

Environmental Crisis as The Ultimate Life Issue

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Abstract: *The environmental-ecological problem that humanity faces today is believed to be as 'the ultimate life issue.' Such is the rationale for the study. This research investigates the said issue thru descriptive-historical research. Lonergan's method is used as a framework of the study. Lonergan distinguishes four realms of meaning as: (1) common sense, (2) theory, (3) interiority, and (4) transcendence.*

The investigation covers the gamut of the ecological problem, the causes and origins, the present environmental situation, its encompassing effects, and the different paradigmatic responses to it.

The environmental crisis can be traced from how the people's mindset and cultural attitudes operate in relation to how nature can be used in the pursuit of science, modernization, growth, and progress. The sad state of the environmental degradation includes the prevalence of continued deforestation, uncontrolled flooding, topsoil erosion, heavily silted inland waterways, destruction of coral reefs, and various forms of pollution. Amidst the crisis, hope can be seen from the moral values and beliefs of Filipinos. Social principles can be transformed into practice through authentic human functioning associated with knowledge and choice.

Keywords: *Environmental Crisis, Filipino Values, Moral-Spiritual Crisis, Eco-Theology, Eco-Philosophy*

Introduction

The environmental-ecological problem that humanity faces today is believed to be as 'the ultimate life issue.' This is the reason that this paper intends to investigate. The investigation covers the gamut of the ecological problem, the causes and origins, the present environmental situation, and its encompassing effects and different paradigmatic responses to it.

Today, people around the world are becoming increasingly aware of the fragility of the planet Earth. More and more people dedicate, engage, and commit themselves to the environmental causes in order to remedy the problem. This is a sign of hope that leads to alleviating the condition. Admittedly, the Earth's crisis is getting worse. But any crisis offers, and in many instances leads, to both danger and hope (Cane, 1992).

Way back in May 5, 1984, in a conference in Washington, D.C., a group of scientists and scholars "called for a concerted international action that aims 'to protect the global environment and the biological systems that support human life'" (Bokenkotter, 1992, pp. 383-384). This writer believes that support must not only be given to human life; but, to all forms of life as well. It should be remembered that there are about four (4) to 40 million species on the planet Earth. The human being is just one (1) of these species (Wenz, 2001). Confronted with this reality, we are all therefore challenged to lead a new way of life and to act out a renewed moral responsibility, authentic stewardship towards the planet Earth. The Earth's critical condition, indeed, 'the ultimate life issue' as 40 million species are endangered, summons all human beings to a total conversion. As McFague (1993) reiterates, "we must change our behavior for the future being of this world" (p. x). Winter (1996) supports this insight of McFague (1993) when she says that "we can deduce three ways to enhance the consistency between pro-environmental attitudes and pro-environmental behaviors: join an environmental organization, maintain a sense of environmental responsibility, and tell others about intentions to do environmentally responsible actions" (1993, p. 69). It is one thing to make some changes in people's attitudes and behaviors from time to time, it is quite another to do it consistently (Lonergan, 1994; Conn, 1986). Magnanimous efforts are required to combat the continuing vast ecological damaged. Indeed, environmental healing requires consistency in people's attitudes and behaviors.

Part I: Origins and Causes of Preset Environmental Crisis

Northcott (1999) "examines the character and causes of modern environmental problems, and argues that they are linked with fundamental changes in religious belief, and in human moral

and social ecology, as well as with new technological and industrial processes” (p. iii). His examination with regard to the origins and causes of said phenomenon can be delineated as follows:

1. The agricultural revolution

In the olden times, most humans subsist as hunter-gatherers. They simply live on what the natural environment provides. However, they never exhaust the capacity of nature to supply for their daily needs. They are nomadic; moving from one place to another searching for their food. Their lifestyles never have any serious threat to the natural world. But, this changed during the *modern period*. This period is characterized by European conquest mentality. The *conquistadores* did not only abuse the natural environment but even the inhabitants of their colony. Along with this, they also introduce a revolutionary means of agriculture by clear-cutting forested lands, large-scale draining of wetlands, input of hazardous chemicals, and the like. This system of agricultural revolution which spread throughout the world constantly has lasting impact to the natural environment.

2. The commodification of nature

The development of the market economy also has a major impact on the degradation of the environment. The natural environment has become a commodity to be marketed. The economy has depended on the natural resources because everything under this economic paradigm has a “price tag.” Such produced unimaginable transformation to the way humans looked at the natural resources. The Humans-Nature relation has been radically changed. The natural environment becomes a commodity. It has now served humans’ end.

3. Science, technology and the mythology of progress

The scientific revolution during the 16th Century is another factor which has contributed to the ecological crisis. Unfortunately, industrialization and the application of the technological fruits of the modern scientific method resulted to a lasting negative

impact to the natural world. The natural world becomes a “giant laboratory” which is open for experimentation and exploration. Nature has been dominated by modern science. The prevailing thought is that nature has no other purpose but for humans. As Northcott (1999) writes “through the deployment of technology, though social processes of experimentation and observation and through the values of domination and progress, modern science is set over nature, the scientific observer over the object of her experiment. Nature is reduced to a status of materials bank and human living spaces” (p. 63).

4. The moral climate of modernity

The moral principle that influences modernity is utilitarianism. It is understood as the pursuits of those action which produce the greatest happiness for the greatest number, otherwise known as the “Greatest Happiness Principle.” It involves a numerical, calculative view of happiness – the more you have, the merrier you become. That is a “culture of having” mentality. This leads to the phenomenon, which we call today as consumerism, has a great impact to the environment because it considers the instrumental value of the natural world to serve the insatiable desires of people to consume. As Northcott (1999) says, ‘more goods... have been consumed in the last forty years than throughout the whole of human history” p. 73).

5. Modernity and ecology in conflict

Today, many people still attempt to live in harmony with the natural world; not only the indigenous or tribal people. On the other hand, a great number of people have lost their intimacy with the natural world; thereby, abused it. Modernity has brought about significant changes in the metaphysical, theological, and moral conceptualization of the cosmic context of human life as well as the nature of the self and society. These changes involve the desacralization of nature, removing God from human vision of the world, and a new focus on material things that modernity believes in order to satisfy the necessities of human life (Northcott, 1999).

Aside from those reasons outlined above, there are plethora of different authors that perceive the origins and causes of environmental crisis. Obviously, an observation varies from one author to another. Some examples can be briefly outlined, as follows:

- A. Ehrlich proposes that if ecological catastrophe can be averted over-population needs to be addressed seriously (Paul Erhlich's *The Population Explosion*),
- B. The Meadows' in the influential Club of Rome Report believe that the economics of growth is a major factor of ecological imbalance (Dennis and Donella Meadows' *The Limits of Growth*),
- C. The pursuit of progress which dominated the mentality of the modern person, Artfield believes, has given rise to the environmental degradation (Robin Artfield's *The Ethics of Environmental Concern*),
- D. The modern scientific method Roszak and others believe as the cause of the distorted relationship between human and natural world has helped produce the crisis (Theodore Roszak's *Where the Wetland Ends: Politics and Transcendence in a Postindustrial Society*, Edward Goldsmith's *The Way: An Ecological Worldview*, and Rupert Sheldrake's *The Rebirth of Nature: the Greening of Science and God*).
- E. The problem of changing cultural attitudes to the non-human world, or of the social construction of nature, as the following propose, caused the environmental crisis:
 - i. *Christian Doctrine of Creation* (Lynn White's article "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis"),
 - ii. 'Cartesian dualism' (S. McDonagh, McFague, and others)'
 - iii. *Gender construction and patriarchy* (Mary Daly and Rosemary Radford Ruethers' **Gyn-Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism**; Rosemary Radford Ruether's **Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing**); the connection between the exploitation of the earth and sexist definition and treatment of women (Elizabeth A. Johnson's, **Women, Earth, and Creator Spirit**); and, anthropocentrism (Deep Ecologists)

Northcott, 1999; Wenz, 2001; Zimmerman, 1993).

The aforementioned observations vis-à-vis the origins and causes of the present global crisis are equally valid. Moreover, Boff (1997) argues emphatically that “the loss of interconnectedness” among the relationship of humans with the Creator and the rest of the whole created order is the ultimate root of the environmental dilemma. The ecological problem lies on “the ongoing disruption of the basic connectedness with the whole of the universe and with its Creator that the human being has introduced, fueled, and perpetuated (Boff, p. 81).

In summary, ecological crisis is just like any reality or phenomenon where people give different perceptions, offer various understanding, and draw out varieties of conclusions. As it were, there is truth to saying that there are many ways of looking. Understanding, responding, or acting to a single phenomenon. This can be likened to a metaphor of the fable of blind Hindustan people who are asked to describe an elephant. The blind people give different perspectives of the elephant. Analytically, vis-à-vis the origins and causes of environmental crisis, different people give pluralistic perspectives.

The Present Environmental Situation

The Manual for Promoters of Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (1998), provides a section on “injustice to humanity.” It shows that “there is a close inter-connection between social injustices and environmental injustices” (p. 39). Thus, to address the former, the latter should be addressed first. No social justice exists without environmental justice. The increasing injustices done toward the environment are the results of social injustices.

Moreover, the same *Manual*, presents the facts and figures of environmental injustices. In the said *Manual*, the International Commission on Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation, devoted a chapter on various injustices being done to humanity (pp. 13-50). One among the many injustices listed is the injustice done to the global environment. Some cited examples of injustices are: (1) world’s ocean degeneration, (2) pollution to air and land, (3) desertification and soil erosion, (4) deforestation, (5) the green

house effects, and (6) the depletion of the ozone layer. Natividad (2000) describes it pointedly and poetically as people, expert and non-expert alike, “smell the problem in the air, they taste it in the water; they see it in more congested living spaces and blemished landscapes” (p. 219). All people care for life, a clean air to breathe, an uncontaminated food to eat, and a safe water to drink.

Furthermore, the aforesaid *Manual* cites facts that the world’s oceans are now being polluted. These oceans (1) regulate the Earth’s climate, (2) provide tons of sea food annually for both humans and sea animals, and (3) nourish living beings of its salts and minerals.

If worse comes to worst, the oceans can eventually be distilled into fresh water. They may become waste containers as toxic substances are thrown into the oceans. Urban refuse and unhealthy forms of modern methods of agriculture have added more to the pollution of the oceans. Pesticides, animal manure, and fertilizers are just a few of these pollutants.

On the one hand, the pollution of the air and the land, the greenhouse effect, and the depletion of the ozone layer, in a global scale and undoubtedly caused by “liberal toxic capitalism” (Cajes, 2002). On the other hand, desertification, soil erosion, and deforestation are caused by humans’ abusive attitude towards the environment. In April 9, 2001 *Time Magazine* published a Special Report that confirms the global worsening condition of the environment. In the following month, the same publication illustrated alarmingly how people wrongly manage the most precious resources which the Earth and all of its inhabitants can ever have, that is, water. Water management is a “21st Century challenge” (p. 50). Some countries especially sub-Saharan Africa, Middle East, and Europe are experiencing water problems. There are even threats of “water-wars” (pp. 52-52; Wenz, 2001, p. 10).

McDonagh (1986) adds a diagnosis of the present condition of the planet Earth. He emphasizes that if the present trends of abusing the Earth continue indiscriminately, the Earth faces a catastrophe comparable to a nuclear holocaust. Note that a nuclear holocaust can transform the Earth into a fireball and render the planet unlivable. The constant cumulative destruction of all life forms and different ecosystem is tantamount to the same effect. Furthermore, McDonagh (1990) gives a global bird’s eye

view of the damage the Earth is suffering. In the “heart” of his book, *To Care for the Earth: A Call to a New Theology*, he outlines the phenomena that threaten the life on earth. He cites different kinds of pollution such as industrial, air, water, food, and land. He also enumerates nuclear waste, soil erosion, global warming, and deforestation. All of these either poison all life forms on Earth or result / lead to its degradation. Such data describe Ireland, Latin America, and the Philippines. Indeed, the present ecological crisis has a serious global effect.

Like the rest of the countries in the globe, the Philippines suffers the same crisis. Ecological crisis is a reality that cannot be confined to any particular country or region. The origins and causes of the country’s ecological problem might not fit in the above-mentioned mold. But it cannot be denied that the Philippines does experience a similar problem. *The Institute of Church and Social Issues* (ICSI, 1999) alerts the people of the worsening condition of the environment. The Philippine forests are getting thinner. The quality of air, especially Metro Manila, is one of the world’s most polluted. The fresh water resources are badly managed as many of the rivers are moribund. The natural marine resources do not fare well too. Lastly, the garbage problem is very much a perennial hot issue as it continues to increase by tons every day. In short, the Philippines environment is terribly managed in many respects.

More concretely, the ICSI studies graphically show the destruction that the Philippines is currently experiencing. ICSI reports the following:

1. Forests-laid waste (forests original 30 million hectares; now 1 million)

The Philippines has a total land area of around 30 million hectares. In the 1960’s, more than half of these are densely covered. However, today, only 18.6 percent of the total land area are forested. For the Philippines to be ecologically sound and able to sustain its ecosystem, its ideal forest cover should be 54 percent of the total land area. Only one province, Palawan, meets the ideal. A folio of reports entitled *Saving the Earth: The Philippine Experience*, edited by Gamalinda (1990), although

a decade ago, bears out ICSI's study. Recently, Utting (2000) explicates that "the Philippines continues to experience one of the highest deforestation rates in the world, having lost each day 3.5 percent of its forest covers between 1990 and 1995. During this brief period, the total forest area declined from 8 million to 6.8 million hectares or 22.7 percent of the country's total land area of 30 million" (p. 4).

2. Hemorrhage of life blood (in a night's rain rivers can become chocolate brown and become a cloak of death)

The consequence is a "hemorrhage of life blood." The Filipinos are experiencing tremendous and uncontrolled flooding. It washes millions of tons of topsoil. Consequently, leaving thousands of hectares of productive farmlands eroded and a lot of inland waterways heavily silted.

3. Deserts in the sea (only 5 percent of corals are in their pristine state)

The destruction of coral reefs is equally alarming. The recent study of the University of the Philippines Marine Science Institute reveals "that 70% of coral reefs re in a progressive stage of degeneration. The rampant destruction of the coral reefs is attributed to siltation due to erosion, the use of cyanide by tropical fish collectors, the practice of "muro-ami" fishing, and the prevalence of coral mining (ICSI, 1999, p. 3).

With such condition, the blue planet is becoming brown. The most beautiful of all the planets is becoming ugly.

People need to realize that whenever forests are gone, human beings and animals soon be gone, too. Trees are people's external lungs. Humans will lose their external lungs because of deforestation. Animals and every living beings or life forms, i.e., all living organisms in the forest may perish. Without forest there will only be dried up riverbeds waiting for the rain to come. As a result, the rain water will carry the soil to the sea; thereby, destroying the sea ecosystems such as corals. Without the forest, the air that people breathe in everyday, most especially the residents of Metro Manila, will continue to worsen. It will bring forth bad health

which results to death affecting especially the most vulnerable, the poor people in the metropolis.

As Hui (1997) writes, an “Earth without forest is a picture that most of humankind presently could not perceive. Forest covers much of the planet’s land area. They are extremely important to humans and the natural world. For humans, they have many aesthetic, recreational, economic, historical, and cultural and religious values. In the year 900 common era (C.E.) forest have covered approximately 40 percent of the land on earth. Today, forests cover less than 20 percent and it is shrinking fast (Robbins and Solomon, 1994).

Johnson (1993) gives a summary of the present state of the earth using the “blue planet” story. She says, that

Our blue planet, as a habitat for life, stands in jeopardy due to atmospheric damage, deforestation, pollution of the seas, disruption of ecosystem, destruction of habitat, extinction of species, loss of biodiversity, overpopulation, resource exhaustion, and nuclear proliferation (pp. 7-8)

It is a fact that human beings are a destructive race. However, it must be pointed out that humans are a creative race as well. Despite all the problems cited, both in the global and local arena, human beings remain the hope of the Earth. As Cane (1997) puts it, “human beings may be devastating the earth, but human beings remain the earth’s hope. With hands joined together locally and globally we are now one of the earth’s crucial life-support systems” (p.29).

Ruether (1983) shares Cane’s (1992) belief on the important role which human beings have played to make the Earth a healthy planet again. Ruether (1983) writes that

Nature will never be the same again as it would have been without human intervention. Although we need to remake the earth in a way that converts our minds to nature’s logic of ecological harmony, this will necessarily be a new synthesis, a new creation in which human nature and non-human nature become friends in creating of a livable and sustainable cosmos (p.92)

Some Paradigmatic Responses

Ecotheological and Ecophilosophical Response

The ecological problem has reached nearly irreversible proportion today. Such prompted many people with various paradigms so as to respond to this phenomenon. Smith (1997) provides a quick overview of this various responses in her book *What are they saying about environmental ethics*. Smith writes that “in recent decades new fields of inquiry and discussion have appeared: ecotheology, ecospirituality and creation spirituality, ecophilosophy, and environmental ethics” (p. 2). These new fields, admittedly, have some convergences and divergences as regards the matter in question. They obviously agree on one thing, that is, indeed we are facing an imminent environmental catastrophe. On the other hand, these new fields have so many disagreements as regards their perception of the problem (Smith). That is why, Smith and Zimmerman (1993) attempt to clarify the issue by speaking of deep ecologists, ecofeminists, natural ethicists, conservationists, animal rights activists, philosophical ethicists, and religionists (Smith, 1997; Zimmerman, 1993). In his edited anthology, Zimmerman, presents a scholarly and philosophical considerations of the whole created order. The collective efforts of different philosophical school of thoughts gear ultimately to the same important and urgent concern. For instance, the “radical” ecophilosophy (includes deep ecology, ecofeminism, and social ecology). The groups who are primarily astute here are environmental ethicists and anthropocentric reformists. Collectively, they all gear ultimately to the same important and urgent concern, that is, to further the well being of all life on Earth.

In addition, Wenz (2001) in his *Environmental ethics today* updates both students and general readers to current positions, controversies, and concepts in environmental ethics. His viewpoints are similar to that of Smith and Zimmerman. Environmental ethics can discern encompass the moral issues of the time. Wenz promotes his so-called *environmental synergism*. It means “synergy exists when the effect of things acting together is greater than the total effect of those same thing acting separately. Respect for nature promotes respect for people, so the best way to serve people as a group is

to care about nature for itself” (p. 169). What humans do to the environment, they do to themselves. If humans care for the natural world, they also care for their fellow humans. If they promote the well being of the earth, they also promote the well being of fellow humans. This is the essence of *pakikiisa*.

Ecofeminist Response

Ruether (1978) asserts that the culprit behind the ecological crisis is man’s misunderstanding of “biblical injunction to conquer and subdue the earth and have dominion over it. The earth and its nonhuman inhabitants are regarded as possessions or property given to ‘man’ for ‘his’ possession.” In her *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a feminist theology*, Ruether (1983) reiterated her perception that the root of ecological crisis can be equated to the “devaluation of women in the analogy of devalued nature” (p.72). She further adds explaining that are some feminist responses to various social problems including the environment. In her edited work *Women healing earth: Third world women on ecology, feminism and religion* Ruether (1996) reiterates the same idea of double domination. That is, abuse of nature is associated with abuse of women, in a worldwide scale. Ruether writes that

there is a variety of movements dealing with ecological crisis from several perspectives, and within those movements, there are women who make conscious critique of the movement’s androcentrism and seek to show the connections between women’s domination and the domination of nature (p.2).

Magisterial Response

The 1986 comment made by McDonagh (1986) that “the Catholic Church’s voice on the ecological crisis has been muted” (p. 109) is finally heard by the Church. There are so many theologians, males and females, coming from the different Christian denominations, have finally spoken loud and clear. Worth mentioning is the emergence of ecological awareness in the official documents since Vatican II. Some of the prominent ones are *Octogesima adveniens* 21 (1971), *Justitia in mundo* 11 (1971), and *Redemptor hominis*

15 (1979). Ecological concern are reflected in Pope John Paul II's recent encyclicals (SRS, 1988; paragraph numbers 26, 34) and in his 1990 message during the celebration of the World Day of Peace, in *Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All of Creation* (Ryan, 1994). Most recently, Pope Francis' *Laudato Si* (2015).

To date, there are at least forty-eight official documents coming from the different Episcopal Conferences throughout the world. Therefore, the comment, that "the Catholic Church voice is muted" cannot hold water anymore. As Ryan (1994) says, " 'muted' neither means silent nor blind" (p.305). Furthermore, Christiansen and Grazer (1996), in *And God saw that it was good: Catholic theology and the environment*, explicitly argue that indeed the Catholic Church has responded to ecological crisis. Christiansen and Grazer include scholarly and prayerful considerations of the (1) theology of creation, (2) Christian eschatology, (3) on-going dialogue between science and religion on cosmological questions, (4) sacramental theology, and (5) moral theology's core conceptual values such as human dignity, common good, and virtue. They show the relevance of all these to present eco-theological and eco-ethical reflection. As part of the appendix it also includes the message of Pope John Paul II, some Episcopal statements on ecology, and other helpful materials written by individual theologians.

In a broader sense, anyone reflecting about his/her Christian faith can be considered a theologian. Hence, it is equally important to recognize the contribution of theologians who exert efforts to show their concern for the well being of the whole created order vis-à-vis the ecological crisis. They have come from various different theological schools; but, with one mission - to be good stewards of the Earth.

McDonagh (1990, 1994) links Third World poverty with environmental issues. He espouses that the economic policies of the rich countries are jeopardizing the life of the poor inhabitants as well as the life of the environment. The modern economic system of production, distribution, consumption, trade, and development are taxing and wreaking havoc on the regenerative capacity of the biosphere. This can be tantamount to genocide, ecocide, and biocide. Dorr (1990, 1991) believes that people can remedy the Earth by drawing from the rich wellspring of our Christian spirituality both as individuals and as community or institution. Each individual

has an important role to play in promoting and keeping the Earth healthy; even through small ways. Communities or institutions can do better than individuals. As already noted, many groups of people coming from around the world have already shown their concern for the well being of planet Earth.

Working from the biblical perspectives, Byrne (1990) relates the relevance of Pauline spirituality to the catastrophic effect of the ecological crisis. Human beings have the potential to ruin the earth as well as cause serious irreversible changes. Humans have the devious power to devastate all forms of life. However, God's three-fold commandment of love might help overcome the present ecological problem. Such three-fold commandment of love are that of God, neighbors, self and the rest of the whole created order.

Following the theological framework of the great Karl Rahner, Edwards (1991) challenges all humans to think theologically regarding the crisis in the light of the great Christian tradition. His theological insights link the stories of the cosmos and of Jesus.

Hill (1998) attempts to connect the different facets of Christian faith to the environment. In his book *Christian faith and the environment: Making vital connections*, Hill examines the contribution of Christian theologians in establishing his theological framework such to builds bridges between Christian tradition and the present ecological dilemma. The growing number of different Episcopal conferences' statements on ecology reveals the different responses and the seriousness of the environmental crisis. He integrated the Sacred Scriptures, dogmas and doctrines, spirituality, feminism, and ethical values to the contemporary concerns for the Earth.

In conclusion, due to the importance and the urgency of the problem, people around the world who come from different disciplines try to respond to the ecological crisis. Some study the causes and origins of the ecological crisis. Others show the present state of the Earth. Many others, males and females, young and old, rich and poor, philosophers, theologians, and the like offer their responses to help remedy the healing of the Earth. At the dawn of creation, God has made all humans as stewards of His creation. This is every human being's task and responsibility. So, it is but fitting to hear voices in a global scale in order to urgently pursue the well being of the whole planet Earth.

Indigenous Cultural System of Moral Values and Beliefs

As illustrated earlier, the ecological crisis has been caused by many factors. In essence, human behavior, beliefs, decisions, and values, may very well contribute to such reasons. To remedy the problem on ecology, indigenous Filipino cultural systems of moral values and beliefs are explored. Such investigation is expected to strategically contribute to the pursuit of promoting the well being of the planet Earth. The pertinent researches of Church (1986), Gorospe (1988), Church and Katigbak (2000), and Romero (1999) have documented some of the salient Filipino indigenous cultural systems of moral values and beliefs. Despite the diversities in the result of such researches indigenous Filipino cultural traits that can be found and be sifted through in order to alleviate the ecological problem.

Some examples of the indigenous Filipino values are social (*pakikisama*, *kapwa*, and *hiya*), moral (justice, *amor propio*, and love), and religious (prayer, popular religiosity) (Gorospe, 1988; Church & Katigbak, 2000). The Filipino indigenous values can be appropriated and become Christian values. Filipino and Christian values can be blended harmoniously (Gorospe, 1988). In fact, among these values, the Filipino spiritual/religious values have the pre-eminence among the rest of all indigenous values. In the context of ecological crisis, the Filipino indigenous values are characterized by harmony with nature. Certainly, the indigenous Filipino cultural systems of moral values and beliefs can very well contribute to the healing of the Earth. The Filipinos have a deep respect for the whole created order; physically and spiritually.

Lonergan (1994) in his *Method in theology* gives an accurate empirical understanding of culture. Of course, there is a classicist notion of culture; hence, it is something constant and will not change. On the other hand, there is the empirical notion of culture. It is empirical because it is rooted in concrete human experience and is dynamic. Culture is defined by Lonergan as “the set of meanings and values that informs a way of life” (p. xi).

In theology, the Lonergan method is commonly called as “transcendental method” (Muller 1983, Streeter 1985, Grace 2001). It has been very helpful in theological enterprise or endeavor in doing theology in the contemporary world. The method seems to be

metaphysical, but on the contrary, it is not. Transcendental does not mean something abstract, speculative, or other worldly. It is called “transcendental” because of its encompassing application (Streeter, 1985) which is not only in theological endeavors. Like the *see*, *judge*, and *act* of *Mater et Magistra* and the four-fold steps of social analysis, the Lonergan method has certainly clarified the process of analysis; thereby, shedding light on the issue at hand and ultimately, developing a *pakikiisa* of God’s created universe, rooted in faith that does justice (Haughey, 1977).

The reason that the method is called ‘transcendental’ has *objective* and *subjective* components. Objectively, it transcends specific fields of study and particular subjects; it looks to the results of any study whatsoever. Subjectively, it looks to the ways we transcend ourselves by the deft operations of mind that bring us knowledge.

The term “*method*” for Lonergan does not mean a technique. Most fundamentally it refers to the innate dynamic operations of human consciousness. The consciousness of the human subject is innately intentional. Intentionality analysis is done by charting the pattern of the operating consciousness of the human subject or objectifying the operations of consciousness. Intentionality analysis provides an understanding of the operations which have to do with *experiencing*, *knowing*, and *deciding*. The pattern of human consciousness is recurrent. Its operations, once identified, can be understood in relation to one another.

In the transcendental method, Lonergan is concerned with objectifying the human subject’s actual process of ‘transcending’ the self. It occurs on four conscious levels - paying attention, getting insights, grasping the truth, and an action based on the truly valuable. This is in congruence with the Church’s own method as inscribed in *Mater et Magistra* 236. It says:

There are three stages which should normally be followed in the reduction of social principles into practice. First, one reviews the concrete situation; secondly, one forms a judgment on it in the light of these same principles; thirdly, one decides what in the circumstances can and should be done to implement these principles. These are the three stages that are usually expressed in the three terms: observe, judge, act.

MM's "observe" can be likened to Lonergan's first level, which is "experience." *MM's* "judge" can be likened to the second and third levels of Lonergan's method which are "understanding and judging." *MM's* "act" can be likened to Lonergan's last level of mental operation, which is "deciding" and "acting" with responsibility. The method of social analysis is significantly the same with Lonergan and *Mater et Magistra* (Manual, 1998; Holland, & Henriot, 1983). Hence, in integrating all of them, one can come up with a method that will give justice to such methodologies. This researcher believes that the *MM's* see, judge, act and social analysis can be integrated with the Lonergan's transcendental method.

Each level sets the conditions for the subject's continuing conscious activities. The process has to do with the struggle toward the authentic human functioning which is identified with knowledge and choice.

Corresponding to each levels of consciousness is the different levels of the realms of meaning. Lonergan distinguishes these four realms of meaning as:

1. *common sense* where, meaning is expressed in everyday or ordinary language;
2. *theory* where meaning is expressed in technical language;
3. *interiority* where meaning rests upon self-appropriation, attending not merely to objects but also to the attending subject in his or her acts; and,
4. *transcendence* where meaning emerges through the language of prayer and relation to divinity.

Lonergan's method is, in essence, a framework for creative activity. It begins with the data (*see, observe or experience*) that must be researched. The data are interpreted (*understand, judge, and decide*). Patterns of development are noted as the study progresses. Opposing perspectives are critically evaluated. Finally, one takes a stand and acts upon the decision reached (*act or doing*). The last level deals with acting with responsibility so that it culminates in decision or commitment (Lonergan 1973, 1994; Streeter, 1985).

Synthesis

The present ecological crisis has a very long history. It can be traced back perhaps when humans started walking on this planet called Earth. Such planet is amazingly beautiful because such is the intention of its Creator. But humans who were first charged to be stewards of the planet, have utilized and abused it according to whims and capriciousness. Experts on the study of the environment have pointed out some possible causes and origins of the present environmental crisis.

The present condition of the planet Earth is getting worse and worse. Verdant forests are replaced with high-rise buildings. Some animal species now exist only in storybooks. People around the globe are experiencing extraordinary and extreme weather phenomena such as El Nino, La Nina, global warming, and the like. If such worsening condition is not alleviated, the impending ecological disaster can be tantamount to a nuclear holocaust. Only the ubiquitous cockroaches will reign on Earth.

Admittedly, humans are mostly responsible for the environmental crisis. Humans, nevertheless, can also be responsible for the healing of the planet Earth. Evidences show that people around the world are becoming increasingly aware of the frailty of the planet; many individuals and groups have dedicated and committed their lives for the well-being of the planet today.

Humans are both a destructive and a creative race. Humans remain the hope of the Earth. Hence, in the Philippine context, essentially Filipino cultural systems of moral values and beliefs are not anti-ecology or anti-environment. Critically analyzing such systems of employing some designs to the pursuit of the promotion of the well being of the Earth and everything in it is urgent and important.

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