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Original Article

Earth Rights in Religious Education: An Eco-Missiological Mandate Toward a Catechetical Reform

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Abstract

This theological discourse addresses the problem of how religious education can respond to the ecological emergency and moral crises arising from humanity's exploitative interpretation of the biblical command to "subdue the earth." It examines how religious education can foster ecological awareness, moral responsibility, and solidarity with both creation and marginalized communities. Using the See–Judge/Discern–Act method, the study observes current ecological realities, interprets them in light of Christian teaching, and proposes practical educational and pastoral responses. The findings reveal that misinterpretations of Scripture have contributed to the rise of consumerism, throwaway culture, and anthropocentrism while a renewed theological and pedagogical approach can reframe 'to subdue' and 'to have dominion' as care for creation, that is the central meaning of Christian stewardship in the Genesis accounts. The study concludes that integrating ecological consciousness into religious education strengthens both spiritual formation and social transformation, positioning care for the breathing Earth as a vital expression of Christian discipleship and the promotion of the culture to life.

Keywords: *Earth rights; ecology; environmental theology; missiology; religious education; rights of nature*

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Introduction

Earth rights, also called "rights of nature," were created as a criticism of laws that focus on people and give them the right to take and damage nature for their pleasure and profit, which endanger other species and upset the balance of nature (Bookchin, 2006; Berry, 1999; Suzuki, 2020). This means that ecosystems, nature, and other living things have the right to exist and should not be seen as anything more than resources for profit (Cullinan, 2011; Stone, 1996; Nash, 1989). These rights should be reflected in laws, treaties, city ordinances, and court decisions (Kauffman et al., 2019; Kauffman, 2020; Kauffman & Sowers, 2021; Kauffman, 2022). Legislating laws that protect and uphold the environment should impose responsibility and liability on everyone. While it is true that *ignorantia legis neminem excusat* (Garner, 1979), we cannot deny that ignorance persists in the first place. Catholic schools, as an institution of learning, are expected to be operative in shunning ignorance and liberating consciousness. Pope Francis, in Laudato Si', is convinced that it is impossible to achieve change without motivation and pedagogical processes (*Laudato Si',* par. 15). To form and transform are the modus operandi of religious education today (Roche, 2008). Environmental emergencies and policies on environmental conservation and ecological welfare are powerful starting points for teaching care for God's creation as a Christian social doctrine. One of the visions of Laudato Si' is to integrate ecological education into catechetical or religious education, trusting that it will have lifelong effects on the youth (*Laudato Si',* par. 213). Creating a series of partial responses to environmental problems is not enough. There needs to be a long-lasting way to fight back against the technocratic paradigm's attacks, such as a set of teaching methods, a way of thinking, and a way of life (*Laudato Si',* par. 111; 202).

In the Christian tradition, the Sacred Scriptures are considered the resource to validate our morality, faith, and actions. However, the biblical command to "subdue the earth" should not be interpreted as a license for domination or exploitation but as a moral responsibility of stewardship. Therefore, religious education must integrate eco-missiological principles, along with proper exegetical-hermeneutical readings of the relevant texts, connecting care for creation with the Church's missionary and educational mission to cultivate ecological awareness, moral responsibility, and justice for both nature and marginalized communities. In other words, the study contends that religious education should serve as a transformative platform for promoting ecological consciousness and ethical responsibility. Through a faith-based pedagogy inspired by Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'*, educators can help counteract the prevailing culture of consumerism, anthropocentrism, and apathy toward environmental crises. The authors emphasize that protecting the Earth is not merely an environmental concern but a spiritual and missiological mandate rooted in the Christian duty to care for both creation and the poor (Buencibello & Aton, 2024).

How can religious education respond to ecological and missiological crises by integrating the concept of *earth rights* (or the rights of nature) into its teaching and practice to promote ecological justice and responsibility?

To address this question, the study focuses on several key areas. First, it examines how biblical texts, particularly the command to "subdue the earth," have been misinterpreted throughout history to justify people-centered and egoistic satisfaction. Second, it explores the theological and missiological principles, especially those articulated in Laudato Si', that can guide a renewed and more responsible understanding of stewardship and the rights of nature. Third, the study seeks to redesign religious education as a pedagogical framework that fosters ecological awareness, moral responsibility, and active participation in caring for

creation. Ultimately, it highlights the crucial role of the Church and educational institutions in promoting both ecological and social justice, ensuring that vulnerable and marginalized communities are safeguarded from the adverse effects of environmental degradation.

This study will benefit every educational institution targeting Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Catholic schools that target the visions and advocacy of Laudato Si' against throwaway and death culture (including other life forms that is at the risk of extinction), the catechists and religion teachers that seek viable solutions on how to facilitate ecologically oriented religious education and values education.

Methodology

This study employs a theological reflection approach using the See–Judge/Discern–Act method, a framework rooted in Catholic social teaching (Sands, 2018; Krier Mich, 1998; Holland & Henriot, 1983; Valeriano et al., 2024, p. 11-13). It provides a practical and theological framework for addressing these key areas of the study (Catholic Charities USA, 2020).

In the See stage, the method encourages a critical examination of current ecological realities, such as the misuse of biblical texts and the resulting environmental and social injustices. This stage allows us to recognize the real-world consequences of human exploitation and ecological neglect. In the Judge/Discern stage, these realities are evaluated in light of Scripture and the Church's magisterial teachings in Laudato Si', promoting a renewed understanding of stewardship, moral responsibility, and the rights of nature. Finally, in the Act stage, the insights gained are translated into concrete educational and ecclesial initiatives, such as integrating ecological values into religious education and community action, that embody the principles of justice, care, and solidarity with both creation and marginalized peoples.

This approach ensures that the study not only analyzes the eco-missiological challenges but also advocates for transformative action toward the equitable treatment of both the Earth and marginalized populations. This paper suggests that eco-missionary duties should include protecting the environment as part of the curriculum on how to be good stewards of God's creations. This includes safeguarding the weaker parts of our society from climate change and other man-made disasters (Buencibello & Aton, 2024; Alves et al., 2023; Catholic Charities USA, 2020).

Finally, the study proposes the *See-Judge-Act-Celebrate-Evaluate* framework as an effective learning process that holistically integrates faith, reason, and action. This approach enables students and other school stakeholders to move beyond mere intellectual understanding of ecological issues toward deeper spiritual and moral engagement. Through this process, learners cultivate enduring habits of ecological awareness, responsibility, and care for creation as an expression of lived faith.

Analysis

SEE: Struggles to 'Right to Life' of the Earth and of the Poor

Pope Francis described the living Earth as crying due to the erroneous attitude and behavior of human beings in their relationship with the planet.

> "Praise be to you, my Lord, through our sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us and who produces various fruits with colored flowers and herbs". This sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will. The violence present in

> our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air, and in all forms of life. … We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the Earth (cf. *Genesis* 2:7); our very bodies are made up of her elements; we breathe her air, and we receive life and refreshment from her waters (*Laudato Si',* par. 1-2).

It is not strange to us that the Earth is facing massive degradation from continued decreases in the supply of natural resources and energy, destruction of the atmosphere and climate change, destruction of natural water resources, loss of biodiversity, and finally, the worsening poverty of people affected by the ecological crisis. We are not surprised by the massive degradation of the Earth, which includes ongoing reductions in energy and natural resource supplies, deterioration of the atmosphere, climate change, depletion of natural water resources, extinction of species, and, lastly, an increase in poverty for those suffering from the ecological catastrophe. Environmental disasters originate from people. According to Pope Francis, the planet's dreadful appearance is due to the dominant technocratic worldview. Pope Francis reminds us of the risks and potential misuse of this immense power while simultaneously acknowledging the benefits of contemporary technology in areas such as information, communication, health, and education. Think about how this century's technological advancements made it possible to develop the atomic bomb, genetic engineering, and chemical weapons used in terrorist attacks. Due to the inherent biases in science and technology, it is crucial to exercise caution when evaluating new technical advancements. In addition to reclaiming the ideals and lofty ambitions lost in our uncontrolled arrogance, we must prioritize constructive and sustainable growth (Pilario, 2017; *Laudato Si',* par. 106 and 114).

In our attempt to advance human civilization, we often use egoistic "blinders" that keep our eyes overly focused on achieving the most comfortable life. We become unconscious of our surroundings and damage them just to achieve our goals. For instance, to produce electricity, we invented massive nuclear power plants to generate the amount of energy we need. This reminds us of the Chernobyl accident in 1986, when thousands of people were exposed to radiation that eventually caused them to become seriously ill (Aitsi-Selmi & Murray, 2016). It was on April 26, 1986, when an explosion occurred at the Chernobyl (also known as Chornobyl) nuclear power plant, situated approximately 100 km from Kiev (also known as Kyiv) in Ukraine, which was then a constituent republic of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). This incident led to a prolonged reactor fire that lasted for 10 days, resulting in an unprecedented discharge of radioactive substances from the nuclear reactor. The aftermath of this event had detrimental effects on both the general population and the surrounding environment (International Atomic Energy Agency, 2006). This incident made the whole world cautious about nuclear power plant operations.

The Chernobyl incident, along with the Three Mile Island and Fukushima accidents, has engendered skepticism and uncertainty regarding the safety of the Bataan Nuclear Power Plant (BNPP). Consequently, this apprehension ultimately resulted in the closure of the BNPP on April 30, 1986, during the tenure of President Corazon Aquino. The formal justifications centered on fundamental inquiries regarding the validity of the proposal and the integrity of the planning and execution process (Yap, 2021; Joint Forum of the Senate of the Philippines & Ateneo School of Government, 2022). Furthermore, significant biological factors contributing to the decline in biological diversity are the depletion of natural habitats, the introduction of non-native species, excessive exploitation of biodiversity resources, and the

homogenization of species within agricultural practices. The influence of human activity is a common trait among all of these factors (Hens & Boo, 2005).

In our pursuit to facilitate comfort and convenience in everyday living, other sectors of our society need to catch up. These are the poor people in urban slum areas, living in makeshift houses along the railroads, street dwellers, and individuals in far-flung rural areas who are dependent on nature, including farmers, fishermen, and tribal communities. Compared to wealthier households and businesses, low-income households and those headed by women living in severely deteriorated areas, both within and outside urban poor communities, experienced more severe damage and losses (Porio, 2014). Studies also show that anthropocentric alterations to the natural environment, including land-use changes, climate change, and degradation of ecosystem services, are accelerating. These developments are creating five main public health hazards that threaten hundreds of millions of people, including increased exposure to infectious diseases, water and food contamination, natural disasters, and population displacement. Together, they may be humanity's biggest public health concern. We urgently need to understand the dynamics of each of these threats: the complex interplay of factors that generate them, the characteristics of vulnerable populations, and which populations are most at risk (Myers & Patz, 2009).

In the Philippines, the recent exposure of hundreds of alleged "ghost" or non-existent flood-control works implemented by Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) offers a stark demonstration of how infrastructural programs, designed to protect the most vulnerable, can instead undermine the "right to life" of both marginalized human communities, non-human beings, and the living Earth in general. Investigations have revealed that out of the approximately 8,000 flood-control projects inspected, 421 were physically non-existent or "ghosts," and many others were substandard or overpriced (Mangaluz, 2025). In one of the cities in Metro Manila, 331 projects worth approximately ₱17 billion were identified as being unaligned with flood-prone zones or mislocated, with many lacking evidence of actual work (Mateo, 2025). These failures amount not simply to financial mismanagement, but to a denial of safety, dignity, and ecological integrity for those most exposed: the poor who live in flood-prone zones, such as rivers, wetlands, watersheds, and the ecosystems that absorb excess floodwaters and sustain life.

From a justice lens, we can draw on the work of *An Environmental Justice Perspective on Ecosystem Services* (Loos et al., 2023), who argue that mainstream ecosystem-services frameworks often neglect power relations, distributional equity, and the recognition of diverse values (Loos et al., 2023). In the Philippines case, flood-control funds were awarded disproportionately to a small number of contractors. Fifteen contractors reportedly getting 20% of the P545 billion budget while local governments and rights-holders [communities] were bypassed (Cordero, 2025). This echoes the critique that technical infrastructure alone does not guarantee justice, unless the voices of poor and ecologically vulnerable peoples are heard and addressed, and their capabilities strengthened. Similarly, *Corporate Accountability Towards Species Extinction Protection* (Roberts et al., 2022) demonstrates how accountability can only be meaningfully extended when non-human stakeholders, such as species and ecosystems, are recognized, and governance mechanisms enforce transparency (Roberts et al., 2022). The Philippine flood-control scandal similarly reveals that failing structures degrade both human welfare and ecological resilience. The ghost or substandard works undermine ecosystem capacity to buffer floods, thereby reducing the "right to live" of the Earth as well as its people. Institutional justice further demands accountability. In *Greening Justice: Examining the Interfaces of Criminal, Social and Ecological Justice* (White & Graham, 2015), it emphasizes that "green"

initiatives may become mere reputational instruments if not grounded in justice transformation. In the Philippines, the fact that DPWH officials were not preventively suspended despite *prima facie* evidence of anomalies shows how accountability loops are weak (Cayetano, 2025).

The failures, therefore, are systemic: poor project design coordination with local governments, misallocation of funds, absence of physical verification, contract rigging, and overpayments (Baron, Kabagani, & Angeles, 2025). Therefore, the Philippines flood-control ghost-project scandal reveals the intertwined rights of the poor and the Earth: when infrastructure fails in execution and justice, vulnerable human communities suffer first. They are drowned, displaced, excluded, and ecosystem resilience is eroded, denying the planet's "right to life". To restore justice and accountability, policy reforms must embed distributive, recognitional, and ecological justice, in practice, not just on paper.

According to Pope Francis, there is a lack of awareness of the issues that impact impoverished and marginalized individuals. Although there are billions of people living on Earth, these people make up the vast majority. The issues about them are currently being discussed in international political and economic dialogues. However, there is a prevailing perception that their problems are often given secondary consideration, seemingly as a procedural obligation or as an unintended consequence. Ultimately, individuals frequently find themselves in a disadvantaged position. Due to the concentration of experts, opinion leaders, media platforms, and influential entities inside affluent metropolitan areas, there exists a limited level of direct engagement with the impoverished population and their associated issues. They possess the ability to rationalize and exist at an advanced stage of societal progress and a standard of living that is beyond the means of the majority of the global population. The disintegration of urban areas may potentially foster a decline in physical engagement and encounters, which could result in a diminished sense of moral responsibility and biased evaluations that overlook certain aspects of reality. In contemporary times, it is imperative to acknowledge that an authentic ecological approach necessitates a social dimension (*Laudato Si'*, par. 49).

Discussions

JUDGE/DISCERN: Re-reading Genesis 1:28: From Anthropocentric Justification to Responsible Stewardship

This exegetical reading of Genesis 1:28 provides a helpful key to expanding the appreciation of the creation narrative in teaching and learning practices. According to medieval historian Lynn White Jr., in his 1967 article "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," the Christian anthropocentric view of the natural world was responsible for the modern ecological crisis. In particular, White Jr. found blame in the Genesis creation narratives' portrayal of man and woman as specially made in God's image, with "dominion over" (*radah*) and the obligation to "subdue" (*kabash*) the Earth. This narrative not only validates the exploitation of the Earth but also construes it as "God's will" (White, 1967; Nestor, 2013).

The first chapters (1:1-6:8) of *Bereshit*, translated as "in the beginning" or "at first", popularly known as *Genesis,* contain four major themes. First, God created the heavens, the Earth, all living things, and humans as a *blessing*. Second, it is human responsibility to ensure the survival of everything God has created. The third was the expulsion of Adam and Eve from *Gan Eden*, translated as the Garden of Eden. Lastly, human beings are responsible for one another and the survival of mankind. According to Harvey J. Fields, a lecturer on Jewish tradition and a senior rabbi, Jewish tradition says one God created the world, but humans are "masters" of it, and human decisions

matter. The power of survival or destruction, life or death, is in their hands (Fields, 1990). Furthermore, as Fields highlighted the place of humans in the creation narrative, we argue that it is best to view the power that God has granted humans as a blessing rather than a human right. A blessing that compels us to ponder the goodness of the Creator and to be "masters" over His handiwork with an attitude that is attuned to His. The book of Psalms (8:1–7) invites us to contemplate the mystery and grandeur of creation in comparison to human beings, yet God chose to bestow a blessing upon human beings that they do not deserve. Fields (1990) explains that, unlike ancient stories like *Enuma Elish,* where humans were helpless, God made human beings not as "toys" but as "partners" in shaping life and preserving the world—a manifestation that human beings are stewards of creation. God began by creating human beings in His own image and likeness, endowed with free will and the capacity to exercise their own choices. According to *Sanhedrin* 38a, a tractate of the *Talmud* that discusses laws regulating the courts, human beings had been appointed as "caretakers" of the "palace" called Earth (Fields, 1990). Unlike the analogy of "home" in *Laudato Si',* a palace is the residence of a king, in which caretakers are employed to look after his abode, including animals and plants. However, it is essential to recognize that in the relationship between God and human beings, caretakers do not imply slaves, but rather partners in shaping life and sustaining the world (Fields, 1990). It means a shared responsibility with God to take care of all creation.

However, the idea that God has a special preference for human beings as caretakers could lead to a grave superiority complex. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church (par. 342-343), human beings are the summit of the Creator's work in the hierarchy of creatures; that is, human beings are more valuable than many sparrows and sheep (Luke 12:6-7; Matthew 12:12). It is difficult to deny that such a concept is anthropocentric. In fact, in Genesis 1:28, God told the first humans to fill and subdue [*kabash*] the Earth and have dominion [*radah*] over the animals. *Kabash*, in Hebrew, means "to bring into bondage" or "dominate" (Brown et al., 1977; Collins, 2013). Furthermore, *Kabash,* or *kabas,* also means to "stamp" one's authority over nature (von Rad, 1972; McKeating, 2015). For example, in the book of Esther, *kabash* is used to mean domination, subduing, enslavement, or even the raping of women (Collins, 2013; Botterweck & Ringgren, 1995). Furthermore, the feminine Hebrew word for "earth" in Genesis 1:28, *erets*, translates to "fill the earth and subdue *her*" (Collins, 2013). In short, according to Norman Habel, "there is nothing gentle about the verb *kabash"* (Habel, 2000; Collins, 2013). *Radah,* or *rada,* in Hebrew, is not far from the meaning of *kabash*. It means having dominion, ruling over, or dominating, and is often translated in Genesis 1:28 as "*be masters* of the fish of the sea and over the birds… and every living thing crawling on the earth" (Plaut, 1981; Collins, 2013). It also literally means to "tread" and to "trample on" (von Rad, 1972; McKeating, 2015). "Dominating" and "subduing" the Earth are perfect justifications for the exploitation of the environment under the guise of human flourishing and civilization. Pope Francis urgently calls for a new dialogue on how humans influence the planet's destiny. He acknowledged the need for a discussion regarding environmental issues and their human causes, as they impact all humans. (*Laudato Si',* par. 14). In short, the planet Earth is at stake due to the exploitative attitudes of humans, and someone should protect it from other humans who are irrationally confident in progress and human abilities (*Laudato Si'*, 19).

Antoinette Collins (2013), a lecturer in Old Testament at Australian Catholic University in Sydney, argues that the interpretation of these words has significantly influenced humanity's attitude toward the care of the environment, as they can be

used to justify the severe misuse and irresponsible exploitation of our planet. She further argued that the Greek, Aramaic, and Latin translations of Genesis 1:28 reveal a moderation in the meaning and perception of the harsher-sounding original Hebrew phrase. Such moderation is in keeping with the textual context of "blessing" (Genesis 1:28) and with the understanding that human beings are created in the "image and likeness" of God (Genesis 1:26), who is creative, life-giving, and nourishing, rather than destructive and exploitative. This simply means that translation matters, for it needs to be faithful to the reason behind or intention of the original texts.

According to Fr. Cristino R. Pine, OFM, a Filipino Bible exegete, translation is critical because it entails intricacy in deciding the main or subordinate clauses that could change the meaning of the available texts. According to Pine (2018), there is a greater chance of identifying the text's central theme from the outset when a translation is of high quality. This is precisely the point of Antoinette Collins' exhuming the intention of the early translations of *kabash* and *radah*. Before the English translations and other vernaculars were available, the Greek, Aramaic, and Latin translations already offered essential insights into interpreting the words "kabash" and "radah". In the Greek Septuagint, Genesis 1:28, *kabash* is translated as *katakyrieusate*. Jeremiah 3:14 says, "Come back, disloyal children; it is the Lord [*Kyrios*] who speaks, for I alone am your master [*katakyrieuso*]. I will take one from a town and two from a clan and bring you to Zion. I will give you shepherds after my own heart, and these shall feed you on knowledge and discretion." Collins (2013) argues that *katakyrieo* can also mean "pastoral mastering." On the other hand, the Greek term *archete* is used to translate *radah* [to have dominion over], which means to regulate or rule over, but without the same violent tone as the Hebrew; it simply describes a less destructive, yet powerful reign (Collins, 2013). This Aramaic text, Targum Pseudo Jonathan, is more creative and open-minded than Targum Onkelos and Targum Neofiti. It states that the Hebrew word kabash has two forms: the verb takaph, meaning "to seize" or "overpower," and the noun tekoph, which means "strength, power, help, or protection." The former does not sound temperate, but the latter has an impression of "care" (Collins, 2023). Antoinette Collins finally used the Latin Vulgate as her final textual comparison. The Vulgate uses the Latin term *subiicite* [to place under] for the Hebrew term *kabash* [subdue]. *Subiicite* is related to the root word *subicio* [submit] rather than the similar word *subigo,* which means "subjugation". On the other hand, the Latin term *dominamini* [to be Lord, to reign, to govern, to rule, to command] is used in the Vulgate to translate *radah* [dominate]. *Dominamini* could also mean 'Godlikeliness' [From the Latin, *Dominus,* "the Lord"], similar to what is stated in Genesis 1:26, "Then God said: 'Let us make humankind in our image,... in the image of God He created them; male and female, He created them.'" Therefore, the words *kabash* and *radah* are not meant to allow human beings to lavishly exploit the Earth but to direct and mandate human beings to manifest God in the way they take care of the Earth.

Simply put, human beings should be at the service of all their fellow creations. Collins (2023) advocates encouraging people to see the necessity to "shift from an anthropocentric perspective to planetary awareness." Fr. Colm McKeating, a Columban missionary and professor of systematic theology, argues that in the Priestly account (P) of creation, God charged human beings with a responsibility to care for everything He had made—to look after everything He created. When God said that humans should "dominate" [to lord over; to be master] over creatures, he did not mean to transfer ownership of creation to humans but rather to assign them a task to complete in the same spirit of loving kindness as that of the Lord and Master [in Latin, *Dominus*; in Greek, *Kyrios*]. McKeating further argues that it in no way makes human

beings superior to creation, but rather places them within nature as responsible for caring for God's handiwork. We call it "stewardship" (McKeating, 2015). Furthermore, it is not accurate to say that the first chapter of Genesis is homocentric, as it is evident that God is the sole actor in the story (McKeating, 2015; McDonagh, 1986). Therefore, responsible stewardship is the teleological and original activity of human beings. In Genesis 2:15, "God took the man and put him into the Garden of Eden *to till it* and *to keep it*." God made humans stewards in the garden, not lords. "*Tilling* refers to cultivating, plowing, or working, while *keeping* means caring, protecting, overseeing, and preserving." (*Laudato Si',* 2015, par. 67). To become a responsible steward of creation is to be truly human, following the plan of the Creator. Suppose human beings are expected to be responsible for taking care of God's creation. In that case, responsible stewardship is also subject to morality—a matter of common and universal duty for the sake of the common good (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 1987, par. 34). It also entails that human beings are extensions of nature and cannot subsist without it. In Jewish tradition, every human life is sacred. Each human being must care for one another, for we are guardians or caretakers of each other. According to Fields (1990), Cain murdered his brother, Abel, because he failed to understand that he was his brother's "keeper," or "guardian." This means that responsible stewardship encompasses caring for and protecting not only the Earth, but also for one another. In Genesis 4:10, "Behold, your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground!" According to Fields (1990), "In the Hebrew, the words *deme* [*achicha*] *tzoakim* are plural and may be translated as "[your brother's] *bloods* cry out." The phrase "*bloods* cry out" indicates that Cain killed more than just Abel, for he murdered Abel's descendants. It also implies that Cain is responsible not only for the death of Abel but also for the deaths of his future generations. It was not only the *bloods* of Abel that cried out to God. In Exodus 2:23, during the slavery of the Israelites, "their cry for liberation went up to God; He heard their groaning and was mindful of His covenant." This proves that the cry of the oppressed storms the heavens.

According to Fr. Pine (2018), to "hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor," as *Laudato Si'* (par. 49) puts it, we must consider the consequences of our behavior, for we want a successful culture founded on care, compassion, and respect for others, Earth included. Whatever actions we take in the present will surely impact future generations. Fr. Pine emphasized the challenge that Pope Francis poses, which is that the current ecological crisis affects all of us and exhort everyone to act as responsible stewards of creation and of one another, especially the poor (Pine, 2018).

ACT: Earth's Right to Life

The Earth is breathing (Pine, 2018). Thus, we call our planet a biosphere. The Earth is alive! Humans, animals, and plants do not support life on Earth. Instead, Earth sustains these creatures, including humans (Pilario, 2017, p. 156). Hans-Peter Durr, a German physicist, said, "We must not look at nature as an enemy to dominate and overcome, but rather learn again to cooperate with nature. She has four and a half billion years of experience. Ours is considerably shorter." (See DOCAT*,* 2016, p. 243.) According to Fr. Pine (2018), the Earth has a maternal character. It can nurture its inhabitants. He argues that despite our abuse, the Earth protects us. As uncaring children, she always takes care of us. As she awaits redemption, Mother Earth is the first to observe the Creator's love. Furthermore, while waiting for the universal restoration, humanity experiences God's life and love through our breathing Mother Planet (Pine, 2018; cf. Romans 8:19). Thus, if Earth is alive, it also has the *right to life*. All living things depend on the Earth, so this right must be protected at all costs.

Human beings are not God. Pope Francis reminds us that "Earth was here before us, and it has been given to us… Each community can take from the bounty of the Earth whatever it needs for subsistence, but it also has to protect the Earth and ensure its fruitfulness for the coming generations (*Laudato Si',* par. 67)." Therefore, environmental responsibility should be legalized and constantly echoed in the educational settings. The international community must establish consistent norms to help states better regulate activities that harm the environment and preserve ecosystems from accidents (John Paul II, 1990).

The fight for Earth's right to life is humanity's current eco-missiological mandate. It finds its roots in God's command to "cultivate and care" for the Earth (Genesis 2:15). Two words need to be clarified first and foremost: "*eco*" and "*missio*". The word "eco" is from the Greek word *oikos,* which simply means "habitat earth," "house," or "habitat." It is where all "*eco"* words come from, such as economy, ecology, ecumenism, and so forth. In the New Testament, the *oikonomos,* or "householder," customarily translated as "steward," is the one who learns the house regulations and protects household members. Likewise, household dwellers are referred to as oikeioi, and the early church was described as *oikoi,* or "households of faith" (Rasmussen, 2005). *Missio,* on the other hand, is a Latin word that means "sent off" to do a task or obey a command, usually construed as an evangelical activity (*Ad Gentes,* par. 1 and 6). The reason for the existence of the Church is founded on its missionary nature (*Redemptoris Missio,* par. 1). Together, the terms "eco-missiological" and "eco-missiology" refer to the responsibility of caring for our common home and its inhabitants, as well as adhering to God's command to cultivate and care for the Earth responsibly. Like the cry of the *bloods* of Abel and the cries of the oppressed Israelites in Egypt, the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor also storm the heavens for justice. Exposure to pollution, the causes of global warming and climate change, depletion of natural resources such as potable and clean water, and loss of biodiversity like forestry, marine life, and ecosystems—all these slowly murder the Earth and the poor. Pope Francis said, "The human environment and the natural environment deteriorate together; we cannot adequately combat environmental degradation unless we attend to causes related to human and social degradation." (*Laudato Si',* par. 48.) Advocating for responsible cultivation and care for Earth Rights is also a fight to defend the rights of the poor to live and enjoy the fruits of the Earth (see Jeremiah 29:11).

Religious Education as an Avenue for Ecological Conversion

In his Declaration on Christian Education, Pope Paul VI talked about the rights of nature, responsible stewardship, and ecological conversion. He also stated that the humanities can help develop not only the physical and intellectual abilities of young people but also their moral values. This will eventually lead to a "mature sense of responsibility in striving endlessly to form their lives properly and in pursuing true freedom" (*Gravissimum Educationis*, no. 1). Indeed, education facilitates human advancement and growth, but if it loses sight of the common good, sense of responsibility, humanity, and morality, it can also be an effective vehicle for humanity's self-destruction due to the tragic consequences of human activity (*Octogesima Adveniens,* par. 21; *Laudato Si',* par. 4 & 209). As already argued in this paper, responsible stewardship is also a moral issue, for it is a "common and universal duty for the sake of the common good" (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 1987, par. 34). When morals and the environment get worse, the popes have always called for a serious change in how we treat the environment (Laudato Si', par. 5; John Paul II, General Audience 2001, par. 4; *Octogesima Adveniens*, par. 21 and 48; *Centissimus Annus*, par. 37; Directory for Catechesis, no. 381).

Conversion means transformation, but in the religious sense, it is the response to the call to "repent" and to "sin no more," in Greek, *metanoia* [change of heart]. It is a constant and consistent change of habit and lifestyle attuned to God's plan. It is also a response to live out our vocation as stewards of God's creation, not as an optional or ancillary aspect of our Christian experience; it is essential to a life of virtue (*Laudato Si'*, par. 217). The formation of habits can be formally facilitated at school through religious education. According to Ismael Ireneo Maningas, a professor at De La Salle University, religious education focuses on the method of teaching faith, theology, and moral action to humanity (Maningas, 2003). In other words, the nature of religious education is pedagogical. However, religious education is not merely a scholastic discipline of handing down information for memorization or instructing students on how to do things rigorously. According to Maria Lucia C. Natividad, an associate professor at Ateneo De Manila University, religious education is theology in practice because it attempts to clarify and strengthen the form of Christian living in the world (Natividad, 2018; Schreiter, 2003). It is about understanding human experience, Christ's message, life experiences, and, hopefully, maturity in the faith (Natividad, 2018). In simple words, religious education aims for holistic human transformation. Ecological conversion, on the other hand, is the free response of an informed mind.

Therefore, there is a great chance that ecological education in religious education can be an effective avenue for such a *change of heart*. The question is how to integrate ecological education into religious education in a way that leads to ecological conversion. Ecological education is a scientific discussion of data, advocacy-oriented, and comprehensive disaster and risk management education. According to Pope Francis, ecological education must include a critique of socio-economic issues, such as the unlimited desire for development, consumerism, unregulated markets, and individualistic mindsets. Moreover, it should facilitate a more profound understanding of the value of ecological equilibrium—harmony with oneself, others, nature, creatures, and God. Educators need to be knowledgeable about the ethics of ecology and how to teach and learn it, and have a sense of responsibility, solidarity, and compassion for the environment and its marginalized communities for ecological education to be effective and meaningful (*Laudato Si'*, par. 210). Regarding meaningful ecological education in religious education, we can retell the message of the Scripture using the hermeneutic of ecology. We can already teach ecological education to students in grades one through six, ages six to twelve, instead of recounting Creation narratives and biblical stories as fairy tales in the classroom. For instance, rather than focusing solely on the act of eating the forbidden fruit in Genesis 3 as a sin of disobedience, we can also interpret it as a sin driven by selfish desire to possess prohibited things and to consume excessively. This theme can spark discussions on the evils of consumerism, greed, the unjust use of natural resources, poverty, and corruption (Buencibello, 2024, pp. 134-135). In the story of the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, instead of emphasizing punishment for their disobedience, we can also tell that God sent them out from the garden, which He tilled and cultivated by His own hands (Genesis 2:8–9), to teach them how to get food from the fruits of their sweat by cultivating the land by their own hands as well (Genesis 3:17–19) as a consequence to their sin of disobedience and mismanagement of the things under their care.

John Fowler perceives students ages six to twelve as being in the *mythic-literal faith* stage. It is essential to teach students the distinction between myths and their significance in life (Maningas, 2003). Teachers should not end their lessons with *Jonah being eaten by a big fish alone; rather, they should continue the story by*

*explain*ing the meaning and lesson of the story in connection with real life. Kohlberg says that kids this age do not see any value in the rules themselves. They just tell them what feels good and what feels bad (Maningas, 2003). Therefore, it is crucial to teach objective moral codes to foster a good conscience, along with proper facilitation for reflective thinking. In Erikson's *industry and inferiority* stage, the student is focused on the benefits of hard work and success, but tends to punish and make fun of failure (Maningas, 2003). This is also the reason why students laugh at others' faults and praise those who are doing well. In Piaget's *concrete operations* stage, students are fairly adept at employing inductive reasoning, which entails moving from a particular experience to a general principle (Maningas, 2003). For example, when discussing pollution and waste management, their potential references would be their homes.

In simple words, Fowler, Erikson, Piaget, and Kohlberg believe that students at this age level are capable of respecting rules (Maningas, 2003) with a certain level of capacity for reflection and introspection. *Earth rights*, which encompass our planet's intrinsic value as well as its biological, philosophical, and spiritual characteristics, should be included in school curricula. This curriculum should not only address ecological hazards and management but also promote a proper attitude towards understanding the interconnectedness of all things and the dangers posed by irresponsible human decisions that could threaten the biosphere. Religious education can best incorporate anthropology that highlights the mutual and inseparable relationship between human beings, their habitat, and other creatures, in contrast to the anthropocentric view of civilization that subdues and dominates the Earth. Ecological education should also expose students to the dangers of technocracy—the ruling elites, monopolies of power, and economic dictatorships. Politics and economics must immediately engage in an open dialogue at the service of life to advance the common good (*Laudati Si',* par. 189). Dialogue should not always start from above; it can also be initiated in academic institutions, community levels, homes, local churches, and barangay levels to foster mutual listening and learning. Pope Francis said, "Good education plants seeds when we are young, and these continue to bear fruit throughout life." (*Laudato Si'*, par. 213.)

See-Judge-Act-Celebrate-Evaluate as Learning Framework: A Curricular Proposal

This study supports curriculum developers, educational policy makers, and environment-advocates by showing that religious education can become a site for holistic care of the environment: it demonstrates how extending the notion of "earth rights" into teaching reframes ecological responsibility as integral to faith and mission, thereby urging curricula to incorporate moral, theological, and ecological dimensions (Altmeyer et al., 2021). Moreover, it demonstrates that teacher competencies in environmental and moral education are crucial for translating awareness into action in religious schools (Robina-Ramírez et al., 2020).

A curricular framework built on *See-Judge-Act-Celebrate-Evaluate* can facilitate meaningful catechetical engagement with our ecological crisis (ECCE & CBCP, 2007):

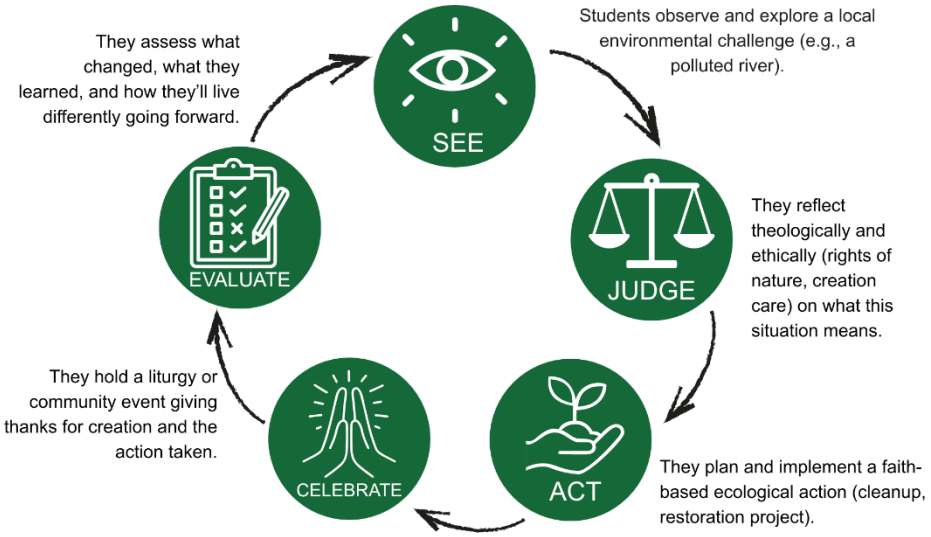

Figure 1. Visual representation of See-Judge-Act-Celebrate-Evaluate as an Eco-missiological process in aid of ecological concern and pedagogical method

The ***See-Judge-Act-Celebrate-Evaluate*** method, as described in the *National Catechetical Directory for the Philippines* (ECCE & CBCP, 2007, par. 353), is a systematic and dynamic approach to catechesis that guides learners from awareness to transformative action. It begins with **"See,"** where learners observe and analyze real-life situations or issues, in this study's context, ecological and social realities such as environmental degradation and injustice. **"Judge"** involves theological and moral reflection on these realities in light of Scripture and Church teaching, discerning how faith calls for responsible action**.** **"Act"** translates this discernment into concrete initiatives promoting stewardship and ecological justice. The inclusion of **"Celebrate"** highlights gratitude and recognition of God's presence in creation, fostering communal joy and motivation for ongoing commitment. Finally**,** **"Evaluate"** encourages reflection on the outcomes, learning experiences, and areas for growth, ensuring that ecological awareness leads to sustained conversion and responsible living.

For example, in a Grade 10 Junior High School religious education class, students take a field trip to a local waterway (See). Back in class, they read texts on creation and earth rights, such as *Laudato Si',* a City Ordinance, or any other laws on water waste management (Judge), then in small groups evaluate local land-use practices, sewage management, and rehabilitation, and propose a restoration campaign (Act). At the campaign's completion, they hold a service thanking God and creation, and invite community members to join (Celebrate). Finally, students write reflective journals and peer-review what worked, what did not, and how they will sustain new habits (Evaluate). Allow this activity to be done by every batch of Grade 10 students to continue the pastoral cycle. As the new batch commences another field visit to a local waterway, they may revisit the outputs of the prior batches, including their implemented projects and evaluations, so that the new batch can have an informed perspective on the current situations on the ground.

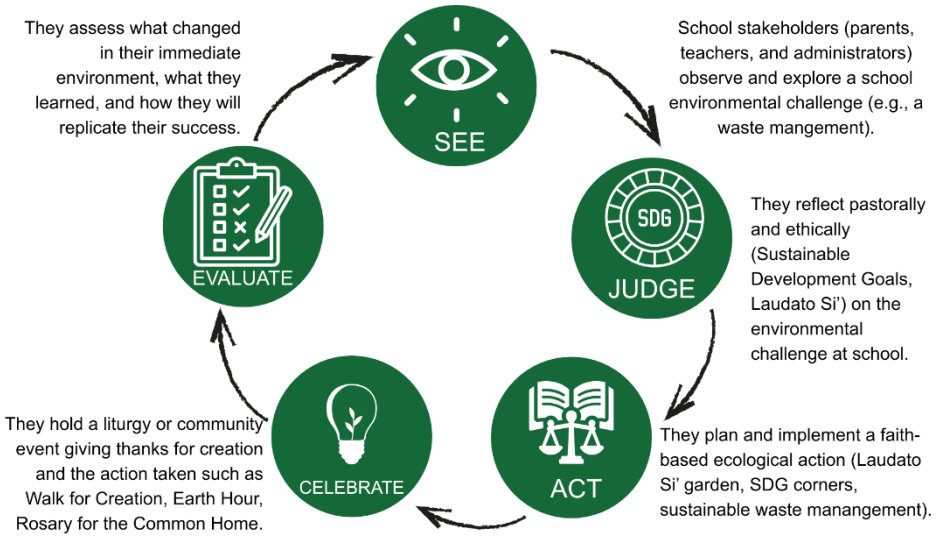

Figure 2. Visual representation of See-Judge-Act-Celebrate-Evaluate as an Eco-missiological process in aid of ecological concern and pastoral method

In relation to the study, this framework serves as an effective **learning process that integrates faith, reason, and action**. It helps students not only understand ecological issues intellectually but also engage spiritually and morally, forming habits of care for creation. By employing *the See-Judge-Act-Celebrate-Evaluate approach*, catechesis and religious education become a participatory and transformative experience that promotes ecological conversion, moral responsibility, and a lived commitment to the **rights of nature and the common good**—core themes of eco-missiological education.

In terms of participatory democracy in the school pastoral setting, the campus ministry can also use *the See-Judge-Act-Celebrate-Evaluate approach as its modus operandi in implementing projects that protect and uphold* care for creation in general, and the school environment in particular. For example, school stakeholders [comprising parents, teachers, administrators, and other members of the school community] begin by identifying and examining a specific environmental concern within the school context, such as ineffective waste management. Through pastoral and ethical reflection grounded in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Laudato Si', they analyze the issue in light of faith and moral responsibility. Based on this discernment, they design and implement faith-driven ecological initiatives, including the establishment of Laudato Si' gardens, SDG learning corners, and sustainable waste management systems. The process culminates in communal acts of thanksgiving, such as Walks for Creation, Earth Hour observances, or Rosaries for the Common Home, which celebrate the shared commitment to caring for creation. Finally, stakeholders engage in evaluative reflection to measure environmental impact, assess the effectiveness of their actions, and determine strategies for sustaining and expanding these ecological practices within the educational community.

Finally, to embody the principles of justice, care, and solidarity with both creation and marginalized peoples, concrete educational and ecclesial initiatives must be undertaken. In the context of education, religious institutions can integrate ecological theology, environmental ethics, and the rights of nature into religious education curricula at all levels. Lessons grounded in Scripture, Catholic Social Teaching (CST), and local environmental realities can help learners understand

stewardship as an essential expression of discipleship (*Laudato Si',* pars. 209–215). Catechetical programs may also include eco-centered service-learning activities, such as tree planting, waste management, and ecological restoration, framed as acts of faith and gratitude toward the Creator (Natividad, 2018). In the context of the Church, parishes and dioceses can establish creation care ministries and fortify the ministry on ecology that encourage sustainable practices, ecological advocacy, and direct assistance to communities most affected by environmental degradation (*Laudato Si',* pars. 211–214). The ongoing formation of teachers, catechists, and pastoral workers in eco-theology and ecological spirituality ensures that those who teach the faith also model simplicity, compassion, and environmental responsibility (Maningas, 2003; Natividad, 2018). Furthermore, local churches and faith-based schools can organize community dialogues and interfaith collaborations addressing environmental and social issues, emphasizing the interconnectedness of all creation and the preferential option for the poor (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, par. 38). Finally, sustainable parish practices, such as energy conservation, waste reduction, and community gardening, *et cetera*, serve as living witnesses of ecological conversion in action. These initiatives transform both education and ecclesial life into concrete platforms of hope, where care for creation and solidarity with the poor converge as inseparable dimensions of the Church's mission in today's ecological crisis.

Conclusion

We cannot deny that religious education is facing many challenges in the ever-changing contexts of globalization, consumerism, materialism, secularization, pluralism, and postmodernism (Roche, 2008). Our educational efforts will be ineffective and insufficient unless we promote a new way of contemplating humans, life, society, and our relationship with nature. Otherwise, the consumerist paradigm will continue to advance with the assistance of the media and the highly efficient market (*Laudato Si'*, par. 215).

This study has attained a renewed theological and pedagogical understanding of *earth rights* as an essential dimension of religious education and Christian mission. By reinterpreting the biblical mandate to "subdue the earth" through the lens of responsible stewardship, this work clarified that dominion over creation is not a right of ownership but a sacred duty of care (Collins, 2013; McKeating, 2015). Utilizing the See–Discern–Act methodology, the research illuminated how religious education can serve as an effective platform for promoting ecological consciousness and missiological engagement (Holland & Henriot, 1983; Sands, 2018). It demonstrated that ecological conversion, when integrated into faith formation, fosters moral responsibility, compassion for the marginalized, and respect for the intrinsic value of creation (*Sollicitudo rei socialis,* pars. 34 & 38; *Laudato Si',* pars. 210, 217–219).

The study's contribution lies in establishing a theological framework for an *eco-missiological mandate* – a call for educators and faith communities to integrate ecological justice into their teaching and practice (Rasmussen, 2005; Pine, 2018). It bridges biblical exegesis, moral theology, and pedagogy by proposing an *anthropomorphic empathy and care, or simply empathy,* as guiding principles for cultivating "planetary awareness" among learners (McKeating, 2015). This anthropomorphic narrative draws its roots from the spirituality of St. Francis of Assisi and the Golden Rule, as well as from fables and literary genres. We need to view our planet Earth as an integral part of our identity, a "sister/mother Earth," and because we originated from its dust, we owe it inviolable respect. Furthermore, it expands the discourse on religious education by positioning it not merely as catechesis but as a

transformative agent that connects spirituality, ethics, and ecology (Natividad, 2018; Maningas, 2003).

The Earth is struggling, and humanity is dying due to the toxic wastes our current civilization lavishly produces. While we await the eschatological new heavens and the new Earth (Revelation 21:1), Jesus taught us to desire the 'Reign of God' *on Earth* as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:9-10; Buencibello, 2024). Ultimately, this research affirms that the care for creation is both a faith imperative and a moral responsibility (*Laudato Si',* pars. 64, 67, 208-209, 217). It invites religious educators to view the Earth as a living partner in the divine covenant – a "sister/mother" deserving of justice, reverence, and love (*Laudato Si',* pars. 1-2, 11, 66-67; Pine, 2018). By embedding ecological awareness within the mission of education, the study contributes to forming future generations who see environmental care as integral to discipleship and to the realization of God's Kingdom in the here and now (*Laudato Si',* par. 67, 213-215, 217; Buencibello, 2024, p. 132; United Nations, n.d.).

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