

SYNODALITY, ECO-CONVERSION AND THE CHURCH IN AFRICA: A DIALOGUE THROUGH THE LENS OF *LAUDATO SI'*

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Abstract

This essay examines the interconnectedness of synodality, eco-conversion, and Pope Francis' encyclical Laudato Si', specifically emphasising their importance for the Church in Africa. It contends that comprehending these ideas together provides a persuasive vision for the Church's mission in advancing social justice and environmental sustainability in Africa. The scope of this essay encompasses the definition of synodality, eco-conversion, and Laudato Si', utilising pertinent theological and social principles from Catholic Social Teachings. Subsequently, it analyses the significance of these topics for the African Church, explicitly emphasising the continent's ecological and social obstacles. This analysis will examine the relationships between synodality, eco-conversion, and Laudato Si', demonstrating how these ideas might enhance the involvement and ecological consciousness of the Church in Africa. The study ends by examining the prospects and difficulties of applying these principles in the African setting, highlighting the significance of education and partnership in promoting a synodal and environmentally equitable African Church.

Keywords: Synodality, Eco-conversion, Laudato Si', Justice, Environmental sustainability.

1. Introduction

The current worldwide ecological catastrophe is characterised by unparalleled environmental deterioration, the exhaustion of natural resources, and the exploitation of susceptible groups. Considering these difficulties, the Catholic Church has formulated a social and ecological justice vision, drawing on theological principles like synodality, eco-conversion, and integrated ecology, as presented in Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical on the environment, *Laudato Si'*. These principles are becoming increasingly crucial for the African Church as environmental issues collide with cultural, social, and economic realities in distinct ways.

The Church in Africa, which is heavily influenced by communal ideals and possesses a strong bond with nature, is well-positioned to take the lead in

addressing the worldwide ecological issue. Nevertheless, accomplishing this task necessitates establishing a structure that effectively incorporates theological and environmental concepts into the Church's synodal operations. This essay examines the interconnectedness of synodality, eco-conversion, and *Laudato Si'*, specifically their potential contributions to fostering an environmentally equitable and spiritually dynamic African Church. This study illustrates how the African Church might become a global leader in ecological justice by analysing the theological underpinnings, cultural context, and practical applications of synodality and eco-conversion, influenced by *Laudato Si'*.

The Church in Africa faces tremendous social, environmental, and theological issues, making the notions of synodality, eco-conversion, and *Laudato Si'* highly relevant. These topics highlight the importance of working together and engaging in discussions within the Church, especially in the African setting where environmental degradation and socio-economic inequality are pressing concerns. As Pope Francis advocates, *synodality* fosters a more inclusive and cooperative Church. In the context of the African Church, this entails including clergy and laity in decision-making procedures, ensuring that the Church remains pertinent and adaptable to local concerns such as poverty, conflict, and environmental deterioration (Francis, 2018).

Eco-conversion is a conscientious and metaphysical reaction to the worldwide ecological emergency. It emphasises the need to change attitudes and beliefs towards a more substantial commitment to preserving the environment. This concept is firmly ingrained in African spirituality and traditional ethical frameworks, which place considerable importance on maintaining a harmonious relationship with nature (Chuwa, 2019). In a continent significantly impacted by climate change, deforestation, and resource exploitation, eco-conversion provides spiritual rejuvenation and practical resolutions to environmental issues. Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, focuses on the ecological catastrophe and calls for universal participation in preserving our shared environment. Its message is particularly relevant in Africa, where the most impoverished populations frequently suffer the most from environmental degradation (Francis, 2015). The African Church, by adopting the ideals of *Laudato Si'*, has a distinct advantage in being a frontrunner in promoting ecological justice and sustainable development.

Synodality is where the Church involves all its members in decision-making, discernment, and action through a collaborative and participatory process (Whelan, 2021). The practice of communal leadership in the early Church, where bishops, priests, and laypeople collaborated to discern God's will, forms the foundation of this concept. Synodality is a theological term based on communion (*koinonia*), which highlights the unity and variety of the Church as

the Body of Christ (Francis, 2018). Synodality embodies the Church's dynamic and interactive character, emphasising inclusiveness, collective accountability, and receptiveness to the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

Within the Church in Africa, synodality aligns closely with conventional structures of governance and leadership that prioritise communal decision-making and mutual assistance. African ecclesiology has been significantly influenced by the philosophy of Ubuntu, which expresses the idea that one's existence is interconnected with the collective existence of others (Mugambi, 2014). Ubuntu prioritises interdependence, solidarity, and communal well-being, which aligns it closely with synodality. Within traditional African leadership systems, decisions are commonly reached through consensus-building processes that prioritise the opinions of elders, leaders, and community members. This method aligns with the synodal strategy of the Church (Phiri, 2017).

Throughout history, the Church in Africa has actively adopted synodality as a fundamental aspect of its ecclesiastical organisation, utilising organisations such as synods, councils, and Small Christian Communities (SCCs). These venues offer opportunities for discourse, cooperation, and joint efforts, particularly regarding fairness, tranquillity, and progress. The *Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar* (SECAM) exemplifies the synodal ethos by convening African bishops to tackle regional and continental issues (Chitando & Nyakudya, 2019). In recent years, African synods have addressed peace-building, reconciliation, and social justice matters. Nevertheless, the ecological aspect of synodality still needs to be fully established. This essay contends that eco-conversion, as expressed in *Laudato Si'*, provides a crucial framework for incorporating ecological considerations into the synodal procedures of the African Church.

2. Synodality and the Church in Africa: Theological understanding, African Models and Ecclesiastical Contexts

Synodality refers to the concept and theological understanding of a collaborative decision-making process within a religious community, particularly in the context of the Catholic Church. It involves the active participation and consultation of various members, including clergy and laity, to discern and make decisions on faith, doctrine, and governance matters. Synodality, originating from the Greek term *synodos*, which translates to "walking together," is a theological notion that underscores the cooperative essence of the Church's mission. Pope Francis defines synodality as attentively heeding the Holy Spirit using the Word of God, prayer, and open conversation among believers (Francis, 2018). It emphasises the involvement of all individuals within the Church, including bishops, clergy, and laity, in discernment and

decision-making. From a theological perspective, synodality is based on the belief that the Church consists of the People of God who collectively progress under the direction of the Holy Spirit (Vogt, 2020). The communal aspect of the Church is a direct reflection of the inherent essence of the Christian life, which is characterised by living in close association with others.

Synodality signifies a transition from a hierarchical and clerical framework of Church administration to a more collaborative and comprehensive one. The statement follows the ecclesiology of Vatican II, which prioritised the involvement of laypeople and stressed the significance of discussion and cooperation among various Church members (Whelan, 2021). Pope Francis has highlighted that synodality is not just a one-time occurrence but a continuous process. It is a way for the Church to come together, involving constant transformation, careful consideration, and active involvement in the Church's purpose and activities (Francis, 2018).

Synodality in early Christian communities thrived in North Africa, which was vibrant during St. Augustine's time (4th-5th centuries). The Church practised co-responsibility, dialogue, and collaboration among bishops, clergy, and laity. Key examples include:

St. Augustine's participation in regional councils, seeking God's will.

Council of Hippo (393): Augustine explained the symbol of faith, leading to *De Fide et Symbolo*.

Councils addressed liturgical, administrative, and moral issues.

Collaboration with the Apostolic See: North African bishops, including Augustine, alerted Pope Innocent I to Pelagianism, leading to its condemnation (Agustinos Reolestos, 2022). The synods convened by the Church at Carthage were crucial in influencing the development of early Christian theology and practice, specifically about the absolution of sins and the authority of bishops in Church administration (Mugambi, 2014).

The contemporary advancement of synodality in the African Church is intricately linked to the historical impact of colonialism and the subsequent post-colonial quest for autonomy (Adrian Hastings, 1994). The Catholic Church influenced numerous African nations by championing social justice, human rights, and political liberation. African bishops and clergy participated in synodal processes to tackle the various issues afflicting their countries, including poverty, political instability, ethnic strife, and environmental degradation (Chuwa, 2019). The Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) marked a significant shift for the African Church, as it advocated for increased involvement of the laity and fostered the growth of indigenous models of church administration. After Vatican II, numerous African bishops' conferences created synodal organisations to tackle the requirements and difficulties of their local circumstances (Falola, 2018).

The African Church has increasingly used synodality through dialogue to tackle present-day difficulties. For instance, The African Synod of 1994, with the theme, The Church in Africa and her Evangelising Mission Towards the Year 200, focuses on Reconciliation, Justice and development in the Church. (Ecclesia in Africa, 1995) The 2009 Synod titled “The Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace “ (Africae Munus, 2011) facilitated gatherings of African bishops, clergy, and laity to listen and pray with one another. The synodal procedures emphasised conversation, collaboration, and mutual support within the African Church. These processes were crucial in enhancing the Church's capacity to promote social justice and peace in Africa. All these conversations, I would argue, are profoundly shaped by African cultural and social paradigms, precisely the principles of Ubuntu, traditional leadership in Africa, and communal governance. These approaches align with theological concepts of synodality since they prioritise the significance of community, active involvement, and collaborative leadership.

Ubuntu is an African philosophical concept that highlights the interdependence of individuals and the significance of community. The idea is commonly encapsulated in the slogan, "I am because we are," which signifies that persons are shaped and characterised by their connections and interactions with others (Murove, 2009). Ubuntu holds profound theological significance for the African Church, as it corresponds with the Christian concept of communion and solidarity within the Church. Synodality, with its emphasis on collective decision-making and mutual understanding, aligns with the principles of Ubuntu by fostering a more encompassing and collaborative Church.

Furthermore, a collaborative and agreement-driven decision-making process distinguishes traditional leadership in numerous African communities (Ragolane, M & Malatji, T.L., 2023). Chiefs and elders frequently guide their communities by engaging in discourse and consulting with community members, ensuring that decisions are reached jointly rather than imposed by a sole leader (Chuwa, 2019). The synodal processes of the African Church embody a leadership model that promotes dialogue, active involvement, and collaborative leadership among bishops, clergy, and laity.

Conversely, communal governance in African states is based on communal accountability and collaborative decision-making. In African communities, decisions that impact the entire community generally fall under councils of elders or local leaders. These decisions are typically made through a process that places great importance on consensus and collective discernment (Mugambi, 2014). This governance model is based on the ideals of synodality, which aim to engage all members of the Church in the decision-making process and promote a collective feeling of responsibility for the Church's mission.

Thus, the African Church's embrace of synodality signifies the perpetuation of certain African traditional customs within a Christian framework. The African Church can enhance its synodal procedures by incorporating African cultural principles such as Ubuntu, communal government, and traditional leadership. This integration will result in a more inclusive and culturally appropriate approach to Church governance and pastoral care.

The African Church has already observed multiple instances of successful implementation of synodality. As mentioned above, the African Synod of 1994 convened bishops, clergy, and laity from various regions to tackle the obstacles faced by the Church in Africa in the aftermath of colonial rule. The Synod focused on reconciliation, justice, peace, and integral development. It underscored the imperative for the Church to advocate for the impoverished and marginalised segments of African society (De Souza, 2019). The synodal process served as a forum for discussion and cooperation among various members of the Church, and its results continue to influence the Church's purpose and service throughout Africa.

An additional illustration of synodality in the African Church is the function of bishops' conferences in fostering discourse and cooperation within the Church. Bishops' conferences in numerous African nations have implemented synodal structures, which facilitate gathering bishops, clergy, and laity to discuss social justice, human rights, and environmental sustainability (Chuwa, 2019). The synodal procedures have enhanced the Church's capacity to promote peace, reconciliation, and sustainable development in Africa (Ikenna O et al., 2024).

Apart from official synodal structures, African ecclesial environments exhibit grassroots synodality manifestations. Lay-led ecclesial organisations and small Christian communities promote discourse, participation, and collective decision-making in numerous African parishes. These movements offer laypeople the chance to assume leadership positions within the Church and make contributions to the Church's mission in their local communities (Phiri, 2017). These initiatives support the ideas of synodality and contribute to making the Church more participatory and inclusive. This helps to guarantee that the Church stays relevant and responsive to the demands of African society.

I believe synodality is essential to the mission of the Church in Africa, providing a means to increase involvement, cooperation, and collective accountability within the Church. Synodality, rooted in the theological concept of the Church as the People of God, is in harmony with African cultural frameworks like Ubuntu, African Traditional Leadership, and communal governance. These frameworks prioritise community, dialogue, and collaborative decision-making. The historical evolution of synodality in the African Church demonstrates the

Church's continuous endeavours to confront the continent's social, political, and ecological obstacles. The African Church may advance social justice, peace, and integral development by utilising synodal processes. It can also cultivate a more participatory and inclusive Church firmly grounded in African culture and spirituality.

3. Eco-conversion and the Church in Africa: Theological Understanding and Contextualization

Eco-conversion, as defined in Catholic theology, is based on the conviction that humanity bears a moral responsibility to steward God's creation. This obligation is based on religious texts, including the creation stories in Genesis, which depict humans as caretakers of the planet (Genesis 1:26-28). The Bible's stewardship concept entails a connection characterised by attentiveness, safeguarding, and the responsible administration of natural resources (Francis, 2015). The theological basis is strengthened by verses like Psalm 24:1, which proclaims that "the earth is the Lord's, and everything in it," confirming that God owns creation. It should be regarded with veneration and esteem.

Catholic social teaching expands upon this Scriptural comprehension by advocating for holistic ecology. Pope Francis advocates for an "ecological conversion," which entails a mindset transformation towards a more balanced and cooperative connection between humanity and the natural world (Francis, 2015). This conversion involves acknowledging the inherent worth of creation and comprehending the interrelatedness of the ecological catastrophe with matters of social justice, poverty, and inequality. Eco-conversion is connected to the Church's concept of the common good, which states that the earth's resources should benefit everyone, especially those most vulnerable and marginalised (Benedict XVI, 2009). Eco-conversion pushes individuals and communities to reevaluate their lifestyles, consumption habits, and connections with the environment. It necessitates a shift in mindset, a reversion to a more fundamental way of living, and a dedication to safeguarding the environment for the benefit of future cohorts. In Africa, eco-conversion assumes added complexity due to the continent's distinct social, cultural, and environmental circumstances.

Eco-conversion denotes the essential process of undergoing a spiritual and ethical metamorphosis to confront the ecological problem effectively. Based on Catholic social teaching, Eco-conversion advocates for a fundamental transformation in how individuals and communities interact with the environment. It acknowledges the interdependence of all living beings and emphasises the ethical obligation to protect and nurture the Earth (Francis, 2015). Eco-conversion, from a theological perspective, is rooted in the biblical concept

of stewardship. This concept emphasises that humanity has been responsible for caring for God's creation, as stated in Genesis 1:26-28. It also incorporates the Catholic practice of integral ecology, highlighting the interconnectedness of social, economic, and environmental justice (Dorr, 2016).

Eco-conversion holds particular significance in Africa, primarily due to the continent's abundant biodiversity, cultural affinity towards the land, and susceptibility to environmental degradation. Colonial forces and multinational businesses have extensively exploited Africa's natural resources, resulting in deforestation, desertification, and the decline of biodiversity. Furthermore, African populations have been disproportionately affected by climate change, which has worsened poverty, food insecurity, and displacement (Sundberg, 2020). Therefore, eco-conversion in Africa should tackle the environmental and socio-economic aspects of the ecological dilemma.

Africa's spiritual and cosmological beliefs provide excellent resources for promoting the process of eco-conversion. Numerous African tribes often profoundly respect the environment, considering the land, animals, and ecosystems sacrosanct (Eze, 2021). For instance, the Samburu people in Kenya perceive their connection with the soil as a reciprocal reliance and reverence. In contrast, the Yoruba community in Nigeria highlights the interdependence of all living entities (Falola, 2018). The Indigenous spiritualities align with *Laudato Si'*'s principles, namely its emphasis on acknowledging the inherent worth of nature and the necessity for an "ecological conversion" that promotes harmony with the environment (Francis, 2015).

Various strategies have been employed to encourage the adoption of environmentally friendly practices in Africa, ranging from community-based movements to initiatives headed by religious institutions. An example is the *Laudato Si'* Movement in Kenya, which has successfully organised and motivated local communities to participate in initiatives such as reforestation projects, water conservation, and sustainable farming techniques (Njoroge, 2020). The Catholic Church in Nigeria has collaborated with environmental organisations to enhance public understanding of the consequences of oil production on nearby ecosystems and communities (Umejei, 2019). These efforts showcase the capacity of eco-conversion to promote ecological resilience and social fairness in Africa.

An intricate interaction of social, cultural, and environmental elements influences the ecological landscape of Africa. The continent harbours some of the planet's most diversified ecosystems but is also very susceptible to environmental degradation. The massive ecological destruction in Africa can be attributed to deforestation, overgrazing, mining, and unsustainable agriculture methods

(Sundberg, 2020). Moreover, climate change intensifies problems such as drought, lack of access to food, and involuntary migration, especially in areas like the Sahel and the Horn of Africa (Njoroge, 2020).

Environmental degradation in numerous African countries is intricately connected to social and economic adversities, such as poverty, inequality, and political instability. The extraction of natural resources, such as petroleum, minerals, and lumber, has frequently resulted in conflicts and ecological catastrophes, as exemplified by the Niger Delta in Nigeria (Umejei, 2019). Furthermore, environmental degradation disproportionately impacts impoverished individuals since they heavily depend on natural resources for their sustenance and typically lack the necessary means to adjust to evolving environmental circumstances (Njoroge, 2020).

Cultural considerations exert a substantial influence on the development of eco-conversion in Africa. Ancient African civilisations have always had a strong connection with the natural world, considering it sacred and essential to their community's existence. African cosmology embodies this perspective by stating that the planet is not solely a means to be utilised but a sentient being that necessitates nurturing and reverence (Chuwa, 2019). Nevertheless, the influences of modernisation, urbanisation, and globalisation have frequently diminished these customary traditions, resulting in a heightened exploitative connection with the environment.

In this context, eco-conversion for the African Church encompasses resolving the ecological issue and addressing the fundamental social, economic, and cultural causes that lead to environmental degradation. It necessitates a reinvigorated dedication to sustainable development, social equity, and the advancement of Indigenous customs that cultivate a balance with the environment.

The process of eco-conversion in Africa is intricately interwoven with indigenous African spirituality and cosmology, which have historically emphasised the interdependence of all living beings. Across numerous African civilisations, the earth is revered and is frequently anthropomorphised as a conscious or maternal figure that fosters and maintains life. African cosmologies firmly hold that the natural world is intricately connected to existence's spiritual and social aspects (Murove, 2009).

African spirituality is intrinsically ecological, as it acknowledges the interconnectedness of humans, animals, plants, and the environment. Traditionally, rituals, prayers, and ceremonies are frequently performed to pay tribute to the spirits of the land and maintain the equilibrium and concord of the natural realm (Chuwa, 2019). Eco-conversion aligns with these historic ideas by advocating for restoring a respectful and balanced connection with the planet.

Furthermore, the African philosophy greatly emphasises Ubuntu, highlighting the significance of community and shared responsibility. Ubuntu, commonly called "I am because we are," embodies a perspective emphasising humans' and the environment's interdependence and unity (Murove, 2009). In this sense, eco-conversion can be viewed as an expansion of the concept of Ubuntu, as it entails individuals and communities assuming joint accountability for preserving the environment and collaborating to safeguard it for the benefit of everyone. The Church in Africa may cultivate a more substantial commitment to ecological stewardship and advance sustainable practices by incorporating eco-conversion ideas alongside indigenous African spirituality and cosmology, thereby grounding these activities in African cultural traditions.

4. ***Laudato Si'* and the Church in Africa: Significance and Significations**

The 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si'* by Pope Francis, titled "On Care for Our Common Home," is a pioneering treatise that tackles the interconnected issues of environmental deterioration, social injustice, and economic exploitation. This text is not solely focused on ecology but emphasises the need for a complete transformation, which the Pope calls "integral ecology" (Francis, 2015, para 137-162). This concept acknowledges the interconnectedness of environmental, social, and spiritual challenges. *Laudato Si'* is particularly significant for the African Church due to the critical ecological issues confronting Africa, such as deforestation, desertification, and exploiting natural resources by external entities (Ebalu, A., 2022).

The encyclical revolves around integrated ecology (Francis, 2015, para 137), which posits that several facets of existence, including the environment, economy, society, and culture, are interrelated (Ibid, para 143). Pope Francis emphasises that addressing the ecological issue requires more than technological or economic measures. It necessitates fundamentally reconsidering humanity's connection to the environment, culture, and fellow human beings (Ibid, para. 135). The concept of interconnection is based on the theological notion that all creation is a divine gift and that humans have a moral duty to act as caretakers of this gift, as stated by Francis in (Ibid, para 60-100).

The Church in Africa considers *Laudato Si'* very pertinent to its specific circumstances since the dual predicaments of ecological deterioration and economic exploitation have inflicted severe consequences (Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria, 2015). Despite its abundant natural resources, Africa is experiencing extensive environmental decline. Deforestation, desertification, and biodiversity loss are widespread in Africa, often caused by external exploitation of the continent's land and resources (Sundberg, 2020). In areas such as the Niger Delta in Nigeria, the process of extracting oil has resulted in

significant environmental contamination, causing the destruction of ecosystems and negatively impacting the well-being of local inhabitants (Umejei, 2019). In accord with *Laudato Si'*, the Church in Africa recognises the imperative of ecological justice as indivisible from social justice, as the deterioration of the environment frequently inflicts harm upon the most impoverished and susceptible individuals (Jude, I & Chinwe, F.N, 2022 & Francis, 2015, para 49, 91, 118, 147).

The Church in Africa is frequently confronted with the enduring effects of colonialism and contemporary neocolonial practices, such as economic exploitation, which includes unequal trade agreements (African Development Bank, 2019), and foreign control of natural resources in many African countries United Nations Economic Commission for (Africa, 2019). There is also cultural imperialism, which involves the suppression of Indigenous languages and cultures (Mazrui, 2005) and the Westernisation of our African values and traditions (Wiredu, 2005). There is also political instability, which involves foreign interference in the African Political landscape (Cheru, 2016) and exploitation of natural resources, as argued by Pope Francis (*Laudato Si* para 32) and climate change (IPCC, 2014). All of these pose a considerable challenge in terms of economic exploitation. African economies have historically relied on extracting natural resources for export, frequently resulting in adverse impacts on residents and the environment. Pope Francis' criticism of the global economic system, which places profit above the well-being of people and the environment, strongly resonates with African situations where multinational corporations often exploit natural resources without considering the local population or the ecological impact (Francis, 2015).

Furthermore, social inequality, particularly the marginalisation of indigenous peoples and rural communities, intensifies ecological degradation in Africa. African populations heavily rely on natural resources for their sustenance, and the deterioration of the environment poses a significant risk to food security, water accessibility, and public health (Njoroge, 2020). *Laudato Si'* offers the African Church a moral structure to address these inequalities, emphasising the need for increased environmental stewardship and endorsing economic systems that prioritise all well-being rather than taking advantage of it.

The Church in Africa finds three core themes of *Laudato Si'*—integral ecology, care for creation, and preferential choice for the poor—especially relevant to addressing Africa's ecological and socioeconomic difficulties.

- i. As defined by Pope Francis, Integral ecology highlights the interdependence of all living beings and the indivisibility of ecological, economic, social, and cultural systems (Francis, 2015). Within the

African setting, this comprehensive perspective corresponds with traditional African cosmologies, which perceive a close connection between the earth, human beings, and the spiritual realm (Chuwa, 2019). The concept of integral ecology urges the African Church to advocate for solutions tackling environmental and social issues simultaneously. It acknowledges that preserving the earth entails caring for individuals, particularly those economically disadvantaged and socially marginalised.

- ii. Care for Creation: *Laudato Si* advocates for a revitalised feeling of reverence and care for creation, calling the Church to embrace activities that foster environmental sustainability and ecological justice. For the Church in Africa, this entails actively endeavouring to save ecosystems, preserve biodiversity, and advocate for sustainable agriculture methods. Several African nations, including Kenya, are currently witnessing the severe consequences of climate change, such as drought and food insecurity (Njoroge, 2020). The Church in Africa is responsible for serving as a prominent advocate for environmental conservation, promoting policies that safeguard the planet while simultaneously addressing the concerns of marginalised communities.
- iii. Preferential Option for the Poor: Pope Francis emphasises the Church's dedication to the poor, disproportionately impacted by environmental deterioration (Francis, 2015). This issue holds significant meaning in Africa, where poverty continues to be prevalent and where the impoverished frequently experience the full force of ecological harm, such as desertification and water scarcity. The objective of the Church in Africa, by *Laudato Si*, is to champion the rights of the impoverished and advance laws that guarantee fair access to natural resources and safeguard against environmental degradation.

The principles of *Laudato Si* align deeply with African ethical principles like "*Samburu*" and "*Ubuntu*," which prioritise community, interdependence, and the symbiotic connection between humans and the environment. In numerous African cultures, "*Samburu*" denotes a moral principle of mutual exchange and concern among community members and towards the environment. This concept is based on Pope Francis' advocacy for holistic ecology, highlighting the interconnectedness of human well-being and ecological health (Francis, 2015). In traditional African communities, the land is not simply considered a resource but a vital life source that demands reverence and safeguarding. This perspective aligns with *Laudato Si*'s ethical position, which advocates for a more enduring and considerate connection with the planet.

Ubuntu is a renowned African concept that highlights the interdependence of individuals and the significance of community. Ubuntu is commonly defined as "I exist because we exist," emphasising the shared obligation to support and nurture each other and the planet (Murove, 2009). This ethical principle aligns with the concepts discussed in *Laudato Si'*, precisely the notion of collective well-being and the moral duty to protect and nurture the environment. *Ubuntu* and *Laudato Si'* both advocate for a shared duty and the community's welfare. *Laudato Si'* asks explicitly for a collective transformation towards ecological practices prioritising social justice and environmental sustainability.

Samburu and *Ubuntu* embody an African perspective that considers humans integral members of a broader ecological and spiritual collective. *Laudato Si'* and African ethical systems complement one another, providing a common perspective on the importance of environmental stewardship, fairness, and collective accountability.

5. The Church in Africa and the Interconnections of Synodality, Eco-conversion and the Principles of *Laudato Si'*

Synodality, eco-conversion, and *Laudato Si'*'s teachings are deeply intertwined in their theological foundations. One of the central themes in all three is solidarity—understood not only as solidarity with other human beings but also with all creation. In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis insists on recognising the interconnectedness of all life and the call to care for creation as an expression of love for God and neighbour (Francis, 2015). Similarly, synodality emphasises participation, dialogue, and shared responsibility within the Church, urging all members to actively engage in the community's life. This concept of participation parallels the inclusivity called for in eco-conversion, which involves the whole community in efforts to address environmental degradation (Benedict XVI, 2009). The shared values of solidarity and participation lay the groundwork for a theology of ecological justice. The Church in Africa, long concerned with social justice issues, can build on these theological connections to foster a more ecologically just Church. This means integrating eco-conversion as a fundamental aspect of synodal processes, ensuring that dialogue and decision-making within the Church address spiritual and environmental concerns (Chuwa, 2019).

Synodality provides a pragmatic framework for promoting the ideals of ecological transformation and the encyclical *Laudato Si'*. Synods are convened to promote transparent discussions, thoughtful consideration, and collaborative decision-making, all crucial in tackling intricate ecological challenges. By integrating *Laudato Si'*'s teachings into synodal processes, the Church in Africa

can guarantee that environmental concerns are not sidelined but given utmost importance in Church activities and purpose (Francis, 2015).

For instance, synodal assemblies can serve as occasions to instruct clergy and laity on ecological matters and the ethical duty to safeguard the environment. Furthermore, these assemblies can foster sustainable practices within parishes and dioceses, including but not limited to energy conservation, reforestation initiatives, and the utilisation of renewable resources. In addition, synodality promotes a collaborative method of resolving issues, which is crucial in tackling the extensive environmental problems faced by Africa, including deforestation, climate change, and desertification (Njoroge, 2020).

Dialogue is essential to synodality and equally crucial in promoting a comprehensive response to ecological concerns. In Africa, discourse should involve multiple stakeholders, such as Church leaders, government officials, scientists, indigenous groups, and civil society. The African Church can enhance its eco-conversion and ecological justice tactics by actively involving various perspectives and opinions (Murove, 2009). This synodal discourse should also be based on African cultural and spiritual traditions, which have long emphasised the sanctity of the environment and the significance of living in peace with nature.

Theological education is essential for promoting and encouraging this debate. By incorporating the concepts of *Laudato Si'* into African theology education and pastoral care, we may ensure that upcoming Church leaders are adequately prepared to tackle ecological challenges. This necessitates a curriculum that encompasses the theological foundations of eco-conversion and offers hands-on instruction in sustainable development and environmental campaigning (Chuwa, 2019).

Several case studies demonstrate the fruitful interrelationship between synodality, eco-conversion, and *Laudato Si'* in African Church initiatives. For instance, Caritas has worked through synodal structures in Kenya to implement eco-conversion projects focused on agroecology, water conservation, and reforestation (Njoroge, 2020). These initiatives have empowered local communities to take charge of their environmental future, drawing on Catholic teaching and indigenous knowledge.

The Southern African Bishops' Conference (SACBC) has used synodal gatherings to promote *Laudato Si'*'s principles and advocate for stronger environmental protections in South Africa. These efforts have included educating local parishes on ecological issues, mobilising Church resources for environmental campaigns, and engaging in dialogue with government agencies to address climate change (Murove, 2009).

In Nigeria's Niger Delta, where oil extraction has led to severe environmental damage, the Church has been active in advocating for

environmental justice through synodal processes that involve local communities, environmental experts, and policymakers. These efforts have helped raise awareness of the ecological crisis and have led to tangible actions such as legal advocacy and community-driven environmental restoration projects (Umejei, 2019).

6. Recommendations and Conclusion: The Role of the Church in Africa in Global Synodal and Ecological Movements

The African Church plays a crucial role in global synodal and ecological movements. By actively engaging in international discussions on ecological justice and synodality, drawing on its distinct perspectives and experiences, the Church in Africa may make valuable contributions to the broader Church. Participating in this endeavour can contribute to developing worldwide solutions to tackle ecological emergencies and advance a fairer and more sustainable planet.

Education, advocacy, and collaboration are crucial elements in promoting eco-conversion in Africa. African theological institutes should incorporate *Laudato Si'* into their curricula to ensure that upcoming Church leaders are adequately prepared to tackle ecological concerns. Furthermore, it is imperative for the Church to actively support more robust environmental regulations and engage in partnerships with governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and local communities to effectively establish and maintain sustainable practices (Njoroge, 2020).

Establishing synodal networks that specifically tackle ecological concerns is paramount for the Church in Africa. These networks should encompass clergy, laity, scientists, environmental activists, and policymakers, fostering a complete approach to eco-conversion. The Church may enhance its efforts to promote ecological justice and sustainable development by encouraging discourse and collaboration across many sectors (Sundberg, 2020).

Laudato Si's ideals must be included in African theology education and pastoral care to promote eco-conversion. A curriculum prioritising the theological and ethical aspects of ecological matters and hands-on instruction in environmental stewardship is necessary. To ensure its mission encompasses a firm dedication to preserving the environment, the Church in Africa can educate future Church leaders on integrated ecology (Chuwa, 2019).

In Africa, synodality and eco-conversion have the potential to emerge as influential tools for promoting sustainable development in the future. Synodal processes can assist the Church in Africa address spiritual and ecological concerns by encouraging discourse, participation, and shared accountability.

Eco-conversion, based on the ideas of *Laudato Si'*, provides a way to achieve a future that is both sustainable and fair, where the dignity of both humans and the environment is respected (Francis, 2015).

In conclusion, the Church in Africa is uniquely positioned to tackle the continent's ecological and socioeconomic difficulties by utilising the interconnected concepts of synodality, eco-conversion, and *Laudato Si*. Using education, advocacy, and partnership, the Church may actively work towards an environmentally just and equitable future, drawing upon African spirituality and Catholic social teachings. The Church's involvement in worldwide synodal and ecological movements provides significant perspectives and guidance in the quest for sustainable development and ecological justice.

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