service of the plenary assembly of Bishops and their permanent council, the General Secretariat remains the element of coordination and liaison between the various secretariats, services, and national offices of NECC. The head office of the NECC is in Yaoundé, the executive capital of Cameroon. The study consists of conducting interviews within the National Service for Justice and Peace (NSJP) (one of the structures of the NECC) for the collection of information on the actions by the bishops in their implementation performance of the socio-ecological documents at the community level. For this purpose, a Gatekeeper's Consent has been signed by the General Secretary of the NECC for permission and authorisation to effectuate the interview within the organisation in the context of the study.

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<sup>15</sup> As it can be observed, apart from the ecclesiastical province of Bertoua, which covers the entire eastern region of the country and Garoua, which extends over three regions (Adamaoua, North and Extreme North), the three other church provinces each cover two regions. For instance, Bamenda covers the Northwest and Southwest regions; Douala – West and Littoral regions and Yaoundé – Central and South regions.

<sup>16</sup> In the Roman Catholic Church, an Archdiocese is a Diocese with a metropolitan city as its seat and whose ordinary has the title of Archbishop.



**Figure 1.1:** Location of National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon (NECC)

**Source:** The researcher

For years, the NECC, which covers the whole territory of Cameroon, has been active in addressing environmental protection and socio-economic issues through its National Service for Justice and Peace (NSJP). This includes lobbying and interventions, such as publishing reports on multinationals like Société Camerounaise de Palmeraies (Socapalm) in 2016 and Société Sucrière du Cameroun

(Soscucam) in Banjock, as well as creating environmental protection units in Figuil (NSJP, 2016). In a 2016 report, the NSJP condemned Socapalm for land dispossession, forest exploitation, and pollution caused by human waste disposal in rivers. Fouda (2019), under the NSJP's direction, further criticised the government's inaction on environmental fraud in artisanal mining in the Eastern and Adamaoua regions. The report called on the government to take responsibility for addressing the urgent ecological challenges facing the country.

The NECC supports environmental preservation solely through the NSJP. However, it is concerning that this ecclesiastical structure has not directly engaged in raising awareness or educating the population on environmental issues. As mentioned above, no pastoral letter or document addressing Cameroon's ecological vulnerability exists in its archives. This highlights a lack of prophetic leadership in tackling the country's environmental challenges despite numerous appeals from the Pope for active ecological engagement. This gap requires attention to enhance the Catholic Church's role in addressing the ecological crisis through its mission.

## **1.8. Research Methodology**

This study deployed qualitative exploratory research design. This methodological choice was relevant and enabled to achieve interviewing twenty well-informed participants from ten Dioceses in Cameroon, on the environmental preservation activity and the implementation of the socio-ecological documents by the NECC. The detailed methodology is found in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

## **1.9. Limitation and Scope of the Study**

### **1.9.1. Limitation of the Study**

The scarcity of scholarly published literature on environment and eco-theology by the Roman Catholic Church's authorities and theologians in the context of Cameroon was the major limitation of the study. Not much has been written or researched on the socio-ecological activity of the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon. This makes the study in some way not only assiduous but also challenging. This work, therefore, aims to contribute to overcoming this limitation in the sense that it will generate and share knowledge, thus constituting a source and at the same time an orientation for future research.

### **1.9.2. Scope of the Study**

The scope of this study will be twofold. First, the Christian religion in Cameroon includes the Protestants, Catholics, and the Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches. However, the horizon of this study is restricted to the implementation of socio-ecological documents by the Catholic National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon. References to other churches and faith communities will be by way of illustration. Second, the social teaching of the Roman Catholic Church for nearly two thousand years encompasses a panoply of topics; however, the ambit of the present study will only be on the issue of the socio-environment for five decades (1965-2015).

### **1.10. Definition of Key Terms**

#### **1.10.1. Socio-ecological Documents**

The socio-ecological documents refer to all publications (encyclical letters, official speeches, messages, pastoral letters) of the various Popes of the Roman Catholic Church to address issues regarding ecology and environmental protection. The study focuses on this type of documents dating from Pope Pius XII (1948) to Pope Francis (2025).

#### **1.10.2. National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon**

The National Episcopal Conference is the structural and governing body of the Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon. It incorporates all the bishops of twenty-six Dioceses of all ten regions of Cameroon. The bishop is the Head Pastor of each Diocese. Traditionally, the NECC holds its seminars every year in one of the Dioceses. At the end of each seminar, they publish a pastoral letter or a final message. The said letter is a message generally addressed to Priests, consecrated persons (religious), lay faithful and people of goodwill.

### **1.11. The Structure of the Thesis**

The study is organised and framed in eight chapters, as outlined in the following table.

*Table 1.1: Plan of the study*

Chapters	Scope
<b>Chapter One: The Introduction to the Study</b>	The first chapter introduces the entire study and the scope of the problem studied. It outlines the background of the study, the significance and the statement of research problem, the research questions and objectives, the location of the study and an overview of the methodology underpinning the study.
<b>Chapter Two: Perspectives on Socio-ecological Engagement Praxis</b>	The second chapter presents the relevant literature that underpins the study from the perspective of discourses on social engagement praxis, the environment, and social ecology. Central to social science conversation on ecology is the interconnection between the ecosystem and the human socio-transformational wellbeing.
<b>Chapter Three: Theological Perspectives on Socio-ecological Engagement Praxis</b>	The horizon of Chapter Three is the evaluation of the body of literature on theology. The conceptual argumentation of this literature revolves around ecological theology, the common good and servant leadership.
<b>Chapter Four: Conceptual and Theoretical Framework</b>	This fourth chapter is constructed around the conceptual and theoretical frameworks, with a critical theological reflection on environmental social engagement. The chapter emphasises the embodiment of correlated theories such as implementation, integral eco-theology, the inalienability of the common good, sacramentality of creation, and servant leadership.
<b>Chapter Five: Research Methodology</b>	The methodology elaborated in Chapter Five revolves around interpretivist philosophy and

	<p>qualitative exploratory research design. It further describes the targeted population, purposive sampling and interviews, data collection and data analysis techniques and tools, and secondary data.</p>
<p><b>Chapter Six: Presentation of Results and Findings</b></p>	<p>The sixth chapter draws from the theoretical framework of environmental social engagement and research questions to present the results and assess the findings from interviews. Additionally, the chapter establishes the extent to which the NECC has been promoting the implementation of the socio-ecological teaching of the Roman Catholic Church in the country, especially at the grassroots level.</p>
<p><b>Chapter Seven: Discussion of Findings</b></p>	<p>Chapter Seven is a discussion on the findings on the implementation interventions of the socio-ecological documents by the NECC. This discussion is achieved through the interpretation of findings in connection with the research problem and objectives, in light of emerging themes from the interview. The socio-ecological (SET) framework is proposed to underpin the effectiveness of the implementation of socio-ecological documents.</p>
<p><b>Chapter Eight: Recommendations and Conclusion</b></p>	<p>This last chapter presents the general summary of the study: the encapsulation of all the work as elaborated in the previous chapters. It then envisages theological interventions or suggestions to strengthen the NECC towards effective implementation of the socio-ecological documents and social transformation.</p>

**Source:** The researcher

The review of literature in social science constitutes the essential part of the thesis.

Next is Chapter Two.

## CHAPTER TWO

### PERSPECTIVES ON SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL ENGAGEMENT PRAXIS

#### 2.1. Introduction

The previous chapter presented the scope of this thesis. It introduced the background leading to the investigation on the implementation of the socio-ecological documents of the Roman Catholic Church by the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon at the community level. The purpose of the present chapter is to examine studies on social science perspectives on socio-ecological engagement praxis knowledge gaps, leading to an understanding of the theological research problem in ecological crisis. The chapter critically evaluates the literature on sociological engagement praxis, focusing on theories underlying social engagement praxis within the scope of social science. Thematized concepts constitute the subheadings in the chapter, in view of directing the critical discussion of the thematic gaps. The discussion highlights the global efforts in the preservation of the environment and ecology for social transformation.

#### 2.2. Social Engagement Praxis

Scholars who have elaborated on social engagement praxis include Donati (2013), Johnson (2018), and Borghi *et al.* (2022). Discussions from these scholars indicate various approaches to social engagement exercise. While Donati (2013) and Johnson (2018) approach the discourse on social engagement from the perspective of dynamics of social ethics and economics, Borghi *et al.* (2022) discuss the concept from the viewpoint of social interaction through a cross-sectional interdisciplinary focus on psychology, communication, freedom of speech, and research. Borghi *et al.* (2022:2) adopt “anthropological, philosophical and psychological perspectives, [and focus] on concepts, abstraction, abstractness, and the difference between concepts and linguistic concepts”.

Donati (2013) defines social engagement from the frame of reference of post-modern relational sociology by exploring the affinitive and intrinsic relational character of engagement. The practice of social involvement is understood by Donati as the political and economic depolarisation of the world to finally arrive at conceiving a society where there are no longer classes and gaps between the few extremely rich and many underprivileged, very poor people. With this conception of social engagement, Donati moves away from Webber (1864-1920), who sees capitalism as a positive advent with social classes based on economic resources that are relevant for capitalistic economic progress.

According to Swedberg (1999), Webber articulates that institutions operate through bureaucracy, which rationalises and legitimises their existence and brings people to accept their authority while following their orders. On the contrary, Donati (2013:85) shifts from Webber and discourses on “engagement as a social relation through a framework inspired by critical, analytical and relational realism”. Considering Donati, it is evident that the discourse on social engagement shifts from theory to becoming incarnated into a permanent struggle for the dignity of all humans, regardless of geographic area and skin colour.

Johnson (2018:10) approaches social engagement as “a dynamic [of] multidimensional relational concept” which involves behavioural “attributes of connection, interaction, participation, and involvement, designed to achieve or elicit an outcome at individual [and organisational] levels”. It can be analysed that in the context of Donati (2013:94), social engagement involves work, social participation, and quality of life; and denotes “the shift from engagement as an individual enterprise to engagement as care for social relations”: communion with others and care for the common good<sup>17</sup>. Social engagement is further viewed as a dynamic of getting out of oneself to embrace the common cause. Donati (2013:86) names this dynamic “secularisation process”, which consists of a considerable move from individualism to collectivism. Johnson (2018) approaches social engagement from the organisational perspective of practical communication, considering a fully functioning society, of ethical decision-making, and of building social capital for the improvement of human living conditions. It should be mentioned that in Johnson’s discourse, social engagement is investigated from both community and personal levels, using the framework of relational (social belonging), emotional, and rational as its characteristics. In this perspective, social engagement is characterised by “interactional richness and shared meaning between the individual and the objective” (Johnston, 2018:21). In other words, the importance of communicative intervention between the individual and society must be underlined with a view to social engagement. Borghi *et al.* (2022) explore social engagement in line of communication, although they add a cognitive dimension.

Borghi *et al.* (2022) analyse social engagement as interaction with selves and with others, through language and psychosocial mechanisms. From the perspective of Borghi *et al.* (2022), social engagement takes a civic and public turn to both individual and collective freedoms, which promote not only multidimensional and multidisciplinary research but also speaking out in public fora without

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<sup>17</sup> This concept of common good is discussed in Section 3.3.

fear of reprisals. According to Borghi *et al.* (2022), it is an environment of freedom that can allow researchers to explore major issues of society, take part in constructive debates, and disseminate knowledge in the service of communities. Borghi *et al.* (2022:3) address “how concepts emerge from social interaction and how interaction influences their acquisition and use”. They further discuss how social interaction with others (outer self) influences the interaction with the inner self and empowers the concept of social engagement and human cognition. In this viewpoint, language is considered an important medium for the social interaction of inner self with outer-self because it serves “for conceptualisation and especially for abstractness [...] as a special mode of being in [and interpreting] the world” (Borghi *et al.* 2023:1-2). Language enhances dialogue with self (inner-speech / monologic) and with others (outer-speech / dialogic). In this perspective, language is viewed as “a powerful instrument that enriches our cognitive abilities” (Borghi *et al.* 2023:2). It should be noted that Borghi *et al.*'s evaluation of social interaction based on linguistic cognition is in line with Olsen and Tylén (2022) who discuss the coordination process which varies according to the functional dynamics of the composition of the social group. The discourse on social engagement evolves around the study of learning to return to its “natural ecology” that Borghi *et al.* (2023:3) name “the social niche”. The return to the social niche is a sensory cognitive system which essentially consists, for human beings, of perceptual and motor processing, allowing them to interact with the immediate environment in which they live. From this perspective, language, in social interaction, allows knowledge to be internalised before being expressed. Olsen and Tylén (2022) and Borghi *et al.* (2023) then evoke the notion of internalisation and expression.

The above literature shows that social engagement encompasses much more of sociology which deals with relationships through the psychological and social conditions of human beings. Communication then plays a key role in social interaction between individuals and their living environment. The concept of the praxis of social engagement, as discussed by Donati (2013), Johnson (2018) and Borghi *et al.* (2023), revolves around behavioural patterns, social connection, interaction, and participation in a community movement with communication (language) and ethics as correlates. It should be noted, however, that the above literature does not explicitly approach the concept of social engagement from the perspective of the environmental space in which human beings live, act and interact. This deficiency requires an evaluation of further literature to shed light on environmental discourses.

### 2.3. Environment

Environment and ecology are modern words that are intrinsically linked to their Latin and Greek etymologies. Environment comes from the Latin verb *ambire*, which means “to go around”. It is also a name that indicates the space that surrounds human beings and in which they move and live together with others, including non-humans. Considering its Latin root, Kumar (2018:315) describes environment as the surroundings and “the circumstances or conditions that surround an organism or group of organism or the complex of social or cultural conditions that affect an individual or community”. From the onset, it can be observed that Kumar’s semantic definition seems limited only to human beings, while the notion of environment englobes much broader components as evaluated from the Greek origin of the term. Conradie (2003) seems to give a more integral definition of the environment, discoursing on a triadic and holistic interpretation of the term. And conceiving it as, firstly, a human body viewed in the perspective of “an integral part of the earth’s ecosystems”; secondly, a human dwelling home (where humans live and work), and thirdly, as the “nature out there”, the global environment which requires attention and protection from worldwide menaces “such as nuclear threats, global warming, ozone depletion, deforestation and the loss of biodiversity” (Conradie 2003:123). In Conradie’s perception, “nature out there” includes all beings created by God: humans and non-humans.

The term environment is a model built on the Greek word *oikia* or *oikos* (house, household, home, dwelling place, family, economy), which in turn, refers to *oiko-logy*. As Conradie (2003:124) and Schwarz and Jax (2011:145) argue, the term *oecologie* (ecology) was coined by the German zoologist, Ernest Haeckel (1834 – 1919) as a reference to the unabridged science of the relationship between creatures and their surrounding outside world. It is the science that studies plants and animals in relation to each other and to the environment in which they live, grow, and spread. In Haeckel’s conceptual frame, ecology informs about “the science of the household of nature or the economy of the organism” (Schwarz and Jax 2011:145). Taking into consideration Schwarz and Jax’s claim, it can be expostulated that the environment is a place to which all creatures of the earth belong and in which they have to live safely and joyfully. Schwarz and Jax (2011:147) further assert that the Latins and Greeks did not directly use the words environment and ecology, but that they had other terms that testify to their sensitivity on the topic<sup>18</sup> which, by extension, calls for respect for environmental space, the common home to all.

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<sup>18</sup> This argument is going to be developed further in section 2.4.

The theme of environment and environmental preservation certainly does not need solitary champions, but rather positive examples from collective individuals, even as drops in the middle of the sea. It equally requires courageous and decisive political and institutional decision-choices that can positively impact the safeguarding of the planet earth for the betterment of all its inhabitants. As the literature explores in this chapter, it is undeniable that, even when it comes to protecting the earth, certain personalities have the power to gain more of a hold on the attention of public opinion than others, because of their media visibility or a dialectical ability capable of giving a specific weight to the words spoken in front of a virtual or real audience. However, words are capable of surprising interlocutors with the strength of concepts that are as shareable as they are powerful in their universality. That is why the literature on environmental advocacy is as varied as they are geographically circumscribed. The centrality of this literature is the reference to the natural world and the plundering of its resources by humanity, disconnected from nature and with an egocentric vision of the world.

There is a vast body of literature on the notion of the environment, considered the natural world or the habitat in and around which people, animals, plants, and other ecosystem components live amidst their polycentric and multifaceted issues affecting them (Lévêque, 2003; Kumar, 2018). In other words, the environment is everything that surrounds beings and with which they live and interact. It involves both creatures' health and the "economy"<sup>19</sup>. The environment is among the protected goods of the earth. It includes nature: flora and fauna in correlation to the meteorological or geological phenomena of the earth. The discourse on the environment cannot ignore matter and energy. In this viewpoint, Kumar (2018) contends that the natural environment is also made up of deserts and rocks. The environment further includes the seas and the breath, the rivers and oceans, which contribute to the life of all that exists. The future generations will be able to live if there is respect and safeguard for the environment. The protection of this precious asset is fundamental. The rainforest of Central Africa is one of those assets that deserves conservation attention.

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<sup>19</sup> As already mentioned, "Economy" comes from the combination of the Greek word *οἶκος* (*oikos*), which means "house", also understood as "family assets", and the Latin word *nomos*, which means "norm" or "law" or "rule". The economy is therefore the rule(s) that regulate the organisation of common or family goods or resources, and productivity. This organisation includes the complexity of exchanges, productions and trades of objects and services, such as innumerable services. Madondo (2023:79-80) argues that the economy emphasises "the importance of managing natural resources in a way that prioritises the livelihoods and well-being of all members of society, especially ordinary people [...] within a community as a common household."

### 2.3.1. The Central African Rainforest

The study dwells much more on the socio-ecological literature around the natural environment, which is the rainforest of the Congo Basin<sup>20</sup> in which Cameroon is established and is considered by most researchers as the second “lungs of our planet” after the Amazon forest (Ndih, 2008:154). Ndih (2008:155) further argues that the central African rainforest “provides, by the mechanism of photosynthesis, a mass production of oxygen necessary for life. The enormous biodiversity of this ecosystem also constitutes a stock of useful wealth both for the populations that inhabit it and for the rest of humanity”. Megevand *et al.* (2013:29) inform that the Congo Basin “encompasses 400 million hectares, 200 million of which are covered by forest, with 90 per cent being tropical dense forests”. Megevand *et al.* (2013:29) further claim that 99 per cent of the forested area in the Central Africa region is primary forest or naturally regenerated forest, in contrast to farms or plantations. This leads to the consideration of this biodiversity of Central Africa as one of the planet’s nourishing basins, in terms of regeneration of vital energy. In this vein, Shapiro *et al.* (2022:4) note the crucial role that the Central Africa Forest plays in mitigating human-related climatic variations. These forests constitute “an important carbon sink for regional and global ecological and climate regulation, a huge biodiversity hotspot and home to 60 million people for whom forests represent essential natural resources and cultural heritage” (Shapiro *et al.* 2022:4). They (the equatorial forests) are home to the largest continuous expanse of forest in Africa, regulating the global climate while providing essential resources and livelihoods for humans, and also being home to vast biodiversity.

Despite its vastness and richness in biodiversity, it is observable that this natural habitat in Central Africa is suffering enormously from the phenomenon of deforestation. Shapiro *et al.* (2022:2) observe that “The threats to these forests are expected to increase” if no serious measures are taken to halt them. The precariousness of land denuding is perceptible, especially in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), which is covered with 68.78% of the Congo Basin rainforest. The country is the second host of the largest tropical forest on earth (after Brazil) and given the rate of its deforestation, it is estimated that it will lose its entire primary forest by 2100 (Megevand *et al.* 2013:13). Megevand *et al.* (2013) further observe that the rate of deforestation in the DRC has quadrupled from 0.11% during the period between 1990 and 2000 to 0.34% between 2000 and 2010.

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<sup>20</sup> The six countries in which is located in the Congo Basin include Cameroon, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, and Gabon.

This deforestation in the DRC is mainly driven by mining, logging and agriculture. The alarming issue of deforestation also extends to Cameroon.

### **2.3.2. Deforestation in Cameroon**

In just over a decade, the phenomenon of deforestation has taken a critical shape in the reflections of environmentalists in Cameroon. Scholars such as Alemagi (2011), Darkoh (2018) and Bergen (2019) have highlighted the issue of deforestation as a key factor threatening biodiversity and food security in the country. These scholars underline that several factors are at play in enforcing and exacerbating the issue of deforestation in Cameroon. These factors include, for instance, negligence of government institutions to preserve forests, poor environmental policies, and increasing land degradation. Darkoh (2018:95), however, goes further to establish a connection between deforestation and other pressing societal issues such as pollution, water crisis, littering, increasing rate of poverty and health hazards. He argues that these issues have contributed to the high rate of deforestation experienced today in Cameroon.

Nkoulou *et al.* (2021) contend that Cameroon's forestry area is estimated at 19 63,000 hectares and contributes to "16% of the country's Gross Domestic Product [GDP]". However, as warned by Anaka (2018), the continued clearing of forests in Cameroon by national and multinational logging companies is becoming more and more a phenomenon that needs to be considered and addressed as an environmental threat because it is creating a huge loss of biodiversity in the country. Anaka (2018:24) further observes that within a period of 15 years, that is, from 2000 to 2015, "About 13.4% of 3.3 million hectares of forest cover was lost in Cameroon". Since deforestation remains an environmental/ecological problem in Cameroon, it is appropriate to draw attention to both its causes (of deforestation) and its consequences on the socio-economic life of the population and the ecosystem of the country.

#### **2.3.2.1. Causes of Deforestation in Cameroon**

Various literature highlights various causes of deforestation and forest degradation in Cameroon. These causes include the high demand for fuelwood (Nkwemoh *et al.* 2017; Anaka, 2018; Sotamenou *et al.* 2024); land expansion for agriculture (Ordway *et al.* 2017; Aquilas *et al.* 2022); timber

exploitation/exportation (Alemagi, 2011; Chupezi 2015) and rampant urbanisation (Bessat, 1996; Nkwemoh *et al.* 2017).

In rural areas, as well as in the cities of Cameroon, the demand for fuelwood is increasing rapidly. This is mainly because the price of cooking gas is escalating daily. Anaka (2018:24-25) points out that, because “cooking involves a lot of energy-intensive activity”, the population is engaged in cutting down trees to supply the demand in the sector, usually called “the poor man’s energy”. Tonnes of trees are felled in the forest and transported to cities for lucrative purposes. A good amount of this wood is used either for cooking in households or transformed into charcoal for embers on street corners and in front of bars and restaurants<sup>21</sup>. The analysis of a field survey conducted by Nkwemoh *et al.* (2017:11) shows that 54% of households in the metropolitan city of Yaoundé<sup>22</sup> use fuelwood and charcoal for cooking, 29% use it for furniture, and 16,3% use it for other means. In 2022, the deforestation rate was estimated at 0.0168% of the total area of the country’s forests or approximately 3,628 hectares. These deforested areas include 1,250 hectares lost due to logging, and approximately 2,177 hectares lost due to agriculture (Sotamenou *et al.*, 2024).

Through agriculture, the land provides the human person with his food needs. Farming contributes to major cash crops and thus participates in the country’s GDP. As Aquilas *et al.* (2022:11) contend, agriculture “contributes to 35% of the destruction of the forests in Africa”. It is evident that human beings need food through agricultural activities. However, improper or exacerbated use of the land through the clearing of trees creates an imbalance and loss of forests and the ecosystem (biodiversity). As Masolele *et al.* (2024:3-4) argue, the report shows that Africa has the highest net-annual loss of forests, with 2 million hectares annually; this means that forest cover is being removed. In Cameroon, the woodland is taken out for the cultivation of industrial crops such as coffee, cocoa, white and black pepper, cotton, bananas, tea, and sesame, essentially meant for exportation. Other varieties of food crops comprise cereals (rice, maize, beans and peanuts), tubers (cassava, yams, and sweet potatoes), millet, sorghum, Irish potatoes, a wide variety of vegetables, oilseeds (palm oil, coconut palm) and garden products. The increased demand for commercialised products such as cocoa, coffee, and palm oil impels the government to invest in a large-scale agricultural sector. This agricultural investment is done through the unsustainable felling down of trees because “68% of Cameroon’s land suitable

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<sup>21</sup> This phenomenon of embers in front of bars or refreshment stalls is easily observed in towns and metropolitan cities of Cameroon in the evenings. Although it regenerates jobs and income for individuals and families, the phenomenon leads to a demand for fuelwood, which exacerbates deforestation and therefore requires regulation for greater sustainability.

<sup>22</sup> “Yaoundé is the capital city of the country. It was founded in 1888 by the German Colonial Administration” (Nkwemoh *et al.* 2017:7).

for agriculture is under dense tropical forest” (Ordway *et al.* 2017:3). As already mentioned, it is certain that human beings need land for their livelihood; however, the risk of deforestation must be mitigated through sustainable agricultural activities. Farming activities should not be detrimental to the forest and its wide range of biodiversity, which is important not only for Cameroon but also for the entire planet earth. Log exploitation and exportation play a major role in the phenomenon of deforestation.

The high global demand for wood and its by-products on national and international markets is one of the driving causes of deforestation in Cameroon. This assertion is relayed by Ngaba *et al.* (2023:1) who remark that “renowned for its abundant forest resources and substantial contributions to the global wood industry, [Cameroon] finds itself facing numerous concerns related to sustainability, legality, and environmental impact”. The spoliation of Cameroon’s forests is the enterprise of both national and multinational timber companies such as the Industrial Wood Company of Cameroon, African Wood Company, Company of Exploitation of Cameroon’s Wood, South & FILS and Cameroon Wood Park Company, just to mention a few. These companies participate in the rampant harvest of timber without paying attention to its implications for society and biodiversity (Chupezi 2015:3). Only a few of these logging or timber companies are owned by Cameroonian nationals. Alemagi (2011:67) observes that most forestry concessions in Cameroon belong to Asian and European companies from France, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium, Malaysia, China, Hong Kong and Lebanon. Statistics from 2021 by Ngaba *et al.* (2023:4) indicate that Cameroon’s four top export markets for forest products by import value include China (34%), Vietnam (19%), Belgium (13%), and Italy (7%). Another contributing factor to deforestation is the galloping rate of urbanisation.

The drift from the countryside in Cameroon is a phenomenon that dates back to the 1960s, just after the country’s independence (as mentioned in Section 1.2). The young population migrates to towns and cities in search of employment and better living conditions. The overflow of the urban population increases housing demands and the expansion of cities. The human struggle for settlement in Yaoundé, for instance, with a total population of about 4.1 million (according to 2020’s functional urban area<sup>23</sup>), has resulted in environmental distress. Natural forests that surrounded the country’s capital city some 20 years ago are now replaced by houses. Plots are being purchased, and the trees of natural forests are giving way to new buildings. As Nkwemoh *et al.* (2017:7) notice, the continued increase in urban population has led to an increase in the need for residential space. Subsequently,

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<sup>23</sup> This figure is retracted from Factsheet 2022’s Partner City, Yaoundé, Cameroon.

the extension of the city is reflected in the increasing expansion of housing on the outskirts of the city. Remnant forests around these areas are also rapidly being spoliated, leading to severe environmental impact. One of these impacts is the deadly landslide that occurred on October 8, 2023, in the Mbankolo neighbourhood of Yaoundé<sup>24</sup>. It is worth mentioning that the environmental reality regarding the degradation of forests is replicable in other cities located in the equatorial zone of the country. The town of Bertoua is experiencing exponential urbanisation with the loss of its green space in its outskirts, formerly covered by forest.

### **2.3.2.2. Consequences of Deforestation in Cameroon**

Ngaba *et al.* (2023:1) warn that deforestation poses a threat “to the biodiversity, fragile ecosystems, and the livelihoods of local communities who rely on these forests for sustenance”. This threat includes, among others, the dislocation of Pygmies, loss of biodiversity, shortage of water, and land erosion. Considering the huge quantity of wood felt and sold by nations of the tropical rainforests to “developed” nations, Reginald (2017:234) alerts that the clearing of trees could lead to serious harm to ecosystems and ultimately cause defilement “not only to the citizens of the developing country but also to the entire world”. Hence, the need for the importing country to consider the global effect of its consumption and judiciously avoid destroying the ecosystems of developing countries. Pemunta (2013) and Avila Martin *et al.* (2020) point to the unsettlement of the “Hunter-Gatherers” as one of the devastating consequences of deforestation in Cameroon.

“Hunter-gatherers” is the concept coined and used by Pemunta (2013:1) and Avila Martin *et al.* (2020:3) to designate the Pygmies, who are the first inhabitants of the equatorial rainforest of Central Africa. By nature, the Pygmies are nomadic people and physically characterised by their small stature. They make their living from hunting and gathering fruits in their bio-natural environment (Avila Martin *et al.*, 2020:1). They live in huts made of stakes and tree leaves. Studies carried out by both Pemunta and Avila Martin *et al.* observe that the Pygmies in Cameroon represent about 0,4% of the total population of Cameroon and that they form three main ethnic groups which are: the Baka (more

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<sup>24</sup> On that day, as reported by Njie and Muia (2023), torrential rain caused “a landslide in the Mbankolo neighbourhood in the Yaoundé II district council” followed by “the collapse of the embankment of an artificial lake uphill”. The toll provided by the Red Cross volunteers makes mention of some “700 people affected with almost 110 households. The landslide swept away around 27 homes that were destroyed, around 30 that were partially destroyed, 27 corpses were found, and around 35 people were injured or missing”.

than 40,000 inhabitants and occupy 75 000 km), the Bagyeli (3,700 inhabitants on 12 000 km) and the Bedzang (with a population of more than a thousand inhabitants) (Pemunta, 2013:3).

Kuate (2011), Pemunta (2013) and Avila Martin *et al.* (2020) observe that the Hunter-gatherers are being forced by agricultural projects, multinational logging companies and urbanisation to separate from their forest and to live on the edges of their ancestral lands, along the roads. Thus, making it very difficult for these indigenous people to access their traditional sources of livelihood: hunting small animals and gathering fruits and medicinal plants. Pemunta points to the fact that attempts by the government, and national and international NGOs to modernise the Pygmies in the name of decentralisation are a threat to the indigenous people of the forests because that will require removing them from their natural habitats (the forest) where they are living peacefully and bringing them into towns where they will feel deracinated. Endeavouring to bring the Pygmies out of their forest has instead “ostracised them for the benefits of development” (Pemunta 2013:1-2). Furthermore, the Pygmies “are completely dependent on the environment for their sustenance and medical care. When the forest is destroyed their way of life is also destroyed” (Avila Martin *et al.* 2022:5). Another lamentable phenomenon decried by Avila Martin *et al.* (2022:6) is the observable reality that forestry companies are cutting down some trees that are essential to the life of the Hunter-gatherers communities, as in the case of Moabi. Moabi is a tall tree, typical of the central African region, which produces a fruit rich in oil used by the Baka and other Pygmies for lighting fires and for cooking. Moabi fruit is also a source of income for the communities when it is sold at the local market.

Pemunta (2013:3) further identifies eight major impoverishment risks inherent with the resettlement of the Pygmies, namely, “the risks of landlessness, joblessness, homelessness, marginalisation, increased morbidity/mortality, food insecurity, loss of access to common property resources, and social disarticulation”. The Pygmies’ identity is closely tied to the existence of the forest. The loss of forests through deforestation is synonymous with the loss of their ancestral cradle, which is their land, their source of livelihood and their homes. In a nutshell, the Pygmies in Cameroon are losing their dignity and their rights to live through the loss of their land in the hands of governmental and NGOs, and national and international logging companies. Pope Benedict XVI (2010: n.4) argues about the escalating phenomenon of “environmental refugees”, namely people forced by the degradation of their natural home to abandon it – and often also their property – to face the dangers and the unpredictability of forced and involuntary migration. This papal statement can implicitly be referred to and applied to the situation of Pygmies of the equatorial rainforest of Cameroon. Another negative effect of logging in Cameroon is the decline in species diversity.

Masolele *et al.* (2024:3-4) define biodiversity as “a huge variety of animals and plants on our planet living and depending on each other in the place they are found”. Growing up in Babadjou, my native village in the Western region of Cameroon, in the 1980s, there were forests in which many species of wild animals inhabited. We could see those animals on our way to the farm, among others, chimpanzees, monkeys, antelopes, elephants, and gorillas. But today, those forests have completely disappeared under humanity’s intensified farming and felling of trees. The animals, too, have disappeared mostly because of hunting activities and lack of shade. Deforestation has an impact on the impoverishment and the extinction of the forest ecosystem. This is how species of trees, herbs, and wild animals drastically diminish or die out completely. Ndihi (2008:164) remarks that logging always begins in a particular region where there are certain species of wood highly valued by companies to which the State has granted exploitation concessions. And when these species become rarer due to logging, other species begin to pay exploitation costs. This progressive skimming of forest cover thus contributes to the reduction of biodiversity in the short and long term. It also leads to dryness of land and scarcity of drinking water.

The shortage of drinking water is becoming more and more the world’s phenomenal disaster. Lack of adequate access to clean water and sanitation is one of the root causes of disease and mortality worldwide, especially in developing countries. Diseases, such as diarrhoea and typhoid, are some of the consequences of this lack of drinking water and adequate sanitation. In *Laudato Si’*, Pope Francis (2015, n.13, 24-25, 27-30) points out that the ecological crisis affects mostly the poor communities whose members cannot afford to buy bottled water to drink, especially when the natural spring has dried up. Trees play an important role in the water cycle because they can absorb rainwater and then release it as vapour into the atmosphere, which then falls again as rainfall. That is why deforestation causes the drying of the soil, which becomes poor in water, especially in wooded savannas in Cameroon. Even though there are no reliable statistics available, one may say that the lack of drinking water in Cameroon is increasingly felt in rural areas as well as in cities. In cities, dry taps are unreliable, and in the countryside, people travel for long distances to find a source where they can draw what can be called drinking water. The water supply in most rural communities is affected during the dry season due to the lack of rain and the dryness of water catchments. Land disintegration during the rainy season is another impact of deforestation.

The forest is a considerable cover of the earth’s space against degradation. As Masolele *et al.* (2024:6) establish, “Forest soils are moist, but without protection from sun-blocking tree cover, they quickly

dry out. Roots normally can hold soils together, especially on slopes and may prevent the possibility of landslides in particular areas”. The soil exposure to rain due to deforestation or lack of trees has caused landslides in various parts of Cameroon (Anaka 2018:24). The natural disaster of that nature is the unprecedented landslide that occurred on October 29, 2019, in the Gouache district in the city of Bafoussam, the west region of Cameroon, after several days of heavy rainfall. This natural disaster caused considerable human and material damages: 11 houses were completely wiped out with their inhabitants. The victims of this natural catastrophe were 60 deaths, and several dozen were injured (Wantim *et al.* 2023:1). The slope of the hill on which residential houses were built was completely bare, with no trees. The lesson that the administrative authorities and citizens have learned from this deadly calamity is that trees should be planted to cover the soil to prevent its future erosion.

Erosion also causes soil infertility. When it rains, the rainwater sweeps away all the nutrients from the soil and drives them towards the rivers. So, the earth becomes arid and unable to produce crops. Due to deforestation, the land is transformed into ferric breastplates by the effect of sunshine without plant protection (Bessat 1996:2-3). Masolele *et al.* (2024:10) infer “that depletion of the forest and degradation of the land endanger the soil and render it infertile for agriculture. This further pushes the poor into harsh economic realities, since they depend on the land for their subsistence crop production”. It is observable in Cameroon that land dryness due to deforestation exposes the rural population to harsh economic conditions. Farmers are obliged to use chemical fertilisers every planting season to hope for a satisfactory harvest. Long-term harmful consequences of these chemical fertilisers on human and aquatic animal populations cannot be neglected. It is appropriate to glance at the attempts of the government of Cameroon to mitigate the causes and harmful effects of deforestation.

Even though deforestation in Cameroon may look diverting from the focus, it gives a glimpse picture of the environmental degradation in the country and urges for action. The rampant degradation of the equatorial forest, which endangers the ecological balance of the whole world, requires the implementation of documents issued by the RCC to call for respect for the Earth, the common home of all. These documents are termed “socio-ecological” because they address critical environmental issues. These types of documents include the address to the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) (Pope Pius XII, 1948), the address to the FAO (Pope John XXIII, 1959), *Ecclesia in Africa* (Pope John Paul II, 1995), *Africae Munus* (Pope Benedict XVI, 2011), *Evangelium Gaudium* (Pope Francis,

2013c), *Laudato Si'* (Pope Francis, 2015), to mention a few. Implementing the said documents by the RCC in Cameroon still lacks effectiveness in the rampant environmental degradation in the country<sup>25</sup>.

### **2.3.3. The Government's Environmental Initiatives in Cameroon**

The efforts of the Cameroonian government to fight against deforestation are mainly centred on the institutional and legal framework. The government has been formulating and promulgating laws aiming at addressing the issue of deforestation in the country. Among others, can be mentioned a major forestry law (Law N0. 94/01 of 20th January 1994) on the regulation of forests, wildlife and fishing; and the fundamental decree (Decree N0.95- 531-PM of 23rd August 1995) that was formulated and passed to facilitate the implementation of the forestry law of 1994 (Alemagi, 2011:66). Furthermore, “the Cameroonian Environmental Management Framework Law of 1996” (Law No, 1996/12 of August 5, 1996) “expresses the country’s willingness to educate its population on environmental awareness and forest conservation” (Anaka, 2018: 32). It is also necessary to mention the Decree No. 99/781 of October 10, 1999, which, establishing the terms of article 94/01 of January 20, 1994, sets the taxes and surcharges on the different categories of logs (Alemagi, 2011:68). Additionally, it is worth mentioning the Cameroon’s Ministerial Order No 0053/MINFOF of 1 April 2020, which places the Forest and Savannah Elephant as Class A protected species.

Alemagi argues, however, that the country’s laws and regulations on forest management have been ineffective due to the laxity of the government in following up after a forest concession is awarded to the tender by the MINFOF. Moreover, Alemagi critiques flimsy and corrupt governmental regulations, coupled with the lack of appropriate ecological education of the population of Cameroon (Alemagi, 2011:71). It is also worth noting that corruption in the forestry sector is crippling the government’s efforts in making its forest policies effective (Anaka, 2018: 24-25). Anaka (2018:27) also points to the fact that laws on forest management in Cameroon are “bureaucratically, arbitrarily and weakly enforced and implemented”. On their part, Ngaba *et al.* (2023:1, 4) blame corruption, deficiency of ethical merit and consistency on the side of the country’s government in regulating timber exploitation and in fostering “sustainable forest management”. They insistently argue that corruption remains one of the major contributing and crippling factors in the forest’s spoliation in Cameroon. This fraudulent factor is demonstrated by Cameroon’s “consistently low rankings on the Corruption Perceptions Index by Transparency International” (Ngaba *et al.*, 2023:4). Illegal

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<sup>25</sup> This lack of effectiveness will be demonstrated later in this study.

logging and widespread corruption are exacerbated by the complicity of government officials who often request bribes for services such as issuing logging permits. Consequently, this unscrupulous practice allows officials to make personal profits at the detriment of the government's rightful share of forest revenue. Due to the lack of ethical standards set by the government, it has lost credibility as an effective regulator and faces criticism when it attempts to hold dealers accountable for illegal activities. Faced with this environmental disaster, which is the rampant deforestation, the government is seen as the victim of its own decadence because it has no ethical quality or qualification to govern its forests<sup>26</sup>.

Ngirinshuti (2018:30) mentions the lucrative connivance that has settled between the political power in Cameroon and the exploiters of natural resources at the expense of the environment, and most of the population languishing in poverty. All these legislative and administrative pitfalls indicate that there is still a lot to be done by the Cameroonian government to sustainably regulate the exploitation of the country's forests. The prophetic voice of the Roman Catholic Church becomes an urgency to address the issue of forest degradation through the implementation of the socio-ecological documents for social transformation and better environmental preservation.

After presenting the government's initiatives and the legal framework around the issue of deforestation in Cameroon, the stance of the RCC seems relevant. However, as explained in section 1.7, the implementation framework of the socio-ecological documents by the leadership of the RCC in Cameroon is meagre and needs theological interventions for its effectiveness.

The above-evaluated literature explores the environmental crisis in the Congo Basin in general and in Cameroon in particular without, however, suggesting concrete solutions to the issue. They investigate the causes and consequences of deforestation in Cameroon, but do not propose any tangible guidance on how to remedy it. Following this spoliation of forests, it becomes obvious that, given the implementation of socio-ecological documents, the Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon should investigate the issue of deforestation. It is also deemed relevant to dive into ecology in its relationship to social harmony.

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<sup>26</sup> As Ngaba *et al.* (2023:5) claim, the government has lost credibility as an effective regulator and faces criticism when it attempts to hold dealers accountable for illegal activities.

## 2.4. Social Ecology

A little over three decades ago, social ecology emerged as a profound rethinking of society from the perspective of development underpinned by the environmental question and the criticism of the hierarchical system. Social ecology is mostly concerned with addressing the environmental issue as a social question, trusting that the domination of humans over nature is closely connected with the domination of human beings over others. A synopsis of literature shows a considerable number of scholarly socio-ecological works. In the niche of social ecology, these scholars ground their discourse on the interconnectivity between the ecosystem and human beings and place ecology at the centre of social wellbeing. This literature includes Bookchin (1990), Laurent (2011), DeLoughrey and Handley (2011), Caminero-Santangelo (2014), Schlichten (2017), Osuji (2018), Nginshuti (2018) and Ruppel and Tchente (2018). While Bookchin articulates the holistic approach to ecological problems, Laurent, DeLoughrey and Handley point to human abusive actions in exacerbating deforestation and desertification. Schlichten approaches the subject of social ecology in line with the efforts made by certain African ecologists like Wangari Mathai; Osuji looks at the problem through the lens of African traditions; Nginshuti advocates for ecological training of future church leaders in confessional universities or seminaries.

Bookchin (1990:18-19) asserts that the ecological problem is not merely limited to the scientific consideration perspective, nor the sociological/humanistic approach; it is instead a global issue, because ecology is a broader concern that cannot be reduced to a single domain of knowledge. In other words, the ecological problem can only be handled holistically and integrally because of the complexity of the world. Bookchin (1990:19) recognised the need for radical change in institutions as a requirement to resolve the ecological crisis. For Bookchin (1990), the term “social ecology” refers to the analysis of the economic, political and social structures of society; and to the search for a less hierarchical, more collective-based community, grounded on democratic and ecological foundations, respectful of natural resources and biological rhythms of the cosmos. In this perspective, Bookchin (1990:21-23) discusses anthropology, science, sociology, psychology, politics, and economics not in a fragmented way, but in an organic approach and from the basis that nature is understood as *physis*, which is a reality before everything and beyond any propagated and obsequious apologists of power. Nature conceived as hierarchical<sup>27</sup> only reflects a human condition in which domination, subordination and submission are ends in themselves, and this calls into question the

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<sup>27</sup> Bookchin illustrates his refuted hierarchical theory with the zoologists’ example of a lion as the king of animals and argues that this theory is propagated by those who command empires in a capitalistic business.

very existence of the biosphere. Critiquing market capitalism as the anti-ecological trend, Bookchin (1990:24) recognises that the ecological problem is a social issue whose solution requires the commitment of all of society. It can be argued that the ecological model of Bookchin is that which is in total harmony with the world ecosystem and closely intertwined in all its components. It condemns individualism to finally be in tune with the community. Social ecology results in a system which, starting from considering the world as a totality and not a mere set of parts, presents itself as a social, political and economic model. Even though Bookchin's concept of social ecology has been critiqued for being utopic by suggesting that human beings must free themselves from everything they have been accustomed to and embrace the social, it remains evident that it shook up the ambient hierarchical social stratification that was used until then in human sciences (Rudy, 1997:49-53). As previously mentioned, Bookchin's footsteps were followed by many other environmental sociologists such as Laurent, DeLoughrey and Handley, Schlichten, Osuji, Ruppel, Tchuente, and Ngirinshuti.

Through a transversal and empirical study of the micro-social and macro-social structures of territories, Laurent (2011:69, 77, 115, 180) makes visible the social and environmental inequalities connected to the exploitation and unsustainable degradation of natural resources of the southern countries by the northern countries. The socio-ecological reading of Laurent (2011:72-73, 93, 117, 125) highlights the contradictions between the social and environmental policies of the rich countries of the northern hemisphere in the management of ecological inequalities in the countries of the Global South. These contradictions lead to "ecological shocks" such as environmental nuisances (pollution, health) and the high risks of socio-ecological disasters (earthquakes, floods, intensification of cyclones) thus exacerbating the vulnerability of poor territories which, being responsible for only 7% of the global rate of greenhouse gas emissions, yet suffer the harmful effects of climate change at the global level (Laurent, 2011:73, 180). It is therefore evident that the accumulation of social and ecological inequalities does not allow poor countries to guarantee sustainability through their vast natural resources (Laurent, 2011:74).

To reduce the inequalities and succeed in reconciling society and the ecology, Laurent (2011) suggests a twofold socio-ecological political solution. First, global environmental solidarity through the development by international organisations of a management system adapted to different scales of decentralised cooperation. The said cooperation could be achieved on the one hand, through assistance to poor countries by transferring clean technologies free of charge and on the other hand, by the socio-spatial management of vulnerable territories in developed countries (Laurent, 2011:172). Second, the renewal of economic policies through a restructuring of existing subsidiaries as well as

eco-industries through the combination of the green economy (green jobs, green sectors) and redistribution policies (transport policy, tax policies) (Laurent, 2011:180, 2024-205, 207, 212).

Pope Francis (2015: n.139) aligns with Laurent when he (Pope Francis) asserts that the ecological crisis and the social crisis are intrinsically connected (they are a single crisis) and that the solution to this crisis requires “an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature”. It is appropriate, however, to point out that Laurent has not further developed his reflection on the notion of environmental justice, especially in certain socio-economic contexts where the poorest populations in some of the largest cities in Sub-Saharan Africa live in slums located near toxic waste sites (Duclaux-Monteil, 2014:10-15). This reflection would have made it possible to show the capacity of the populations to demand reconciliation between environmental preservation and management of natural resources alongside local development. It is by relying on the right to equity and recognition of their social identities that the populations of the Global South can champion cultural and environmental self-management of their territories. It is relevant, therefore, to ask whether, instead of focusing on southern countries for their supply of raw materials, northern countries could not consider reducing their consumption, given the territorial management of their resources. If this were to happen, it would help to imagine the conditions for understanding collective resilience and thus alleviate ecological inequalities, considering current ecological constraints. Similarly, as Pope Francis (2015: n.170-173) argues, rich countries would fulfil their duty to lead by example through the reduction of their emissions and making funds available to developing countries to seek to do the same.

Parallelling Laurent, DeLoughrey and Handley (2011), Caminero-Santangelo (2014) and Osuji (2018) focus much more on the socio-economic aspect of social ecology. DeLoughrey and Handley (2011:15-20) articulate the danger of land spoliation through structural hierarchy, corrupt and oppressive regimes that jeopardise the rights and dignity of the people in the southern hemisphere, and the African people in particular. In the postcolonial context, Caminero-Santangelo (2014), in his review of environmental literature from Sub-Saharan Africa, underlines the socio-ecological engagement by the Africans in the background of post-imperialism and post-colonisation. His environmental review screens through the Green Belt Movement in East Africa, the Environmental Justice Movement in South Africa, and the fight against the “Petro-capitalism” in the Niger Delta. The Green Belt Movement was promoted by Wangari Maathai in the 1970s. As already mentioned (see Section 1.2), Wangari Maathai won the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize for her “fight for sustainable development, democracy, and peace” mostly through the planting of millions of trees of peace across

Kenya (her home country) and in other African countries (Schlichten, 2017). DeLoughrey and Handley (2011:3, 18, 28) preconise an “aesthetics of the earth” phrased in a “discourse of transformative self-conscious disruption” that aligns with the “dangers” of universalising frameworks.

The aesthetics of the earth is framed by DeLoughrey and Handley (2011:28-30) as the medium of an “environmentalism of the poor [...] as a key aspect of postcolonial ecocriticism”. Osuiji (2018:187) discourses on social ecology from the viewpoint of “cosmic common good” and “cosmic harmony”, underscored by African traditions. He argues that according to African worldviews, Africans live in interdependence with the earth, the fauna, and the flora, “with humans, non-human animals, the gods, and the spirits, as well as the ancestors”. In the African context, the community spirit includes not only human beings but also living beings (humans and non-humans) and the dead, nature, and the supernatural. Thus, Osuiji (2018:188) further maintains that in Africa, “... the natural and the supernatural, the mundane and the divine, the material and the spiritual, are united in an inseparable oneness”. It is in this inclusive and encompassing community that all the components of the visible and invisible universe can flourish.

While Ngirinshuti (2018) argues for ecological education at the university, Ruppel and Tchunte (2018) discuss the emergency in the academic framework, emphasising the importance of respect for the environment in the sustainable development agenda within the groundwork of corporate social responsibility in Cameroon. These scholars suggest the voluntary integration of ecological concerns into the commercial activities of companies (Ruppel and Tchunte, 2018). Ngirinshuti (2018:62) champions the formation and equipment of pastors in the praxis of environmental protection through an “ecological catechesis” in the university curriculum. In Ruppel and Tchunte’s (2018) arguments, companies must no longer focus on their financial profits but also on socio-ecological wellbeing to minimise the possibility of compromising future generations. They go in the direction of compatibility between human activities and preserving biodiversity and ecosystems. Ruppel and Tchunte seem not to be clear on the ecological rules and the mechanism to be set up, given the controlling private and state companies.

The above literature does not reflect the effects of pesticides on ecological and human diets. Simkins and O’Keefe (2013) argue that food choices are among the significant ecological decisions that are directly under human personal control. However, the issue of responsible choices of food is less highlighted by Tchunte, Ngirinshuti, Ruppel and Tchunte’s discourses. Yet the use of pesticides

and other chemicals in agriculture continues to negatively impact the health of our ecology/ecosystem and of human beings<sup>28</sup>. The Roman Catholic Church's education of people on the choice and the quality of food they buy and eat seems, therefore, important. The use of organic fertilisers from organic waste as an alternative to improve agricultural productivity and human wellbeing can be considered as a way forward.

## **2.5. Summary of the Chapter**

This chapter provided an analytical overview of the sociological corpus of literature. The chapter thematically examined studies on social science perspectives on socio-ecological engagement praxis. This was achieved through an evaluation of scholarly works on the praxis of social engagement, environment, and social ecology. From the perspective of social engagement praxis, the chapter explored the dynamics of social ethics, economics, and social interaction through a cross-sectional interdisciplinary approach focused on psychology and communication to address the issue of exploitation of the underprivileged and the poor by the rich capitalists. From its Latin and Greek etymological definition, the concept of the environment has highlighted the reality that the earth or the planet needs to be safeguarded. This protection imperatively involves various key players such as the government, the churches or faith communities and the civil society. Scholarship in social ecology centres its elaboration on environmental protection towards social transformation. The essential aim of this social transformation is to improve the socio-economic conditions of people in harmony with ecological sustainability. In this vein, social ecology focuses on both the wellbeing of the planet and the "health" of human beings.

The discursive literature on social science shapes the ground on which this study explores the implementation of the socio-ecological documents of the Roman Catholic Church in the context of Cameroon. The next chapter reviews literature that engages ecology and theology. It seeks to demonstrate the need for an urgent socio-ecological engagement of theology to adequately respond to the ecological crisis by the Church today.

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<sup>28</sup> The influence of technology and science in agriculture has led to the modification of the organism (animal, plant, bacteria) by genetic engineering techniques commonly called "Genetically Modified Organism", whose consumption has undesirable effects on the human body.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL ENGAGEMENT PRAXIS

#### 3.1. Introduction

Chapter Two discussed the deficiencies in science perspectives on socio-ecological engagement praxis knowledge. The current chapter examines studies on theological perspectives leading to the apprehension of the research problem in ecological crisis. The chapter discusses the concepts of ecological theology, common good, and servant leadership. Each of these scholarly concepts revolves around a particular perspective of engagement with socio-environmental theology. Subsequently, they bring about a compendium of discursive knowledge on ecological preservation. The available literature on these thematic areas is relevant to the study because it turns the focus to the issues the academic discourses have been silent about; for instance, the deficiency of theological research in identifying the implementation performance of the socio-ecological documents of the Roman Catholic Church by the NECC at the grassroots or community level. This literature provides insights not only into the general idea of the common characteristics of the ecological crisis and its evolution, but above all, envisages how humanity can and must tackle it. On account of the literature review, the concept of ecological theology seems appropriate from the outset.

#### 3.2. Ecological Theology

The discourse on ecological theology establishes the intrinsic relationship between ecology and theology. In this perspective, Edwards (2005) maintains that theology is necessarily ecological and that ecology is, by its very nature, eminently theological. Buitendag (2023:1, 3) further defines ecological theology as “Theology of Nature, where [...] cosmos, God, and human beings [come] together into a cosmotheandric understanding of reality”. In other words, eco-theology is the synchronisation of theological thoughts with ecology, considered one of the most evocative themes of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. The epistemological knowledge about the cosmos and its processes opens new perspectives in the continuous search for the meaning of human beings; this is driven by the restlessness of wanting to know who they are, where they come from, where they are headed, and why they are on the earth, and their relationship with God, the Creator. Aligning with Edwards and Buitendag’s arguments, literature dated between 2009 and 2020 shows that theologians have intensely invested in reflections on the socio-ecological crisis that our humanity has been experiencing for

decades. This literature is much more varied and is articulated according to an evolving critique. Its development is mainly informed by the paradigmatic perceptions of the relationship between God, human beings, non-humans and the rest of creation on the one hand, and the sacredness of creation on the other hand.

A threefold model of eco-theological consideration has emerged and can be ascertained as intertwining building blocks in the body of the eco-theological literature. First, the dominion model of creation held by Lynn White (1968), Kulikovsky (2009) and Cavedon (2015); second, the stewardship model of creation championed by Conradie (2005), Rhoads (2009), and Jenkins (2016); and third, the community of creation model advocated by De Gruchy (2009), Bauckham (2010) Johnson (2014), and Lane (2020).

### 3.2.1. The Dominion Model of Creation

It should be emphasised that a preliminary understanding of the concept of dominion deserves attention. For this purpose, a glance in history garners the argument according to which philosophical anthropology of the Renaissance and the rationalism of the modern period have contributed to placing human beings so much at the centre of the universe that they have seen themselves attributed the role of masters of everything that exists around them. In this perspective, Leonardo Da Vinci (1490) and Descartes (1637) deserve to be particularly mentioned. The former flourished in geometric architecture, while the latter demystified science, thus opening a new era of empiricism.

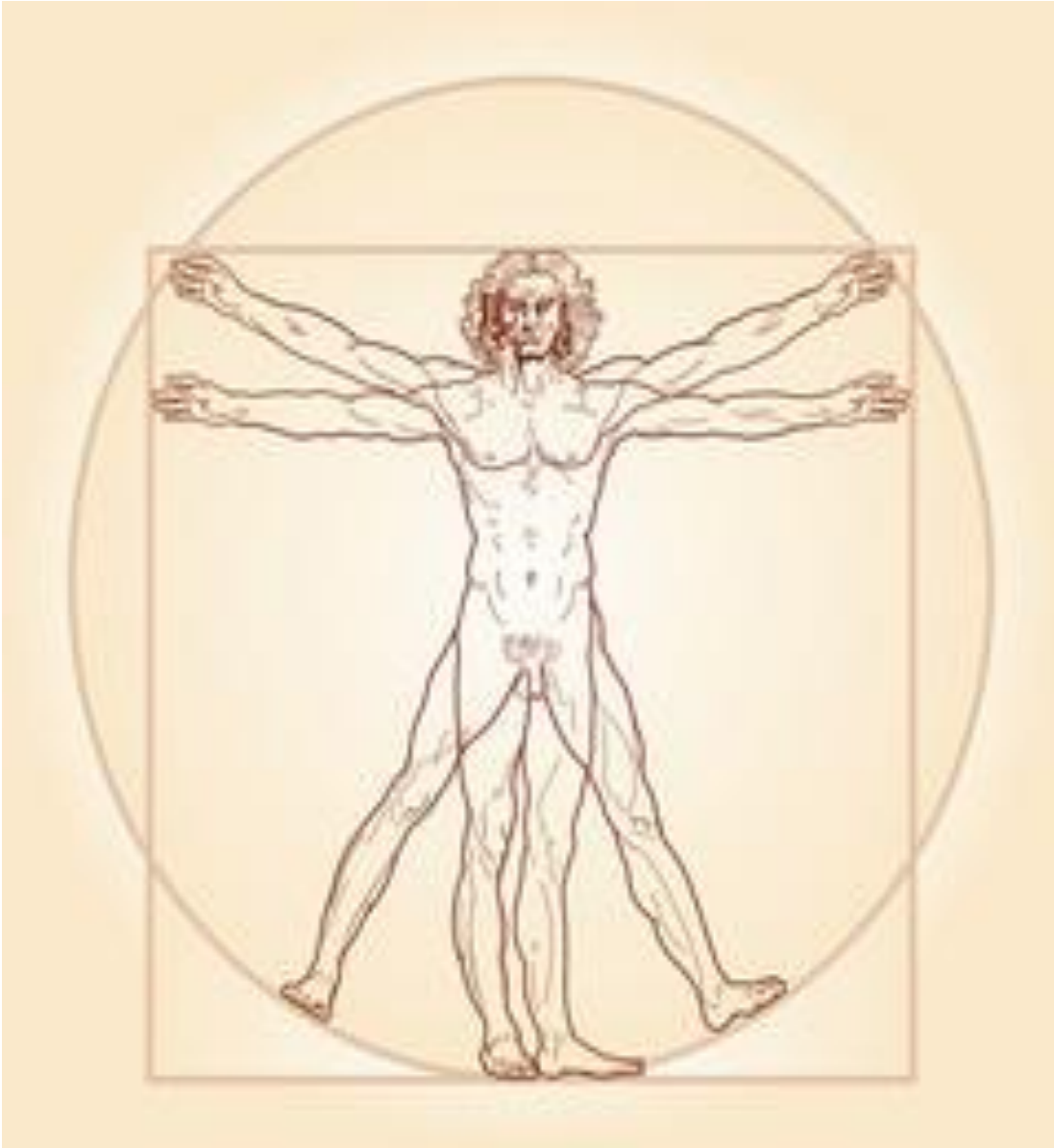
The understanding of the anthropological and ecological dominion traces back to the famous drawing by Leonardo Da Vinci, *Uomo Vitruviano* (The Vitruvian Man<sup>29</sup>) (See Figure 3.1 below). Giraud (2021:7) observes that the man in Da Vinci's drawing "is considered only as an adult male, White and healthy, isolated from the rest of the world, endowed with technical knowledge that allows him to face the world only to find himself in absolute metaphysical solitude". In other words, the metaphysical characteristic of the solitude of man in Da Vinci's artwork denotes an intrinsic individualism in front of the creation (Eva Perez, 2023:163). Scholars have interpreted Da Vinci's

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<sup>29</sup> The drawing is called "The Vitruvian Man" because da Vinci was inspired by the Roman architect, Marcus Vitruvius Pollio's concept of the "Squaring circle", according to which he claimed that, 'the navel is the centre of the human body, and if one takes the compass and places the fixed point on the navel, a circle can be drawn perfectly around the body. [And that] that arm span and height have a nearly a perfect correspondence in the human body; thus, perfectly placing the body inside a square (the *homo bene figuratus* [well-formed human being] and the *homo erectus* [the upright man])'" (Mascia 2019:3). Other Da Vinci's famous drawings include "the Mona Lisa and the Last Supper" (Mascia, 2019:2).

masterpiece either as the age of the “Golden ratio” (the “Renaissance man”) (Mascia, 2019) or as the fascinating anatomy of the *figura istrumentale dell’uomo* (“The instrumental figure of a man”) (Mifsud, 2019:9) or again as the symbol of the “Renaissance humanistic concept of rectitude” (Eva Perez, 2023:163). However, as Pezzullo (2019:48-49) argues, these interpretations are androcentric because the drawing that is perceived as a symbol of humanity is a man, and so portrays that a woman will not be part of humanity. Similarly, Rossetti and Tiboni (2012) observe that the man in Da Vinci’s drawing is healthy and well-built; he appears to be of a wealthy social standard. Moreover, there is no assumption of children, nor elderly and sick people in Da Vinci’s emblematic artwork, especially in the environmental space. This delineates that the frail, the weak, the vulnerable, the poor or people of low or no income are excluded from humanity. The artwork of Da Vinci lacks friendliness, inclusiveness and accommodativeness. Yet children, the elderly, the sick and the disabled, named by Rossetti and Tiboni (2012:92) as “the weak users”, have the inalienable right to be integrated into humanity. Furthermore, the man in Da Vinci’s drawing is a European equipped with geometry (a squaring circle) to face the world, to face creation. The Da Vinci’s man is thus considered a “measure” of creation and a “meter” of the built environment (Rossetti and Tiboni, 2012:93; Eva Perez, 2023:163).

The anthropological interpretation of humanity illustrates the Eurocentric anthropology based on a White male who can govern and dominate creation (human, non-human and nature) because of his science, art and technology (the interweaving of architecture, human anatomy, mathematics and symmetry through the human body) (Eva Perez, 2023:162-163). This further alludes to the interpretation that aligns with the dominion in Genesis 1:28 that Western people have in their mindset. Consequently, as Pope Francis (2025, n.115) argues, modern anthropologically centred humanity sees creation only “as an object of utility, as raw material to be hammered into useful shape”.



**Figure 3.1:** *L'Uomo Vitruviano* (the Vitruvian Man)

**Source:** Wikipedia (The Free Encyclopaedia)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vitruvian\\_Man#/media/File:Da\\_Vinci\\_Vitruve\\_Luc\\_Viatour.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vitruvian_Man#/media/File:Da_Vinci_Vitruve_Luc_Viatour.jpg)

Da Vinci's metaphysical masterpiece and expression of the human's dominion over creation was followed nearly two centuries after by René Descartes, not in drawing but in philosophical thoughts and through what Nadler (1988:229) considers as demystification of "nature and emptying [of] the world of its theological significance", which led to "Scientific Revolution" and to "a break-up between philosophy and theology, between naturalistic and religious ways of thinking" (Kato and van Ruler, 2020:133).

Considered as one of the greatest French thinkers of the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Malivskyi, 2019:1), Descartes articulates that with reason and rationality, human beings become masters over all things to the extent that they can dominate the universe. The “*cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore, I am)” is the statement that captures the philosophical embodiment of the Cartesian certitude. This monumental frame of thought was coined by the philosopher himself in his “Discourse on the Method” (1637), in which he sets out the path to follow to conduct one’s reason well and seek the truth in sciences (not in religion or religiosity). The Cartesian philosophical scheme is set out in this little but emblematic piece of text from his “Discourse on the Method”, “Becoming the master and possessor of nature” (Descartes, 1637: n. 76). Following Descartes, technological progress in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries has mainly served to tame and dominate nature: the human reign on nature through the demystification and the conquest of it (Kato and van Ruler, 2020:134-135). Thus, Descartes made nature, the universe, the servant of human beings who can enjoy its fruits and all the amenities found in it. Humans can exploit nature for their health at the expense of the health of the ecology/nature itself. The rational principle (the *Cogito ergo sum*) ascertains Descartes that the human person can avoid any natural impulses. Historical-philosophical investigations have led Iofrida (2021) to maintain that the Cartesian classical expression with his dualism of soul and body gave rise to the radicalisation of an anti-naturalism that still affects our ecology (soil and earth) today. The mastery of nature advocated by Descartes is expressed, to a certain extent, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century by the capacity of labour productivity with a view to a sort of economic progress that nations designate by “the growth rate” (Amadou *et al.*, 2020:10-12). It seems appropriate to explore the concept of dominion in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, particularly with Lynn Withe (1967).

In the late 60s, Lynn White (1967) published “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis”. After discussing the historical evolution of the technological and scientific relationship between humans and the environment, White (1967:1-4) arrives at the observation that the Bible and the Judeo-Christian biblical tradition and theology are responsible for the ecological crisis in which the world is plunged. White’s argument is underpinned by Genesis 1:28, which claims that after creating man and woman (known as Adam and Eve), God blessed them, and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth”. In the mentioned biblical passage, White finds the ultimate justification for human predatory and exploitative behaviour towards nature. White (1967:5) claims, therefore, that Christianity inherited from Judaism not only the non-interpretative and untwisted concept of time but also and above all the narrative about creation. In an evolving way, Almighty God created light and darkness, heaven and earth, with everything it contain: plants,

animals, birds, and fish. And subsequently, God created Adam and Eve “as an afterthought” to spare man (Adam) from loneliness. By receiving from God the authority to name all animals and other beings on earth, human beings were thus able to establish their “domination” (lordship) over them. White (1967:6) further asserts that God explicitly planned everything for the benefit of human beings to the detriment of the rest of creation. However, White (1967:6) nuances his argument by contending that the human body is not only part of nature because it is made of clay (cf. Genesis 2:7) but also created it “in the image and likeness of God”. White’s nuance of claim brings about the human’s capacity of pro-creation, adding something (positive) to creation as God would do<sup>30</sup>.

White interprets the “rule over” or dominion as the mandate given by God through the Bible to humankind to do whatever they want with creation. This, still according to White, is the reason why human beings felt that it was appropriate for them to destroy creation because they have been given the power to rule over everything. White (1967:6) further asserts that the Western anthropocentric and anthropogenic interpretation of Genesis 1:28 arose especially during the patristic period of the second century, namely with Tertullian and Saint Irenaeus, who typologically saw in Adam not only the prefiguration of Christ but also the transcendence of God over nature. Consequently, White sees in the biblical text (Genesis 1:28) the fundamental components of a worldview completely breaking away from paganism. In antiquity, every tree, every spring, and every hill had its *genius loci* (spiritual guardian or presiding God); Christianity has desecrated the world and allowed the exploitation of nature. In the ancient Greek world, any disrespectful action, such as cutting down the trees of the sacred forest, was a serious offence to the goddess who makes wheat grow, offers humans food, and alternates the seasons in a balanced way (White, 1967:7-9).

It is worth mentioning that the Greeks deep respect for the natural environment is paralleled by the traditional reality of the people of the Northwest and West regions of Cameroon, in which sacred respect is observed towards nature. As Fonjong (2006) analyses, the people in these regions live in symbiosis with their environment, particularly with the forests considered as home of the gods of the ancestors, to whom sacrifices are regularly offered. As already mentioned, traditional authorities have forested reserve zones around their palaces. Fonjong (2006:668) goes on to observe that the natural environment is known in these regions as “sacred forests [...] where hunting, farming and deforestation of all sorts (are) prohibited”. Various animal species swarm and flourish in the dense sacred forests around traditional chiefdoms in Cameroon. Trees and other plants germinate, grow, die

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<sup>30</sup> Ecclesiastes 12:7 confirms the lordship of God the Creator over all things, including human beings, when it states that humans will return to the earth as they were.

and regenerate themselves without any human intervention. The sacred forests exemplify that the ancestors in this part of Cameroon had the primary and allogenic notion and wisdom of preserving the environment and bequeathed it to their descendants, the chiefs or traditional authorities who are the custodians of tradition.

Destroying the antique pagan animist religious belief in nature where “every tree, every spring, every stream, every hill had its *genius loci*, its guardian spirit, [Christianity has] not only established a dualism of man(sic) and nature but also insisted that it is God’s will that man(sic) exploit nature for his proper ends” (White, 1967:6). White (1967:7) goes on to conclude that “Christianity bears a huge burden of guilt” for the spoliation of environment because of its derisive theology of human transcendence of and human lordship over nature. By demystifying nature, the Judeo-Christian tradition has legitimised the despotic and irresponsible dominion of the human being over other creatures. The scholarly discourse on dominion follows its evolution in this early 21<sup>st</sup> century, notably with Kulikovsky (2009), Zalasiewicz *et al.* (2011) and Cavedon (2015).

From the outset, Ludlow (2010) observes that the protagonists of the dominion model of creation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century have framed their arguments based on their literal, figurative, and allegorical interpretations of the book of Genesis regarding human beings having lordship over animals and the earth. Furthermore, this model is mostly influenced by the Anthropocene theory, which, according to Zalasiewicz *et al.* (2011), is the current geological age in which human activity has profoundly shaped the planet and its biodiversity for millions of years, especially during the era of *Homo habilis* (handy man). In other words, the term Anthropocene indicates a geological phase in which, once the Holocene<sup>31</sup> ended, the subsequent period is characterised by the absolute prevalence of human beings as formative agents of the dynamics of transformation of the earth. While Kulikovsky (2009) contends that as bearers of the *imago Dei* (image of God) in Genesis 1:27, human beings not only benefit from God’s grace, but also have the privilege of dominating the rest of creation; Cavedon (2015) considers humanity as the highest point of creation because God has endowed human beings with science and technology to exercise their lordship over the earth. The subjugation of the earth’s surface and the increasingly widespread conquest of the stratosphere are expressions of a single collective hysteria, which is the now omnipresent idea according to which human beings are superior to nature, and not an aspect of it. Therefore, humans have the right and the duty to subjugate nature. Perceiving

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<sup>31</sup> According to Sinha *et al.* (2013:3), the term “Holocene” comes “from the Greek words *holos* (meaning ‘whole’) and *cene* (meaning ‘recent’) [and refers to] the youngest subdivision having the rang of Epoch/Series in the Geological Time Scale (GTS – 2009 – Walker, Geissman, and compilers, 2009)”.

themselves as superior to animals and other living creatures right from the beginning of creation, human beings view nature as a stage for their ambitions: as a reserve of raw materials and any other resources worthy of their wellbeing. And from this perspective, they have the presumed privilege to conquer and dominate the entire planet, and to inexorably submit it to their will. The explosive increase in scientific knowledge and technological capabilities in the modern era has brought significant benefits to humankind, but also poses difficult challenges. Even though human beings have an accurate knowledge of the immensity and antiquity of the universe, their position and importance within it appear much more in finitude. It is conspicuous that technological and scientific progress has considerably increased the ability of human beings to master, control and direct the forces of nature, but it has also come to exert an unexpected and uncontrollable impact on the environment and even on humankind themselves.

The domination perspective is underpinned by the unfolding of civilisation and the triumphal progress of science and technology, which finds its expression in the way in which humans relate to the environment. However, the dominion model has been critiqued for being utilitarian and over-anthropocentric and anthropogenic by raising an exacerbated human sense of superiority over other creatures and consequently, contributing to the alarming ecological crisis that the world has been facing. Pope Francis (2015, n.67) argues that past attempts to justify humans' absolute domination over other species are "not a correct interpretation of the Bible". Alternatively, the stewardship paradigm has been suggested by some eco-theologians.

### **3.2.2. The Stewardship Model of Creation**

The stewardship paradigm of creation emerges fundamentally from the consideration according to which the dynamism of the Holy Spirit has been given to help human beings figure out how to sit on the throne, how to exercise their power, and how to organise their institutions. In this consideration, Jesus proclaims that the Kingdom of God is among us (Luke 17:20). Then the miracle of Pentecost becomes the fact that humans understand each other despite the reality of speaking different foreign languages (Giraud, 2023:21-24). In other words, the Holy Spirit constitutes the basic understanding among God's people. This leads to the realisation that the same Holy Spirit has put people in a relationship from the beginning, regardless of what kind of language they speak and what kind of culture or civilisation they belong to. There appears to be a kind of analogical network between human beings and the creation. This network is *parakaleîn* (spiritual) because it has been given by the Holy Spirit to enable human beings to love one another (Williams, 2014:189). The Pentecost therefore

becomes the experience of being in a relationship with each other because humans are already embedded into the Kingdom of God, which is among us, and is translated into the visible network that allows us to speak to each other (Acts 2:7), and to act as caretakers over God's creation.

Theologians of the stewardship model, such as Rhoads (2009), Conradie (2005), Jenkins (2016), and DeWitt (2016) argue that human beings are not owners of creation, but caretakers. They all maintain that the real owner of creation is God, the Creator, the author of all that exists. In this perspective, as custodians on earth, human beings are invited to take good and responsible care of the world's common goods to live in harmony and peace with other creatures. Edwards (2005), Rhoads (2009), and DeWitt (2016) claim that the custodianship of the common property (the ecological space) urges human beings to act in such a way that enables them to leave something positive for posterity. Their discourses align with the ethics of responsibility.

Similarly, Conradie's (2005) metaphor of 'household' (*oikos*) of God becomes useful to describe the earth and of stewards (*oikonomos*) to denote human beings that are invited to be cooperative and responsible towards the earth. The domestic (household) image used by Conradie enables Christian theology to portray human beings as the administrators of a house to whom God has entrusted the care of all its goods (Cf. Mt 24:45). In this context, humans can use their ingenuity in deploying the resources of the visible creation and somehow exercise their participatory ascendancy over nature through science, technology and art using and being guarded by the "natural law" (Regan, 2016). It should also be noted that the stewardship paradigm is paralleled with the teaching of the Vatican Council contained in the document entitled, *Gaudium et Spes* (1965, n.34), which articulates that created in the image of God, human beings have received from God the mandate to subjugate the earth and all that it contains and to govern the world with fairness and godliness. This mandate is that of religion: a mandate that enables human beings to relate themselves and all created things to the Creator of all that exists. According to this paragraph from *Gaudium et Spes*, God thus gave humans the authority to take care of all creation for the glory of the Creator throughout the earth.

God designates humans as God's stewards just as the master does in the parables of the talents (cf. Luke 19). The human person is the only creature that God expressly granted the privilege to occupy a unique place at the top of visible creation (Genesis 1.26; 2.20; Ps 8.6-7; Wisdom 9.2-3)<sup>32</sup>. A kenotic

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<sup>32</sup> As it will be argued later in this study, Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'* (2015, n.123) appears to have recentred the catholic interpretation of Genesis 1:28. These reframing sheets from dominion to interdependency and interconnectedness, from lord-over to *koinonia* (referred to as the spirit of communion in love and service (Williams 2014:193).

interpretation of the parable of Luke 19 with the stewardship mind leads to the awareness that human beings have received creation as a gift to be laboured and to enable it to bear fruit through the way they manage it. God will consequently reward the good steward by giving them authority, and dominion (*Exousia*, in Greek) “over ten cities”, that is, over creation (Giraud, 2023:27).

The critical discussion revolving around the stewardship paradigm is about the human being who, to a certain extent, still dominates creation even as the caretaker. This critique mostly emerges from what Attfield (2015:4) considers as an inappropriate “instrumentalist attitude” and an inadequate “managerial model” according to which the stewardship paradigm assigns to human beings the authority to colonise “the entire surface of the planet”. In other words, the underlying idea of stewardship remains the frame of mind of a master whose role is to watch over the existence of other creatures. These critiques have led to another theological perspective, which seems more inclusive, integral, and engaging commonality: the community of creation model.

### **3.2.3. The Community Model of Creation**

Eco-theologians of the community of creation claim that the model is a theocentric articulation conceived from Psalm 24:1, which says, “The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world and those who live in it”. This passage of the Bible reveals that God makes human beings an integral part of an interdependent and interconnected community. And this community is the creation to which all must live and return. The paradigm of the community of creation is grounded on the fourfold guiding characteristic principle. First, the Spirit of God continues its creative action in the world through the divine sacramental presence (The Holy Spirit springs life everywhere, in human beings as well in other created beings) (De Gruchy 2009); second, other beings are fellow creatures, not separated from human beings but are an integral part of the nature, which implies the responsibility of all created beings (Johnson 2014); third, all creatures share interdependence and interconnectedness, namely the unity of the whole (Lane 2020); and fourth, the new notion of neighbourhood, which goes beyond the human species to include every created being (the advocacy for new ecological vocation) (Bauckham 2010 and Johnson 2014). Pointing to the diversity of all creatures, the theology of the community model of ecology recognises and upholds the distinctiveness, singularity, and uniqueness that are intrinsic to every being (Lane 2020). As already mentioned, Johnson (2014) further remarks that the community of creation paradigm is not a shift from anthropocentrism to biocentrism but rather a theocentric articulation; that is, the theological anthropology of the understanding of ecology, which does not diminish the dignity of the human person within the broader context of creation. Buitendag

(2023:6) captures the eco-theological articulation of the community of creation in a threefold eco-dominical shift. First, nature must no longer be viewed and treated by human beings as an object to be exploited, but rather as a subject within the green creation community. Second, humanity must be seen as rooted in this neighbourhood of creation. Third, a new global or planetary spirituality with deep respect for life and all that lives is necessary.

In the same vein, De Gruchy (2009) uses the metaphor of olive theology to conceptualise the communality and interdependence of creatures of the universe and their relationship with their Creator. De Gruchy (2009:7-13) defines metaphorical theology as the blending of the brown colour, which symbolises poverty, with the green colour, which emblematises the environment and leads to the analogy of the “Olive Agenda” or “the Olive Metaphor”. The “Olive Agenda” is substantially underpinned by both respect for human dignity and the preservation of ecology. With De Gruchy’s (2009) “Olive Metaphor”, eco-theology enhances the intertwining of the economy or (household rules), ecology (House-wisdom), and God, the Creator of all. The theological emphasis on the community of creation model mainly aims at shifting the discussion on the role of human beings from exploitation to respect, and from competition to cooperation in communion. The community of creation model has given rise to one of the ecological ramifications, which is the sacred dimension of the universe.

Ecological theologians who discourse on the sacredness of creation aim to get out of the assumption that the debate on the environmental crisis is the sole realm of specialists such as biologists, cosmologists, technocrats, politicians, and activists. The theme of the sacrality of creation is mainly articulated by Stoleriu (2010), Chryssavgis and Foltz (2013), Kelly (2016), Chryssavgis (2019), and Lane (2020). These authors evolve divergent conceptions around the sacred facets of creation. While Stoleriu (2010) exploits the myths and symbols expressed in Christian art to generate a reflection and knowledge on spiritual and cultural categories in connection with the sacred dimension of creation, Chryssavgis and Foltz (2013) and Chryssavgis (2019:87) articulate twofold characteristics to underscore their discourses on the sacred dimension of creation. First, they dwell on the sacramental principle according to which in the Eucharist<sup>33</sup>, the material creation is transformed and becomes the

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<sup>33</sup> In the traditions of the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church, the Anglican Church, and the Lutheran Church, the Eucharist designates the last meal (Last Supper) that Jesus shared with his disciples on Holy Thursday before suffering his passion and dying on the cross. Jesus thus consecrated the bread and wine and gave it to his disciples, “which was his body and his blood”; and invited them to “do this in remembrance of him” (Luke 22:7-21). The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC, n.1323) defines the Eucharist as “the source and summit of all Christian life”. The theme of the Eucharist is much more developed in the New Testament, but with the backdrop or typology of the Old Testament (Exodus 16:31; Ps 104, 13-15). In the New Testament, the Eucharist has several synchronising meanings. It designates thanksgiving (Luke 22:19), the supreme act of love (John 13:1-20), unity (1Corinthians 10:17), the memorial (1Corinthians 11:25), the meal

body of Christ; and second, the spiritual principle, which is in resonance with human integrity with the natural world, especially the organic unity that makes humanity interdependent with the rest of creation. This second characteristic is highlighted by the vision in faith that allows the believer to recognise that the world is made to be centred under the effect of a presence that is both immortalising and uniting; that the revealed Christ is none other than the Omega of evolution; that Christ is the one “in whom everything is held” (Colossians 1:17) and; finally, that Christ and the creation are inseparable. In the light of Chryssavgis and Foltz (2013) and Chryssavgis (2019:85-86), the sacramental dimension of ecology is about making present the beauty of creation in the Eucharist through the highlighting of the image of the Sanctifier (the Creator’s spirit) about the sanctified (creation).

This beauty is a sign of receptivity to things in the world that are becoming more and more visual. Chryssavgis (2019:87) asserts that “the Eucharist is God’s manifestation in the bread and wine, where the world becomes the historical and material sacrament of God’s presence, transcending the ontological gap between created and uncreated”. To illustrate their arguments, these authors suggest, for instance, sensitivity to the ecological image of the altar or the central space of the Eucharist, which can render the participants more receptive and enhance the memorial dimension of of the celebration. The Eucharist becomes the sacrament that unites heaven and earth with all that it contains. In this same perception, Pope Francis (2015, n.236) discourses on ecology, asserting that all created beings of the universe find their greatest exaltation, the achievement of their fullness, and their centredness in the Eucharist, which is “the overflowing core of love and of inexhaustible life”. The eucharistic becomes the everlasting expression of the cosmic love for the universe, which finds its full expression in Jesus, the incarnate Son of God, because it is celebrated “on the humble altar of a country [and] of the world”. Pope Francis (2015, n.236) further asserts that Eucharist bridges heaven and earth in the sense that it unfolds and “penetrates all creation”. Perceived from the eucharistic perspective, creation as the manifestation of God’s magnificence and creativeness then returns to God in thanksgiving. Pope Francis (2015, n.236) claims that, “the Eucharist is also a source of light and motivation for our concerns for the environment, directing us to be stewards of all creation”. Pope Francis’s understanding is that the Eucharist, human life, and ecology are intrinsically connected. Pope Francis (2015, n.237) further views the eco-Eucharist as the enhancement of the participation in Sunday liturgy, which is the “first day of the new creation” and the Sabbath, “a day which heals our

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of Lord while awaiting his return (1Corinthians 11:26; Matthew 26:29), the bread of life and body of Christ (John 11:51-57; 1Corinthians 10:16), the new Passover (Mark 14:2-16; John, 19:36). In the Roman Catholic Church, the Eucharist is also called holy Mass.

relationships with God, with ourselves, with others and with the world”. With this purpose, Sunday becomes a day embedded with meaning: the day of rest, relaxation and thanksgiving through the contemplation of the works of God in creation.

Stoleriu (2010) further maintains that, in artistic works, the sacredness of creation lies in the mystical connection and communication between the Creator and the created. Stoleriu (2010:72) intermingles “the sacred, the creation, the myth and the symbol, as spiritual and cultural categories” to identify the common relationship and connectedness of created beings. Analysing religious artistic works, Stoleriu (2010:73-74) comes to the observation that most of them have a background of the image of the Creator present in nature and conveyed through myths and symbols. Theokritoff (2012), Kelly (2016) and Lane (2020) continue the discussion but conceive their conversation on the sacredness of creation from another perspective. Drawing from the Christocentric cosmology of Teilhard de Chardin’s (1968) articulation in “*Le Phénomène humain et Le Milieu divin* (the Human Phenomenon and The Divine Milieu)”, these scholars metaphorically argue that creation is a book written by God with diverse letters. Each letter of the book represents a created being in which lives the spirit and the love of God, the fundamental moving force or principle. Theokritoff (2012:20) contends that “The world is not simply a resource, or a garden entrusted to our care but above all a revelation of the ways and will of God”. It should be further observed with Lane (2020:67-70) that the reference to Teilhard de Chardin is explicitly expressed through the theological consideration of the divine presence in the world, which goes beyond the historical moment of the Incarnation with regard not only to the Spirit of God but to Christ. Discourse on creation as a book implies that the universe itself is intelligently structured so that there is a profound correspondence between human subjective reason and objectified reason in nature. It becomes inevitable that there is a single original intelligence, which is the common source of both subjective reason and objectified reason, and that even though both reasons are intrinsically united, they hold their mutual autonomy. God is the Creator, the origin of the book of creation.

Chryssavgis (2019:87-88) further argues that the perspective of God’s presence in creation can undoubtedly be found in contemporary theology, which, to account for the presence of Christ in the world, inclines to emphasise pneumatology, because it is through the spirit that Christ communicates himself to the world. Furthermore, (Chryssavgis 2019 and Lane 2020) suggest the concept of “cosmic liturgy”, which is the celebration of “the mystery of nature’s participation in the Christological drama”. Considering Teilhard de Chardin, the cosmic liturgy is referred to as a particular effort to combine the activities that take place on earth with the saving action of the cosmic Christ through the

divine environment, the mass on the world. In this understanding, the celebration of the Holy Mass is read as a very powerful collection and explosion of unitive and transforming energy capable of simultaneously embracing all humanity and all creatures up to the entire planet. In this liturgy, the goal of the journey of the universe is the fullness of God: all creatures are moving together with and through human beings towards this common goal. Chryssavgis (2019) and Lane's (2020) scholarship on the conception of "cosmic liturgy" evidence Fretheim's (2005:31) argument according to which, "the Christianity of the industrial societies and especially the Christianity of intellectuals [...] has long since lost the cosmic values it still possessed in the Middle Ages". In other words, the cosmic liturgy, which is the mystery of nature's participation in the Christological drama, has not only to be rediscovered, but also to become accessible to Christians living in the modern city. This rediscovery and accessibility are an impetus to Christians' cognisance of their responsibility to God and to history. In the light of Fretheim, the Christian scholarship should help the people to get connected with other created realities of the world, including nature in the Christological drama, which is a confession of faith relating to the salvific death of Jesus and his Easter glorification.

It is worth noting that the message of the community of creation is to extend the project of salvation not only to human beings but also to all creatures: the forests, rivers, mountains and ecosystems of the world that represent a passage from self-realisation to immersion in an undifferentiated cosmic-self, an expression of the unity in which all creatures belong (Bookchin, 1991). This leads to arguing that everything in the universe is intimately and intrinsically connected, even though each being has its fundamental autonomy that deserves to be considered and respected. Created beings are dependent on each other and complement each other, while organisms are open systems in constant communication.

The perspective of the community of creation leads to the rediscovery of the vision of a nature governed by equity because even the smallest creature has value and, at the same time, contributes to the balance of the system to which it belongs. It is worth highlighting that this eco-theological articulation does not intend to undermine the privilege of the species, which would require only human beings to be worthy of moral consideration. It rather refers to a theology of belonging to a community which is broader than the human society; it is an *oikos* (home) whose inhabitants include the soil, the waters, the plants and the animals, the entire earth. It urges a broader moral criterion which, according to Leopold (1988:514), considers what is right as anything that "tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community". From the perspective of the community of creation, the misery of human beings is linked to the misery of the planet and vice versa. A true

ecological approach thus becomes a social lens through which humans listen to both “the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor” (Pope Francis 2015, n.49) and are open to the common good. The concept of common good is deemed relevant to address the ecological problem, specifically, the deficiency of implementation of the socio-ecological documents of the Roman Catholic Church in the context of Cameroon.

### **3.3. The Common Good**

#### **3.3.1. A Glance at Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas**

Since antiquity, the concept of the common good has always occupied a place of predilection in political, legal, socio-economic, and philosophical thoughts. It appears as the common thread in the social teaching of the Roman Catholic Church (Argandoña, 2011:3). Over time, this term has been deployed through various lenses. The notion of the common good refers to the good of the community and its members (Giraud, 2023:24-27). Aristotle (1984a, III, 9, 1280-1281) articulates that one of the fundamental requirements for the formation of any community, society or nation is the common good, because “the end of the city is living well [...] It is to be assumed, therefore, that the object of the political community is good actions, not only life in common”. The common good is one of the constitutive fundamentals of any given human society because it is the first virtue. From Aristotle’s philosophical perspective, every human action always has a good end. Human beings act with a view to a good. However, as Argandoña (2011:4-5) points out, Aristotle distinguishes the goods that are instrumental for the sake of others from those that are desired for themselves (and not for the sake of others). The former are individual/private goods, while the latter refer to the common good. Then the supreme good (*Ariston*, in Greek) is that to which human beings aspire and that which is naturally a goal. It should be noted, however, that with Aristotle, the good of the single individual is part of the good of the *polis*<sup>34</sup> just as the single individual, in turn, is part of the *polis*. All members of the community work together to achieve a common goal. And this common goal is the good of the *polis* or the common good. Aristotle’s philosophy on the good of the *polis* was rediscovered and reconsidered in the thirteenth-century Western Europe by Thomas Aquinas (1225 – 1274) in a much deeper theological and systematic elaboration.

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<sup>34</sup> It should be specified that in Aristotle’s political philosophy, *polis* does not refer to the city but to the community.

The disciple of Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, brought the reflection further by arguing that the common good finds its meaning in the governance of the supernatural Good (God) and temporal goods (the created goods). As Argandoña (2011:3-4) contends, with Aquinas, the ultimate purpose of human beings is to contemplate and enjoy God, the highest of goods. In Aquinas' theological articulation, the common good "has both a supernatural dimension and a temporal dimension, which coincides with what society needs to live in a good way" (Argandoña, 2011:3-4). Argandoña (2011:5) further observes that "the concept of common good was cut off from" its Aristotelian and Thomist tradition due to "a range of positions, from individualistic liberalism (the good of society yields to that of the individual) to collectivism (society is an entity in its own right, with a collective good that is different from and higher than the good of its members)". Thomas Aquinas' theory of public life is based on two fundamental concepts, namely, the idea of the perfect community applied to Aristotle's notion of the city and on the concept of the common good, the goal of any political action. As Rybka (2000) analyses, the common good in Aquinas's elaboration is a good that refers to every human and to the whole human, that is, to his corporal and spiritual dimension at the same time. The common good provides human beings with the intellectual capacity and freedom to find everything necessary to reach their full perfection while improving their nature in all its dimensions: physical, moral, and spiritual. The realisation of the common good of all the members of society passes through the community gathering. It is not the sum of the good of the individuals but a new good superior to the private good.

The common good and particular good differ from each other, not only in a quantitative sense, but qualitatively, because the former is the end of society and common to all members. It can be argued that, in light of Aquinas' socio-political philosophy, the principle of the common good is underpinned by the concern about the welfare of the community, and the wellbeing of all that exists in the natural world. As Giraud (2023:24) remarks, the notion of the common good is not the invention of the activists in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. The philosophy of the common good also existed in the uses and customs of the Roman Empire.

### **3.3.2. The Common Good in the Roman Antique Rule**

The Roman antique law distinguished the *res privata* (private objects), the *res communis* (common objects), the *res nullius* (objects that belong to no one), and the *res publica* (public objects) (Falcon, 2016:111-112; Giraud, 2023:24-25). It can be noted that in the Code of Justinian (529-534), the Romans established the most honourable way to relate to things (goods). The *rest private* (private

objects) was the less interesting way to relate to things because it referred to things that had meaning exclusively for the individual. The *res privata* gives the right to exclude anybody else from using the private objects or things, especially the things that belonged to the prince (Fiorentini, 2010:46). On the contrary, the *res communis* is the way to share the resources in common and the society puts together the rules on how the citizens were going to manage those resources (Falcon, 2016:115). The *res nullius* was the idea according to which there are things with no owner (Lesaffer, 2005:30). For instance, the remote island in the Mediterranean Sea. The *res nullius* has nothing to do with the *res communis*. The excursion into the laws of the ancient Romans gives a perspective to explore the notion of good in the Bible.

### 3.3.3. The Common Good in the New Testament

The New Testament, especially the primitive Church of Acts of the Apostles, enables the study to have a glimpse into how the Christian community lived and practised the value of the common good. In Acts 2:44-45, the fundamental principle of the common good is well noted and sealed as it stands written that, “All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need”. This verse aligns with the other passage of the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 4:32), which reads, “Now the whole group of those who believe were of one heart and soul and nobody claimed private ownership of any possessions, but anything they owned was held in common”.

The biblical references portray the life of the early Christians in persevering in communion. The Greek word used is *koinonia*, which is translated into English in various ways or words. However, the word that it most refers to is communion, with the connotations of participation, collaboration, and solidarity. *Koinonia*/communion also refers to a life experienced and shared. *Koinonia* is about helping each other with needs that arise and sacrificing for the good of one another. The praxis of communion requires living in true and deep connection with each other.

The Acts of the Apostles that deserve consideration for the common good. Giraud (2023:25) made mention of “the episode of Ananias and Saphira (Acts 4:32 – 5:11) who were punished by God because they wanted to keep private property”. Giraud (2023:25) further argues that “according to the Lukan<sup>35</sup> community, privatising common things was a very serious sin” and a threat to peace and

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<sup>35</sup> Luke, the evangelist, is the author of the Acts of the Apostles.

social cohesion. This assertion is affirmed by Pope Francis' (2013, n.217) claim that "The dignity of the human person and the common good rank higher than the comfort of those who refuse to renounce their privileges". The principle of common good requires that the dignity of human beings be respected everywhere by ensuring that resources (human, material, and financial) serve their inalienable rights.

Considering the respect for human dignity and rights, Argandoña (2011:8) asserts that the pursuit of self-interest divorces from any consideration of the common good and leads to poor results, which include poor governance and the mismanagement of public resources as one of its corollary consequences. It can therefore be argued that a community led by the Holy Spirit is urged to interact with each of its member and to share resources in such a way that no one lives in dire need or feels hungry (Giraud, 2023:25). It is noteworthy that, according to the spirit of the Acts of the Apostles, the common good (*res communis*) has nothing to do with communism and totalitarianism, which are political ways to absorb the entire social sphere into the public sphere, namely the sphere of the state to which the human person is subordinate (Argandoña, 2011:6-7). A government that has the common interest of the people at heart is eager to integrate the common good into the political management of public life. One of these common interests is taking the environmental issue seriously with a view to ecological protection.

As already discussed, the environment is the most important good for all. It includes what can be defined as the common good par excellence, namely the survival of human beings and all various species of the biosphere. Climate change, the depletion of biodiversity, desertification, and the energy crisis are problems that, in various ways, call this survival into discussion, especially in the discourses of the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church.

### **3.3.4. The Common Good in the Roman Catholic Church**

Less than a century ago, the concept of the common good appeared and sounded much more relevant to be explored in the context of ecological preservation. Towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Roman Catholic Church, through the documents of the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II) and the various Popes, began to emphasise its social teaching on the notion of the common good that embeds fundamental human rights and dignity. As an attempt to answer the interrogations of modern people, the Vatican II Council further suggests "the communitarian nature of the human vocation in God's plan, the interdependence between the human person and society, the inalienability of the common

good, the respect of all human persons, and social justice” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 1965, n.4-29). The Vatican II Council asserts that the common good is a composite of socio-economic conditions that enable an individual or members of a social group to access fulfilment and everything that can make their life truly human. These socio-economic conditions include “food, clothing, and shelter; the right to choose a state of life freely and to found a family, the right to education, to employment, to a good reputation, to respect, to appropriate information, to activity in accord with the upright norm of one’s conscience, to the protection of privacy and rightful freedom even in matters religious” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 1965, n.26). In line with the Vatican II Council, Pope Paul VI (1972) contends that “No one can take possession in an absolute and selfish way of the environment, which is not a *res nullius* – something not belonging to anyone – but the *res omnium* – the patrimony of humankind”.

It should be emphasised that after Vatican II and Pope Paul VI, each Pope of the Roman Catholic Church has brought his special anchor in the theological articulation around the social notion of the common good. In this perspective, continuing the reflection of *Gaudium et Spes*, Pope John Paul II (1987, n.38) links the notion of the common good to that of solidarity which he describes as “the firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say, to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all”. As Argandoña (2011:2) observes, Pope John Paul II’s discourse on the common good frames with the personalist philosophical tradition which articulates “that the person is naturally social, not only by necessity but on account of his ontological plenitude”. In line with his predecessors, Pope Benedict XVI (2009, n.39, 53, 55) approaches the notion of the common good from the perspective of economic life, gratuitousness and communion, which embraces not only the private sphere but also the public realm to satisfy the social interests and wellbeing of all. He explicitly claims that the common good “is not merely a matter of a ‘third sector’, but of a broad new composite reality embracing the private and public spheres, one which does not exclude profit, but instead considers it a means for achieving human and social ends” (Benedict XVI 2009, n.46). Pope Francis (2020: n.112, 154) grafted another concept to the notion of the common good: that of universal fraternity, which he defines as the unceasing and the tireless pursuit of the good of others and the entire human family. According to Pope Francis (2020, n.8), “universal fraternity engulfs fundamental human rights that must be preserved, especially during the humanitarian crisis of the pandemic”<sup>36</sup>. Pope Francis’s articulation of the common good does not vary from the antecedent notion of “common home” as an exhortation to bring down walls and build bridges to connect people, to respect the environment, to oppose nationalism and populism because humanity can only be saved together, to realise brotherhood

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<sup>36</sup> Pope Francis was referring at that time to the humanitarian pandemic of COVID-19.

/sisterhood, to work for peace (Pope Francis, 2015, n.1). Pope Francis suggests political management of the world that shifts from polarisation to a broader and unlimited consideration of humanity: the universal fraternity.

This universal fraternity has the possibility of enhancing the progress of a global community of neighbourhoods grounded on the integration and implementation of social friendship by people and nations. For this universal fraternity to be effective, Pope Francis (2020, n.154) suggests “a better kind of politics, one truly at the service of the common good”. Pope Benedict XVI (2011) addressed the issue of the common good in relation to the ecological crisis in Africa. In *Africae Munus*<sup>37</sup>, he decries the excessive falling of trees as a scourge against this fundamental principle of common goods that include “land and water”, nature and forests, flora and fauna and which threatens everything: ecosystem and by extension all life and humanity (Pope Benedict XVI 2011, n.79-80).

It must be said that outside the Roman Catholic Church, the notion of the common good has gained ground, particularly in the field of management of socio-economic and political affairs. In this vein, Bullier (2006:1) claims that the necessity of the common good arises whenever and wherever a given community consensually decides that it wants to manage resources collectively, paying particular attention to equitable access, use and sustainability. It is a social form which has long lived in the shadow of our market culture, but which is now emerging as fundamental for communal fraternity and solidarity. The common good is a good to which the entire community has access, and which is shared according to the needs of each member. In the context of natural biodiversity, the Equatorial Forest and the Amazonian forest, for instance, can be considered as the common good. These natural forests or green spaces are common, not because each of the superpowers can monopolise and colonise them at will, but because they regulate and balance climatic variations on a global scale. These natural environments benefit all humanity, the poor and the rich, the weak and the strong, the sick and the healthy, and the equilibrium of nature or the ecosystem itself.

The principle of the common good should be realistically based on praxis. A practical application would give substance to the concept of the common good and prevent it from being accused of utopia. As Bullier (2014:4) opines, the elaboration on the common good should not be confused with “a utopian vision”, an “ideological agenda” or an “intellectual construct”. In other words, the common

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<sup>37</sup> *Africae Munus* is a Latin expression which means “Africa’s commitment”. It is the post-synodal apostolic exhortation on the Church in Africa in the service of reconciliation, justice and peace. *Africae munus* marked the climax of the Second Synod of the Roman Catholic Bishops of Africa in 2009.

good is about collective efforts to constructively address human needs “in more equitable and environmentally responsible ways” (Bullier 2014:5). It is a notion to be integrated by each human being in their life and their daily relationships with their fellow human beings and the rest of creation.

In its practicality, the principle of the common good is not without some limitations, which have been noted by some critiques. Its implementation has not always been a smooth ride. Shortcomings of the notion of the common good are voiced mainly by Hardin (1968) and Bullier (2014). These deficiencies include first, the risk of overusing and inevitable ruining of available resources (tragedy) due to complete freedom given to citizens by the state (in the name of commons) to access goods (Hardin, 1968:683) and; second, the complicated antagonism between the state and the private entities with the growing tendency of translating common resources into private commodities (Bullier, 2014:3). This second limitation has a particularity of disrupting the social relationships and identities that mainly constitute the notion of common good.

It should be noted that Hardin’s criticism is essentially based on one aspect of the common good: the dimension of freedom. Nevertheless, the praxis of the principle of the common good does not pretend to be the reign of “*Laissez-faire*”. It requires that the community of users manage resources according to the rules and laws it has set and according to the responsibilities assigned to each member. Furthermore, despite these limitations, Bullier (2014:3-4) acknowledge that the common good remains an alternative gateway through which ordinary people can access deliberations with others and subsequently be heard. From this perspective, the common good appears as an essential concept for the realisation of a viable environmental and economic protection project, because it is about empowering people to participate in making decisions that affect them in their daily lives. Bullier (2014:5) proceeds by asserting that “the common good honours use-value over exchange-value and seeks to assure that basic needs are met first”. In other words, the principle of the common good is a driving force capable of satisfying the needs of the poor and controlling and limiting the abuses that weigh on ecology by establishing an ethics that regulates and balances relations between the Market and the State. This Market/State ethical equilibrium can limit both overexploitation and abuse of our planet’s resources. It can therefore be argued that the common good is a resource that is managed according to rules which are open to democratic deliberation through and by the community (Giraud 2023:26).

Servant leadership is one of the key concepts for the implementation of socio-ecological documents and environmental praxis. The notion of servant leadership can strengthen the discourse of ecological theology.

### **3.4. Servant Leadership**

#### **3.4.1. Generality on Servant Leadership**

The leadership perspective emerges within human society because it concerns a group of people, a community or a company/enterprise. In this context, the leader becomes the one to whom others look for direction. Bass (1990:11) acknowledges that there have been a variety of attempts to define the concept of leadership. Three of these definitions from different scholars retain the attention with special relevance for the implementation of socio-ecological documents. First, Yukl (2006:8) defines leadership as “the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives”; second, Northouse (2010:3) expounds leadership as “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal”; and third, Fairholm (2015:9) elucidates leadership as “the process of guiding and directing the behaviour of people in the work environment”. It is important to note that these definitions perceive leadership as a “process”. Kotter (2012:1-2) argues that leadership is a “process” that has a dual purpose. First, “leadership is a two-way interactive event between leaders and their followers rather than a linear, one-way event in which the leader affects the followers but not vice versa.” Second, leadership is made “available to everyone—not just a select few who are born with it. More importantly, it means that leadership is not restricted to just the one person in a group who has formal position power”. Kotter (2012) contends that leadership is a skill that can be acquired through learning and experience. It is not an inherent privilege of one person or a few people or the elite, but an open opportunity for all.

Within leadership, numerous styles can be detected and adopted to achieve efficient achievement. Each style has specific advantages and disadvantages. These styles include traditional leadership and servant leadership. The concept of servant leadership has attracted significant attention in recent years as an alternative to traditional hierarchical approaches. While the traditional leadership model is characterised by a top-down pyramidal approach that prioritises the authority, control and decision-making power of the leader, servant leadership is instead a bottom-up model that seeks to promote an

environment in which employees or members feel empowered to contribute their ideas, take risks and collaborate effectively. As Hunter (2004:57) asserts, traditional leadership follows the paradigm of “Do as I say and if I want your opinion, then I will ask you [and of] he [she] who has the gold makes the rules”. Kawama (2024:8389) describes traditional leadership with the image of “someone who acts as a superior father figure and makes all the important decisions”. On the contrary, and because of its empowering capacity, servant leadership has been linked to increased employee satisfaction, reduced turnover and discouragement, and improved organisational performance. The servant leader listens to opinions and values the talents of others to maximise the growth of the company or community for the fulfilment of all. Their ability to listen and consider others can minimise discontentment in the company.

Traditional leadership has the potential to lead to a lack of engagement and suppression of creativity among members, whereas servant leadership shifts the focus to the needs and development of the teamwork and coordinated team members and fosters a sense of belonging and purpose within the organisation (Siregar *et al.*, 2022). The willpower of servant leadership aims at encouraging teamwork motivated by the expression “we can do it together” or “alone, we cannot achieve much”. Traditional leader views leadership as a position to achieve; they use power and control to drill performance and often tend to become self-centred (with the leader at the centre of attention) (Siregar *et al.*, 2022). Although traditional leadership may have the advantage of avoiding distractions by having a single leader for the management of the business of the company or community, it remains evident that this style of leadership is a top-down approach that can create an environment where employees or people feel undervalued, disengaged and hesitant to take initiatives. That is why servant leadership appears to have emerged as an efficient alternative.

Servant leadership is an alternative to traditional leadership because of its emphasis on empathy, collaboration, and team-building development. Servant leadership is a values-based leadership style that focuses on decision-making autonomy and support of others. As Augusta and Azmy (2023:350-351) argue, a servant leader views leadership not as a merited privilege to command, but rather as an opportunity to indispensably serve others and to share responsibilities given enhancing engagement; they also measure success through the lenses of career growth, positive achievement and development, especially in “human resource management”. Additionally, servant leaders focus on those they serve more than themselves. Servant leadership is a philosophy in which the main goal of the leader is to serve others, and not to be served. In this viewpoint, servant leadership becomes “a practical altruistic philosophy that supports those who choose to serve first and then lead as a way to

extend service to individuals and institutions” (Augusta and Azmy 2023:352). A servant-driven manager ensures that the ministerial position is used to lead others to have access to better resources, and a better working environment, and better socio-economic living conditions. It is a set of practices that aim to build better organisations, starting from people and “serving” the people who work there. It aims to build cohesive and compassionate working conditions and to be the first to serve others. By putting the needs of their team members first and having a vision for a bright future, servant leaders create an environment where people can thrive, grow, and ultimately contribute to the greater success of the organisation (Minnis and Callahan, 2010:8-9). A detour into the Holy Scriptures enables the study to gain more knowledge about the deployment and meaning of servant leadership.

### 3.4.2. Servant Leadership in the New Testament

In the New Testament, Jesus appears as the leader par excellence, especially when he declares that he “did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mathew 20:28)<sup>38</sup>. Jesus put this maxim into practice when he washed the feet of his disciples on Maundy Thursday during the Last Supper and instructed them to do the same (John 13:14-17). Kawama (2024: 8387) considers servant leadership as Christlike leadership that “is rooted in the life and acts of Jesus Christ as presented in the Bible. [It is the] type of leadership that centres on others and not the self. Jesus Christ was always busy finding ways to uplift others not only for His own glory but more for the good of humanity”. It is this model of leadership that the Roman Catholic Church needs most to witness to the gospel not only in verbal preaching but above all in actions. Gandolfi and Stones (2018.264) posit that “the best-recorded examples of servant leadership are derived from the teachings of Jesus Christ among the Jewish culture nearly two thousand years ago”. Furthermore, the concept of servant leadership is translated in the New Testament context by the Greek word *Diakonia*<sup>39</sup>, to signify ministry, selfless service, and servant of all (Hartley 2016). It is the ethos of leaders who do not work for their self-gratification and advancement but for others, especially for the coming generations. This concept is variously articulated by Hartley (2016), Siregar *et al.* (2022) and Goujon (2023). While Hartley (2016:4) parallels the term *diakonia* to the evangelical and prophetic mission of the church’s ministry through means of charitable works as opposed to a “command-and-control leadership style”; Siregar *et al.* (2022) analyse the influence of God’s servant leadership model and the role of the faith-based community in the entrepreneurship towards the realisation of the transformative *diakonia* from the perspective of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Goujon (2023) approaches the concept

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<sup>38</sup> This similar passage can be read in other Gospels such as Mark 10:45 and John 13:1-17.

<sup>39</sup> The word *Diakonia* appears in Luke 10:40; Acts 6:1-7; 11:29; 20:24; 21:19; Romans 12:6-7 and; 1Thimothy 3:8-13.

of servant leadership from the perspective of ecological conversion. He suggests that the servant leader goes down to the grassroots to harvest transformative and innovative ideas or information from the community to drive environmental conservation. Goujon aligns servant leadership with closeness to the people for ecological social transformation. Hartley (2016:52) further points out that limiting the term *Diakonia* to servant leadership “moves it away from the rich spiritual depth of ministry” and therefore risks falling into the temptation of reductionism. On their part, Siregar *et al.* (2022) contend that the paradigm of God’s servant leadership has a direct impact on entrepreneurship to create a transformative ministry in the context of socio-economic development. Unlike Hartley (2016) and Siregar *et al.* (2022), Goujon (2023) is more elaborate and extensive on the concept of servant leadership. Given the seriousness of the environmental crisis, Goujon (2023:53-54) advocates for leadership in the Roman Catholic Church which invests in an ecological conversion by taking to heart the transformation of human ways of life, of production, policies, and representations in the world. *Diakonia* becomes a leadership which is a servant-agent of transformation with a view to an ecology reconciled with itself, with God and with human beings.

Like any intellectual and academic articulation, the notion of servant leadership has encountered criticisms along the way. These critiques are tabled in the scholarship of Johnson (2001), Whetstone (2008), Minnis and Callahan (2010), and McFarlane (2011). While Johnson (2001) observes that the notion of servant leadership has a negative connotation because it is connected to “servant” (slave), Whetstone (2008) evaluates the concept as being too pleasant and too downplayed that it tends to hearten a passive managerial style. Another critique has emerged from Minnis and Callahan (2010:4), who lament the lack of empirical evidence for a viable and applicable theory. According to Minnis and Callahan (2010), servant leadership navigates more in theory than in praxis. McFarlane (2011:31) points to the humility and meekness of the servant [leaders] “as weak or ineffective in a society where domination, oppressive strategies, and individualism are stronger values than humility, collectivism, and sharing of power and authority with others”.

Critiques against servant leadership can be as percussive as they appear; however, it remains true that this style of leadership prevails to be attractive and futuristic due to its characteristics and its aim for the great achievements of the company, the organisation or any given community. Gandolfi and Stones (2018:266) “contend that servant leadership fits seamlessly within the context of [...] the highest level of leadership”. They further observe that servant leadership is a desirable leadership style in theory, but because it can also be quantitatively measured, it becomes easier for even the

greatest of sceptics to see the “viability and potency of this often-misunderstood concept” (Gandolfi and Stones, 2018:267).

### **3.4.3. Servant Leadership: An Urgency for an Ecological Conversion**

In the face of the unprecedented deepening ecological crisis caused by the exacerbated exploitation of the earth at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Goujon (2023) urges leaders to undergo an ecological conversion. This conversion consists of the engagement of all the living forces of the globe, such as citizens, States, companies, and communities, to operate towards ecologically motivated choices in the preservation of the ecosystem. The leadership’s ecological conversion begins first with an attitude of wonder, joy and thanksgiving at seeing the beauty of creation and second, with the call “for the need to transform our ways of life, of production, of our policies, of our representations of the world” (Goujon 2022:194, 196). In this perspective, a servant leader lives in a *kairos* (a change of mentality, of ways of life and visions of the world) vis-à-vis creation by denouncing (with the vehemency that this requires) the violence and destruction inflicted on the earth. From the perception of Goujon (2013), the leadership’s ecological conversion becomes a movement of faith that leads to salvation not only of human beings but of all creatures. Ecological conversion is much more a question of “living” than of “discourse”, of practising/praxis than of theorising. It is the integration of the ecological ethos into everyday life through one's relationships with one's fellow human beings and the whole of creation.

Whatever the divergence in the discourses of the above-mentioned scholars, it remains obvious that the notion of servant leadership appears to be a track to be exploited for the implementation of socio-ecological documents in Cameroon, especially at the grassroots/community level. Selfless leadership could be an attempt to fill the gap between the teaching and the implementation performance of socio-ecological documents by the bishops of the Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon. This concept could also impel the Roman Catholic Church’s leadership in Cameroon to go down to the community level, not only to learn about the reality of ecological degradation, but also to draw and know from the people the way in which the Church can tackle this ecological crisis in the country.

### **3.5. Summary of the Chapter**

The focus of this chapter was on analysing ecology from a theological perspective. The chapter has provided an analytical and evaluative overview of literature on ecological theology, the notion of common good, and servant leadership. It emerged that humanity needs a theology reconciled with the spirituality of the earth; a theology capable of dealing with the salvation of the earth and all beings (humans and non-humans). In this line of thinking, it appears that humanity needs to learn the wisdom that developed an attitude of cosmic compassion that existed before Christianity, in Greek antiquity and the African ecological wisdom tradition. Ecological theology strives to seek harmony between God, human beings and the rest of creation by shifting from dominion and Anthropocene theories to the community of creation paradigm. The eco-theological community of the creation model underlines the connectedness and interdependence of all created beings on earth.

Studies on the common good and servant leadership have highlighted the centrality of the theme of the earth as a common home and the urgent necessity to properly manage this universal God-given heritage by the political and ecclesiastical leadership. From Aristotle to Aquinas via the Roman antique jurisdiction, the literature evaluated has demonstrated that the establishment of the common good above the private good has its fundamental aim, the wellbeing of all and all creation. The wellbeing of all must be safeguarded by selfless leaders. For this reason, the servant leadership style of administration or management has been proven to be advantageous compared to traditional top-down leadership. In servant leadership, the leader is not only the servant of all, but the one who considers the abilities of their collaborators through listening to them from the bottom-up, consulting with them, sharing responsibilities and measuring success through the growth and development of the structure. The willpower of a servant leader is the empowerment and social transformation of the people through the equitable management of the common good.

The analysis of studies thus led to the assertion that servant leadership is the model which seems suitable for the effectiveness of the implementation of socio-ecological documents by the Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon. Furthermore, the possibility of an ecological catechesis on the generative reality of a common home that is at peace with human beings, nature and the Creator. The ecological catechesis is seen as an attempt at the environmental education of people's faith. Only careful and rigorous research around the hermeneutical elaboration about the issue of ecology in catechesis can broaden the horizons of this vital action and produce essential knowledge. This eco-knowledge then enables addressing the question or expectation of meaning, planning, dialogue and

encounter. It can also assist every believer to understand (to take with themselves) the complexity of reality and to become an echo of the Word and an interpreter of hope for a better humanity and better ecology. Research for the development of this catechesis, however, requires an appropriate conceptual and theoretical framework to underpin a socio-ecological theology.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### 4.1. Introduction

The previous chapters evaluated the body of literature on the socio-environmental preservation and eco-theology. The current chapter focuses on the conceptual and theoretical perspectives toward addressing the research problem of the study. The conceptual and theoretical foundations deal with the issue of the deficiency in the implementation of socio-ecological documents by the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon at the grassroots level.

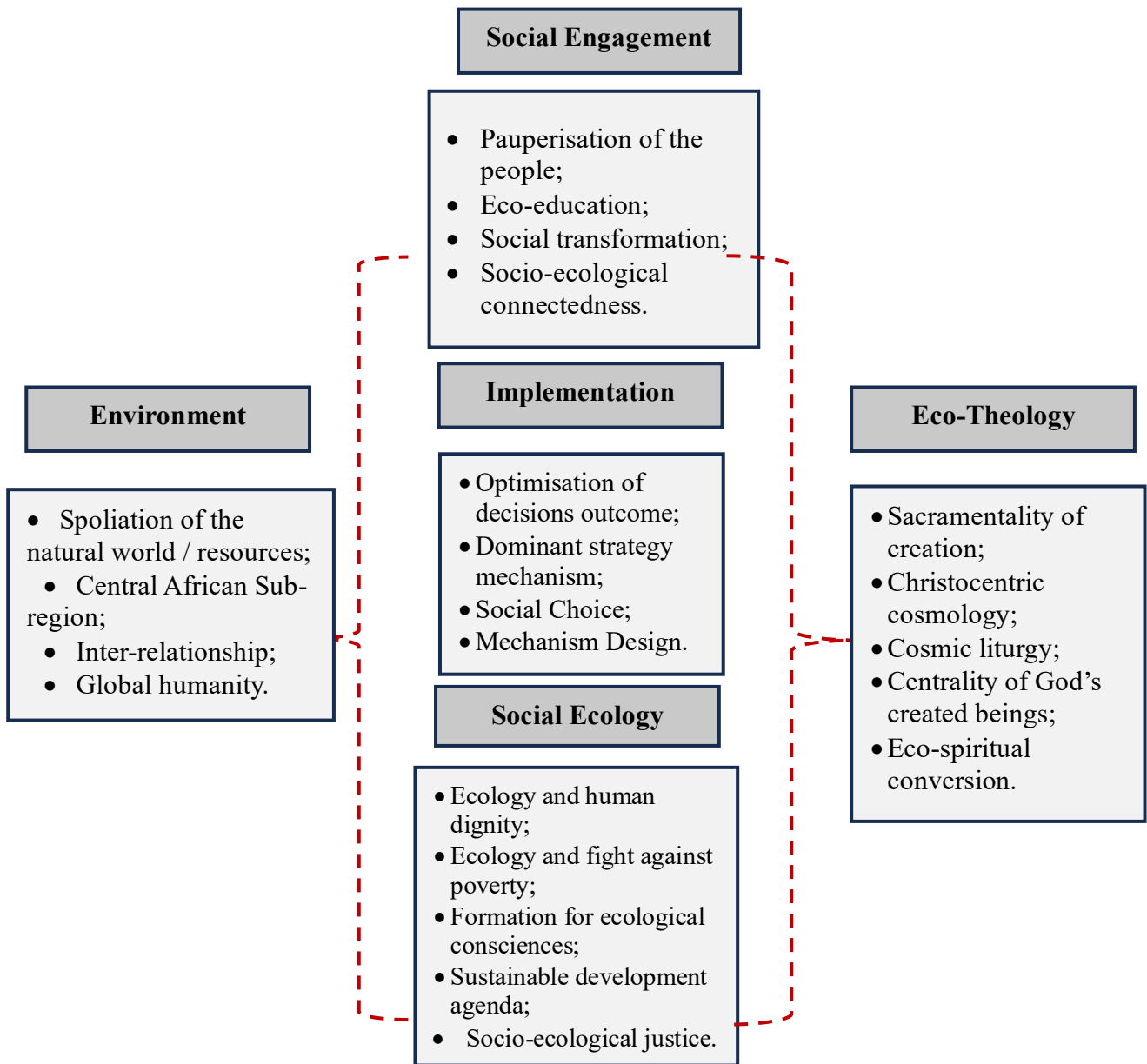
The chapter analyses various theories that support critical theological reflection on environmental social engagement. The conceptual framework embodies concepts such as integral ecology, inalienability of the common good, sacramentality of creation, and servant leadership. It also focuses on the environmental situation in Africa, with the specific case of Cameroon. The theoretical framework dwells on the triplicity of theory-explanation-theorist. The analysis delves into implementation theory, Servant Leadership Theory, Anthropocene theory, and Integral Eco-Theology Theory. These theories are discussed to find an appropriate explanation for implementing socio-ecological documents by the NECC at the community level. The conceptual framework is discussed in the next section.

#### 4.2. Conceptual Framework

The research problem was investigated under a threefold conceptual framework of social engagement, implementation, and social ecology. This triadic frame connects to the environment and eco-theology. The conceptual framework serves for the functionality and feasibility of the possible response(s) to the deficiency of scholarly research on the implementation of socio-ecological documents by the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon.

Furthermore, the above-mentioned threefold conceptual framework appears to be ideally identified to stream the praxis of environmental social engagement. It is equally a fundamental prerequisite for guaranteeing its practicability in connection with the social transformation paradigm. Figure 4.1

presents a visual arrangement of concepts and constructs. Under each of these concepts are its variables, and each variable has a characteristic that carries different values.



**Figure 4.1:** Conceptual Framework

**Source:** The researcher

The transformation of the world continues to impact the components of societies. Nichols (2017) observes that in a rapidly changing world with new technologies which fuse quasi-daily, it becomes evident that change starts with each member and component of society. This transformation can have a more significant impact when it is shared and supported collectively and cohesively. In this

prospect, DeLoughrey and Handley (2011) present social engagement as a gear towards constant and continued efforts to urge companies and corporations to commit to social issues through corporate social responsibility initiatives. These social issues include ecological crises that deserve an efficient response. Companies are therefore expected to occupy the role of agents of social conversion, and for this to take flesh, it is crucial to ensure the impulse of scholarly studies in social engagement.

#### **4.2.1. Social Engagement**

The prime motivation of social engagement is the increased awareness about the complexity of the era in which humanity finds itself and the sensitivity towards socio-environmental issues that characterise and impact on people's daily lives. Donati (2013) and Borghi *et al.* (2022) argue that social engagement is one of the key concepts in sociology, which consists of a constant effort to enter a critical dialogue with disciplines such as psychology, economics, social ethics, and communication sciences to establish just relations with the members of society. Social engagement aims not only to improve relations between people in society, companies and other social constructs and structures, but also the living conditions of human beings. The articulation of social engagement focuses on constructs such as the pauperisation of people, social transformation and socio-ecological connectedness. Other related concepts to that of social commitment are those of implementation and social ecology.

The anchor of social engagement is the consideration that each person has a social responsibility in building their community through a service towards it. Social engagement is an expression of one's solidarity by taking the side of and responding to the needs of the poor and the marginalised through raising awareness in the community and stimulating politics and policies for social transformation for the better living conditions of all members. Solidarity and support are feelings/empathies and principles that move scholarly proponents of social engagement to promote active involvement in society and for social transformation. Participation attitude and the sharing of ethical values, combined with social and environmental responsibility are the characterising common traits of social engagement.

Furthermore, the concept of social engagement advocates for an ecological humanism in which the relational dimension is emphasised. The connection between the living beings aimed at mutual care. The intrinsic relationship is driven by a principle of responsibility extended to the ecosystem of which all creatures of the earth belong. The concept of social engagement can be implemented through an

ecological education as an imperative for environmental preservation. That is why Pope Francis (2015, n.111) argues on the need for an “ecological culture” that includes “a distinctive way of looking at things, a way of thinking, policies, an educational programme, a lifestyle and a spirituality which together generate resistance to the assault of the technocratic paradigm”. Mortari (2020:42) contends that eco-education in the context of social engagement consists of forming human beings to the responsibility and to the consciousness of being “profoundly interconnected with biophysical world [and to be] ecologically oriented and virtue-based ethics”. Eco-education is thus viewed as an advocacy of the shift from the dominant egocentrism and technoscience towards eco-biocentrism. It endeavours to place human beings not in the dominant position, but at the service of the whole creation by protecting it. The effective embodiment of social engagement requires a coherent mechanism for implementing decisions.

#### **4.2.2. Decision Implementation**

Implementation is conceptualised as an operation or activity of perfecting or taking a resolution to its practical phase. It is the operational passage back and forth between the conceived project design and its realisation. The concept of implementation is discussed by Palfrey (1995), Jackson (1999), and Maskin and Sjöström (2001). Scholars argue around a threefold variable. First, the optimisation of decisions outcome and of dominant strategy mechanism which aims at the visibility of the effectiveness of choice rule (Maskin and Sjöström, 2001); second, the social choice which is the intended or predicted feasibility outcome (Palfrey, 1995) and third, the mechanism design, especially in the context of complex organisational system (Palfrey, 1995). For these scholars, implementation in social decision-making is grounded on a processing scheme that is conceived following the analysis of the problem to be addressed and the related design of the solution. The principle of effectiveness is central to any decision taken, and the attribution of a specific risk area to the responsibility is a guarantee of readiness for proactivity. Within this frame of reference, the professionalism of the relationship between the leadership and members of society or organisation is pivotal in assuring cohesion and verification of success. It is noteworthy to indicate that the effectiveness of the implementation requires a verification mechanism, without which a decision taken runs the risk of remaining a bureaucratic dead letter. The notion of implementation leads to the conceptual elaboration on social ecology.

### 4.2.3. Socio-Ecology

The concept of socio-ecology is elaborated from the perspective of human dignity, of the fight against poverty, of the formation of ecological consciousness and of the sustainable development agenda. Socio-ecology starts from the individual to the community, from the particularity to the universality, from locality to the globality, and ultimately champions an ecology of communion on a broader scale. The lens of social ecology converges with DeLoughrey and Handley (2011), Caminero-Santangelo (2014), Schlichten (2017), Osuji (2018) and Nginshuti (2018) to assess the reality of the green space with a global spectrum, which is the preservation of the common good and cosmic harmony.

From the perspective of social justice, socio-ecology consists of making the cry of the earth become the cry of the poor and the oppressed. Pope Francis (2015) articulates the urgency to acknowledge that there is little awareness of the ecological crisis, which particularly affects the marginalised who represent most of the world's population. Pope Francis (2015, n.49) further argues that the cry of the poor is often "mentioned in international political and economic discussions, but one often has the impression that their problems are brought up as an afterthought, a question which gets added almost out of duty or in a tangential way, if not treated merely as collateral damage". Most often, the poor remain at the bottom of the list and are counted as those left behind and at the margins. Pope Francis points to the urbanised mindset of many professionals, opinion makers, media and power centres as the reason for the ostracisation of the poor at the international level. The reality, according to which world organisations are headquartered in the comfortable cities, can be the plausible evidence that they are far disconnected from the poor and have little direct contact with the ecological and environmental crisis that affects them (the poor). Pope Francis (2015, n.49) ascertains "professionals, opinion makers, communications media and centres of power live and reason from the comfortable position of a high level of development and quality of life well beyond the reach of the majority of the world's population". In the era of the environmental crisis, it becomes critical to acknowledge that a true ecological approach must be consistently a social process. This approach must incorporate the issue of social justice into the debate on the environment. This merging of social justice with environmental concerns enables professionals and opinion makers "to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor" (Boff 1997:107).

From the approach of *Laudato Si'*, it becomes evident that Pope Francis seeks to bridge the gap between the social and the ecological. From this understanding, it is ascertainable that an authentic and effective ecological approach is a social approach that is not disassociated from the reality of

poverty and marginalisation. The discourse on social ecology becomes an inevitable exhortation extended to all stakeholders and decision-makers (scholars/academics, organisers of international fora, religious leaders) to get off the pedestal and go down into contact with poverty in order not only to empathise with the poor but also to make the poor and the underprivileged take part in finding solutions to the current ecological crisis.

Research on the implementation of socio-ecological documents aims precisely to establish possible evidence on the proximity of the Roman Catholic Church's leadership to the peripheral people within the framework of ecological dialogue. It is obviously a question of establishing a theological substantiation on the practicality of the Roman Catholic Church and its teaching. In other words, the aim of the conceptual exploration of social ecology in this study is to find one or more possible factual realities which attest to the presence of the Church alongside the poor and the less privileged in the context of ecological preservation. The twinning of socio-ecological engagement and socio-theology enables us to shed more light on the praxis of social engagement, implementation and social ecology.

#### **4.2.4. Eco-theology**

The above conceptual framework demonstrates a twofold-concept structure: socio-ecological engagement and eco-theology. The socio-ecological engagement has variables such as pauperisation, eco-education, social transformation, and connectedness between all the components of the natural world. The eco-theology highlights elements including the sacrament of creation, of Christocentric cosmology, of cosmic liturgy, the centrality of God's created beings, and eco-spiritual conversion. Rossetti and Tiboni (2012) and Eva Perez (2023) claim that the socio-ecological engagement explains human centrism and the technocratic dominion paradigm as two root causes of the ecological crisis. Human centrism and technocracy are characterised by a frenzy of unlimited growth and consumerism, and an exploitative mindset. Eco-theology is a theological attempt to respond to the myth of power, utilitarianism and individualism that are increasingly guiding the human relationship to the earth. Pope Francis (2015, n.115) sums up this response when he argues that "the technological mind" which sees nature only "as an object of utility, as raw material to be hammered into useful shape"; while suggesting that human "immense technological development be accompanied by an education in human responsibility, values and conscience". This responsibility and awareness lead to ecological conversion, which is the transforming ways of being human through thinking, seeing, feeling, acting, and living in an integral ecology. The ecological conversion is what Edwards (2005:22) names the

change of heart and mind reflected in our actions towards nature<sup>40</sup>. The urgency for an awareness of the risk of misusing technology and science to the detriment of the earth was somehow foreseen in the 16<sup>th</sup> century by the epistemologist, Rabelais (1483 – 1553), when he asserted that “Science without conscience is but the ruin of the soul”.

The twin concepts of socio-ecological engagement and eco-theology are one of the frames used in the study to explore the extent of implementation of the socio-ecological documents in the pastoral documents of the NECC. This is carried out through a methodical assessment of the engagement of the Roman Catholic Church in ecological social justice in the country and the effectiveness of this engagement in the transformation of people’s lives at the community-based level.

### **4.3. Theoretical Framework**

This study is underpinned by four theories, namely, implementation theory, Servant Leadership Theory, Anthropocene theory, and Integral Eco-Theology Theory. These theories help better explain the way socio-ecological theology connects with environmental social engagement praxis and to explain the assessment of the (non-) implementation of socio-ecological documents in the Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon. The following table presents summarised theories and theorists, scope, and key proponents.

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<sup>40</sup> This notion will be further elaborated in Chapter Seven of this study.

**Table 4.1: Theories, scope and proponents**

Theories	Summarised theories /scope	Key proponents
Implementation	<p>The implementation theory discusses the relationship between the structure of the institution through which individuals interact and the intended outcome of the interaction. The aspect of achievement in the desired goal enables implementation theory to assist the research in explaining the problem of enactment deficiency of the socio-ecological documents of the Roman Catholic Church by the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon. The theoretical weakness of the implementation lies in its abstractness and the difficulty of being grasped. Yet interpretivism and feasibility for the action remain the strength of the implementation theory.</p>	<p>Palfrey (1995), Jackson (1999), and Maskin and Sjöström (2001).</p>
Servant Leadership	<p>The Servant Leadership Theory is built on selflessness and charity-motivated action for and with the people. Weaknesses of the Servant Leadership Theory</p>	<p>Bass (1990), Yukl (2006), Northouse (2010), Kotter (2012), Fairholm (2015), Hareley (2016), Siregar <i>et al.</i></p>

	<p>include negative connotations due to the term “servant” (slave), the tendency of the passive managerial style, and humility and meekness, which tend to portray servant leaders as “weak or ineffective.” However, the Servant Leadership Theory remains attractive because its praxis has great potential for better achievements in an organisation (including faith-based communities) where the leader takes members into account for collaborative teamwork. Servant leadership theory appears to be an attempt to fill the gap between the teaching and the implementation performance of socio-ecological documents by the bishops of the Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon at the community level.</p>	<p>(2022), Goujon (2023) and, Augusta and Azmy (2023).</p>
<p>Anthropocene</p>	<p>The Anthropocene theory dwells on the profundity of human activities in shaping the planet planet and the entire ecosystem. The Anthropocene articulates the understanding of the relationship between nature and human culture. The greatest feature of the Anthropocene theory is that it</p>	<p>Zalasiewicz <i>et al.</i> (2011) and Revkin (2014)</p>

	<p>exalts the technological and scientific power of humans over the rest of creation. The Anthropocene argues for the perpetuation of the reign of human domination over the earth and, by extension, over ecology. For this reason, the theory cannot be proposed to explain and attempt to solve the research problem of this study. Integral Eco-Theology Theory is therefore suggested as an alternative to Anthropocene.</p>	
<p>Integral Eco-Theology Theory</p>	<p>The Integral Eco-Theology Theory highlights the interrelationship between creation and the Creator.</p> <p>The focus of integral eco-theology is an elaboration of constructive theology that focuses on the interrelationships of religion and nature, particularly considering environmental concerns.</p> <p>The emphasis on God and the sacred dimension of nature can lead the Eco-Theology Theory to a lack of consideration for people who do not believe in a Supreme Being. However, the integrative aspect of the interaction between the natural environment, society</p>	<p>Stoleriu (2010), Theokritoff (2012), Chryssavgis and Foltz (2013), Kelly (2016), Chryssavgis (2019), Lane (2020), Deane-Drummond and Deneulin (2021).</p>

	<p>and human beings constitutes a significant asset within the framework of the effectiveness of the implementation of socio-ecological documents by the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon.</p>	
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**Source:** The researcher

The purpose of the table above was to present a brief overview of the various theories that underpin social engagement praxis and socio-ecological theology. These theories are now going to be discussed in the following section.

**4.3.1. Implementation Theory**

The implementation theory is intrinsically linked to the notion of social choice and the notion of mechanism, given balancing results with individual functions. The implementation theory is elaborated by Palfrey (1995), Jackson (1999), and Maskin and Sjöström (2001). The common denomination of these scholars is the achievement of a desired goal in decisions or resolutions taken in an institution. They define implementation theory as research on the relations between the structure of the institution through which individuals interrelate and the intended outcome of the interaction. The implementation aims at socially optimising the intended feasible outcome of a social choice rule or a decision. Jackson (1999) further describes the implementation theory as the games about the actions of individuals and the resulting outcomes to be predicted and designed while making rules. Maskin and Sjöström (2001) introduce the notion of game theory which is a tool for the effectiveness of the implementation theory. Game theory plays a central role in modelling strategies in implementation theory. Maskin and Sjöström (2001) argue that for a social planner, the issue at stake with implementation theory is the welfare of members of society considered as agents and that each social agent is important in their capacity level. However, Palfrey (1995) and Maskin and Sjöström (2001:7) observe that there is no satisfactory social strategy-proof; that is why “any social choice rule

can be implemented by a sufficiently clever mechanism together with a suitable refinement of Nash equilibrium<sup>41</sup>”.

In implementation, decision-making follows a method of gathering information, evaluating alternatives, and making a final choice to make the best possible decision. To this end, Osmani (2015:55-57) suggests that the following approaches are appropriate. First, define goals, which ultimately help to find possible solutions, especially when the problem is clearly defined. Second, gather information (inside or outside the company) related to the decision to be made. Third, look for different possible solutions for the problem in question according to the needs of the different stakeholders and their roles. Fourth, evaluate all the suggested solutions to see how they would solve the problem by identifying the pros and cons of each option and eliminating those that are not considered possible. Fifth, evaluate all the information gathered and consider how the decision may affect each stakeholder making the final decision. Sixth, the solution must be put into practice. This implies taking the necessary time to create an implementation action plan so that all stakeholders are informed about what to do next. The implementation theory is analysed and evaluated in terms of the success indicators of the decision to optimise its effectiveness.

Even though implementation mechanism theory has been criticised for being abstract and complicated to grasp, Maskin & Sjöström (2001) admittedly argue, however, that these critiques are unfounded because the basic objective of the theory has always been to establish the implementability of any given social choice rule or decision. In this perspective, implementation theory is viewed as feasible. Its feasibility is grounded on the fact that it points at the realisation and execution of plans, methods, concepts or ideas, models, specifications, standards and rules for specific purposes. Even though implementation theory might use abstract terms, but it is underpinned by the action which must follow reflection to bring it to fruition. For any socio-economic decision to be effective, there is a need for servant leadership.

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<sup>41</sup> The first formulation of this theorem, relating to the most famous notion of equilibrium in game theory regarding “non-cooperative games” appears in a very short article published in 1950 where John Nash (1928 – 2015), then a doctoral student at Princeton, explains his idea to intimately merge two very distant concepts: the concept of a fixed point in a coordinate transformation, and the concept of the most rational strategy that a player can adopt, when competing with an opponent who is also rational, extending game theory to an arbitrary number of participants, or agents. Nash demonstrates that, under certain conditions, an equilibrium situation always exists, which is obtained when each individual participating in a given game chooses his strategic move to maximize his/her chances of winning. This equilibrium is guarded by the conjecture that the behaviour of rivals will not vary because of their choice (Maskin and Sjöström, 2001:7-9).

### 4.3.2. Servant Leadership Theory

Servant leadership was first theorised in the years 70s by Robert Greenleaf (1977) and then further developed in 90s by Larry Spears (1998). As mentioned in section 3.4, Servant Leadership Theory is built on selflessness and charity-motivated entrepreneurship and grounded in transformative ministry in the context of creative socio-economic development. Ortiz-Gómez *et al.* (2022:2622) contend that servant leadership “is a fundamental mechanism in guiding efforts to achieve goals”. This theory is mainly articulated by Bass (1990), Yukl (2006), Northouse (2010), Kotter (2012), Fairholm (2015), Hareley (2016), Alvesson *et al.* (2017), Siregar *et al.* (2022), Ortiz-Gómez *et al.* (2022), Goujon (2023), Augusta and Azmy (2023), Deep (2023) and Foulkrod and Lan Lin (2024). These scholars broadly frame servant leadership theory in a non-exhaustive set of characteristic traits or paradigms. These traits include shared authority/responsibility, adaptability, agility, innovation, communication, openness to new ideas, people-centredness, empowerment, empathy, collaborative teamwork, authenticity, objectivity, resilience and flexibility, humility, and decision-making/decision-processing. Gandolfi and Stones (2018) argue that these traits enable the leader to frame their authority and enhance achievements. Additionally, these traits are mainly grounded on a bottom-up representation of leadership and embedded in the coaching<sup>42</sup> capacity of the leader who strives for a unifying body within the organisation or community. Coaching is understood in this context as the ability to have an overall vision for the future. It is appropriate to briefly expand and explain each of these traits within the framework of servant leadership. From the onset, it should be specified that the articulation of servant leadership fundamentally aims at projecting the elaboration of model implementations/recommendations for more socio-ecological and economic transformative engagement by the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon.

#### Shared authority (Spears 2010)

Servant leadership spirit encourages leaders to share their responsibility with others in the context of the exercise of their function or authority. Servant leaders share responsibility for important decision-making with their team members, encouraging a more democratic and collaborative approach. Nauman *et al.* (2021:12) argue that servant leaders share responsibility “for important decision-making with their team members”. A leader who shares responsibility is enabled to adapt to changing situations. Sharing authority in servant leadership is synonymous with sharing leadership. In this vein, Spears (2010) posits that authority is shared in leadership when a participative approach is embraced

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<sup>42</sup> Coaching in the context of servant-leadership refers to a process of accompaniment or journey in which an experienced person guides and moulds a learner to achieve specific personal and community objective(s). Coaching implies putting one’s talents and abilities at the service of others for their upliftment and for the future generation.

in decision-making. The servant leader does not prioritise authority and absolute control of decision-making power but encourages the commitment and creativity of team members. This bottom-up approach can create an environment in which employees feel valued, motivated and prompted to creatively take initiative. The authority in service leadership is that which aims to be competitive in the sense of developing humans together with their enterprise in connection with maximum freedom and trust.

### **Adaptability**

In leadership, adaptability refers to a leader's ability to adapt to new environments or new complex and unexpected situations. In this viewpoint, Foulkrod and Lan Lin (2024:76) observe that adaptability proficiency is not only a prerequisite but also an essential trait for global efficient leadership in the twenty-first century. Cultivating adaptability is important for effective leadership development. Adaptability is one of the key leadership traits because leaders who can adapt to changing circumstances and evolving environments are better equipped to lead their teams through challenges and uncertainty. Adaptability is demonstrated in the actions and decisions of the leader. When the team sees their leader embracing changes and remaining resilient, they are more likely to follow suit. Leaders who are guided by the spirit of adaptability avoid resultless or fruitless rigidity.

### **Agility**

In general, agility refers to the virtuosity, to the vivacity and to the dexterity in the movements of the body and in the intellectual operations. Ahmed (2023:1) argues that "the term agility has emerged as a new solution for managing a dynamic and changing environment, as it has become a vital factor for the success of contemporary organisations". In other words, enhancing agility appears to be one of the essential workforce in managing an organisation or a human community. Ahmed (2023) acknowledges that agile leadership aims to give the team and employees the autonomy they need to solve problems, create innovative solutions, and learn from their mistakes. In this perspective, an agile leader does not intervene in every detail. Rather, they set goals and deadlines and assign tasks. Agility aligns with innovative transformation. It has to do with changes in the work environment, adaptation to new ideas and new science-technology, the dexterity in generating creative ideas and accepting new responsibilities, skills and knowledge in teamwork and negotiations (Ahmed 2023:6). One of the ascendancies of agility is its promptness in problem-solving. That is why, in the context of servant leadership, Ahmed (2023:7) has identified the following threefold advantage in agility. First, increase "in the efficiency of performance of the working individuals"; second, the capacity to

identify and implement change with a proactive approach and third, better organisation of human resources in accordance with the nature and the objectives of the enterprise.

### **Innovation**

Chen *et al.* (2019) observe that innovation is essentially an evolving activity that has marked the history of humankind. In the context of high competitiveness marked by the development of communication technology (internet), innovation becomes one of the most important elements or traits for creating leadership within an organisation, in manufacturing and the market. Chen *et al.* (2019:21) assert that “innovation contributes to corporate competitiveness, economic performance and environmental sustainability”. Innovative leadership aims at promoting a culture of creativity within the organisation. In the framework of innovation, the leader encourages their team to brainstorm, experiment and deliver. They promote autonomy of thought and encourage others to always experiment with new solutions and ideas. The leader builds together with others through great and innovative ideas to render the structure or the company more profitable and competitive.

Chen *et al.* (2019) recognise, however, that any innovation needs to be accompanied by an ethical framework to limit any offence linked either to human dignity or to ecological or environmental degradation. They cite, for instance, cases of “industrial technologies [that] may cause pollution, agricultural and fishing technologies [that] may aggravate ecological problems and medical technologies [that] may involve drug-resistance problems and bioethical issues” (Chen *et al.* 2019:24). The effective ethical management of any scientific and/or technological innovation can help minimise its negative effects (of innovation) to enable it to better serve human beings, the environment and nature in general. Innovation takes shape in a conducive environment of open-mindedness in which new thoughts are welcomed and explored.

### **Openness to new ideas**

It is essentially about the open-mindedness of a leadership that welcomes new ideas from other team members and can lead to new opportunities for the team and the organisation (Xu *et al.* 2016:6). Successful leaders are willing to listen to emerging concepts or ideas and perspectives, even if these ideas differ from their pre-existing views. As Xu *et al.* (2016) posit, openness improves creativity, innovation, and transformative because it enables the members of the team to feel comfortable in sharing their ideas and perspectives in order to come up with ingenious solutions to problems, and to be inventive in their assignments (work). Tse and Mitchell (2015) observe that open-mindedness management is synonymous with transformational leadership because it strengthens the sense of

belonging and collaboration among team members. Open-minded leaders understand that innovation and progress often come from unexpected sources. Openness is also a critical key to communication (Xu *et al.* 2016).

### **Communication**

Communicating is the dynamics of making known, sharing, getting out of self to enter into dialogic relationships, and using the means of communication. Communication is important in servant leadership. It is much more a question of speaking to the right people at the indicated or appropriate times and places. In this vein and in the context of “marketing”, leadership-communication is differently apprehended from other forms of communication by the ponderous engagement and mission they must fulfil for the cohesion and achievements of the company and community. Efficient and adequate communication can lead to maximising the full potential of the members of a business or company (Llopis, 2015). The leader must inspire, persuade, build relationships, share ideas, transmit the company's values and make things happen.

Open and transparent communication is one of the salient characteristics of servant leadership, unlike traditional or authoritative leadership styles, which may involve one-way, top-down communication. Clear, empathetic communication is vital for leadership. Adaptable leaders are skilled at tailoring their messages to different audiences and situations, ensuring their teams are well-informed and motivated (Kotter, 2012:3). Frank, honest, transparent and prudent communication enables the leader to avoid or minimise conflict situations by limiting the dissemination of unreliable information commonly called “fake news”. Open communication distinguishes servant leadership from traditional leadership styles, which can involve a dictatorship attitude commonly termed as top-down order-giver. A communicative-minded leader is equally community-oriented.

### **People-centredness**

In the context of hybrid and possible remote working that has blurred the lines between work and personal lives, “it is becoming more important than ever for leaders and managers to take a human approach to leadership, putting people’s interests first” (Foulkrod & Lan Lin, 2024:80). People-oriented leadership is a management approach that cares for the welfare of the people. Its guiding principle remains serving and responding to others’ needs. Therefore, being people-centred means valuing people for their individual qualities and respecting individual circumstances. Harley (2016) employs the biblical term, *diakonia*, to describe a selfless servant or a leader who works for the upliftment or the wellbeing of all. In the working environment, the spirit of people-centredness means

considering employees as people (fellow humans), not in terms of their roles and functions, by listening to their needs and offering them support where necessary. The servant leader comes down from their pedestal to serve even those considered the least in the community, mostly at the grassroots level. They do not wait to be served but are always ready to serve others and even to sacrifice<sup>43</sup> themselves for them (for others). In this perspective, they become the first among the servants in a circle not closed but open to all servants. A people-centred approach to leadership inspires others through empowering them.

### **Empowerment**

The servant leader does not predict ruins after them but rather empowers others to become future leaders with the eventuality to replace them when they are no longer in the position. In this perspective, van Dierendonck and Nuijten (2011:254) perceive a servant leader as a steward who not only empowers people but also courageously holds them accountable for their own good and the success or achievement of the mission of the organisation. The servant leader gives the opportunity to others to autonomously make decisions that can positively impact situations (Yukl *et al.* 2006). Empowering leaders groom others to become future leaders through coaching and positive monitoring. In this viewpoint, Northouse (2010) argues that leadership skills can be acquired through a learning process and that these leadership competencies can be observable through a leader's actions or behaviours in society. A servant leader has objective reasons to propose a reliable replacement for their position. This is guided by the principle and conviction that no leader is eternal and indispensable. To empower, the leader needs to inspire others through being collaborative, trustworthy, leading by example and being empathetic.

### **Empathy and compassion**

From the Greek word *empathia* (from *em-* [in, at] *pathos* [feeling, passion, state of emotion]), the term empathy (or in-feeling) basically refers to understanding and sharing the feelings of others. Foulkrod & Lan Lin (2024:81) assert that “Empathy is the most critical leadership characteristic [because] it makes a leader efficient and effective and can be the distinction between satisfactory and extraordinary leadership”. Empathy is intrinsically connected to compassion. Etymologically from the Latin word *compassio* (sympathy [*sympathia*, in Greek]), with the participle *compati* (to feel for, with, towards ...) and the prefix *com* or *cum* (with), the word compassion points to suffering with or feeling for others. Compassion refers “to shared language of feelings and experience, one heart to the

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<sup>43</sup> In the reality of servant leadership, sacrifice refers to the spirit of abnegation, which can lead the leader to give up their own advantages and privileges for the welfare of the people they are called to serve.

next, beneath the words, behind the posturing and gestures” (Deliu, 2019:184). Servant leaders are more likely to demonstrate empathy towards their team members. They understand that everyone has their own unique experiences and challenges and are willing to adapt their leadership style to accommodate these differences and uniqueness. Deliu (2022) describes servant leadership as “Empathetic transformational leadership”. The ability to empathise and understand others is a critical component of emotional intelligence, which allows leaders to build trust and foster a supportive work culture. Empathy enables the leader to value teamwork. Furthermore, as ascertained by Deliu (2019:281), empathy enables leaders to build up a universal type of community or “citizenship that echoes current societies and global behaviours” by driving them to “experience other people’s feelings and sensitivities”.

### **Collaborative teamwork-focus**

Teamwork takes its source from team leadership, which corresponds to the ability of the leader to build synergies, productive and branded project teams for a strong spirit of collaboration. In line with team leadership, the emphasis is significantly more on the communication of the group and the connectedness of members. Putri and Renwari (2023:48) define teamwork as “the process of a group working together on a task characterised by effective coordination, communication, decision-making, conflict management, and performance feedback that all individuals must learn”. The teamwork spirit is a competence or skill that must be acquired by all the people involved in the functioning of a community, a family or an enterprise. It leads towards achieving cohesive and collaborative “shared objectives” by enabling each individual expert in their area of work or commitment because it allows “team members [to] bring diverse perspectives to the table and think creatively (Putri & Renwari 2023:48). Collaborative teamwork is one of the positive characteristics of leadership that needs to be implemented in a given organisation. Even though teamwork skills take effort, having a collaborative relationship remains important. Collaboration is another way of understanding and implementing teamwork spirit. It helps the leader find solutions to problems as a team. However, the leader should have the awareness that people may resent forced cooperation when no clear evidence is given as to why collaboration is vital. That is why collaboration that arises naturally often appears to be the best because everyone understands what others contribute. Collaboration opens leadership to trustworthiness.

### **Authenticity**

In existential philosophical discourse, the term authenticity refers to a reality in which the individual finds their deepest self, far from the daily, superficial and impersonal way of being in which a person

usually lives. Authenticity can also be referred to as the genuineness, frankness and spontaneity of a person. The leadership authenticity is motivated by goals or objectives that are consistent with the leader's real values, beliefs and passions. The servant leader is a moral and ethical steward of the people. Authenticity adds to the servant leader values of being accessible, welcoming, and appearing balanced in thoughts and behaviours. Furthermore, authenticity consists of acting with genuine purpose and enabling true self-expression. It paves the way to fairness and impartiality. Consistency between the leader's behaviours and self-concept is crucial in building and maintaining authenticity. Ortiz-Gómez *et al.* (2022:2622) observe that authentic leadership is more inclined to the "value-based leadership style" and is structurally oriented towards faith-based or religious organisations that "carry out their activities according to the values of their charisma". From this perspective, the leader is evaluated according to a certain number of moral values or principles determined either by the organisation or by the individuals from whom the leader receives their legitimacy. Authenticity in servant leadership goes hand-in-glove with fair-mindedness.

### **Objectivity**

Objectivity is the characteristic of what is objective (in opposition to subjectivity). It denotes the fact of what is objective, true or valid, regardless of the judgment or interpretation that others may give it. As a philosophical concept, objectivity refers to the attitude of someone who views, evaluates and analyses people, events, and circumstances with realism and impartiality. In epistemology, an objective analysis is untethered from prejudices and personal passions or emotions because it is verifiable through a series of facts (Assis 2018). Besides, objectivity in servant leadership requires integrity, which helps to reduce biases and to minimise criticisms (Aliekperova & Aliekperov, 2023).

A goal-oriented leader is characterised by the ability to concentrate on the result they want to achieve through identifying and defining strategies and modifying them when necessary. They persevere in attaining their goals by focusing on priorities and not stopping in the face of failures. With objectivity, the servant leader becomes not only focused on a futuristic vision but also resilient and flexible.

### **Resilience and flexibility**

From its Latin etymology of the term *resilire* (to re-climb, to jump back, to bounce), resilience points to the ability to self-restore or to auto-heal after being a victim of damage, and to be able to positively reorganise one's life despite onerous situations. In psychological discourse, resilience defines people's ability to cope with stressful or traumatic events and to reorganise their lives positively in the reality of hardships. In other words, resilience allows adaptation to adversity. In biology and

ecology, resilience expresses the ability of a system to return to a state of equilibrium following a disturbing event, such as a natural disaster. Building resilience is essential for maintaining calm and staying focused during turbulent times. It implies a positive dynamic and an ability to move forward, despite predicaments and to consider setbacks “as opportunities for learning and progress” (Deep, 2023:86). It allows the construction or rather the reconstruction of a life path that has been damaged or impacted. Furthermore, resilience empowers leaders to adapt their strategies while remaining true to and focused on their vision. Flexible leaders understand that different team members may require different approaches to communication. They are not only willing to adapt their plans and objectives to new situations, but also to promptly re-centre and embrace change to be able “to stay ahead of the competition and navigate through unpredictable times with agility” (Deep, 2023:86-87). They are willing to adapt their communication style to meet the needs of their collaborators or team members, ensuring that their message is effectively conveyed (Deep, 2023:89). Flexibility in communication is a key aspect of emotional intelligence<sup>44</sup> as it allows leaders to create stronger connections with their team and foster a positive working environment. Flexibility enables one to adapt to new challenges and needs. Resilience and flexibility in leadership are motivated by the value of humility.

## **Humility**

As Pienaar and Nel (2017:5) assert, the virtue of humility is a quality by which a person considers themselves not at the centre of all but rather as dependent on others for personal and common growth. Pienaar and Nel (2017:4-5) further argue that humility is the opposite of pride, haughtiness, egoistic and pretentious attitude in which the person “has a view of themselves as ‘I deserve’ or ‘I am better than’ or ‘I deserve’ better and different treatment from others because I feel ‘I am better than’ others”. Humility is one of the key traits in servant leadership. Gandolfi and Stones (2018:265) argue that “humility [requires] the leader to put their own needs after the needs of those they serve”. In other words, a humble leader is not the one who is narcissistically full of self and pride, and who has the answers to everything. A genuinely humble leader is one who, in certain situations, can admit that they have made a mistake, capable of laying themselves bare in front of their team and showing their collaborators that they know how to recognise their mistakes. A servant leader makes collaborative

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<sup>44</sup> Emotional Intelligence is understood as the ability to create harmony between “mind and heart”, that is, to make intelligent use of emotion. Aliekperova and Aliekperov (2023) further consider emotional intelligence as the “ability of a leader to recognise and manage his or her emotions, especially negative ones such as fear, anger, sadness, or despondency”. In other words, the way leaders feel is the basis of almost every major decision they make in their lives. Knowing how to recognise and give a name to emotions is therefore fundamental to giving meaning to what happens or is happening to the human person.

decisions and follow up. Lin (2016:137) captures the merit of humility in servant leadership by arguing that “the importance of leadership’s humility [consists] in fostering workers’ motivation, sense of belonging, inclusive culture, capacity for learning, self-awareness, opportunities for employees’ growth, awareness of our own and organisation limitations”.

### **Decision-making and decision process (Northouse, 2010)**

The decision-making process in leadership is connected to strategic management of ethics within the strategic the decision-making procedure. Servant leaders prioritise consensus-building and collaborative decision-making, valuing the input and perspectives of those on their team. Any decision-making is then followed up for careful implementation.

These traits are marks of the visibility of allocentric leadership in the service of others and of the whole community. The servant leader is noticeable through their abnegation and altruism. In essence, servant leadership theory can be captured as that which elaborates on a leadership style that prioritises the needs, growth, and wellbeing “of team members over the leader’s self-interest. The servant leader shares power, emphasises collaboration and focuses on developing the potential of their team members” (Nabeel *et al.* 2020:8), adapting to different types of responsibilities.

It should be mentioned that the common thread of servant leadership remains the combination or the merging of intelligence and wisdom. Intelligence comes from acquired knowledge, mostly from books or the classroom, while wisdom is the emanation of the experiences that life offers in connection with a human being in a social reality. Thus, the servant leader is urged to walk with his two pillars: intelligence and wisdom. These pillars help them maintain their balance in the management of both people and the assets for which they are responsible.

As already discussed in Table 4.1, the Servant Leadership Theory stands as an attempt to bridge the gap between the teaching and the implementation performance of socio-ecological documents by the Bishops of the Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon at the grassroots level. The theory has encountered various criticisms from diverse scholars such as Johnson (2001), Whetstone (2008), Minnis and Callahan (2010), and McFarlane (2011). These critiques include the negative connotation of the theory due to the term “servant,” which refers to slave (Johnson, 2001), the tendency of the passive managerial style (Whetstone, 2008); the lack of empirical evidence for a viable and applicable theory (Minnis and Callahan, 2010) and; the humility and meekness that portray servant leaders as “weak or ineffective”, especially in the society characterised by domination and oppressive strategies

(McFarlane, 2011). Criticisms of the servant leadership style appear insightful. It remains evident, however, that the praxis of this theory has great potential for better achievements in an organisation where the leader takes everyone into account for collaborative teamwork.

Another theory that emerges and deserves consideration in the context of the ecological crisis and environmental preservation is that of the Anthropocene.

### 4.3.3. Anthropocene Theory

The Anthropocene theory has been coined by international organisations of geologists from the Greek word *anthropos* (human being) and *kainos* (recent) to designate the impacts of *homo sapiens* (modern human beings) on the equilibrium of the planet Earth, “a new geological epoch” (Wright *et al.*, 2018:455) in which humans are living. The impact of human activities is “evident in climate change, toxic pollution and mass species extinction” (Wright *et al.*, 2018:455). The theory essentially points to the current geological era in which the terrestrial environment, in all its physical, chemical and biological characteristics, is strongly impacted on both a local and global scale by the effects of human action. As Holl (2020:1) argues, the Anthropocene is “a human-dominated geological epoch” marked by the highly intensified influence of human beings on ecosystems. The effects of human actions on the earth interact with the environment. In this way, local action affects the global level and vice versa.

The Anthropocene emerged from the 15<sup>th</sup> century with Leonardo Da Vinci’s *Uomo Vitruviano* (The Vitruvian Man) to the present time through the humanistic period with René Descartes’s *Discourse on the Method* (1637). The theory has been articulated in the last two decades mainly by Zalasiewicz *et al.* (2011) and Revkin (2014). It dwells on the current geological age in which human activity has massively and profoundly shaped the earth planet and its biodiversity for millions of years, on the one hand, and on the radical change that has taken place in our understanding of the relationship between nature and culture and between human and nature, on the other. Wright *et al.* (2018:456) argues that the anthropogenic human global techno-scientific endeavours include “economic globalisation based upon the rapacious exploitation of fossil fuels and the destruction of forests, lands, oceans and cultures [that] have disrupted the earth’s atmosphere and ice caps and devastated the biosphere”. In other terms, the presuppositions of the Anthropocene theory dwell on the different ways through which human beings have dominated the universe. That is why the

expression “Anthropocene” is inevitably connected to a perspective according to which human beings are destined to be the masters of the natural world.

The most significant feature of the theory is that it exalts humans’ technological and scientific power over the rest of creation. The Anthropocene argues for perpetuating the reign of human domination over the earth and, by extension, over ecology. For this reason, the study cannot suggest the Anthropocene to explain and solve the research problem of implementing socio-ecological documents for a social-environmental commitment.

#### **4.3.4. Integral Eco-Theological Theory**

Consciousness of the environmental crisis has led to widespread religious/theological reflection or rethinking on humans’ connectedness to the earth. As for integral eco-theological theory, it is articulated by Stoleriu (2010), Theokritoff (2012), Chryssavgis and Foltz (2013), Kelly (2016), Chryssavgis (2019), and Lane (2020). These scholars invest in an elaboration of constructive theology that focuses on the interrelationships of religion and nature, particularly considering environmental concerns. In this line of thought, integral eco-theology theory delves into the interconnectedness (relational paradigm) of everything that exists in the world and takes into consideration the interactions between the natural environment, society and its cultures, institutions, and economy as a set of rules that enter the organisation or management for the care of the common home. It starts from the assumption that there is a relationship between the vision of the spiritual world and the degradation of nature. The theory of integral eco-theology has become an attempt to search for possibilities to overcome the techno-science-economic paradigm and the consumerist lifestyle that is plunging the world into an unprecedented ecological crisis. It is a shift from a dominion model of human-nature relationship to a theocentric paradigm characterised by interdependence and responsibility. It is equally an endeavour to get out of the individualism and self-referentiality that are impoverishing human relationships with nature. The integral eco-theology does not segment creation but looks at it from the perspective of wholeness: as something beautifully created by God. This world is made up of human beings, non-humans, and other living beings (the entire ecosystem). The cognisance of God as the Creator of the world highlights the inalienability of the sacrality of creation. In that light, Boff (1997) suggests the theology of creation to allude to an area of critical and social transformative reflection that has often been placed in relation to eco-theology. The emphasis on God and the sacred dimension of nature can lead the eco-theology theory to a lack of consideration for people who do not believe in a Supreme Being. This “exclusion” thus makes the theory onerous to apply for

everyone. However, the integrative aspect of the interaction between the natural environment, society, and human beings constitutes a significant asset within the framework of the effectiveness of the implementation of socio-ecological documents by the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon.

#### **4.3.5. Integrated Theoretical Framework**

The theories discussed in this chapter build on eco-sociology and theology with particular emphasis on safeguarding the environment. Nevertheless, each of these theories has weaknesses and strengths. The Anthropocene theory, for instance, elaborates on the past and presents the dilemma of environmental management. Yet, this theory seems to be focusing on human beings as the centre of creation. This centrality is that of power and domineering<sup>45</sup> as initiated in modern and humanistic eras. In line with the present geological technocentric epoch, it is evident that Anthropocene inclines to the domination paradigm according to which God gave a mandate to humans to Lord over other created beings, including fellow humans and the rest of the ecosystems. The Anthropocene theory appears not appropriate to address the research problem of the study because it contributes to accentuating the dominant power of human beings over all of nature, thus exacerbating the ecological crisis from which the world is currently grappling. Consequently, the Anthropocene theory will not serve the purpose of this study, which is to answer the implementation problem of the socio-ecological documents by the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon.

Elaborated by Palfrey (1995), Jackson (1999), and Maskin and Sjöström (2001), the implementation theory is the maximisation of decision outcome(s) based on a strategy mechanism in which a planner must invent a game in a class of eligible games, which implements the social choice rule. The Nash equilibrium (which corresponds to an assumption on the rationality strategy of the players) stands as a starting point of the solution concept in Implementation Theory. Even though the theory has the weakness of being abstract and difficult to grasp, its implementation strategy proves crucial in any leadership that places the interests of others as its managerial priority.

The servant leadership theory, with its bottom-up approach, has been demonstrated to lead to greater employee satisfaction, deeper collaboration, and improved organisational performance achievements. By fostering an environment where team members feel valued, supported, and encouraged to grow,

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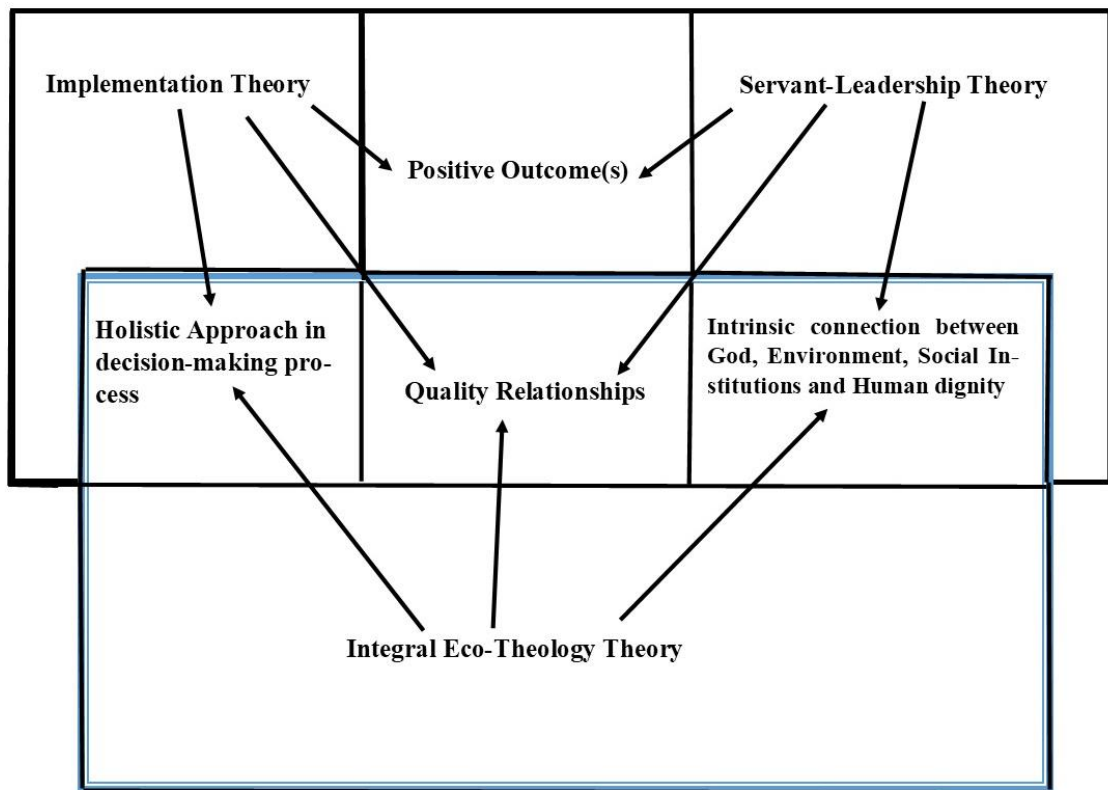
<sup>45</sup> The Anthropocene appears to be the possibility of the emancipation of human beings from their condition of constraint emanating from the materiality of their existence, because human beings are capable of superintending their intelligence to explore the secrets of nature in order to use the energies of the cosmos for their own good.

servant leaders cultivate a positive company or community culture that promotes innovation, creativity, and teamwork with practical outcomes or results. Furthermore, the particularity of servant leadership is that it has the scope of promoting a sense of community by encouraging everyone to share and participate in the decision-making process, as well as in the implementation of the decision. Servant leaders look to the future with hope by establishing medium- and long-term objectives, by communicating their organisational vision and by striving to involve the team in sharing their vision. Additionally, servant leaders can go down into the community (go down to the people's level) to draw information for a social transformative purpose. The servant leadership theory appears suitable for establishing a much more integral ecological theology.

The theory of integral eco-theology is an approach to all complex systems which aim at understanding the foreground of the relationship between God and all the components of the natural world: the ecosystem. It is a paradigm capable of bringing together environmental phenomena and problems (global warming, pollution, resource depletion, deforestation) with issues that are not normally associated with the ecological agenda in the strict sense, such as liveability and the beauty of urban spaces or the overcrowding of the biggest cities around the world. The theory is summed up in Pope Francis' (2015, n.142) presupposition, "If everything is related, then the health of a society's institutions has consequences for the environment and the quality of human life". In other words, integral theology is intrinsically connected with social ecology and institutional structures. In terms of responsibility, Integral Eco-Theology Theory considers individual, families, social groups, "national and international communities" (Francis', 2015, n.142). Integral social ecology is theocentric because it places God at the centre of the universe and argues that every being has meaning and justification only by reference to the Creator (God), affirming thus the sacredness of the universe and all that it contains.

As already discussed, despite their weak points (see Table 4.1), the implementation theory, the servant leadership theory and the integral eco-theological theory appear to be more salient and relevant to answer the research problem of this study. They integrate well with the deficiency of theological research around the issue of the implementation of the socio-ecological documents of the Roman Catholic Church by the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon.

The three discussed theories are combined into one integrated theoretical framework to underpin this study. The following figure demonstrates how these theories come together.



**Figure 4.2:** *Integrated Theoretical Framework*

**Source:** The researcher

Figure 4.2 describes the meeting points of the implementation theory, servant leadership, and integral eco-theology theory. The three integrated theoretical frameworks are relevant in underpinning data collection and data analysis. It further assists the study in envisaging model implementation recommendations for more socio-economic transformative engagement by the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon.

#### **4.3.6. Summary of the Chapter**

The chapter focused on analysing and constructing the conceptual and theoretical framework towards addressing the deficiency of the theological perspective for the implementation of socio-ecological documents. The conceptual and theoretical framework stands as a lens for the possibility of solutions to the ecological crisis in the context of the Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon. It emerged from this segment of the thesis that the wholeness, the sacredness of creation and leadership at the service

of the common good constitute the centrality of conceptual and theoretical development. These notions appear to be foundational for an ecological objective of the wellbeing of created nature.

In view of the above, the chapter discussed key concepts and theories demonstrating how these are arranged in this thesis. Key concepts include social engagement, environment, implementation, socio-ecology and eco-theology; and theories are implementation theory, servant leadership theory, Anthropocene theory and integral eco-theology theory. Anthropocene has been widely used in ecological studies. However, some of its elements have been argued not to be useful for this study because this theory positions nature as an object to be exploited (sometimes abusively) for the sole benefit of human beings and in contempt of nature itself. This thesis draws from the conceptual lenses and theoretical roadmap discussed in this chapter to explore theological perspectives available to understand the environmental social engagement praxis towards the implementation of the socio-ecological documents of the Roman Catholic Church by the NECC. The chapter further builds an eco-sociology and theology as an integrated framework for quality relationships between God and created nature: humans and non-humans. These lenses and a roadmap also serve to guide and develop the research methodology for the study. The said methodology is discussed in Chapter Five.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 5.1. Introduction

Chapter Four presented the conceptual and theoretical frameworks underpinning environmental social engagement praxis. It explored socio-ecological documents by the NECC, highlighting social engagement, implementation, social ecology, environment, and eco-theology. By examining their variables and relationships, the chapter clarified the research problem and outlined the methodology to address it. The corpus of theories of implementation, servant leadership, Anthropocene, and integral eco-theology was analysed in view of environmental preservation. To continue the investigation of this study, it is appropriate to elaborate on the research methodology, which is the quintessence of this chapter.

It should be noted that all academic scientific research is grounded on the systematic use of specific methods and procedures to deepen and/or generate knowledge on a particular topic, to obtain information or to reveal relationships between societal variables. Research methodology consists of a researcher answering the questions “why?”, “How?” and “what” of research. The why question leads to the motivations for choosing a method and the reason behind undertaking a particular research study, while the how question alludes to the way in which the researcher intends to use the method(s) and tools to solve the research problem and carry out the study. The “what” question refers to the type of data to be collected, to the tools or instruments to be used to collect and analyse the data, and also the size of the sample population. The use of an adequate research methodology aims at properly conducting research depending on the nature of the study and research objective.

The scope of this chapter is the elaboration of the methodology of the study, which revolves around the research philosophy, research design, the targeted population, data collection, the inclusion and exclusion criteria, data analysis technique and tool.

#### 5.2. Research Philosophy

Research philosophy refers to how the research methodology has been constructed and clutched together. The research philosophy is often called the research “paradigm” or a philosophical

framework based on the research. Moreover, research philosophy is the epistemological conviction that data on a particular phenomenon must be collected, analysed, and used to achieve the research objective(s).

There are various research philosophy. However, Sol and Heng (2022) distinguish three main types, namely positivism, pragmatism and interpretivism. While positivist philosophy assumes that knowledge can be gained through objective observation and measurements (careful measuring and analysing of numeral or quantitative data through hypothesis that can be approved or disapproved); the pragmatist research seeks the foundation of scientific truth in the functionality of reality (Sol and Heng, 2022). In the positivist perspective, reality is not only separated from the researcher but is also in search of laws with an explanatory objective (causality). Pragmatism is an approach underpinned by a belief that reality is continuously interpreted and negotiated against an ever-changing backdrop of an unpredictable situation. A pragmatist researcher uses a spectrum that focuses “on the usefulness and applicability of research findings” (Jansen, 2023:7). In contrast to positivism and pragmatism, the interpretivism presumes that reality or knowledge is socially and subjectively constructed by the observer through their experience of it, and the adoption of qualitative methodology (Sol and Heng, 2022:91-94).

It is important to shed light on the conversation between the three research philosophical approaches by alluding to their correlation. An attempt to establish the similarity among the positivist, pragmatist and interpretivist research paradigms proves adequate<sup>46</sup>. The correlation among positivism, pragmatism and interpretivism lies at the epistemological and ontological level. The epistemology of these three research philosophies is essentially based on how to acquire and/or generate and interpret realistic, critical, constructive, and pragmatic knowledge. Knowledge is understood in this context as a representation of the world constructed in and through human interactions with the world. In addition, their epistemology focuses on how knowledge is developed and justified. From the ontological perspective, positivism, pragmatism and interpretivism are interested in knowledge perceived as the representation of the world as it is. From this perspective, these research approaches ask the question of what the nature of the world is. It should be mentioned that in the scientific aim, the world exists independently of the knowledge of human beings<sup>47</sup>.

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<sup>46</sup> After the above evaluation and presentation on positivism, pragmatism and interpretivism, the evidence of their divergence does not need to be demonstrated.

<sup>47</sup> Human beings themselves are a constitutive part of the world, therefore of the object or nature of knowledge.

Another common conversational and reconciling junction among the three philosophical research paradigms is that they propose to be out of phase with the metaphysical myths based on beliefs which stagnate the quest for experienced and experimental truth. Positivism, pragmatism and interpretivism suggest that the *doxa* (doxology) and *epistêmê* (epistemology) walk together in complementarity, the same as faith and reason in search for the truth, as Pope John Paul II (1998, n.1) argues. Pope John Paul II (1998) reasserts the existence of an original vocation of philosophical thought to search for truth and a corresponding ability of reason to develop an authentically metaphysical thought, capable of ascending from the natural and social phenomena as its foundation. He further presents scientific enterprise as an aspect of human reason's search for truth. In this philosophical search, the dignity of the subject and the object remains the central focus.

Even though Orlikowski and Baroudi (1991:8) suggest that the choice of one or the other of the above approaches depends “on the underlying philosophical assumptions or the worldview of the researcher in the discipline”, other scholars such as Iivari and Venable (2009) and Göran Goldkuhl (2012) propose blending the paradigms as a combining action and design-methodological research. The production of knowledge in qualitative research justifies the difference between interpretivist and positivist approaches. However, for a socio-transformative vision, it deems imperative to base this study on a philosophical approach that appears to be more inclined to social engagement praxis. In this vein, the research context for this study suggests that the most effective approach is to choose methods that are best suited to answering the research question(s).

Grounded on environmental social engagement praxis, the vision of this study is essentially epistemological, with an interpretivist philosophical approach. The rationale for the choice of the said approach is the research reality is contextual-based and socially constructed. The study is fundamentally oriented towards acquiring and sharing knowledge in terms of answering the question of the praxis of socio-environmental engagement. Figures are used to present the interview results and the subsequent analysis (Chapters Six and Seven). The interpretation of the figures aimed at optimising the praxis of socio-environmental engagement and the implementation of the RCC's socio-ecological documents.

### 5.3. Interpretivist Research Approach

This qualitative study used an interpretivist<sup>48</sup> approach because it involved sampling, data collection, and in-depth analysis of the social reality of environmental engagement praxis. Berryman (2019) states that the primary aim of using the interpretive approach is to draw answers to qualitative research questions. According to (Sol and Heng, 2022:91-95), the interpretivist research approach is that which emphasises “understanding social phenomena through the subjective interpretations and meanings that individuals assign to them. [The approach] is often associated with qualitative research methods and seeks to explore how people make sense of their world and interact with others”. In other words, interpretive qualitative methods include interviews and focus groups to explore individual experiences and social reality for in-depth understanding and meaning-making purposes. In this study, the interviews were the lenses through which the social phenomenon of environmental engagement was observed and interpreted. The research was embedded in the social environment through interviews with participants about their vision of environmental preservation in Cameroon. This consideration aligns with Pervin and Mokhtar (2022:421), who assert that the interpretivist approach involves “explaining the elements of research [...] through the exploration of human language, [so that] the meanings can be understood and shared in a qualitative research”. The interpretivist research approach has further assisted the study in developing a new theory for an efficient social-environmental praxis and the implementation of socio-ecological documents by the NECC.

Even though the interpretivist may be accused of being extremely subjectivist<sup>49</sup> (scientific knowledge is the fruit of interpretations), with the impossibility of remaining outside the subject while conducting research, it is nonetheless true that, through interpretivism, the epistemological foundations of qualitative research are explained. The interpretivist approach was appropriate for this study since it led the researcher to observe and interpret the words or phrases in line with the interview participants’ recurrency, intentions, motivations, and expectations. This prompted the empathy of the researcher to attempt to understand not only the social reality of the environmental degradation but also the level of engagement of the RCC in Cameroon in addressing ecological issues. Furthermore, the

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<sup>48</sup> The protagonists of interpretivism thought in social science include Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) for whom the comprehensive approach to knowledge is enacted; Max Weber (1864-1920), the father of modern sociology, precursor of methodological individualism and axiological neutrality; Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) who laid the foundations for a transcendental phenomenology by advocating a return to things themselves, the setting aside of prejudices and beliefs and trust in personal intuitions.

<sup>49</sup> In qualitative social research, the subjectivity of the subject and that of the researcher is explained in line with what the participant in the study (the subject) says, what the researcher understands, and the interpretation that he (the researcher) makes of it.

interpretivist approach had two benefits in this study. First, the ability to develop a socio-ecological theory based on the participants' experience (see the Socio-Eco-Theological [SET] in section 7.6); second, how the researcher conducted the investigation process to build the explanatory model based on the participants' knowledge and involvement in socio-environmental projects for ecological preservation. An interaction between the subject and the object of research was operated using a dialogic interview. This interaction corresponded to the exteriorisation of an operation in which note-taking or recording became fundamental. The interaction between the subject and the object has a particular meaning insofar as it is not only a human but also a social act constructed in various situations and contexts. The result of this encounter was determined by the history and culture of the subject and the group(s) to which participants in the interviews belong. The existing theories that underpinned the study have been tested by comparing them with what was empirically happening in the field to generate new hypotheses. This test makes it possible to understand or identify the scientific validity of theoretical statements (Da Rocha Braga, 2023). The protocol for validating these statements was based on the research design, target population, data collection tools and data, inclusion and exclusion criteria, data analysis techniques and instruments, and the relevance of the findings towards effective implementation of the Roman Catholic Church's socio-ecological documents by the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon and the church leadership's involvement in social transformation.

#### **5.4. Qualitative Research Approach and Design**

Looking at the implementation of socio-ecological documents, a qualitative research approach was adopted for this study because it brooks into areas of investigation that are less researched. These areas include theological perspectives that enable the study to understand the environmental social engagement praxis geared towards ecological preservation. According to Hancock *et al.* (2009:6) and Copley (2023), a qualitative research approach "seeks to systematically answer research questions by focusing on the description and interpretation of concepts and theories that have already been explained". Bassot (2022:7) asserts that a qualitative study implies exploring situations or issues through interviews "to gain understanding via interpretation" of findings. Khanday (2019:371) argues that "Researchers rely on qualitative research design where they are expected to conclude "why" a particular theory exists, along with "what" respondents have to say about it".

The advantage of a qualitative research approach and design lies in the reality that through the interviews, the study focuses on capturing and analysing what people think, say, and do, how they

understand their environment, and how they feel about the issue of the implementation performance of socio-ecological documents of the Roman Catholic Church in the reality or context of Cameroon. The qualitative interview design in this study has allowed the researcher to gain an understanding and knowledge of the theological evidence of the implementation of the socio-ecological documents by the Roman Catholic Church leadership in Cameroon, and to prospect further theological interventions that can be envisaged and proposed for an effective enactment of the said documents at the community level. The design further assisted the researcher to logically answer the research question(s) and research objectives through methodical collection and analysis of qualitative data.

## **5.5. Population and Sampling**

The understanding of the distinction between population, target population, and sample population seems crucial. Mncedisi (2023:1) explains that in social sciences research methodology, the population refers to the entire group or set of individuals “that share a common characteristic, while the target population represents a specific subgroup within the population that is the main focus of a study or analysis”. According to Bhandari (2023), in scientific research, the term “population” does not always refer to people. Bhandari (2023). The notion informs about “a group containing elements of anything [the researcher wants] to study, such as objects, events, organisations, countries, species, and organisms”. Bhandari (2023) further specifies that the “group” in human sciences is the entire population that the study envisages to draw some analytic conclusions about, while the sample alludes to an identified group from which the study intends to collect and analyse data. In this line of thought, Bhandari (2023) specifies that the size of the sample is always smaller or “less than the total population”. It is important to highlight the population from which the sample for this study was drawn.

### **5.5.1. The Population of Cameroon**

According to the statistics from World Population Day (WPD) (2022:3), the population of Cameroon is estimated at 27,419,137 inhabitants (in 2022) with a demographic growth of 2.37% per year. The same statistics of the WPD predict Cameroon’s population to be 30,000,000 inhabitants by 2025. According to the study by O’Neill (2024), the population density in 2021 in Cameroon was 57.54 inhabitants per square kilometre on average. However, this population density “varies from one region to another” (Ondoua 2002:61). According to WPD (2022), 43% of Cameroon’s population is

under the age of 15, with the population median age of 17.8 years. According to the World Meter (2024:3-4), about 58.8 % of the population is urban, which means that an estimation of 17 739 676 people in 2024 live in towns and cities<sup>50</sup>.

A third of the population of the north is made up of Foulbés, who are of the Fulani family and Nilotic stock. The other two-thirds are the populations of Sudanese and Bantu strains (Kuate 2011:13). The Bantu constitute an important group of the population of Cameroon. They occupy the southern part of the country. The current establishment of the Bantu is the result of three major waves of migration: the first wave was caused by the arrival of Muslim populations in North Cameroon which triggered the flight to the south of the Bantu who did not want any forced Islamisation<sup>51</sup>; the second wave moved from the Central Republic of Africa, these are Bantu who would have followed the great rivers to settle where they are now<sup>52</sup>; and the third wave is made up of the Douala, the Bakweri, the Batanga who came from the Congo Basin probably by the Atlantic Ocean (Kuate 2011:14-16).

### 5.5.2. Targeted Population

The study targeted the Roman Catholic Church's (RCC)<sup>53</sup> population in Cameroon. According to Fombad (2019) and the Vatican's Migrants and Refugees Section (MRS) (2020), there are an estimated 10,450,000 baptised Catholics in Cameroon, which represents 38,4% of the population<sup>54</sup> in 26 Dioceses. There are approximately 1.356 priests and 2600 men and women in religious Orders or Congregations in Cameroon. The administration of the RCC in Cameroon is carried out through individual baptised Christians, families, ordinary Christian communities, mission stations, and parishes under the pastorship of Parish Priests; Dioceses at the head of which are Bishops who are in some cases assisted by Auxiliary or Coadjutor Bishops, the Ecclesiastical Provinces or Conferences at the head of which are Presidents. In addition to the work of evangelisation, the RCC in Cameroon

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<sup>50</sup> These statistics shed more light on the phenomenon of urbanisation in Cameroon and also help to better understand why this phenomenon is a contributing factor to deforestation in the country.

<sup>51</sup> This group is mostly constituted of the people of the grass fields of the West and Northwest regions of Cameroon.

<sup>52</sup> These are the Fang and the Beti populations of southern Cameroon.

<sup>53</sup> According to the Roman Catholic "Church's Book of Statistics" updated to December 31, 2022, by the *Agenzia Fides* (A F) of the *Propaganda Fide* (the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith) (2024), the "Catholics in the world numbered 1.389.573.000 units with an overall increase of 13.721.000 compared to the previous year [...] The world percentage of Catholics increased slightly (+0.03) compared to the previous year, reaching 17,7%". The said number has registered an increase of +7.271.000 in Africa. As for the Roman Catholic Priests world, the statistics number 407.730, with an increase of 1.160 in Africa. The number of Roman Catholic Church's Bishops in the world has also increased, reaching 5.353.

<sup>54</sup> According to Fombad (2013), the other Christian denominations and religions in the country include the Protestants (25.5%), the Muslims (24.4%), other Christians (6.9%), animists (2.2%), other religions (0.5%), and no religious affiliations (2.2%).

is involved in the health and educational sectors, in works of charity, and the formation of Priests and religious through seminaries, Catholic Universities and religious institutes.

Since the setting of this study is the Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon, the target population for the study is the 200 active members of the Justice and Peace<sup>55</sup> Commission in the twenty-six Dioceses of Cameroon. These members are males and females aged between 30 and 58 who have been engaged in justice, peace and environmental socio-engagement for at least seven years. The twenty-six Dioceses that comprise the Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon are configured in five ecclesiastical provinces<sup>56</sup>, namely Bamenda, Douala, Yaoundé, Bertoua, and Garoua. The study proceeds according to the principle of representativeness (Rateau and Moliner 2012) to ensure the coverage of the Catholic ecclesiastical territory in the country. The reason underlying the targeting of members of the Diocesan Justice and Peace Commission is that, since 2015, the year of the publication of the encyclical *Laudato Si'*, several environmental projects have been underway in this Commission. This serves as a ground to ensure certain reliability of their well-informed capacity and eligibility to accurately participate in the study.

### **5.5.3. Purposive Sampling**

Purposive sampling was used in this study for the interview data collection. Connelly (2016) presents purposive sampling as a type that produces a sample that can be logically assumed to be representative of the population. Cook and Hockings (2011) further assert that purposive sampling focuses on a characteristic of the population that is of interest (key informants) for the study and enables the researcher to fully answer the research question(s). In other words, purposive sampling refers to a technique in which the person conducting the research relies on their judgment to choose the members who will be participating in the study. It is also called a “non-probability sample [or] a judgement sample” (Cook and Hockings 2011:373). Singh and Jadhav (2023) argue that purposive sampling requires the researcher to have prior knowledge of the objective of their study, to be able to accurately

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<sup>55</sup> Justice and Peace is a pontifical commission that was created in 1967 in line with the resolutions of the Second Vatican Council. It is a ministry in the Roman Catholic Church whose aim is to build a more peaceful, fairer, and secure world. Its objective is the study of issues relating to development, peace and human rights, and to raise awareness among Catholics on these issues. In other words, the work of Justice and Peace is mainly “focused on the promotion of human rights and justice as factors of sustainable peace and development. The prevention and management of conflict and post-conflict situations are at the heart of [its] work” (Roman Catholic Church: Justice and Peace 2015:1).

<sup>56</sup> As already mentioned in section 2.4, an ecclesiastical province is a group of more than two Dioceses, one of them being the archdiocese headed by a metropolitan bishop or Archbishop who has ecclesiastical jurisdiction over all other bishops of the province.

choose and approach eligible participants. In this perspective, sampling size seems appropriate and beneficial when the participants share the same characteristics.

Singh and Jadhav (2023) and Nyimbili and Nyimbili (2024) discuss the following five epistemological and ontological benefits of purposive sampling. First, purposive sampling is accurate (no randomness), relevant and cost-effective, due to its smaller sample size. Second, it gives qualitative response data that generates a “more robust understanding of a topic with precise results”. Third, it is targeting a project approach. Fourth, it presents a low error margin because the choice of informants is underpinned by their qualities. Fifth, there is a high possibility of generating substantial results in real time because the participants have specific knowledge about the research topic. In a nutshell, it can be asserted that purposive sampling is more reliable because of its non-randomness, its assurance of, and its ground fitness on the quality knowledge of both the researcher and the participants.

Considering purposive sampling, the people in two Dioceses per ecclesiastical province were targeted. The preferred Dioceses for the study are Bamenda and Kumbo (in the ecclesiastical province of Bamenda), Bafoussam and Bafang (in the ecclesiastical province of Douala), Yaoundé and Bafia (in the ecclesiastical province of Yaoundé), Bertoua and Batouri (in the ecclesiastical province of Bertoua) and Garoua and Ngaoundéré (in the ecclesiastical province of Garoua). The preferential choice of these Dioceses was motivated by easy accessibility, not only in their territory, but also to well-informed participants for the study at hand<sup>57</sup>. These Dioceses represented the sample of the Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon, and the pre-selected participants in the interview have had training on, and sufficient information/knowledge around environmental preservation and the implementation of socio-ecological documents at the community level. Furthermore, the selection of the sample size was guided by “the literacy level of the participants” (Taherdoost, 2021:34) and their suitability and availability level to respond to the interview.

As the study covers ten Dioceses and as two informants were invited from each of these Dioceses, the following formula was used to determine the percentage of the sample size of participants:  $2 \times 10:200 = 0,1 \times 100 = 10$ . Therefore, 10% of the total 200 members of the Justice and Peace Commission of the Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon constituted the sample from the total target population for the study. If two members were selected from two of each of the five ecclesiastical provinces, then 20 people from 10 different Dioceses participated in the study. This is translated into

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<sup>57</sup> These Dioceses have a certain historical record regarding their involvement in environmental preservation activities.

the sample size of 20 members of the Justice of Peace Commission that were purposively drawn from the population. As already mentioned in the previous paragraph, the selection of these specific participants was not random. The researcher previously inquired about their skills and abilities in terms of knowledge of environmental issues and the involvement of their respective Dioceses in the implementation of the socio-ecological documents of the Roman Catholic Church. This is why it was possible to obtain precise and sound responses to the study interview guide as presented in Chapter Seven of the study. These answers to the interview guide have constituted data for the study.

#### **5.5.4. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

In human sciences, the issue of inclusion and exclusion criteria arises mostly when the study is conducted on a sample of subjects selected from a larger population, with the implication of making a set of decisions regarding the selection of participants in the research. As Patino and Ferreira (2018) argue, the inclusion and exclusion criteria are preliminary in weighing the standards that determine which participants will be allowed to enter the study. For the researcher, the main objective of these criteria is to be able to transfer the qualitative results or conclusions obtained from the sample size studied to a larger population. From this perspective, the sample should be representative of the larger population from which it was selected. Burchett *et al.* (2013) conceptualise the argument on inclusion and exclusion by referring to the contingency of “transferability” and “applicability” of the results to a larger population than the one that participated in the study, based on the assumption that similar populations present similar effects/associations/responses. Porzsolt *et al.* (2018:2) assert that “Inclusion criteria describe the conditions a [targeted group] has to meet to be included in a study, [whereas] the exclusion criteria describe the conditions a [group] must not meet to be included in a study”. In qualitative research, the inclusion and exclusion criteria are used to describe the sample given to improve the feasibility of the results of the study.

For this study, the target population for the interview were those who knew the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church on the preservation of the environment. The interview also includes adults aged between 30 and 58 8 (or more) who were directly involved in the ecological or environmental projects in their respective Dioceses through the Justice and Peace Commission for at least seven years, and who freely accepted to take part in the discussion. This implies that those who were members of the Justice and Peace Commission but did not fulfil the above conditions (quality knowledge about the Roman Catholic Church’s teaching, involvement in the ecological project and members of the Justice and Peace Commission, and preferential age frame) were excluded from the

data collection through interview. The exclusion of these individuals was motivated by the possibility of their interference with and compromise of the quality and accuracy of the data and their interpretation. The particularity of members of the Justice and Peace Commission who have been involved in environmental projects for a minimum of seven years aimed at reaching the main objective of the study, which was to secure vital and precise information to substantiate the exploration of the theological perspectives which underlie the environmental social engagement praxis in Cameroon. It should be mentioned that, to some extent, the inclusion and exclusion criteria could enhance the in-depth analysis and understanding of the research findings in line with the interpretivist vision or philosophy of the study, as elaborated earlier in section 5.2.3 of this work. The inclusion and exclusion criteria can be visualised in the following table.

**Table 5.1: Visualisation of the inclusion and exclusion criteria**

<b>Inclusion criteria</b>	<b>Exclusion criteria</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adults <math>\geq 30</math> years of age.</li> <li>• Knowledge of the ecological teaching of the RCC.</li> <li>• Currently involved in environmental projects through justice and peace in their respective Diocese for at least 7 years.</li> <li>• Those who will freely accept the invitation and sign the consent form.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adults <math>&lt; 30</math> years of age.</li> <li>• Not knowing much about the ecological teaching of the RCC.</li> <li>• Less than 7 years of involvement in environmental projects in their respective Diocese through justice and peace.</li> <li>• Those who freely opted not to accept the invitation to participate in the interview.</li> </ul>

**Source:** The researcher

After having defined and outlined the inclusion/exclusion sample selection criteria, it is deemed appropriate to elaborate on the technique and instrument used in data analysis.

## 5.6. Data Collection

Dawit (2020:2) defines data as any information in the form of “numbers, characters, images, or other method of recording, [...] which can be assessed to make a determination or decision about a specific action”. In this perspective, any research or study necessarily requires activity of data collection, which “is an essential component to conducting research” (Monday 2020:16). According to Kabir

(2016:202), data collection in research refers to a “process of gathering and measuring information on variables of interest, in an established systematic fashion that enables one to answer stated research questions, test hypotheses, and evaluate outcomes”. The term “process” is key in Kabir’s definition, because it implies one or more methods of data collection. In this vein, there are two types of data, namely, primary and secondary. Each of these types has its collection methods. This section of the work deals essentially with primary data. There are a variety of primary data collection methods which, according to Kabir (2016:201), include interview guide, focus group discussions, observation, survey, case study, memo motion study, process analysis, link analysis, experimental method, and statistical method. The focus of this section of the study is the use of the interview method for data collection.

### **5.6.1. Interviews**

In scientific research, the interview is a dialogue or an interrogation with a participant (in the research), which aims at questioning them about their ideas, their knowledge, their decisions, their actions, and their projects to generate other knowledge and to publish or divulge its content. Fox (2000:1) argues that an interview method in research is an “important data-gathering technique involving verbal communication between the researcher and the subject”. An interview is one of the methods of conducting scientific and qualitative research. An interview is a personal or interpersonal communication elicited for the purpose of collecting the information required for scientific research. Bless and Higson-Smith (2006) further contend that an interview method in data collection involves direct personal contact with a participant who is asked to answer questions relating to the research problem. Kabir (2016) distinguishes among the various types of interviews which include an informal interview that involves a free and open conversation with the participant to draw some quality information; a structured interview which requires a list of the same prepared list of questions to be asked to each participant<sup>58</sup>; an unstructured interview during which the interviewer can be prompted to ask questions that were not on the initial list and; a semi-structure exploratory interview which consists of asking open-ended “questions within a pre-determined thematic framework”. In the semi-structured type of interview, the researcher disposes of a list containing previously established questions (questionnaire), on which they detect and collect all the information they deem useful.

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<sup>58</sup> Kabir (2016:215) considers a structured interview as a “closed, fixed-response interview (in which) all interviewees are asked the same questions and asked to choose answers from among the same set of alternatives”.

For this study, an interview guide has been used as an in-depth interview tool (Adams, 2015). This “approach facilitates faster interviews that can be more easily analysed and compared” (Kabir, 2016:215). In this perspective, the researcher conducted individual face-to-face interviews. Meetings with various individual participants were timely scheduled. The face-to-face interviews were preferable for this study because, firstly, they could offer a greater degree of flexibility; secondly, the “interviewer [could] explain the purpose of the interview and [encouraged] potential participants to cooperate” and thirdly, the participants could clarify questions, correct misunderstands and offer prompt responses to the questions asked (Fox, 2000:6). In other words, by providing an interview guide, it was possible to propose some open questions to participants to give them greater freedom and spontaneity in their responses and to be able to link their answers to keywords, for example, based on identified research questions and objectives. The basic idea of the keywords was not to synthesise what was said by the participants, but rather to select some salient concepts that highlight their thoughts. This leads to elaborating on the research instrument, in essence.

The relevance of the data collected and their interpretation during the analysis brought reciprocities in light of the main question of the research and its objectives. In this perspective, the presentation of results and findings in the subsequent chapters aims at establishing the extent to which the NECC has been socially engaged in the praxis towards the implementation of the socio-ecological documents of the Roman Catholic Church in the country at the grassroots level. In the presentation of this report on the results of the interview, the responses are distilled to allow their greater visibility. Communicating the results thus gives this study the possibility of authenticating new knowledge<sup>59</sup> destined for sharing. The scope of the observability of the findings leads to understanding both what can be drawn from the interviews and the interest in the results.

It should be further noted that the presentation of results, which follows the succeeding chapter, is fundamentally based on what emerges from the interview. That is why the development and refinement of the information are essentially centred around threefold axes. First, the narrative of the approach leading to the interview; second, the presentation of results, which integrates the categorisations of information and highlights some of the most critical data that the study intends to make visible through tables and Figures as it appears in section 6.2.4; and; third, it concludes by underscoring a handful of observable findings generally spotted from the interview. To achieve the

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<sup>59</sup> This new knowledge will be further analysed in chapter seven of the study.

desired goal (that of collecting reliable information), it proved necessary to first organise the interview.

### **5.6.2. A step-by-step Administration of the Interview Guide**

Five steps have guided the administration of the interview guide.

#### **Step 1. The choice of data collection instrument**

The study used an interview guide as a data collection instrument. Monday (2020) considers an interview in social science as an instrument of data collection, which appears to be more reliable because it allows the researcher not only to have a comprehensive interactive dialogue with the participants but also to investigate their actions in greater depth through direct explanations. As a data collection tool, the interview assists the researcher in either testing the validity of the hypothesis or achieving “the objectives of the topic under investigation” (Monday, 2020:16). In social science research, the interview appears not only as an information technique, but also a dynamism of a dyadic researcher-participant (interviewer-interviewee) relationship in which the first holds the role of asking questions and the later of answering them by following the rules established by the researcher and consented participant.

Having opted for the interview as the data collection instrument for this study, the following threefold procedure has been observed. First, a semi-structured interview guide with a set of eight open-ended questions has been designed, created and administered to the participants based on their involvement in the ecological projects in their respective Dioceses (see Appendix VIII). This interview guide was drawn in line with the study’s background questions and objectives. Second, considering that French and English are the two official languages of Cameroon, and inasmuch as the likelihood of meeting some participants who speak only one of the two languages, the English version of the questions was then translated into French (see Appendix XI). However, for this study, answers in French have been translated into English, and the copies in the original version have been kept in the University of KwaZulu-Natal database. Third, answers to the semi-structured interview guide were collected through handwritten note-taking. An iPhone has also been available to assist the researcher in recording answers from the participants. This recording has been made only with participants who gave their consent for it.

## **Step 2. Planning meeting at the headquarters of the NECC**

In line with the interview guide, a meeting was organised at the Headquarters of the NECC between the Principal Investigator and the National Coordination of Justice and Peace. The purpose of this meeting was to inform the National Service for Justice and Peace about the study and to receive indicative information from this structure on potential participants in the research. During this meeting, the project and its objectives were explained in detail and questions for clarification were answered. This led to obtaining the names of Dioceses engaged in environmental preservation projects, including people (members of the diocesan coordination for the Justice and Peace Commission) best suited to provide adequate and credible information in terms of the implementation of socio-ecological documents in the Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon. Their contact details were also provided for the arrangement and planning of any near-future meetings for interviews with them. It should be noted that the inclusion and exclusion criteria were observed (see section 5.5.4).

## **Step 3. Identification of Interview participants**

Twenty people, including ten women and ten men, were identified for the interview in ten Dioceses of the Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon. The inclusion and exclusion criteria amount to arguing that the people selected to participate in the interview were those who are at least 30 years old, who have sufficient knowledge of the socio-ecological teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, and who have been involved in environmental protection activities (projects) for at least seven years<sup>60</sup>.

## **Step 4. Organisation of meetings with participants**

The targeted people were contacted individually on the telephone by the Principal Investigator (PI). They were courteously explained how (by whom) their contact was obtained and the reason why they were contacted. Subsequently, the study project and its objective(s) were clearly explained to them while expressing what the PI expected of them. In these preliminary conversations, questions for clarification were asked by the targeted people and answered by the PI. The PI then made an appointment with each participant for the interview. After these telephone conversations, a schedule for meetings was drawn up according to the date negotiated with each participant. In elaborating the scheme, the PI endeavoured to bring together the dates of the meetings for each ecclesiastical province and to meet the participants from each selected Diocese on the same day or on nearby dates. The

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<sup>60</sup> Information about their age and other necessary records concerning them is kept at the coordination office of the National Service for Justice and Peace. This information has been ascertained to the interviewer that these people are the most suitable to participate in the interview in order to provide the desired data.

consideration of such a schedule not only facilitated the PI's movements but also allowed him to save time and money to be spent on transport.

Additionally, each participant has been requested by the PI to choose a venue and time suitable for them for the interview. It should be noted that all of the participants in the interview chose calm and quiet places. This denotes the seriousness they placed on the exercise of data collection.

The interviews took place in the participants' offices or workplaces on the days and times previously established, as indicated above. In this regard, it was essential to ensure that the participant had read and understood the protocol and that the information sheet heading was filled out properly. Some participants answered the interview guide questions by filling out the answers themselves on the interview form, while others preferred that the PI take notes of their words.

#### **Step 5. Transcription of interview answers**

As detailed further in this study (section 5.6.5), answers collected from the interview participants have been transcribed on the computer in Word format. The transcription of answers aligned with keeping the anonymity and confidentiality of participants according to the protocol previously signed by each of them (see Appendix IX). In light of this anonymity, each response sheet has received an identification code. These answers were then converted and integrated into digital data<sup>61</sup>.

#### **5.6.3. Ethical Consideration**

The ethical consideration in research aims to establish a certain moral standard to regulate scientific research. In the process of this study, ethical considerations required several preliminary principles. The ethical clearance obtained from the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) is included in these preliminary principles. Additionally, these principles considered the dignity of the participants in the research (interview guide), their well-being, respect for their privacy and the protection of personal data. The principle of anonymity and confidentiality has been observed while reporting (results and findings) and analysing data from the interview (see Chapters Six and Seven. See also Appendix X). This implies that the researcher removed any identifying information (names of the participants, their specific locations and any other characteristics) from the data and subsequent analysis. This principle

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<sup>61</sup> It should be mentioned that this conversion and integration into digital data aims at enhancing better data organisation, visibility and analysis (Banister and Dodi 2005:8).

of anonymity and confidentiality was preliminarily and clearly explained to participants and was written in the invitation and the informed consent form. The outlined constituent elements of the informed consent form include the participant's declaration to voluntarily participate in the study; their understanding of their freedom to withdraw from the process of the study at any time without suffering from any prejudices against them; information to participants about confidentiality or anonymity<sup>62</sup>; and, their health security in case of any injury (see Appendices VI and VII). For the greater understanding and integration, the written informed consent to participants in the study was both written in English and in French (see Appendices VI and VII). Each participant has read the information and subsequently signed the consent form. It was only after this preliminary verification (reading, explanation and understanding) that each participant put their name and signature on the protocol document. As indicated in the interview protocol of this study, and for reasons of their own, some participants freely chose not to have their answers recorded or to take videos. They preferred that notes be taken of the conversation with them.

Furthermore, all interviewees requested and received the interview protocol (informed consent form and the interview guide) before the scheduled date and time for the interview. The said documents were sent to them either by email or by WhatsApp. Therefore, each of them had time to read and understand in-depth what would be discussed in the interview and the scope of the study. The advantage of having the protocol and the interview guide before the scheduled day of the interview is that the participant knows, in an anticipated way, what is to be discussed and becomes familiar with and better prepared to answer the questions. Furthermore, this helps to save time and to be more precise in the answers.

The voice records of some of the conversations are safely kept and have helped in the transcription of the responses<sup>63</sup>.

Additionally, a written invitation on letter paper has been sent to each selected participant in English and in French (see appendices IV and V). The letter explains the aim and purpose of the study. This invitation aimed further at enhancing the credibility of the study and at increasing the response rates.

No compensation/token of appreciation or incentive has been offered to participants (as stipulated in the consent form). Furthermore, the interview was harm-free because the questions did not touch on

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<sup>62</sup> Participants have been duly informed "that their identities will not be revealed in the aggregated findings" (Mathers 2000).

<sup>63</sup> Additionally, no participant agreed to have videos taken or the conversation filmed.

the participant's emotional experiences and private life. In this sense, participants' lives were not at risk because the interviews were not dealing with conflict-affected and conflict-prone contexts in which interviewees were "victims and perpetrators of violence and human rights violations" (Kostovicova and Knott, 2022:60). The ease in answering the questions could be read in the faces of the participants.

## **5.7. Data Analysis**

Taherdoost (2022) considers data analysis as a process that involves examining raw data using different techniques and tools to discover patterns, correlations, and insights. It is about understanding historical data to draw informed conclusions. These techniques of data analysis have the possibility to enable the researcher to use this information to predict and define future academic shifts, to prescribe measures needed to be taken and to guide the decision-making process. Islam (2020) and Taherdoost (2022) argue on the distinction among qualitative, quantitative data analyses, and mixed methods.

Qualitative data analysis involves exploring and interpreting non-numerical data, such as text, images, sounds or videos. Qualitative data analysis pertains to techniques such as content analysis, thematic analysis, and grounded theory. As for quantitative analysis, it focuses on analysing numerical data to uncover relationships, trends, and patterns. This analysis often uses statistical methods. The goal of quantitative analysis is to highlight the results obtained to gain maximum information and knowledge. In light of this, the interpretation of the numerical results aims to evaluate what the figures reveal. Mixed methods analysis is a research design where a researcher systematically collects and analyses qualitative and quantitative data within a single study to answer their research problem. The study at hand has opted for qualitative data analysis.

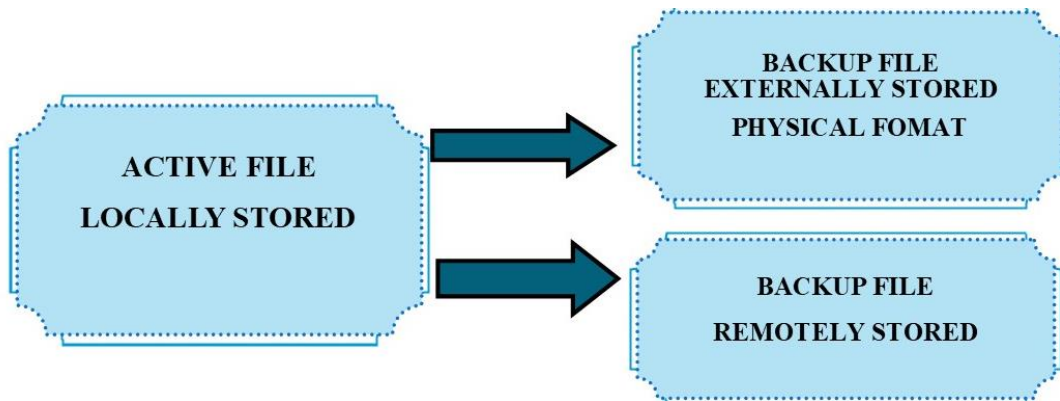
Within the framework of this study, the qualitative analysis of the interview necessarily passed through a process of deconstruction and construction of the content of the information collected from participants. This deconstruction and reconstruction are grounded on significant themes, words and metaphors. Themes were identified and ordered through a final grouping and comments/interpretations were given to their content. The reconstruction and monitoring of the methodological path served to define both the light margin of uncertainty that weighs on the results achieved and their credibility/reliability; while the reflective/analytical delineation and the process of building the empirical documentation have become evident. The main purpose of the analysis of the

interview data was to verify the hypothesis of the implementation or not of socio-ecological documents by the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon. Aligning with Weston *et al.* (2001), the conceptual and theoretical frameworks served as lenses for interpreting and analysing the interview data, especially the findings.

Additionally, the study draws meaning from the data by reading through interview texts and other documents to search for segments that are relevant to the research questions/research problem. Qualitative data on theories underlying social engagement, socio-ecological theology and implementation performance of the socio-ecological documents are analysed using the perspectives of the conceptual and theoretical framework. In principle, data analysis in scientific research follows a technique and opts for a particular instrument.

### **5.7.1. Data Management and Storage**

Taherdoost (2021) considers interview data management as a process that consists of creating, storing and making accessible the information collected through the questions and answers session. In the context of this study, interview data collected using handwritten notes and recording with the iPhone have been securely handled in the following ways. First, after the interview, the name and gender of each participant on the note-taking sheet and iPhone recording were replaced by a code in the process of transcribing their information. For instance, mp1 stands as a code for male participant 1; similarly, fp1 corresponds to a code for female participant 1. This deidentification process has been completed before handing the information for storage. Second, the iPhone that was used for interview recordings is secure thanks to a locking and unlocking system using Face ID features (compatible models). Thirdly, three sets of copies of the transcript of the responses have been kept in three different locations, namely an original copy saved on the researcher's computer; a backup copy stored on a physical external drive (external disc or hard drive); a backup file stored on a cloud drive (e.g. the iCloud storage of the University of KwaZulu-Natal ) and will be unloaded in a secure area allocated to this study. The researcher's desktop and laptop computers, where research interview material is accessible, are safeguarded by passwords. All these locations are captured and can be visualised in the following figure.



**Figure 5.1:** Location for data management

**Source:** The researcher

Additionally, by paragraph 3.3.5 in Section B of the UKZN “Policy on Research Ethics” (2018), the information collected through the interview will be retained for five years in the University database.

### 5.7.2. Frame Analysis Technique

The study employed *frame analysis* to explore the issue of whether the NECC is implementing the Roman Catholic Church’s socio-ecological documents at the community level. Historically, *frame analysis* emerged in the 1970s, notably with Erving Goffman (1974), who maintains that human beings classify, organise and interpret their life experiences to give meaning to them. In this viewpoint, *frame analysis* is conceived by Goffman (1974:21) as the “schemata of interpretations which are labelled as ‘frames’ [and] which enable individuals to locate, perceive, identify, and label occurrences or information”. In other words, frame analysis evaluates the way people understand social phenomena. For researchers in social science, *the frame analysis* technique serves to “conceptualise news content as a form of discourse by discussing several conceptual dimensions of news texts” (Pan and Kosicki 2015:56). Van Dijk (2016) regards *frame analysis* as a technique in social science that consists of looking into and examining social situations, messages and documents given knowing how and why they are chosen and used. This methodological technique uses a particular framework or perspective to interpret and give meaning to situations that occur in society. Meanings are drawn from the active interpretation of knowledge and experiences (Pan and Kosicki 2015:64). Frame analysis conceives people’s discursive opinion and exploration as a pragmatic substantiality. Van Gorp (2007:73) argues that the *frame analysis* aims at assessing “the implicitly present cultural phenomena conveyed by all these elements as a whole and to relate them to the

dynamic processes in which social reality is constructed”. Linström and Marais (2012:26) further explain that qualitative frame analysis engages “extensively” and “wholistically” with the text to identify “frames” by examining “the keywords and metaphors”.

For the study, *frame analysis* was applied using four guiding steps as elaborated by Caulfield (2020). First, the PI got familiarised with the data through reading and re-reading the interview transcripts and paying attention to the emerging ideas; second, he used the *MS Excel* data analytic software to thematically codify the text of the transcripts with different coloured highlighters (see section 6.2.4); third, distinct themes was carved out using recurrent ideas from the interviews and; fourth, the analysis was written out while cross-referencing the themes in the different sets of the transcripts (see Chapter Seven).

### **5.7.3. Computer-assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Tool**

Ose (2017:2) distinguishes several prominent “Computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS)” that have been developed in recent years. These well-known computer-based analytic software programmes include *NVivo* and *ATLAS.ti*, *MAXqda*, and *Microsoft (MS) Excel*. The functionalities of this software are diverse with reference to qualitative analyses. While *NVivo* provides insights into unstructured data such as “open-ended survey responses”, *ATLAS.ti* helps the study to manage, extract, compare, explore, and reassemble meaningful segments of information from large amounts of data (Friese 2014). *MAXqda* assists in analysing “interview, reports, tables, online surveys, focus groups, videos, audio files, literature, images, and other sources” (Ose 2017:2). *MS Excel* “produces a flexible Word document of interview data separated into logical chapters and subchapters” (Ose 2017:1).

Information gathered from the participants in the interview in the context of this study was explored and analysed using qualitative methods through *MS Excel* data analytic software. The study has opted for *MS Excel* because of its usefulness and visibility in empirical data through making them easy to understand, view, and decode (Gattman 2010). Furthermore, Ose (2017:1) argues that *MS Excel* helps “social science projects that involve many interviews [and] produce a vast amount of data or text that is difficult to structure and analyse systematically. [*MS Excel*] is also suitable for coding and structuring answers to open-ended questions”. In other words, the *MS Excel* software is the operational parameters that help the interview to be more focused in answering the research

question(s). This exploration and analysis through *MS Excel* has been carried out in the following steps.

First, the handwritten and recorded answers to the interview guide from the participants in the interview were transcribed into electronic format through MS Word and stored on the researcher's computer. This transcription was a fundamental step in the analysis and interpretation of data that has ensured the accuracy and reliability of the research results. Accurate transcription was crucial because it acted as a bridge between the raw data collected and the in-depth analysis that followed in the subsequent chapter of the study. Finally, it ensures that the nuances of participants' speeches or spoken words are faithfully represented in text form. Second, as already mentioned, each participant has been given an identity or a code in the process of transcription, for example, MP1 for male participant 1 and MP2 = male participant 2, FP1 = female participant 1 and FP2 = female participant 2, and so on. Third, the research's main question and sub-questions were labelled. Fourth, the transcribed Word files were conveyed into Excel and "a few common Excel functions" (Ose 2017:3) were used to code or thematise emergent concepts and to organise graphs and pie-charts for each question. Fifth, the study proceeded with identifying common and emerging themes from the participants' views by coding concepts or phenomena that are apparent. Sixth, the writing up of the findings, which includes describing the categories and their connection, discussing results through interpreting them, considering research questions, objectives and theories underlying social engagement praxis and socio-ecological theology.

In clear, transcripts of all the responses have been examined using thematic analysis by systematically identifying all the main concepts which arise from the interview and categorising and developing these concepts into common themes. An inductive approach was applied to identify themes for analysis. The implementation of inductive "involves allowing the data to determine themes" (Caulfield 2020:6) and "Without fitting [them] to a pre-determined coding frame" (Bree and Gallagher 2016:2813)<sup>64</sup>.

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<sup>64</sup> It should be noted that the inductive approach is different from the deductive approach, which implies coming to data with already preconceived themes that are expected to be found, grounded on theory, or on existing knowledge (Caulfield 2020:7).

## **5.8. Summary of the Chapter**

Chapter Five outlined the study's methodology, emphasising the researcher's vision, shaped by epistemology and doxology. This vision guided the choice of an interpretivist approach for its flexibility and practicality, leading to a qualitative explorative interview research design. This chosen methodology informed the systematic collection and in-depth analysis of data, supporting the research problem and objectives. The chapter further outlined the study population target, sampling size, and technique. It explained that primary data were collected from informed members of Diocesan Justice and Peace commissions in Cameroon's Catholic Church, while secondary data were derived from books and published articles. Inclusion and exclusion criteria ensured source relevance. For data analysis, the frame analysis technique was outlined for use alongside *MS Excel* for data processing because of its clarity and ease of use. Chapter Six presents the findings based on this approach.

## CHAPTER SIX

### PRESENTATION OF RESULTS AND FINDINGS

#### 6.1. Introduction

Chapter Five outlined the research methodology for acquiring data. This Chapter Six presents the findings from the interview conducted to address the research problem and objectives. This presentation of the interview results focuses on three pillars. First, the framework purpose of each question asked in compliance with the principle of confidentiality and anonymity; second, the categorisation of the answers collected from the participants applying *frame analysis*; and third, the actual presentation of the results (questions and answers to each question) visually captured in tables and Figures using the *Microsoft Excel* software (computer) programme. Data collection followed approved ethical research protocols, ensuring participant confidentiality and anonymity. These findings aim to strengthen the Church's capacity for environmental preservation.

#### 6.2. Presentation of Results

##### 6.2.1. Interview Guide Purposes

A set of eight questions (see Appendices VIII and IX) was individually posed to interview participants. Each question (Q) was aligned with specific research objectives:

- Access participants' engagement in environmental preservation activities (Q1 & Q4).
- Examine participants' socio-environmental and theological training by the Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon (Q2).
- Investigate church leadership's initiatives for implementing socio-ecological documents at the grassroots level (Q3).
- Evaluate Bishops' involvement in environmental preservation within their Dioceses (Q5).
- Analyse support provided by the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon for ecological preservation (Q6).
- Gather recommendations for theological interventions and the potential societal impact of implementing socio-ecological documents (Q7).

- Explore strategies for implementing *Laudato Si'* at the parish level (Q8).

### 6.2.2 Data Transcription

Data are securely stored for future reference and verification. Data categorisation followed the transcription. Participants' names were encrypted using codes: P for "participant," M for "male," F for "female," MP for "male participant," and FP for "female participant" (see Appendix X). Each code was assigned a number (e.g., MP1–MP10, FP1–FP10) to indicate the interview order. The study targeted 20 participants (10 men, 10 women across selected Dioceses). French responses were translated into English for consistency. Minor linguistic edits were done to ensure readability (Dornyei, 2007).

### 6.2.3. Responses Categorisation

Data categorisation aimed to identify the recurring insights from participants' responses, facilitating theoretical analysis and verifying alignment with study objectives. This process highlighted essential themes within the data. As Gattman (2010) states, Excel aids in simplifying empirical data for better comprehension and analysis. Thus, using *MS Excel*, graphical representations such as charts and pie diagrams were generated to enhance data visibility and recurrency (see Figures below). Spreadsheet functions provided deeper insights supporting further qualitative interpretive analysis in Chapter Seven of this thesis. The visualisation ensures concise communication of findings and their implications through a structured graphical representation.

### 6.2.4. Presentation of Results

***Question 1. Tell me about your involvement in church environmental preservation activities. How and why are you involved?***

This table categorizes participants' responses according to recurring themes.

***Table 6.1: Answers by categories and recurrency (question 1)***

**Source:** The researcher

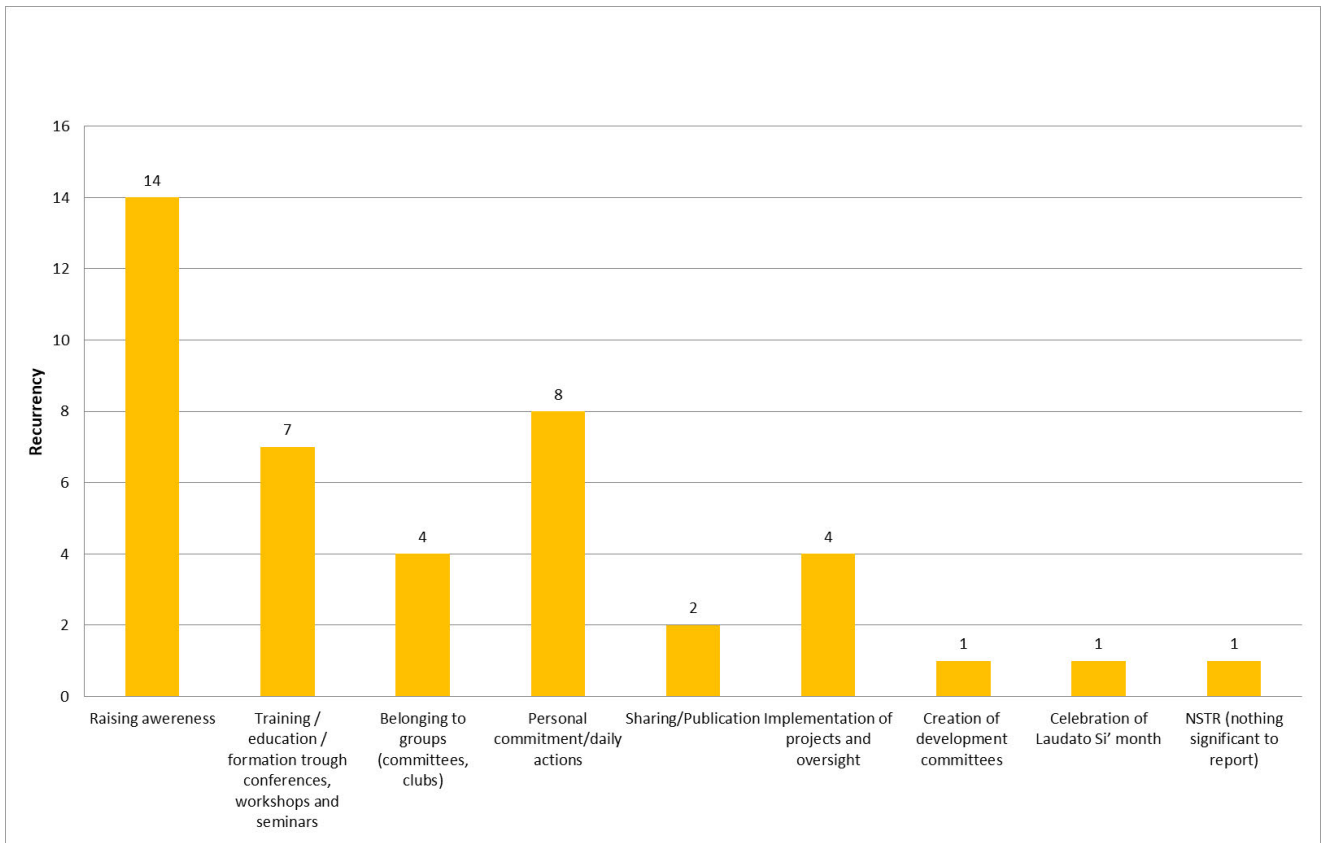
<b>Categories with key elements in the answers (with a few illustrative quotes from the interviews)</b>	<b>Recurrency</b>
<b>Raising Awareness</b>	<b>14</b>

<p>The theme of “raising awareness” recurrently emerged from the interview. While some participants recommended “Raising awareness among agro-foresters against excessive tree falling [deforestation]” (MP1 and FP1), others championed “Raising of awareness through recollection preaching [and] against chemicals that kill fish in waterways” (MP2 and FP5). Other currencies of the theme “Awareness” include the following categorisations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Awareness for regeneration after farming;</li> <li>- Raising awareness against the mentality of a consumerism of which consequences are negative for our ecology;</li> <li>- Raising awareness among Parish Justice and Peace Committees (PJPC);</li> <li>- Raising awareness for a healthy environment;</li> <li>- Raising awareness about environmental preservation;</li> <li>- My commitment to environmental preservation is through my sense of questioning, fighting against, and raising awareness against the use of chemical fertilisers in plantations;</li> <li>- I raise awareness among Christians about cleanliness and personal and community hygiene;</li> <li>- I am involved in sensitising people about the environmental pollution and deforestation Sensitisation (awareness raising);</li> <li>- Awareness / sensitisation and training of members of parish committees and other lay associations on integral ecology;</li> <li>- Raising awareness among members on the importance of preserving the environment.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Training / education / formation trough conferences, workshops and seminars</b></p> <p>These themes occurred from several participants. For instance, one argued that their diocese is involved in “the promotion of training centres for young people and agents in sustainable agriculture (two years of training)” (Q4: MP9); others mentioned “formation on environmental preservation [and] of <i>Laudato Si</i>’ clubs in parishes, Catholic schools and colleges” (Q1: MP1 and FP1; Q8: MP1 and FP1).</p> <p>Other mentions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Formation on environmental preservation in Small Christian Communities (SCC);</li> <li>- By educating children in Catholic schools, including teachers and parents on cleanliness, example: putting garbage bags in schools and in family homes;</li> <li>- Training of justice and peace delegates for ecological preservation;</li> </ul>	7

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- For this reason, the Diocese has thought of training people for the preservation of the environment;</li> <li>- Training on environmental protection within the church;</li> <li>- Training of members of parish committees and other lay associations on integral ecology.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Belonging to groups (committees, clubs)</b></p> <p>Participants have various motivations and ways to be involved in church environmental preservation activities. One of the participants voiced out that “[The] situation of water shortage in my entire city in the 1990s triggered in me the desire to join Justice and Peace [Commission] for issues of environment and ecology” (Q1: MP4).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- This situation triggered in me the desire to join the issue of environment and ecology to justice and peace when I was barely part of the Commission;</li> <li>- My presence in the Church and volunteer movements;</li> <li>- Formation of Laudato Si’ clubs;</li> <li>- Formation of Laudato Si’ clubs.</li> </ul>	<b>4</b>
<p><b>Personal commitment/daily actions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Cleaning up of the environment” (Q1: FP7);</li> <li>- Planting of flowers;</li> <li>- I make sure not to throw garbage in a disorderly manner;</li> <li>- Cleanliness in my office;</li> <li>- Cleaning the parish premises;</li> <li>- Maintain the few trees that survive despite the drought and plant others to safeguard the environment;</li> <li>- Defending integral human rights;</li> <li>- Solidarity through common actions for respect for the earth and the dignity of all beings.</li> </ul>	<b>8</b>
<p><b>Sharing / Publication</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “The vulgarisation of <i>Laudato Si’</i>” (Q1: FP1);</li> <li>- Divulgate of socio-ecological documents in parish committees of justice and peace.</li> </ul>	<b>2</b>
<p><b>Implementation of projects and oversight</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I work for the preservation of the environment by implementing the actions of the Diocese in favour of environmental protection;</li> <li>- I was involved in the implementation of the project entitled “My land my treasure”;</li> <li>- I support in the land issue;</li> </ul>	<b>4</b>

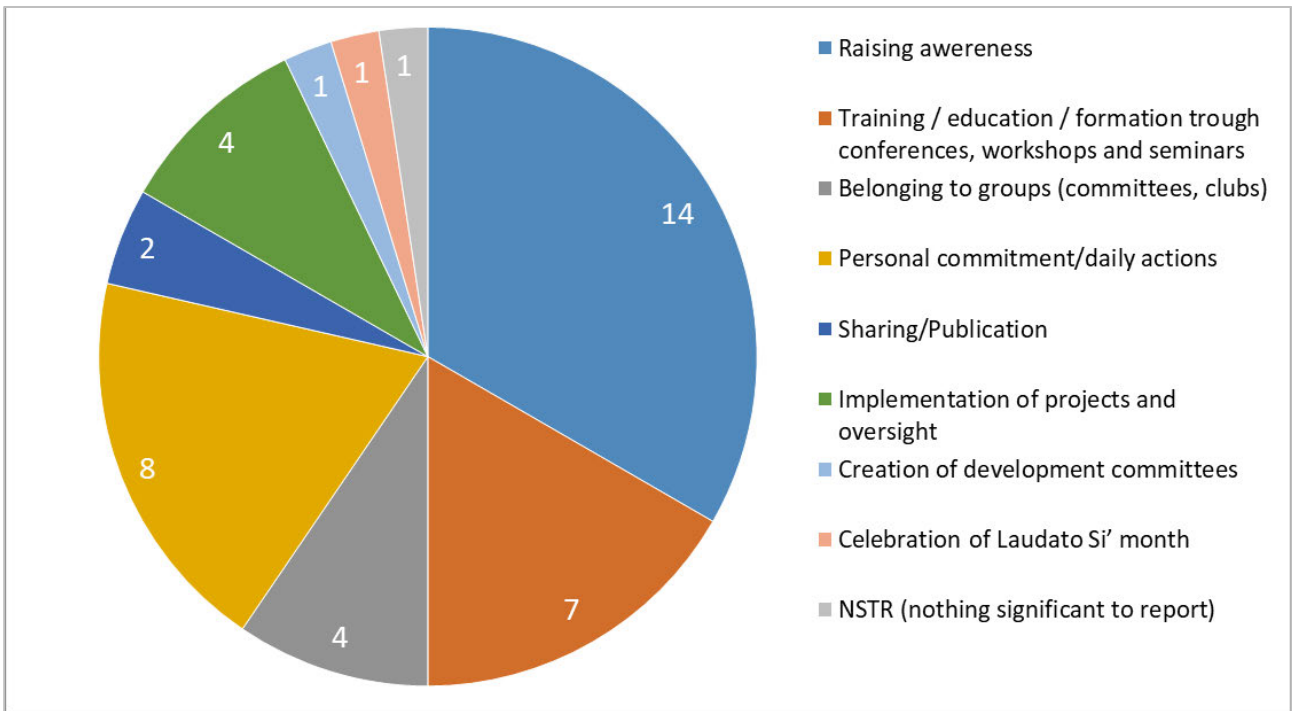
- I serve as environmental protection agent for my Diocese by enhancing protection of water catchment areas in villages. I also serve in villages water pipeline supply programme.	
<b>Others</b> Establishment of development committees to create awareness on the importance of the environmental preservation;	<b>1</b>
<b>Celebration of Laudato Si' month in September</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>NSTR (nothing significant to report)</b>	<b>1</b>

***Question 1. Tell me about your involvement in church environmental preservation activities. How and why are you involved?***



***Figure 6.1: Capturing of the answers to the interview questions 1***

**Source:** The researcher



**Figure 6.2: Visibility of answers to the interview questions 1 through 9 through different colours**  
**Source:** The researcher

Relying on Table 6.1 and Figures 6.1, 6.2, the interviews reveal responses such as “NSTR” (nothing significant to report) and “I don’t know” regarding the NECC’s ecological training initiatives. Participants are aware of the NECC but are unaware of its involvement in training ecological preservation agents. This revelation suggests a lack of communication between the NECC and the grassroots Church community. The insufficient connection and lack of information hinder the effective implementation of socio-ecological documents, thereby limiting the Church’s impact on environmental preservation.

***Question 2. How has the church leadership trained you in the ecological teaching of the Roman Catholic Church?***

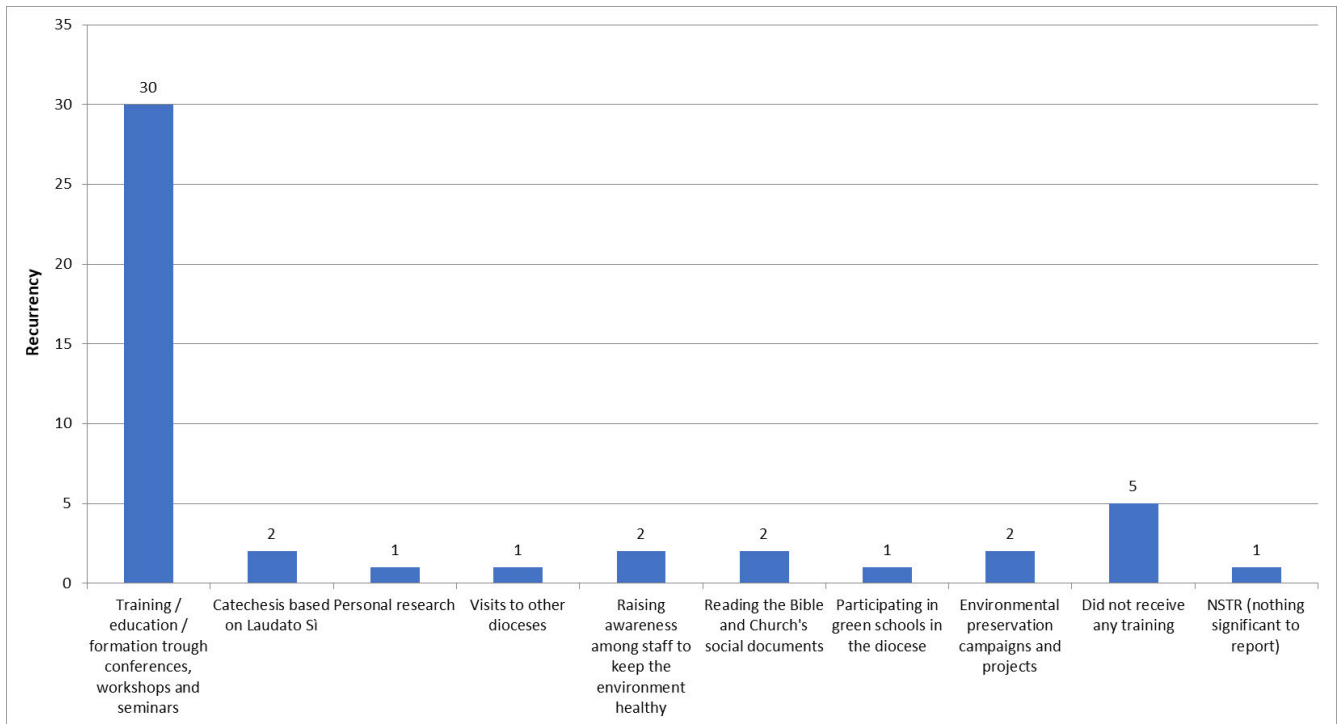
**Table 6.2: Answers by categories and recurrency (question 2)**

**Source:** The researcher

Categories with key elements in the answers (with a few illustrative quotes from the interviews)	Recurrency
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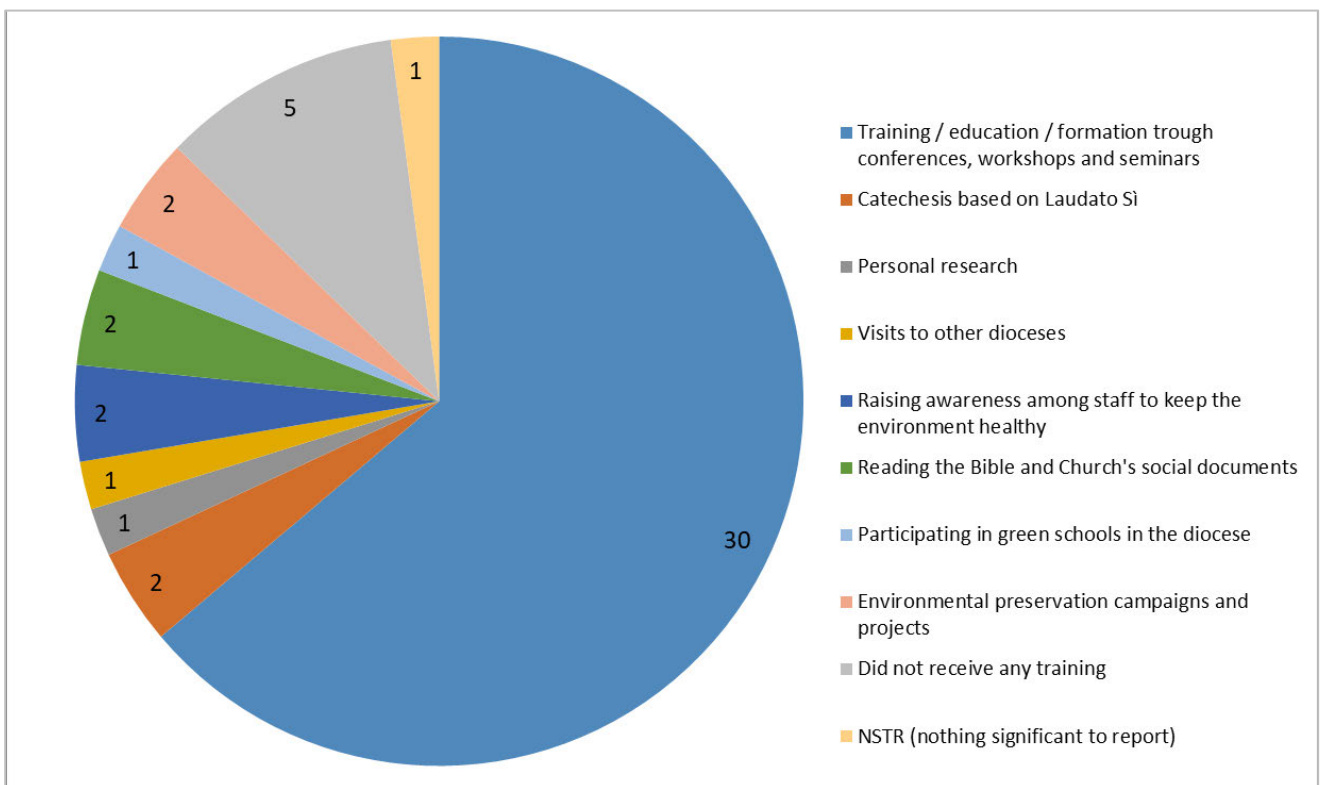
<b>Training / education / formation trough conferences, workshops and seminars</b>	<b>30</b>
- Workshops, conferences and seminars about social teaching on ecology. Two participants in Question 1 recommended “workshops, conferences and seminars on the establishment of a catechesis based on <i>Laudato Si’</i> [and ] on the themes related to ecology” (Q2: MP1 and FP2). - Training on the common good and on the pastoral care of development; - Ongoing training supported by partners; - Training on the governance and extractive industries where the duty of industrialists and citizen surveillance are taught.	
<b>Catechesis</b> Catechesis based on <i>Laudato Si’</i> (Q2: MP1).	<b>2</b>
<b>My personal research</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Visits to other Dioceses</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>By raising awareness among staff to keep the environment healthy</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Reading the Bible and Church’s social documents</b> - Re-reading the Bible; - Read some related documents such as <i>Laudato Si’</i> , Compendium on the Social Teaching of the Catholic Church, and Pastoral letters.	<b>2</b>
<b>By gaining knowledge through participating in green schools in the Diocese</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Environmental preservation campaigns and projects</b> - The movement of “Catholic Action for Children (ACE)” (Q2: MP9) with the reforestation campaign; - “Encouraging Christians to preserve ecology” (3times) (Q2: FP9; Q4: FP9 and MP10).	<b>2</b>
<b>Never received any training</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>NSTR (nothing significant to report)</b>	<b>1</b>

***Question 2. How has the church leadership trained you in the ecological teaching of the Roman Catholic Church?***



**Figure 6.3: Capturing of the answers to the interview questions 2**

Source: The researcher



**Figure 6.4: Visibility of answers to the interview questions 2 through different colours**

Source: The researcher

Table 6.2 and Figures 6.3 and 6.4 on participants' socio-environmental and theological training by the Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon still reveal responses such as "NSTR" (nothing significant to report) regarding the NECC's ecological training initiatives. This portrays the persistence of a lack of communication between the NECC and the grassroots Church community with regard to ecological training.

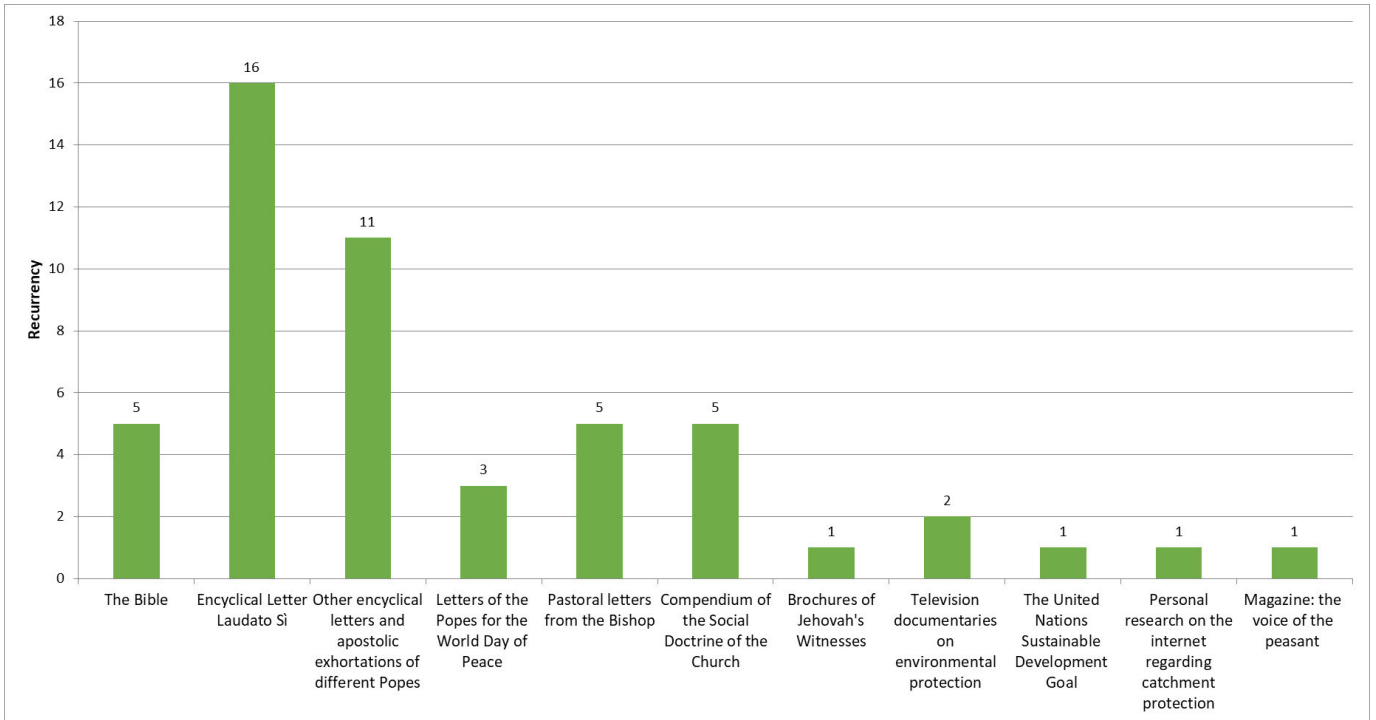
***Question 3. Tell me about the document(s) you have read to help you implement of the socio-ecological teaching at grassroots level.***

**Table 6.3: Answers by categories and recurrency (question 3)**

**Source:** The researcher

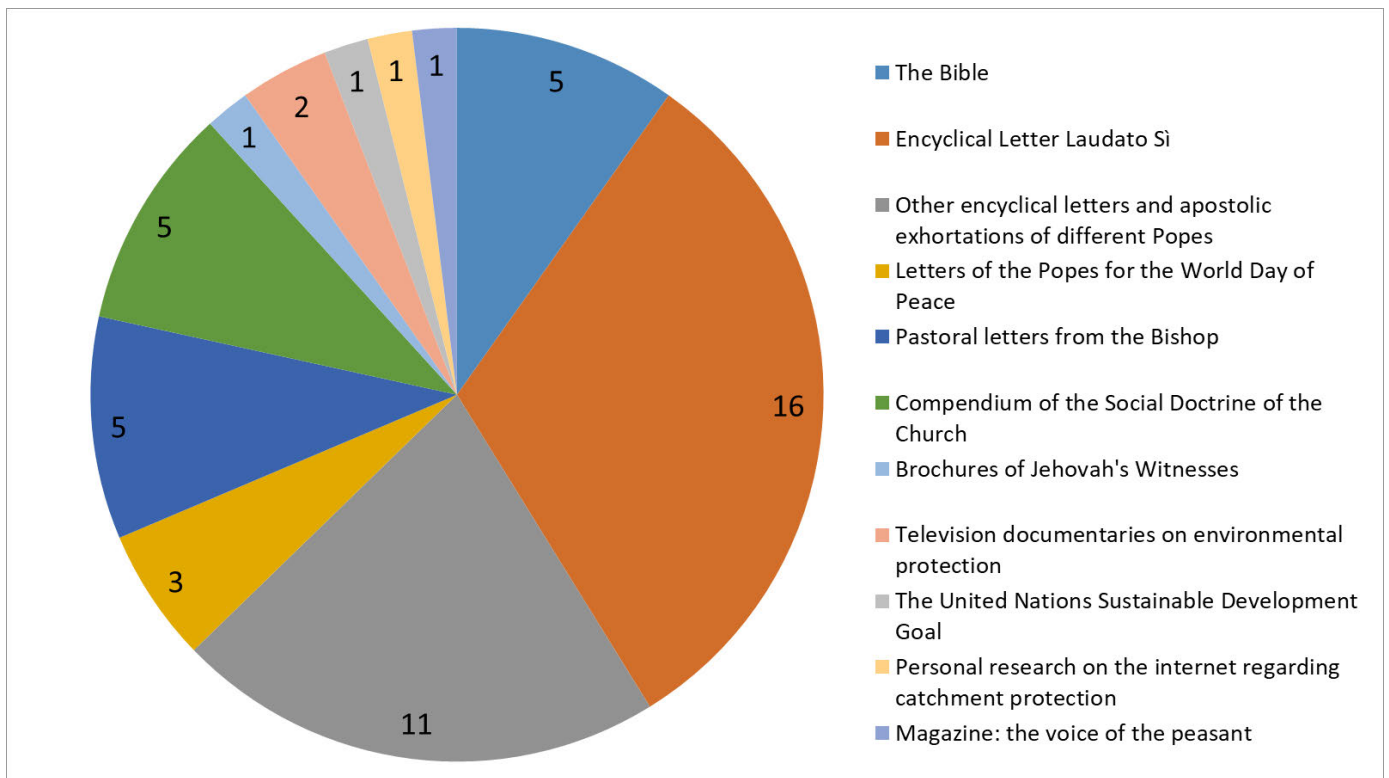
<b>Categories with key elements in the answers (with a few illustrative quotes from the interviews)</b>	<b>Recurrency</b>
<b>The Bible</b>	<b>5</b>
<b><i>Laudato Si'</i></b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Other encyclical letters and apostolic exhortations of different Popes</b> - " <i>Encyclical Rerum Novarum</i> " (Q3: MP3 and FP3) - " <i>Laudato Deo</i> " (Q2: FP6; Q3: MP6 and FP6); - " <i>Fratelli Tutti</i> " (Q3: FP2); - " <i>Africae Munus</i> " (Q3: MP2 and FP4); - " <i>Evangelii Gaudium</i> " (Q3: FP2); - " <i>Caritas in Veritate</i> " (Q3: MP2 and FP2).	<b>11</b>
<b>Letters of the Popes for the World Day of Peace</b> - Letter for of Pope Francis on the occasion of the 54 <sup>th</sup> World Day of Peace; - The messages of Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis during the World Days of Peace (every January 1st); - The Message of Pope Benedict XVI in 2010 on the occasion of the World Day of Peace.	<b>3</b>
<b>Pastoral letters from the Bishop</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>"The compendium of the social doctrine of the church" (Q3: MP3 and FP4)</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>"Brochures of Jehovah's Witnesses" (Q3: FP5)</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Television documentaries on TV5/ documentaries on environmental protection and global trends of climate change</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>"The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal [SDG]" (Q3: FP6)</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Personal research on the internet regarding catchment protection.</b>	<b>1</b>

**Question 3.** *Tell me about the document(s) have you read to help you implement of the socio-ecological teaching at grassroots level.*



**Figure 6.5:** *Capturing of the answers to the interview questions 3*

**Source:** The researcher



**Figure 6.6: Visibility of answers to the interview questions 3 through different colours**

**Source:** The researcher

Table 6.3 and Figures 6.5 and .6.6 highlight that the Bible and the Church’s documents have helped participants implement socio-ecological teaching at the grassroots level. This can be evidenced by the interview verbatim of Q3 whereby participants mention “the Bible” (see FP2), “*Laudato Si*” (see MP1, FP1, MP2, FP2, MP5, FP6, MP8, MP10 and FP10), “*Rerum Novarum*” (MP3 and FP4). The contribution of other non-Catholic sources in their efforts to implement socio-ecological teaching should also be noted. These sources include “brochures of Jehovah’s Witnesses” (FP5), television documentaries on TV5 (FP5) and the SDG (FP6).

***Question 4. Tell me about environmental preservation issues your Diocese is committed to. Why?***

**Table 6.4: Answers by categories and recurrency (question 4)**

**Source:** The researcher

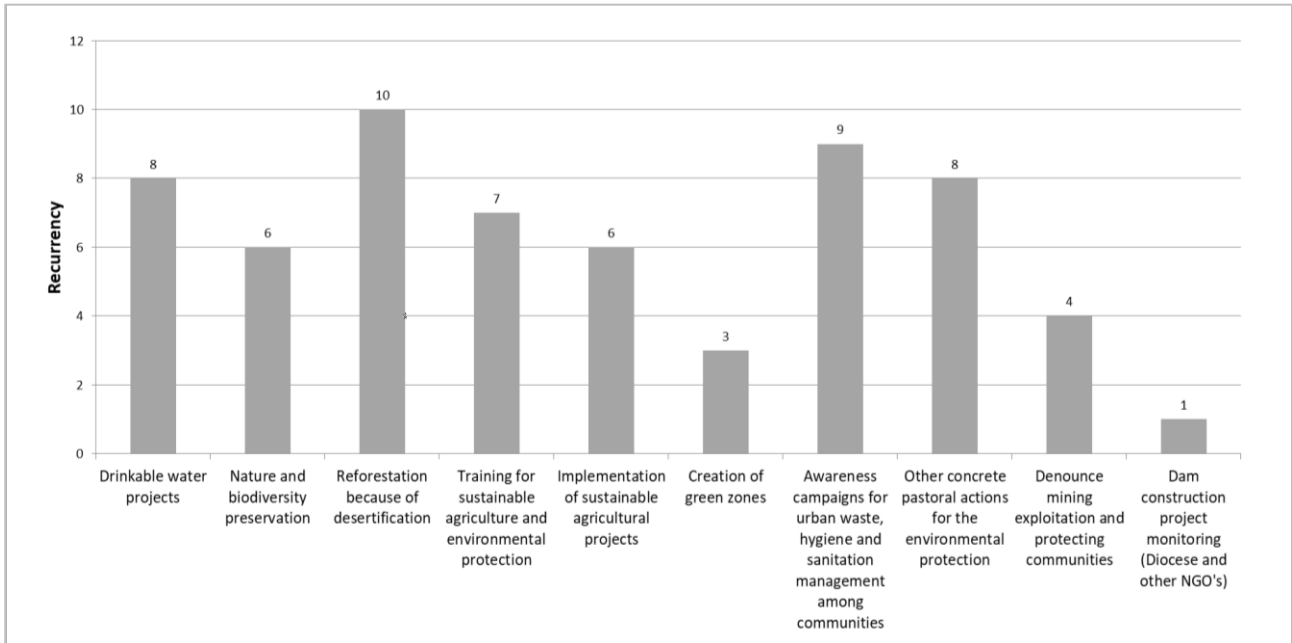
Categories with key elements in the answers (with a few illustrative quotes from the interviews)	Recurrency
Dioceses are committed to various environmental issues or projects. The most evocative of these issues include:	<b>8</b>

<p><b>Drinkable water projects</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Drinking water supply” (Q4: MP1, FP2 and MP3);</li> <li>- “raises awareness against chemicals that kill fish in waterways” (Q4: FP5);</li> <li>- “Campaign for the preservation and conservation of waterways for human health” (Q4: MP4).</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Nature and biodiversity preservation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Nature preservation” (Q4: MP1);</li> <li>- “Preservation of land through [a project such as] ‘My Land, my Treasure project’” (Q4: MP8);</li> <li>- “Protection of forests” (Q4: FP10);</li> <li>- “Preservation of wildlife and biodiversity” (Q4: MP1);</li> <li>- The safeguarding of biodiversity;</li> <li>- “Pastoral development which involves respect for the earth, plant and animal species” (Q4: MP2 and FP2).</li> </ul>	<b>6</b>
<p><b>Reforestation because of desertification</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Desertification and erosion, and deforestation : Planting trees;</li> <li>- Reforestation of all sites occupied by the church (schools, health centres, chapels).</li> </ul>	<b>10</b>
<p><b>Training for sustainable agriculture and environmental protection</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Training for organic fertilisers and sustainable agriculture” (Q4: FP4, MP9; Q5: MP1);</li> <li>- Training on the production of biological/organic fertiliser;</li> <li>- Training and support for Christians at different levels through development committees;</li> <li>- Training on ecological preservation at the Catholic University, Institute of Saint Therese of Yaoundé, for instance;</li> <li>- Training (seminars) on environmental protection;</li> <li>- The promotion of two-year training centres for young people and agents in sustainable agriculture;</li> <li>- Training and encouraging Catholic primary and private schools to involve young people in the love of trees and the environment.</li> </ul>	<b>7</b>
<p><b>Implementation of sustainable agricultural projects</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The implementation of agricultural projects;</li> <li>- The creation and sustainable agricultural exploitation;</li> <li>- Praxis of bio-agriculture;</li> </ul>	<b>6</b>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Discouraging farming methods such as burning of soil (against bush-burning);</li> <li>- Encouraging natural / organic manure;</li> <li>- Practice of agroforestry on about a hundred sites.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Creation of Green zones</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Creating gardens (green zones);</li> <li>- Creating wooded parks within schools;</li> <li>- Creation of vegetable gardens in prisons and schools;</li> </ul>	<b>3</b>
<p><b>Awareness campaigns for urban waste, hygiene and sanitation management among communities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Raising awareness and educating communities on environmental preservation;</li> <li>- Raising awareness against plastic littering;</li> <li>- Raising awareness on household waste management;</li> <li>- Awareness campaigns with garbage bags;</li> <li>- Awareness through the messages of the bishop;</li> <li>- Raising awareness of the harmful consequences of bush fires;</li> <li>- Raises awareness against chemicals that kill fish in waterways;</li> <li>- Raise awareness with foresters and miners against the lands spoliation of natives;</li> <li>- Awareness raising of foresters and miners against the lands spoliation of natives.</li> </ul>	<b>9</b>
<p><b>Other concrete pastoral actions for the environmental protection</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Clean-up campaign” (Q4: MP7);</li> <li>- “Fighting urban insalubrity” (Q4: FP9);</li> <li>- “Hygiene and sanitation in schools and colleges in the Diocese” (Q4: MP3, FP6; Q8: PF2);</li> <li>- The hygiene and sanitation campaign in communities;</li> <li>- Development of pastoral plans in which the environmental issues figure prominently;</li> <li>- Strengthening income-generating activities (projects) in parishes;</li> <li>- Twinning between rural and urban parishes.</li> </ul>	<b>8</b>
<p><b>Denounce mining exploitation and protecting communities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Ensuring that mining operations respect the preservation of the environment” (Q4: MP5). Targeted sectors include gold mining and excessive logging that exposes humans and animals to danger;</li> <li>- Fight against the exploitation of the Pygmies by loggers and miners;</li> <li>- Dialogue with foresters and miners against the lands spoliation of natives;</li> <li>- Supporting populations living near mining project sites in protecting their environment.</li> </ul>	<b>4</b>

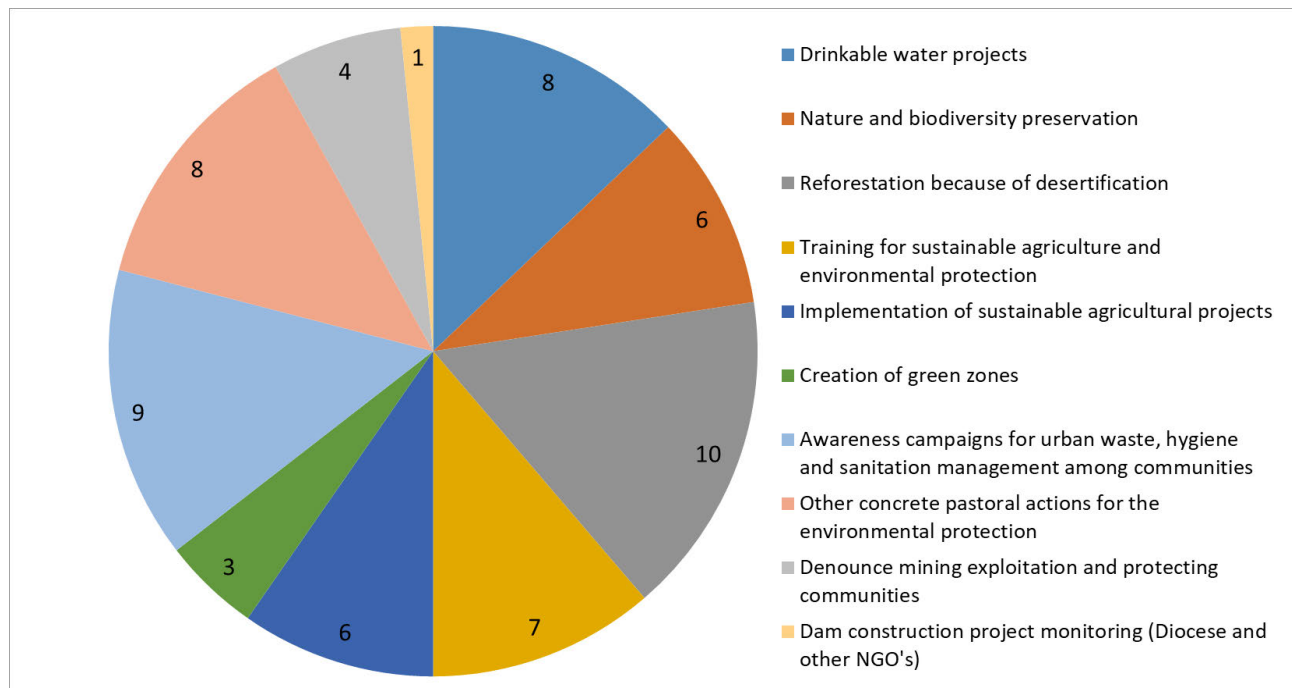
**Participation of the Diocese with other NGOs for the monitoring of the specifications of the construction of the dam in the region. 1**

**Question 4. Tell me about environmental preservation issues your Diocese is committed to. Why?**



**Figure 6.7: Capturing of the answers to the interview questions 4**

Source: The researcher



**Figure 6.8: Visibility of answers to the interview questions 4 through different colours**

Source: The researcher

Table 6.4 and Figures 6.7 and 6.8 show that the primary motivations for the engagement of interview participants in environmental preservation activities are concern for “drinking water supply” (MP1, FP2, MP3, MP6, MP7, FP7, MP8); “reforestation” (FP6, MP7, MP9, MP10); “preservation of wildlife and biodiversity” (MP1, FP1); “organic farming” (MP4, FP4, MP7, FP8, FP10); and, “hygiene and sanitation” (MP3, FP6, FP9).

***Question 5. How is the bishop of your Diocese showing the importance of environmental care and preservation issues?***

**Table 6.5: Answers by categories and recurrency (question 5)**

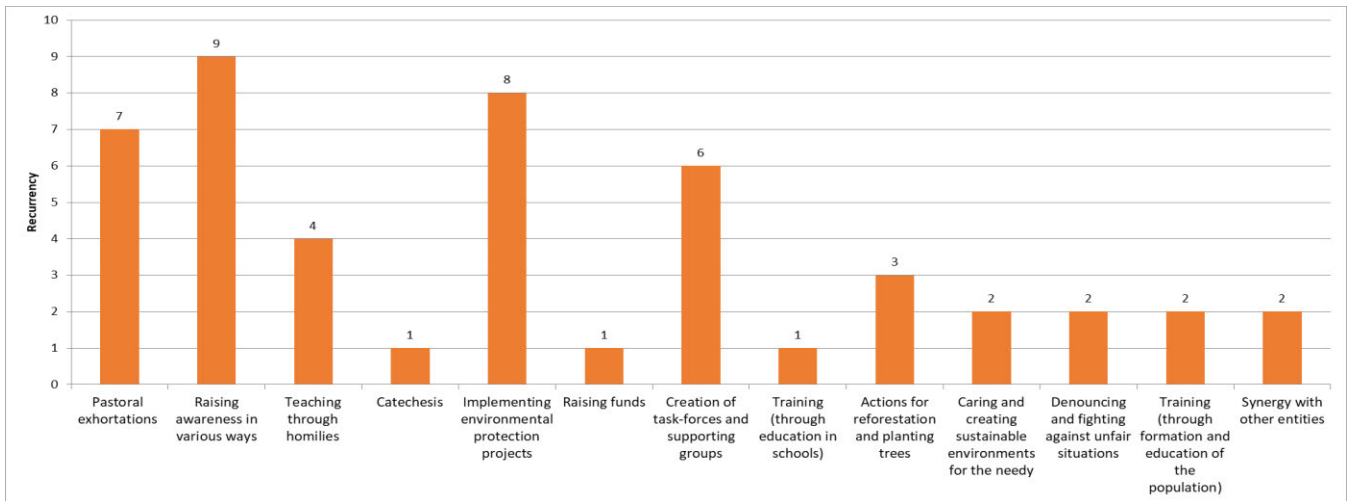
**Source:** The researcher

<b>Categories with key elements in the answers (with a few illustrative quotes from the interviews)</b>	<b>Recurrency</b>
<p>Key elements in the response categories to the interview questions on dioceses' involvement in environmental preservation include:</p> <p><b>Pastoral exhortations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- One participant mentioned that their Bishop is involved through promoting “Sustainable agriculture with respect for the forest” (Q5: MP1).</li> <li>- “Agricultural promotion” (Q5: MP2)</li> <li>- “Invitation to Christians to work the land without polluting it” (Q5: MP2);</li> <li>- “The Bishop encourages and supports all actions that are geared towards environmental protection, including projects that mainstream preservation of environment” (Q5: FP8);</li> <li>- “Calling on the faithful and Christian movements to promote actions in favour of environmental protection” (Q5: FP9);</li> <li>- Putting the environmental issue is at the centre of the bishop’s concerns;</li> <li>- Encouraging priests and all Christians towards the care for nature.</li> </ul>	<b>7</b>
<p><b>Raising awareness in various ways</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Raising awareness among the population of the diocese on environmental protection through the construction of latrines and homilies” (Q5: FP3);</li> <li>- Awareness about the respect for land heritage to better conserve it;</li> <li>- Raising awareness on ecological protection in the media;</li> <li>- Raising awareness through his homilies;</li> <li>- Awareness in the media (example: Catholic radio) on the preservation of the environment;</li> </ul>	<b>9</b>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Raising awareness on ecological protection in the media;</li> <li>- Raising awareness among the populations and gold miners about the dangers of environmental pollution;</li> <li>- Raising awareness among forest and mining operators.</li> <li>- Raising awareness for the protection of nature as God’s work during his pastoral visits to parishes.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Teaching through homilies</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- There is a mention that “the Bishop calls for environmental protection in his homilies” (Q5: MP4);</li> <li>- His homilies and pastoral letters;</li> <li>- Cover letters for environmental projects;</li> <li>- The teachings in his homilies on various occasions.</li> </ul>	<b>4</b>
<p><b>Catechesis</b></p> <p>Catechesis on ecological preservation.</p>	<b>1</b>
<p><b>Implementing environmental protection projects</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Respect for the environment in regeneration activities;</li> <li>- Campaign for respect for green species;</li> <li>- “Promotion of solar energy [renewable energy]” (Q5: MP2);</li> <li>- “Creation of farms and orchards” (Q5. FP2)</li> <li>- “Creation of boreholes water” (Q5: MP3);</li> <li>- Creation of hospitals and their monitoring;</li> <li>- The development project in the northern part of the Diocese;</li> <li>- The launching of organic markets.</li> </ul>	<b>8</b>
<p><b>Raising funds</b></p> <p>Looking for funds towards ecological projects.</p>	<b>1</b>
<p><b>Creation of task-forces and supporting groups</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Pastoral development with the creation of development units in certain parishes [and] which involves respect for the earth, plant and animal species” (Q4: MP2 and FP2) ;</li> <li>- The establishment of environmental management committees;</li> <li>- Support of groups / associations in parishes and prisons for the preservation of the environment;</li> <li>- The encouragement of justice and peace projects for ecological preservation;</li> <li>- Supporting justice and peace projects in favour of environmental protection;</li> </ul>	<b>6</b>

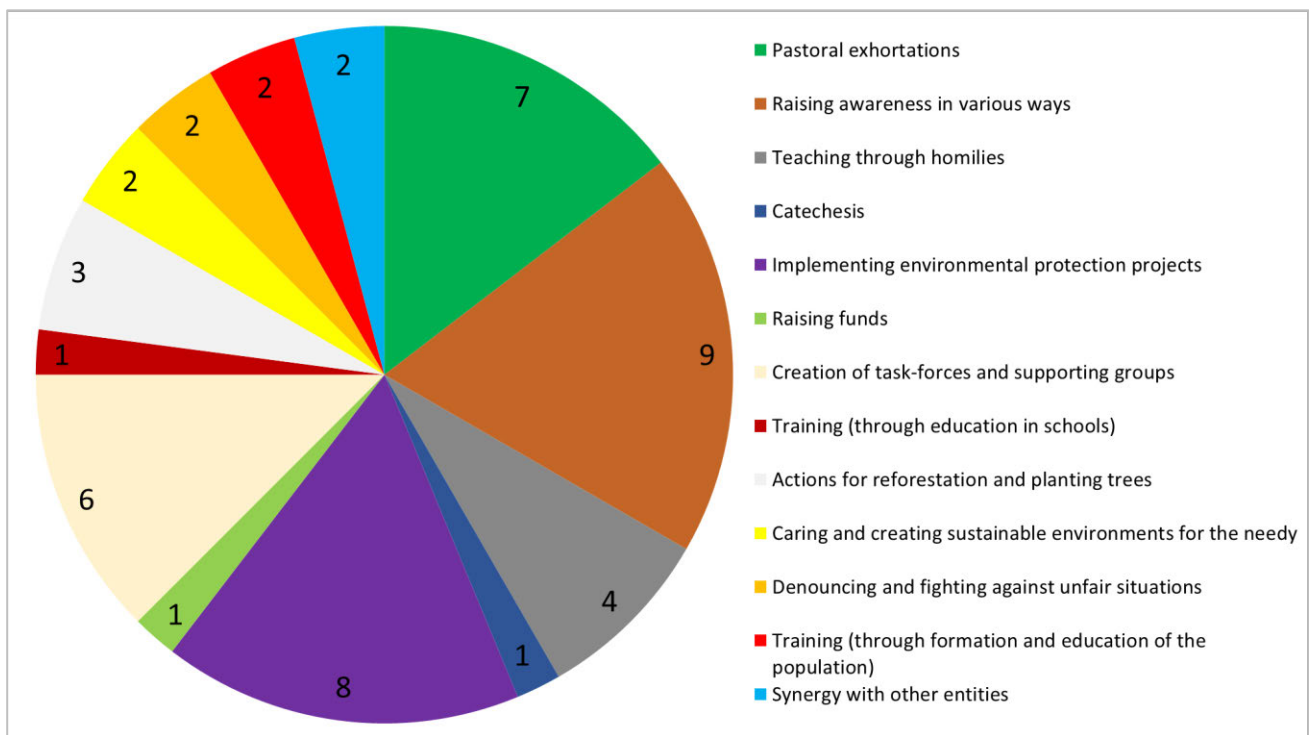
- His directives to relevant diocesan services (e.g. caritas and justice and peace) to enforce environmental protection in their field of activities.	
<b>Actions for reforestation and planting trees</b> - “The planting of trees in all parishes [on the occasion of the 10 <sup>th</sup> anniversary of the creation of the Diocese] (Q5: MP3); - Planting of trees and promotion of organic fertiliser to farmers; - The invitation to strengthen reforestation (e.g. planting of trees) in order to fight against deforestation.	<b>3</b>
<b>Caring and creating sustainable environments for the needy</b> - The primary concern for sick priests in order to keep their environment healthy; - Taking care of vulnerable people such as migrants and small farmers.	<b>2</b>
<b>Denouncing and fighting against unfair situations</b> - “The fight against poaching which creates the reduction or even disappearance of rare species in wildlife” (Q5: MP6); - Advocacy actions against pollution and environmental destruction.	<b>2</b>
<b>Training (through formation and education of the population)</b> - “Education of rural populations not to fall into pollution” (Q5: FP2); - Creation of a training and communication network in schools with teachers; - Training on organic agricultural in agro-pastoral schools and training centres. <i>*A disadvantage worth to be mentioned is that the bishop does not sign the agreements for funding from partners. And we wonder why.</i>	<b>3</b>
<b>Synergy with other entities (Dioceses and operators)</b> - “Working in synergy with other bishops such as Ngaoudéré and Batouri” (Q5: MP5); - Meetings with forest operators;	<b>2</b>

***Question 5. How is the bishop of your Diocese showing the importance of environmental care and preservation issues?***



**Figure 6.9: Capturing of the answers to the interview questions 5**

**Source:** The researcher



**Figure 6.10: Visibility of answers to the interview questions 5 through different colours**

**Source:** The researcher

Drawing from Table 6.5 and Figures 6.9 and 6.10 shows that there is a refusal to sign funding agreements, which demonstrates a lack of concern for environmental preservation projects. This fact is reported in the interview verbatim of Q5 in which participants cited that “the bishop does not sign the agreements for funding from partners” (MP4 and FP4). Environmental preservation projects are reported to be stalling for years due to financial constraints. This is hindering socio-ecological efforts

and, at the same time, frustrating apostolic workers in this sector of the Church. For instance, one participant questioned the bishop’s refusal and raised concerns about possible mismanagement and the need for greater transparency from Church leaders. The issue of blocking environmental protection projects influences environmental initiatives in the Roman Catholic Church Dioceses in Cameroon.

***Question 6. Tell me about ecological preservation assistance that the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon has been providing you as a worker and a church member.***

***Table 6.6: Answers by categories and recurrency (question 6)***

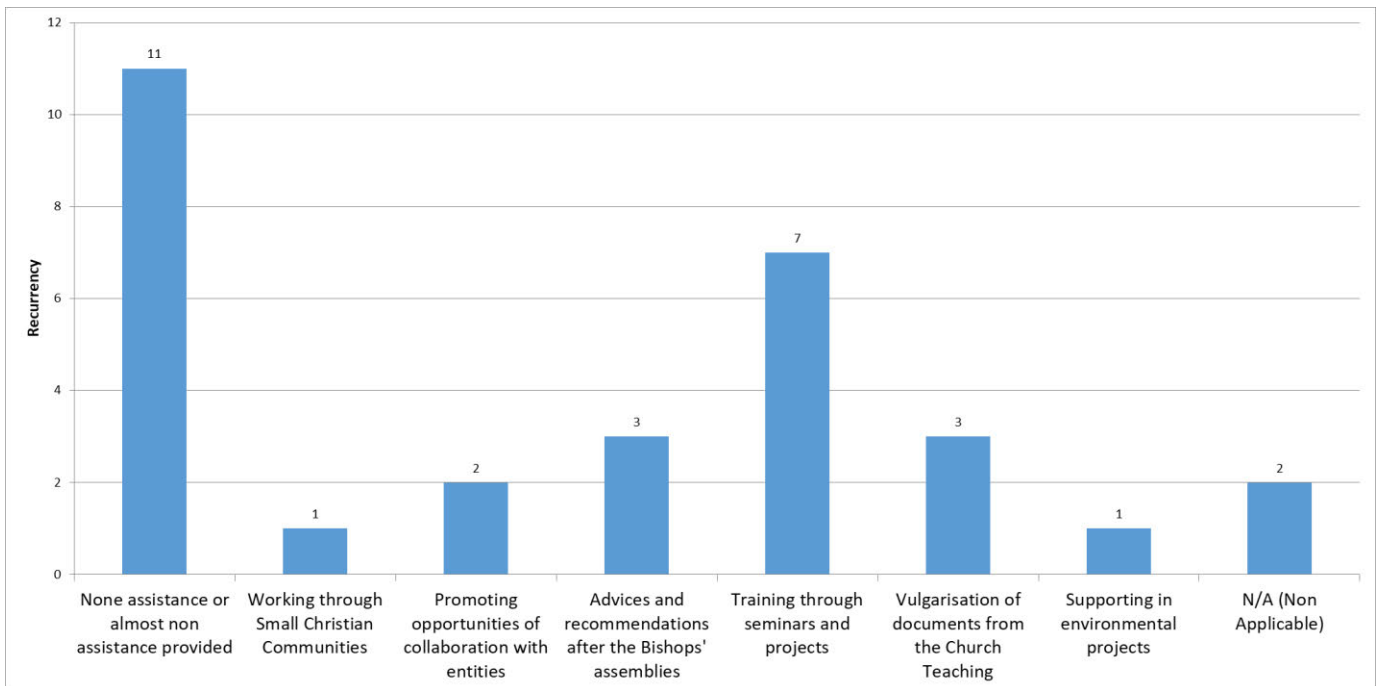
**Source:** The researcher

<b>Categories with key elements in the answers (with a few illustrative quotes from the interviews)</b>	<b>Recurrency</b>
<p><b>None assistance or almost non-assistance provided</b></p> <p>It has emerged that the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon (NECC) provided little or no assistance to the apostolic workers for ecological preservation. This occurrence could be detected from answers such as,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “There is no special assistance from the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon” (Q6: FP1);</li> <li>- “No assistance. Except the National Service for Justice and Peace (NSJP) which sometimes gives some information on ecology and sanitation in the prison environment” (Q6: MP3);</li> <li>- “The National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon does not assist in any way in ecological preservation” (Q6: FP3 and MP5) ;</li> </ul> <p>(However, the bishop sometimes receives some donations from benefactors for environmental preservation and makes it benefit the entire diocesan justice and peace coordination);</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “The National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon does nothing to support the Diocesan justice and peace Coordination in ecological preservation” (Q6: MP4);</li> <li>- “The assistance of the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon for ecological preservation is very little. There are some meagre passages of their pastoral letters sometimes deal with environmental issues. However, it does not assist in any way in financing” (Q6: FP4).</li> </ul>	<p><b>11</b></p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- We used to receive a few information on ecological preservation from the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon;</li> <li>- “It is a surprise to me that I have not yet heard them sending pastoral letters concerning the ecological preservation” (Q6: MP7);</li> <li>- “We have not heard of any assistance from the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon in relation to ecological preservation” (Q6: MP8);</li> <li>- “NSR [Noting significant to report]” (Q6: FP10).</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Working through SCC</b></p> <p>A participant mentioned that the NECC is “Promoting collaboration between ecclesiastical Provinces for synergistic work to convey the message of environmental protection at the level of dioceses, parishes, mission stations, Small Christian Communities (SCC) and Catholic action movements” (Q6: FP2).</p>	<b>1</b>
<p><b>Promoting opportunities of collaboration with entities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Promoting collaboration between ecclesiastical Provinces for synergistic work to convey the message on the environmental protection at the level of Dioceses, parishes, mission stations,) and Catholic action movements;</li> <li>- Inter-religious dialogue where the environment is one of the themes discussed.</li> </ul>	<b>2</b>
<p><b>Advices and recommendations after the Bishops' Assemblies</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Advices;</li> <li>- Recommendations after the Bishops' assemblies;</li> <li>- Recommendation of the bishops of Cameroon;</li> </ul>	<b>3</b>
<p><b>Training through seminars and projects and others</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Assists through the National Justice and Peace Service: this service trains us through various seminars and coordinated actions to combat ecological degradation.</li> <li>- The organisation training through seminars and conferences at the national level on the urgency of environmental issues;</li> <li>- The National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon assist on training, e.g. training on <i>Laudato Si'</i> and land issues;</li> <li>- The National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon assists through organisation of seminars (training) at the national level on justice and peace in link with the ecological issues;</li> <li>- Support of the Diocesan justice and peace Coordination by the National Service for Justice and Peace;</li> </ul>	<b>7</b>

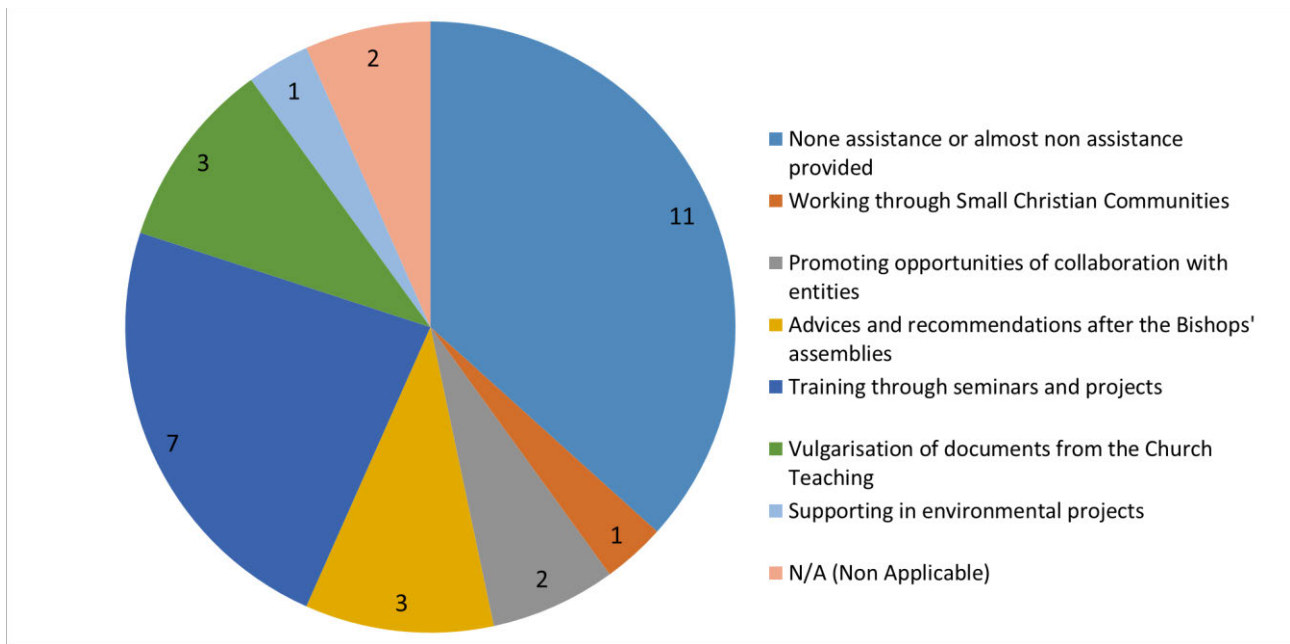
The National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon assists through different projects initiated by the National Service for Justice and Peace; - Support for some seminars (training) on environmental preservation.	
<b>Vulgarisation of documents from the Church’s Teaching</b> - “The provision of socio-ecological documents published by Pope Francis” (Q6: FP6); - Vulgarisation of documents and recommendations of the Holy See on the environmental issues; - Sharing or disseminating Church documents on ecological issues.	<b>3</b>
<b>Supporting in environmental projects</b> The National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon assists through its support to the church (Diocese) in the environmental project, e.g. distribution of sanitary materials.	<b>1</b>
- <b>N/A [Non Applicable] (Q6: FP8);</b> - “NSTR [nothing significant to report] (Q6: FP10).	<b>2</b>

**Question 6. Tell me about ecological preservation assistance that the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon has been providing you as a worker and a church member.**



**Figure 6.11: Capturing of the answers to the interview questions 6**

**Source:** The researcher



**Figure 6.12: Visibility of answers to the interview questions 6 through different colours**

**Source:** The researcher

Table 6.6 and Figures 6.11 and 6.12 reveal a discrepancy: while a few participants report “receiving assistance from the NECC” (see MP2, FP2, PM5, MP6, and FP6), the majority claim otherwise. This latter claim is that there is “no assistance from the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon” (see MP1, FP1, MP3, FP3, MP4, FP4, FP5, MP7, FP7, MP8, FP8, FP10). These amount to eleven participants who explicitly stated they received no support. This lack of commitment hampers the Roman Catholic Church’s socio-ecological efforts and reflects indifference among its leadership. Given the country’s alarming ecological crisis, the NECC’s limited pastoral interest in environmental issues is concerning to the apostolic and pastoral workers. This finding suggests that an urgent ecological conversion is needed within the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon.

***Question 7. How should the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon implement socio-ecological teaching at the community level?***

**Table 6.7: Answers by categories and recurrency (question 7)**

**Source:** The researcher

Categories with key elements in the answers (with a few illustrative quotes from the interviews)	Recurrency
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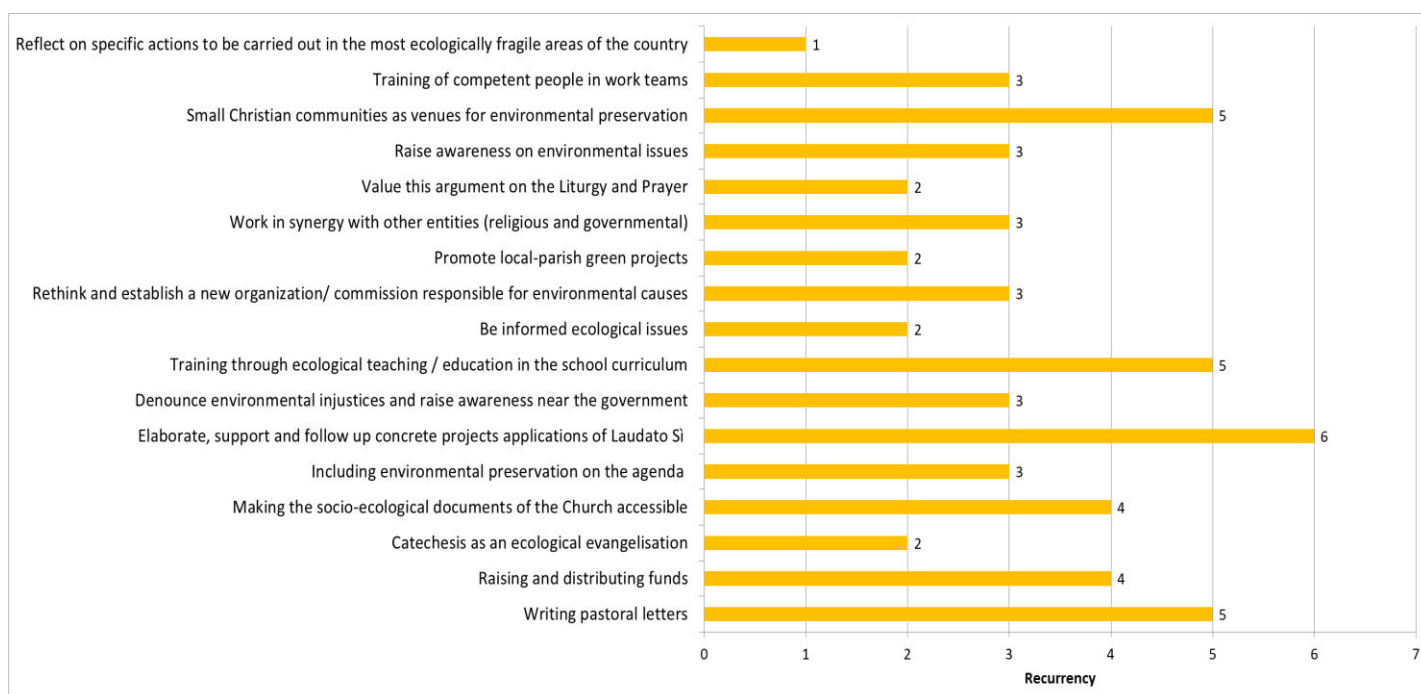
<p><b>Writing pastoral letter</b></p> <p>The theme on “Pastoral letter” was recurrently mentioned as quoted below.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Write a pastoral letter to address the environmental issue that is becoming more and more alarming” (Q7: MP1);</li> <li>- “Write a pastoral letter on the preservation of the environment” (Q7: MP7);</li> <li>- Develop simplified manuals on socio-ecological teaching;</li> <li>- “Address a correspondence (letter) to the communities to encourage them to reforest” (Q7: FP9);</li> <li>- Document on the technical support of the National Service for Justice and Peace by bringing together the main guidelines for the implementation of socio-ecological documents.</li> </ul>	<b>5</b>
<p><b>Raising and distributing funds</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Vote and allocate a budget for environmental preservation” (Q7: MP6);</li> <li>- Make available funds for implementation of socio-ecological teaching and its effectiveness at the grassroots level;</li> <li>- Seek timely funding for environmental protection projects;</li> <li>- Provide minimum resources for replication of the training at all levels.</li> </ul>	<b>4</b>
<p><b>Catechesis as an ecological evangelisation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Encourage each bishop to initiate in his Diocese a catechesis on the environment”. This catechesis should be based on <i>Laudato Si’</i> and be taught at all levels: Small Christian Community, parish groups, etc” (Q7: MP1).</li> <li>- Establish a catechesis for the Dioceses based on <i>Laudato Si’</i> and with emphasis on the ecological dimension of the human person.</li> </ul>	<b>2</b>
<p><b>Make the socio-ecological documents of the Church accessible</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Promulgate <i>Laudato Si’</i> in the Dioceses of the country” (Q7: MP1);</li> <li>- propagate <i>Laudato Si’</i> in the Dioceses;</li> <li>- Promulgate the socio-ecological documents of the Roman Catholic Church (the majority of said documents are not known by Christians);</li> <li>- Make the texts of the Church’s ministry on environmental issues more accessible by simplifying them and translating them into local languages.</li> </ul>	<b>4</b>
<p><b>The National Episcopal Conference should</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Include environmental preservation on the agenda of their meetings;</li> <li>- Organise a Conference or assembly of bishops solely on environmental issues;</li> <li>- Introduce or insert the issue of the environment in their final message after their annual assembly.</li> </ul>	<b>3</b>

<p><b>Elaborate, support and follow-up concrete projects applications of Laudato Si'</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Elaborate a <i>Laudato Si'</i> action plan at the local level;</li> <li>- “Support the projects of the Diocese on ecological protection” (Q7: MP4);</li> <li>- Propose concrete actions / projects to meet these needs and challenges;</li> <li>- Be more practical in their teachings (praxis is often lacking in their speeches). The Bishops' Conference can, for example, organise a clean-up day in the Roman Catholic Church throughout the country;</li> <li>- Provide greater support for environmental action projects in the Dioceses;</li> <li>- Follow-up the implementation of environmental protection (policy) at all levels.</li> </ul>	<b>6</b>
<p><b>Denounce environmental injustices and raise awareness in the government</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Denounce the blatant deforestation in Cameroon, because the forest is our common heritage” (Q7. MP2);</li> <li>- “Denounce the phenomenon of deforestation that is becoming a current issue in Cameroon” (Q7: MP7);</li> <li>- Carry out advocacy / lobbying actions for better compliance with environmental standards (norms) by the various stakeholders, in particular business leaders and other economic operators, foresters and miners, and the government.</li> </ul>	<b>3</b>
<p><b>Training through ecological teaching / education in the school curriculum</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Introduce the ecological question into the school curricula of all Dioceses through the National Secretariat for Education to enable the new generation to equip themselves for the defence of the environment [our common home]” (Q7: FP3);</li> <li>- Publish a document or roadmap for primary and secondary schools on environmental preservation;</li> <li>- Include ecological teaching in the school curriculum;</li> <li>- Introduce specific modules (school curricula) on the ecological question in the order of Catholic Private Education;</li> <li>- Strengthening services such as health and education.</li> </ul>	<b>5</b>
<p><b>Be informed ecological issues</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Inquire about ecological problems at the level of the Dioceses (keeping in mind the slogan: “Together, we are stronger”).</li> </ul>	<b>2</b>
<p><b>Rethink and establish a new organisation / commission responsible for environmental issues</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ensure that justice and peace extends its activities on the use of medicinal plants for the preservation of the environment;</li> </ul>	<b>3</b>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Set up a commission for ecology in the Church” (Q7: MP5)</li> <li>- Detach environmental issues from the National Service for Justice and Peace and create a National Commission and Diocesan Commissions for Ecology.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Promote local-parish green projects</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Promote the “green parish” operation (Q7: FP4);</li> <li>- Encourage parish to make dustbins available in all church premises.</li> </ul>	<b>2</b>
<p><b>Work in synergy with other entities (religious and governmental)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Work in synergy with other churches and other religions in an ecumenical and inter-religious perspective” (Q7: FP4);</li> <li>- “Work in synergy with other churches and religions for the preservation of the environment” (Q7: MP5);</li> <li>- Propose to the Government specific measures for an integral ecology.</li> </ul>	<b>3</b>
<p><b>Value this argument on the Liturgy an Prayer</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Initiate the celebration of the sacraments at the foot of the baobab so that Christians can appreciate the importance of the tree in their lives and in the protection of nature” (Q7: FP4);</li> <li>- Establish specific moments in the life of the Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon (in the Dioceses) on the ecological question (establishing a Catholic national day of prayer and action for the environment).</li> </ul>	<b>2</b>
<p><b>Raise awareness on environmental issues</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Raising awareness on ecological issues;</li> <li>- “Raising awareness among the population on reforestation (for example: when you cut down a tree, you should think about planting one or two)” (Q7: FP5).</li> <li>- Raising awareness on environmental issues by showing the importance of each species in the ecosystem and evidence of the disappearance of rare wood species.</li> </ul>	<b>3</b>
<p><b>Community / Small Christian communities as venues for environmental preservation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Ensure that environmental preservation issues are discussed in the Small Christian Communities (SCCs) for implementation” (Q7: MP6),</li> <li>- reflect on ecological issue in the Small Christian Communities (SCCs);</li> <li>- Develop national policy to implement socio-ecological teaching at the community level</li> <li>- Encourage communities to protect the environment through the distribution of working materials;</li> <li>- Identify in a participatory manner the needs and challenges of the communities in terms of environmental preservation.</li> </ul>	<b>5</b>

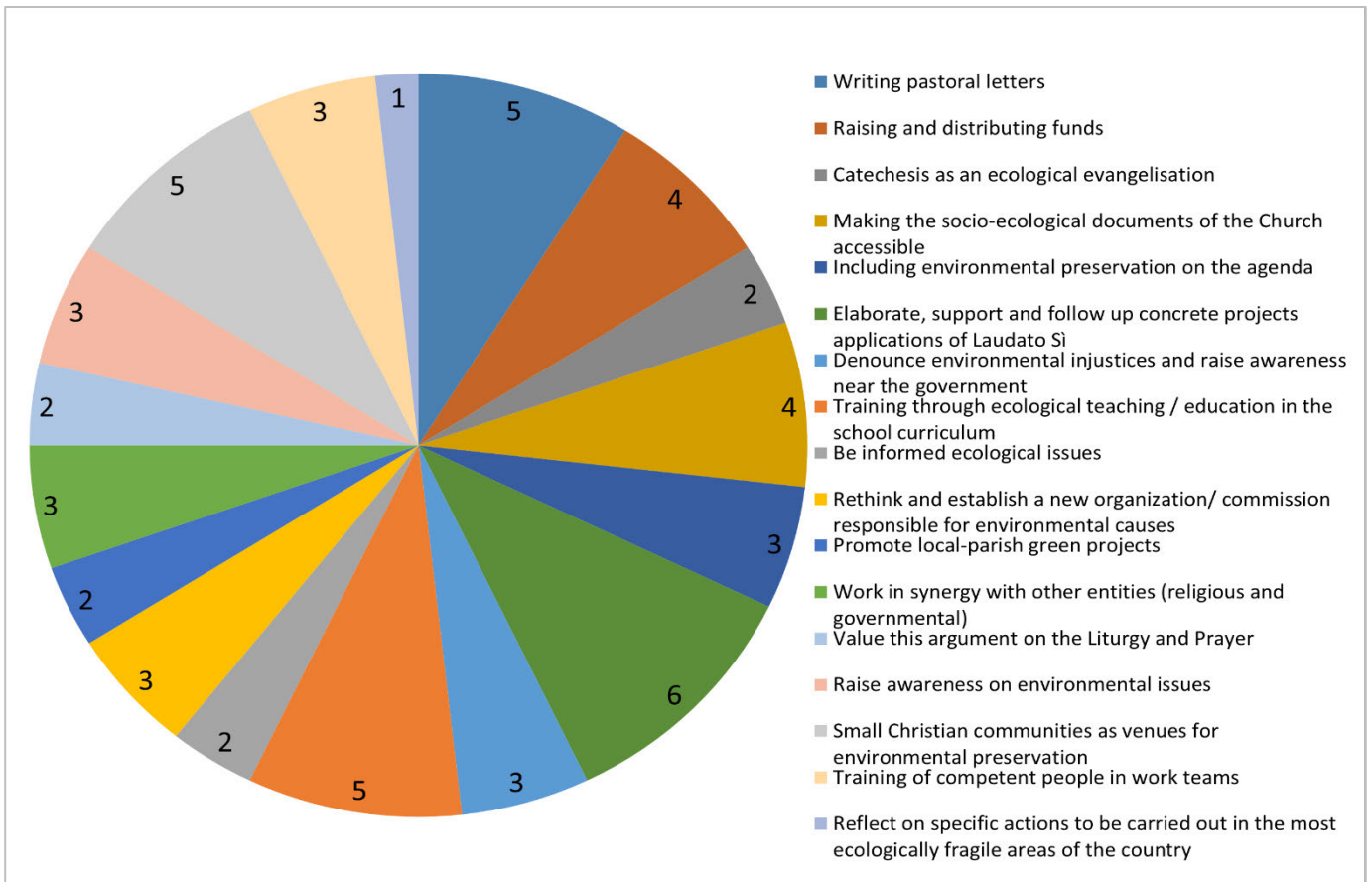
<p><b>Training of competent people in work teams</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Training on socio-ecological teaching of the Church should be carried out to build the capacities of community-based personnel at diocesan and parish levels” (Q7: MP8);</li> <li>- Put in place mechanisms to get Dioceses commit themselves to their environmental protection policy;</li> <li>- Identification and training of staff of the technical service (in Dioceses).</li> </ul>	<b>3</b>
<p><b>Reflect on specific actions to be carried out in the most ecologically fragile areas of the country.</b></p>	<b>1</b>

***Question 7. How should the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon implement socio-ecological teaching at the community level***



***Figure 6.13: Capturing of the answers to the interview questions 7***

**Source:** The researcher



**Figure 6.14:** *Visibility of answers to the interview questions 7 through different colours*

**Source:** The researcher

The pastoral letter, a message from Bishops to the faithful, serves to guide Christian behaviour and address social issues. However, Table 6.7 and Figures 6.13 and 6.14 disclose a lack of significant pastoral letters from the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon (NECC) on environmental preservation. Three participants noted either the absence or scarcity of such letters: “no pastoral letter was issued concerning ecological preservation” (MP7, FP7). This prompted suggestions in Question 7 that the NECC issue pastoral letters on the country’s environmental crisis. These letters are seen as an essential tool for evangelisation and raising awareness about the preservation of creation. This finding suggests that listening to the grassroots voices is crucial for effective church leadership.

***Question 8. How should the Church documents like the Laudato Si’ on the protection of the environment be implemented at the parish level?***

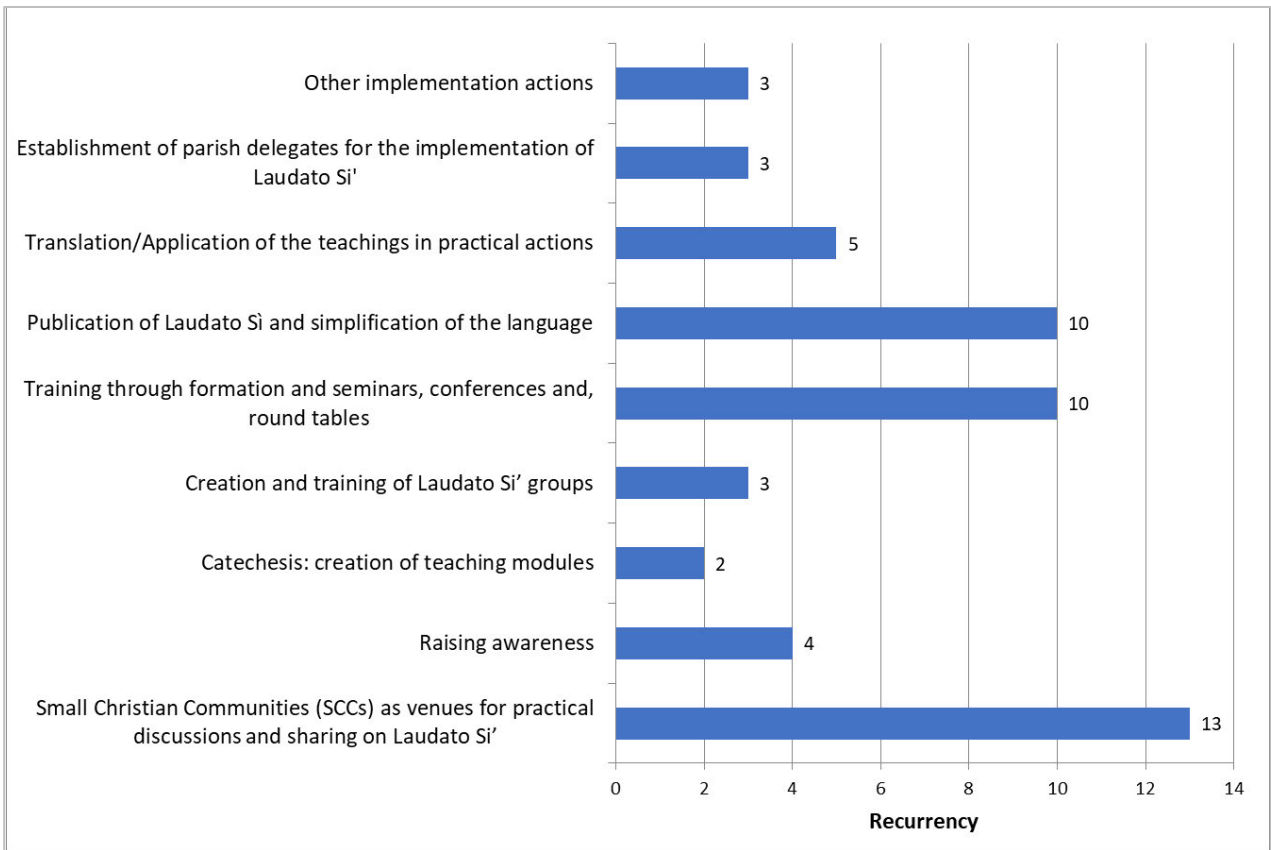
**Table 6.8:** *Answers by categories and recurrency (question 8)*

**Source:** The researcher

<p><b>Categories with key elements in the answers (with a few illustrative quotes from the interviews).</b></p> <p>Participants discussed how socio-ecological documents such as <i>Laudato Si'</i> can be implemented. The most evocative ways are highlighted below, with some quotes.</p>	<p><b>Recurrency</b></p>
<p><b>Small Christian Communities as venues for practical discussions and sharing on <i>Laudato Si'</i></b></p> <p>A participant noted the need for “an appropriation of the encyclical <i>Laudato Si'</i> through its presentations in groups and movements and Small Christian Communities (SCCs) of the parishes” (Q8: FP1). Other emergences of SCCs for implementation of <i>Laudato Si'</i> include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Active, practical and non-theoretical awareness Study / analyse of <i>Laudato Si'</i> in Small Christian Communities” (Q8: MP2);</li> <li>- Sharing and promotion of “<i>Laudato Si'</i> in Small Christian Communities [with the scope of helping people to take actions for its effective implementation]” (Q8: FP3 and FP7);</li> <li>- Read <i>Laudato Si'</i> in Small Christian Communities;</li> <li>- Develop concrete action plans on the implementation of <i>Laudato Si'</i> in Small Christian Communities;</li> <li>- “Make <i>Laudato Si'</i> one of the bases of reflection at the level of Small Christian Communities” (Q8: FP6).</li> <li>- Conscientize Small Christian Communities, mission stations and parish to plant trees for life;</li> </ul> <p>Building capacities at Small Christian Communities level.</p>	<p><b>13</b></p>
<p><b>Raising awareness</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increase awareness in parishes on the ecological issues raised in <i>Laudato Si'</i>;</li> <li>- “[...] Awareness-raising of communities” (Q8: FP10);</li> <li>- Raise awareness in each family;</li> <li>- Sensitise / raise awareness among parishioners against burning of farms and lands.</li> </ul>	<p><b>4</b></p>
<p><b>Catechesis: creation of teaching modules</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Promote <i>Laudato Si'</i> through catechesis” (Q8: FP2, MP3, FP3 and FP9);</li> <li>- To make known the content of <i>Laudato Si'</i> to the parish community through catechesis;</li> </ul>	<p><b>2</b></p>
<p><b>Creation and training on <i>Laudato Si'</i> groups</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Formation of <i>Laudato Si'</i> groups or clubs in parishes”, in Catholic schools and colleges”; (Q8: MP1)</li> <li>- “Formation of <i>Laudato Si'</i> groups in parishes” (Q8: FP1);</li> <li>- Create a movement called “<i>Laudato Si'</i>” at the parish level.</li> </ul>	<p><b>3</b></p>

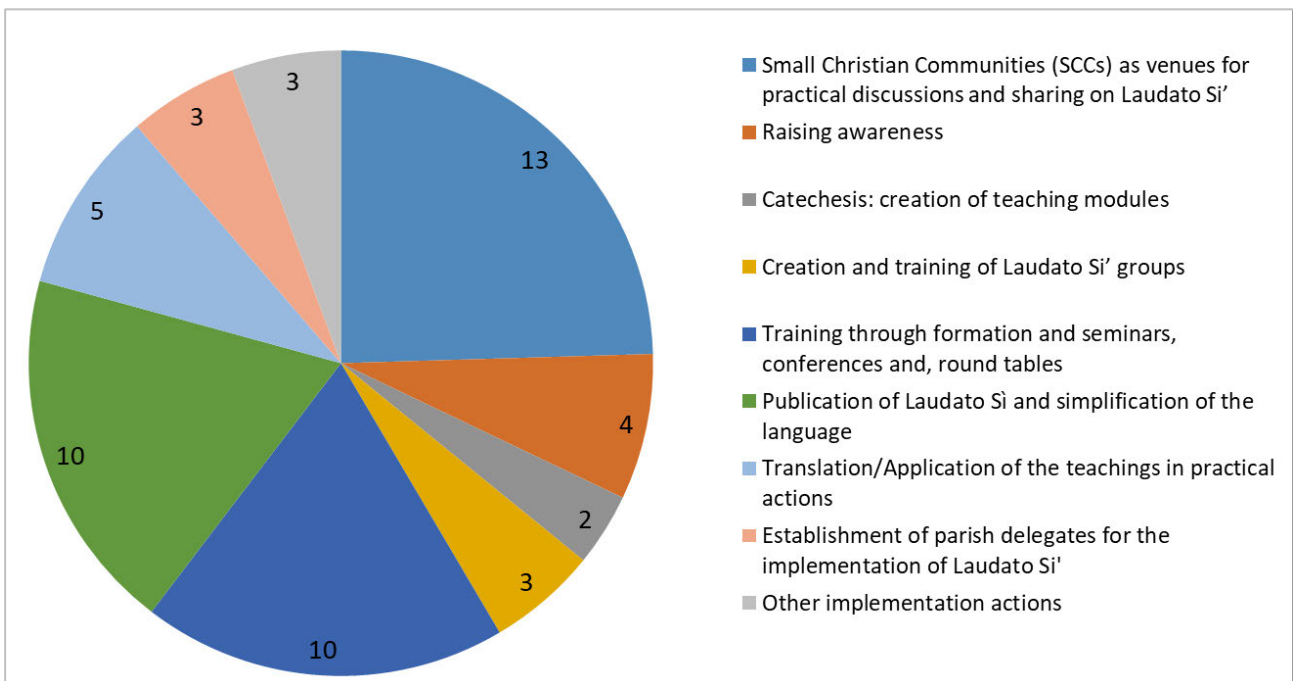
<p><b>Training through formation and seminars, conferences and, round tables</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Organisation fo “Cconferences on <i>Laudato Si’</i> in parishes” (Q8: MP2 and MP3);</li> <li>- Training to increase awareness on environmental issues;</li> <li>- Organise teachings in parishes on <i>Laudato Si’</i>, e.g., catechesis, round tables and conferences, games with children, etc.</li> <li>- Organise seminars first at the parish level to train Christians on <i>Laudato Si’</i> (and even on other socio-ecological documents of the Church);</li> <li>- Initiate courses on ecological preservation based on <i>Laudato Si’</i> in Catholic primary and secondary schools;</li> <li>- Training for capacity-building of community members;</li> <li>- Create and train parish committees for the implementation of <i>Laudato Si’</i>.</li> </ul>	<b>10</b>
<p><b>Publication of <i>Laudato Si’</i> and simplification of the language</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Disseminate <i>Laudato Si’</i> through printing of comic booklets” (Q8: MP1);</li> <li>- “Printing and publication of leaflets on the salient themes of <i>Laudato Si’</i>” (Q8: FP2);</li> <li>- It is necessary to print and publish small, easily readable brochures and distribute them in parishes to allow Christians to know that our environment is a common heritage to be protected;</li> <li>- “Rewrite the encyclical <i>Laudato Si’</i> in comic strips more attractive to be read and understood by all” (Q8: MP4);</li> <li>- “Simplification of <i>Laudato Si’</i> with a language understandable and accessible to all” (Q8: FP1);</li> <li>- An appropriation of this encyclical by priests in order to distil it to Christians;</li> <li>- Disseminate <i>Laudato Si’</i> in parishes;</li> <li>- Divulgate / disseminate the content of <i>Laudato Si’</i> in parishes through episcopal vicars;</li> <li>- “Divulging <i>Laudato Si’</i> through brochures (it is worth mentioning that the vast majority of Catholic Christians are still ignorant about <i>Laudato Si’</i>]” (Q8: FP5); ;</li> <li>- “Simplification and dissemination of <i>Laudato Si’</i> in Small Christian Communities [because the vast majority of Catholic Christians have not yet heard of this encyclical letter so important for ecological preservation]” (Q8: MP6);</li> <li>- “Simplify <i>Laudato Si’</i> in order to facilitate its understanding and implementation by Christians and people of good will at the community and local level” (Q8: MP6);</li> <li>- “Make <i>Laudato Si’</i> accessible to the majority of Christians in parishes” (Q8: MP9).</li> </ul>	<b>10</b>
<p><b>Translation / Application of the teachings in Practical actions</b></p>	<b>5</b>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Actions such as hygiene and sanitation campaigns to keep the environment clean [these campaigns can be carried out from sermons in church, for example, the minute of catechesis at the end of each mass] (Q8: FP2);</li> <li>- “Trees should be planted in each Parish” (Q8: FP2);</li> <li>- Implement concrete actions, for example, creation of “parish ecological zones” (Q8: MP9);</li> <li>- “To encourage the implementation of the directives contained in this encyclical letter, <i>Laudato Si</i>’ [especially in its last part] (Q8: FP9);</li> <li>- Implement practical recommendations contained in <i>Laudato Si</i>’.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Establishment of parish delegates for the implementation of <i>Laudato Si</i>’</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Create parish committees for the implementation of <i>Laudato Si</i>’” ((Q8: FP4)</li> <li>- “Building the capacities of community members both at the parish and mission station levels” (Q8: MP9);</li> <li>- Awareness raising of and in the communities.</li> </ul>	<b>3</b>
<p><b>Other implementation actions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Promote the culture of peace, for example, set up civil service for peace in Catholic schools by highlighting the cultural notion of the ‘Peace tree’” (Q8: FP4);</li> <li>- “Follow-up of the above action by the parish and diocesan authorities” (Q8: MP9);</li> <li>- “Set up clear diocesan policy put in place for the teaching and the implementation of what it (<i>Laudato Si</i>’) stipulates” (Q8: FP8).</li> </ul>	<b>3</b>



**Figure 6.15: Capturing of the answers to the interview questions 8**

**Source:** The researcher



**Figure 6.16: Visibility of answers to the interview questions 8 through different colours**

**Source:** The researcher

broader accessibility. This call is noted in the verbatim responses to Q8, where participants urged for “simplification and dissemination of Laudato Si’ in Small Christian Communities [...], with a language understandable and accessible to all [and] through the printing of comic booklets” (MP1, FP1, MP2, FP2, FP3, MP4, MP6 and FP6). Simplification by the local church leadership involves making the documents easier to understand and implement and ensuring the effective transmission of key information. Participants suggested using creative methods to make the documents accessible to all, regardless of age or education. This requires engaging local communities, particularly families and small Christian groups, in a bottom-up leadership approach (see Section 3.4). Practical suggestions include comic booklets for children, leaflets for youth and adults, and translating the documents into local languages to improve understanding. These proposals from research participants highlight the need for proximity in ecological pastoral theology to ensure the effective dissemination and implementation of socio-ecological documents. This finding suggests that the issue of simplification of socio-ecological documents significantly impacts grassroots engagement and warrants further attention by the NECC.

### **6.3. Summary of Findings**

From the above results, five findings were identified about the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon (NECC):

1. Blocking of Environmental Protection Projects
2. Support Deficiency for Environmental Preservation from the NECC
3. Lack of Pastoral Letters on Environmental Preservation by the NECC
4. Paucity of Connections between the NECC and the Grassroots Community
5. Simplification of socio-ecological Documents for Accessibility to all

A brief narrative to each finding has been given below the figures in section 6.2.4.

### **6.4. Summary of the Chapter**

The scope of this chapter was the presentation of the results and findings of the interviews. The chapter highlighted the interview guide in line with the research questions, described the procedure for transcribing the participants’ responses, and categorised these responses. The presentation of the actual results of the interviews using tables and figures underlined five findings. The discussion of these findings constitutes the bulk of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

#### 7.1. Introduction

This study investigated the implementation of socio-ecological documents by the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon. Chapter 6 presented five key deficiencies as research findings: lack of concern for environmental preservation, insufficient support from the NECC, absence of pastoral letters on environmental issues, poor Church-community connection, and the need for accessible socio-ecological documents. This Chapter Seven interprets and discusses the findings in relation to the research problem and objectives, drawing on emerging themes from the interview. It engages the research objectives in connection with themes, namely, environmental awareness, small Christian communities, and catechesis training. These themes reflect the concerns of most participants. Ultimately, the discussion offers a socio-ecological and theological framework to help the Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon effectively implement socio-ecological documents at the grassroots level.

#### 7.2. Raising Awareness on Environmental Preservation

The insight “awareness raising” or “raising awareness” appears 23 times in the responses from participants in the interview, that is, precisely from 7 males and 16 females. It emerges in the answers to questions 1, 2, 4, 5, 7 and 8 (see Figures 6.1; 6.4; 6.7; 6.8; 6.9; 6.10; 6.13; 6.14; 6.15 and 6.16)<sup>65</sup>. Additionally, it is important to note that the term “awareness” came up 42 times in the overall answers. The family or parents play a key role in environmental awareness. For instance, one participant used the term “awareness” in the following responsive sentence, “The education I received from my grandmother was a great asset to my environmental awareness. My grandmother never used chemical fertilisers to fertilise her fields, but rather organic fertilisers obtained from kitchen waste. It was organic or bio-farming. I thus grew up in a context where environmental preservation was at stake. My commitment to environmental preservation is through my sense of questioning and fighting against the use of chemical fertilisers in plantations” (see FP4 in Question 1). Other usage of the word “awareness” includes the navigation of “increased awareness”, “theological awareness”, “awareness campaign”, “creating awareness”, “environmental awareness”, “awareness in the media” and

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<sup>65</sup> Answers to the interview questionnaire are attached in Appendix XI.

“practical and non-theoretical awareness”. It becomes conspicuous that “awareness” emerged as one of the key variants of ecological social engagement and refers to the interactions, connections and conversations that take place between individuals and brands on various social media platforms, as Johnson (2018) articulates (see Section 2.2). The elaboration leads to the significance of the means of communication in the awareness-raising campaign for environmental preservation by the Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon.

### **7.2.1. Awareness Campaigns through means of Communication**

In today’s ever-changing world, the art of educating on social awareness through effective campaigns has become an increasingly complex challenge. In the context of the interview for this study, it emerged that the success of an awareness campaign by the Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon can not only be measured through its ability to reach a wide audience, but above all, by the impact it generates on people’s lives and society in general, with reference to environmental preservation. To achieve these objectives, it is essential to adopt targeted and innovative strategies capable of intellectually and emotionally involving and engaging the public and driving them to action. That is why participants mentioned awareness in relation to the perspective of an “advocacy actions against pollution and environmental destruction” (see Figures 6.7, 6.8; 6.11; 6.12) or taking “actions for [an] effective implementation [of *Laudato Si*]” (see Figure 11a and Figure 11b). Considering awareness raising, Johnson (2018) and Olsen and Tylén (2022) argue that engaged communication is positioned as a practical tool for empowering people in the process of raising consciousness of the need for the betterment of their living conditions. In this perspective, an assiduous understanding of the target audience, combined with the creation of strong and striking messages and the choice of the most suitable communication channels, is one of the crucial aspects that lead to the success of awareness initiatives, which can leave one or more indelible marks on individuals and society. This can be achieved through the ability of the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon to mobilise the masses on issues of collective or public importance. In the views of the participants, action or praxis is central to mobilisation for an awareness campaign. For instance, a participant expressed “lobbying actions for better compliance with environmental standards (norms) by the various stakeholders, in particular business leaders and other economic operators, foresters and miners” (see Figures 6.11 and 6.12).

Awareness campaigns on environmental issues have allowed some interviewees to gather valuable lessons on how to behave towards nature and to better equip themselves to involve the target audience.

In this vein, awareness raising has the potential to be transformed into concrete action for the implementation of the socio-ecological documents at the grassroots level by the Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon. To achieve the expected goal of awareness raising against environmental degradation, the Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon can either use the media or collaborate with influential media actors and civil society organisations. Acting in synergy can be considered the gateway to the awareness campaigns, attracting a larger and more diversified audience. Putri and Renwari (2023) argue that collaboration is one of the qualities in servant leadership that enhances good communication, decision-making and conflict management. Thus, collaboration makes it possible to adopt effective communication strategies and use appropriate tools to measure the (positive) impact of awareness raising. The impact of sensitisation is measurable through people's behavioural attitude and effort towards the environment, especially when they start to worry or be concerned about the degradation of the ecological conditions of the environment in which they live. For example, the effectiveness of the Roman Catholic Church's awareness campaign for environmental preservation is verifiable when the population not only avoids throwing garbage in a disorganised manner but also protests against the piles of garbage that litter their towns and cities with an unbearable stench and without any action from the administrative authorities<sup>66</sup>. It is for this reason, that MP3 in Question 1 made mention of "raising awareness for a healthy environment by educating children in Catholic schools, including teachers and parents on cleanliness, for example: Putting garbage bags in schools and family homes"; while FP2 in Question 4 alluded to "household waste management through awareness campaigns with garbage bags" as support measures towards awareness raising (see Figures 6.7; 6.9; and 6.10).

To this end, participants in the interview were inclined to think or to allude to the fact that identifying the most effective communication channels is essential for the Roman Catholic Church to maximise the impact of a social awareness campaign for environmental preservation in Cameroon. In an era dominated by technology, social media has proven to be a powerful tool and means to reach a large audience quickly and effectively.

Participants' conception of awareness through means of communication aligns with Pope John Paul II (1995, n.72-73), who, in *Ecclesia in Africa* (Church in Africa), praises the media as standing "at the service of an authentic communication" and as a contributing factor towards the development of the African continent. His successor, Pope Benedict XVI (2011, n.144-145), approaches

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<sup>66</sup> When people organise or join peaceful protest marches against the piles of garbage that litter and pollute their surroundings and environment.

communication in the same perspective when he urges the Roman Catholic Church “to be increasingly present in the media to make them not only a tool for the spread of the gospel, but also for educating the African people”, underscoring the promotion of the human person and the common good. On his part, Pope Francis (2015, n.49) urges communication media to move from the city-centres to the peripheries where most of those suffering from the harmful effects of ecological degradation are living. However, choosing the right channel must be based on a thorough understanding of the targeted and diversified audience. For example, *Instagram* and *TikTok* are ideal channels to engage young people, and *Facebook* and *LinkedIn* are platforms suited to a more mature audience. The key is to personalise the message for each platform while ensuring that it is relevant and engaging for the audience, with a specific objective to reach.

Besides social media, the potential of traditional communication should not be underestimated. Tools such as daily or weekly newspapers and magazines, radio and television continue to have a strong impact on social awareness raising, especially in the less digitalised rural areas of Cameroon or among segments of the population less accustomed to using the internet, such as some elderly people. Integrating online and offline strategies can thus significantly amplify the outreach of an awareness campaign for environmental safeguarding by making pro-environmental messages accessible to a wider and more diverse audience. The leadership of the Roman Catholic Church would reach more people using the most engaging socio-environmental theories for each audience. The challenge lies in creating a consistent message across all channels of communication. However, it is crucial to optimise communication for the specific audience, to maximise engagement and the expected impact.

### **7.2.2. Targeting an Audience for a successful Awareness Campaign**

To ensure the effectiveness of an environmental engagement awareness campaign, as discussed by Edwards (2005), it is essential to accurately identify the target audience. This identification of the audience is a crucial step that should not be overlooked in planning a successful outreach campaign. This process goes beyond a simple demographic definition. It requires a thorough understanding of the motivations, behaviours, and expectations of the group of people the campaign intends to reach. It is only by carefully mapping the interests and needs of the audience that awareness representatives can develop messages that truly resonate with the objectives, thus increasing the chances of the campaign’s success/outcome. Drawing from theories elaborated by Chryssavgis and Foltz (2013), Kelly (2016), Chryssavgis (2019), Lane (2020), Deane-Drummond and Deneulin (2021) and Augusta and Azmy (2023), the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church can effectively build striking

messages such as “my environment, my home...”; “the dignity of creation, the welfare of all human beings...” and, “care for creation, my legacy for future generation”<sup>67</sup>. It is precisely about designing appropriate messages for each specific audience in the reality of implementing strategic resolutions for the safeguarding of ecology. In the interview, the participants mentioned, for instance, loggers and miners whose activities have a direct and harmful impact on the ecology in the case of rampant deforestation in Cameroon (see section 2.2.2 and Figures 6.1, 6.2; 6.9 and 6.14). Participants suggested that the Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon conduct a targeted awareness campaign for the said group of people with precise messages and fearlessly using the appropriate means of communication. The same is true for the case of waste management in urban and rural environments, as already mentioned. A thorough understanding of the audience and a careful selection of communication channels are key to efficaciously influencing environmental social awareness. Through a targeted and strategic approach, it is possible not only to reach, but also to involve the public in a meaningful way, thus leading to positive ecological behavioural changes in society. Successful social awareness campaigns thus contribute to a better society.

Awareness of socio-ecological engagement as noted by the participants in the interview can be measurable on social networks through electronic actions such as likes, comments, shares and subscriptions, which demonstrate the public’s interest in, and adherence to the content of the message. Measurability then allows the Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon to evaluate the effectiveness of the social media strategy and adapt it to optimise not only the outreach and collaborative relationships with the audience, but also other further concrete actions to be taken (Putri and Renwari, 2023). The targeted audience would undoubtedly help the Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon to sharpen its strategy for implementing socio-ecological documents throughout the country (see section 3.4.1). The eco-awareness at the grassroots level certainly involves families and small ecclesial cells. As largely pointed out by the participants in the interviews, these church cells are termed small Christian communities. Small Christian communities have a historical evolution and narrative that deserves particular attention to better discern their importance in environmental preservation.

### **7.3. Small Christian Communities**

The notion of a small Christian community is conversely linked to the third objective of the study, which is to establish theological evidence that the NECC is implementing the socio-ecological

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<sup>67</sup> These environmental awareness-raising campaign messages are framed by the researcher.

documents at the community level. Similarly, research findings speak to a lack of support for environmental projects and the deficiency of connection between NECC and the grassroots communities (see sections 6.3.2 and 6.3.4). Harley (2016) and Deliu (2019) argue that community-oriented empathy is the characteristic of servant leaders whose priority remains the interest and wellbeing of the people. Yet the disconnectedness with the community at the grassroots level for environmental preservation demonstrates that the leadership of the Catholic Church in Cameroon is missing one of its essential elementary missions. As the participants in the interview largely expressed, small Christian communities remain pivotal for the implementation of the socio-ecological documents of the Catholic Church.

The reference to small Christian communities appears 14 times in the answers by the participants in the interview guide. Precisely, it emerges in the answers to Questions 1, 6, 7 and 8. In Question 1, the mention of small Christian communities appears in the answer from the MP1; in Question 6, it comes out from the response from FP2; in Question 7, MP6 and FP7 alluded to it and; in Question 8, FP1, MP3, FP3, MP4 (x2), MP6, FP6, MP7, FP7, MP8 referred to small Christian community as predilection venue for the implementation of *Laudato Si'* (see also Figures 6.1; 6.2; 6.11; 6.13; 6.14; 6.15 and 6.16). It is perceivable that participants in the interviews profusely<sup>68</sup> referred to small Christian communities either as the preferred settings for environmental preservation (see MP1 in question 1, FP2 in question 6, and MP6 in Question 7), or as centres for the promotion and dissemination of the encyclical, *Laudato Si'* (see all answers to Question 8 visibly reflected in Figures 6.15 and 6.16). They consider this avenue as the place par excellence to make known and implement socio-ecological documents by the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon. Additionally, it is worth noting that Question 8 of the interviews was geared towards practical recommendations for the implementation of socio-ecological documents at the community or grassroots level. It further aimed at drawing from the participants' theoretical and practical knowledge for an effective action for environmental preservation. To take the discussion further, it is appropriate to venture into the meaning of the notion of a small Christian community. Small Christian communities have a historical evolution and narrative that deserves particular attention to better discern their importance in environmental preservation.

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<sup>68</sup> As can be seen, ten out of the fourteen mentions of small Christian communities came from answers to Question 8.

### 7.3.1. Historical Glance at Small Christian Communities

According to *De Godoy* (2018), the Basic Christian Communities emerged in the Roman Catholic Church in the 1950s, within Catholic Action with its inductive method of See – Judge – Act. After their first official recognition by the Roman Catholic Church’s authority in Medellín<sup>69</sup>, in Northwestern Colombia, small Christian communities have definitively impacted the transmission of the faith and all forms of celebration. Small Christian communities (called at the time, BECs spread rapidly in the 1960s) (Ward, 1991:69), notably in Brazil, in other countries in Latin America, in Asia (especially in the Philippines) and in Africa (Guzmán, 2013:37). In Africa precisely, the SCCs started in the DRC through the pastoral plan approved by Congolese Episcopal Conference in 1961 (Mukenge, 2013:5; Healey, 2018:).

The SCCs became part of the guiding principles of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) which took the following fourfold preferential option: first, a Church of proximity; second, a Church at the concrete service of the poorest and the marginalised; third, a Church eager to share the treasure of the good News with all seekers of God and; fourth, a Church as an organic and co-responsible body (*Lumen Gentium* 1964, n. 9, 18, 30-34 and *Gaudium et Spes* 1965, n. 12, 67-71). In 1994, the bishops of the special Synod of the Roman Catholic Church in Africa stressed the involvement of all the people of God in the work of evangelisation. In this perspective, Pope John Paul II (1995, n.23, 89) encourages Christians to be involved at “all levels of the Christian Community: individuals, small communities, parishes, Dioceses, and local, national and international bodies”. From Figures 6.15 and 6.16, it appears plausible that the Bishops of Cameroon promote the SCCs but do not use them in the context of the implementation of socio-ecological documents. Yet, the implementation of these documents remains a considerable area of evangelisation.

### 7.3.2. The Eco-Evangelical Scope of Small Cristian Communities

It is not insignificant that the participants gave fundamental importance to small Christian communities in the framework of the interview. As a structure of the Roman Catholic Church, it has significantly contributed to the process of evangelisation. From their origins, the Small Christian

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<sup>69</sup> The following text can be read in the concluding documents of the General Conferences of Latin American Bishops (CELAM) at Medellín: “The Christian base community is the first and fundamental nucleus of the Church. At its level, it is responsible for the spread of the faith and of the worship that is its expression. It is the initial cell of the ecclesial structure and the centre of evangelisation, and it is at present a fundamental factor of human advancement and development.” (CELAM 1970:226).

communities were called “Basic Christian Communities”. Participants in the interview understood small Christian communities (SCCs) as one of the initial cells of the structure of the Roman Catholic Church. In its pastoral plan, the Bamenda Ecclesiastical Province (BEP, 2009:20) describes SCCs as “the places where the Church as Family is experienced [and as] an evangelising community”. In this context, SCCs are institutionally perceived as one of the units of the local Church. In Cameroon and elsewhere in Africa or in the world, the SCCs have various names. They are either called “Basic Ecclesial Community (BEC)”, “Basic Christian Community (BCC)<sup>70</sup>”, “Living Ecclesial Community (LEC)” or “Living Ecclesial Basic Community (LEBC)” (De Godoy, 2018:10 and Healey 2024:29).

The book of the Acts of the Apostles constitutes the foundational biblical text for the establishment of small Christian communities (cf. Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-35; 5:12-16). It is a community that brings together the people of God (lay faithful, catechumens<sup>71</sup>, Priests, religious men and women of a village, a neighbourhood, a sector)<sup>72</sup>. Considering the Acts of the Apostles, small Christian communities are venues where the spirit of *koinonia* and *diakonia* (communion and selfless service) is exercised. Krämer (2013:163) and Healey (2024:29) understand the small Christian community as “A new way of being Church”. In this perspective, it is crucial to emphasise pastoral proximity to encourage fraternity and solidarity in the Christian community.

The NECC can emulate the example of the Roman Catholic Church’s leadership in other African countries. The Southern African Catholic Bishops Conference (SACBC) recommended that small Christian communities strengthen efforts for the care of creation. In its pastoral plan, the Catholic Church in Southern Africa engages itself “to work together with others for the good of all, by responding to the cry of the poor and of the earth, through worship [...], human development and the care of creation” (SACBC, 2019:9)<sup>73</sup>. This ecclesiastical structure in Southern Africa urged all people of God to work for environmental preservation through small Christian communities. The focus on small Christian communities is to make “the creative spirit” of God alive in the communities (Ward,

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<sup>70</sup> In Africa, the term “Small Christian Communities (SCCs)” is mostly used in South Africa (Benz 1996), and in the English-speaking Dioceses of Cameroon, Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda, just to mention a few.

<sup>71</sup> In the Roman Catholic Church, a catechumen is a candidate for baptism or the sacraments of Christian initiation (baptism, first communion and confirmation) who follows Christian teaching for a given period before receiving the said sacrament(s). The period of catechesis or preparation for the sacraments depends on one Episcopal Conference to another. It can range from two to four years, depending on the reality of each Diocese or Conference.

<sup>72</sup> According to the catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC 752), “One becomes a member of [God’s] people not by a physical birth, but by being ‘born anew,’ a birth ‘of water and the Spirit,’ that is, by faith in Christ, and Baptism”.

<sup>73</sup> Twenty years before the publication of their 2019 pastoral plan, the bishops of Southern Africa had issued a pastoral letter to all the Catholic faithful and people of goodwill. In that letter, the bishops vehemently decried the health degradation of millions of people “as a result of the dumping of hazardous waste next to their homes. Such waste is contaminating the air and poisoning water supplies” (SACBC, 1999:1). The bishops also condemned the cutting down of trees for energy and industrial purposes which created erosion in the southern regions of the African continent.

1991:70). As already mentioned, a small Christian community is the neighbourhood church where people share faith and life experiences in the light of the Word of God and are empowered by the same Word and experiences to take leading role in the perspective economic and socio-ecological involvement and transformation.

### **7.3.3. Small Christian Communities: Avenues for Reflection and Action**

In the context of Cameroon, small Christian communities (SCCs) are a grouping of several Christian families in one of these families or in a neutral place to share their life of faith and action in the service of others. In this perspective, SCCs are based on the idea that one cannot be a Christian alone, that one is a Christian in a community where one lives one's faith. This is why SCCs are called "the Church of the neighbourhood<sup>74</sup>" (De Godoy, 2018). SCCs are places of mutual listening and sharing. Generally, it is in SCCs that members discern and take actions in addressing certain neighbourhood problems such as prayer, evangelisation, reconciliation of individuals and families, issues about justice and peace, development and the wellbeing of all. As examples of concrete actions in the SCCs, the interview participants mentioned, among others, the collection of household waste and cleanliness-hygiene and sanitation in the neighbourhood, the planting of trees around houses, and meetings of forest and mine owners. The dynamism of SCCs is consistent with Jackson (1999) and Maskin and Sjöström (2001), who consider implementation theory considering harmonious relationships between the individuals and the institution, with an intended positive outcome of the decision taken. In the SCCs, the stake of the relationships lies in the wellbeing of the members. This wellbeing is fundamentally based on the healthy environment of the SCC members. If the environment is polluted or not cared for, then their wellbeing is jeopardised.

Through the SCCs, communities are involved in the life of the neighbourhood, the village and in the development of the country. This is why some interview participants (10 participants in Questions 7 and 8) hold that small Christian communities are the ideal place to promote the reading, reflection and implementation (praxis) of socio-ecological documents, particularly *Laudato Si'*. The participants have suggested that "*Laudato Si'*" and related ecological issues be addressed and discussed in the "small Christian communities" (see answers from MP6 and FP7 to Question 7; and from FP1, MP3, FP3, MP4, MP6, FP6, MP7 and MP8 to Question 8). It is worth mentioning that the SCCs not only bring together all Catholic Christians but also interested people from other Christian

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<sup>74</sup> In the community sense of the term, neighbourhood refers to a social reality of relationships in which members consider themselves brothers and sisters who love each other and care for each other in the spirit of *diakonia*.

denominations and other religions of the neighbourhood or village for common actions and the common good, which includes the safeguarding of creation<sup>75</sup>.

The members of the SCCs are elderly people, adults, young people and children. In addition to the lay faithful, catechumens, religious, seminarians, and priests can be members of the SCCs. Altogether, the members see the ambient reality, reflect on it and provide one or more solutions as a community. The main aim of the SCCs is therefore to respond to the fundamental problem of the gap between the doctrinal ecclesiastical institution and the life of the people, which often results in having very little coherence with their faith. The participants' reliance on SCCs highlights the importance of their interest in ecological socio-transformative action. This highlights the socio-transformational component articulated by Siregar *et al.* (2022), Goujon (2023) and Augusta and Azmy (2023) in their theoretical framework of servant leadership. As Donati (2023) denotes, transformation requires a full engagement in social liberation actions. In the same vein, Mukenge (2013:3) contends that the activist and liberating aspect of the SCCs deserves to be emphasised, especially in the Latin American, African and Asian contexts. It is in this perspective and considering the first Christian communities (Acts 2:42-47) that the movements for the support of landless peasants, agricultural or food cooperatives, ecological preservation, and health centres for the poor and the most deprived have emerged in the Global South.

Approaching from the same angle, Ela (2009:31) holds that the sole motivation and objectives of SCCs are not to serve pious spirituality through “prayer and singing” but for members to witness unity, to protect each other and to work towards “the salvation of each person”. Environmental protection is one of the social salvation projects of SCCs because the ecological crisis affects mostly the poor and the marginalised (Pope Francis, 2015, n.13, 24-25, 27-30). In this perspective, members of SCCs can carry out actions by helping victims of natural disasters and organising cleanliness and sanitation campaigns. As De Godoy (2018) contends, SCCs in the neighbourhood form a network of fraternity and solidarity which serves as a foundation for socio-economic projects and the efficient implementation of the socio-ecological documents of the Roman Catholic Church. In this same line of thought, Mukenge (2013:4) asserts that SCCs can be viewed as the embodiment of “caring communities in which faith is lived out in daily life by paying closer attention to believers' lifestyles

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<sup>75</sup> As Gmunder and Ngueugam (2002) argue, the safeguarding of creation is an engagement to and for a society that respects all of God's creatures, including humans, animals and plants. This safeguarding of creation is a global thought which establishes “the essential links uniting all creatures, which also sees the link between the local and the global, between the present and the future” (Gmunder and Ngueugam, 2002:31).

and tangible desires” for wellbeing. SCCs are thus the places where active charity is experienced by propelling brothers and sisters to be a gift to one another.

#### **7.3.4. Small Christian Communities: An Open Space for Communion and Service**

As elaborated by Argandoña (2011), Hareley (2016), Siregar *et al.* (2022) and Goujon (2023), the Greek words *koinonia* and *diakonia* seem to be the most appropriate to translate communion and service in the context of small Christian communities (as already mentioned in section 7.2.1). Considering these authors and as previously discussed in this work (see sections 3.3.3 and 3.4.2), these two concepts are parallel and complementary because one cannot exist without the other. In other words, without one, the other becomes handicapped. From the perspective of the participants in the interviews, SCCs are miniature church gatherings. They are places par excellence where families and individuals, members of the Christian community or not, come together to express in actions their care for their socio-economic environment. In this vein, Amherdt (2013) argues that one of the goals of the SCCs is the search for communion and dialogue with all human beings. Healey (2024:1303) contends that SCCs require synodality, which is a process of listening to and discerning God’s will for the church of this time by inclusively involving everybody in the search for the common good, which is the safeguarding of God’s creation. In this perspective, synodality becomes the connective thread between communion and service. Ward (1991:78) asserts that SCCs enable neighbourhood people to listen to each other, to share, and to “support and empower one another [...] with a new and creative vision and goal”. The members of the SCCs do not only walk together but are driven by a spirit of collegiality, which underpins their relationships of collaboration and co-responsibility in the ministry or service to all (Pope John-Paul II, 1995, n. 26). If the participants emphasised the SCCs, it is undoubtedly because they discern in this scale of the parish or diocesan church an important means at the service of communion for the safeguarding of creation. It becomes evident that the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon cannot efficiently implement the socio-ecological documents while neglecting the theological perspective of a grassroots pastoral: that of purposefully emphasising the praxis of environmental preservation from the small Christian communities. This aligns with the vision of pastoral or practical theology. As Goujon (2023) argues, respect for creation requires that the leadership involve personal and community engagement. The finding from the participants equally generates the evidence that the Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon has a pressing need to update its catechism or catechesis to include environmental issues in the more practical sense of the term.

#### 7.4. Catechesis for Eco-social Transformation

Although the notion of “catechesis” emerges only 11 times in the answers from the participants in the interview, it is deemed important to elaborate on it because it is the key to the ecological teaching platform for the Roman Catholic Church. This notion not only resonates with objective 2 of the research, which is to investigate theological studies carried out on the implementation of the ecological documents of the RCC by the NECC at the community level, but also connects with finding 5 from the interviews. As it emerges from the previous chapter, the interview participants insisted on the urgency of the simplification of socio-ecological documents with the aim of greater accessibility. The simplification (through translations into local languages) and dissemination of socio-ecological documents through catechesis join the concept of the sacrament of creation articulated by Edwards (2005) and Pope Francis (2015) within the framework of eco-theology. This catechetical element is still lacking in the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon. However, as the finding points out, it remains crucial and relevant that the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church teaches the people that they are God's collaborators in the care of creation.

At first glance and for an adequate visualisation, it is relevant to reminisce about the loci where the term catechesis appears clearly in the answers from the participants. The notion is visible in Question 2, the answers from MP1, FP1; in Question 5, the answer from FP1; in Question 7, the answers from MP1 (2 times) and fp1and; in Question 8, the answers from FP2, MP3, FP3, MP9 and, FP9 (see also Figures 6.3; 6.4; 6.9; 6.10; 6.13; 6.14; 6.15 and 6.16). The insistent presence of the notion of catechesis in the answers to Question 8 deserves careful attention. This question (Question 8) aimed particularly at drawing knowledge from the participants' thoughts or opinions on the practical ways and suggestions towards the implementation strategy of the socio-ecological documents of the Roman Catholic Church, with a particular focus on *Laudato Si'*. A good number of participants identify catechesis as the predilection channel not only for teaching, but also for the implementation of the Church's documents on environmental preservation. For instance, answering Question 7, MP1 suggested that the NECC should “encourage each bishop to initiate in his diocese a catechesis on the environment. This catechesis should be based on *Laudato Si'* and be taught at all levels: Small Christian Communities, parish groups”. The importance of the theme of catechesis is verified by the reality that each member of the Roman Catholic Church has received a required period for preparation

before receiving the sacraments<sup>76</sup>. Catechesis has a particular significance and dynamics in the context of Africa.

#### 7.4.1. Catechesis in the African and Cameroonien Context

The prologue of the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC, n.4-10) defines catechesis as the process of “handing on the faith” according to the life of the Church<sup>77</sup>. This action of conveying belief is concretised through “an education in the faith of children, young people and adults which includes especially the teaching of Christian doctrine imparted, generally speaking, organically and systematically, to initiate the hearers into the fullness of Christian life” (CCC, n.5). The teaching of catechesis is grounded on the gospel. That is why the General Directory for Catechesis (GDC, 1998, n.10) precises that catechesis is a procedure of “transmitting the gospel, as the Christian community has received it, understands it, celebrates it, lives it and communicates it in many ways”. In *Africae Munus*<sup>78</sup>, Pope Benedict XVI (2011, n.9 and 104) invites Bishops, Priests, Missionaries, consecrated persons, permanent Deacons, Seminarians and Catechists to appropriate catechesis to bring the good news to the laity in the African continent characterised by ecological predicament through “transforming theology into pastoral care”. It is certainly in this context that more than half of the participants mentioned the term “catechesis” in their answers to the interview guide, expressing their desire to see the catechism of the Roman Catholic Church being reformed, considering the socio-ecological documents. This insistence is proof or validation of the hypothesis that studies have not yet been conducted to effectively implement socio-ecological documents at the grassroots level. The catechetical reform should therefore carefully consider the environmental issues that are becoming more and more alarming nationwide and globally. This aspiration of the participants aligns with the vision of the pastoral plan of the Catholic Bishops of Southern Africa that calls for the need to incorporate into catechesis teaching “material on the gift of creation and God-given responsibility to care for the environment” (SACBC, 2019:60). The Southern African Catholic Bishops seem to understand effective and constructive transmission of the faith takes place at and from the grassroots level through catechesis and in synergy with other actors of civil society. That is why, drawing from

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<sup>76</sup> Cogan (1990) defines a sacrament as a visible, touchable and “an outward sign made by Jesus Christ to give [...] his life”.

<sup>77</sup> Furthermore, the 1992 edition of the Catechism of the Catholic Church presents catechesis as “an organic synthesis of the essential and fundamental contents of the Catholic doctrine” (Njue 2008).

<sup>78</sup> *Africae Munus* is the title of a post-synodal pastoral exhortation published by Pope Benedict XVI after the second synod of African Bishops held in Rome in October 2009 under the theme: The Church in Africa at the Service of Reconciliation, Justice and Peace. *Africae Munus* is the Latin title for “Africa’s commitment”.

the gospel of Mark 16:15, they exhort pastoral councils<sup>79</sup> in Dioceses and parishes to form a commission for the mission of the safeguarding of creation, to train “pastoral agents” for that mission and, to “cooperate with the many groups and agencies prompting and working for the care of creation and the environment” (SACBC, 2019:60). The underlying idea in the declaration of the bishops of Southern Africa is the networking dynamism that strengthens the capacity of the ecclesial structure in its commitment to ecological preservation. The Bishops of Cameroon can thus be stimulated by the example of their colleagues in Southern Africa.

The theme of catechesis was approached by the participants in multifaceted ways. A distinguished threefold line of thought can be detected in the answers gathered. While some approach catechesis as a channel of formation through seminars, conferences and workshops (see answers to Question 2 from MP1 and FP1; to Question 8 from MP3); others conceive it as a teaching given either from the pulpit, in a classroom or from the pastoral letter issued by the bishop of the Diocese on the environmental issues (see answers to Question 5 from FP1; to Question 7 from MP1 and FP1 and; to question 8 from MP3, FP3 and MP9); still others understand catechesis in the line of participatory and inclusive environmental action (see the answer to Question 8 from FP2). Catechesis is consequently considered by the participants in the interviews as one of the essential instruments for conveying the message about the socio-ecological documents of the Roman Catholic Church<sup>80</sup>. Hence, a critical need for an appropriate education of Christians to encourage them to take concrete actions in terms of environmental preservation. From the perspective of the interview participants, catechesis should not only be a recitation of the “truths” of the faith, which is the mystery of Christ, but also an integration of the guiding lines of the social teaching of the Roman Catholic Church that takes into consideration integral human development. The perception of the participants in the interviews aligns with Biduaya Badidiunde (2021:79), who argues that today, Christian education in Africa is called to shift from a notional catechesis<sup>81</sup> to an integrational catechesis, a catechesis of life and for life. The integral human development has integral ecology as its backdrop. According to Deane-Drummond and Deneulin (2021:1), this integral ecology points to the “biological, physical, environmental dimensions of human life, and the interaction between all living creatures, humans,

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<sup>79</sup> In the Roman Catholic Church, the pastoral council (parish and/or diocesan) is a structural body aimed at promoting communion between the parish priest and the parishioners or between the bishop and his priests and Christians to stimulate the participation of the faithful, to involve them responsibly.

<sup>80</sup> The emphasis on catechesis will be one of the points of the previous chapter within the framework of the recommendations of theological interventions and actions to the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon, with a view to the efficient implementation of socio-ecological documents.

<sup>81</sup> Biduaya Badidiunde (2021:87) considers this notional catechesis as truncated, biased and deficient. He further argues that catechesis taught with the Western paradigm is merely cerebral and intellectual and cut off from the socio-cultural experience of its recipients (the catechumens) and deprived of any service of conversion and the life of faith.

and non-humans”. As discussed in Section 4.2, catechesis thus becomes a framework that intertwines contextual issues and paves the way to praxis. This leads to the understanding that the catechetical dimension of integral ecology takes into consideration the environmental, biological and physical health of human beings and all beings created by God. This aligns with Deane-Drummond and Deneulin (2021), who consider catechesis as an interdisciplinary paradigmatic framework of eco-theology. The bracing of social sciences and natural sciences brings a better theological and Christological apprehension of the relationship between human beings and the whole universe (Teilhard de Chardin, 1968). The catechesis promoted by the participants in the interviews is that which favours the symbiotic interaction between faith and the safeguarding of creation. It is this embodied catechesis that can adequately address the current ecological crisis in Cameroon. The leadership of the Roman Catholic Church in the country would do well to direct its environmental actions towards this catechetical teaching model.

#### **7.4.2. Towards a Catechesis for Socio-ecological Transformation**

As already mentioned, catechesis is a complex activity that is part of the evangelising mission of the Roman Catholic Church. By emphasising catechesis, Christians who were interviewed expressed their deep aspiration to put Christian initiation and worship in parishes at the forefront of the environmental concerns of the Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon. Catechesis is regarded as an in-depth reflection on what constitutes the heart of the Christian faith: this faith should not only be professed but also be lived through the daily transformative actions of the believer. The participants from the interviews seemed not to see in catechetical teaching the evidence of an insistence on Christian witness. The urgency is therefore for the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon to insert the ecological or environmental question at all levels of preparation for the reception of the seven sacraments, namely, baptism, first communion, confirmation, anointing of the sick, reconciliation, marriage and holy order<sup>82</sup>. In this urgency lies the missionary conviction of the Roman Catholic Church and its local communities “to proclaim the good news of God’s salvation” through servant leadership of all creation (cf. Psalm 105 and Mark 16:15). In this vein, the primary aim of catechesis would be the upliftment of the human being and their natural environment because, as Augusta and Azmy (2023) assert, the glory of God is also revealed through God’s creation. Catechesis that emerges from the participant and which has to be elaborated by the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church as a means of educating the people of God should suitably emphasise social

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<sup>82</sup> This is about establishing ecological teaching in the curriculum for preparing seminarians for the priesthood. This curriculum should have as its foundation the socio-ecological documents of the Roman Catholic Church.

transformation with particular attention to sustainable development, health, and caring for the environment for the benefit of the poor and marginalised communities (Haddad 2016). This catechetical paradigm is that which is not only grounded on knowledge of the history of salvation but also a consideration of the experience of the modern human being who understands themselves as perpetually becoming and on the journey with a God who reveals Godself in their daily experiences.

As theorised in Section 4.2.4, the instance of this catechesis is precisely the praxis of the theological paradigm of creation as a sacrament of God's goodness toward humanity. As earlier articulated by Chryssavgis (2019) and Lane (2020), the components of the eco-theological catechesis practically include the sacramentality of creation, the Christocentric cosmology, the celebration of the cosmic liturgy, the centrality of God's created beings and the eco-spiritual conversion. Thus, the renewed catechesis becomes that which listens to human beings and the environment. The above-mentioned components are indispensable for listening to God<sup>83</sup>. This speaks again to *diakonia*, which is nothing other than the service of the transformation of society, to which catechesis invites Christians to situate themselves in a fertile field and in this tension, which leads to personal and collective engagement in social wellbeing and to a healthy ecology. Ela (2009:130-131) approaches the theme of catechesis in this same light, when he argues that evangelisation (catechesis) and "human promotion cannot oppose each other", especially in the reality in which people are living in abject poverty exacerbated by the alarming ecological degradation. Eco-catechesis is thus the enhancement of the liberation process, which implies considering integral ecology in the preparation of candidates for the reception of the sacraments. The Christian then becomes an active agent of positive transformation of their ecological environment.

Ultimately, a catechesis at the service of social transformation is that which attempts to formulate a pastoral theology that is more practical and carries at heart the aspirations of the grassroots people in their most urgent and deepest needs. In this line of thought, Ela (2009:184) discourses on peripheral African theology in contrast with academic theology. He further expresses his preoccupations through the following didactic question, "should [the theologian] not leave libraries and offices to go towards a type of society where we see the intellectual among the peasants, the academic among the illiterate, the doctor among the men(sic) of the bush, the theologian or the pastor in the villages where hunger, misery and despair become a future that leads to nothing and throws man[sic] on the road to revolt?<sup>84</sup>".

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<sup>83</sup> Listening to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor thus becomes synonymous with listening to God.

<sup>84</sup> Ela also elaborates on this theological engaging frame of thought in his concept of "theology under the tree", in which he perceives Christian peasants as brothers and sisters sitting side by side, reflecting sharing, and seeking to "take responsibility for their own future and for transforming their living conditions" (Ela 2009:180).

Ela's African theological perspective impels a hermeneutic of action, which is central to servant leadership (see section 3.4), to respond adequately to the socio-economic and ecological challenges faced by the people in Cameroon today. A local catechesis thus aims to educate Christians to be agents of eco-social transformation. That is why most participants in the interview (eight out of eleven) mentioned *Laudato Si'* as the foundational document for the reformation of catechesis (see answers to Question 2 from FP1, to Question 7 from MP1, FP1 and, to Question 8 from FP2, MP3, FP3, MP9, FP9. See also Figures 6.3; 6.4; 6.13; 6.14; 6.15 and 6.16). It is worth mentioning that the emphasis of the participants on *Laudato Si'* is not trivial. Being a socio-ecological document published in recent years, *Laudato Si'* has aroused much attention and comments both within the Roman Catholic Church and in other religions and in society in general. Already in his introductory note to this document, Pope Francis (2015, n.7) acknowledges the valuable contributions of “numerous scientists, philosophers, theologians and civic groups [...], other Churches and Christian communities – and other religions” in finding solutions to the ecological harm inflicted on the “Mother Earth”.

The adaptation of catechesis to address ecological issues is therefore an emergency awaiting the Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon, especially its leadership. As discussed earlier by Osuiji (2018) and Ngirinshuti (2018) in Section 2.4, this reconstruction implies using some of the socio-cultural values contained in many traditions in Cameroon and the formation of Pastors/Priests in the praxis of environmental protection to strengthen the catechetical teaching of the Roman Catholic Church in the country. To be more specific in line with Pope Francis (2025, n. 202-232), the catechesis of social transformation could be concretised by an ecological education and spirituality which has as paradigms the move towards the adoption of “a new lifestyle”, “the covenant between humanity and the environment”, the “ecological conversion” and, the celebration of “joy and peace”<sup>85</sup>. The environmental or ecological catechesis referred to by the participants in this study effectively paves the way to a substantial individual and societal conversion.

### **7.4.3. Catechesis for an Ecological Conversion**

Catechesis is synonymous with evangelisation, which consists of announcing the good news of Jesus Christ and making authentic adherents to this good news. This is why catechesis plays an important part in the evangelical mission of the Roman Catholic Church. Participants in catechesis have thus

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<sup>85</sup> This celebration of joy and peace is the deepest expression of the harmony finally found between the human being freed from all the gears of a consumerist society and their environment (Pope Francis 2024; n. 222-226).

rediscovered the essential goal of this education, which is to lead them to *metanoia* (spiritual conversion/repentance), a catalyst for social transformation. In the context of environmental catechesis, *metanoia* is discussed as “a global ecological conversion” which, as discussed by Pope Francis (2015, n.3, 216-232), is embedded in the safeguarding of “the moral conditions for an authentic human ecology”. The promotion of an ecological engagement in catechesis urges the need to listen to the cry of the earth, which, as discussed by Boff (1997), is closely connected to the cry of the poor. In this twin cry through which creation groans (cf. Rom 8:22), there is hidden a call that comes from God to humanity: a call to change from the dominion lenses to an approach of respect and care for God’s creation with the spectrum of environmental concerns (New Directory for Catechesis [NDC] 2020, n.211). In this perspective, Chryssavgis (2019) and Lane (2020) suggest a community of creation model as an alternative to the dominion paradigm. This shift in catechesis aims to educate Christians for active integration into a community vision or model of creation viewed as the work of God in which human beings responsibly collaborate (see section 3.3.3). Through catechetical conversion underpinned by the theology of creation, men and women are brought closer to the Kingdom of God.

As will be discussed later in this chapter, the ecological healing that this catechesis brings about reveals God’s compassion in the face of human suffering. It is a perspective that encourages human beings to recognise the presence of God in the beauty and yet suffering of creation. Through compassion, God touches hearts and impels them to feel the ecological suffering and to take care not only of each other but also and above all of “Mother Earth”. This attention is precisely the response to the cry of the earth and the cry of the socially and economically marginalised people. As Johnson (2014) articulates, conversion – ecological conversion, which is the framework of catechesis – would promote co-responsibility and interdependence between human and non-human beings (see section 3.2.3). In this vein, the emphasis is obviously on the role of humans in protecting creation with the same compassion as God. In this context, the recognition of the divine presence in all aspects of creation, the response to the cries of the earth and the poor, and the adoption of responsible actions lead to fostering a deeper connection with the planet and with each other in humanity. This connection is possible through a catechesis built on sustainable harmony for humanity and the environment. In addition to catechesis, another salient argument from the participants in the interview towards the implementation of the socio-ecological documents was that of fostering training through conferences, round tables, seminars, workshops and schools as concrete actions in favour of environmental preservation.

## 7.5. Training as an Empowerment for the Ecological Ministry

At first glance, it is worth mentioning that the theme of training aligns with the theoretical vision of Nginshuti (2018) and with research objective four, which aims to propose theological actions for the effective implementation of socio-ecological documents by the Roman Catholic Church. It should be noted, however, that Nginshuti (2018) does not consider training within the framework of Christian formation in general, but rather from the perspective of the theological education of Pastors on issues related to the environment and the safeguarding of creation. On the contrary, the interview participants did not reserve ecological training for a certain category of people or an elite, but for all those who claim to be Christians and/or non-Christians. For them, this universality of ecological training has the potential to positively impact efforts to implement the documents for environmental preservation. As it can be noted, participants repeatedly referred to the urgency of training.

Participants made mention of “training” 38 times in the answers to seven (of the eight) interview questions. These include: Question 1, answers from MP1, FP1, MP5, MP9 and, FP9; Question 2, answers from FP2 (2 times), MP3 (2 times), MP4, FP4 (2 times), MP5, FP5, MP6, FP6, MP8, FP8, MP9 and, MP10; Question 4, answers from FP2 (2 times), MP4, FP4, MP9 (2 times), MP10; Question 5, answers from FP2 and FP4 (2 times); Question 6, answers from MP5 (2 times); Question 7, answers from MP8 and FP8 and; Question 8, answers from MP1, MP8, FP10. An example of these recurrences was identified in the answer to Question 2 in which MP6 stated that he has been trained by the leadership of the Church “through seminars, conferences and training workshops organised at the diocesan level and led by experts in environmental and ecological preservation”. As it can be observed, the term “training” plausibly appeared 15 times in the answers to Question 2. This is undoubtedly because of the “how” question. The question of “how” in an interview has as an essential aim of exploring not only the outline of the subject at stake but also the scientific method or methodology by which something is done or must be done: the manner of proceeding or the process of and in any evolution. Even though the verb “to train” appears in Question 2, it remains evident that participants in the interviews viewed training as useful and judicious in their answers to the other questions. This is what gives a thematic value to the term “training” in the study. The participants discussed at length the methods used and places of their training in the context of the socio-ecological teaching by the Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon. Their training avenues include homilies, conferences, seminars, workshops, notebooks and Catholic academic or learning institutions (primary, secondary schools and universities).

It is worth mentioning that the theme of training does not emerge from any of the answers to Question 3. The reason is certainly because the question specifically sought to inquire about the documents read by the participants to help them implement socio-ecological teachings at the grassroots level. Thus, the participants considered the mention of training to be less significant (in their answers to Question 3). Although books are necessary tools for training, the participants focused more on the Bible, documents and messages of the different Popes (especially encyclical letters), the document of the United Nations' SDG, television documentaries on ecological issues, personal research on the internet and the agro-pastoral journal or magazines.

The theme of training appears in the participants' answers in four different categories. First, in terms of equipping justice and peace agents, or delegates, with knowledge about the ecological reality (see the answers from MP1 and FP1 to Question 1). Second, the participants believed that people (Christians and non-Christians) need to be taught how to preserve ecology (see the answers from MP5, MP9, FP9 to Question 1; from FP2, MP3, MP5, MP9 to Question 2; from FP2, MP4 and FP4 to Question 5; from MP5 to Question 6; from MP8, FP8 to Question 7 and; from FP1, MP8, FP10 to Question 8). Third, the participants considered the training of learners at all levels of academic institutions as crucial (see the answers from FP2 and MP10 to Question 4 and from FP2 and FP4 to Question 5). They expressly mentioned Catholic primary schools, colleges and Catholic institutions of higher learning, as well as other agricultural training centres for young people, as ideal learning structures that can offer effective training for ecological preservation. Fourth, the participants decried the scarcity of training on the issues of the environment in the Church, and by the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon (see the answers from FP4, FP5, MP8, FP8, MP10 to Question 2). This institutional gap constitutes a concern that requires further elaboration in this study<sup>86</sup>. It is now deemed appropriate to delve deeper into the thinking of participants to discover other components of the theme of "training".

### **7.5.1. Training Intelligences in an Ecological Culture**

Most of the literature on training is devoted to entrepreneurial organisations towards better performance. Shandra (1997:1-2) defines training as a process for increasing the knowledge and skill" of people in view of transformation in their behaviour for the amelioration of an enterprise's achievement. In line with Shandra, Gutterman (2023:1-3) argues that training consists of creating

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<sup>86</sup> This point will be touched on in Chapter 8.

“and sharing of knowledge” aimed at achieving goals and objectives in the working environment of a given organisation. Training is key to enhancing performance in any given organisation, including the Roman Catholic Church. In the managerial organisation, each trained member plays an important role in the value chain of their relationship with others. However, training on ecological concepts and environmental preservation remains crucial, especially in the current time when the news is dominated by the harmful effects of climate change. As reported in Question 2, participants in the interviews perceived training as the development of a planetary consciousness for an eco-sustainable education project (see Figures 6.3 and 6.4). To be more practical, environmental education must gear towards a formation of behaviours that are essentially prescriptive and mainly aimed at acquiring and teaching certain good habits for the common good<sup>87</sup>. This view aligns with DeWitt (2016), who discourses education to the common good from the perspective of the ethics of responsibility. This eco-educational endeavour is in line with the research objective, which seeks to propose appropriate theological interventions and actions for an adequate and efficient implementation of socio-ecological documents.

Illustrative examples of good environmental and ecological habits (non or less-polluting behaviours) voiced out by the participants include, sparing use of water<sup>88</sup>, responsible waste management with the recycling of household waste (see the answers to Question 1 from FP4 and Question 4 from FP2), education to and practising of hygiene and sanitation (see answers to Question 2 from FP3, to Question 4 from MP3 and FP6 and, Question 8 from FP2), avoiding bush fires<sup>89</sup> (see the answers to Question 1 from FP4), implementation of organic farming (see answers to Question 1 from FP4; to Question 4 from MP4, FP4, MP8, and MP10 and; to Question 5 from FP4, MP8), the fight against poaching (see answer to Question 5 from MP6), to mention just a few. The participants’ thoughts in favour of sustainable ecological training comply with the UN 2030 Agenda for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 2, 3, 4, 6, 11, 13, and 15. The mentioned goals elaborate on “food security” and the promotion of “sustainable agriculture”; the “wellbeing for all at all ages”; “equitable quality education for all”; the “sustainable management of water and sanitation for all”, the safety and the inclusivity of “cities and human settlements”; the urgency to engage in actions aimed at combating “climate change and its impacts” and; the protection, the restoration and the promotion of “forests”, combating of “desertification”, halting and reversing of “land degradation”, and terminating

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<sup>87</sup> As already mentioned, the ecosystem and the environment (the Earth) are both considered a common good for all creatures (humans and non-humans).

<sup>88</sup> See Goal 6 of the UN’s *2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals*.

<sup>89</sup> It should be noted that in the context of Cameroon, rudimentary farmers often use bush fires as an easy way to clear the fields before cultivation.

“biodiversity loss” (UN 2015). These UN SDGs can serve as a source of inspiration to develop a proactive strategy for environmental education.

Furthermore, the notion of ecological training is in conversational agreement with Persson (2021), who argues that environmental education has to substantially broaden its meaning and significance with the aim of converging towards a pedagogy for sustainability, which englobes among others: multiculturalism, interculturalism, the planetary axiology<sup>90</sup>, solidarity, peace, social justice, the promotion of a culture of dialogue, the promotion of an ethic of care for others and common good. The training of intelligence in ecological culture arises from the reality that environmental degradation is a symptom and an effect of the degradation of human beings themselves, their values and their horizons of meaning. It is in this context that Dozza (2022:15) argues about an interdisciplinary educational training of intelligences on “the ecological paradigm [that] involves different spheres” and which considers society, economy, ethics, psychics, politics, ontology and epistemology. Interdisciplinary involvement in ecological training can generate various scopes of conceptions for the safeguarding of the planet Earth.

The ecological training of intelligence is beneficial to the preparation of a new generation of people with the re-configuration of a mentality that can understand the complex reality of the natural world. The interview participants highlighted the training provided by educational institutions. However, it is appropriate to add the family framework as a basis or foundation for a significant ecological education. In this context, parents teach their children about environmental protection through rigorous management of household waste. This education in the family can be done through the practice of waste categorisation or differentiation and cleanliness, for example. It is about a symbiosis between basic ecological training (from the family) and that received in the classroom or on the benches. The complementarity between the two eco-educational paradigms is of paramount importance. In this perspective and given the implementation of the socio-ecological documents, Catholic educational institutions and parents are encouraged to organise or maintain the culture of ecological excursions to natural environmental sites. The excursions aim at conceiving environmental relationships outside the classroom and the school setting to reconnect young people with the neighbourhood and their ecological territory. The intention is to build or rebuild not only a rational, but also an emotional affiliation with people’s environment, to sense it and recognise it as a place to which they belong and where their roots are. Bringing people, especially young people, to nearby

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<sup>90</sup> Planetary axiology essentially aims at the establishment of a global ecological consciousness which considers all the dimensions of the relationship between humans and non-humans.

green spaces or other natural world<sup>91</sup> and involving them in the analysis of the environmental quality of the territory can serve as a tool for leading and self-creation of knowledge that allows everyone to become an agent of and for ecological change. It equally creates in learners a sense of collective responsibility oriented towards the environment in which they live and interact with each other. In the context of ecological training, it is necessary that the leadership of the RCC brings the people to the consciousness that individual action against the environment globally affects the rest of creation, hence the importance of the consciousness about co-responsibility. However, cognitive training would remain deficient without the specificity of the hearty love for ecology. The imbalance and the ecological malaise that are currently affecting the world have their roots in the human heart (Pope Francis 2024, n.29). This observation is the motivation to heal and train hearts to love others.

### **7.5.2. Training Hearts for Ecological Sensitivity**

The dimension of the heart is crucial in ecological preservation consciousness. Knowledge from literature on biology and cardiology leads to the understanding that the heart functions as a pump which, through its regular contractions, propels blood throughout the body through the arteries and veins, thus ensuring the supply of oxygen to the entire body (Raman and Hassan, 2013). In other words, it is through the circulation of the blood that the life of the body is substantially maintained. However, for the blood to retain its dynamism, it must return regularly and punctually to the heart, which reanimates and renews its strength (Branko and González-Alonso, 2023). In addition to biological science, the heart is considered by other literature to be the place of deep thoughts. The heart is the expression of the vitality of humanity. The heart is the articulation of the human intimate self and the tangible centre of human “personal history” (Pope Francis 2024, n.11). It is from the heart that not only emotions and passions are born, but also, above all, compassion and sympathy. The heart is the centre of relationships (the centre of communion) with others (humans and non-humans). In this logic, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (1943:62) observes that “It is only with the heart that one can see rightly, [and that] what is essential is invisible to the eye”. From this De Exupéry’s perspective, it can be argued that human beings can converse heart-to-heart with the natural world. In that light, the heart can be considered the human internal eye. As discussed earlier with Deliu (2019) in Section 4.3.2, far from being simply an expression of “suffering” with the other (*cum-pati*), compassion drives one to the decision to act (action), to be engaged in and with, to do something to alleviate the ambient pathetic situation<sup>92</sup>. It is in this context that Goujon (2023) advocates leadership from the Roman Catholic Church, which takes the ecological issue to heart for the wellbeing of the people. This

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<sup>91</sup> Some examples of this natural world can be the botanical garden, the forest, the river, and the ocean.

<sup>92</sup> This section 4.3.2 elaborates on empathy and compassion as one of the traits of Servant Leadership Theory.

dimension of compassion agrees with Pope Francis (2024, n.3, 6, 21, 23) who draws from the Greek etymology word *kardia* to argue that being foundational to a healthy life project and harmony, “the heart appears as the locus of desire and the place where important decisions take shape. [This leads to understanding that the heart makes the] unity of body and soul with a coordinating centre that provides a backdrop of meaning and direction to all that a person experiences”. From the anthropology of the heart, it follows that the formation of ecological consciousness requires a shift of focus because it is out of love that humanity can recognise the dignity of others and work “together to care for our common home” (Pope Francis 2024, n.217).

Discussing the ecology of the heart, Schroeder (1996:14-16) argues for the interwoven wonder of the human being in the face of the beauty of creation and the magnificence towards God, the Creator of this beauty. Appreciating the environmental nature in its profound and intrinsic reality, human beings let their hearts be soothed to free them to love their fellow beings and all other created beings. The understanding of people comes through their experience with their environment, which includes (in a non-exhaustive way), “the kinds of emotions, imaginative and inspirational experiences” that are intrinsically connected to others<sup>93</sup> (Schroeder 1996:14). Training for ecological sensitivity then propels to the cognisance that a profound change can be possible if human beings can look at the world with the eyes of the heart. Anderson (1996) approaches ecology in Schroeder’s orientation when, based on the theory of connectivity between ecology and culture, he asserts that a strong environmental management system requires an understanding of human emotions<sup>94</sup>. Environmental engagement and human-nature and culture are inextricable. That is why Anderson (1996:175) further argues that “knowledge, emotion, and social institutions are inseparable, and all are involved in all significant action in the environment”.

The scope of seminars, workshops, conferences, and round-table discussions that the Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon is encouraged to intensify the organisation is imperative to get people to endorse an ecological lifestyle. As expressed by the interview’s participants, this eco-lifestyle is possible through solidarity with the populations who are victims of deforestation, mine extraction, climate change, water pollution, and stinking garbage bins in towns and cities. The repercussion of training hearts to the ecological sensibility should be verified through the way people experience tender love for all creatures, the way they listen to the cry of the poor and of the earth and, through their struggle

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<sup>93</sup> From the perspective of Schroeder (1996: 14, 17), the term “others” includes human beings as part of the ecosystem.

<sup>94</sup> From Anderson’s perspective, it can be argued that frustrated people are dangerous to fellow human beings and to the natural environments.

for justice, peace and reconciliation with others. In agreement with the theoretical articulation of Chryssavgis (2019) and Lane (2020), it becomes evident that an ecology of the heart makes people aware of how beings are connected, how to care for one another in a universal fraternity, and how to practice an operational responsibility towards what is common. In this way, the paradigm is shifted from excessive individualism to altruism, where people feel united with others to better listen to the groaning of the earth with the rhythm of the heartbeat of the human body. Until now, the elaboration on training has focused on the cognitive or even rational and affective or emotional dimensions that can motivate the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church to effectively engage in what can be termed eco-cardio theology in its effort towards the safeguarding of the environment. It now appears suitable to look at the functional aspect of these two previous models (cognitive and affective) in the community reality for the empowerment of all.

### **7.5.3. Training as Capacity-Building for the Environmental Protection**

This proposition emerged from MP8's answers to Question 7 and MP8's answer to Question when participants suggested that "training on socio-ecological teaching of the Church should be carried out both in mission stations and in Small Christian Communities to build the capacities of community-based personnel at diocesan and parish levels". Even though only two participant alluded to this notion, the scope and depth of the theme raised are not the least, especially in a context (like that of Cameroon) where training people in and for the community to "deal with their own problems and development has become an important aspect" in leadership (Atkinson and Willis, 2006:1). This suggestion appears to be in conversation with the servant leadership theory as elaborated earlier. Augusta and Azmy (2023) and Foulkrod and Lan Lin (2024) discuss servant leadership theory in terms of people-centredness, which implies attention and listening to others, bottom-up management, forming others to become "good" leaders, and sharing responsibilities. The underlying thought behind this suggestion of capacity-building through training seems to be the enforcement of the involvement of the community in the engagement for the protection of the environment and biodiversity. In line with this thought, Uzoaru and Ntente (2021) consider community-based environmental training as a process that "involves learning activities that relate to environmental problems in a community setting", and on ecological-related topics through "promoting responsible environmental behavioural change toward the environment". In this reality, community-based personnel are viewed as people capacitated through training to accompany the community in the implementation of the environmental policies initiated by the Roman Catholic Church and, as far as possible, by the government in its incumbent role. It should be noted that these environmental facilitators are members of the community in which they live and work. Community-based initiatives create and stimulate the

proximity through which the community takes care of the environmental protection of its living space. With the assistance and support of trained people, members appropriate and assume control of the ecological responsibility of their local community while collaborating with the parish and the Diocese of their ecclesial territories. Environmental agents make available their experience and ecological sensitivity to help each person live in a healthy environment. The objective of community-based training is the connection of the environment and the socio-economic to build the integrity that generates the common welfare for the entire community<sup>95</sup>. The basic idea is the praxis of integral ecology, which finds its usefulness and fruitfulness in conversation with the UN's *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (ASD, 2015) of the international community. As already mentioned, the UN's goals include seventeen objectives which aim at defeating poverty, reducing inequalities and safeguarding the planet, our common home. Journeying with and accompanying the community, environmental personnel have the mission to train other members to carry out the work of implementing decisions for the preservation of nature in different dimensions of life.

The ecological training of everyone in the community constitutes an effective force for safeguarding the common good, which is the environmental space. Each member of the community thus becomes the guardian of a healthy environment because they can denounce anti-ecological or environmental habits such as polluting or littering activities, bush-burning and deforestation. It is precisely from capacity-building that activists for ecological conviction emerge and become informed champions for environmental safeguarding. From the outlines of capacity-building, it appears that community involvement is crucial for the effectiveness of any intervention by the Roman Catholic Church in the context of an effort to actively implement the socio-ecological documents. It is in this vein that Marsili *et al.* (2020) argue that in polluted areas where the health of the populations is at stake, worthwhile interventions require the involvement of the affected communities. In this framework, the concept of social capacities is then appraised "in a perspective aimed at empowerment and the promotion of environmental justice" (Marsili *et al.* 2020:12). The responsibility for empowering the community lies with the leadership of the church. This empowerment involves a back-and-forth movement between the bottom and the top: the triplicity of decision, follow-up and feedback. It is therefore an urgency for the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon to train the community towards an integral ecological preservation. It is through this grassroots ecological training for

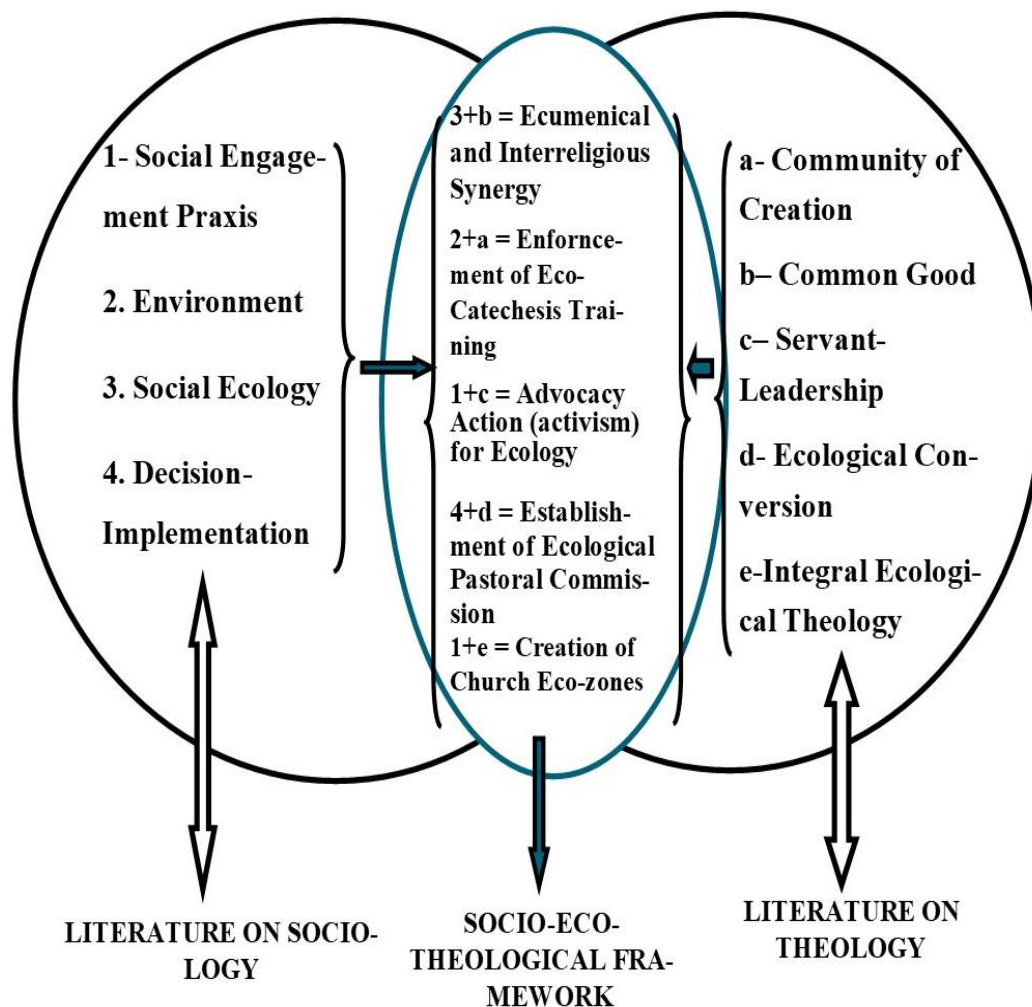
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<sup>95</sup> Diseases caused by an unsanitary environment not only degrade human health but also increase the cost of treatment (economic effects). Therefore, diseases must be prevented by living in a clean environment. Hence, the importance and mission of trained basic environmental agents.

capacity-building that socio-ecological documents such as the encyclical letters of various Popes can be effectively enacted.

### 7.6. Proposed Socio-Eco-Theological Framework

Drawing from the discussion of the key findings, a new theoretical foundation is proposed. Thus, it is appropriate to consider a connection vision of a socio-eco-theological (SET) framework towards environmental pastoral praxis and the implementation of socio-ecological documents beyond the Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon. This connecting vision is mostly supported by the literature review chapters of this thesis (Chapters 2 and 3). Figure 7.5 (2) represents the socio-eco-theological (SET) framework. This is an illustrative interconnection between Socio-Ecology and Eco-Theology.



**Figure 7.1: Illustration of interconnectedness between socio-ecology and eco-theology**

**Source:** The researcher

The Socio-Eco-Theological (SET) framework is demonstrated in the middle part of Figure 7.1. The SET is applicable in the academic and practical/pastoral theology environment, including implementing the socio-ecological documents. Moreover, the SET framework is articulated as the combination of discourse and action with, and for, the community at the grassroots. It thus bridges the gap between the poor and the rich for a more social transformation. The framework applies as follows:

- ✓ The ecumenical and inter-religious synergy has emerged from rethinking socio-ecological engagement towards the economic common good, cosmic harmony, and social wellbeing. This view is drawn from the scholarly work of Falcon (2016), Schlichten (2017), Osuji (2018), Nginshuti (2018), Ruppel and Tchente (2018), Pope Francis (2020), and Giraud (2023). These scholars converge towards bringing into play the servant leadership theory in the service of social transformation through ecological preservation. An ecumenical and inter-religious ecological dialogue thus exemplifies in this study the reliability of the pastoral project for the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church and the broader Christian community in Cameroon and elsewhere.
- ✓ The themes of environment and community of creation intersect and give rise to the enforcement of eco-catechetical training. These themes find support in works of Conradie (2003), De Gruchy (2009), Shapiro *et al.* (2022), Ngaba *et al.* (2023:1), and Chryssavgis (2019). These scholars emphasise the importance of inclusive management of the common home, the earth. Eco-catechetical training reverberates in the Theory of Integral-Eco-Theology and as an inspiration for feasible ways in implementing socio-ecological documents at the community level. For instance, celebration of the Eucharist at the foot of the Baobab tree and the enhancement of hymns and prayers towards the preservation of creation, insertion of reforestation, and sustainability in catechesis.
- ✓ The convergence of social engagement praxis and servant leadership has brought about advocacy action for ecology. These themes find support in Donati (2013), Johnson (2018), Hartley (2016), Borghi *et al.* (2022), Siregar *et al.* (2022), and Goujon (2023). The common thread among scholars is the engagement of the servant leader in the cause of social ecology. Theoretically, social commitment and servant leadership become a *sine qua non* disposition to listen to the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth. Practically, advocacy action by the Roman Catholic Church translates through denunciation and demonstration against deforestation and other environmental degradation, lobbying aiming at bringing decision-

makers to initiate, vote, implement, and enforce rules and regulations in favour of forest protection in Cameroon.

- ✓ The thematic interconnection between implementation-decision and ecological conversion has led to the establishment of environmental commissions as a feasible outcome. These commissions characterise the social choice rules and specificity in goal orientation that underpins the implementation theory. The interconnectedness discussed by Jackson (1999), Maskin and Sjöström (2001), and Goujon (2023). The intersecting arguments in the discussion emphasise the effectiveness of decision-making and the integration of sustainable morality in faith that aims to transform human ways of life, production, policies and representations in the world. The environmental pastoral praxis of this connection is the involvement of all Christians in the ecological through community-based commissions for an effective implementation of the socio-ecological documents by the Roman Catholic Church's leadership in Cameroon.
- ✓ Donati (2013), Pope Francis (2015), Johnson (2018), and Badidiunde (2021) converge towards social engagement praxis and integral ecological theology. Motivated and strengthened by the Integral Eco-Theology Theory, social engagement has the potential to transform people's lives (living conditions) and their environment. The combination of social engagement praxis and integral ecological theology has led to the creation of church eco-zones, which are enabled by a differentiative collection of waste in families, church and school premises, promoting sustainable and bio-agriculture and creating orchards in church lands. The creation of ecological zones in parishes or church communities aligns with the application of SDG 13, which aims to "combat climate change" and mitigate its impacts, especially in "the more vulnerable regions" of the globe.

## **7.7. Summary of Chapter**

This chapter discussed the research findings in view of the research problem and the research objectives, considering the support of the conceptual and theoretical framework. This discussion was carried out drawing from salient themes that emerged from the interviews with participants. In this perspective, the theme of environmental awareness was aligned with objective 1 of the research; that of small Christian communities, with objective 3; that of catechesis for social transformation, with objective 2 and finally, that of training for capacity-building with objective 4.

Raising awareness means making people understand the need or the merits of a healthy environment in their physiological, psychological, economic and social wellbeing. Raising awareness also involves a proximity effort through small community cells of the Roman Catholic Church, where neighbours take ownership of their environmental issues and find practical solutions<sup>96</sup> to commune in the service of one another. Furthermore, the need for catechesis for ecological transformation is viewed as crucial in terms of teaching and evangelising for the conversion of hearts. It is a step towards *metanoia* and *kairos*<sup>97</sup> for an ecologically transformed Roman Catholic Church and Cameroon's society. It was important to emphasise the reality and the notions according to which ecology and environmental preservation necessarily intersect through education at all levels (family, primary school, secondary school and university) to form and to guide a new generation: a generation concerned about and connected with the common home and common good which is the Earth. This ecologically empowered generation from the Roman Catholic Church is undoubtedly able not only to solve the current environmental crisis in Cameroon, but also to regenerate a new dawn in co-responsibility and respect for Mother Earth.

The discussion on the above themes was done in dialogue with the findings and under the light of the theoretical framework previously defined. It has appeared that an adequate environmental social engagement praxis requires working in synergy with other faith-based organisations, religious education of consciences towards ecological preservation, feasible action planning through advocacy, connection with the grassroots communities, and making churches the places for implementing the green revolution (establishment of eco-zones). The analysis of themes and discussion of findings highlight and substantiate the existence of an environmental social engagement crisis and reveal the lack of effective implementation of socio-ecological documents by the Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon. This thesis statement establishes a theoretical basis and leads to the conclusion of this study. The convergence between the review of literature in Sociology and Theology and research findings led to the proposal of a socio-eco-theological (SET) framework as a new theoretical foundation to build practical avenues for ecological pastoral praxis and the effective implementation of socio-ecological documents at the grassroots level by the Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon. These approaches are developed in the next chapter.

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<sup>96</sup> The term "practical solutions" refers to its measurability and implementation.

<sup>97</sup> According to Youvan (2024:1-2), the Greek word *kairos* is "a multifaceted concept with deep roots in various disciplines, including philosophy, theology, mythology, and practical applications. (It is the embodiment of) the idea of the right or opportune moment for action". Theologically, *kairos* is considered the time or the opportunity for the recognition of the realisation of God's presence among God's people. This presence is synonymous with God's Kingdom manifested by justice, peace, joy, brotherly and sisterly love/charity, solidarity, to mention a few.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY

#### 8.1. Introduction

The study findings highlighted that an environmental social engagement crisis exists in Cameroon and confirmed that there is a lack of effective implementation of socio-ecological documents by the Roman Catholic Church NECC. The scope of this chapter is the presentation of the general synopsis of the study. It encapsulates all the work as elaborated in the previous chapters. The aim is to bring the study together as a one-roofed unit under the socio-eco-theological framework. Considering the investigation and analysis of data collected in the context of the research, the chapter further provides some recommendations that could lead to the effective implementation of the socio-ecological documents. This concluding chapter also presents some limitations to the study and points to a few indications or spheres for future research. These areas presented further down stand as having the potential to enrich not only the acquisition of academic knowledge, but also the enhancement of the practice of engagement in the safeguarding of creation.

#### 8.2. Summary to the Study

The study is summarised from Chapters One to Seven using the Research Questions (RQs) to show how the study objectives were achieved and how each chapter contributed answers to each research question and the research findings.

***RQ 1: What are the theories underlying social engagement praxis and socio-ecological theology?***

The main objective of this study was to explore the theological perspectives which underlie the environmental social engagement praxis towards the implementation of the socio-ecological documents of the Roman Catholic Church by the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon. To achieve this objective, the study sought to answer several research questions, considering the elaboration of each chapter. Research question 1: *What are the theories underlying social engagement praxis and socio-ecological theology?* This study established that the theories underlying social engagement praxis are implementation, servant leadership, and integral eco-theology. Chapter four of the study contributed through a dyadic conceptual-theoretical referential structure whose components are implementation, servant leadership, integral eco-theology and socio-ecological

engagement. This conceptual and theoretical framework served as functionality and feasibility towards the effective implementation of the socio-ecological documents by the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon. It emerged that the wholeness and sacredness of creation and leadership at the service of the common good and communion constitute the centrality for the enactment of the socio-ecological documents. Additionally, it emerged that these notions are foundational for an ecological objective of the wellbeing of creation: humans and non-humans.

***RQ 2: What theological studies have been carried out on the implementation of the ecological documents of the Roman Catholic Church by the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon at the community level?***

Chapters two and three played a key role in answering research question 2 about *theological studies that have been carried out on the implementation of the ecological documents of the Roman Catholic Church by the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon at the community level*. These chapters have enabled the study to fill the insufficiency of theological studies carried out by the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon by evaluating a set of bodies of literature on social engagement praxis and ecological theology. The themes of environment and social ecology have led to highlighting the degradation of the African equatorial forest, or the Congo Basin, of which Cameroon is part and the urgency of ecological preservation for socio-economic transformation. The social approach of the literature on ecology further emphasises the need for disciplinary intertwining to better address the issue of the environmental crisis. The scholarship on ecological theology has opened a foundational structure for understanding creation as a masterpiece of God that deserves to be sustainably safeguarded for the wellbeing of humans and non-humans. The literature on eco-theology has led to the discovery of a triad of conceptual paradigms that modulate human relationships to creation. These conceptual model-frames include first, the dominion model whose roots go back not only to the biblical text of Genesis but also to the philosophical anthropology of the Renaissance and Modern eras, particularly with Leonardo Da Vinci and René Descartes; second, the stewardship model which differentiates itself from dominion by the establishment of an analogical network between humans and the rest of creation and considers human beings as custodians of all that exist on earth, the common home; and third, the community model of creation whose proponents champion that God makes human beings an integral part of an interdependent and interconnected community.

The literature further revealed that the community model of creation is underpinned by the vision of the sacramental and creative presence of the Spirit of God in the world. The sacramental divine

presence in the world thus impels human beings to shift from viewing creation merely as an object for exploitation, to consider themselves as rooted in this neighbourhood of creation and to develop a new planetary spirituality framed and enlightened by respect for all created beings. Other notions addressed by the literature of ecological theology in the context of this study include the common good and servant leadership. While the common good is articulated as a principle rooted in ancient philosophy (notably with Aristotle rediscovered by Thomas Aquinas), in the Roman ancient rule, in the New Testament, in the social teaching of the Roman Catholic Church and, in secular scholars such as Hardin and Bullier; the servant leadership is considered in recent years as an alternative to traditional hierarchical approach of leadership. This consideration shift is driven by the evidence according to which servant leadership emphasises the praxis of empathy and compassion, selfless service to others (*diakonia*), bottom-up management, collaboration, listening, team-building development, humility, and shared authority. The common good is underpinned by the universal fraternity, which implies the communion (*koinonia*) of all God's creatures for reciprocal welfare.

***RQ 3: What theological evidence can be found that the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon is implementing the Roman Catholic Church's socio-ecological documents at the grassroots/community level?***

The study revealed that the NECC has established an organisation like the National Service for Justice and Peace, which concerns environmental issues. However, it remains evident that the Roman Catholic Church's leadership in Cameroon is not doing enough to implement the socio-ecological documents at the grassroots or community level. Chapters Six and Seven contributed to this view. The presentation of the interview results and findings in these chapters using the categorisation of key ideas from the interview participants and figures highlighted the general interest of the participants with broader visibility. The interview data has led to the revelation of five findings which involve the blocking of environmental protection projects by one of the bishops, the deficiency of support for environmental care activities by the NECC, the absence of awareness raising on the ecological crisis through pastoral letters from the bishops of Cameroon, the lack of connection between the NECC and the grassroots community and, the need for translation of socio-ecological documents of the Roman Catholic Church into people's local languages for more dissemination. These findings have brought to light the urgency of elaborating a socio-eco-theological framework to assist the Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon to effectively and realistically consider the implementation of the said socio-ecological documents. In this perspective, some emerging themes from the interview were analysed in order to develop a body of recommendations for a better implementation of socio-ecological documents. A conversational intertwinement has established the

connection between the themes of environmental awareness raising, small Christian communities, catechesis for socio-ecological transformation, and training on the study's objectives on the one hand, and the conceptual and theoretical framework on the other. While the theme of raising awareness on environmental issues through a targeted audience in the means of communication has proven essential, that of small Christian communities has attracted attention for its place in ecological evangelisation and the implementation of the socio-ecological documents from the grassroots level.

The study has demonstrated that the theme of awareness raising aligns with the concept of socio-ecological engagement, whereas that of the small Christian community connects with the concept of servant leaders whose priority remains the interest and wellbeing of the people at the grassroots level. Catechesis was highlighted as a fundamental and essential tool not only in terms of its doctrinal transmission of faith but also concerning its vision of ecological conversion, considered as the *metanoia* (inner transformation) for an authentic moral *oikos* (common household management). In the same vein, training has been highlighted in the study as key to enhancing the performance of the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church in its attempt to implement the socio-ecological documents. Training prevents the population from ignorance about the crisis linked to environmental degradation and equips them with the knowledge necessary to face the said crisis. The analysis further disclosed training as important for modelling hearts to compassion and empathy, which impel to go down into the depths of the suffering humanity to get in touch and to act to alleviate the ambient pathetic situation of ecology. Given that the findings from the interviews showed porous aspects in the implementation of social-ecological documents, the study further elaborated recommendations for the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon. These recommendations are drawn from socio-ecological and theological frameworks.

The interview technique was employed to systematically answer the research questions. The study has used interpretivist philosophy and a qualitative exploratory research design. This approach assisted the study not only in focusing on the understanding of the research findings but also in diving into areas of investigation that have been less researched, namely the theological perspectives that enable understanding the environmental social engagement praxis geared towards the implementation of socio-ecological documents. The Study used interviews as the primary data collection method by applying a semi-structured interview guide. The purposive sampling was used to interview twenty well-informed participants (one man and one woman from each Diocese) from ten Dioceses in Cameroon. The people interviewed were all members of the Roman Catholic Church. This approach was carried out in the framework of collecting valuable information on participants' activity in

environmental preservation and on the implementation of the socio-ecological documents. The *MS Excel* data analytic software has been applied as an interpretive qualitative technique to explore, process and analyse information gathered from the participants in the interview. Data collected through the interviews provides, after their exploitation, more detailed answers to the research problem and the objective of the study. The results and findings from interviews were presented in conversation with the conceptual and theoretical framework of environmental social engagement and the research methodology.

***RQ 4: What theological interventions can be proposed for the effective implementation of the Roman Catholic Church's socio-ecological documents in addressing environmental and social engagement in Cameroon?***

This fourth research question is answered both in Chapter Seven and in the current chapter. As already mentioned above, the pinnacle of this study was to propose an actionable intervention for the effective implementation of the socio-ecological documents of the Roman Catholic Church in addressing the environmental and social engagement issues in Cameroon. Drawing from the findings, a socio-ecological (SET) framework is proposed as a new theoretical underpinning for pastoral socio-ecological praxis toward achieving efficient implementation of socio-ecological documents in and beyond the Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon.

### **8.3. Recommendations**

As already mentioned, the recommendations highlighted in this concluding section of the study are oriented towards the environmental social engagement praxis. In other words, these recommendations are practical mainsprings that point towards an effective implementation of the socio-ecological documents of the Roman Catholic Church in addressing environmental and social engagement in Cameroon. At first glance, it should be noted that these recommendations are not only of equal intrinsic importance but are also parallel and complementary. They hold together and complement each other. For this reason, their elaboration below is not categorised in order of merit or importance. The recommendations are drawn from the proposed socio-eco-theological (SET) framework for ecological pastoral praxis and the effective implementation of socio-ecological documents at the community level by the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon. Dioceses under the NECC are urged to create ecological zones to facilitate efficient waste management policy and green landscape operational projects and activities.

1. The leadership of the Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon is encouraged to work in ecumenical and inter-religious synergy with other faith communities for an effective preservation of the environment.
2. The NECC should enhance an eco-catechetical liturgy in families, small Christian communities, schools, parishes, and conferences to facilitate the celebration of the integrity of creation in an act of thanksgiving.
3. The Roman Catholic Bishops are exhorted to establish a theoretical and practical socio-ecological curriculum in seminaries and in houses of formation for future priests and for religious men and women.
4. The NECC is invited to prophetically organise lobbying and advocacy actions against deforestation and other environmental degradations to various stakeholder groups, including the administrative and political authorities.
5. The NECC is encouraged to establish a National Commission for Ecology to increase engagement and visibility of socio-ecological activities both at the Dioceses and parishes/communities' levels.
6. The NECC is called upon to organise an annual seminar on ecological crisis and to publish a Pastoral Letter addressing the blatant scourge of environmental issues in the country.
7. The NECC should ensure the translation of the Roman Catholic Church's socio-ecological documents into various predominant vernacular languages and the simplification of the said documents for better content-access, assimilation and implementation.

#### **7.4. Limitations of the Study**

The study was restricted to environmental social engagement praxis in Cameroon and within the framework of the National Episcopal Conference of the Roman Catholic Church. It did not investigate the socio-environmental commitment of the leadership of the other mainline and Protestant Churches present in the country, like the Presbyterian Church, the Evangelical Church, the Lutheran Church, and the Baptist Church, to name just a few.

Another limitation of this study is the time framework. The Roman Catholic Church has over 2000 years of history of social teaching. However, in its background, the study focused only on the last eighty years (1948-2023), from Pope Pius XI to Pope Francis. The rationale for this restraint was to better anchor on the subject in question: that of socio-ecological documents. Extrapolating from this historical context would risk unnecessary entanglement of the study.

## 8.5. Areas for Future Research

Further research would be required for greater improvement. For this purpose, six areas for future research have been identified as outlined below.

- **Area 1.** The investigation of individual Dioceses of the NECC using interviews to get their narrative and personal engagement in the environmental issues and implementation of socio-ecological documents in Cameroon would be of interest towards adding impetus to the involvement of the Catholic Church in addressing the ecological crisis in the country. This investigation will certainly demonstrate the willingness of certain leaders of the Roman Catholic Church to engage wholeheartedly alongside local communities in addressing environmental degradation and the spoliation of land from the people by logging and mining companies.
- **Area 2.** Another domain would be the socio-economic impact of environmental degradation on the wellbeing of the population of Cameroon. This investigation could be carried out using either interviews or group discussions. It is no secret that environmental degradation in Cameroon is causing unbearable socio-economic burdens. The people who are victims of these environmental challenges could inform the academic and ecclesiastical settings either on their resilience mechanisms or on suggestions for alleviating the ecological impasse.
- **Area 3.** The comparative study of socio-ecological engagement praxis between two ecclesiastical bodies or structures would be useful and informative in terms of knowledge acquisition. An exemplary case of such a comparative study would be an investigation of the implementation of socio-ecological documents by the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon and the SACBC. A future comparative analytical approach to the two ecclesial structures may be possible because the SACBC has already issued documents in the framework of the safeguarding of creation. These documents include its Pastoral Statement on the Environmental Crisis of 1999, its pastoral plan published in 2019 entitled “Evangelising Community Serving God, Humanity and all Creation”, and other related articles in the Catholic Journal such as the *Southern Cross*.
- **Area 4.** A certain number of questions were raised about the finding that a Bishop refused to sign funding applications for environmental projects in his Diocese (see Section 6.3.1). These

questions have received little attention in the study because they need further thorough investigations to know the motives or reasons for this episcopal obstinacy. However, it would be useful to return to this Diocese and conduct interviews with the aim not only of determining the rationale for such “leadership” behaviour, but also of contributing to the fluidity of relationships between the bishop and his environmental workers.

- **Area 5.** Another realm for future study would be the search for the existence of learning networks of secular NGOs in environmental preservation, such as government agencies, traditional religion in Cameroon, and the socio-economic transformational impacts of these organisations on people’s lives.
- **Area 6.** An exploration into the connectedness of justice, peace and integrity of creation in the context of Cameroon and Africa in general. Cameroon and Africa are fragmented by wars, conflicts, poverty, and the obstructive effects of climate change. Academic research to establish the performance role of justice, peace, and integrity of creation would be crucial in attempting to overcome these humanitarian challenges and finding alternative mechanisms or approaches to address both the cries of the earth and the marginalised poor. The dignity of creation is intrinsically connected to the dignity of the human person.
- **Area 7.** Further research into Cameroon’s indigenous knowledge, stories, and proverbs, which have sustained the environment for centuries, will enhance the Roman Catholic Church’s engagement in eco-inculturation and facilitate the efficient implementation of socio-ecological documents.

## **8.6. Conclusion**

In the context of a global ecological crisis, it was imperative to explore the socio-ecological engagements of the Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon, focusing on the implementation of socio-ecological documents by the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon (NECC). A socio-ecological argument was then drawn from the research findings.

This study concerned itself with the existence of a dearth of theological research on the environmental social engagement praxis, focusing on the implementation of socio-ecological documents of the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) by the NECC at the grassroots level. These documents have been enacted by the leadership of the RCC in Cameroon to enhance environmental preservation at the

community level. However, there was urgency to comprehend the theological perspectives that underscore the environmental social engagement praxis and the implementation of the socio-ecological documents of the Roman Catholic Church by the NECC. The main question sought to know if available theological perspectives can help to understand the environmental social engagement praxis and the implementation of the socio-ecological documents of the RCC by the NECC. Methodological procedures included, firstly, the review of literature on social ecology and ecological theology. Second, a threefold theory with the potentiality of its impact on socio-environmental engagement. Theories influencing social transformation include implementation theory (social choice and decision-making), Servant leadership theory (people-centred leadership with adaptability and collaboration), and Integral Eco-Theology Theory (interconnection between creation and the Creator, restoring dignity through socio-economic transformation). Third, the findings established and highlighted evidence of inadequacies in implementing socio-ecological documents by the NECC. These inadequacies connect to the socio-ecological engagement crisis. Drawing from the discussion of findings, a socio-eco-theological framework is proposed for the ecological pastoral praxis and implementation of socio-ecological documents by the NECC. The recommendations were drawn for more socio-ecological and economic transformative engagement by the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church in the country. The recommendations could assist the NECC in its perspective to theologically address environmental and social engagement.

From a theological and ecological perspective, this thesis contributes to the new knowledge by laying the SET framework as a new theoretical foundation for socio-ecological pastoral engagement and praxis beyond the Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon. The framework is not only enriching a body of literature in eco-theology but can also be used to guide the process of future research in *Theology and Development* towards socio-ecological environment praxis. The significance of the study lies in its ability to lead to new avenues in theology and social transformation. An example of this potential avenue is to assist the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon in its efforts to implement the socio-ecological documents. This connects well with the *Theology and Development* discipline, which is precisely to combine or marry theological theory with development practice.

Furthermore, this study is not a closed door. As already discussed in section 8.5, it paves the way for possible future research, which can not only enrich the *Theology and Development Programme* but also contribute to other theological and social science disciplines, thus fostering the achievement of the vision of SDG 13 on climate action. For instance,

- An investigation into the personal engagement of the NECC's Bishops in the environmental issues and implementation of socio-ecological documents.
- In-depth research into the socio-economic impacts of environmental degradation on the wellbeing of the population of Cameroon. This in-depth research will align with SDG 13, which refers to combating "climate change" and its impact, mainly on the more vulnerable regions of the world.
- A comparative study of socio-ecological engagement praxis between the NECC and SACBC, to mention just a few.

These areas identified for further research could expand the scholarship on the theological and practical implementation performance of socio-ecological documents in Cameroon and elsewhere. Ultimately, this thesis contributes to raising awareness of the environmental challenges facing humanity in general and Cameroon in particular. This ecological or environmental awareness contributes to improving the living conditions of the people, whether Christian or not, through their socio-economic transformation.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix i: Turnitin Similarity Index Report

Turnitin Originality Report

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Similarity by Source	
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Similarity Index  
**11%**

## Appendix ii: Ethical Clearance from UKZN



26 July 2024

Rev Gilbert Kamta Tatsi (220112667)  
School of Rel Phil & Classics  
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear Rev Tatsi,

**Protocol reference number:** HSSREC/00006841/2024

**Project title:** Environmental social engagement praxis: Exploring the implementation of socio-ecological documents by the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon

**Degree:** PhD

### Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 26 March 2024 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

**PLEASE NOTE:** Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

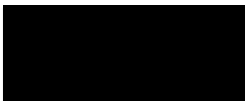
Incidents of adverse events and serious adverse events (AEs and SAEs) should be reported in writing to HSSREC, the study sponsors, and any regulatory authority (where appropriate), within 7 working days of the occurrence for local sites and 14 days for all other South African sites.

This approval is valid until 26 July 2025.

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Health Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,



Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)  
/nng

### Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa

Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 8350/4557/3587 Email: [hssrec@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:hssrec@ukzn.ac.za) Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics>

Founding Campuses:  Edgewood  Howard College  Medical School  Pietermaritzburg  Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

Appendix iii: Gatekeeper Letter



**Conférence Épiscopale Nationale du Cameroun**  
**National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon**

Code postal : B.P : 1963 Adresse : 7624 Avenue Mgr Henri Vieter, Yaoundé 3  
Tél. : 00 (237) 222 31 15 92/222 31 49 10 Fax : (237) 22 31 49 15 E-mail : [REDACTED]  
Pays : Cameroun Ville : Yaoundé - Mvolyé

N/Réf. 0335/CENC/SG/CO/PJJK/jph/04-24

**TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN :**

Gatekeeper's letter of permission and authorization

I, the undersigned, Mgr Jervis KEBEI KEWI, in my capacity as the Secretary General of the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon, and spokesperson of the Catholic Church in Cameroon, hereby give permission to a student named: **Gilbert Kamta Tatsi (Rev. Father) (Student No. 220112667)** to conduct research in the Head office and the territory of the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon (NECC) for the Ph.D project entitled: ***“Environmental Social Engagement Praxis: Exploring the Implementation of Socio-ecological Documents by the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon”.***

The student MAY use the name of the Organisation in the dissertation.

Done at Yaoundé, 24<sup>th</sup> April 2024

[REDACTED]  
Mgr Jervis KEBEI KEWI  
Secretary General (NECC)

**Appendix iv: Ethical Clearance from the Cameroon Ethical Committee for Research on Human Health**

<p>REPUBLIQUE DU CAMEROUN Paix -Travail- Patrie</p> <p>-----</p> <p>MINISTERE DE LA SANTE PUBLIQUE</p> <p>-----</p> <p>SECRETARIAT GENERAL</p> <p>-----</p> <p>COMITE NATIONAL D'ETHIQUE DE LA RECHERCHE POUR LA SANTE HUMAINE</p> <p>-----</p> <p>SECRETARIAT TECHNIQUE</p>		<p>REPUBLIC OF CAMEROON Peace -Work- Fatherland</p> <p>-----</p> <p>MINISTRY OF PUBLIC HEALTH</p> <p>-----</p> <p>SECRETARIAT GENERAL</p> <p>-----</p> <p>NATIONAL ETHICAL COMMITTEE FOR RESEARCH ON HUMAN HEALTH</p> <p>-----</p> <p>TECHNICAL SECRETARIAT</p>
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N° 2024/07/1693/CE/CNERSH/SP

Yaoundé, le 10 JUL 2024

**ETHICAL CLEARANCE**

The National Committee on Research Ethics for Human Health (CNERSH) in its ordinary session of June 14, 2024, examined the research project entitled: **“Environmental Social Engagement Praxis: Exploring the Implementation of Socio-ecological Documents by the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon”**, submitted by **Rev. Father Gilbert KAMTA TATSI**, Principal Investigator, University of Kwazulu-Natal.

The project is of great scientific and social interest. The general objective of this study is to understand to what extent the socio-ecological documents of the Roman Catholic Church have been implemented by the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon; it further aims to develop theological actions for effective implementation of the socio-ecological documents of the Roman Catholic Church in terms of environmental and social engagement in Cameroon. The study methodology is clearly documented. This study will take place at the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon. The risks linked to the study, although minor, are specified as well as the measures to avoid and minimise them. The information notice and consent form, in French and English, are well elaborated and easy to understand. The measures taken to guarantee the confidentiality of the data collected are presented in the document. The investigators’ CVs describe them as competent people, capable of carrying out this study. For all these reasons, the National Ethics Committee approves, for a period of one year, the implementation of the first version of the protocol.

Investigators are responsible for scrupulous compliance with the approved protocol and should not make any amendment, however minor, without a favourable opinion from CNERSH. The investigators are called upon to collaborate for any visit of the CNERSH to monitor the implementation of the approved protocol. The final project report must be submitted to CNERSH and the health authorities of Cameroon.

This clearance may be withdrawn in the event of non-compliance with the regulations in force and the aforementioned recommendations.

In witness whereof, this ethical clearance is issued to serve and assert what is right.

**Amplification**

- MINSANTE


  
**The President**
  

  
**Prof. MBACHAM Wilfred**

**N.B.** This ethical clearance does not exempt you from the administrative research authorization (AAR) required to conduct this study in the Cameroonian territory. This will be issued to you by the Minister of Public Health.

- N° d'enregistrement : IORG0007861-IRB00009439-FWA00016054 - [setcomina@gmail.com](mailto:setcomina@gmail.com)  
 - Arrêté N° 0977/A/MSP/SESP/SG/DROS du 18 avril 2012 portant création, organisation et fonctionnement des Comités d’Ethique de la Recherche pour la Santé Humaine au sein des structures relevant du ministère en charge de la santé publique.

## Appendix v: Invitation to participate in the interview (the English version)

### INFORMATION NOTICE

#### Invitation to Participate in the Study

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL (UKZN) HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES  
RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HSSREC)

For research with human participants

Information Sheet and Consent to Participate in Research

Date: .....

**Research Topic: Environmental Social Engagement Praxis: Exploring the Implementation of Socio-ecological Documents by the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon.**

**Principal Investigator (PI): Gilbert Kamta Tatsi.**

**Affiliation: School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics (SRPC), University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), Pietermaritzburg Campus, Scottsville, Pietermaritzburg – South Africa**

#### Contact Details:

*Ms Andile Mchunu*

*101B Pietermaritzburg*

*+27 33 260 5540.*

**Email:** [Mchunua@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:Mchunua@ukzn.ac.za)

You are being invited to consider participating in a study that involves research on environmental social engagement praxis at the grassroots level. The aim and purpose of this research is to understand the extent to which the socio-ecological documents of the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) have been implemented by the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon. It further aims at developing theological actions for the effective enactment of the RCC socio-ecological documents in addressing environmental and social engagement in Cameroon.

The duration of your participation if you choose to participate and remain in the study is expected to be 30 minutes in consideration of the following: The study is NOT funded by any entity.

The study does not involve any physical, psychological, legal, or informational risks and/or discomforts. I hope that the study will create the following benefits knowledge and positive view of the socio-ecological documents of the Roman Catholic Church:

1. The theological studies carried out on their implementation at the community level by the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon;
2. Actions for the effective implementation of the RCC socio-ecological documents in addressing environmental and social engagement in Cameroon.

There are no funding or financial rewards associated with participation in this study.

This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (reference number of the complete approval protocol: HSSREC/00006841/2024).

This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (reference number of the complete approval protocol: HSSREC/00006841/2024).

In the event of any problems or concerns/questions you may contact the researcher at:

**Gilbert Kamta Tatsi**  
**Via del Casale di San Pio V, 20**  
**00165 – Roma (Italia)**  
**Tel: +3[REDACTED] or +[REDACTED].**  
**Email: [REDACTED]**

Or the UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, contact details as follows:

**HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION**

**Research Office, Westville Campus**

**Govan Mbeki Building**  
Private Bag X 54001  
Durban 4000 KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA  
Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609  
Email: [HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za)

Your participation in the study is voluntary and by participating, you are granting the researchers permission to use your responses. You may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time with no negative consequence. There will be no monetary gain from participating in the study. Your anonymity will be maintained by the researcher and the School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics and your responses will not be used for any purposes outside of this study.

All data, both electronic and hard copy, will be securely stored during the study and archived for 5 years. After this time, all data will be destroyed.

If you have any questions or concerns about participating in the study, please contact me (the researcher) at the abovementioned address or my supervisor at the following address:

**Dr. Madondo Mfazo Clifford**

**School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics (SRPC), UKZN, Pietermaritzburg Campus.**

**Tel: +[REDACTED]**

**Email: [REDACTED]**

Sincerely

Gilbert Kamta Tatsi (PI).

## Appendix vi: Invitation to participate in the interview (the French version)

### Avis d'information

#### Invitation à participer à l'étude

**COMITÉ D'ÉTHIQUE DE LA RECHERCHE EN SCIENCES HUMAINES ET SOCIALES  
DE L'UNIVERSITÉ DU KWAZULU-NATAL – UKZN (HSSREC)**

#### DEMANDE D'APPROBATION ÉTHIQUE

*Pour la recherche avec des participants humains*

#### Fiche d'information et consentement pour la participation à la recherche

Date : .....

**Sujet de recherche : Praxis d'Engagement Socio-environnemental : Exploration de la Mise en Œuvre des Documents Socio-écologiques par la Conférence Episcopale Nationale du Cameroun.**

Investigateur Principal (IP) : Gilbert Kamta Tatsi.

Affiliation : Département de Religion, de Philosophie et des Lettres Classiques (SRPC), Université du KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), Campus de Pietermaritzburg, Scottsville, Pietermaritzburg – Afrique du Sud.

#### Contact :

**Ms Andile Mchunu**  
**101B Pietermaritzburg**  
**+27 33 260 5540.**  
**Email: [Mchunua@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:Mchunua@ukzn.ac.za)**

Vous êtes invité à envisager participer à une étude qui implique la recherche sur la pratique de l'engagement socio-environnemental au niveau local. Le but de cette recherche est de comprendre dans quelle mesure les documents socio-écologiques de l'Église catholique romaine (ECR) ont été mis en œuvre par la Conférence épiscopale nationale du Cameroun. Elle vise en outre à développer des actions théologiques pour une mise en œuvre efficace des documents socio-écologiques du ECR en matière d'engagement environnemental et social au Cameroun.

La durée de votre participation si vous choisissez de participer et de rester dans l'étude devrait être de 30 minutes en tenant compte de l'élément suivant : l'étude n'est financée par aucune entité.

L'étude n'implique aucun risque et/ou inconfort physique, psychologique, juridique ou informationnel. J'espère que l'étude créera les avantages suivants en matière de connaissance et d'une vision positive des documents socio-écologiques de l'Église catholique romaine :

1. Les études théologiques réalisées sur leur mise en œuvre au niveau communautaire par la Conférence Episcopale Nationale du Cameroun ;
2. Les actions pour la mise en œuvre efficace des documents socio-écologiques du ECR en matière d'engagement environnemental et social au Cameroun.

Il n'y a aucun financement ou récompense financière associé à ta participation à cette étude.

Cette étude a été examinée et approuvée sur le plan éthique par le comité d'éthique de la recherche en sciences humaines et sociales de l'UKZN (numéro de référence du protocole d'approbation complet : [HSSREC/00006841/2024](#)).

En cas de problèmes ou de préoccupations/questions, vous pouvez contacter le chercheur à l'adresse suivante :

**Gilbert Kamta Tatsi**  
Via del Casale di San Pio V, 20  
00165 – Rome (Italie)  
Tél : + [REDACTED] ou + [REDACTED].  
Courriel : [REDACTED]

Ou le comité d'éthique de la recherche en Sciences Humaines et Sociales de l'UKZN, dont les coordonnées sont les suivantes :

#### **ADMINISTRATION DE L'ÉTHIQUE DE LA RECHERCHE EN SCIENCES HUMAINES ET SOCIALES**

**Bureau de Recherche, Campus de Westville**  
**Bâtiment Govan Mbeki**  
**Sac privé X 54001**  
**Durban 4000 KwaZulu-Natal, AFRIQUE DU SUD**  
Tél : 27 31 2604557 - Fax : 27 31 2604609  
Courriel : [HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za).

Votre participation à l'étude est volontaire et en y participant, vous autorisez le chercheur à utiliser vos réponses. Vous pouvez refuser de participer ou vous retirer de l'étude à tout moment sans aucune conséquence négative. Il n'y aura aucun gain monétaire en participant à l'étude. Votre anonymat sera maintenu par le chercheur et le Département de Religion, de Philosophie et de Lettres Classiques et vos réponses ne seront utilisées à aucune fin en dehors de cette étude.

Toutes les données, tant électroniques que calligraphiés (notes prises sur papier), seront stockées en toute sécurité pendant l'étude et archivées pendant 5 ans. Passé ce délai, toutes les données seront détruites.

Si vous avez des questions ou des préoccupations concernant la participation à l'étude, veuillez me contacter (l'investigateur principal) à l'adresse mentionnée ci-dessus ou mon superviseur à l'adresse suivante :

**Dr Madondo Mfazo Clifford,**  
**Département de Religion, de Philosophie et de Lettres Classiques (SRPC), UKZN, Campus de Pietermaritzburg – Afrique du Sud.**  
Tél : + [REDACTED].  
Courriel : [REDACTED]

Sincèrement,

Gilbert Kamta Tatsi (IP).

## Appendix vii: Statement of Consent from the Participant (the English version)

### STATEMENT OF CONSENT

I, ..... have been informed about the study entitled: **Environmental Social Engagement Praxis: Exploring the Implementation of Socio-ecological Documents by the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon.**

I understand the purpose and procedures of the study.

I have been given an opportunity to ask questions about the study and have had answers to my satisfaction.

I declare that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without affecting any of the benefits that I usually am entitled to.

I have been informed about any available compensation or medical treatment if injury occurs to me as a result of study-related procedures.

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study I understand that I may contact the researcher at the following address:

**Gilbert Kamta Tatsi**  
**Via del Casale di San Pio V, 20**  
**00165 – Roma (Italia)**  
**Tel: +[REDACTED] or +[REDACTED].**  
**Email: [REDACTED]**

If I have any questions or concerns about my rights as a study participant, or if I am concerned about an aspect of the study or the researchers then I may contact:

### **HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION**

**Research Office, Westville Campus**

**Govan Mbeki Building**

**Private Bag X 54001**  
**Durban 4000**  
**KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA**  
**Tel: 27 31 2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609**  
**Email: [HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za)**

Additional consent, where applicable

I hereby provide consent to:

Take notes during the interview YES / NO

Audio-record my interview YES / NO

Video-record my interview YES / NO

Use of my photographs for research purposes YES / NO

I agree to take part in the postgraduate supervision model study, including any necessary follow-up. I certify that all the information above is correct. I understand that clicking 'Submit' will electronically sign the form and that signing this form electronically is the equivalent of signing a physical document.

---

**Signature of Participant via Consent**

---

**Date**

---

**Signature of Witness**  
(N/A)

---

**Date (N/A)**

---

**Signature of Translator**  
(N/A)

---

**Date (N/A)**

## **Appendix viii: Statement of Consent from the Participant (the French version)**

### **DÉCLARATION DE CONSENTEMENT**

Je, ..... ai été informé(e) du projet d'étude intitulé : **Praxis d'Engagement Socio-environnemental : Exploration de la Mise en Œuvre des Documents Socio-écologiques par la Conférence Episcopale Nationale du Cameroun.**

Je comprends le but et les procédures de l'étude.

J'ai eu l'occasion de poser des questions sur l'étude et j'ai obtenu des réponses à ma satisfaction.

Je déclare que ma participation à cette étude est entièrement volontaire et que je peux me retirer à tout moment sans que cela n'affecte aucune des prestations auxquelles j'ai habituellement droit.

J'ai été informé(e) de toute indemnisation ou traitement médical disponible si une blessure me survient à la suite de procédures liées aux études.

Si j'ai d'autres questions ou préoccupations ou requêtes liées à l'étude, je comprends que je peux contacter l'investigateur principal à l'adresse suivante :

**Gilbert Kamta Tatsi**

**Via del Casale di San Pio V, 20**

**00165 – Rome (Italie)**

**Tél : + [REDACTED] ou + [REDACTED]**

**Courriel : [REDACTED]**

Si j'ai des questions ou des préoccupations concernant mes droits en tant que participant à l'étude, ou si je suis préoccupé(e) par un aspect de l'étude ou de l'investigateur principal, je peux contacter :

### **ADMINISTRATION DE L'ÉTHIQUE DE LA RECHERCHE EN SCIENCES HUMAINES ET SOCIALES**

**Bureau de recherche, Campus de Westville**

**Bâtiment Govan Mbeki**

**Sac privé X 54001**

**Durban 4000**

**KwaZulu-Natal, AFRIQUE DU SUD**

**Tél : 27 31 2604557 - Fax : 27 31 2604609**

**Courriel : HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za**

Consentement supplémentaire, le cas échéant

Par la présente, je consens à :

Prendre des notes pendant l'entretien OUI / NON

Enregistrer mon entretien en audio OUI / NON

Enregistrer mon entretien en vidéo OUI / NON

Utilisation de mes photographies à des fins de recherche OUI / NON

J'accepte de participer à l'étude du modèle d'encadrement postdoctoral, incluant tout suivi nécessaire. Je certifie que toutes les informations ci-dessus sont exactes. Je comprends que cliquer sur « Soumettre » signera électroniquement le formulaire et que signer électroniquement ce formulaire équivaut à signer un document physique.

---

Signature du participant

---

Date de consentement

---

Signature du témoin  
(N / A)

---

Date (N / A)

---

Signature du traducteur  
(N / A)

---

Date (N / A)

## **Appendix ix: Interview Guide (the English version)**

**University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN)**

**Student Name: Gilbert Kamta Tatsi.**

**Student Number: 220112667.**

**Project Title: Environmental Social Engagement Praxis: Exploring the Implementation of Socio-ecological Documents by the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon.**

**Supervisor: Dr. Madondo Mfazo Clifford.**

**Semi-structured interview guide to members of Justice and Peace Commissions in Cameroon**

### **I. The Participant's Biographical Information**

**Interviewee's Name and surname: .....**

**Age: .....**

**Diocese:.....**

**Number of years in the environmental preservation: .....**

**Any leadership position: .....**

**Approximate length of interview: 30 minutes,**

**Number of Questions: 8**

### **II. Interview Guide questions**

1. Tell me about your involvement in church environmental preservation activities. How and why are you involved?
2. How has the church leadership trained you in the ecological teaching of the Roman Catholic Church?
3. Tell me about the document(s) have you read to help you implement of the socio-ecological teaching at grassroots level.
4. Tell me about environmental preservation issues your diocese is committed to. Why?
5. How is the bishop of your diocese showing the importance of environmental care and preservation issues?
6. Tell me about ecological preservation assistance that the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon has been providing you as a worker and a church member.

7. How should the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon implement socio-ecological teaching at the community level?
8. How should the Church documents like the *Laudato Si'* on the protection of the environment be implemented at the parish level?

**Interviewer:** Thank you for your participation. I believe your input will be valuable to this study and in helping **enhance the implementation of the socio-ecological documents for effective environmental preservation at the community level.**

## Appendix x : Guide d'Interview (la version française)

L'Université de KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN)

Nom de l'étudiant: Gilbert Kamta Tatsi.

Numéro de carte d'étudiant: 220112667.

**Titre du Projet:** Praxis de l'Engagement Social Environnemental : Explorer la Mise en Œuvre des Documents Socio-écologiques par la Conférence Episcopale Nationale du Cameroun.

**Superviseur:** Dr. Madondo Mfazo Clifford.

Guide d'interview en questions semi-structurées destinées aux membres des Commissions Justice et Paix au Cameroun.

### I. Informations Biographiques du participant

Nom et prénom de la personne interviewée: .....

Âge: .....

Diocèse:.....

Nombre d'années dans la préservation environnementale: .....

Position de leadership: .....

**Durée approximative de l'entretien : 30 minutes,**

**Nombre de questions : 8.**

### I. Questions du guide d'interview

1. Parlez-moi de votre engagement dans les activités de préservation de l'environnement au sein de l'église. Comment et pourquoi y êtes-vous engagé ?
2. Comment est-ce que les dirigeants de l'Église vous ont-ils formé à l'enseignement écologique de l'Église catholique romaine ?
3. Parlez-moi du ou des documents que vous avez lus pour vous aider à mettre en œuvre l'enseignement socio-écologique sur le terrain.
4. Parlez-moi des questions de préservation environnementale dans lesquelles votre diocèse est engagé. Pourquoi?
5. Comment l'évêque de votre diocèse montre-t-il l'ampleur des questions de protection de l'environnement ?

6. Parlez-moi de l'assistance pour la préservation écologique que la Conférence Episcopale Nationale du Cameroun vous fournit en tant qu'ouvrier et membre de l'Eglise.
7. Comment est-ce que la Conférence Episcopale Nationale du Cameroun devrait-elle mettre en œuvre l'enseignement socio-écologique au niveau communautaire ?
8. Comment est-ce que les documents de l'Église, tel que *Laudato Si'* sur la protection de l'environnement devraient-ils être mis en œuvre au niveau paroissial ?

**Intervieweur:** Merci pour votre participation. Je pense que votre contribution sera précieuse à cette étude et contribuera à améliorer la mise en œuvre des documents socio-écologiques pour une préservation efficace de l'environnement au niveau communautaire.

## **Appendix xi: Codification of participants' identity**

**Transcription of answers from participants to the interview guide**

**Number of participants: 20**

**Codification of participants**

**P = participant(s)**

**M = male**

**F = female**

**MP... = Male participant ...  
(...) the participant's number)**

**FP... = Female participant...  
(...) the participant's number)**

**N.B. Numbers go from 1 to 10 for male participants and from 1 to 10 for female participants.**

## Appendix xii: Answers Sample to the Interview Guide Questions

**Question 6.** Tell me about ecological preservation assistance that the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon has been providing you as a worker and a church member.

### Answers

**Mp1.** I do not remember having ever received any assistance from the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon. I have the impression that the preservation of the environment is not a big concern of the Conference of Bishops of Cameroon. Each bishop takes care of it alone in his diocese.

**Fp1.** There is no special assistance from the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon.

**Mp2.** I can mention the following assistance from the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon:

- Support for some seminars on environmental preservation;
- Recommendations after the Bishops' assemblies.

It should be mentioned, however, that each diocese has its ecological realities.

**Fp2.** I can mention the following assistance from the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon:

- Sharing or disseminating Church documents on ecological issues;
- Promoting collaboration between ecclesiastical Provinces for synergistic work to convey the message of environmental protection at the level of dioceses, parishes, mission stations, Small Christian Communities (SCC) and Catholic action movements;
- Inter-religious dialogue where the environment is one of the themes discussed.

**Mp3.** No assistance. Except the National Service of Justice and Peace (NSJP) which sometimes gives some information on ecology and sanitation in the prison environment.

**Fp3.** The National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon does not assist in any way in ecological preservation.

(However, the bishop sometimes receives some donations from benefactors for environmental preservation and makes them benefit the entire diocesan Justice and Peace coordination).

**Mp4.** The National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon does nothing to support the Diocesan Justice and Peace Coordination in ecological preservation.

**Fp4.** The assistance of the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon for ecological preservation is very little. Some meagre passages of their pastoral letters sometimes deal with environmental issues.

**Mp5.** The National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon assist with training, e.g. training on *Laudato Si'* and land issues. However, it does not assist in any way in financing.

**Fp5.** I have no idea.

**Mp6.** The National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon assists through the National Justice and Peace Service: this service trains us through various seminars and coordinated actions to combat ecological degradation.

**Fp6.** The National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon assists through:

- The organization of training through seminars and conferences at the national level on the urgency of environmental issues;
- The provision of socio-ecological documents published by Pope Francis.

**Mp7.** I used to receive a little information on ecological preservation from the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon. However, it is a surprise to me that I have not yet heard of them sending pastoral letters concerning ecological preservation.

**Fp7.** The National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon assists through the organisation of seminars at the national level on Justice and Peace in link with ecological issues.

However, no pastoral letter was issued concerning ecological preservation.

**Mp8.** We have not heard of any assistance from the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon in relation to ecological preservation.

**Fp8.** N/A (Non Applicable)

**Mp9.** The National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon assists through:

- Advice;
- Vulgarisation of documents and recommendations of the Holy See on environmental issues;
- Recommendation of the bishops of Cameroon;
- Support of the Diocesan Justice and Peace Coordination by the National Service for Justice and Peace.

**Fp9.** The National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon assists through its support to the church (diocese) in the environmental project, e.g. distribution of sanitary materials.

**Mp10.** The National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon assists through different projects initiated by the National Service for Justice and Peace.

**Fp10.** NSTR (nothing significant to report).