

## CARING FOR CREATION: OUR ROLE AS STEWARDS OF GOD'S CREATION IN THIS TIME OF PANDEMIC

Cindy C. Paguirigan♦

### Abstract

The pandemic has caused disruption to everyone all over the world and indeed brought many challenges to humanity. Pandemic experts warned people about environmental degradation, the reason why this pandemic emerged. The reality of the interconnectedness and interdependence of people and the planet has been highlighted, which puts emphasis on why people are greatly affected by what is happening to nature and environment. While this pandemic serves as a wakeup call to better manage one's relationship with nature and all creatures, it is important to reflect on one's role as God's steward in these challenging times. Thus, our relationship with the environment must never be different from our relationship with others and with God. Humans as stewards of creation, have the responsibility to take care of what is entrusted to them and must have the commitment to be protectors and caretakers of the creation in many ways, for the common good of all. To do self-reflection and evaluation of one's lifestyle, and to respond to the call for an ecological conversion of the heart and for solidarity treating our nature, other creatures in our

---

♦Cindy Paguirigan is currently a student from De Lasalle University, Manila Philippines taking Certificate of Teaching in Religion. A graduate of Bachelor in Secondary Education Major in Mathematics at University of Makati, Makati City Philippines. Mathematics teacher at Assumption College, Makati City from School Year 2012-2018 and currently a Christian Living Education teacher at the same school. She is a member of Ligaya ng Panginoon (LNP) Community, a renewal community of disciples with the mission to build communities of faith and to train leaders in the service of the Church and also part of mission team in Pathways Assumption, an evangelistic outreach of LNP with a mission to singles and married couples experience fullness of life in God. Her experience in Equipping School—Catholic Schools Youth Ministry in Australia last March-April 2020 inspired her to be involved in a ministry that empowers people in evangelization. Email: cindy\_c\_paguirigan@dlsu.edu.ph

common home with compassion, empathy, connectedness, kindness, and gratitude are our important roles as stewards of God's creation.

**Keywords:** Creation; Interconnectedness; Pandemic; Solidarity; Stewards

## Introduction

The year 2020 has been disrupted by the novel coronavirus COVID-19 which is continuously disrupting the entire world in the present as it continues to take thousands of lives. Consequently, we continue to read or hear news about people contracting this disease, becoming vulnerable and even dying because of the evolving disease.

The challenges such as the global health crisis, economic crisis, mental health problems due to social isolation and even challenges in faith practice are some of the realities that everyone is facing. News of vaccines being developed gives people hope but recent confirmation of a new variant of the COVID-19 has emerged. Accordingly, people ask questions because of the uncertainties of the future; however, people continue to learn from the situation they are in. Indeed, this pandemic became a threat to each one of us but gave opportunities for us to learn and continuously grow as faithful stewards.

Experts claim that COVID-19 emerged because of our disregard for nature. According to Jeffries (2020), the COVID-19 virus follows a number of diseases that already existed in recent decades. Furthermore, he claimed that these all originated in animals because of humanity's overexploitation of nature; thus, being one of the factors behind the spread of new diseases. In his article, "The Loss of Nature and the Rise of Pandemics," the emerging illegal and uncontrolled trade of live wild animals has dangerous impacts because of contact between humans and the diseases these creatures carry.<sup>1</sup> This is also the reason why many recent outbreaks have originated in markets that sell a mix of wild and domestic mammals, birds and reptiles, creating conditions for the development of old and new zoonoses: infectious diseases that can be transmitted from animals to humans. These events mentioned show the links between humanity's impact on ecosystems, biodiversity and the spread of certain diseases. He added that of all the emerging diseases, zoonoses of wildlife origin represent one of the most significant threats to the health of the world population. Not only that some regions experience health crises, these diseases also have a heavy socio-

---

<sup>1</sup> B. Jeffries, "The Loss of Nature and the Rise of Pandemics." [https://d2ouvy59p0dg6k.cloudfront.net/downloads/the\\_loss\\_of\\_nature\\_and\\_rise\\_of\\_pandemics\\_protecting\\_human\\_and\\_planetary\\_health.pdf](https://d2ouvy59p0dg6k.cloudfront.net/downloads/the_loss_of_nature_and_rise_of_pandemics_protecting_human_and_planetary_health.pdf) (March 2020), 21.

economic impact, contributing significantly to enduring poverty in some regions. Along the lines, Andersen and Rockstrom (2020), pointed that the biggest lesson is that COVID-19 is more than an illness as it is a symptom of the ailing health of our planet because of humanity's dysfunctional relationship with nature. They also claimed that the COVID-19 is a zoonotic virus that evolved into a pandemic due ecosystem destruction, species loss, global warming, colliding with risky human behaviour like illegal wildlife trade.<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, according to Gnanakan, deforestation, climatic changes, droughts and calamities such as floods, typhoons and other natural problems threaten life on Earth.<sup>3</sup> These are not just merely local issues, but demand urgent attention of the whole global community as human survival is at stake. More importantly, these are not merely socioeconomic, political questions, but have deep implications for biblical theology.

Read on the other hand, pointed out the impacts of the progress of science and technology on the environment.<sup>4</sup> She claimed that science and technology which are considered good, resulted in environmental destruction that now risks the future of not only humans but of life on the planet.

The interconnectedness of the people and the planet greatly affect how people use God's given resources and can be seen through what is happening to nature and the environment.

In the *Laudato Si* of Pope Francis (2015), states the human environment and the natural environment deteriorate together.<sup>5</sup> If this happens, humans will be greatly affected. Moreover, Pope Benedict XVI (2007), claims we must know how to listen to what our earth is telling us in order for us to survive. Based on Pope Benedict's speech in Australia on the World Youth Day, Skylstad (2009), emphasizes the importance of protecting God's creation and that

---

<sup>2</sup>I. Andersen & J. Rockström, "COVID-19 Is a Symptom of the Planet's Ailing Health," *Time Magazine*, <https://time.com/5848681/covid-19-world-environment-day/>, (June 5, 2020).

<sup>3</sup>K. Gnanakan, *Creation And Ecology: Global Dictionary of Theology - Credo Reference*, Infobase.[https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/ivpacat/creation\\_and\\_ecology/0?institutionId=10800](https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/ivpacat/creation_and_ecology/0?institutionId=10800), (2008).

<sup>4</sup>S. Read, "Sacred Earth: The Evolution of the Catholic Church's Teaching on Care for Creation and How Ordinary Catholics are Hearing the Call" (dissertation), University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Retrieved from <https://cdr.lib.unc.edu/concern/dissertations/1g05fc70w>, (2011).

<sup>5</sup>*Message of His Holiness Pope John Paul II for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace*, [http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_mes\\_19891208\\_xxiii-world-day-for-peace.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19891208_xxiii-world-day-for-peace.html). (January 1, 1990), 45.

sustainable development and care for our environment are “of vital importance for humanity.”<sup>6</sup>

As humanity faces this reality and as everyone continues to live in these challenging times, it is good that one should reflect and take the opportunity to step up in one’s role as faithful stewards, paying attention to the ways on how one can respond to these challenging times. It is more important to go back to the call of God as His trustees here on earth, the call for stewardship.

### 1. Historical Perspectives on Care for God’s Creation

In the Old Testament, the Book of Genesis tells how the first humans, Adam and Eve, were given stewardship of the earth (Gen 1:28 and 2:15). God gave humans the task and responsibility to take care of His creation. As part of Christianity beliefs and holds that the earth and everything in this world, including natural world resources belong to God, and that humans are part of God’s creation. As humans were created in the image and likeness of God, they were to share in His rule as His earthly trustees and to act as how God designed humans to be—a good and faithful stewards of His creation. They were not to waste, exploit, or abuse His creation, but to care for it and use it in the service of God and fellow human beings. In the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, in the beginning, God entrusted the earth and its resources to the common stewardship of mankind to take care of them (no. 2402). Accordingly, humans are God’s stewards; thus, this stewardship is for human’s own good and for the good of human life today and in the next generations to come. If humans will take responsibility for what God entrusted then the future generation will reap the fruit.

In the Book of Psalms, one way to respond and show appreciation to God’s creation is in a form of thanksgiving. Expression on appreciating nature as both a gift from God and a way to give thanks to God by wondering at the marvels He has created. The author of Psalm 104 exclaimed, “How many are Your works, Lord! In wisdom You made them all; the earth is full of Your creatures” (Ps 104:24; *New International Version*).

Consequently, Barrett and Bergstrom affirm the role and responsibility given to people over nature.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, God

---

<sup>6</sup>W. S. Skylstad, “*Stewards of Creation*,” <http://content.ebscohost.com/ContentServer.asp?T=P&P=AN&K=37570466&S=R&D=ulh&EbscoContent=dGJyMNHX8kSeqa44yNfsOLCmsEmepq5Ss6q4SrSWxWXS&ContentCustomer=dGJyMPGvsEu2p7JQudjifOro4VPj3u2L8gAA> (2009).

<sup>7</sup>C. Barrette, “The Economics of God’s Creation,” <http://christianeconomists.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/1998-Spring-Barrett.pdf>, (1998)



entrusted the people with the responsibility of carefully tending nature in the same way a wise and prudent gardener would tend his or her garden. With the stewardship rights and responsibilities, God gives humankind the right to name other kinds, as described in the book of Genesis. This means that it is vital for them to convey the right to appropriately value and manage God's creation as His stewards.

The environmental crisis is an ongoing battle for humanity as humans become unmindful of their role and responsibility as God's stewards due to the fact that emerging challenges such as catastrophes and even pandemics are experienced globally. As cited by Lynch, from his *Invitation to Reflection and Action on Environment in Light of Catholic Social Teaching*, at its core, the environmental crisis is a moral challenge for humanity.<sup>8</sup> It calls each steward to examine how one uses and shares the goods of the earth, what one passes on to future generations, and how one lives in harmony with God's creation. Mishandling of the natural resources diminishes one's own dignity and sacredness, not only because people are destroying resources that future generations need, but also because people are engaging in actions that contradict what it means to be human. One cannot deny the fact that caring for the environment is a challenge for all humanity. It is a responsibility that must mature on the basis of the global dimension of the present ecological crisis and the consequent necessity to meet it on a worldwide level, since all beings are interdependent in the universal order established by the Creator.<sup>9</sup>

Pope Francis, in his fourth catechesis on the Covid-19 pandemic entitled, "To heal the world," claimed that the pandemic, as a result from destruction of nature and environmental degradation, has its root and that is the sin of wanting to possess and wanting to dominate one's brothers, sisters and nature because of personal interest to possess more.<sup>10</sup> In this case, Christians should not only watch and stand by with what is happening, but the pandemic should move everyone to act, in solidarity with the rest of humanity. They must recognize the existence of the mutual relationship between oneself and nature. Thus, their responsibility of not doing whatever they want with the earth must be fulfilled. As humans

---

<sup>8</sup>M.R.N. Lynch, "Renewing the Earth," United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, <https://www.usccb.org/resources/renewing-earth> (November 14, 1991).

<sup>9</sup> *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/justpeace/documents/rc\\_pc\\_justpeace\\_doc\\_20060526\\_compendio-dott-soc\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html), 2004, 466.

<sup>10</sup>Pope Francis, "To Heal the World."

benefit from the resources from nature, whatever they need for subsistence, they have the duty to protect the earth. People are called therefore, to be in solidarity in carrying one's role and responsibility as God's stewards for the common good.

Therefore, humans as stewards of creation, hold a responsibility and vital role to be protectors and have responsibility for creation in a variety of ways. As one embraces responsibility to care for God's earth, one should also reaffirm the truth that God is the most important among all things.

## **2. Our Role as Stewards of God's Creation: Various Perspectives/ Views**

Read pointed out the developments in the Roman Catholic Church's message on the caring for the environment for several reasons where bishops from many countries have written exhortations to the faithful on this subject of caring for the environment.<sup>11</sup> In the 1990 World Day of Peace Message of Pope John Paul II, he called the individual's attention towards lifestyles and called for an ecological conversion of the heart.

Modern society will find no solution to the ecological problem unless it takes a serious look at its lifestyle. In many parts of the world, the society acquires instant gratification through consumerism while remaining indifferent to the damage which these cause... If an appreciation of the value of the human person and of human life is lacking, we will lose interest in others and in the Earth itself. Simplicity, moderation and discipline, as well as a spirit of sacrifice, must become a part of everyday life, lest all suffer the negative consequences of the careless habits of a few.<sup>12</sup>

While this may be true, Pope John Paul II emphasized two important things people can do as part of a call for good stewardship of the individual's attention towards lifestyles and conversion of the heart.

Ong and Selveindran, claimed an insightful point that negligence to one's responsibility as good stewards leads to sin.<sup>13</sup> In the

---

<sup>11</sup>S. Read, "Sacred Earth: The Evolution of the Catholic Church's Teaching on Care for Creation and How Ordinary Catholics are Hearing the Call," (dissertation), University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Retrieved from <https://cdr.lib.unc.edu/concern/dissertations/1g05fc70w>. (2011)

<sup>12</sup>Pope John Paul II, 1990 World Day Peace Message, para. 13.

<sup>13</sup>M. Ong & P. Selveindran, "The Ecology of Salvation and the Salvation of Ecology - Theological Overview," <https://books.google.com.ph/books?hl=en&lr=&id=M1HSDwAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PT6&dq=It+is+with+the+same+importance+that+as+individuals+take+its+role+to+protect+the+environment+,+to+live+their+personal+lives+in+creation-friendly+ways+like+practicing+effective+recy>.

Christian doctrine of sin, they pointed out that the effects of sin are not only a vertical axis existing between God and humanity but also horizontal affecting human relationships and hurting the rest of creation. Consequently, sin injures not only our relationship with God but also with ourselves, with other people, and with the non-human creation.

Certainly, as God's faithful stewards, it is important to reflect on one's lifestyle how one uses the resources entrusted to him and live life not just according to one's satisfaction but also live and use all the resources in a way one is mindful of its proper use for the benefit and common good of all. By doing this, a self-reflection on how one uses resources entrusted to him or her and reflecting on one's lifestyle, are steps for a change of heart not only towards self, neighbours but also for non-human creation.

In the same way, Hyneman and Shore, explained the meaning and importance of good stewardship for the common good. They defined good stewardship as a responsibility that requires attention to how creation was designed to work.<sup>14</sup> They claimed that as God's command to Adam in Genesis 2:15, to work in the garden and care for it came before the fall. It is a requirement for humans to care for creation and this is not a result of sin. Thus, using the creation requires caring for it. If people want creation to sustain them, there is a need to care for creation. If people want creation to feed them, then there is a need to steward creation appropriately. In addition, good stewardship is being perceptive to the owner and the owner's intentions. By definition, stewardship of God's creation must be attentive to the things that are close to the heart of God: the orphan, the widow, the vulnerable and the oppressed. Consequently, there's a need for these resources to be shared, used and developed in accordance with justice and charity. Christian's stewardship must cultivate the earth with the good intention that all humanity can enjoy and benefit from creation's abundance. Furthermore, they emphasized on the call to exercise godly dominion in using creation for the sake of human welfare and needs in areas such as farming, fishing, mining, energy generation, engineering, construction, trade and medicine. As humans do these activities to provide for their welfare and needs, it is important to remember their interconnectedness with nature and reflect on the effects of these

---

<sup>14</sup>J. Hyneman & C. Shore, "Why Are We Stewards of Creation? World Vision's Biblical Understanding of How We Relate to Creation," [https://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/World%20Vision%E2%80%99s%20Biblical%20Understanding%20of%20How%20we%20Relate%20to%20Creation\\_Full.pdf](https://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/World%20Vision%E2%80%99s%20Biblical%20Understanding%20of%20How%20we%20Relate%20to%20Creation_Full.pdf). (May 2013).

activities to the planet's natural systems. Accordingly, as stewards, one needs to think of these activities not only in terms of beneficial products and results, but also the risk and impact on others and the environment. On the other hand, taking responsibility and reflecting on one's role as God's stewards is not only the task of an individual or even a local nation. Taking care of creation is a call for human solidarity.

"The protection of the environment, of resources and of the climate obliges all international leaders to act justly and to show a readiness to work in good faith, respecting the law and promoting solidarity with the weakest regions of the planet."<sup>15</sup> Skylstad has reinforced this through the idea that Catholic community, together with its interfaith partners, should not neglect moral and human dimensions, but must have a capability to respond and speak for the voiceless and work in solidarity towards issues of social justice and environmental stewardship. To exercise stewardship for God's gift, there is a call for solidarity that is vital for humanity's survival.<sup>16</sup>

Pope Francis in his Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'*, expressed the importance of reflecting on our role as God's stewards of creation.<sup>17</sup> It is with the same importance that as individuals take their role to protect the environment, live their personal lives in creation-friendly ways like practicing effective recycling, conserving resources, government and international leaders must be urged as well to encourage fuel efficiency, reduce pollution, encourage sustainable use of natural resources, and provide for the proper care of wildlife and their natural habitats. Being in solidarity is recognizing others as our brothers and sisters and actively working for the common good. Thus, the protection of the environment is not only a call for solidarity, but also a duty to be fulfilled consciously by all, with responsibility and with a view to the common good.

While catastrophes and extreme weather events can be linked to global warming and the pandemic is linked to how people interact with their environment and God given resources, the Church leaders have continuously called everyone to be in solidarity with nature by developing new ways of living.

In 1979, Pope John Paul II gave a tribute to Saint Francis' love for creation by declaring him the Patron Saint of Ecologists. He

---

<sup>15</sup>Pope Benedict XV, *Charity in Truth/Caritas in Veritate*, 50.

<sup>16</sup>Skylstad, "Stewards of Creation."

<sup>17</sup>Pope Francis, "Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* of the Holy Father Francis on Care for Our Common Home.

acknowledged Saint Francis as an example of someone who has a genuine and deep respect for the integrity of creation. Saint Francis, a friend of the poor and who was loved by God's creatures, invited all of creation to give honour and praise to the Lord. This gives people an inspiring witness that when one is at peace with God, one is able to devote oneself to building up that inseparable peace between creation and peoples. Furthermore, St Francis embodied how one should relate to the good and beautiful things that God created. He has a sense of fraternity to every good creature that the Almighty God has created which is a great reminder to people of their obligation to respect and watch over them with care, in light of that greater and higher fraternity that exists within the human family.<sup>18</sup>

While people continuously reflect on and understand their impact as humans on the physical environment, it must not end there. Inspired by St Francis' ways on how to interact with nature, many people rally for ways to save the earth and be witnesses to the value of respect for the integrity of creation. As human impacts on the environment come in different forms, ways to prevent this and to save the earth would also come in different ways.

### **3. Our Role as Stewards of God's Creation: Personal Perspectives/View**

Pope Francis continuously addresses the challenges we face especially in this time of pandemic in relation to how we care for creation, and how to address our ailing planet. In his speech for Jubilee for the Earth 2020 celebration which marks the year of the 50th anniversary of Earth Day, which began in the United States in 1969, he recalled that in the biblical tradition, "A Jubilee is a sacred time to remember, return, rest, restore and rejoice." He developed his message around these five verbs. According to him, a jubilee is "a time of grace to remember" that "we exist only in relationships: with God the Creator, with our brothers and sisters as members of a common family, and with all of God's creatures within our common home."<sup>19</sup>

This message for me is a clear indication that as stewards of creation, it is always important to reflect on our actions and the impact or effect of our daily choices not only to one's self but to God,

---

<sup>18</sup>Pope John Paul II, Message of His Holiness Pope John Paul II for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace: Peace with God the Creator, Peace with all of Creation, paragraph 1.

<sup>19</sup>G. Connell, "Pope Francis: "The pandemic has 'given us a chance to develop new ways of living,'" *America The Jesuit Review*, <https://www.americamagazine.org/faiith/2020/09/01/pope-francis-covid-19-pandemic-climate-change-cancel-debt> (Accessed on September 1, 2020).

to our neighbours and to all God's creatures. While we are always concerned about how to value our dealings with others or to human life, we tend to forget how to give importance and value to our interactions with all God's creations, most importantly to our nature, Mother Earth. Our relationship with our environment must never be different from our relationship with others and with God. We tend to forget that failure to value respect for the integrity of all creatures and nature is a failure to consider other members of our common home because everyone and everything on our planet is all interconnected; hence, there is an interdependence that exists between ourselves, other animal species and the natural world.

Stewardship means taking care of what is entrusted to us. There will always be consequences. Romans 11:36, "For from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen," clearly states that we are not the owner, but we are just trustees of all the resources we have here on earth. As trustees, our role is to give honour and show our thanksgiving by giving value on how we interact with everything entrusted to us in a way that is pleasing to God and for the benefit and for the common good. We must believe the fact that as God's stewards, we were given talents, skills, gifts and treasures not only for our own use, but to use it for His glory which entails us to manage all of creation for His purpose and for our own interest.

In these challenging times when pandemic experts give people the warning about environmental degradation, we are called to reflect on this wakeup call to better manage our relationship with nature and all creatures. While there are many different sides on how the pandemic changed our lives, staying healthy and being responsible stewards to all creation must continue to share equal importance. For me, as stewards, change of heart entails dealing with the rest of God's creation even in simple ways such as making daily choices in our household, and evaluating lifestyle, being mindful of our actions towards the environment. This is our first obligation. However, as individuals, we can only do so much; that is why, this interconnectedness and interdependence with all creations must be transformed into solidarity. As one of the Catholic Social Teachings principles emphasizes, the goods of creation are meant for all; thus, taking care and committing to taking care of God's creation is a call for solidarity. Additionally, the protection of our earth including all the resources is a duty of all, as a family in our common home, we must be committed to work together for the common good and to live out the principle of subsidiarity as well as empower local and international leaders to work together and to manage and address these concerns of

environment degradation sufficiently. Lastly, it is always good to go back to seek our Creator in this challenging time, to be one in prayer and to act for building solidarity and love of our common home.

## **Conclusion**

God made humans in His own image and He gave them “dominion” over every living thing upon the earth (Gen 1:26-28). This is the truth that humans were given the responsibility to care for nature aligned to God’s will and are accountable to the Creator for stewardship and interaction with the rest of the creation.

Humanity must recollect the fact that caring for creation as stewards is greatly connected to one’s faith and relationship with others and with Christ. The way people relate with others and with God according to God’s will must not be different from the way they relate with the rest of God’s creation. Humanity is dependent on creation because of the interconnectedness and interdependence of the entire creation as creation provides resources to humans. It is vital to manage it well and show commitment and compassion for the common good, in a way that it will also be able to provide well for the rest of the creation especially for the least and last in every community.

The call to care for creation starts with a self-reflection on how one should live a sustainable lifestyle that will not only benefit one’s self but others as well. This may include simple ways such as making good and sustainable food choices, choosing green products conserving water and energy, 3Rs (Recycle, Reduce, Reuse) of Solid Waste Management and other practices that promote safeguarding our common home.

While the pandemic brought to humanity the reality that everyone can be victims of failure to safeguard the creation, this also awakens one’s call for solidarity in caring for God’s creation.

The pandemic indeed made people realize how fragile lives can be and how vulnerable humans can be. This gives opportunities to bring solidarity in order to protect lives (Cardinal Tagle for the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation: The “pandemic of love and solidarity,” August 2020).

This calls us for oneness, solidarity to act for the protection of our common home and a call to a change of heart from wanting to possess more to secure lives not according to God’s will. Care for creation therefore, must not only be a cry of an individual but of the entire humanity.