


## Article

# The Catholic Church and Mining: Types of Responses

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## Abstract

The increase in global demand for mineral resources with the energy transition is likely to intensify the consequences of mining, such as deforestation; biodiversity loss; soil, water, and air contamination; violations of civil, political, and labour rights; loss of livelihoods; and harm to health. It is a paradox that the quest for sustainability and transition away from fossil fuels are leading to another set of unsustainable practices. The paper analyses how one major faith actor, the Catholic Church, is dealing with this paradox and is translating its theological and moral commitment to integral ecology into practice in the context of mining. Based on a series of consultations with cross-continental actors, the paper aims to offer a typology of responses in order to inform the work of other actors in sustainable development and the transition to renewable energy. The paper examines five types of intertwined responses: (1) the accompaniment of mining-affected populations, which is the starting point of all responses; (2) the mediation of experience through theological and organisational resources and international policy frameworks; (3) the 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 socio-economic development. The paper concludes by discussing some shortcomings in these responses, as well as avenues for broad-based coalitions for sustainability in the context of the mining requirements of the energy transition.

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## 1. Introduction

Mining and mineral extraction are the foundation of modern-day living and a necessity for transitioning away from fossil fuel to renewable energy. Solar panels, wind energy, and electric cars require, among others, zinc, nickel, copper, cobalt, tin, nickel, aluminium, and lithium [1,2]. Demand for lithium is predicted to rise by over 1500% by 2050, with projections of a similar scale for nickel, cobalt, and copper. To meet the 2030 net-zero emissions targets, it is estimated that more than 80 new copper mines, 70 new lithium mines, 70 new nickel mines, and 30 new cobalt mines will be needed [3]. In addition to the energy transition, the pressure on mineral demand is heightened by current military expansion, with NATO releasing a list of twelve minerals critical to defence in December 2024, including lithium, aluminium, beryllium, cobalt, graphite, titanium, and tungsten [4].

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 [5]. The Business and Human Rights Resource Centre has tracked more than 630 cases of human rights violations between 2010 and 2023 in relation to the extraction of transition minerals [6], and Global Witness singled out mining as the most dangerous sector for civil society actors [7]. It is a paradox that the quest for sustainability and reducing carbon emissions through renewable energy brings in its wake a series of non-sustainable consequences and human rights violations.

In this paper, we are examining how one faith actor, the Catholic Church, is expressing its moral and theological commitments to sustainability in the context of the mining requirements of the energy transition. Numerous actions are taking place across Christian denominations, such as the Church of England initiative on mine tailings [8]. There are also cross-influences shaping theological and moral commitments to sustainability, such as Pope Francis crediting the influence of the Orthodox Church on the ecological commitment of the Catholic Church [9], and many Catholic responses to mining are undertaken collaboratively with a wide range of civil society actors, both secular and religious. We have focused on the responses of the Catholic Church partly because it is the largest Christian denomination, and partly because its theological and moral commitments to sustainability are contained in a body of documents known as Catholic Social Teaching (CST), but most of all because there was a need to gather the experiences of the Catholic Church in responding to mining globally. In March 2024, one of the authors of the paper participated in a meeting in Ghana of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) to examine issues around mining [10]. The participants expressed the need to gather experiences and responses at a global level. The “Catholic Church and Mining” project emerged as a response to that need. This paper is part of a larger project which aims to strengthen the extensive work of Catholic organisations in addressing the human rights violations and ecological destruction caused by mining and the ways that current experiences can promote additional engagement. It is based on a series of consultations with Catholic organisations that are working on addressing the social and environmental injustices which arise from mining activities in Latin America, Africa, Asia and globally. Four workshops took place online between November 2024 and March 2025, involving 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, and 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. There was also a gathering of more than 50 participants from Catholic organisations worldwide in Bogotá in June 2025 as part of the wider project on the “Catholic Church and mining”.

By proposing a typology of the actions that are being taken globally by Catholic actors, our aim is to bring to the fore the work of an often-neglected civil society actor in sustainability and inform the work of other civil society actors involved in responding to the challenges that arise from mining in the context of the energy transition and the quest for sustainability. Overall, this paper seeks to summarise the practices of faith actors in sustainable development, in this case its mining requirements, and contribute to the Special Issue “Faith and Sustainable Development: Exploring Practice, Progress and Challenges among Faith Communities and Institutions”. Given the conceptual remit of the paper and the limited space, we are not exploring how the work of the Catholic Church is carried out empirically, nor evaluating the obstacles it encounters, including, at times, from other members of the Catholic Church. Empirical studies on the Catholic Church and mining include: in Peru, Arrellano-Yanguas (2014) [11]; in the Philippines, Holden (2012) and Gaspar (2021) [12,13]; in El Salvador, Nadelman (2015) and McKinley (2021) [14,15]; and in Ecuador,

van Tijnlingen (2022) [16]; on European Union advocacy, Otano-Jimenez (2023) [17]. There are also references to further empirical studies in Montevecchio and Powers (2021) and Montevecchio (2024) [18,19]. We hope, however, that this typology may enable readers to better understand the work of one major faith actor in sustainable development, and serve as a springboard for undertaking empirical studies on how these actions are proceeding in specific localities and mining cases, and identifying the obstacles and enabling factors in shifting policies and transforming ecologically damaging economic practices.

The paper is structured in five sections, each describing and analysing a type of action identified in the consultative workshops and a way in which the Catholic Church is expressing its moral and theological commitments to sustainability in the context of the mining requirements of the energy transition: (1) accompaniment; (2) mediation of experience; (3) documentation; (4) education and formation; (5) advocacy. It then discusses how these different types intertwine in practice, summarises some of the challenges, and proposes some ways forward to strengthen the work of the Catholic Church and other faith-based actors in promoting sustainable development within the urgent global need to transition away from fossil fuels and reduce carbon emissions.

## 2. Accompaniment

The primary type of response 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 the CST document *Fratelli Tutti* [20], this is a service 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” (paragraph 115). This means that whatever the response to mining, people’s experiences of harm and injustice are prioritised.

This service is often talked about in Catholic organisations as “accompaniment”, or “being in solidarity with” mining-affected communities. In the guidelines of the Latin American Episcopal Council for the Church’s pastoral action on the continent [21], which the Latin American workshop participants drew on for their work, this relationship between service, solidarity, and accompaniment is expressed “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, 2017, p. 394). Relationships of trust and a shared journey of transformation are core to accompaniment [22]. This involves supporting the efforts of people whose dignity has been violated to become subjects of change and actively participate in the transformation of the unjust structures which undermined their dignity and violated their human rights. As *Fratelli Tutti* [20]—expresses (see the next section for the mediating role of CST documents), “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” (paragraph 116).

Accompaniment entails that local communities experiencing human rights violations are the drivers of any action. Any response springs from dialogue and listening to their grievances and needs. There is no general framework for responding beyond processes of listening and journeying together or, in theological terms, “synodality” [23]. Workshop participants emphasised that this journeying included organisations which might already be active in mining-affected territories of any or no faith background. They highlighted that

accompaniment processes started with the question: “With whom could mining-affected communities journey together on their road to justice and peace?”.

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 through 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 for 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 accept 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.

This “journeying with” extends to the whole biotic community, and is not limited to humans. The concluding document of the Synod on Synodality, which outlines what “journeying with” entails [23], highlights that the listening to those who suffer includes the earth itself, our common home (p. 48). The Latin American bishops whose dioceses are profoundly affected by mining stated in July 2025 that “by vocation and mission, the Church is called to put itself on the side of the human and non-human victims” [24]. The Latin American workshop participants noted the nascent work of Catholic organisations 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 actions denouncing unsustainable practices and promoting sustainable ones to take place.

### 3. Mediation of Experience

A crucial step in journeying with mining-affected communities on the path to sustainable development is making sense of the experiences of vulnerability, and understanding the dynamics at play during each phase of mining operations, whether announcement, exploration, exploitation, or closure. Arellano-Yanguas and Bernal-Gómez (2023) have shown that the mere announcement of a mining project, before any exploration activity starts, already breaks the social fabric of local communities [25]. Theological resources, such as CST documents, and ecclesial bodies such as dioceses and bishops’ conferences, as well as international policy frameworks such as human rights and the rights of nature, are important resources to mediate these experiences and channel transformative actions to address social and environmental injustices.

Catholic Social Teaching 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* [9], *Fratelli Tutti: On Fraternity and Social Friendship* [20] and *Querida Amazonia* [26] are recent CST documents with special relevance for mining, and which provide compasses for the work of Catholic organisations who accompany mining-affected communities. The first CST document was *Rerum Novarum* (“On New Things”), by Pope Leo XIII, in 1891. The new leader of the Catholic Church, Pope Leo XIV, took his name in direct reference to this body of social teachings to signal a strong commitment to translating these teachings into practice during his papacy. A central CST theme, based on the biblical narratives of Creation, is that the entirety of the living community is loved by God and finds fulfilment in harmonious relationships [9]. Mining breaks these relationships by causing social conflicts, ecological degradation, and human rights violations. The workshop participants emphasised the following breaking of ecological and social relationships: mining is water-intensive, and once aquifers are depleted, they are not replenished; when an area is deforested, its biodi-

versity is lost forever; water and soil contamination has long-term consequences, especially for children's development and women's reproductive health; mining brings divisions and social conflicts, with some 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.

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 they the violation of the dignity of work through dangerous and unsafe working conditions, poor pay, or the violation of bodily integrity through health risks and violence, including psychological and sexual violence. Integral human development is another cornerstone for mediating local experiences and denouncing models of economic and social development that go against the development of the human person in all their dimensions, including the ecological dimension—it is worth noting that the Catholic Church privileges the language of integral human development over that of sustainable development. 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-term improvements in people's lives; however, 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 foundation of CST, integral ecology.

The theological paradigm of "integral ecology" developed in *Laudato Si'* [9] provides a central mediating framework 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" (paragraph 11) to relating as carers, united by bonds of kinship with the living world (paragraph 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 (paragraphs. 48–52), excessive consumption and a "throwaway culture" (paragraphs. 20–22), and a lack of regulation and corruption (paragraphs. 177–179).

The way the Catholic Church is structured and organised is critical to the development of CST and the frames through which mining activities and their consequences are analysed. It is vertically integrated in its hierarchy, from the priest as the leader of a local community, the bishop at a higher level, bishops' conferences at the national level, regional bishops' councils, and the papacy at the international level; it is also horizontally integrated through a large array of organisations at each level, like schools, parishes, universities, religious orders, NGOs and development agencies, and civil society organisations. One example of this vertical and horizontal integration that participants from all continents highlighted as important in their work is the Amazon Synod, which led to the publication of the CST document *Querida Amazonia* [26]. This document is based on consultations with more than 2000 people across the region. Its analysis strengthened the social and ecological justice work of Catholic organisations globally. The Amazon synod is part of a broader institutional process of "synodality" within the Catholic Church. This has given the experiences and insights of local churches and communities, mediated by regional bishops' groups and local bishops, even greater significance in the development of CST, and many of these bishops have emphasised the impacts of mining in their teaching. For example, the Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM 2018) issued a pastoral letter interpreting *Laudato*

*Si'* in the Latin American context and extractive industries figured prominently in that teaching [27]. In preparation for the COP 30 in Belém in November 2025, the Catholic bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa and Madagascar, and Asia spoke with one voice, gathering the common experiences of mining-affected communities on their continents [28]. They warn that mining in the name of the energy transition is a false solution to climate change:

The growing rhetoric that the solution [to climate change] lies in expanding mining, especially for the extraction of minerals considered 'critical' and rare earths, is ecologically unsustainable, unjust and predatory. It reinforces colonial extractivism, transforms entire territories into sacrifice zones, violates human rights and devastates nature in the name of false sustainability. It is urgent to [...] move towards a regenerative and distributive economic model that recognises the ecological limits of the planet and places care for life at its centre, replacing the extractivist logic with an economy of well-being and care for our common home (p. 27).

It is noteworthy to highlight that, as a consequence of the experiences of local communities, mediated by organisational and theological structures (bishops' conferences and CST documents), there has been a shift away from anthropocentrism, and a recognition of the intrinsic value of non-human species. In that respect, there has been a move to organise the Church structures according to biomes or ecological territories, as with the gathering of all the bishops whose dioceses encompassed the Amazon region in the Amazon Synod, and the creation of the Ecclesial Networks Alliance, which gathers the experiences of what is happening in ecological territories such as the Congo Basin, River Above Asia and Oceana (which covers the Pacific Ocean), and the Gran Chaco and Guaraní Aquifers [29].

In addition to these organisational 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 important one, but they also mentioned the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the ILO Convention 169, which enshrines the right to Free, Prior, and Informed Consent. The Latin American participants added the international legal movement of the rights of nature [30] and the regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean [31], 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 recognises the rights of Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers.

The workshop participants noted two important challenges regarding these mediation channels. First is the organisational challenge. They noted that there was much room for rethinking current organisational Church structures to address mining issues. In many countries, bishops' conferences, as well as civil society organisations linked to the Catholic Church, do not have the human or financial resources, nor the expertise, to take actions to defend human rights and protect ecosystems. 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 have yet to be mediated through organisational and theological channels, such as by appointing women in official positions of leadership in ecclesial bodies and discussing the specific challenges faced by women in CST documents to place their specific concerns at the core of Church actions (Cahill 2023) [32]. Despite these challenges, the responses of Catholic actors to the socio-ecological consequences of mining, and the ways in which they translate their theological and moral commitments to sustainability into practices, span a wide area, 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 in turn strengthens other rights. With mining activities often taking place in remote areas, recording and compiling data about human rights violations, ecological damage, the criminalisation of protest, and threats or violence, can be used to amplify local communities' experiences through national and international channels. This constitutes a mainstay action to promote sustainability in the context of mining. It is frequently conducted in partnership with other organisations from different sectors of civil society and beyond faith boundaries.

In addition to general information-gathering, some Catholic actors also conduct in-depth case studies, which allow for more contextual and structural analyses, and can better highlight 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 [33], the study by CAFOD (2023) on gold mining in the Yanomami Indigenous Territory in Brazil [34], the study by Jesuits in the state of Jharkhand in India (Jeyaraj 2024) on a land acquisition process by a coal company [35], or the study of CERN-CENCO (2013) on mining exploitation in North Kivu in the DRC [36].

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, and violations of legal requirements, as well as 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. This includes conducting alternative assessments to those conducted by mining companies themselves, which are often biased and underestimate or soften the ecological impacts.

Collecting information on what is happening or developing alternative impact assessments require a significant amount of time, expertise, and organisational resources. Many workshop participants noted the challenges posed by 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 criminalisation 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 the vast network of educational institutions that can be mobilised. They especially noted the following areas in which educational and formation initiatives could particularly be effective in fostering sustainability. 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 licence to operate. This educational work is important even before any mining project takes place or is announced.

A second area of educational responses is the mobilisation of expert knowledge, whether legal, scientific, political, or other, from Catholic universities, both nationally and internationally, and from other individuals and organisations who share a similar commitment to human rights and ecological protection. This could include mobilising expertise around monitoring water quality and the health of local populations. The mobilisation of external expert knowledge can be coupled with building local scientific and legal expertise, and other skills, such as leadership and advocacy skills. Examples cited by the workshop participants include increasing water monitoring expertise and human rights expertise, legal literacy training, and university programmes oriented toward local communities and directly addressing the complex problems they face.

Third, as the largest provider of private education in the world [37], the Catholic Church possesses a unique opportunity to form ethical values and a sense of conscience around the respect of human dignity and ecological protection across its educational institutions at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels. All workshop participants converged in singling out this formation work as one of the most important responses of the Catholic Church to the sustainability challenges that arise from the mining requirements of the energy transition, and a response that has a comparative advantage over all the other types of response.

Another important formative space emphasised is liturgy, prayer, and other forms of spiritual practice. For many of the participants, spirituality, understood as connections with rivers, forests, other human beings, and God, was seen as the grounding of the Catholic Church's actions for sustainability. This echoes the work on "eco-martyrdom" [38], which underlines the centrality of spirituality in the work of environmental defenders in Latin America. 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. 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 the disinvestment of all Church actors globally from mining companies—though some shares may be maintained 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 flourishing ecosystems. 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. As was 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, Catholic 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 [15]. 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 [13], which was also revoked, but the campaigning to revert the decision continues. There is also more targeted advocacy work demanding stricter auditing processes of mining companies' compliance with international law, fairer distribution of the profits that mining companies make, and greater taxation and redistributive measures.

Advocacy often requires applying pressure for change to happen. This involves building large-scale coalitions with other actors, from different faiths or of no faith, and at different levels, including achieving international visibility. This can range from partnering with organisations 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, 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 for 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 is carried out by an independent body or oppose a government decision to grant a mining company licence to explore or operate. 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 mobilising 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 mobilisation, sometimes coupled with formation activities [39].

When applying pressure for change, workshop participants noted the difficult balance between prophetic discourse, denunciation, and condemnation on the one hand and policy discourse and constructive engagement with governments and mining companies on the other. 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 net-zero commitments, as they were not "critical" to the local communities which are experiencing the negative social and ecological consequences of mining them. Such prophetic discourse has its place to denounce injustices, but it might not be helpful for organisations which are working to change the policies regarding 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 to sustainability 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, even of renewable energy, are connected to the lives of those who live in territories where mining for transition minerals takes place. In addition to engaging on mining issues, there is work to perform advocating for the development of an alternative economic model based on joyful sobriety and low-consumption lifestyles in the Global North and alternative livelihoods for mining-affected communities, such as agro-ecology projects or social and solidarity economy initiatives.

## 7. Concluding Remarks

On the basis of the experiences of Catholic organisations involved in addressing social and ecological degradation caused by mining, this paper proposed a typology of the actions of one major global faith actor to promote sustainability in the context of the mining requirements of the energy transition. We sought to capture the responses of

Catholic actors to sustainable development in terms of “types” for analytical purposes. Obviously, all of them are intertwined in practice and none of the workshop participants neatly categorised their work into the distinctive types presented here. All expressed their actions in terms of “accompaniment”, being on the side of the victims and walking with them so they can be agents of change. In some cases, accompaniment involves documenting the human rights and environmental violations caused by renewable energy projects (type 3: documentation), as in the case of a participating organisation from Brazil; advocating that the European Union changes its supply of raw materials for the energy transition (type 5: advocacy), as in the case of a participating organisation based in Brussels; emotionally, socially, economically, and legally supporting communities displaced by mining (type 1: accompaniment), as in the case of a participating organisation from India; facilitating a joint document from global-South ecclesial bodies to state the position of the Catholic Church with regard to climate change and renewable energy [28] (type 2: mediation of experience); or creating educational programmes for environmental governance and leadership (type 4: education and formation), as in the case of participating academic organisations. Several workshop participants also noted that any policy advocacy work needed to rest on good data and information-gathering, as well as required skilled human resources and formation, and analytical frameworks. Therefore, some viewed the actions their organisations were undertaking, such as water quality monitoring, human rights monitoring, training, and contributing to the statements of global ecclesial bodies and CST documents, not only as accompaniment, but also as forms of advocacy.

Some types of actions will be more important at certain times than others, and some Catholic actors will focus on particular types according to their remit and the level at which they operate (local, national, or global). For example, workshop participants mentioned the crucial role of human rights education and informing local communities of the long-term consequences of a mining project even before any project has been publicly announced. However, once a project has started, the focus will shift to documenting its impacts. A Catholic organisation based in the Peruvian Amazon may focus on providing local water monitoring expertise, but a Catholic organisation based in Brussels might focus on advocacy work with the European Union regarding its supply of raw material for energy transitions. Some actions also do not fit into the types identified here and accompaniment can take other forms, such as developing alternative livelihoods, social and solidarity economy projects and ecosystem restoration and agro-forestry. In all cases, the principle of subsidiarity applies; that is, problems should be dealt with at the lowest level possible, but the highest level necessary. Action at the mine site needs to be connected to action in the company headquarters and the national and international legislations under which its activities fall. One of the Church’s strengths is its ability to engage with multiple levels of society through its unique organisational structures, which bridge the local and global levels, and coordinate those engagements.

Given the scope of the paper and space limitations, we were not able to detail empirical examples of how different Catholic organisations are responding to the mining requirements of the energy transition—a series of examples are detailed in a forthcoming document, *‘Catholic Approaches to Mining: A Framework for Reflection, Planning, and Action’*, which was written to help Catholic organisations harness their capacity to address the many dimensions of the socio-environmental injustices related to mining. We were also unable to analyse how these various actions play out empirically in a given country or mining site, their effectiveness, the obstacles Catholic organisations encounter, including both within the Church’s own leadership and with other Catholic organisations, or internal and external power dynamics. Workshop participants expressed the need to conduct empirical studies that focus on cases of “success”, where Catholic actors were able to prevent a socially

and ecologically destructive project or shift a policy, so that other actors can learn about enabling and disabling factors, exchange experiences, and learn from each other. It should be noted, however, that “success” is never guaranteed once and for all, as the revocation of the mining ban in El Salvador illustrates.

In addition to conducting such detailed empirical studies and enabling deeper exchanges and learning using cross-continental experiences, workshop participants underlined two areas for strengthening the responses of the Catholic Church to mining. One is in relation to recognising and strengthening the leadership of women. Women are often at the forefront of leading mining-affected communities to defend human rights and ecosystems at the local level, yet their leadership has no official recognition within Catholic ecclesial bodies, whether at the local level (parish and diocese), national level (bishops’ conference), or global level (Vatican dicasteries), as leadership is often tied to ordination [32,39]. With the appointment of women in decision-making bodies of the Catholic Church, there are some small steps in decoupling Church leadership from ordination, but more women could be appointed to positions of leadership at all levels. There could also be more recognition and inclusion of women who are leading at the community level in broader Church activities like regional collaborations.

Other areas of responses that need strengthening is in building networks of solidarity between communities in which transition minerals are consumed and those in which they are sourced. The 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 accompany mining activities, actions are also needed to lower the pressure on mineral extraction, and this includes, above all, changing consumption patterns. Connecting faith communities in the Global North, where demand is concentrated, 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. As Miller (2021) has argued, the existing global networks of the Catholic Church should be able to offer ready-made avenues for fostering such contact and solidarity [40]. There is also a need to strengthen technical and legal expertise, and for 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 similar commitment to sustainability. 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 of mining are more acutely felt.

Engagement with mining companies themselves to increase their accountability and improve their human rights and ecological records has been a thorny area of response, with some organisations and ecclesial bodies 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, policy-oriented stance, demanding fairer distribution of revenue and more dignified employment for local communities, or have engaged with the industry itself to identify leverage points for avoiding or limiting human rights violations and ecological destruction.

There is a paradox: this very paper could not have been written without relying on the industry itself (the bauxite, copper, gold, lithium, etc., in the computer, or the solar panels used to produce the electricity to fuel the computer). We all need energy. Limiting global temperatures and avoiding the catastrophic consequences of climate change requires a rapid transition to renewable energy, and this, with energy consumption remaining equal, unavoidably requires a large increase in mining activities to meet demand.

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. These are: A Day of Reflection on the Ethics of Mining organised in September 2013, by the then Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace; a Day of Reflection on "United with God, We Hear a Cry" organised in July 2015; a two-day conference on "Mining for the Common Good" organised in May 2019 by the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development. However, there has been little sustained engagement to reform the industry itself, and to our knowledge, these gatherings have not led to changes in the industry. It is one thing to make declarations about the cry of mining-affected communities, denounce the unsustainable practices of the extractive sector, and repeat Church teachings around human dignity and care for our common home, and another to find concrete constructive alternative ways to sustainably meet the mineral demand of the energy transition. In his address to the participants of the 2019 conference, Pope Francis highlighted two directions forward to guide the dialogue between mining companies and Church actors: (1) ensuring mining operations serve people, respecting their human rights, including the involvement of local communities in shaping every phase of a mining project; (2) promoting a circular economy centred on reducing, reusing, and recycling [41]. A concrete plan of action in both directions has yet to be designed and globally implemented in a coordinated way. Such a coordinated strategy, reaching across Catholic institutions and Church-affiliated organisations, would greatly strengthen the global Church's position as a moral voice for change in the extractive sector and better address the unsustainable consequences of the quest for sustainability. The united message of the Catholic bishops' conferences of Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa and Madagascar, and Asia, in advance of the COP 30 in Belém, cited earlier [28], offers a prophetic sign of hope.

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