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Contextualizing *Laudato si* in the Philippines: Environmental Problem in Purok 1A, Hapay na Mangga, Barangay Dolores, Taytay, Rizal

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Abstract

Laudato si (2015) is a landmark encyclical in the teachings of the Catholic Church concerning the environment. While the Church has issued encyclicals before on social teaching, and briefly mentioned the environment in previous encyclicals, this is the first time that social teaching has been put deeply into the context of an encyclical devoted primarily to the environment. This calls for a reassessment of the peoples' perceptions on how they care for the environment in the Philippine context. A case study was conducted in a rural area near Metro Manila in the Province of Rizal. This paper reports the views of 47 respondents (N=47) from Purok 1A, Hapay na Mangga, Barangay Dolores, Taytay, Rizal, Philippines, aged from 18 to 60 years old. The Descriptive results of statistics and thematic analyses of respondents' responses were based on the Care for the Environment Scale (CES) developed by the researcher in this study. The CES revealed significant differences in the perceptions of the respondents about how they care for their environment. This case study illustrates how this research can be used to inform all the people to initiate programs based on the ethics of care and the encyclical *Laudato si*.

Keywords: *Laudato Si*, environment, care, CES.

Introduction

Environmental issues present serious moral problems. Environmental pollution is a global issue and is causing widespread problems around the world. This study with regard to the current situation, intends to provide solutions to existing problems. For this purpose, the research has been carried out with the aim of investigating the care for the environment in *Purok 1A, Hapay na Mangga*, Barangay Dolores, Taytay, Rizal.

Ethics of Care refer to the “approaches to moral life and community that are grounded in virtues, practices, and knowledge associated with caring and caretaking of self and others” (Whyte and Cuomo, 2017, p.234). The ethics of care as an approach will be utilized in this study together with the recent encyclical of Pope Francis *Laudato Si* (2015). Pope Francis was overturning long established beliefs that the earth was to be subdued, rather than nurtured and cultivated. He is a new standard bearer for some—in the preface to a compendium of articles on integral ecology, John B. Cobb, Jr. says:

The pope’s primary audience was not the elite in the church or in the wider world. He addressed the world’s people. And millions have resonated [with] Francis’ call. Before then, we had scores of leaders working for rational change, and therefore, effectively, no leader at all. Now the cause of LIFE has a champion who cannot be ignored. (Cobb & Castuera, 2015: iv–v)

Laudato si’ comes at a time of rethinking about global development. The United Nations’ (UN) Millennium Development Goals (MDGs, 2000-2015) have now run their course, achieving moderate success. With the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the UN has established the development path for the next 15 years. Today, the world’s people are facing complex and interrelated problems: long-term problems never resolved and mounting, such as the rise of new threats connected to biotechnologies, genetics, Internet and modern communication devices; and old and new health threats that often catch us unaware and inadequately prepared. As Pope Francis explains in his Encyclical letter *Laudato si’*, everything is deeply interrelated. It underlines that everyone can do something for our common home. In response to this call, each diocese of the church in the Philippines, in collaboration with other faiths and civil society organizations like the NGO’s, and the different Institutional Community Involvement Center

(ICIC) of schools, colleges, and universities can plan to educate and mobilize communities to protect the environment and the threatened resources and species in the area.

Over the last years, there has been a growing interest in issues related to the care of the environment. To sustain this commitment as citizens, therefore, necessitates a spirituality that inspires, nurtures, and provides ultimate meaning to our personal and communal acts. Though *Laudato si'* explicitly speaks of spirituality only in the last chapter, the whole encyclical is distinctively about an integrative eco-spirituality based on an integral ecology that links labor and technological and social development with care for creation and the diversity of life forms and cultures, and with a special concern for the poor and the vulnerable.

As will be explained in the Theoretical Background section below, research on *Laudato si'* and the environment has focused on a variety of topics. However, missing from the literature are investigations designed to understand the relationship between *Laudato si'* and its concrete application to a specific community in the Philippines. This research seeks to investigate the water problem in *Purok 1A, Hapay na Mangga*, Barangay Dolores, Taytay, Rizal juxtaposed with the recent encyclical *Laudato si'*.

This research utilized a self-made questionnaire using mixed-method approach, both qualitative and quantitative, to understand the ecological problems in Taytay, Rizal. Thus, the research gap revealed that the Filipino view on the environment in relation to the ecological ethics has been rarely investigated in the Philippines.

Statement of Research Problem:

How do the people of *Purok 1A, Hapay na Mangga*, Barangay Dolores, Taytay, Rizal care for their environment, specifically on the water?

Statement of Specific Objectives:

The researcher aims to propose an environmental program for the local community in *Purok 1A, Hapay na Mangga*, Barangay Dolores, Taytay, Rizal. This will include the following:

1. To find out the various efforts that they are doing related to caring for their environment;
2. To examine their environmental programs based on their answers, and to find their relationship based on *Laudato Si*;
3. To analyze the challenges and difficulties that they encounter in caring for the environment; and
4. To find out what other courses of actions can be done to care for the environment.

Conceptual Framework

To achieve its objectives and address the questions raised by this proposed study, it will appropriate Bernard Lonergan's *Transcendental Method of Doing Theology* (1992). Lonergan's Transcendental Method consists of four basics but closely related patterns of operations, namely: (1) The Empirical, where the theologian senses, perceives, imagines, feels, speaks and moves, whether externally or internally. Thus, he asks the question "What is it?" to gather data; (2) the Intellectual, where the theologian asks the questions what, why, how and what for. Thus, he asks the question "Why is It?" to establish its intelligibility; (3) the Rational, where the theologian reflects, presents pieces of evidence, passes judgment on the truth or falsity, certainty or probability of his statements while attempting to resolve the issue. Thus, he asks the question "Is It so?" to establish the truth; and, (4) the Responsible, where the theologian focuses on himself, his own operations and his in goals to decide what course of action should be undertaken. Thus, he asks the question "Is it valuable?" to arrive at what is good. This process may be expressed in the table presented below:

Methodology

Mixed-method research design and the convenient sampling technique were employed in this study. Forty-seven (47) research participants were sampled. A Personal Information Sheet (PIS) was used to obtain personal data from the participants.

They were determined using the purposive sampling technique (Sarantakos, 2013). The data were gathered using an unstructured interview. The interview was individually done to validate the perspectives, practices, and problems relevant to the environmental problems from the participants. The use of in-depth interview facilitated the gathering of detailed and useful information to provide the context to the data (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010; Boyce & Neale, 2006).

Guided by the interview protocol, the participants were oriented on the purpose of the study, duration of the interview, the interview approach, content, confidentiality, consent, and recording methods, and the use of the data.

For the quantitative part of the present research, the researcher used two sets of questionnaires. The first questionnaire was the Personal Information Sheet (PIS). It was used to obtain the demographic data of the participants. The second questionnaire was the Care for the Environment Scale (CES). It was used to obtain the participant's perception about caring for the environment.

The CES was developed by the researcher. It is composed of 20 items. The scale is divided into 4 dimensions. The response format is as follows: 5-Strongly Agree, 4-Agree, 3-Uncertain, 2-Disagree, and 1-Strongly Disagree. The scores are determined by computing the mean of all the items per dimension. A computed value greater than 3 may suggest high score while a score lower than 3 may suggest low score.

Consciousness Level	What I Want	Question	Task as A Knower
Empirical Level	Data	What is it?	Be Attentive
Understanding Level	Intelligibility	Why is it?	Be Intelligent
Reflecting Level	Truth	Is it so?	Be Reasonable
Responsibility Level	Good	Is it valuable?	Be Responsible

Figure 1: The Bernard Lonergan Method of Theology

Results and Discussions

Table 1.
Participants' Demographics (Frequency and Percentage Distribution)

Demographic	Categories	<i>f</i>	%
<i>Age</i>	Undisclosed	3	6.4
	18 – 35 (Early adulthood)	27	60
	36 – 60 (Middle age)	<u>17</u>	<u>32.2</u>
	<i>Total</i>	47	100
<i>Sex</i>	Undisclosed	2	4.3
	Male	22	46.8
	Female	<u>23</u>	<u>48.9</u>
	<i>Total</i>	47	100
<i>Religion</i>	Catholic	13	27.7
	Christian/Born Again	30	63.8
	<i>Iglesia Ni Cristo</i>	1	2.1
	Other	<u>3</u>	<u>6.4</u>
	<i>Total</i>	47	100
<i>Occupation</i>	Undisclosed	8	17
	Accounting Staff	8	17
	Civil Engineer	1	2.1
	Construction Worker	1	2.1
	Driver	1	2.1
	Family Driver	2	4.3
	HDC	1	2.1
	Housewife	1	2.1
	Maintenance	14	29.8
	Midwifery	2	4.3
	Painter	1	2.1
	Plumbing	1	2.1
	Production Worker	1	2.1
	Radio Operator	1	2.1
	Sale Staff	1	2.1
	School Maintenance	1	2.1

Table 1.

Continued

Demographic	Categories	<i>f</i>	%
	Service Crew	1	2.1
	Student	1	2.1
	Teacher	5	10.6
	Welder	<u>1</u>	<u>2.1</u>
	<i>Total</i>	47	100

Table 1 shows that there are 47 respondents. In terms of age, six-point four percent (6.4 %) gave no answer, fifty-seven point four (57.4 %) are 18 – 35 which, means they belong to Early adulthood; thirty-two-point two percent (32.2 %) are from the Middle age bracket 36 – 60. With reference to Havinghurst's human life stages, most of the participants belong to early adulthood. In terms of sex, forty-six-point eight percent (46.8 %) are male; forty-eight-point nine percent (48.9 %) are female; and four-point three percent (4.3 %) gave no answer. In terms of religion, most of the participants are Born Again Christian, with sixty-three point eight percent (63.8 %); followed by Roman Catholic with twenty-seven point seven percent (27.7 %). However, there are two 2 or six point four percent (6.4 %) with undisclosed religion. All the respondents are from *Purok 1A, Hapay na Mangga, Brgy. Dolores, Taytay, Rizal.*

Table 2.

Participants' Responses: Mean and Standard Deviation of the Dimensions and Items of the Care for Environment Scale (CES)

Dimensions/Items	Mean	SD
A. Pananaw Tungkol sa Basura	3.74	1.29
1. Itinatapon ko basura sa tamang lalagyan.	4.49	0.72
2. Nagsesegregate ako ng basura.	3.57	1.02
3. Naglilinis ako ng kapaligiran.	4.4	0.71
4. Gumagamit ako ng recyclable.	4.06	0.87
5. Nagtatapon ako sa ilog.	2.15	1.38
B. Pananaw Tungkol sa Ilog	3.04	1.52
1. Mahalaga ang ilog sa pamumuhay namin.	4.47	0.65
2. Mahalaga ang ilog sa aming pamayanan.	4.47	0.69
3. Sa ilog kami kumukuha ng aming makakain.	1.98	1.03
4. Kung wala ang ilog hindi kami mabubuhay.	2.55	1.16
5. Sa ilog kami nagtatapon ng mga basura.	1.74	1.05

Table 2.
Continued

Dimensions/Items		Mean	SD
C. Pananaw Tungkol sa Kalamidad		4.24	0.99
1.	Ang kalamidad ay sanhi ng tao.	4.35	0.92
2.	Nakatira ako sa mabababang lugar (malapit sa ilog)	4.36	0.96
3.	Madalas ang pagbaha sa aming lugar.	3.64	1.03
4.	Nakahanda ang aming pamayanan sa posibleng paglikas.	4.28	0.95
5.	Nakahanda ako sa posibleng pag-apaw ng ilog.	4.57	0.83
D. Pananaw Tungkol sa mga Dapat Gawin para sa Pangangalaga sa Kalikasan		4.50	0.98
1.	Ang kalikasan ay dapat pangalagaan.	4.83	0.38
2.	Ang kalikasan ay likha ng Diyos.	4.91	0.28
3.	Ang kalikasan ay pinagkukunan ng likas na yaman.	4.81	0.40
4.	May mga programa ang aming pamayanan tungkol sa pangangalaga sa ilog.	3.42	1.55
5.	Ang ilog ay nagbibigay-buhay.	4.43	0.88

Table 2 presents the participants' responses on the five dimensions and items of the self-administered scale. It provides information regarding their perceptions about caring for the environment. A score of 3 and above per dimensions would indicate favorable or positive attitude towards caring for the environment. Looking at the mean scores of the five dimensions of the scale, the participants did not get a mean score lower than 3. This would give us an overall impression that most of the participants are aware of the importance of ecological balance to people's lives. Moreover, they are aware on how to properly care for the environment.

The highest mean score fall under dimension C (*Pananaw Tungkol sa Kalamidad*), this would suggest that most of the participants were aware about the causes of natural calamities. They also believed that calamities were sometimes due to people's neglect of their duties to protect the environment. They were aware that floods were caused by irresponsible act of throwing garbage at the river.

The lowest mean score fall under dimension B (*Pananaw tungkol sa Ilog*). Although this dimension got the lowest mean score, the score itself was still considered favorable since it did not fall below 3. This means that they were aware of the importance of keeping the bodies of water clean. They were aware that rivers were sources of food and livelihood.

The Case of Purok 1A, Hapay na Mangga, Barangay Dolores, Taytay, Rizal



Figure 1. Study Area

Study Area. The study's subject is Barangay Dolores (Poblacion) of Taytay, Rizal Philippines. Total population is 61,115 as of May 2015. Taytay is the third most populous municipality in the country, after Rodriguez and Cainta.



Figure 2. Picture of the river in Purok 1A, Hapay na Mangga, Barangay Dolores, Taytay, Rizal

Water is an essential necessity of human existence and industrial development, and it is one the most delicate component of the environment (Das and Acharya, 2003; Yisa and Jimoh, 2010; Yu and Salvador, 2005). Rivers supply more than 90% of water supply-which originate from highland forest and catchments areas. River is source of life, providing freshwater for human consumption, irrigation for agriculture, as a means of transportation, a source of food in fisheries, hydroelectric power and water use for industries. Therefore, monitoring its water quality has become necessary initiative, especially for rivers affected by urban effluents. “Furthermore, the poor quality of water is compounding the problems of scarcity. More than half of the world’s lakes and rivers are seriously polluted, and half the world’s wetlands have disappeared in the last century.

Table 3.

Tabulated Results from the Survey Instrument

Statements concerning environment	Superordinate Themes	Subordinate Themes	Implications
A1-A5	The Problem of Garbage	Segregation/ Disposal	Water Pollution
B1-B5	Importance of the River	Community	Care for the Water
C1-C5	Disaster Preparedness	Calamities	Disaster-related issues
D1-D5	Caring the Environment	Life-giving	Sustainability

The results are discussed based on levels of river pollution and issues relating to environmental problem in a local community. Local authority councils generally manage committees made up of barangay officials and local authority officials and make policies under the full council meeting. The Barangay Council officials provides for the powers of local authorities to function as local planning authorities. Based on the discussion above, this study examines the extent environmental ethics principles manifest in the management of urban river, especially about the problem of garbage in *Purok 1A, Hapay na Mangga*, Brgy. Dolores, Taytay, Rizal, the importance of the river to the local community, the disaster preparedness is in full effect and caring the environment in coordination between agencies involved in river management.

The Church in the Modern World

The Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* (1945) exhorts that “one of the gravest errors of our time is the dichotomy between the faith that many profess and the practice of their daily lives.” To find the repercussions of these challenges, the *Laudato Si* encyclical of Pope Francis in the context of caring and conserving will be used as a model in *Purok 1A, Hapay na Mangga*, Barangay Dolores, Taytay, Rizal. In *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis calls for people to recognize the value of the environment and everything in it. He said, “it is not enough, however, to think of different species merely as potential “resources” to be exploited, while overlooking the fact that they have value in themselves (LS33)”.



Figure 3. The local community in Purok 1A, Hapay na Mangga

Pope Francis also affirmed this by calling all people of the world to take "swift and unified global action" on “care of our human home. This could be done by uniting the government agencies, church leaders, educational institution, respective communities and even the basic unit of society, which is the family to work together in strengthening educational and informational campaign on the care of the environment.

In response to this call, each diocese of the church in the Philippines, in collaboration with other faiths and civil society organizations like the NGO’s, can plan to educate and mobilize communities to protect the environment and the threatened resources and species in the area. Some researchers applied Pope Francis’ encyclical with implications for businesses and organizational managers (Urick

et.al, 2017). However, missing from the literature are investigations designed to understand the relationship between *Laudato si*' and its implication to a specific local community in the Philippines.

The Call of Francis' *Laudato Si*

Pope Francis insists that to care for the natural world and for society at large, and for the weaker sections in particular, "is part of our spirituality, which is an exercise of charity and, as such, matures and sanctifies us" (*Laudato si*, 231) The Pope writes:

In this way, the world, and the quality of life of the poorest, are cared for, with a sense of solidarity which is at the same time aware that we live in a common home which God has entrusted to us. These community actions, when they express self-giving love, can also become intense spiritual experiences (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 232).

While the ecological crisis affects our common home and its common household, its deleterious impacts will befall mainly on the poor and the most vulnerable sections of our society. The ecological crisis is brewed within the crucible of inequality. The injustices brewed by the contemporary ecological crisis are conspicuously manifest in the case of climate change, the greatest of the ecological challenges facing humanity. There is no dearth of assessments, which emphasize the fact that the impacts of climate change are falling first and most heavily on the 'poorest and most vulnerable people around the world' (Cuomo 2011, p. 693).

Robert Henson (2006, p. 13) expresses well the tragic irony of an ecological problem like climate change that will affect the poor most, yet they have contributed least to its underlying causes.

Pope Francis writes in the encyclical, citing Pope Benedict, "only when 'the economic and social costs of using up shared environmental resources are recognized with transparency and fully borne by those who incur them, not by other peoples or future generations,' (Pope Benedict XVI 2009, p. 686) can those actions be considered ethical" (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 195).

Moral justice is primarily about concern for the poor and vulnerable members of our common household, "whose life on this earth is brief and who cannot keep on waiting" (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 162). Hence, there is "an urgent moral need for a renewed sense of intra generational solidarity" (Pope Benedict XVI 2010, p. 45; see also: Pope Francis 2015a, par. 162).

Conclusion

The research revealed significant differences in perceptions respondents about how they care their environment. This study provides some insights on the participation of the local community in the pollution of the river. This study suggests how the factors can be used to inform all the people to initiate programs based on the encyclical *Laudato Si* by doing a social analysis.

The research suggested that local people, authorities involved in the river water management were less aware of the water ethics. Many of them had shown tendencies to approach water issues from a technical perspective; they were less cognizant to the socioeconomic and social justice perspectives and the importance of the river in their lives. Disaster preparedness and awareness among stakeholders, implementers and enforces is still significantly lacking and should be enforced. Even though there are many legislations and guidance, there exists a gap in the implementation and action as seen on the figure 1.

Effective public education and outreach efforts through ICIC, San Beda Outreach Programs can be valuable tools for encouraging constructive public participation and building strong communities. A strengthened information, education, and communication (IEC) component through an enriched content and rationalized delivery can help in counteracting the problem of pollution and garbage in the area. *Laudato si* suggests that people must focus on wide-ranging information on ecology, environmental conservation and management, and population education and must be disseminated to a more diversified community.

To contextualize the findings of this paper, the following recommendations are in order: (a) revisit the of the community service programs of the university through the alignment of its programs and activities to the vision, mission, goals, and objectives; (b) strengthen the community-building with special focus on sustainable environment; (c) re-tool the faculty and non-teaching personnel on the nature and purpose of community service programs such as immersions, outreach, and advocacies on environmental protection; and (d) re-assess the environmental protection policies suggested by *Laudato si* for a comprehensive assessment in caring for the environment.

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