

Article

Not peer-reviewed version

The Catholic Church and Mining: Types of Responses

[Severine Deneulin](#) * and [Caesar Monteverchio](#)

Posted Date: 3 July 2025

doi: 10.20944/preprints202507.0239.v1

Keywords: mining; catholic church; Laudato si'; extractive industries



Preprints.org is a free multidisciplinary platform providing preprint service that is dedicated to making early versions of research outputs permanently available and citable. Preprints posted at Preprints.org appear in Web of Science, Crossref, Google Scholar, Scilit, Europe PMC.

Copyright: This open access article is published under a Creative Commons CC BY 4.0 license, which permit the free download, distribution, and reuse, provided that the author and preprint are cited in any reuse.

Article

The Catholic Church and Mining: Types of Responses

S  verine Deneulin ^{1,*} and Caesar Montevecchio ²

¹ Laudato Si' Research Institute

² Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies

* Correspondence: severine.deneulin@campion.ox.ac.uk

Abstract

The increase in global demand for mineral resources with the energy transition and military expansion is likely to intensify the consequences of mining, such as deforestation, biodiversity loss, soil, water and air contamination, violation of civil, political and labour rights, loss of livelihoods, and health damage. The paper analyses responses of the Catholic Church to the challenges which arise from mining. Based on a series of consultations with cross-continental actors, its aim is to offer a typology of responses in order to better understand what is currently taking place and inform the work of other actors in addressing the socio-ecological consequences of mining. The paper examines five types of intertwined responses: 1) Accompaniment of mining-affected populations, which is the starting point of all responses; 2) Mediation of experience through theological and organizational resources and international policy frameworks; 3) Documentation of what is happening, or likely to happen; 4) Education and formation to address the structural causes of social and ecological degradation at a multi-scalar level; and 5) Advocacy for policy and institutional change, including alternative modes of economic development. The paper concludes by discussing some shortcomings in these responses, as well as avenues for broad-based coalitions.

Keywords: keyword 1; keyword 2; keyword 3

1. Introduction

Mining and mineral extraction are the foundation of modern day living. According to The Geological Society (n.d), smartphones require gold, cassiterite (tin), bauxite (aluminium), tungsten, lithium, zinc, and copper, among its 62 metal components; solar panels require, among others, zinc, nickel, copper, tin, and molybdenum; and electric cars lithium, titanium, aluminium, cobalt, nickel, iron, and copper – with up to one mile of copper wiring per electric car. UNCTAD (2024) predicts that demand for lithium could rise by over 1,500% by 2050, with projections of a similar scale for nickel, cobalt, and copper, and fourfold increase by 2030. To meet the 2030 net-zero emissions targets, it estimates that more than 80 new copper mines will be needed, in addition to 70 new lithium and nickel mines each, and 30 new cobalt mines. In addition to the energy transition, the pressure on minerals demand is heightened by current military expansion, with NATO (2024) listing twelve minerals critical to defence, among them lithium, aluminium, beryllium, cobalt, graphite, titanium, and tungsten.

This intensification of demand for minerals is likely to be accompanied by an intensification of mineral extraction and of its often-observed consequences, such as deforestation, water, soil and air contamination, human rights violations, deepening inequality, social and economic exclusion, livelihood and land dispossession, violence, and corruption (Bebbington 2023). The Business and

Human Rights Resource Centre (2025) has tracked more than 630 cases of human rights violations between 2010-2023 in relation to extraction of transition minerals.

In a series of consultations with Catholic organizations working on mining issues in Latin America, Africa and Asia,¹ participants emphasized the all-encompassing destructive effects of mining, including on rivers, forests, human health, social relationships, cultures, livelihoods, and even graveyards. They noted especially the rippling and often permanent effects of the ecological consequences of mining. Mining is water intensive, and once aquifers are depleted, they are not replenished. When an area is deforested, in addition to biodiversity loss, it leads to soil erosion and destruction of natural flood defences, putting higher strains on fragile ecosystems already affected by climate change. Water and air pollution travel far beyond a mine's location, affecting people's health and livelihoods. Children and women are at particular risk, with long-term consequences for children's development and women's reproductive health. Mining also brings divisions and social conflicts in local communities, with some members endorsing narratives of social and economic opportunities brought about by mining and others rejecting these narratives on the grounds that the opportunities are short-term, less than advertised, and do not compensate for the social and ecological costs. The workshop participants also highlighted that mining activities come with a large array of human rights violations, including rights to health and labour rights – poor pay, unsafe labour conditions, no compensation for accidents – and civil and political rights.²

A lot has been written on the ecological commitments of faith communities,³ but there is little on how faith communities have responded to the socio-ecological problems caused by mining.⁴ In this article, we focus on the response of the Catholic Church, which recent literature on environmental justice has highlighted as an important actor whose role has been under-studied and little understood (Martinez Alier 2023, Walter and Wagner 2021). We seek to offer a typology of actions that Catholic actors have taken to defend human rights and protect ecosystems when these are threatened by mining activities. By Catholic actors, we understand the ecclesial bodies such as parishes, dioceses, national bishops' conferences and regional bishops' councils, religious orders, Vatican dicasteries and agencies, and the civil society organisations that are linked to these ecclesial bodies, such as Caritas Internationalis and its national chapters. We examine five types of intertwined responses: 1) Accompaniment; 2) Mediation of experience; 3) Documentation; 4) Education and formation; 5) Advocacy. The paper concludes by summarizing the strengths and weaknesses of Catholic responses to the socio-ecological consequences of mining. The typology proposed is based on a series of consultations with Catholic actors working on mining issues. They were selected for their known involvement (see footnote 1).

2. Accompaniment

The primary type of response which the workshop participants expressed, and which underpins all other responses, is that of service, of caring for people who are in a situation of vulnerability and whose human dignity has been undermined. As Pope Francis explains in *Fratelli Tutti*, it is a service

¹ Four workshops took place online between November 2024 and March 2025 and involved 45 participants from Catholic organisations and bishops' conferences (Brazil, Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, India, Kenya, Peru, the Philippines, South Africa, Zambia), as well as Caritas Internationalis, Caritas Africa, Catholic Relief Services, Publish What You Pay, Iglesias y Minería, the Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, and academics.

² Mining is the most dangerous sector for civil society actors (Global Witness 2024).

³ See, among others, Chaplin (2016), Gottlieb (2006), Jenkins, Tucker and Grim (2017), Köhrsen, Blanc and Huber (2023), Öhlmann and Swart (2022).

⁴ Studies on the Catholic Church and mining include Arrellano-Yanguas (2014), Holden (2012), Montevecchio and Powers (2021), Montevecchio (2024), Nadelman (2015), Otano-Jimenez (2023), van Tijnlingen (2022).

which “always looks to their faces, touches their flesh, senses their closeness and even, in some cases, ‘suffers’ that closeness and tries to help them. Service is never ideological, for we do not serve ideas, we serve people” (Francis 2020a, 115). This means that in whatever response to mining, people’s experiences of harm and injustice are prioritized.

This service was often talked about by the participants as “accompaniment”, or “being in solidarity with” mining-affected communities. In the document that defines the guidelines for pastoral action of the Catholic Church in Latin America and the Caribbean, the continent’s bishops expressed this relationship between service, solidarity, and accompaniment as follows:

From our faith in Christ, solidarity springs as a permanent attitude of encounter, of brotherhood and service, which finds expressions in visible choices and actions, mainly in the defence of life and the rights of the most vulnerable and excluded, and in the permanent accompaniment of their efforts to be subjects of change and transformation of their situation (CELAM 2007, paragraph 394, authors translation).

Relationships of trust and a shared journey of transformation are core to accompaniment.⁵ During his papacy, Francis continued the pastoral orientation of the Latin American bishops. This involves supporting the efforts of people whose dignity has been violated to become subjects of change and take active participation in the transformation of the unjust structures which undermined their dignity and violated their human rights. As *Fratelli Tutti* expresses it, “Solidarity means much more than engaging in sporadic acts of generosity. [...] It also means combatting the structural causes of poverty, inequality, the lack of work, land and housing, the denial of social and labour rights. It means confronting the destructive effects of the empire of money” (Francis 2020a, 116).

Accompaniment entails that local communities experiencing human rights violations are in the driving seat for any action. Any response springs from dialogue and listening to the grievances and needs of affected communities. There is no general framework for responding beyond processes of listening and journeying together, or in theological terms, “synodality”.⁶ Workshop participants emphasized that this journeying included organizations which might already be active in mining-affected territories, of whatever faith background or none. They highlighted that accompaniment processes started with the question: “With whom could mining-affected communities journey together on their road to justice and peace?”. They also noted that efforts for structural change are not mutually exclusive from direct assistance, such as offering healthcare for mine workers suffering injuries after accidents or giving socio-psychological support for those who experience harassment and violence.

Accompaniment is in many ways an “ideal type” response. Even if in their discourses, Catholic actors may “serve people and not ideas”, there is a risk for certain ideas and rigid frameworks to be put forward, at times unconsciously, especially in the area of gender and race, with Catholic actors reinforcing patriarchal and colonial modes of relationships. For all its discourses of listening, the Amazon Synod, which was intended to be a process for the Catholic Church to journey together with the people living in the Amazon region, hear their sufferings, and take joint responses, reinforced certain ideologies of gender complementarities against the voices and experiences of women, especially those belonging to religious orders who served local communities in the Amazon, and the experiences of women leading anti-mining struggles (Cahill 2023). The Amazon Synod also tended

⁵ See Stephen Pope (2019) for a further discussion on “accompaniment”.

⁶ The concluding document of the Synod on Synodality defined it as “the walking together of Christians with Christ and towards God’s Kingdom, in union with all humanity. [It] involves gathering at all levels of the Church for mutual listening, dialogue, and community discernment” (Francis 2024, 28), and especially attentive listening to those who are poor, including the earth itself (Francis 2024, 48).

to essentialize indigenous cosmologies and not reflect on the possible ongoing influences of colonialism in the Catholic Church's mode of operating (van Teijlingen 2022).⁷

When a local community is divided between those supporting mining activities in a territory and those cautioning against its promised benefits, accompaniment can be a difficult path to tread. Some workshop participants mentioned cases of co-optation, with mining companies enlisting the support of Catholic actors by charitable donations for church buildings or religious celebrations. By definition, accompaniment is not walking with each member of a community on a neutral basis but being present to those who suffer and journeying with them to remove the structural causes of their sufferings. It is not supporting whatever actions people decide to take— whether, for example, to take employment by the mining company or migrate because livelihoods have been destroyed by contamination – but supporting actions that defend ecosystems and human rights as an integrated whole when these are threatened.

One must also add that the “journeying with” extends to the whole biotic community, and not only human. The Amazon Synod was in that regard not only an exercise of journeying with the people living in the Amazon region, but its forests and its rivers too, for “the care of people and the care of ecosystems are inseparable” (Francis 2020b, 42). The Latin American workshop participants noted the nascent work of Catholic actors in the region in advocating for the rights of nature, in addition to human rights. This leads us to a second type of response which intersects with accompaniment: the experiences of local communities affected by mining need to be mediated in order for action to take place.

3. Mediation of Experience

A crucial step of journeying with mining-affected communities is making sense of the experiences of vulnerability, and understanding the dynamics at play during each phase of mining operations they may be facing, whether announcement, exploration, exploitation or closure.⁸ Theological resources, such as Catholic Social Teaching, and ecclesial bodies such as dioceses and bishops conferences, as well as international policy frameworks such as human rights and rights of nature, are important resources to mediate these experiences and channel transformative actions.

Catholic Social Teaching (CST) is a body of documents which reflect on social, economic, political, and ecological realities in the light of the Gospel. *Laudato Si': On Care for our Common Home* (Francis 2015), *Fratelli Tutti: On Fraternity and Social Friendship* (Francis 2020a) and *Querida Amazonia* (Francis 2020b), are recent CST documents with special relevance for mining. A central CST theme, based on the biblical narratives of Creation, is that the entirety of the living community – human and non-human alike – is loved by God and finds fulfilment in harmonious relationships (Francis 2015, 66). Mining breaks these relationships by causing social conflicts, ecological degradation, and human rights violations.

Upholding human dignity has been a constant in CST and is a fundamental mediating concept to make sense of the experiences of mining-affected communities, be it the violation of the dignity of work through dangerous and unsafe working conditions, poor pay, or the violation of bodily integrity through health damage and violence, including psychological and sexual. Integral human development has been another cornerstone for mediating local experiences and denouncing models of economic and social development which go against the development of the human person in all their dimensions. By bringing low-skilled employment to local populations and providing public goods such as schools, roads, infrastructure, and playgrounds, mining activities may lead to short

⁷ Aware of these obstacles to listening, dialogue and openness to transformation, and the temptations to let one's own ideas and views prevail, the final document of the Synod on Synodality emphasises how forgiveness is central to synodal processes of decision-making and action (Francis 2024, 6).

⁸ Arellano-Yanguas and Bernal-Gómez (2023) have shown that the mere announcement of a mining project, before any exploration activity starts, is already breaking the social fabric of local communities.

term improvements in people's lives; but, by breaking ecological relations through soil, water, and air contamination and deforestation, they do not lead to *integral* human development. The benefits are also not sustainable and lead to greater vulnerability to climate change and extreme weather, which is another way in which they fail to represent integral human development, and which leads to another tenet of CST, integral ecology.

The theological paradigm of “integral ecology” developed in *Laudato Si'* provides another mediating framework for Catholic actors to analyse the consequences of mining and their causes. Integral ecology is set in contrast with a “technocratic paradigm” that ignores the human roots of ecological devastation. The solution to the climate crisis is not a technological fix but a change in the way humans relate to each other and the entire biotic community, a change from relating as “masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters” (Francis 2015, 11) to relating as carers, united by bonds of kinship with the living world (Francis 2015, 92). *Laudato Si'* also offers an analysis of some of the causes of the violations of human dignity and destruction of ecosystems brought about by mining activities such as inequality and power imbalances (Francis 2015, 48-52), excessive consumption and a “throwaway culture” (Francis 2015, 20-22), and lack of regulation and corruption (Francis 2015, 177-179), which all have their roots in an attitude of relating to people and ecosystems as users and exploiters and not as carers or siblings with whom one is united in a common home.

The way the Catholic Church is structured and organized is critical to the development of CST and of the frames through which mining activities and their consequences are analysed. Montevecchio and Powers (2021, 3) talk of the role of its “vertical and horizontal integration.” It is vertically integrated in its hierarchy from the priest as leader of a local community, the bishop at a higher level,⁹ bishops' conferences at the national level, regional bishops' councils, and the papacy at the international level; it is horizontally integrated through a large array of organizations at each level like schools, universities, religious orders, NGOs and development agencies, and civil society organisations. With “mining radically local and massively global”, they argue that “[t]he Catholic Church is one of the few institutions in the world with the scope, scale, and sophistication needed to match the scope, scale, and sophistication of mining industries” (Montevecchio and Powers 2021, 3).

The bishops, in collaboration with other members of the Catholic community in their diocese and country – often referred to as the “People of God” (Francis 2024, 71), play a critical role in mediating local experiences and sharing nationally and internationally their analysis of the social and ecological realities they face in their diocese from the perspective of the Gospel. For example, one of the first documents of the Catholic Church that raised the alarm on ecological devastation, and the responsibility of the Church to address it, is the pastoral letter issued by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines in 1988, “What is Happening to our Beautiful Land?” (CBCP 1988). The document covers much of the analysis found later in *Laudato Si'*, such as the interconnectedness of the living world. It refers to water pollution caused by mining and its effects on aquatic life and human life, sees the ecological crisis as a moral crisis, and attributes some of its causes to greed and excessive consumption. The document itself was the result of the involvement of Church leaders with peasant communities affected by deforestation, and who were organised in base ecclesial communities where they interpreted their social realities from the perspective of the Gospel (Gaspar 2021). *Querida Amazonia* (Francis 2020b), the outcome of the Amazon Synod which took place in Rome in October 2019 to discuss the problems facing the Amazon region, relies on analysis of local communities of their situations. The preparatory document which formed the basis of the Synod's discussions was the outcome of consultations with more than 2,000 people across the region. The Amazon synod was part of a broader push in the Church for “synodality,” which refers to a stronger emphasis on the experiences and insights of local churches and communities. This has given the work and teaching of regional bishops' groups and local bishops even greater significance in the

⁹ According to the final document of the synod on synodality, the task of bishops “is to preside over a local Church as a visible principle of unity within it and a bond of communion with all the Churches” and to serve and accompany local communities in the challenges they face (Francis 2024, 69-70).

development of CST, and many of these bishops have emphasized the impacts of mining in their teaching. For example, in 2018, the Latin American Episcopal Council issued a pastoral letter interpreting *Laudato Si'* in the Latin American context and extractive industries figured prominently in that teaching (CELAM 2018). It is noteworthy to highlight that, as a consequence of the experiences of local communities mediated by organizational and theological structures (bishops conferences and Catholic Social Teaching), there has been a shift in the Catholic Church's position towards a less anthropocentric position which recognizes the intrinsic value of non-human species, and includes the earth itself as a vulnerable being that needs special attention and care.

In addition to these organizational and theological mediation channels, workshop participants often referred to international policy instruments as a mediation of local experiences. The human rights framework is the most central one, but also legal frameworks around indigenous rights like the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples of 2007 and the ILO Convention 169 which enshrines the right to Free, Prior, and Informed Consent, though only 23 countries have ratified the ILO Convention and even if ratified, the law is often violated. The Latin American participants added the international legal movement of the rights of nature (GARN n.d), and the regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean (CEPAL 2024), known as the Escazú Agreement. The agreement makes access to information a precondition for being able to provide consent. Participants from India mentioned the national legal framework of the Forest Rights Act of 2006, which recognizes the rights of Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers.

The workshop participants noted two important challenges regarding these mediation channels. First is the organizational challenge. They mentioned that there was much room for rethinking current organizational Church structures to address mining issues. In many countries, bishops' conferences as well as civil society organizations linked to the Catholic Church do not have the human or financial resources, nor the expertise, to accompany communities affected by mining and take actions to protect their lives and ecosystems to which their lives are intrinsically connected. Second, given the patriarchal nature of the Church's vertical integration (priests-bishops), the experiences of women who face gender-specific threats such as sexual harassment and other forms of gender-based violence, remains yet to be mediated through organizational and theological channels (see also Cahill 2023). Despite these challenges, the responses of Catholic actors to the socio-ecological consequences of mining span large, as the following sections examine.

4. Documentation

Information gathering and communications of what is happening in mining-affected territories was a response undertaken by many workshop participants. They mentioned how strengthening the right to information strengthens in turn other rights. With mining activities often taking place in remote areas, recording and compiling data about human rights violations, ecological damage, criminalization of protest, threats, or violence and using it to amplify local communities' experiences through national and international channels constitutes a mainstay response of Catholic actors. It is frequently conducted in partnership with other organizations from different sectors of civil society and beyond faith boundaries. Examples include the Observatory of Mining Conflicts in Latin America (OCMAL n.d.) and Alyansa Tigil Mina (n.d.), which are coalitions of secular and faith-based organizations which document human rights violations and ecosystem destruction caused by mining projects in Latin American countries and the Philippines respectively, with the latter also involved in advocacy.

In addition to general information gathering, some organisations also conduct in-depth case studies which allow for more contextual and structural analysis, and can highlight better how power imbalances, inequality, and violence operate in mining-affected territories. Some are place-based such as the case study by CINEP and ALBOAN (2019) on the impact of the El Alacrán gold mine in Colombia, CAFOD (2023) on gold mining in Yanomami Indigenous Territory in Brazil, Jeyaraj (2024) on a land acquisition process by a coal company in the state of Jharkhand in India, or CERN-CENCO

(2013) on mining exploitation in North Kivu in the DRC. Others are theme-based, such as the case study by the Solidarity Network and Indigenous Apostolate (RSAI 2024) of the Latin American Conference of Jesuit Provincials on women's experiences of violence in mining in Brazil, Bolivia, and Guatemala.

Documentation is, however, not limited to what is happening in local territories. It extends to documenting what is happening in policy processes and bringing to light cases of corruption or pieces of legislation whose socio-ecological consequences can be hidden behind legal complexities. Increasing transparency, or exposing information about royalties, procurement processes, violation of legal requirements, and holding governments and mining companies accountable, is an important part of Catholic actors' responses. Transparency work is often conducted in partnership with other actors such as Publish What You Pay. In addition, some workshop participants mentioned the Environmental Impact Assessment as an important tool for furthering transparency, including conducting alternative assessments as ones conducted by mining companies themselves are often biased and underestimate or soften ecological impacts.

Collecting information on what is happening or developing alternative impact assessments require a significant amount of time, expertise, and organizational resources. Many workshop participants noted the challenge of a lack of local research capacity to collect the needed data. They also mentioned significant safety concerns given the violence that is often taking place in mining-affected territories and the criminalization of those who seek to defend human rights and protect ecosystems. Moreover, information needs to be communicated through a variety of communication channels and platforms, such as press statements, social media, newspapers and magazine articles, and radio broadcasts. Several workshop participants noted the role of radios to inform local and national populations of the ecological and human rights impacts of mining. Some underlined the potential of social media which remains under-utilised within Catholic ecclesial bodies to communicate and inform the wider Catholic community of the negative impacts of mining activities.

5. Education and Formation

To overcome the challenges of limited local research capacity, workshop participants highlighted the traditional role of the Catholic Church in education and value formation, and the opportunities that lie in a vast network of educational institutions that can be mobilized. They noted especially the following areas where educational and formation initiatives could particularly be effective. First, educational institutions can help make local communities aware of the long-term impacts of mining, giving them the tools to question narratives of job creation and social improvement, and laying bare the strategies used by companies to obtain consent and the social license to operate.¹⁰ This educational work is important even before any mining project takes place or is announced. This involves preparing the formation groundwork irrespective of mining activities taking place and making local communities aware of their rights, including the right to live in a healthy environment, the right to Free Prior and Informed Consent, and the "right to say no" to a project.

A second area of educational responses is the mobilization of expert knowledge, whether legal, scientific, political, or other, from Catholic universities, nationally and internationally, and from other individuals and organizations who share a similar commitment to human rights and ecological protection. This could include mobilising expertise around monitoring water quality and health of local populations, such as in the case of the smelter town of La Oroya in Peru where the grassroots social movement enlisted the expertise of an American university to assess contamination and its effects on children's health (CRS 2011), leading to a court ruling fifteen years later that the government failed to protect the right to health of local populations and ordering compensations (Human Rights Watch 2024). Mobilizing expert knowledge externally is coupled with building local scientific and legal expertise, and other skills such as for leadership and advocacy. Examples include

¹⁰ For strategies used by mining companies to obtain local consent, see, among others, Dunlap (2024).

building water monitoring expertise so that local communities can themselves monitor levels of contamination, human rights expertise and legal literacy training for local communities so that they can better navigate complex legislations, or university programs oriented toward local communities and directly connected to addressing the complex problems they face such as the University Program of the Amazon linked to the Ecclesial Assembly of the Amazon.

Third, being the largest provider of education after states (Wodon 2022), the Catholic Church possesses unique opportunity for the formation of ethical values and conscience around the respect of human dignity and ecological protection. Some universities are gradually changing their curriculum, such as introducing a course in integral ecology across all programmes to educate young people about the structural causes of socio-ecological degradation and debunk the myth of unlimited material progress (Francis 2015, 78). All workshop participants converged in singling out this formation work as one of the most important responses of the Catholic Church to the challenges that arise from mining and where it has a comparative advantage over all the other types of response.

In a similar line, another important formative space is liturgy, prayer, and other forms of spiritual practice. *Laudato Si'* has an entire chapter dedicated to “ecological education and spirituality” (Francis 2015, chapter 6), which, it argues, is capable of providing the motivation and commitment needed for the profound transformation of lifestyles and economic structures required. Spirituality, understood as connections with rivers, forests, other human beings, and God, is an important component of the efforts at the local level to defend human rights and protect ecosystems in the face of significant obstacles, setbacks, harassment, violence, and even the threat of death (Gandolfo-O'Donnell 2023). It is also an important component to motivate low-consumption lifestyles lived in solidarity with those who are vulnerable, including non-human species.

One of the main challenges to the formation and education work of the Catholic Church that workshop participants noted is its lack of internal coherence and lack of accountability and transparency. The Church's work on increasing transparency and addressing corruption in the extractive sector is more effective when the Church itself is transparent. Efforts are being made in that regard with the synodal process (Francis 2024), which is aimed at enabling participation of all the members of the Church in its decision-making and leadership structures and fostering a culture of accountability, with leaders accountable to the communities they serve (Francis 2024, 99). Several bishops in Brazil and the Philippines have declared a total ban on ecclesial bodies and organisations in their dioceses receiving donations from mining companies, and they are also calling for disinvestment of all Church actors globally from mining companies – though maintaining some shares so as to enable shareholder advocacy.

6. Advocacy

Advocacy is the final type of response that workshop participants expressed as an essential part of accompanying mining-affected communities on the journey towards human dignity and ecosystem flourishing. It can take many forms, such as legal prosecution, legislative reform, or disinvestment campaigns, and it can be targeted at many different social levels, from the local to the international. The law is an area of special focus for advocacy actions, such as for protecting indigenous rights, right to health, right to information, or others. As has been pointed out earlier, international legal and policy frameworks can be important instruments of mediation between the experience of local communities and structural change. In some instances, Church organisations are one of the plaintiffs in a court case. In some countries, the Catholic Church played a role in stopping legislation that would have opened the country to large investment in the mining sector. El Salvador introduced a total mining ban in 2017 (McKinley 2021). It was overturned in December 2024, and civil society mobilisation is taking place to change the law and revert the decision. In the Philippines, the Church participated in mobilisations that led to the introduction of a moratorium on mining in 2012 (Gaspar 2021), which was also revoked, but the campaigning work to revert the decision continues. There is also more targeted advocacy work in demanding stricter auditing processes of environmental law compliance of mining companies, demanding fairer distribution of the profits that

mining companies make, and greater taxation and redistributive measures, or changing legislation in countries that are buying minerals such as the Dodd-Frank legislation in the United States which prohibits the import of minerals whose sale fuels conflict. Facilitating dialogue roundtables and convening different actors to mediate a way forward among conflicting positions has also been in some countries, such as Peru, Colombia, and Ghana, an important role the Church plays in the policy arena whilst keeping a strong moral voice and upholding human dignity, care for creation, and preferential option for the vulnerable.

Advocacy often requires applying pressure for change to happen. This involves building large-scale coalitions with other actors, and at different levels, including achieving international visibility. This can range from partnering with organizations in Europe or elsewhere to launching a campaign to disinvest from mining companies, protesting against multinational companies' headquarters in London, Toronto, New York, or elsewhere, to protesting against their subsidiary companies at a national level, or launching a large-scale media and information campaign about the consequences of renewable energy consumption on vulnerable communities. Applying pressure for change also often involves acts of non-violent civil resistance. This can include marches, roadblocks, or creating other forms of disruption to, for example, demand an environmental impact assessment to be carried out by an independent body, to oppose a government decision to grant a mining company license to explore or operate, to demand new or stricter compliance of environmental laws, or to demand compliance with agreed social compensation and environmental mitigation plans. Liturgical and symbolic resources are sometimes used as a way of drawing public attention, such as celebrating the Eucharist in an open-pit mine to bring attention to the social and ecological devastation and mobilizing the sacrament of baptism to highlight the sacredness of water, without which there is no life. Pilgrimages have also been used as a form of mobilising, sometimes coupled with formation activities such as human rights training.¹¹

When applying pressure for change, workshop participants noted the balance between prophetic, denunciation, and condemnation discourse and policy and constructive engagement discourse with governments and mining companies. For example, some participants rejected the very concept of "critical minerals", which are listed by some countries as minerals that have strategic importance for their national priorities, such as their net zero commitments, as they were not "critical" for the local communities which are experiencing the negative social and ecological consequences of mining these minerals. Such prophetic discourse has its place to denounce injustices, but it might not be helpful for organisations which are working at changing the policies around these minerals, such as the European Union Critical Raw Materials Act.

One aspect of advocacy that workshop participants highlighted as a unique contribution of Catholic actors is that of advocating for change in consumption patterns and strengthening links of solidarity between the so-called "Global North" and "Global South". The high-energy consumption lifestyles of some are connected to the lives of those who live in territories where mining takes place. In addition to engaging on mining issues as such, there is work to be done on advocating for developing an alternative economic model based on joyful sobriety and low consumption lifestyles in the Global North, and developing alternative livelihoods for mining-affected communities such as agro-ecology projects or social and solidarity economy initiatives.

7. Concluding Remarks

This paper has sought to propose a typology of responses to mining of a highly diverse and complex faith-based actor, namely the Catholic Church, on the basis of a series of consultations with organizations involved in accompanying mining-affected communities in some Latin American, African, and Asian countries. It has highlighted the Church's considerable assets and potential through its vertical and horizontal integration, its sets of reflections and analysis on the causes of the

¹¹ See Deneulin et al. (2024) for the use of symbolic, liturgical and spiritual resources to mobilize civil society for the protection of human rights and ecosystems in extractive and mega-infrastructure contexts.

socio-ecological consequences of mining within the horizon of human dignity and flourishing ecosystems, and its educational institutions and formation avenues, including liturgical and spiritual spaces. It has also highlighted some weaknesses or areas where more critical self-reflection is needed, especially in acknowledging its own participation in colonial and extractive practices and in responding to the specific realities and experiences of women in mining-affected communities. Despite its centrality of human dignity in its teachings, the Catholic Church is yet to affirm the equal dignity of women through recognizing their leadership qualities and experiences – as has been noted, women are often at the forefront of leading the struggles to defend human rights and ecosystems at the local level. There are some small steps in that direction with the synodal process but there is ample room for more women in position of leadership in the Church's ecclesial bodies and organisations at the national, regional and global level.

Other areas of responses that need strengthening is in building solidarity networks between communities where mineral products are consumed and where they are sourced. Extraction of mineral resources is driven by demand. As much as actions are needed to remedy, or limit, the large array of harms that often go with mining activities, actions are needed to lower the pressure on mineral extraction, and this includes above all changing consumption patterns. Getting Church communities in the Global North, where demand is concentrated, in connection with peoples and experiences in the Global South in order to make the consequences of high consumption seen and understood can help with lowering that pressure. And the existing networks of the global Catholic Church should be able to offer ready-made avenues for fostering such contact and solidarity (see Miller 2021). There is also a need for strengthening technical and legal expertise, and stronger and more informed policy advocacy. The Catholic Church has often emphasised cooperation with “all women and men of goodwill”, and there is much untapped potential for coalitions with experts and professionals from around the world who share a commitment to human rights and ecological protection. And greater North-South engagement can encourage demand-side advocacy to complement the work being done at the community level near mine sites or in countries where adverse social, economic, and ecological impacts or mining are more acutely felt.

Engagement with mining companies themselves to improve their accountability and their human rights and ecological records has been a thorny area for faith-based actors, with some defending a prophetic stance, condemning companies and their harmful practices and seeking an end to mining activities in their territories. Some, however, have adopted a more nuanced stance, demanding fairer distribution of revenues and more dignified employment for local communities, or have engaged with the industry itself to identify leverage point for avoiding or limiting human rights violations and ecological destruction. As a reviewer of the book *Catholic Peacebuilding and Mining* (Montevecchio and Powers 2021) noted, “unless such time as producing a book like this does not require the products of the mining industry, we need not only denunciatory challenge but also co-labour across the industry” (Reed 2023, 734). Indeed, many chapter contributors also noted the paradox of writing on denouncing the harms of the extractive industries whilst relying on the industry itself to write (the bauxite, copper, gold, lithium, etc. in the computer, or solar panels used to produce the electricity to fuel the computer).

Three conferences have been held in the Vatican with representatives from the International Council on Mining and Metals, multinational mining companies, Catholic and non-Catholic Christian church leaders, men's and women's religious orders, and civil society organisations.¹² But there has been little sustained engagement to reform the industry itself. It is one thing to make declarations about the cry of mining-affected communities and denounce the human rights and ecological abuses of the extractive sector, and repeat Church teachings around human dignity and

¹² A Day of Reflection on the Ethics of Mining was organized in September 2013, by then Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, another Day of Reflection on “United with God, We Hear a Cry” was organized in July 2015, and in May 2019 a two-day conference on “Mining for the Common Good” organized by the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development.

care for our common home, and another to find concrete constructive alternative ways forward to meet the mineral demand of our ways of lives without harming people and planet. In his address to the participants of the 2019 conference, Pope Francis (2019) highlighted two directions forward to guide the dialogue between mining companies and church actors: 1) making mining operations at the service of people, respecting their human rights, and this includes the involvement of local communities in shaping every phase of a mining project; 2) promoting a circular economy centred on reducing, reusing, and recycling. A concrete plan of action in both directions is yet to be designed and implemented in a coordinated way globally, though there are many shoots springing up across all continents, as we have sought to document throughout the paper. Such a coordinated strategy across Catholic institutions and Church-affiliated organizations would greatly strengthen the global Church's position as a moral voice for change in the extractive sector.

References

- Alyansa Tigil Mina (n.d.). "About the Network." Accessed 1 May 2025. <https://www.alyansatigilmina.net/about>
- Arellano-Yanguas, Javier. 2014. "Religion and Resistance to Extraction in Rural Peru." *Latin American Research Review* 49 (Special Issue): 61-80.
- Arellano-Yanguas, Javier and María del Pilar Bernal-Gómez, eds. 2023. *Energy transition, Mining expansion and eco-social conflicts in the Amazon*. Bilbao: University of Deusto. Accessed 8 April 2025. <https://www.somos-amazonia.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Conflictos-ecosociales-ENGL-DIG.pdf>
- Bebbington, Anthony. 2023. "Just Energy Transitions and Mining." *LSRI Briefing Note* 5. Accessed 3 April 2025. https://lsri.campion.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2023-01/lsri-bn-no.05_bebbington-02.250123.pdf
- Business and Human Rights Resource Centre. 2025. "Transition Minerals Tracker." Accessed 3 April 2025. <https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/from-us/transition-minerals-tracker/>
- CAFOD (Catholic Agency For Overseas Development). 2023. *Gold Mining in Yanomami Indigenous Territory*. Accessed 15 April 2025. <https://cafod.org.uk/news/campaigning-news/uk-role-in-tackling-illegal-gold-mining>
- Cahill, Lisa. 2023. "Mining and Women's Activism: Still Under the Surface of Catholic Social Teaching". In *In Solidarity with the Earth* edited by Hilda Koster and Celia Deane-Drummond, 138-157. London: T&T Clark.
- CBPC (Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines). 1988. "What is Happening to our Beautiful Land?" Accessed 10 April 2025. <https://www.silene.org/en/documentation-centre/declarations/what-is-happening-on-our-beautiful-land-pastoral-letter-on-ecology>
- Chaplin, Jonathan. 2016. "The Global Greening of Religion". *Palgrave Communications* 2(1).
- CELAM (Conferencia del Episcopado Latinoamericano y del Caribe). 2007. *Documento Conclusivo de Aparecida*. <https://www.celam.org/aparecida/Espanol.pdf>
- CELAM. 2018. *Missionary Disciples: Custodians of our Common Home*. Accessed 13 May 2025. https://justiceinmining.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/07-ENG-CELAM_pastoral_letter_2018_final.pdf
- CEPAL (Comisión Económica para América Latina). 2024. *Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean*. Accessed 9 April 2025. <https://www.cepal.org/en/publications/69163-regional-agreement-access-information-public-participation-and-justice>
- CERN- CENCO (Comission Episcopale pour les Ressources Naturelles - Conférence Episcopale Nationale du Congo). N.d. *Impact de l'Exploitation Minière sur l'Economie et le Social de Walikale*. Accessed 1 May 2025. <https://notredame.app.box.com/s/fcofkjkmqujlrqct4mqxdse7ybz32osj>
- CINEP and ALBOAN. 2019. *Gold Mining and Local Communities in Southern Córdoba in Colombia: The Case of El Alacrán Mine*. Accessed 14 April 2025. <https://centroderecursos.alboan.org/es/registros/8776-gold-mining-and-local>

- CRS (Catholic Relief Services). 2011. *Extractives and Equity: An Introductory Overview and Case Studies from Peru, Angola and Nigeria*. Accessed 15 April 2025. <https://www.crs.org/sites/default/files/tools-research/extractives-and-equity.pdf>
- Dunlap, Alexander. 2024. *This System is Killing Us: Land Grabbing, the Green Economy and Ecological Conflict*. London: Pluto Press.
- Francis. 2015. *Laudato Si': On Care for our Common Home*. Accessed 9 April 2025. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html
- Francis. 2019. "Address to Participants at the Meeting Promoted by the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development on the Mining Industry." 3rd May 2019. Accessed 1 May 2025. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2019/may/documents/papa-francesco_20190503_incontro-industria-mineraria.html
- Francis. 2020a. *Fratelli Tutti: On Fraternity and Social Friendship*. Accessed 8 April 2025. http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html
- . 2020b. *Querida Amazonia: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation*. Accessed 8 April 2025. <http://www.sinodoamazonico.va/content/sinodoamazonico/en/documents/post-synodal-apostolic-exhortation-querida-amazonia.html>
- Francis. 2024. *For a Synodal Church*. Accessed 8 April 2025. https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/news/2024-10-26_final-document/ENG---Documento-finale.pdf
- Gandolfo-O'Donnell, Elizabeth. 2023. *Ecomartyrdom in the Americas: Living and Dying for our Common Home*. New York: Orbis Books.
- Gaspar, Karl. 2021. "Catholic Peacebuilding and Mining in the Philippines." In *Catholic Peacebuilding and Mining*, edited by Caesar Montevecchio and Gerard Powers, 54-66. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature (GARN). N.d. "Rights of Nature Articles and Reports." Accessed 10 April 2025. <https://www.garn.org/articles-and-reports/>
- Global Witness. 2024. *Missing Voices: The Violent Erasure of Land and Environmental Defenders*. Accessed 3 April 2025. <https://globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/land-and-environmental-defenders/missing-voices/>
- Gottlieb, Roger S. 2006. "Introduction: Religion and Ecology—What Is the Connection and Why Does It Matter?" In *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Ecology*, edited by Roger S. Gottlieb, 3–19: Oxford University Press.
- Holden, William. 2012. "Ecclesial Opposition to Large-Scale Mining on Samar: Neoliberalism Meets the Church of the Poor in a Wounded Land." *Religions* 3: 833–861.
- Human Rights Watch. 2024. "Landmark Court Ruling Upholds Right to Healthy Environment." Accessed 15 April 2025. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/04/18/landmark-court-ruling-upholds-right-healthy-environment>
- Jenkins, Willis, Mary Evelyn Tucker, and John Grim. 2017. *Routledge Handbook of Religion and Ecology*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Jeyaraj, Xavier. 2024. "Profit Over People: Killing a Tribal Movement Against Corporate Mining in India." *Environment: Science and Policy for Sustainable Development* 66(4): 22-39.
- Köhrsen, Jens, Julian Blanc and Fabian Huber. 2023. eds. *Religious Environmental Activism: Emerging Conflicts and Tensions in Earth Stewardship*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Martínez-Alier Joan. 2023. "Religious Groups as Environmental Activists." In *Land, Water, Air and Freedom*, edited by Martinez-Alier, 487–506. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- McKinley, Andrés. 2021. "The Mining Struggle in El Salvador and the Role of the Catholic Church." In *Catholic Peacebuilding and Mining*, edited by Caesar Montevecchio and Gerard Powers, 80-91. Abingdon: Routledge.

- Miller, Vincent. 2021. "Mining and the call for solidarity: the networks we have and the synodal network the Church is called to be." In *Catholic Peacebuilding and Mining*, edited by Caesar Montevercchio and Gerard Powers, 202-220. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Montevercchio, Caesar and Gerard F. Powers, eds. 2021. *Catholic Peacebuilding and Mining: Integral Peace, Development and Ecology*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Montevercchio, Caesar. 2024. "A Catholic Peacebuilding Response to the Environmental Violence of Mining." In *Exploring Environmental Violence*, edited by R. Marcantonio, J.P. Lederach and A. Fuentes, 278-300. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nadelman, Rachel. 2015. "'Let Us Care for Everyone's Home': The Catholic Church's Role in Keeping Gold Mining Out of El Salvador." *CLALS Working Paper Series* No. 9
- NATO. 2024. "NATO releases list of 12 defence-critical raw materials." Accessed 3 April 2025. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_231765.htm
- OCMAL (Observatorio de Conflictos Mineros en América Latina). N.d. "Map of Mining Conflicts." Accessed 14 April 2025. <https://www.ocmal.org/ocmal/>
- Öhlmann, Philipp and Ignatius Swart. 2022. "Religions and the Environment." *The State of the Evidence in Religions and Development*, edited by Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities (JLIFC), 33-89. Washington, DC: JLIFC. Accessed 10 April 2025. <https://jliflc.com/2022-state-of-the-evidence/>.
- Otano-Jimenez, Gillermo. 2023. "Agency, Power and Ecological Conversion: The Case of the Conflict-Free Technology Campaign." In *Integral Human Development*, edited by Séverine Deneulin and Clemens Sedmak, 259-282. South Bend, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Pope, Stephen. 2019. "Integral Human Development: From Paternalism to Accompaniment." *Theological Studies* 80(1): 123-147.
- Reed, Esther. 2023. "Book Review: *Catholic Peace-Building and Mining*." *Studies in Christian Ethics* 23(3): 732-4.
- RSAI (Red de Solidaridad y Apostolado Indígena). 2024. *Extractivismo, Mujeres y Resistencia*. Accessed 14 April 2025. <https://jesuitas.lat/2024/11/12/presentacion-de-los-resultados-de-la-investigacion-extractivismo-mujeres-y-resistencia/>
- The Geological Society (n.d). "Posters: Minerals in a Smartphone, Solar Panel, and Electric Car." Accessed 3 April 2025. <https://www.geolsoc.org.uk/education-and-resources/secondary/secondary-resources/>
- UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development). 2024. "Critical Minerals Boom: Global Energy Shift Brings Opportunities and Risks for Developing Countries." Accessed 3 April 2025. <https://unctad.org/news/critical-minerals-boom-global-energy-shift-brings-opportunities-and-risks-developing-countries>
- Walter, Mariana and Lucrecia Wagner. 2021. "Mining Struggles in Argentina: The Keys of a Successful Story of Mobilisation." *The Extractive Industries & Society*, 8.
- Wodon, Quentin. 2022. *Global Catholic Education Report 2023: Transforming Education and Making Education Transformative*. Washington, DC: Global Catholic Education. Accessed 15 April 2025. <https://www.globalcatholiceducation.org/global-reports>
- Van Teijlingen, Karolien. 2022. "The 'Church of the Poor and the Earth' in Latin American Mining Conflicts." *Religions* 13(5): 443. doi.org/10.3390/rel13050443.

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.