

A Church's Response to the Earth's Healing in the Face of Ecological Crisis

Arnold B. Donozo

College of Arts and Sciences
San Beda University
Arnolddonozo@yahoo.com

Julius B. Tutor

College of Arts and Sciences
San Beda University
July_tutor@icloud.com

Kim S. Guia

College of Arts and Sciences
San Beda University
kimstclair@icloud.com

Abstract

The Roman Catholic Church, thru the Supreme Pontiff, prides herself in her prophetic vocation. Just like the prophets of old, the Church speaks whenever there are social issues that threatens the people of God. Currently, all people are facing the ecological crisis as characterized by unprecedented natural weather patterns (climate change), loss of species of both flora and fauna, desertification and the like. As a crisis, it needs an immediate response. This response is the main focus of this research. Hence, this research aimed to fulfill the following objectives: to describe the current ecological crisis; to identify the Church's traditional and scriptural basis in responding to the challenges of the ecological crisis; to examine the different Church's encyclical and teachings as responses to ecological crisis; and to propose recommendations to alleviate the present ecological crisis. The social action cycle of *Mater et Magistra* was used as framework in identifying the origins of the crisis (context), followed by identifying diachronically the response of the Church drawing from the scripture, tradition (conscience), and examining synchronically the response of the Church's encyclical with special emphasis on *Laudato Si*, concluding with concrete recommendations (consciousness) to help alleviate the present ecological crisis. Thus, the result showed that the current ecological crisis is characterized by 'excessive anthropocentrism' which is a clear misunderstanding and misinterpretation of the human and

nature relationships. Moreover, a clear interpretation of the Biblical truth must be preserved. Lastly, the Catholic Social Teachings, specifically the *Laudato Si*, indicated that there is a need for a “*Dialogue*”, among various sciences, to respond effectively to the ecological crisis.

Keywords: Ecological Crisis, Laudato Si, Earth’s Healing, Care for the Environment, Social Action Cycle/Spiral

Introduction

The 'environmental holocaust' (Josol, 1991) is upon us. McDonagh (198) charged the Church for being silent about the ecological crisis. As 'the people of God,' we cannot afford to remain 'muted'. Discussing the ecological "status" today is of significant importance. This was made evident in the urgent call made by the Church's hierarchy.

On the address of Pope Francis I (2015b), he stated:

A second key area where you are called to make contribution is in showing concern for the environment. This is not only because this country, more than many others, is likely to be seriously affected by climate change. You are called to care for creation not only as responsible citizens, but also as followers of Christ!

Remarkably, Pope Benedict XVI (2010) uttered a related statement on the role of the Church amid the ecological crisis which is pressing the world. He said:

The Church has a responsibility towards creation, and she considers it her duty to exercise that responsibility in public life, in order to protect earth, water and air as gifts of God the Creator meant for everyone, and above all to save mankind from the danger of self-destruction.

Hence, it is a very serious duty of the Church and its members to protect and preserve creation in its public mission. In the past years, Pope John Paul II, now a saint, consistently reminded the members of the Church of an urgent need to respond to this Ecological crisis.

The ecological crisis reveals the urgent moral need for a new solidarity, especially in relation between the developing nations and those that are highly industrialized. When the ecological crisis is set within the broader context of the search for peace within society, we can understand better the importance of giving attention to what the earth and its atmosphere are telling us: namely, that there is an order in the universe which must be respected, and that the human person, endowed with the capability of choosing freely, has a grave responsibility to preserve this order for the well-being of future generations. I wish to repeat that the ecological crisis is a moral issue (Pope John Paul II, 1990b).

O'Brien (2010) mentioned about ecological crisis as a moral issue that calls for "changes in the ways we think and act toward the variety of life, beginning with the premise that the decline in the variety of life on our planet can be halted only by significant changes in human behavior". This same thought is of equal significance to the responses or action needed to answer the ecological crisis that we have today. Between, 1988 to 2015, several documents were actually issued and produced not only from the Roman Catholic Episcopal Conferences but also from other Religious Traditions. Different voices warned of ecological crisis in many forms, i.e., legal international treatises, publications of experts about the issue (Rozzi, *et al.*, 2015), and community outcry for help.

According to Jenkins (2008), "environmental problems are a crisis in Christian identity". Hence, the ecological problem and environmental degradation is to some extent a religious problem also, which indeed needs a religious response. Sincerely, we cannot separate our 'being' Christian into our 'becoming' Christian. What we do reflects the very essence of our identity as creatures 'created in the image and likeness of God'.

Hence in this study, the Encyclicals are our consideration of the response of the Church to ecological crisis. Moreover, in proposing a responsible solution to the current ecological crisis, Jenkins' (2008) environmental ethics is used to further analyze and clarify our research endeavor.

Operational Framework

This research will follow the framework presented in Figure 1.

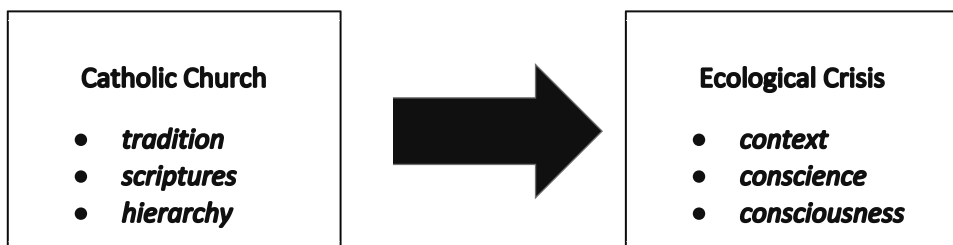


Figure 1: The Framework of the Catholic Church Response to Ecological Crisis

The research framework illustrates the process of analyzing problems and issues which confronts the community on ecological crisis. The Catholic Church through its tradition, scriptures and hierarchy, with emphasis on its theological assertions, has taken steps toward in understanding and interpreting the ecological crisis and the “preempted” responses to this problem; social action response to ecological Crisis. The pillar of a sound theological interpretation is rooted in these elements. ‘Ecological awareness’ and ecological integrity began in some of the public messages of Pope John Paul II in the early 1990s. Recently, this was emphasized by Pope Francis I in his encyclical *Laudato Si*. Hence, the study proceeds using as a framework- the social action cycle of *Mater et Magistra*, in identifying the origins of the crisis (context), followed by identifying diachronically the response of the Church drawing from the scripture and tradition (conscience), and examining synchronically the response of the Church’s encyclical with special emphasis on *Laudato Si*, concluding with concrete recommendations (consciousness) to help alleviate the present ecological crisis.

Methodology

This research used the descriptive approach in describing the current ecological crisis and presenting the Church’s traditions, scripture, and encyclicals as a way of responding to the ecological crisis. This research followed the four ‘stages’ of the social action cycle. The four stage cycle of social action consists of the following: (1) Observe Social Reality and Identify needs; (2) Social Analysis to Identify Social Causes; (3) Theological Reflection in the light of Scripture and Catholic Social Thought; and, (4) Social Action to Change Sinful Social Structures. This is based on *Mater et Magistra* as reformulated by Hornsby-Smith (2006).

The *diachronic and synchronic approaches* are used to reflect on, evaluate and propose responses echoed in the history of the Church. In Greek, ‘*dia*’ means “through” while ‘*kronos*’ refers to “time.” So, diachronic means “through time”. For synchronic ‘*syn*’ means “same and ‘*kronos*’ is “time”. The technique ‘synchronic’ then refers to “present time”. Thus, this research examined how the issue of ecological crisis has developed ‘historically’ up to the ‘present time.’

Hence, from the teachings and promulgation of the Church which can be read in reports, write-ups, documents, and books, a diachronic historical approach was applied. On the other hand, the synchronic approach was done in an attempt to understand and gain knowledge from present phenomena.

This research used the Social Framework Analysis, as a scientific observation of the ecological crisis. To deepen the research endeavor, the use of social analysis thru the Ideological-Political Apparatus (IPA CODE) was observed. The IPA CODE was utilized primarily to see how the social reality operates through understanding of the different social classes --- the dominant class, auxiliary, and dominated classes.

Results and Discussion

The Context: The Current Ecological Crisis

White (1967) p.1203 stated that “the history of ecologic change is still so rudimentary that we know little about what really happened, or what the results were”. The word “ecology” first appeared in the English language in 1873 (White, 1967) p.1203. But the ecological changes were then observed already in the gradual extinction of creatures like the European Aurochs in the late 1627 (White, 1967, p.1203).

The *locus theologicus* of this research is ‘the current ecological crisis’. The researchers aimed to ‘describe’ the current state of ‘our common home’ as to whether we take good care of Mother Nature and preserve its pristine beginnings. We, humans, are mandated to “have dominion” over the earth and to “till it and keep it” (Pope Francis, 2015).

Most of us, if not all, experience the crisis thru the air that we breathe, the water that we drink, the extreme heat or cold we bear depending on our location on Earth, the unprecedented weather conditions like super typhoons, massive flooding, heavy rainfall, and the like. Pope John Paul II (1990b) described concretely the ecological crisis in terms of:

The gradual depletion of the ozone layer and the related "greenhouse effect" has now reached crisis proportions as a consequence of industrial growth, massive urban concentrations and vastly increased energy needs. Industrial waste, the burning of fossil fuels, unrestricted deforestation, the use of certain types of herbicides, coolants and propellants: all of these are known to harm the atmosphere and environment. The resulting meteorological and atmospheric changes range from damage to health to the possible future submersion of low-lying lands.

This observation was gradually noticed and responded to. Christiansen and Grazer (1996) reported the U.S. Catholic bishops' statement in a 1991 pastoral letter, "Renewing the Earth, was a call to theologians and ethicists to explore, deepen and advance the insights of Catholic tradition and its relations to the environment". Moreover, White (1967) asserts that the Judeo-Christian anthropocentrism is a dominant cause for mankind's impact on the environment. "She argues that the idea of an old agriculture model brought man closer to nature but modern agriculture brings about alienation and disruption. She also did not believe that democracy is capable of dealing with environmental crisis and does not foresee less forms of anthropocentric exploitation in the future" (White, 1967, p.1207).

Pope Paul VI (1971) offered a guidepost to the Christian community as regards what to do primarily when the Christians face a crisis. Hence, "*It is up to the Christian communities to analyze with objectivity the situation which is proper to their own country, to shed on it the light of the Gospel's unalterable words and to draw principles of reflection, norms of judgment and directives for action from the social teaching of the Church*" (Pope Paul VI, 1971, p. 2).

Pope Francis (2015) believed that the root cause of the present crisis points to human beings. He writes, "It would hardly be helpful to describe symptoms without acknowledging the human origins of the ecological crisis".

White (1967, p. 1207) wrote that "Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of the natural objects". Such comment buttresses his thesis that "the roots of our troubles are so largely religious; the remedy must also be essentially religious".

Admittedly, Pope Francis has neither written about the religious roots of ecological crisis nor has he contradicted that the causes are 'largely religious. However, Pope Francis has acknowledged that human beings as such, mandated to have dominion and "to till and keep the garden", did overextend its understanding of their place in the schemes of the material universe; consequently, leading to 'excessive anthropocentrism'. This excessive anthropocentrism could be the culprit of the mismanagement of our common home --- the cosmos.

White (1967, p. 1203) and Pope Francis both pointed out that the 'marriage' of science and technology vis-a-vis the ecological crisis would seem to be a marriage 'made in hell'. Though both acknowledged the

positive contributions of science and technology to the cosmos, most especially to human beings; both also admitted the misgivings of science and technology.

White (1967, p. 1204) reiterated that “science was traditionally aristocratic, speculative, intellectual in intent; technology was lower class, empirical, action-oriented”. The fusion of the two has united the head and the hands. Their combination has not always brought about a positive consequence to the world.

Pope Francis (2015, p. 75) believes that, like everyone else, “We are the beneficiaries of two centuries of enormous waves of change: the steam engines, railways, telegraph, electricity, automobiles, airplanes, chemical industries, modern medicine, information technology and, more recently, the digital revolution, robotics, biotechnologies, and nanotechnologies”.

“Techno science, when well directed, can produce important means of improving the quality of human life, from useful domestic appliances to great transportation systems, bridges, buildings and public spaces (Pope Francis, 2015, p.76)”.

So, if indeed, ‘human life and activity have gone awry,’ what are the kinds of ecological crises that we face today?

According to Pope Francis (2015) pollution was brought about by a wasteful lifestyle and a throwaway culture. No country is not guilty of this. Sadly, the most advanced and rich countries are considered as the earth’s most polluters.

Further, climate change has been manifested in tremendous extreme weather patterns which were unprecedented historically. There have been massive flooding, hurricanes, and tsunamis. There had been ultra-high temperatures which produced heat waves; even in the cooler countries and ultra-low temperature in like Oymyakon, Siberia. Oymyakon is “one of the coldest permanently inhabited locales on Earth”.

Pope Francis (2015) included on the list, deforestation and the overharvesting of fish from rivers, seas, and oceans. The world’s water supply gets more and more polluted while droughts are experienced in sub-Saharan Africa.

Pollution is in the air; especially in Metro Manila. Per the report of the United Nations in the past, Manila has already been deemed as inhabitable due to air pollution.

Also, inescapable are global warming and the loss of biodiversity. The quality of human life has declined, and the society has started to crumble (Pope Francis, 2015).

Other examples could be added to the list like, the degradation *ecosystem services* wherein several human activities resulted to the destroying of the ecosystem. Another is the *desertification* wherein land degradation makes a relatively dry area of land increasingly arid that it typically loses its bodies of water, vegetation, and wildlife. It is caused by a variety of factors such as climate change and the overexploitation of soil. Moreover, the *invasive species* happens when a specie which is not native to a specific location tends to cause and spread damage to the environment, human health, and local economy.

There are pluralities of opinions as to the roots of the ecological crisis. Here we see how environmental deterioration and human and ethical degradation are closely linked by religions (White, 1967) or by excessive anthropocentrism. Anthropocentrism views that the sole purpose of the material universe is to become mere instruments or tools to serve humans; denying the intrinsic values of the material universe.

At the end of the day, it all boils down to humans as the main culprit for the ecological crisis. Humans have done malpractices on the created world. "Here we see how environmental deterioration and human and ethical degradation are closely linked (Pope Francis, 2015, p. 41)".

Indeed, "the intrinsic dignity of the world" is thus compromised. When human beings fail to find their true place in this world, they misunderstand themselves and end up acting against themselves. "Not only has God given the earth to man, who must use it with respect for the original good purpose for which it was given, but, man too is God's gift to man. He must therefore respect the natural and moral structure with which he has been endowed (Pope Francis, 2015, p. 86)".

The Conscience: Church's *Traditional and Scriptural* Basis in Response to the Challenges of Ecological Crisis

The challenges brought out by the present ecological crisis remind us to examine the foundations of our beliefs and values inscribed in the Word of God (*recursus ad fontes*) as handed on from one generation to another (*traditio*) while consistently (*regula fidei*) trying to keep it alive

thru the interpretation (*critical exegesis - hermeneutics*) of its content, to determine whether or not such still makes sense over the years as believers continue their journey on earth (*ecclesia on via non in patria*).

The main content of this section of the research deals with the identification of foundations, i.e., the ‘basis’ or ‘root’ as we respond to ecological crisis. “The Christian will draw from the sources of his faith and the Church’s teaching the necessary principle and suitable criteria . . . to commit himself to serving his brothers” from among the many possible ideological options “the specific character of the Christian contribution for a positive transformation of society” i.e., to alleviate, if not overcome, the crisis at hand (Pope Paul VI, 1971).

It should be noted at the onset that responding to ecological crisis is a universal human undertaking; whether we like it or not. Even with such an urgent milieu, we must keep in mind that the principles and criteria drawn from Judeo-Christian Tradition cannot be universalized. “In the face of such widely varying situations it is difficult for us to utter a unified message and to put forward a solution which has universal validity (Pope Paul VI, 1971)”.

All cultures in the face of the Earth have their own *creation* account. For instance, divided by seas and islands, the Philippines is inhabited by Filipinos who have varied *creation* accounts of *Malakas at Maganda*.

Biblical Tradition

All sacred texts are attempts at articulating ultimate truth and archetype, values, approximations that require interpretation in each new cultural epoch. This means that: (a) The sacred story is our primary channel for accessing the Divine and the ultimate of life; (b) Sacred texts (the Bible) which seek to safeguard the story need to be interpreted afresh in each new age if they are to preserve the ever new challenge and inspirited inspiration of the sacred story; (c) Creation itself, and not we human, is the primary narrator of the sacred story; we humans should be the supreme listeners; and, (d) Both the contemplation and narration of the sacred story require symbol and ritual if we are to engage meaningfully with the deep mythic and eschatological significance (O’Murchu, 2004).

The most influential of all *creation* accounts is the one embodied in the Bible. What makes it so is the fact that it is believed by billions belonging to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam (Judeo-Christian

Tradition). People get 'inspired' because it contains the Divine Revelation.

The Bible says, "All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work (2Tim 3:16-17, NRSV)".

Among the other key traits of the Bible, is that it is 'a source of information about life.' Life began when God created the universe (Gen 1-2, NRSV). Both accounts show the 'performative speech' of God . . . when God says something, something comes about even out of nothing. Thus, believers have professed that God creates *ex nihilo* (out of nothing). God is the ground of all that is. The culmination of these accounts is the creation of human beings; gifted with dignity and given a responsibility as well. Human existence is both a gift and a task.

"The great biblical narratives" talk about the relationship of human beings with the world. In the first creation account in the Book of Genesis, God's plan included creating humanity. After the creation of man and woman, "God saw everything that he had made, and behold it was very good" (Gen 1:31, NRSV). The Bible teaches that every man and woman is created out of love and is made in God's image and likeness (Gen 1:26, NRSV). This shows us the immense dignity of each person "who is not just something, but someone. He is capable of self-knowledge, of self-possession and of freely giving himself and entering communion with other persons (Pope Francis, 2015).

"The book of Genesis contains, profound teachings about human existence and its historical reality. It suggests that human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbor, and with the earth itself. According to the Bible, these three vital relationships have been broken, both outwardly and within us. This rupture is *sin*. The harmony among the Creator, humanity, and creation has been disrupted by our presumption to take the place of God and our refusal to acknowledge our creaturely limitations. This in turn has distorted our mandate to "have dominion" over the earth (Gen 1:28 NRSV) as well as to "till it and keep it" (Gen 2:15 NRSV).

The wisdom and insight of St. Paul in his letter to the Romans (Romans 8:18-25 NRSV) has prefigured of what is happening now: that the Earth faces the 'ultimate life issue', not only human life but the life of all animate created beings and even inanimate entities existing in the planet face a possible destruction. He offered hope, however, that not

everything is in vain, for salvation was promised. This passage completed the creation-redemption paradigm which is the ultimate purpose of God's manifestation or revelation of Himself: the truth of our salvation (Concilium, 1991).

To St. Paul, 'the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. This Pauline prophecy has come about in what John writes at the last chapter of the New Testament: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away" (Rev 21:1, NRSV).

Finally, St. Paul added to the hope and assurance that in the end 'everything will be well'. "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Indeed, by faith[a] our ancestors received approval. By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible (Heb 11:1-3, NRSV).

There are many more biblical wisdom and insights that can motivate a Christian believer to respond to ecological crisis. What we have pointed out are just the 'tip of the iceberg'. But the words of James ought to remind a Christian believer that faith should always be accompanied with action. According to St. James, faith without action is dead (James 2;14-17, NRSV).

The Fathers of the Church

Both St. Augustine and of St. Thomas Aquinas were the epitome of a Christian believer and scholar during their time. Their insights have outlived them and have remained important today especially those on ecological crisis.

St. Augustine of Hippo and St Thomas Aquinas cannot be avoided in matters of discussing the essential link between the human person and the ecology: "Their premodern worldviews diverge sharply from what modern science describes of our universe, notably the 14-billion-year history of the cosmos, in which the story of the Earth occupies a minimal part; and the evolutionary development of life, in which humanity emerges from a common stream of life forms. They exhibited and indeed helped establish the anthropocentric orientation of most Catholic theology, so their basic worldview clearly limited the common good to the human community (Schneid, 1996, p. 1)". Their thoughts "nuanced and thoroughly theocentric understandings of creation offer a rich model of humanity's relationship to the cosmos and to the Earth that emphasizes

the creatureliness and interconnectedness of all beings (Schneid, 1996, p. 1)”.

These holy men can certainly enlighten any Christian believer today to take up the challenge in combatting and overcoming the present ecological crisis. As Schneid writes, “I turn to them both in order to demonstrate how a Catholic cosmic common good has roots in the tradition’s understanding of creation, and also to offer an alternative account for the facets of the cosmic common good”.

The reflection on and exposition of “the theologies of creation” of St. Augustine and St. Thomas suggest “a fivefold dimension to a Catholic cosmic common good: (1) the ultimate good of creation to glorify God; (2) the good of individual creatures pursuing their own perfections; (3) the good of creatures for other creatures; (4) the good of a diversity of creatures; and (5) the good of the order of creatures (Schneid, 1996)”.

Such perspectives can certainly correct the misunderstanding about the places of all creatures in the order of all created realities. We all come from God as He is the Creator of all. His design is for all to achieve fullest development or potential possible whoever they are. However, human beings have the sole responsibility vis-a-vis the present time to create the conditions *sine qua non* for all to exactly arrive at their goal or purpose, teleologically. Their insights furthermore overcome the long debate about values and beliefs that humans are using the lesser creatures as their instruments, i.e., for their own selfish end. All creatures have their own instrumental and intrinsic values. All creatures are in the process of becoming like-God or ‘*theosis*’. . . being each the image of God . . . eventually all will be one with God. We will all be united in God, at the end of the day.

In concluding this part, “a human being to grow in her likeness to God, must not safeguard merely the human common good but the common good of all, and of all creatures, even beyond her own species. Unless she chooses on behalf of the common good, she is not properly conforming her will to the divine will. Promoting the earth’s flourishing is not only integral to the human common good, but it is humanity’s participation in the cosmic common good. Thus, Augustine and Aquinas offer not only content for a Catholic cosmic common good but a cautionary reminder as well: the more we as individuals, or species, prefer our own good to the good of the whole, the more we deviate from God’s purposes for the creation (Schneid, 1996).

The Consciousness: The Church's Encyclical and Teachings as Responses to Ecological Crisis

The modern social encyclicals which contained the corpus and content of the Catholic Social Teaching and Theology have been in circulation in the publication of *Rerum Novarum* (Pope Leo XIII, 1891). This landmark document has veered away from the sporadic, bits-and-pieces approach, in speaking about the social issues at hand. As such, it is the most celebrated among the social encyclicals in the more than 100 years (1891-2015) tradition. The pillars of the encyclical since its inchoate stages until today are anchored on the *creation* accounts in Genesis 1-2: Human Dignity, Rights, and Human Responsibility.

Whenever these pillars are under attack in many and various forms, the Church, through its Prophetic vocation, will come to the fore and speak against those who would want to jeopardize human dignity, rights, and human responsibility.

Hence, for the most part, even if the roots of these pillars are found in the narratives of *creation*, it took the Church more than a century to speak about the plight of 'our common home' thru *Laudato Si* (2015). For the foremost eco-theologians this encyclical marks the first time social and environmental concerns were brought together.

Encyclicals give the Christian believers insights on how to respond to any social concern. It also gives the wisdom to guide Christians and all people of goodwill to actively engage and respond to the crisis that has involved just about everyone and everything, living and non-living alike. However, it is not enough to recall principles, state intentions, point to crying injustice and utter prophetic denunciations; it needs personal responsibility and effective action (Pope Paul VI, 1971).

St. James' message, considered scandalous by some Christian denominations, finds its concrete expression in this encyclical, rightly entitled 'Call to Action'. That 'faith without action is dead' can only be practiced by anyone, believers and people of goodwill. That is, it should be grounded in experience; a "personal conversion is needed first (Pope Paul VI, 1971, p. 18)".

Before going into the 'concrete actions' or 'real response' mode that Catholics must undertake in the light of ecological crisis, let us survey briefly the background of the hierarchy's pronouncement as embodied in pre-*Laudato Si* publication. Dorr (2013, p. 414) explores the

links between “the integral humanistic perspective that had developed in the Catholic Social Teaching and its teaching on ecological issues”. He began by tracing the development of that teaching in the post-Vatican II period. Below is a summary of his points:

1. *Gaudium et spes* gives the human person so central a role that, as Curran (2002) believes, it treats other created realities “only as instrumental with regard to the human person”. The most authoritative document in the Canon of the Encyclicals simply missed the point but continued the ‘excessive anthropocentrism (Pope Francis, 2015)’.

2. *Octogesima Adveniens* mentions the risk associated with ‘an ill-considered exploitation of nature (Pope Paul VI, 1971)’.

3. *Justice in the World* (2006) points out that it is not possible for all parts of the world to have the kind of ‘development’ that has occurred in the wealthy countries. Therefore, it calls on the rich ‘to accept a less material way of life, with less waste, to avoid the destruction of the heritage which they are obliged by absolute justice to share with all other members of humanity. This was the first to ‘emphasize the close link between ecology and justice’.

4. *Redemptor Hominis* (1979c) mentions of ‘the visible world which God created for man’. The document goes on to refer to the treatment of polluting the natural environment’ and the fact that humans frequently look on the natural environment only insofar as it serves them ‘for immediate consumption’. It insists that ‘man should communicate with nature as an intelligent and noble ‘master’ and ‘guardian,’ and not as a heedless ‘exploiter and destroyer’.

5. *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* returns to the issue of ecology in a passage where he referred to ‘the limits of available resources’ (Pope John Paul II, 1987a) and a later passage where he again noted that ‘natural resources are limited’ (Pope John Paul II, 1987a). In the first of these passages, ‘the integrity and cycles of nature’ (Pope John Paul II, 1987a) are referred to. Pope John Paul II (PJP II) uses here the word ‘integrity of creation’ that has already been accepted by the World Council of Churches (Dorr 1991). PJP II has given a brief account of what is meant by ‘integrity of creation in an ordered system, which is precisely the cosmos’. Moreover, the encyclical explains that the task of men and women is to cultivate the garden in accordance with divine law.

6. *Centesimus Annus* (Pope John Paul II, 1991d) shifts from the longstanding anthropocentric perspective to more of a ‘democracy of all

creatures;’ as what White has dubbed. The CA echoes a new voice as it states that “Equally worrying is the ecological question which accompanies the problem of consumerism and which is closely connected to it. In his desire to have and to enjoy rather than to be and to grow, man consumes the resources of the earth and his own life in an excessive and disordered way. At the root of the senseless destruction of the natural environment lies an anthropological error, which unfortunately is widespread in our day”.

7. In the Foreign Visits of Pope John Paul II, he stresses the vital relationship that exists between indigenous peoples and their land:

- 1980, address to the people of the Amazon region of Brazil;
- 1983, address to the indigenous people of Guatemala;
- 1984, address to the indigenous people of Canada;
- 1985, address to the indigenous people of Ecuador and to the indigenous people of Peruvian Amazon;
- 1986, address to the indigenous people of Australia;
- 1987, address to the Native Americans.

8. In the Conference of the Food and Agricultural Organization (Session xxv, Nov. 1989), Pope John Paul II spelled out the need for nations and enterprises of all kinds to build the ecological protection cost of any project into the financial estimates of that enterprise.

9. Pope John Paul II (1990b) also had many positive appreciations especially respect for life: “the most profound and serious indication of the moral implications underlying the ecological problem is the lack of *respect for life* evident in many of the patterns of environmental pollution”. “*The defense of life*” and the consequent promotion of health, especially among very poor and developing peoples will be simultaneously *the measure and the basic criterion of the ecological horizon* at both the regional and world level (Pope John Paul II, 1987a).

The encyclical *Justice in the World* loudly echoes this social concern ministry of the hierarchy: “Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, or, of the Church's

mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation”.

This can be extended now to the topic at hand, i.e. the Catholic Church's main response to earth's healing, focusing on *Laudato Si* as to what concrete “lines of approach and action” can be undertaken as stipulated by His Holiness Pope Francis.

Pope Paul VI (1971, p. 8) enunciates the environment as a ‘new social problem.’ “While the horizon of man is thus being modified according to the images that are chosen for him, another transformation is making itself felt, one which is the dramatic and unexpected consequence of human activity. Man is suddenly becoming aware that by an ill-considered exploitation of nature he risks destroying it and becoming in his turn the victim of this degradation. Not only is the material environment becoming a permanent menace --- pollution and refuse, new illness and absolute destructive capacity --- but the human framework is no longer under man's control; thus, creating an environment for tomorrow which may well be intolerable. This is a wide-ranging social problem which concerns the entire human family”. However, the uniqueness of *Laudato Si* is its strong advocacy for our active engagement on how we can better take care of our common home. This is unprecedented because the past encyclicals, for the most part, only do offer a diagnosis of the problem. But, they do not offer a unified solution as to what to do concerning the problem that humanity faces. Pope Francis gives guidelines or a blueprint for action by the stakeholders which are virtually every human being.

Because the issue, i.e., ecological crisis is all-encompassing, the dialogue rightfully begins at the international arena. Here the major ‘characters’ are presumably the leaders of the states as they are the most powerful people that could “ensure that solutions are proposed from global perspectives, and not simply to defend the interest of a few countries”. This is a *sine qua non* so that “a global consensus is essential in confronting the problems which cannot be resolved by unilateral actions on the part of individual countries (Pope Francis, 2015, p. 122)”.

The Pope believes that when a global consensus is arrived at thru such dialogue it “could lead, for example, to planning a sustainable and diversified agriculture, developing renewable and less polluting forms of energy, encouraging a more efficient use of energy, promoting a better management of marine and forest resources, and ensuring universal access to drinking water” (Pope Francis, 2015). Clearly, these basic

elements that need a global agreement are the very social problems which are enumerated in the beginning of the *Laudato Si*. These are inextricably intertwined with ecological crisis. However, this is not always happening. But at least, Pope Francis is clearly suggesting a better line of approach and action.

Even if the leaders of various countries could not arrive at any consensus or agreement due to their seemingly ‘non-negotiable interests,’ one should not feel dismayed as there are many advances taking place thru the various ‘ecological movements worldwide’ spearheaded by many concerned NGOs of civil society.

Among individual nations *ad intra*, Pope Francis has suggested that a dialogue ought to take place among ‘national and local policies’ for when nature or ecology flourishes everybody wins. Besides, when there is a consensus arrived at within a nation, especially when such is legislated, it can easily be enforced.

This is reminiscent of the clean-up drive of the Manila Bay where aside from the legislation, many people participated in such a meaningful undertaking. However, there are always opposing interest groups that would hinder such a development, but the state leaders of any country must flex its political muscle to make things happen. Enforcing a law needs a strong political will even if such laws are always geared towards, to borrow Daniel Schneid’s words: ‘the cosmic common good’.

We have mentioned that ‘interest groups’ sometimes are the reasons why nation states could not create laws to protect the integral ecology. Such is precisely because it goes contrary to the business interest of certain groups. They will certainly lobby so that any legislation that would jeopardize their interest will not see the day. That is why Pope Francis believes that such should be done in a transparent manner. There should be no cover-up, for example, when a certain business establishment applies for a license to operate or a permit for its business. If such business might bring harm to the integral ecology of a place, the decision of giving the permit or not should be transparent.

Like Boracay and many other tourist spots nationwide, many establishments admittedly wrought havoc to the natural world. The Department of Environment and Natural Resources has done what it ought to do despite the criticisms from many quarters, mostly, again coming from different interest groups.

The goods of the earth belong to all such that these should be enjoyed by everyone and be allowed to take their natural course whatever

it is so that they could attend their designed *telos*. “A consensus should always be reached between the stakeholders who can offer a variety of approaches, solutions, and alternatives (Pope Francis, 2015, p. 122)”.

The greatest sin against the environment is its turn into a commodity or the so-called commodification of nature. Those who are responsible for these are those who hold both the ‘gold and guns:’ the economically powerful and politically influential. Pope Francis appeals to these stakeholders to sit and talk wholeheartedly to help make our common home a better place as well as to make it more habitable especially to those who have no money and no political power. A dialogue of this nature should aim at serving life, especially human life. It can then be extended to other forms of life as well. Commodification of nature certainly brings a lot of money, maximizes the profits among business people, and allows the powerful to continue holding on to power. It is about time to give nature a chance. Let us give life a chance to flourish for its own sake.

Compared to the ones mentioned above, the last frontiers of dialogue among the less influential people include the believers and those involved in science and technology. There have been various ecological movements that pressure influential entities to be mindful not only of their own interests but also of the detrimental effects of ecological degradation to others; and most especially, the integrity of the whole of creation.

In conclusion, Pope Francis writes that “the majority of people living on our planet profess to be believers”. This should spur religions to dialogue among themselves for the sake of protecting nature, defending the poor, building networks of respect, and invoking fraternity among the believers.

Dialogues among the various sciences are likewise needed. At present, each field tends to become so enclosed in its own language where its specialized know-how leads to a certain degree of isolation and to the absolutization of its own field of knowledge. Such phenomenon prevents us from confronting environmental problems effectively. An open and respectful dialogue is truly needed between the various ecological movements; among which ideological conflicts are not infrequently encountered.

Finally, the ultimate purpose of the encyclical, just like the rest for the past 100 years, is to promote the inherent dignity of all living creatures as they are the manifestation of the Creator. “The Glory of God

is life of all created realities lived to their fullness". This is the essence of Christianity, of what St. Irenaeus, the great second-century theologian, has expressed in the adage: "the glory of God is a human being fully alive!"

Conclusion:

The responsive character of the Church to any social problem is a key to her identity as well as the identity of the people of God. This character originated from the Prophets, who were then the 'mouth-pieces' of God. It is thus passed on until today. Now that 'Our Common Home' is gravely threatened, the Church, thru the Supreme Pontiff Pope Francis speaks about this ecological crisis which is being considered as an ultimate life issue thru the encyclical *Laudato Si*. This is the first social encyclical that came out from Rome that integrates social justice with the environmental / ecological crisis.

Having examined the ecological crisis in this research using the social action spiral embodied in *Mater et Magistra*, the origin of the crisis boils down to 'excessive anthropocentrism' which is a clear misunderstanding of human and nature relationships. The Bible and theological tradition (Augustine and Aquinas) both promote the 'natural teleology' of all created order. As such, both (i.e. humankind and other kind) have their own instrumental and intrinsic values. Although previous encyclicals vacillate on these values that tend to favor the instrumental value of the created order to solely serve humans' needs, *Laudato Si* clearly corrected this and thus behooves all people of goodwill to help 'care for our common home'.

Recommendations: *Alleviating the Ecological Crisis*

A telling passage in the Book of Psalms is found in Psalm 24:1 "The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it". This certainly reminds all created realities, especially human beings, who are created by God to be stewards of God's creation.

Going back to where we started, White (1967) has claimed that the roots of our ecological crisis "are largely religious". He has accused that as far as the present ecological crisis is concerned, "Christianity bears a huge burden of guilt". He has reiterated further that "Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of the natural objects" which, additionally, has buttressed his thesis that "the

roots of our troubles are so largely religious, the remedy must also be essentially religious . . .”

Tucker and Grim (*as cited in* Jenkins, 2008) offer a rebuttal to White by pointing out that, “Religions provide basic interpretive stories of who we are, what nature is, where we have come from, and where we are going’. This comprises a worldview of a society. Religions also suggest how we should treat other humans and how we should relate to nature. Religions thus generate worldviews and ethics which underlie fundamental attitudes and values of different cultures and societies.

‘Excessive anthropocentrism’ ought to be jettisoned. Human beings ought to be conscious about their place in the schemes of things (context). i.e. in the material universe. The misunderstanding of the mandate “to name all animals and plants in the garden and to have dominion over them” (Gen. 2, NRSV) resulted to excessive anthropocentrism. It has plagued humankind (Pope Francis, 2015).

To overcome such problem, there should be a clear recognition, in conscience, that “all that God had made are all very good” when God looked at them as they are the mirror-image of the Creator. As such, all possessed inherent dignity. Each has its purpose in the schemes of creation. This should warrant the rational creatures, otherwise known as human beings, to acknowledge that we must have a clear ‘solidarity’ in being responsible for all. We must respect the instrumental values and intrinsic values of all realities, animate, and inanimate.

There ought to be a shift in our values and beliefs. We ought to clearly recognize that we are all one in God; thus, the relational foundation is rooted in the love of God, humankind, and other kind. Thru this, the rapture that led to the disharmony of nature and human relationships will be overcome. Reconciliation could then ensue.

Overcoming the ‘indifference to the natural world’ could be achieved by “ecological conversion (Pope Francis, 2015)”. Presently, conversion is understood as a process of everyday commitment to one’s humanity in relation to God. It is at the heart of Christian life (O’Keefe, 1997). By analogy, ‘ecological conversion’ is an on-going commitment to really care for the environment and not to fall into the cultural trap. We ought to disdain those which promote materialism, consumerism, and a wasteful lifestyle. This is especially a challenge to young people.

“So where does a Christian start?” Other concrete recommendations to heal the planet include the following (Hornsby-Smith, 2006):

1. Cultivate a spirituality of justice-seeking: Spend some time each day reading scriptures and Catholic social thought with ‘new eyes.
2. Start in a small way of doing something: Living simply, ‘practicing responsible simplicity of life’ (Pope Francis, 2015), avoiding materialism and consumerism, not following the ‘throwaway culture,’ and educating oneself about the state of the planet . . .
3. Become an ethically conscious consumer: Boycott certain products (Pope Francis, 2015). Maybe eat less beef so that the demand for such product will decrease and in effect lessen deforestation and desertification for the raising of cows which is one of the major factors of the crises.
4. Develop a concern for the environment again: have an ‘ecological conversion’ and cultivate environmental virtues to protect the environment.
5. Join cause-oriented groups or organizations that protect the environment: The problems of injustice in the world cannot be solved on one’s own.

These practical recommendations could certainly alleviate and help us better take care of our common home better.

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