



## From Stewardship to Sacrament: A Search for Theological Foundation for Ecological Responsibility in Catholic Healthcare Institutions

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### Cite this article in APA

Nzekwe, J. C. (2026). From stewardship to sacrament: A search for theological foundation for ecological responsibility in catholic healthcare institutions. *Journal of pastoral and practical theology*, 5(1), 73-84. <https://doi.org/10.51317/jppt.v5i1.980>



A publication of Editon Consortium Publishing (online)

### Article history

Received: 2026-12-14

Accepted: 2026-01-22

Published: 2026-02-15

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### Abstract

The purpose of this article is to explore how the understanding of creation as a sacrament can promote ecological responsibility in the Catholic Healthcare institutions. To do justice to this research work, we adopted conceptual analysis as a research methodology with the aim of analysing some encyclicals, biblical texts, theological texts, and the works of some Christian ecologists. These resources will enable us to explore the stewardship model as a stepping stone towards developing the sacramental model of ecological responsibility. This study finds that while Catholic social teaching is rightly framed around the idea that human beings are stewards of creation, a more efficient framework is to see creation as a sacrament, an idea also backed by Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'*. Drawing on Scripture, sacramental theology, Catholic social teaching, and healthcare ethics, this article proposed a theological foundation for ecological responsibility in healthcare that is both spiritually rooted and institutionally actionable. When creation is seen as a sacrament, it implies that creation is sacred and ought to be protected, since it bears the presence of God who created it. This study concludes that Catholic healthcare institutions will improve their health outcome if they move from the narrow stewardship model to a sacramental ecology, in which care for the environment is understood as integral to healing, worship, and moral praxis.

**Key terms:** Environmental justice, environmental responsibility, integral ecology, sacrament, stewardship.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Catholic healthcare institutions understood that healing is a participation in God's work of restoring life and dignity, and therefore, human life is sacred. However, the hydra-headed nature of sicknesses in modern times invites us to a deeper reflection on the holistic nature of moral responsibility by taking into consideration the adverse effect of human-induced ecological damage and the great challenges it poses to human life and creation in general (PCJP, 2004). The awareness of the place of the environment in human health, brought about by the stewardship model, did not entirely solve the abuse of the environment, which it set out to achieve, but instead created a gap in practice. This research work, therefore, aims at closing this gap by enthroning the sacramentality of creation as a moral imperative with the purpose of challenging human beings to respect creation, considering the presence of God in them, which makes them sacred. Catholic moral theology is of the understanding that the instruction in Genesis 1:28 is not necessarily to dominate the earth, but rather an invitation for human beings to be stewards of creation.

Human beings are invited to recognise that the earth is a gift from God, and this gift ought to be reciprocated by way of protecting the earth as a way of showing gratitude to God, who is the source of this gift. This idea is one of the core principles within the Catholic social teaching as discussed by Pope Francis in his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, where he introduced the concept of integral ecology, a concept which underlines the interconnectedness of environmental, social, economic, and spiritual crises (Francis, 2015). Hence, for environmental responsibility to be more effective within the healthcare setting, there is a need to tap into the existing communion within the natural world by exploring the symbolic and sacramental character of creation.

It is when we accept the world as a sacrament of communion that human beings can peacefully co-exist with other created neighbours (Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, 2003). This co-existence will benefit Catholic healthcare institutions as an institution dedicated to healing, by helping them to find a balance between restoring human health and the care of creation. By so doing, creation can be respected as sacred rather than a mere resource to be exploited, and as such, Catholic healthcare institutions can focus on healing that respects the human body and the honour of the presence of God in other creatures. This research work will establish how the broad understanding of creation as a sacrament issues a greater imperative of ecological responsibility on Catholic healthcare institutions, without completely cancelling out the place of ecological stewardship.

## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Since its publication in 2015, the encyclical *Laudato Si'* has proven itself to be a veritable resource for many authors whose perspective on ecology revolves around the Catholic understanding of the theme. Authors like Miller V. J. see creation as a tangible reflection of God's goodness, an idea intended to ground the intrinsic value of nature and motivate sacrificial care (Miller VJ, 2017). For Magill, G. and Potter, J., the natural world is a direct reflection of God's grace; they therefore proposed a shift from exploitative, utilitarian approaches to one that recognises the environment as a sacred gift (Magill, G., & Potter, J., 2021). Kureethadam J.'s argument centres on shifting from a view of nature as a commodity to viewing creation as a sacrament and thereby replacing the detached concept of stewardship with an intimate framework of "care" for our common home (Kureethadam JI, 2014).

The common denominator of all these great authors is the fact of arguing from the sacramental understanding of creation as a way of establishing the stewardship model. Hence, this research work intends to make the sacramental model an independent model with a moral imperative that simply says, 'desist from reckless relationship towards creation, if you do not intend to attack God's presence'. It aims at establishing the sacramental nature of material things as a way of promoting ecological responsibility in the Catholic healthcare institutions. However, the encyclical *Laudato Si'* will be a vital source for this article. We shall also be citing numerous eco-theologians whose works are related to our theme. Among the prominent keywords that will feature in this study are 'sacrament', and 'stewardship'. These two words have broad meanings in their common usage, hence, in our context, we shall be defining sacrament, as an outward sign of inward grace, instituted by Jesus Christ to help individuals in their spiritual life and to grow in holiness. More broadly, we shall conceive it as signs of the sacred presence of our God within his creation. Stewardship on the other hand is the framework for understanding human responsibility towards the environment as assigned by God at the time of creation. These concepts shall be elaborated further in the course of this research work. We shall be using the two distinct words 'nature' and 'creation' interchangeably throughout this research as a way of capturing every created thing, which includes human beings. We shall finally focus on the research question: Can interpreting material things as a sacrament help to promote ecological responsibility in Catholic healthcare institutions? We shall discuss this within the scope of Catholic ecology in the context of a healthcare institution.

## 1. Ecological Responsibility as Moral Praxis in Catholic Healthcare Institutions

Ecological responsibility in Catholic healthcare should go beyond moral reflection to assume a concrete form in institutional practice. Healthcare institutions are not morally neutral service providers that simply respond only to market forces or regulatory imperatives. They are social institutions bound by the duty to follow respect public policies, ethical values, and prioritise saving lives above every other thing. They have the responsibility as moral agents to answer for the foreseeable consequences of their actions, which include environmental impacts on communities and ecosystems.

Given the fact that they are moral institutions, they have the obligation to be transparent, such that their success could be measured not just based on financial performance or clinical outcomes, but also on moral integrity, which must shape their daily operations, decisions, and structures (Beauchamp, T.L., & Bowie, N.E., 2004). There is an urgent need for them to translate theological commitments to care for creation, which should reflect in their policy, governance, and ethical actions in such a way that can be felt in their healthcare delivery and daily decisions. Ecological responsibility becomes moral praxis when healthcare institutions intentionally align their operational priorities, mission statements, and ethical guidelines with environmental care (PCJP, 2004). This goes to say that governance plays a central role in this transformation.

The leadership of healthcare institutions determine what values guide institutional culture, how resources are allocated, and which technologies to adopt (Pellegrino ED, 2008). Whatever the boards and administrators prioritise goes a long way to determine the direction of their actions. When they prioritise ecological responsibility, it will reflect in the praxis that the care for creation is inseparable from patient care. Ethical oversight structures, such as mission and ethics committees, can further ensure that environmental decisions reflect Catholic moral teaching (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops,

2018). The staff are to be trained to align with the ecological culture of the healthcare institution where they are working.

There is also the place of ethical formation, education, and participatory decision-making, which helps to foster a shared sense of responsibility that promotes ecological care on the scale of an institution's professional identity. Hence, healthcare institutions are a "moral space" for meeting people, including administrators, clinicians, support staff, patients, and families, within a collective of institutional culture and values. When environmental responsibility is incorporated into this union of peoples, it becomes a collective ethical duty rather than a particular function assigned to sustainability directors. And when sustainability initiatives are rooted in faith, it goes beyond mere strategic improvements to become an expression of institutional conscience and an authentic witness of the values of creation embedded by God in all creatures (Francis, 2015). Hence, the outcome will involve the consideration of the ethics of energy consumption, fair procurement practices, and waste management, which will be included in the everyday ethical practices of the healthcare institutions in such a way that protects all lives at present and the generations yet unborn.

Ecological responsibility invites Catholic healthcare institutions to moral integrity, which challenges them to embody environmental commitments in their daily practice, in such a way that demonstrates consistency between faith, ethics, and action. Such commitment impresses the moral image of the Church, which has stood impeccable for millennia, to also be stamped on the Church's healthcare institutions, in such a way that will strengthen public trust and deepen the Church's witness in a world that urgently needs authentic witness.

## **2. The Ecological Paradox of Modern Healthcare Institutions**

Healthcare institutions have advanced so much in their quest to restore health and preserve life, but sometimes they end up undermining their efforts through their actions and inactions. It is paradoxical to know that the systems that prioritise healing often generate significant environmental harm that undermines healing. Healthcare institutions usually consume vast amounts of energy, water, and materials, thereby producing waste and emissions that end up degrading the environment (World Health Organisation, 2023). This hypocrisy raises some ethical concerns at the high level of contradictions involved, and why they keep undermining their own efforts in the long term. In a bid to control infection and prioritise patients' safety, healthcare institutions rely on the large-scale use of some pharmaceuticals, single-use plastics, chemical disinfectants, and energy-intensive technologies.

These resources end up contributing to pollution and ecological stress. Contaminated water and air from healthcare operations pose great danger for the surrounding communities, transforming environmental harm into a public health issue rather than a distant ecological problem (United Nations Environment Programme, 2024). Usually, the communities that host these healthcare institutions are the major victims of this harm resulting from the ecological footprint of healthcare institutions. In many poor regions where the healthcare institutions rely on fossil fuels due to unreliable energy infrastructure, such reliance owing the vast energy demands of healthcare industries, leads to increased carbon emissions and poor air quality (Health Care Without Harm, 2019). Poor management of waste creates the chance of hazardous medical waste contaminating ecosystems. All these harms occasioned by the actions of the healthcare institutions are directly against the social teachings of the Catholic Church. The principle of "do no harm" extends

beyond individual patients to the social and environmental conditions that shape health outcomes (Beauchamp, T.L., & Childress, J.F., 2019).

When healthcare practices contribute to ecological degradation, they conflict with the moral vision that underlies the healing mission. Ecological harm thus becomes a form of indirect violence against human dignity (Francis, 2015). Healthcare institutions are invited to a state of retrospection on how healing is practised and measured, and a demand to review how far their actions and inactions have deviated from their healing mission. They are also invited to reflect on the harm they are causing to this sacred space, which has been handed over to us as a gift from a generous God. They should turn their gaze from seeing ecological harm no longer as a technical inconvenience, but as a moral issue that challenges their very essence and identity. It is by so doing that they can truly save lives in alignment with the care of creation, protecting lives today and those of future generations.

### **3. Biblical and Doctrinal Roots of Ecological Responsibility**

From the beginning of creation, God gave human beings the freedom to choose between good and evil (Gen. 2:17), but not without letting them know the consequences of their choices. This implies that freedom comes with responsibility. God gave Adam the privilege to name everything he has created (Gen.2:19). He created human beings amid other creation with an instruction to subdue or dominate them (Gen. 1:28); a command that does not pitch a battle between human beings and other creations but rather invites human beings to be stewards of God's creation with love, since God is love (1 Jn. 4:8). God's love is the fundamental moving force in all created things (Francis, 2015). God revealed his love to us at the time of creation by giving us this beautiful world to sustain our lives, and therefore, sustaining the earth is a form of worship to him.

There should be a relationship of mutual responsibility between human beings and nature. Each community can take from the bounty of the earth whatever it needs for subsistence, but it also has the duty to protect the earth and to ensure its fruitfulness for coming generations (Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, 2003). The Catholic perspective of moral responsibility toward the environment reinforces the understanding of creation as a gift received from God and should be treated with utmost care (Brueggemann, W., 1997). When creation is harmed, it is not only nature that suffers but also the moral order that connects humanity to God's intention (John Paul II, 1990). When creation is treated as disposable, the relationship between humanity and God is strained. The ownership of any property makes its holder a steward of Providence, with the task of making it fruitful and communicating its benefits to others (CCC, 1997). This implies that profit, efficiency, or convenience should not be prioritised at the expense of the earth's health.

Environmental responsibility, therefore, is not optional, but an imperative of justice in line with Catholic Social teaching (PCJP, 2004). Catholic theology understands ecological concern not as a modern invention but as obedience to biblical faith and doctrinal rules that call believers to gratitude, restraint, and care (Francis, 2015). In the context of Catholic healthcare institutions, understanding creation as a gift aligns with their mission to save life. Life is sacred, and when the institution that is supposed to save life ends up consuming resources, generating waste, or altering ecosystems, they are disrespecting and indirectly showing a lack of gratitude to God, who is the giver of all life. Recognising creation as a gift invites

Catholic healthcare institutions to be at the centre of protecting human beings as well as the rest of God's creation.

#### 4. Integral Ecology and the Moral Vision of the *Laudato Si'*

Integral ecology, as proposed by Pope Francis in his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, has become a household phrase when it comes to the relationship between human beings and the rest of God's creation. This relationship touches every aspect of human life, from politics to economics, to culture, society, and theology (Deane-Drummond C et al., 2019). Integral ecology holistically encompasses the complex relation that exists between people and the planet they inhabit, with a vast array of accompanying ethical challenges (Magill, G., & Potter, J., 2021). The crucial connectivity between humanity and the environment raises a plethora of ethical issues that necessarily foster connections among social, cultural, economic, and ecological processes to develop sustainable systems to protect the planet, without dominating it (Magill G. & Potter J, 2021). From a Christian point of view, human beings should have a relationship with God, which helps them to have a relationship with their fellow human beings, and also a relationship with the rest of the created world.

The spectacle of the countless diversities and inequalities in creation tells us that no creature is self-sufficient. Creatures exist only in dependence on each other, to complete each other, in the service of each other (CCC, 1997). Everything is connected, and the genuine care for our own lives and our relationships with nature is inseparable from fraternity, justice and faithfulness to others. The crisis facing the planet is a crisis of human values, attitudes, and relationships, requiring moral conversion rather than technical solutions alone (Francis, 2015). Environmental issues cannot be treated as separate from social or moral concerns. This understanding recognises that environmental degradation, injustice, poverty, and public health crises are not different, but are interconnected realities (Francis, 2015). Human beings do not suffer the consequences of ecological harm in isolation; rather, ecological breakdown intensifies social vulnerability, particularly for the poor. By linking care for creation with concern for human dignity, integral ecology reframes environmental responsibility as an expression of love of neighbour. There is a need for an integrated approach to addressing the issue of poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and also protecting nature in general (Francis, 2015).

Pope Francis criticises systems that prioritise profit and convenience while taking no positive action on the long-term consequences for people and the earth (Francis, 2015). This critique is especially relevant for healthcare institutions, where technological advancement and high resource consumption are often taken for granted. These institutions are invited to examine how their practices contribute to ecological harm and social inequality (Deane-Drummond, C., 2016). From the perspective of Catholic healthcare institutions, integral ecology provides a moral framework that unites healthcare ethics with environmental responsibility. Ecological responsibility, therefore, should be seen as a spiritual journey in which the motivation for ecological practices will not be as a result of mere policies and external obligation imposed by regulation or public pressure, but as expressions of faith and worship. Ecological responsibility reminds us that healing cannot be separated from the conditions that sustain life, such as safe water, clean air, and a stable climate (World Health Organisation, 2023). When healthcare institutions embrace integral ecology, environmental sustainability and justice become a natural part of their healing mission.

## 5. Environmental Justice, Public Health, and the Preferential Option for the Poor

The degradation of the environment by the healthcare institutions usually comes with a huge price that is unevenly shared. The poor and marginalised communities are often the victims of pollution, climate change, and ecological degradation, especially because of their limited access to healthcare and a lower voice when it comes to political power. Public health challenges also provide a concrete link between environmental justice and human well-being. Exposure to harmful toxins, climate instability and unsafe waste disposal increases rates of respiratory disease, waterborne illness, and food insecurity (World Health Organisation, 2023). These health burdens mostly affect vulnerable low-income populations and are less likely to affect the rich. This disproportionality raises a moral question that hinges on justice.

It is a social sin against the poor, who are deprived of basic human rights and considered expendable, hence, the principle of common good immediately becomes, logically and inevitably, a summons to a preferential option for the poorest of our brothers and sisters (Francis, 2015). This principle points to the immense dignity of the poor as our fellow human beings created by God, while insisting that social, economic, and institutional decisions must prioritise the needs of every human being, which includes the poor and the minority (PCJP, 2004). When ecological harm leads to contaminated water, polluted air, or climate-related illness, it is often the poor who are the most vulnerable and suffer most severely. There is therefore a need for solidarity with the poor by promoting environmental responsibility and integrating the questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor (Francis, 2015). The neglect of injustice against the poor is a direct threat to human dignity, and when we cease to feel the pain of others, we experience numbness of conscience in a way that challenges our humanity. However, protecting environmental conditions that sustain health is inseparable from protecting life itself (Beauchamp, T.L., & Childress, J.F., 2019).

Catholic Healthcare institutions should be aware that their environmental practices, whether harmful or protective, can directly affect the health outcomes of the populations they are called to serve. They have the moral obligation to live out the preferential option for the poor by respecting the image of God in the people that inhabit the communities they serve.

Instead of making gains from their vulnerability, they should rather make every effort to reduce pollution, manage waste responsibly, and advocate for healthier environments in such a way that extends healing beyond hospital walls. They should be a helping hand to the poor in such a way that reduces their burden instead of multiplying it. They have the obligation to respect human dignity by having strong moral values that constantly challenge them to do the right, especially in those areas where environmental risks intersect with poverty, limited infrastructure, and weak regulatory protection (Health Care Without Harm, 2019). Catholic healthcare institutions have the moral obligation to be ecologically responsible. They should be able to recognise the sacredness of all creation, which includes human beings, in such a way that the care for creation and care for the poor are not separate moral commitments but the same call to justice, and compassion towards all lives at present and in the future.

## 6. Strengths and Limits of Stewardship within Catholic Social Teaching

The word "steward" originates from the Old English *stigweard* (or *steward*), combining *stig* (house, hall, or sty) and *weard* (ward, guardian, or keeper). Originally, it refers to a "guardian of the house" or domestic administrator. The Greek word, *oikonomos*, which is a combination of *oikos* "house" and *nomos* "law",

shares the same meaning as the Old English and defines a steward as someone who manages or oversees another's property, household, or estate. This word has continued to evolve in modern times to signify accountability for managing valuable resources for a higher authority or the community. The term conveys a sense of responsibility, ability to manage, and care for something not owned by you.

When we talk about stewardship, we are referring to the quality or office of that role. In our context, stewardship is the framework for understanding human responsibility towards the environment as assigned by God at the time of creation. Human beings have been given the privilege to manage their environment and its inhabitants in a way that pleases God, who gave them this gift. This implies that being accountable to God is of great priority when it comes to the welfare of his creation. It is expected that a human being, as a moral being, should render an account of the well-being of other creatures in a very responsible manner. Stewardship aligns ecological care with professional responsibility and institutional accountability, reinforcing the idea that caring for creation supports the Church's mission of service (CHA, 2017).

It can reflect the responsibility of healthcare institutions towards life in general by encouraging efficient resource use, reducing waste, and embracing ethical governance. However, the stewardship model is not without its own limitations, which are tied to human nature, that is, humans' history of disobedience and abuse of freedom. There is the possibility of humans being able to perceive creation as an object to be manipulated in a way that exalts the human manager as superior over other creations. There is also the possibility of reducing ecological care to technical efficiency, instead of a moral relationship (Deane-Drummond, C., 2014). Stewardship has the tendency to prioritise the language of management and control, in such a way that it narrows everything to it. In this understanding, nature is measured, optimised, and used primarily for efficiency and productivity (Taylor C, 2007). While this approach has shaped technological progress, it limits our understanding of creation. Within this framework, the environment becomes a resource rather than a reality filled with meaning, value, and presence (Berry T, 1999). When stewardship is not used in the right context, as usually happens, it risks treating sustainability as an administrative goal rather than a spiritual commitment (Cahill LS, 2014). Ecological problems are usually an externalisation of a deeper inner malaise that requires healing (Kureethadam JI, 2019). Stewardship language, when detached from a richer theological vision, may fail to inspire genuine ecological conversion (Northcott M, 2007). Hence, the sacramental model helps to fortify the spiritual dimension of the call to ecological responsibility.

## **7. A Sacramental Ethic of Sustainability in Catholic Healthcare Institutions**

A sacramental ethic of sustainability offers Catholic healthcare institutions a holistic framework for action. It draws together theology, ethics, and institutional practice into a unified moral vision rooted primarily in the Catholic social teaching. This ethic is not human-centred, but instead God-centered and points to the fact that creation has value in itself, independent of its usefulness to human beings. It understands care for creation not as an external obligation, but as an expression of faith rooted in the sacramental life of the Church. A sacramental ethic goes beyond technical efficiency or compliance-driven policies to insist that motivation matters as much as outcomes (Deane-Drummond, C., 2016). It strengthens the connection between environmental care and human dignity. It reframes decision-making at every level in such a way that brings to light that the consequences of the daily choices we make about procurement, waste management, energy use, and infrastructure are not morally neutral, but are ethical acts that either affirm

or undermine the healthcare's identity as a healing ministry of the Church. Sacramental ethic of sustainability can be seen as a way of honouring God's presence in the material creation. This understanding points to the fact that God's presence makes material creation holy and intrinsically valuable, and we must therefore respond faithfully to the gift of creation without reducing it to mere resources meant for human exploitation (Francis, 2015).

Rediscovering the sacramental values of material creation inspires respect for it. Hence, ecological responsibility is shaped by reverence, gratitude, and moral intention, and not just by regulatory pressure or cost savings. It aligns with the Church's commitment to the common good, ensuring that healthcare practices do not contribute to long-term harm or injustice (PCJP, 2004). When healthcare institutions protect the ecosystems that sustain life, they safeguard the health of patients, staff, and surrounding communities. Hence, by embracing this ethic, healthcare institutions can model a form of healthcare that heals bodies while honouring creation as a sacrament, and also be an authentic witness in a world that lacks moral voice in the face of ecological harm being perpetuated by human beings.

## **8. From Stewardship to a Sacramental Imagination of Creation**

It is God's beautiful plan to make the whole of creation mirror Him as their Creator, and to also establish His sacramental presence in all creatures (Lane DA, 2020). This understanding helps us to view the world through the lens of sacrament. Creation is not merely a matter but a sign that points beyond itself to God's presence and grace (Chauvet, LM, 2001). The material world, therefore, is seen as participating in God's self-communication, making creation something to be valued rather than controlled. According to the Catholic understanding, the sacraments rely on matter as the bedrock of their effectiveness. In the economy of grace, when ordinary elements like water, bread, wine, and oil are presented to a valid minister, following the form of each of these sacraments, these ordinary elements are transformed to be channels of divine grace through which God's saving work unfolds. God in his wisdom chooses physical realities as channels of divine life, making creation not merely the backdrop of salvation history but an active participant in it (Schillebeeckx E, 1963).

This implies that matter is not just spiritually neutral as we have always assumed, but rather it has a deeper spiritual meaning since it is created, redeemed, and sustained by God. We cannot totally separate spirituality from material creations. Environmental degradation, therefore, can be considered as not just an ethical or physical problem but a theological rupture that alters the channel through which grace is accessed, which should be avoided by all moral means. When creation is degraded and reduced to management and control, we limit creation and trample its sacramental nature, thereby weakening our ability to recognise God's presence in the world (Francis, 2015). There is therefore a need to move from management and control to focusing on the mystery in creation. This attitude not only enhances our vocation to responsibility and care for creation, but also invites institutions to act not only out of obligation but out of love for God, whose presence manifests in his creation.

It shifts the emphasis on environmental responsibility from compliance to gratitude and reverence, and from healthcare institutions being just technical spaces for treatment, to being places where care for bodies and respect for creation intersect (CHA, 2017). Healthcare institutions rely entirely on material realities, like clean water, breathable air, stable energy, and healthy ecosystems to sustain life. Protecting the material conditions of life cannot be separated from honouring the sacramental logic that undergirds

Catholic faith (Himes KR, 2013). When these conditions are not met, both medical effectiveness and sacramental meaning are diminished. The sacramental model, therefore, acts as a moral imperative that asks us to desist from reckless relationships towards creation if we do not intend to attack God's presence around us. When healthcare institutions recognise the sacred character of material creation, they can freely pursue the path of ecological responsibility. When they begin to see creation as a mysterious gift from God, healthcare institutions will begin to perceive healing in a positive and moral light in such a way that will be beneficial for both human beings and the rest of God's creation.

### 3.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**Conclusion:** Having come to this point in this research work, we have established that ecological responsibility within Catholic healthcare institutions requires a deeper theological grounding than the traditional framework of stewardship alone. While the stewardship model remains an important moral framework, the large-scale ecological crisis in our world today calls for a more profound theological response. We have affirmed that a sacramental model of creation with its moral imperative possesses a more compelling pastoral tone that communicates urgency and care. Understanding creation as a sacrament offers a richer theological grounding for ecological ethics in Catholic healthcare institutions. Viewing creation as a sacrament helps us to conceive material creation, not merely as a resource for human use but as a sign of God's grace and presence in the world he created.

This is necessary considering how healthcare institutions, whose primary responsibility is to heal and save lives, are sometimes found wanting when it comes to ecological responsibility. They generate environmental harms that directly or indirectly threaten public health, particularly through resource consumption, waste generation, and pollution. Inviting healthcare institutions to be ecologically responsible will entail making a shift from a narrow stewardship model toward a sacramental ecology, which provides a more holistic framework for ecological responsibility in Catholic healthcare institutions. When healthcare institutions embrace a sacramental vision of creation, ecological responsibility becomes an expression of faith, worship, and moral praxis. In this way, Catholic healthcare can embody a form of healing that respects both human dignity and the sacredness of the created world, offering a credible moral witness in an era of escalating ecological crisis.

**Recommendations:** Having known the theological stand of this research work, we therefore recommend a sacramental ecological formation for healthcare professionals to enable them to cultivate an institutional culture where environmental care is understood as part of the spiritual and moral vocation of healthcare. Catholic healthcare institutions should be able to adopt sustainable operational practices consistent with Catholic social teaching. Such practices should be framed as ethical actions that protect both human health and the integrity of creation. They should prioritise environmental justice and the preferential option for the poor by addressing the issues of pollution, climate-related health risks, and environmental inequities. They should integrate ecological ethics into institutional mission and governance, in such a way that the sacramental mindset of material creation is embedded not merely in their operational policy but as a theological and ethical commitment rooted in the Church's healing ministry. When all these actions are taken, Catholic healthcare institutions can transcend a limited managerial approach to a spiritually grounded ecological responsibility anchored on the sacramental nature of creation with the goal of healing the body and protecting all creation at present and in the future.

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