



Original Article

‘Maganda’ in the Fifth Argument of *Quinque Viae* of St. Thomas Aquinas

Joenel B. Buencibello  & Paulo Antonio L. Aton 

Humanities and Social Sciences Department

De La Salle University, Philippines

Correspondence: joenel.buencibello@dlsu.edu.ph

Abstract

God created everything as “*maganda*.” However, human interference with creation has led to its degradation. In the fifth argument of the *Quinque Viae*, Saint Thomas Aquinas introduced the idea that the universe was created with order and purpose, or simply “very good” (Genesis 1:31), governed by a wise Sustainer. Dr. Jose de Mesa argued that “The universe created by God is “*maganda*” [in Hebrew, *tôb*; in English, beautiful], and humanity is “*magandang-maganda*” [very beautiful] because they reflect the graciousness of the Creator.” Yet, in the present time, can we still perceive the will of the Creator in how humanity interacts with and manages the beauty of creation? This paper will utilize the concept of cultural contextualization of the “*mabathalang atas*” [divine mandate] (Genesis 1:26, 28) using the *Suri-Nilay-Kilos* [See-Discern-Act] approach. This reflection seeks to demonstrate that the Filipino concept of *maganda* [understood as ethical beauty] corresponds to the form of governance implied in the *quinta via* of the *Quinque Viae*. It further aims to inspire a deeper commitment to the care and preservation of the *ganda* (beauty and goodness) of creation, grounded in the *kagandahang-loob* [gracious will; love] of the Creator.

Keywords: Fifth Argument, Ganda/Maganda, Inculturation, Pangit, Quinque Viae, St. Thomas Aquinas

Suggested citation:

Buencibello, J. & Aton, P.A. (2025). ‘Maganda’ in the Fifth Argument of *Quinque Viae* of St. Thomas Aquinas. *Hitik: International Journal of Catechists and Religious Educators*, 2(2), 27-42. <https://doi.org/10.63130/hijcre.v2i2.116>

Publisher’s Note: Hitik: International Journal of Catechists and Religious Educators stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



Copyright: ©2025 The Authors. Hitik: International Journal of Catechists and Religious Educators is published by the Religious Educators Association of the Philippines, Inc.. This is an open access journal under the terms and conditions of the [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 4.0 International \(CC BY-NC 4.0\) license](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/).

Introduction

In 2017, a book authored by Dr. Jose M. De Mesa, Dr. Estela P. Padilla, Dr. Levy L. Lanaria, Dr. Rebecca G. Cacho, Yuri D. Cipriano, Dr. George N. Capaque, and Dr. Timoteo D. Gener was published, titled *Ang Maganda sa Teolohiya* [“The Beauty in Theology”]. This book is a collection of theological essays centered around the concept of the word *ganda* [beauty]. It aims to illustrate the importance and beauty of theological studies from a Filipino perspective. The book advocates for a cultural approach to theology to make it more relatable, meaningful, and transformative for Filipino Christians. It emphasizes the inculcation of theological ideas into everyday experiences and the realities of Filipino culture, rooted in contextual or lived theology. The authors recommend a theology that is not only intellectual but also pastoral, one that responds to the needs and aspirations of communities using Filipino sentiment and thought (De Mesa et al., 2017).

In the chapter “*Kapag ang ‘Ganda’ ang Pag-uusapan: Mungkahi para sa Dulong at Paraan ng Mabathalang Pag-aaral*,” Dr. De Mesa illustrates that the concept of “*ganda*” is both broad and profound. He states that true beauty has an impact and resonates because it transforms the inner being of the person who perceives it (De Mesa, 2017, p. 5). This explains why, when we encounter something beautiful, we often say, “*ang lakas ng dating!*” [poorly translated as “It has presence!”] or “*may dating!*” [“It stands out!”] as if we feel beauty deep within, *tagos* [penetrating] to the bones! According to the *Diksyunaryo ng Wikang Pilipino* (1989), *ganda* refers to anything that ‘evokes admiration and delight’ [“*pumupukaw ng paghanga at pagkalugod*”] and is ‘visually appealing or attractive’ [“*kaakit-akit ang anyo*”]. Unlike the Western concept of beauty, which predominantly focuses on aesthetic [visual or external] appeal, Filipinos understand beauty as encompassing both admiration and deep appreciation [something very affective and morally uplifting]. Dr. De Mesa argues that the Filipino perspective on *ganda* is inseparable and intertwined—a fusion of aesthetics (captivating goodness or “*nakahahalinang kabutihan*”) and ethics (what is good or “*ang mabuti*”) (De Mesa, 2017, p. 5, 18).

This symbiotic relationship between aesthetics and ethics is evident in Filipino expressions such as “*magandang araw*” [good day], “*magandang asal*” [good manners], and “*magandang loob*” [good-heartedness]. It indicates that in Filipino culture, what is deemed ethically good is beautiful. As Dr. De Mesa (2017, p. 5) explains, we evaluate what we see, observe, experience, and witness in our surroundings by saying ‘*maganda*’ [beautiful/good] or ‘*di maganda*’ [not beautiful/not good]. For instance, when we say, “*Maganda ang ginagawa mong pag tulong sa kapwa*” [translated as ‘Your act of helping others is beautiful.’], we are referring to the ethical dimension of *ganda* (De Mesa, 2016, p. 23-24).

According to Dr. Estela Padilla (2017), in the chapter titled “*Ganda: Isang Pagtinging Kultural*,” the word *ganda* is often used as an adjective or adverb to describe actions or objects. To provide a deeper semantic meaning, the author conducted an interview and asked respondents to provide synonyms and antonyms for the word “*maganda*.” The purpose of this study was to explore the sentiment and cultural concept of beauty among Filipinos from various fields and social standings. Despite differences in status, circumstances, and backgrounds, a significant percentage of respondents shared similar meanings for the word *ganda* (Padilla, 2017, p. 25). It was found that words synonymous with “*maganda*” include “*maayos*” [orderly], “*mabuti*” [good], “*totoo*” [truthful], and “*walang daya*” [sincere], which, upon closer examination, reflect ethical foundations experienced in beauty, whether in people, objects, actions, or events. Conversely, words associated with the absence

of beauty include “*nakakasira*” [destructive], “*marumi*” [dirty], “*magulo*” [chaotic], and “*nakapagpapahirap sa tao*” [burdensome to people]. (Padilla, 2017, pp. 25, 35)

According to Dr. Levy L. Lanaria, in the chapter titled “*O Kay Ganda, Sana!*”, there exists a kind of *ganda* that is not truly beautiful—a deceptive or superficial *gandang pangit* (false beauty). He explains that despite God’s graciousness to Adam and Eve, granting them a *magandang tahanan* [the world] and filling it with *kagandahan*;

“*Naatim pa nilang piliin ang isang “gandang” pangit o mapaglinlang. Kaya’t pangit nga ang pagwawakas ng kuwento nila sa paraiso dahil ang kalooban ng Diyos ay hindi nila ginampanan nang lubusan.*”

(Lanaria, 2017, p. 53).

“They still chose a deceptive or false ‘beauty’ [or ‘ugly beauty’]. Thus, their story in paradise ended in ugliness [pangit], for they did not fully fulfill the will of God.”

(Lanaria, 2017, p. 53).

According to Dr. Rebecca G. Cacho, in the chapter “*Tungo sa Kaganapan ng Magandang Buhay*,” every Filipino dreams of *magandang buhay* [a good life], and all their aspirations and efforts are directed toward achieving it. As Dr. Cacho (2017, p. 63) states,

“*maganda ang buhay kapag maginhawa ang pakiramdam at katayuan; hindi nagkukulang at sapat sa lahat ng pangangailangan...*

kung ang pinaiiral ay ang kagandahang-loob ng Diyos, ang inaasam na magandang buhay ay magkakaroon ng katuparan.

Ngunit dahil sa pangit na ugali, pakikitungo, at pamumuhat nagiging mailap ang hinahangad.

Lumalabo ang pag-asa tungo sa buhay na maganda.”

(Cacho, 2017, pp. 66-67).

“Life is beautiful when one feels at ease and secure, lacking nothing and having all needs sufficiently met.

If God’s ‘kagandahang loob [graciousness/love] prevails, the longing for a good life will find fulfillment.

However, due to undesirable attitudes, poor relationships, and misguided ways of living, the desired life becomes elusive.

Hope for a truly beautiful existence fades.”

(Cacho, 2017, pp. 66-67).

The title of this study is “*Maganda*” in the Fifth Argument of Quinque Viae of St. Thomas Aquinas. The central objective of this paper is to examine the concept of *maganda* (beauty) through the lens of the *quinta via* [fifth way] of Saint Thomas Aquinas, highlighting its theological and ethical dimensions. Specifically, it seeks to explore how *maganda* functions not merely as an aesthetic form but as a manifestation of divine order and purpose (*telos*) observable in creation.

In the *quinta via*, Aquinas presents the teleological argument, which points to the observable order and design in the universe as evidence of an intelligent designer.

The beauty of all existing things, living and non-living, reveals a sophisticated mechanism governed by divine intelligence, sustaining both existence and coexistence. Within this framework, *maganda* reflects not only harmony and order but also the moral good that proceeds from the Creator's will.

This study further situates *maganda* within biblical anthropology, affirming that humanity, created in the image and likeness of God, is *magandang-maganda* [exceedingly good/beautiful]. As Genesis 1:26 and 28 express, humanity is entrusted with a *mabathalang atas* [divine mandate] to care for creation. Yet, despite the Creator's *kagandahang loob* [gracious will; love], the world still suffers from *kapangitan*—destruction, impurity, disorder, and suffering. Saint Thomas explains that while the universe follows the Eternal Law [*Walang-hanggang Batas; Kalooban ng Bathala*], human misuse of freedom disrupts this divine order.

Thus, this research aims to articulate *ganda* as a reflection of divine order and purpose, emphasizing humanity's responsibility to embody the *kagandahang loob* of the Creator through *mabathalang pananagutan* [divine responsibility]. Utilizing the Suri-Nilay-Kilos model, the study proposes a framework that contributes to curriculum development by offering a pedagogical approach in catechesis and religious education. This eco-theological pedagogy encourages learners to observe, reflect, and act toward preserving the beauty of creation as an expression of faith (Buencibello & Aton, 2024).

Methodology

This study employs the **Suri-Nilay-Kilos** (literally means *Observe-Reflect-Action*) framework as its principal analytic method to advance the argument that the Filipino concept of *Maganda*, as both ethical and aesthetic beauty, embodies the divine order and purpose articulated in the *quinta via* of Saint Thomas Aquinas. The study aims to demonstrate how this theological vision, when inculcated in the Filipino context, can inform an eco-theological pedagogy grounded in *mabathalang pananagutan* [divine responsibility].

The **Suri-Nilay-Kilos** method, adapted from the Catholic *See-Judge-Act* model, is used as a contextual theological approach integrating reflection and praxis. It was chosen for its compatibility with Filipino theological thought and its capacity to link faith expressions with concrete ethical action. While alternative frameworks such as theological aesthetics or phenomenological hermeneutics could apply, *Suri-Nilay-Kilos* was preferred for its cultural resonance and pedagogical practicality.

In the **Suri (See)** phase, the paper examines instances of environmental degradation, illustrating how human interference disrupts divine order (*kapangitan*). The **Nilay (Discern)** phase engages the *quinta via* of Aquinas and insights from Filipino theologians like De Mesa and Cacho to interpret *maganda* as the manifestation of *kagandahang-loob* [gracious will] in creation. Finally, the **Kilos (Act)** phase translates these theological insights into a pedagogical framework for catechesis and religious education that promotes ecological conversion and action.

In summary, this methodology proceeds by (1) observing the disruption of divine order in creation (*Suri*), (2) discerning the theological meaning of *maganda* as divine order and ethical goodness (*Nilay*), and (3) proposing a pedagogical praxis that restores harmony with creation (*Kilos*). This three-way method allows the paper to move coherently from argument to application, demonstrating that the rediscovery of *maganda* as order and goodness offers a viable theological foundation for eco-theological pedagogy in the Filipino context.

Discussion

“Pangit”: Consequences of Human Interference

In 2009, Typhoon Ondoy struck the Philippines, severely affecting Provident Village in Marikina. The devastating floods in the area resulted in numerous casualties and the destruction of property. The storm was followed by the onslaught of Typhoon Ulysses, which caused nearly the same level of devastation to the same location. Reports indicate that Provident Village was built in a catch basin (ABS-CBN News, France-Presse, & Flores, 2023), resembling a bowl that collects water whenever the Marikina River overflows. Naturally, the design of this area to accommodate excess water from the river makes it prone to flooding. However, in humanity’s pursuit of urban expansion, even this flood-prone space, intended to absorb overflowing waters, was developed into a residential zone, ultimately leading to disastrous consequences.

In 2020, a government agency in the Philippines decided to place crushed dolomite, an artificial sand, as part of the Manila Bay Rehabilitation Project. The project aimed to enhance the appearance of Manila Bay. Unfortunately, because this artificial sand was not natural to the area; it continued to erode, leading to wasted financial resources. Beyond the erosion, the impact on the location where the dolomite was sourced, in Cebu province, was severe and highly damaging. Google Maps' satellite images reveal the mountain in the town of Alcoy, where the dolomite extraction took place, to be barren. Reports also indicate health-related concerns due to the crushed dolomite in the province (ABS-CBN News, 2020).

“Kagandahan”: Order and Purpose

In essence, *ganda* serves as a *bakas* [trace] of God, continuously manifesting in the created world. As a *bakas* (De Mesa & Cacho, 2017, p. 52-53), *ganda* mirrors the graciousness of the Creator, the source of order and purpose in the universe, which is inherently beautiful. In Filipino culture, the term *maganda* encompasses both an aesthetic aspect [*ang nakahahalinang kabutihan*] and an ethical dimension [*ang mabuti*] (De Mesa, 2017, p. 7). From an aesthetic perspective, *ganda* refers to the external appearance, design, or form of creation. Meanwhile, from an ethical standpoint, *ganda* pertains to the internal essence of creation—something that is felt, transformative, and deeply moving [*may dating at talab*] (Padilla, 2017, pp. 26-27). Thus, the beauty in creation can be discerned through its order and purposive designs.

According to Saint Thomas Aquinas, the universe manifests the existence of an Active, Conscious, and Independent Something [*Aktibo, may Malay, at Malayang Meron*] (De Leon, 2015, p. 36), or simply an Independent Being (Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-I, q. 2, a. 3). Thus, the universe serves as an instrument through which one can perceive a reality that represents both the visible and the felt. For instance, the existence of a table symbolizes a tangible material—whether wood or metal—that takes the form of a square or circle, with legs for support. However, beyond its visible attributes, the table also carries an intangible yet discernible aspect. This is the “table-ness” of the table, which signifies the order that governs its function and essence. Simply put, Saint Thomas Aquinas utilized both observable and experiential elements to demonstrate the existence of an intelligent Creator. According to the Fifth Argument, the universe inherently possesses order and purpose, which cannot—and should not—be violated. This principle highlights the ethical aspect of creation, meaning that every entity—whether living or non-living—exists within a structured system governed by natural order (Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 2, a. 3). Examples such as climate, human metabolism, or the growth of harvestable crops

follow specific structures and laws of nature, ensuring meaningful continuity. As Saint Thomas Aquinas states;

Quinta via sumitur ex gubernatione rerum.

Videmus enim quod aliqua quae cognitione carent, scilicet corpora naturalia, operantur propter finem, quod appetit ex hoc quod semper aut frequentius eodem modo operantur, ut consequantur id quod est optimum; unde patet quod non a casu, sed ex intentione pervenient ad finem.

Ea autem quae non habent cognitionem, non tendunt in finem nisi directa ab aliquo cognoscente et intelligente, sicut sagitta a sagittante.

Ergo est aliquid intelligens, a quo omnes res naturales ordinantur ad finem, et hoc dicimus Deum.

(Summa Theologica, I, q. 2, a. 3)

“The fifth way is taken from the governance of the world.

We see that things which lack intelligence, such as natural bodies, act for an end, and this is evident from their acting always, or nearly always, in the same way, so as to obtain the best result.

Hence it is plain that not fortuitously, but designedly, do they achieve their end. Now whatever lacks intelligence cannot move towards an end, unless it be directed by some being endowed with knowledge and intelligence; as the arrow is shot to its mark by the archer.

Therefore, some intelligent being exists by whom all natural things are directed to their end; and this being we call God.”
(Summa Theologica, I, q. 2, a. 3)

The anthropomorphic adherence of creation to its natural structure and system, which carries inherent meaning, serves as a *bakas* [trace or sacrament] (Cacho, 2011) of the Creator’s intelligent design woven into all living and non-living beings. Creation, devoid of intelligence, cannot produce ugliness, for the Creator Himself governs its structure and order. Humans are special, as they were created with their reason and intelligence, which they can use to decide whether to follow or deviate from the natural structure and system instilled by the Creator in the universe. Simply put, humans possess the ability—and the tendency—to introduce *kapangitan*. *Kapangitan* in creation arises from humanity’s interference with *maganda*. For example, forests serve as sanctuaries for diverse species of animals and plants, following a designated structure and system that maintains harmony. These ecosystems possess a distinctive order and purpose [or simply, *ganda*]. However, when humans destroy forests to build commercial infrastructure, the delicate balance of forest life collapses, disrupting natural flood control and soil stability producing *kapangitan*.

Ang “pangit”—ang pinalalagay na kabaligtaran ng “ganda”—ay taguri para sa di nagugustuhan, nakasisira

“Pangit”—often considered the opposite of “beauty”—is a label given to something unpleasant, disruptive, or perceived as harmful.

ng araw, o kaya'y sa ipinalalagay na nakasasama.

Subalit tulad din ng maganda, kakakitaan ang tinatawag na "pangit" ng iba't ibang tindi ng kalagayan.

Hindi basta't masasabi na lubos ang kapangitan ng itinuturing na "pangit."

Kung gagamitin natin ang larawan ng kulay na puti't itim bilang kasukdulan ng kagandahan [puti] at kapangitan [itim], sa kadalasan mala-abo ang magiging pagsasalarawan natin ng ating karanasan ng "maganda" o "pangit."

Sang-ayon sa pagkiling ng ating interpretasyon, ipapalagay natin ang ating nararanasan na maganda o pangit...

Ang pangit ay may dating din, subalit negatibo ito.
(De Mesa, 2017, p. 6-7)

However, much like beauty, what is deemed "ugly" exists in varying degrees.

It cannot be simply defined as absolute ugliness.

If we use the imagery of black and white to represent the extremes of beauty (white) and ugliness (black), our experience of "beauty" or "ugliness" is often portrayed in shades of gray.

Depending on our interpretation, we may perceive an experience as either beautiful or ugly.

Even ugliness carries an impact, though that impact is inherently negative.

(De Mesa, 2017, p. 6-7)

As Dr. De Mesa states, our perception of beauty and ugliness is often ambiguous, or what could be considered a 'double standard' (see Cambridge English Dictionary, n.d.). For instance, we condemn deforestation, the outright destruction of forests, yet at the same time, we admire the "dolomite beach" created by the Manila Bay Rehabilitation Project. So, where do we really stand?

On the other hand, according to the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus said that birds neither sow nor reap nor store food in barns, yet they are fed by the Creator. Birds rely on the order and purpose of nature, which sustains them. This order and purpose originate from the Creator's *kagandahang loob* [gracious will; love], ensuring that all things align with His divine nature. However, the question remains: where does humanity draw the audacity to manipulate the natural order and purpose of creation?

Mabathalang Atas: Caring for the Ganda of Creation

If we examine Genesis 1:28 in its English translation, it states that God blessed the first humans and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." The term "subdue" in Tagalog is translated as *pasukuin*, *talunin*, *supilin*, or *sakupin* (English, 1977, p. 1026). The Hebrew word for this is *kabash*, a verb often used to indicate the exertion of force over conquered subjects, territories, or battle situations. For example, it refers to military force in occupied lands. The term *kabash* can also be applied in contexts such as

enslavement or violence (Botterweck, Ringgren, & Fabry, 1995, p. 56). According to Old Testament scholar Terence Fretheim, it is crucial to recognize that in most Old Testament passages, *kabash* refers to human-to-human interactions [interhuman relationships]. However, Genesis 1:28 is unique in that *kabash* is applied to human interaction with nonhuman creation. This distinction, according to Fretheim, requires careful interpretation because the original usage of *kabash* primarily deals with human relationships (Fretheim, 2005, p. 52). On the other hand, Norman Habel, an expert in Old Testament studies, argues that there is nothing gentle about the verb *kabash*, as it conveys an inherently harsh meaning (Habel, 2000, p. 47).

The English word “dominate” translates to *pangingibabaw* or *paghahari* (English, 1977, p. 1026). The Hebrew equivalent of this term is *radah* (Coloe, 2013, p. 23). John Rogerson, an Old Testament theologian, argued that the relationship between humans and creation was originally harmonious, particularly before the narrative of the Great Flood in Genesis chapter 7. It has been suggested that in the first chapter of Genesis, the terms *kabash* and *radah* should be understood within the context of a peaceful world rather than the harsh interpretations seen in other Old Testament passages (Beauchamp, 1987, p. 180). Nonetheless, Genesis 1, with its references to subdue (*kabash*) and conquer (*radah*), has been misused to justify the irresponsible exploitation of nature’s beauty (Coloe, 2013, p. 23). A tyrannical and anthropocentric interpretation of Genesis 1:28 leads to *kapangitan* or ugliness rather than divine stewardship. As Pope Francis states, such a view is flawed, emphasizing that, ‘*We are not God. The earth came before us and was given to us as a gift.*’ (Laudato ‘Si, par. 67).

Table 1. Comparative analysis of the translations of the words “Subdue” and “Dominion” from Genesis 1:28 across different languages: Hebrew-Masoretic, Greek-Septuagint, Aramaic-Targum, Latin-Vulgate, Tagalog, and English.

Hebrew Masoretic	Septuagint	Aramaic Targum	Latin Vulgate	Tagalog Translation	English Translation
<i>KABASH</i> “Subdue” (Coloe, 2013)	<i>katakurieusate</i> “Power, lordship over.” Benign/pastoral power of God (cf. Genesis 1:28 and Jeremias 3:14; Coloe, 2013)	<i>takaph</i> – “to seize, to overpower.” The noun <i>tikooph</i> , based on the verb means “strength, power, help, protection.” (Coloe, 2013, p. 27)	<i>Subicite</i> – to throw under, place under, set up, make subject, submit, ascribe (Coloe, 2013)	”At sila'y pinagpala. Wika Niya [Diyos], ”Magpakaram i kayo at punuin ng inyong mga supling ang buong daigdig, at <i>pamahalaan</i> ito.” (Philippine Bible Society, 1973)	God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and <i>subdue</i> it; (The Holy Bible New Revised Standard Version: Catholic Edition, 2006)

<i>RADAH</i> "Have dominion"	<i>Archete</i> "Rule" <i>archai</i> (beginning, a founding leader)	<i>Shalat</i> "To handle, rule, to have power over" P.T. uses <i>shalat</i> in the sense of "power of attorney over another's property"	<i>Dominamini</i> "to be Lord, to reign, to govern, to rule, to command" – in a godly way.	Binibigyan ko kayo ng <i>kapangyarihan</i> sa mga isda, sa mga ibon, at sa lahat ng mailap na hayop, maging malalaki o maliliit."	and have <i>dominion</i> over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.'
(Coloe, 2013)	(Coloe, 2013)	(Coloe, 2013)	(Coloe, 2013)	(<i>Ang Magandang Balita Biblia: May Deuterocanonico</i> , 1973)	(<i>The Holy Bible New Revised Standard Version: Catholic Edition</i> , 2006)

This table illustrates the progression of translation from the ancient Hebrew language to old translations in Greek, Aramaic, and Latin, as well as comparisons with contemporary English and Tagalog translations. Upon examination, we can observe that the harsh Hebrew verbs *kabash* and *radah* were rendered more moderately in their respective translations—*katakurieuseate* and *archete* in Greek, *takaph* and *shalat* in Aramaic, and *subicite* and *dominamini* in Latin—all conveying notions of governance and the authority to rule. According to Mary Coloe, a scholar specializing in the New Testament, translations of Genesis 1:28 in Greek, Aramaic, and Latin reflect an effort to soften the meaning and interpretation of the strong wording in the original Hebrew text. She further explains that this moderation is often overlooked not only in translation but also in real-life applications (Coloe, 2013, p. 31). Similarly, the Tagalog translation also demonstrates moderation in the rendering of the verbs "*kabash*" and "*radah*," reinforcing a respectful and faithful interpretation that aligns with the concept of stewardship rather than domination over God's creation. To fully understand the context of the terms "subdue" and "dominion" in Genesis 1:28, we must revisit the reason behind the elevated recognition of the authority granted to humanity by God. This can be found in the earlier verses of Genesis (1:26).

Table 2. Comparative analysis of the translations of Genesis 1:26 across Latin, Tagalog, and English:

Latin Vulgate	Tagalog Translation	English Translation
" <i>et ait faciamus hominem ad imaginem et similitudinem nostram et praesit piscibus maris et volatilibus caeli et bestiis universaeque terrae omniq[ue] reptili quod movetur in terra.</i> " (<i>Latin Vulgate Old Testament Bible</i> , n.d.)	"Ngayon, lalangin natin ang tao. Ating gagawin siyang kalarawan natin. <i>Siya ang mamamahala</i> sa mga isda, mga ibon, at lahat ng hayop, maging maamo o mailap, malaki o maliiit." (<i>Ang Magandang Balita Biblia: May Deuterocanonico</i> , 1973)	'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have <u>dominion</u> over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.' (<i>The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version</i> , 2006)

This second table presents excerpts of Genesis 1:26 in Latin, Tagalog, and English translations. According to Genesis 1:26, God created humanity to govern all living creatures. The Latin word “*praesit*” conveys “responsibility” or “leadership.” In the Tagalog version of Genesis 1:26, we find the following passage: “*Ngayon, likhain natin ang tao ayon sa ating larawan, ayon sa ating wangis. Sila ang mamamahala ...*” In the Tagalog translation, we can read “*mamamahala*” as significantly synonymous with the Latin word “*praesit*.” However, if we examine the English translation, we find the following passage: “*Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion ...*” Therefore, the English term “dominion” should be understood as “stewardship” rather than absolute control. It is important to remember that stewardship inherently implies care and responsibility. For instance, a parent governs their children not through subjugation or domination but through nurturing and guidance. Genesis 1:26 and 1:28 establish a *mabathalang atas* for humanity to protect and sustain creation according to the capabilities granted by the Creator. In essence, humanity was entrusted with the responsibility of preserving the beauty and harmony [or simply *maganda*] of creation rather than exploiting or destructively [in other words, *pangit*] reshaping it.

This *mabathalang atas* [divine mandate] calls upon humans to be creative stewards, not harmful manipulators of the natural world. As seen in Genesis 3:5, the serpent tells Eve, “*kayo'y magiging parang Diyos...*” [you will be like God...]. This moment led the first humans to deviate from God’s command, exceeding the boundaries of the privilege granted to them to partake of all the fruits of the Garden except the forbidden one. The act of consuming what was expressly forbidden reflects humanity’s greed and excessive desire. Therefore, overindulgence—beyond what is rightfully given by the Creator—goes against the divine principle of stewardship, distorting the intended beauty and balance of creation. According to Pope Francis (2015, par. 66), the relationship between humanity, God, and all of creation is severed whenever people turn away from the *kagandahang loob* [or love] (Cacho, 2011) of the Creator by claiming God’s role for themselves and rejecting their inherent limitations as created beings. Such an attitude leads to choices that are not aligned with the desires of the Creator’s heart.

Humanity as Magandang-Maganda [Exceedingly Beautiful/Very Good]

God created all things beautiful. This truth is evident in the creation narrative, where the Creator, upon making light, the seas and skies, land and forests, the sun, moon, and stars, fish and birds, and all other living creatures, declared that “it was good” [*nakita ng Diyos na ito'y maganda*]. Furthermore, in Genesis 1:31, when God created humanity on the sixth day, He gazed upon all of creation and said, “Indeed, it was very good” (tunay ngang ito'y magandang-maganda). Humanity served as the crown of creation—a glory and honor distinct from other creatures. This profound distinction is emphasized in Psalm 8:4-6;

*Ano ba ang tao upang iyong
pahalagahan; o ang anak ng tao
upang iyong pangalagaan?*

*Nilikha mo siyang mababa sa iyo nang
kaunti, pinuspos mo siya ng dangan at
ng luwalhati.*

What is mankind that you are mindful
of them, human beings that you care
for them?

You have made them a little lower
than the angels and crowned them
with glory and honor.

Ginawa mo siyang pinuno ng lahat ng iyong nilikha sa lahat ng mga bagay, siya ang iyong pinamahala.
(*Ang Magandang Balita Biblia*, 1973)

You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet.
(*New Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition*, 2006)

How beautiful is humanity? Exceedingly beautiful [*Magandang-maganda*] (De Mesa, 2017, p. 16). Humanity stands out as the greatest expression of God's gift of beauty, surpassing all other created beings—whether living or non-living. This beauty is rooted in God's *kagandahang loob* [gracious will; love], reflecting His nurturing and compassionate nature. This also means that humans carry a moral responsibility to preserve the beauty of creation, just as God has cared for them. The commandment "Love your neighbor" extends beyond human relationships—it includes the stewardship of nature as an act of love towards all creation. Proverbs 16:4 affirms that all beings were brought forth from God's purpose, signifying that all existing things come from the mind of the Creator. When humanity lived according to God's will, everything existed in harmony. The first humans dwelled happily and freely in the Garden of Eden (*Genesis 2:16*), coexisting with the animals (*Genesis 2:19*). What was God's intention for humanity upon placing them in Eden? "The LORD God took the man and placed him in the Garden of Eden to cultivate and take care of it." (*Genesis 2:15*). Additionally, God 'entrusted' [in Tagalog, *ipinaubaya*] humans with authority as rulers over the animals of the field and the birds of the air (*Genesis 2:19*). It is evident that before the serpent entered the narrative, humans lived fully aligned with God's will. When the first woman was tempted by the serpent to disobey God's command, the instruction was clear—she could eat from any tree in the garden but not exceed what was permitted by God (*Genesis 3:2-3*). Has humanity forgotten its original mandate to care for creation? Has humanity reached the point of neglecting the responsibility entrusted to them by the Creator? Have people become indifferent toward the care of creation? Indeed, humanity is prone to forgetting. In the story of Adam and Eve, they chose a deceptive beauty, one that led to a tragic end (De Mesa, 2017, p. 53). Even today, we continue to embrace this false beauty. For instance, instead of appreciating natural wonders such as rivers, streams, or waterfalls, we opt for artificial attractions—ones that require payment and contribute to environmental destruction. As the saying goes, "*Ano nga ba ang gamot sa limot? Paalala!*" [What is the cure for forgetfulness? A reminder!]

Humanity is exceedingly beautiful when connected to the Creator's *kagandahang loob*. According to Dr. De Mesa (2017, pp. 53-54),

*"Kapag ang tao ay
naputol ang kanyang
ugnayan sa batis o
bukal ng ganda siya ay
maghahanap at
maghahanap ng uri ng
gandang hindi galing sa
kanyang loob kundi
galing sa labas. Itong*

*"When a person is disconnected
from the stream or
source of true beauty,
they will constantly seek
a kind of beauty
that does not come from within
but from the outside.
However, this beauty is not genuine—
it is deceptive,
a beauty full of illusion,*

*gandang ito ay hindi
totoo...
mapaglinlang, isang
gandang punong-puno
ng daya, kaya
tinatawag na panlabas
na ganda... 'Parang'
maganda lang pero sa
totoo pangit."*

(De Mesa, 2017, p. 53-54)

thus referred to as external beauty.

It only appears beautiful, but in reality,
it is flawed."

(De Mesa, 2017, p. 53-54)

Humanity is encouraged to reawaken their consciousness of their divine responsibility to safeguard the beauty of creation. To restore themselves to their true beauty, they must undergo conversion—a return to their authentic nature [*loob*] (Miranda, 2021) as intended by the Creator. Within every person dwells *Bathalang Ka-loob na Walang Kasing Ganda*—the Divine Presence that continuously makes itself known (De Mesa, 2017, pp. 55 & 57). In essence, humanity must return to its true human nature, aligned with its design and purpose, which constitutes the *telos* [ultimate goal] of being human.

“Maganda” as a Model for Eco-Theological Pedagogy

Education serves as the meeting point for ecological awareness, faith formation, and the pursuit of concrete responses to environmental crises. It plays the role of a bridge, connecting the three key elements: *Sensitivity* to ecological issues, *Spiritual* depth rooted in faith, and *Solution-oriented* actions aimed at addressing environmental challenges.

According to Education for Sustainable Development (UNESCO, 2024), the classroom serves as a training ground where young learners develop the ability to analyze the interconnections between climate, social justice, and the economy. This concept is further enriched by Sterling (2011) through transformative learning, a process in which outdated and anthropocentric perspectives are broken down and replaced with an Earth-centered mindset—one that ultimately leads to concrete action. In the realm of faith, *Laudato Si’* emphasizes that “integral ecology” is at the heart of the Church’s mission (*Laudato Si’*, par. 209–215). As a result, Catholic schools and catechists are challenged to incorporate eco-theological conversion into daily learning and formation. According to Boff (1995), it is not enough to liberate humanity from unjust systems; creation itself must also be freed from the destructive and harmful actions of humanity.

If we apply the concept of “*ganda*”—along with its ethical and aesthetic dimensions—to ecological discussions, we can develop a clear model for eco-theological pedagogy. This framework can serve as a concrete foundation for educational methodologies both inside and outside the classroom. For example, at the curriculum level, this approach can be integrated into a service-learning module that combines ecological education with the cultivation of a culture of care. This can be done using *Suri-Nilay-Kilos* reflection framework [See-Discern-Act]. In the *Suri* (See) phase, students can explore their school grounds and surroundings through a waste-audit walk, where they count, list, and take photos of “*ganda*” elements [such as well-maintained plants or compost bins] and “*pangit*” elements [such as single-use plastics or improperly segregated waste]. In the *Nilay* (Discern) phase, Christian

Living educators can use Aquinas' Fifth Argument and *Laudato Si'* as guiding lenses. Students can then write in two-column journals, reflecting on how "ganda" and "pangit" intersect in their personal lives and faith journey. During the *Kilos* (Act) phase, the class can choose a project, such as "Adopt-a-Tree, Reflect-a-Verse," where each student plants a seedling on school grounds and attaches a Bible verse about creation. Another option is "Eco-Rosary Friday," where each mystery is dedicated to meditating on the beautiful and destructive effects of human actions on creation.

Teachers should also be encouraged to use the *Suri-Nilay-Kilos* framework in classroom discussions. A great starting point is a quiz-poll featuring images of local environmental issues, such as smog over EDSA or high-rise buildings versus the pristine blue waters of Palawan, where students debate which represents true "ganda" based on ethical and aesthetic standards. For catechesis, an activity like "Letter to My Future Child" can prompt students to articulate the kind of "beautiful world" they hope to pass on. As a concluding spiritual exercise, students may pray Psalm 8:1-9 in reflection.

Technology can also be integrated to enrich environmental discussions. For example, students can produce a five-minute podcast where they perform selected Filipino songs, such as "Masdan mo ang Kapaligiran" by Asin or "Karaniwang Tao" by Joey Ayala, followed by a brief reflection on ecology and faith before uploading it to Spotify or YouTube. Alternatively, they can create a QR code to be placed on a parish church, school, or community bulletin board, making the content easily accessible to the public. Students may also connect the message of the songs to Aquinas' Fifth Argument and the teachings of *Laudato Si'*. In this way, the project blends the traditional practice of the Filipino's love for singing with digital evangelization, ensuring that eco-theological awareness is promoted both inside and outside the classroom.

Conclusions

This study affirmed that all of creation was made *Maganda* [good, ordered, and purposeful], reflecting the *kagandahang-loob* [gracious will; love] of the Creator (De Mesa, 2017; Cacho, 2017). Humanity, created in the image and likeness of God, is *magandang-maganda* [exceedingly beautiful] (Genesis 1:26, 28, 31) and entrusted with a *mabathalang atas* [divine mandate] to safeguard the beauty and harmony of creation. Yet, human self-centeredness has disrupted this divine order, resulting in *kapangitan* [ugliness, disorder, destruction] (ABS-CBN News, 2020; *Laudato Si'*, 2015).

By employing the **Suri–Nilay–Kilos** (*See–Discern–Act*) framework, this paper demonstrated that *maganda*, in light of Saint Thomas Aquinas's *quinta via* (*Summa Theologica*, I, q.2, a.3), expresses both the aesthetic and ethical dimensions of divine order and purpose. The *Suri* phase revealed the brokenness in creation; the *Nilay* phase deepened theological reflection through the integration of Thomistic thought and Filipino contextual theology; and the *Kilos* phase proposed eco-theological pedagogy that transforms faith reflection into responsible action (Buencibello & Aton, 2024; UNESCO, 2024).

This study attained its objective of articulating *maganda* as an expression of divine order and moral goodness. It contributes to the expanding field of contextual theology by bridging Aquinas's teleological argument with Filipino moral imagination and ecological ethics. Furthermore, it advances religious education by offering a contextual and transformative framework that fosters ecological conversion and *mabathalang pananagutan* [divine responsibility]. To rediscover humanity's *magandang-maganda* nature is to return to the Creator's *kagandahang-loob*,

restoring both the integrity of creation and the moral beauty of human life. For creation's beauty to be restored, humanity must also undergo a return (*balik*) to its true nature, or *loob* (Miranda, 2021), embracing the exceedingly beautiful essence of being human. This rediscovery and transformation can only take place if people return to the "*kagandahang loob*" of the Creator, seeking to align themselves with the will of the Father rather than their own frail and flawed desires (*cf. Luke 22:42; Buencibello, 2024, pp. 132–133*). This longing is consistently reinforced by the prayer taught by Jesus, which reminds us: "*Ipasunod mo ang loob mo dito sa lupa parang sa langit*" [literally means, "let your *loob* (authentic self; will) be followed here on earth as it is in heaven."] (*De Mesa, 2011, p. 111; Buencibello, 2024; Doctrina Christiana en lengua Española y Tagala, 1593*).

Acknowledgment

The authors extend their heartfelt gratitude to the organizers of the 8th Leonardo Legaspi Lecture Series, with the theme "*Mabathalang Pag-aaral: Doing Filipino Theology and Religious Education in Honor of Dr. Jose De Mesa*," the Religious Education Association of the Philippines, the Center for Theology, Religious Studies, and Ethics of the University of Santo Tomas, and De La Salle University for the opportunity to present and share this paper at the said conference.

Special appreciation is also given to Jennifer M. Pascua-Buencibello, LPT, and Karen De La Cruz-Aton, RN, whose support, encouragement, and thoughtful insights in reviewing the initial manuscripts greatly contributed to the completion of this work.

Disclosure of AI Use

The original manuscript of this research is written in the Filipino language and is entitled "*Ang 'Maganda' sa Ikalimang Argumento ni Santo Tomas De Aquino*." The researchers utilized Microsoft Copilot to translate the texts, aiming to improve the writing style, as many Filipino expressions are challenging to convey in the English language. The researchers manually reviewed, validated, and paraphrased the translation, ensuring it accurately reflected the intended nature and meaning of the words or sentences. We also retain the original Filipino words or texts to enable readers to verify the accuracy of the translation according to their own discernment and knowledge.

References

- [1] ABS-CBN News. (2020, September 25). Environment chief suspends dolomite mining ops in Cebu source of Manila Bay 'white sand'. *ABS-CBN News*. <https://news.abs-cbn.com/news/09/25/20/environment-chief-suspends-dolomite-mining-ops-in-cebu-source-of-manila-bay-white-sand>
- [2] ABS-CBN News, & Agence France-Presse, Flores, M. (2023, February 22). Wetter storms, deforestation: Manila faces worsening floods. *ABS-CBN News*. <https://news.abs-cbn.com/spotlight/02/22/23/wetter-storms-deforestation-manila-faces-worsening-floods>
- [3] *Ang Magandang Balita Biblia: May Deuterocanonicalo*. (1973). Philippine Bible Society.
- [4] Aquinas, T. (1966). *Summa Theologica* (Vol. 60, T. Gilby, Ed.). Blackfriars.
- [5] Beauchamp, P. (1987). Creation et fondation de la loi en Gen 1:1-2,4. In F. Blanquart (Ed.), *La Creation dans l'orient ancien*. Cerf.
- [6] Boff, L. (1995). *Liberation theology and ecology: Alternative, confrontation or complementarity?* https://home.sandiego.edu/~kaufmann/hnrs379/Boff_1995.pdf 67–77.

[7] Botterweck, G. J., Ringgren, H., & Fabry, H. J. (Eds.). (1995). *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Vol. 7). Eerdmans Publishing Co.

[8] Buencibello, J., & Aton, P. A. (2024). *Earth rights in religious education: An emerging eco-missiological mandate*. *National Conference on Catechesis and Religious Education Conference Proceedings*, 11, 34–35. <https://hitik-journal.reapph.org/NCCRE/article/view/65>

[9] Buencibello, J. (2024). *Ang mabathalang pag-aaral sa awiting "Dakilang Maylikha" ayon sa bersyon ng "Ama Namin" ng Doctrina Cristiana*. *Hitik: International Journal of Catechists and Religious Educators*, 1(1), 128–138. <https://doi.org/10.63130/hijcre.vii1.113>

[10] Cacho, R. G. (2017). Tungo sa Kaganapan ng Magandang Buhay. In *Ang Maganda sa Teolohiya* (pp. 61–76). essay, Claretian Communications Foundation.

[11] Cacho, R. G. (2011). Bakas ng Kagandahang Loob ng Diyos (Traces of God's Love): A Proposed Inculturated Approach to Sacraments for Religious Education. *Asian Horizons*, 5(01), 49–65. Retrieved from <https://dvkjournals.in/index.php/ah/article/view/2441>

[12] Cambridge English Dictionary. (n.d.). Double standard. In *Cambridge English Dictionary*. Retrieved September 10, 2023, from <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/double-standard>

[13] Coloe, M. L. (Ed.). (2013). *Creation is groaning: Biblical and theological perspectives*. Liturgical Press.

[14] De Leon, E. C. (2015). Ang pilosopiya at pamimilosopiya ni Roque J. Ferriols, S.J.: Tungo sa isang kritikal na pamimilosopiyang Filipino. *Kritike*, 9(2), 28–50. <https://doi.org/10.25138/9.2.a.11>

[15] De Mesa, J. M. (2011). *Isang maiksing katesismo para sa mga bata na dapat munang pag-aranan ng mga matatanda*. Aklat Ginhawa.

[16] De Mesa, J. M. (2016). *Jose M. De Mesa: A Theological Reader*. De La Salle University Publishing House.

[17] De Mesa, J. M. (2017). Kapag ang 'ganda' ang pag-uusapan. In *Ang maganda sa teolohiya* (pp. 1–21). Claretian Communications Foundation.

[18] De Mesa, J. M., Padilla, E. P., Lanaria, L. L., Cacho, R. G., Cipriano, Y. D., Capaque, G. N., & Gener, T. D. (2017). *Ang Maganda sa Teolohiya*. Claretian Communications Foundation.

[19] De Mesa, J. M., & Cacho, R. G. (2017). *Becoming church being sacrament: A Filipino ecclesiology for students*. C & E Publishing.

[20] *Diksyunaryo ng Wikang Filipino*. (1989). Linangan ng mga Wika sa Pilipinas & National Book Store.

[21] Doctrina christiana en lengua española y tagala. (1593). *The Library of Congress*. <https://www.loc.gov/item/48031307/>

[22] English, L. J. (1977). *English-Tagalog dictionary*. Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer & National Book Store.

[23] Fretheim, T. E. (2005). *God and world in the Old Testament: A relational theology of creation*. Abingdon Press.

[23] Habel, N. (2000). Geophany: The earth story in Genesis 1. In N. Habel (Ed.), *The Earth story in Genesis*. Sheffield Academic Press.

[24] Miranda, D. M. (2021). *Loob: The Filipino Within: A preliminary investigation into a pre-theological moral anthropology*. Logos Publications.

[25] Padilla, E. P. (2017). Ganda: Isang Pagtinging Kultural. In *Ang Maganda sa Teolohiya* (pp. 23–39). essay, Claretian Communications Foundation.

[26] Pope Francis. (2015). *Liham ensiklikal Laudato Si ng Banal na Papa Francisco ukol sa pangangalaga sa tahanan nating lahat* (L. R. Ocampo, Trans.). Claretian Communications Foundation.

[27] Pope Paul VI. (1975, December 8). *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi.html

[28] Sterling, S. (2011). *Transformative learning and sustainability: Sketching the conceptual ground*. Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, (5), 17–33.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/266184629_Transformative_Learning_and_Sustainability_Sketching_the_Conceptual_Ground.

[29] *The Holy Bible New Revised Standard Version: Catholic Edition*. (2006). St. Pauls.

[30] UNESCO. (2024). *Education for sustainable development: Building a shared vision*. <https://www.unesco.org/en/sustainable-development/education/need-know>.

[31] *Latin Vulgate Old Testament Bible* (n.d.). Genesis 1. *Vulgate.org*. Retrieved June 29, 2023, from https://vulgate.org/ot/genesis_1.htm.

About the Authors

Joenel B. Buencibello is a full-time licensed faculty member at De La Salle University–The Academy. He holds a Bachelor of Secondary Education in Religious Education and Values Education from the University of San Carlos and a Master of Arts in Systematic Theology from the St. Vincent School of Theology, Adamson University.

Paulo Antonio L. Aton holds a Master of Arts in Philosophy from the Divine Word Mission Seminary. He is a faculty member at De La Salle University–The Academy, where he teaches Christian Living and Values Education and serves as a Service-Learning mentor. His research interests include Filipino philosophy, theology, and service-learning.