

Talasínup: Exploring the Environmental Consciousness and Christian Environmentalism of Youth Ministers in Mabalacat City in Light of Laudato Si' for Post-COVID-19 Environmental Stewardship

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

*common home,
Laudato Si',
parish youth ministers,
stewardship,
theocentric perspective*

ABSTRACT

This research investigates the influence of Pope Francis' encyclical Laudato Si on the attitudes and behaviors of Catholics regarding environmental stewardship in a post-COVID-19 context. The study employs a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to comprehensively understand the impact of the encyclical and identify potential areas for future action and research in this critical field. The primary data collection involved a survey administered to 144 Catholic Youth Ministers in Mabalacat City, Pampanga. The survey included the Environmental Consciousness Scale and Christian Environmental Scale. Preliminary results indicate that Laudato Si has had a significant impact on Catholic perspectives and behaviors related to climate change and sustainability. The analysis of open-ended responses in the study provided valuable insights into the concerns and aspirations of the youth ministers. While personal aspects of life were the primary concerns for the youth, the youth ministers expressed deep concern about local pollution and the urban expansion on natural landscapes. They emphasized the importance of taking practical action to address these environmental issues and recognized the role of individual behaviors and societal structures in tackling these challenges. This research highlights the influential role of the Catholic Church in promoting environmental stewardship and the transformative power of religious teachings in elevating climate change concerns. The findings contribute to a better understanding of the influence of religious teachings on environmental attitudes and behaviors among Catholics. Furthermore, the insights generated in this study can inform policymakers, educators, and organizations seeking to promote environmental awareness and action among Catholic youth.

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Cite this article as:

Waje, A. O. (2023). Talasínup: Exploring the Environmental Consciousness and Christian Environmentalism of Youth Ministers in Mabalacat City in Light of Laudato Si' for Post-COVID-19 Environmental Stewardship. *European Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 6(4): 27-45. <https://doi.org/10.33422/ejbs.v6i4.1102>

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1. The Transformative Power of the Catholic Church's Environmental Stewardship

Climate change is a pressing global issue, and the Catholic Church, with Pope Francis at the forefront, has become a prominent advocate for environmental stewardship and sustainability. Pope Francis published *Laudato Si* in 2015, a ground-breaking encyclical that combines Catholic teachings with contemporary environmental concerns. The encyclical emphasizes the interconnectedness of all things and the need for a collaborative response to climate change. Its publication has inspired the Catholic community and gained recognition from environmental organizations and scientists worldwide.

While the Catholic Church has a history of environmental care programs, *Laudato Si* is seen as a turning point in its approach to environmental stewardship. The encyclical draws its name from a hymn written by St. Francis of Assisi, widely recognized as the patron saint of the environment. Encyclicals are papal letters intended to guide Catholics on matters affecting their beliefs and daily lives. They often address contemporary issues not directly addressed in the Bible and are written by the Pope under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Catholic doctrine, and scriptural teachings.

Importantly, *Laudato Si* is not exclusively directed at Catholics but is intended for everyone who shares the planet. This research seeks to explore the impact of the encyclical on the Catholic Church's environmental care programs and the broader community's attitudes and behaviors toward environmental stewardship. By examining existing literature and conducting primary research, the study aims to identify how *Laudato Si* has influenced environmental policies and practices within the Church and beyond. It also seeks to identify opportunities for further action and research in this critical area.

2. Literature Review

Laudato Si is a profound and impactful encyclical by Pope Francis that emphasizes the interconnectedness of all living beings and the critical importance of protecting the environment (Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, 2015). It argues for the urgent need to address climate change and advocates for a more sustainable and ethical way of life (Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, 2015).

Published in 2015, *Laudato Si* marks a historic turning point for the Catholic Church's approach to environmental issues. It has elevated climate change concerns to the forefront and emphasized the moral imperative for Catholics to actively engage in environmental preservation and healing (Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, 2015). The encyclical has motivated Catholics worldwide to become more environmentally conscious and take an active role in environmental stewardship.

Pope Francis presents a vision of the Church in *Laudato Si* that highlights its responsibility to defend God's creation and advocate for the rights of the weak and disadvantaged (Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, 2015). He sees environmental protection as an integral part of Christ's mission, drawing on biblical passages to illustrate the profound connection between Christ and the environment (Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, 2015). The encyclical emphasizes that Christ's mission extends beyond Earth, encompassing the entire cosmos and reinforcing the idea that all creation is interconnected and deserving of care and respect (Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, 2015).

A notable aspect of *Laudato Si* is its focus on the future and Pope Francis' deep concern about the destiny of humanity, particularly in relation to the impact of environmental degradation on young people (Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, 2015). The encyclical highlights the yearning for change among the younger generation and their perplexity at the lack of urgency and action

from those responsible for planning a brighter future (Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 2015). This underscores the critical need to address this gap and the urgency of taking action to safeguard the planet and ensure a sustainable future for generations to come (Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 2015).

In summary, *Laudato Si'* calls for a radical transformation in our relationship with the environment, urging Catholics and people of all faiths to embrace an ecological conversion and adopt more sustainable practices in their daily lives. It has sparked a global movement for environmental justice by emphasizing the interconnectedness of all living beings and the moral imperative to care for our common home. *Laudato Si'* has inspired individuals and communities to take meaningful action towards a more sustainable and equitable future (Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 2015).

2.1. Insights from 'Laudato Si' Encyclical and Academic Research

Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical "*Laudato Si'*" emphasized the importance of environmental protection and the interdependence of economic, social, and ecological systems (Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 2015). In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the youth have been particularly affected by the environmental crisis and have had to adapt to a rapidly changing world.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had significant impacts on the environment, including changes in air quality and wildlife behavior (UNEP, 2020). Additionally, the pandemic has highlighted the vulnerability of global systems and the need for collective action to address environmental challenges (UNEP, 2020). The youth have been particularly affected by these changes and have shown a growing interest in environmental stewardship and sustainability (UNEP, 2020).

"*Laudato Si'*" emphasizes the interdependence of economic, social, and ecological systems and the need for a holistic approach to environmental protection (Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 2015). The encyclical argues that environmental protection is not only a scientific or technical issue but also a moral and ethical one (Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 2015). In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the youth have shown a growing interest in environmental stewardship and sustainability, recognizing the importance of protecting the environment for present and future generations (UNEP, 2020).

The encyclical also emphasizes the importance of education and the role of the youth in promoting environmental protection (Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 2015). The youth have a unique perspective on environmental issues and can play a crucial role in shaping public opinion and policy (UNEP, 2020). Additionally, the encyclical calls for a shift in values and behaviors towards sustainable and equitable lifestyles, which can be promoted among the youth through education and awareness-raising campaigns (Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 2015).

Beyond "*Laudato Si'*," several scholarly works provide diverse insights and research on environmental conservation and youth involvement. For instance, Breckwoldt and Muff (2018) found that youth organizations in Germany have the potential to promote sustainability and emphasized the importance of engaging young people in environmental initiatives. They highlighted the role of youth organizations in fostering sustainable practices. Similarly, Ojala (2013) emphasized the significance of hope as a motivational factor in driving environmental actions, particularly among young people in the context of climate change. The author highlighted the importance of instilling hope to inspire young individuals' involvement in environmental issues. Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002) analyzed psychological and social factors that shape individuals' environmental actions and identified barriers to pro-environmental behavior. Their research provided valuable insights into promoting sustainable behaviors. Stedman, Beckley, Wallace, and Ambard (2004) used resident-employed

photography to explore the emotional and psychological connections individuals form with natural environments. Their study revealed the significance of place attachment in fostering environmental stewardship.

In the context of post-COVID-19 environmental stewardship of the youth, "Laudato Si'" provides a relevant and important framework for promoting environmental protection and sustainability (Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 2015). The encyclical emphasizes the interdependence of economic, social, and ecological systems and the need for a holistic approach to environmental protection (Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 2015). Additionally, "Laudato Si'" recognizes the importance of education and the role of the youth in promoting environmental protection (Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 2015). As such, "Laudato Si'" can serve as a guide for policymakers, educators, and organizations seeking to promote environmental stewardship and sustainability among the youth (Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 2015; UNEP, 2020).

2.2. Purposes and Objectives

This research aims to encourage Catholic youth ministers to embrace CE and EC, promoting a youth-led movement for environmental care in a post-COVID-19 world. The study seeks to identify ecological and environmental theologies that can address challenges in the post-pandemic context of *Laudato Si'*. By utilizing culturally appropriate components of Catholic youth ministers' beliefs, the research aims to develop effective strategies to raise environmental awareness and promote action among Catholic youth.

3. Materials and Methods

For this study, data was collected through a survey using a Google form that considered community health guidelines. The survey included the Environmental Consciousness Scale (ECS) and Christian Environmental Scale (CES), previously validated by Baring, Molino, & Reysen (2021). Purposive sampling was used to select 144 Catholic Youth Ministers currently involved in a youth ministry in Mabalacat City, Pampanga. Participants were briefed on the study objectives, gave informed consent, and provided demographic information before completing the CES and ECS statements. Confidentiality and anonymity of participants were ensured, and no identifying information was collected.

The survey utilized a Likert-type response scale ranging from 1 to 5 to assess agreement levels. Table 1 presents a comprehensive analysis of the data, measuring attitudes using Likert-type scales as described by Joshi et al. (2015).

Table 1.
The CE and EC responses based on a five-point Likert-scale

Scale	Descriptor
1	Strongly Disagree
2	Disagree
3	Uncertain
4	Agree
5	Strongly Agree

In this study, a combination of quantitative and qualitative data analysis methods was employed. The quantitative analysis centered on the CES and ECS data, utilizing descriptive statistics like mean, standard deviation, frequency, and percentage. On the other hand, the qualitative analysis involved examining the responses provided in open-ended survey questions.

4. Results and Discussion

In the present study, a total of 144 youth ministers actively participated as subjects. The educational attainment levels of the participants in this study were categorized into three groups: junior high school, senior high school, and college. Table 2 presents the distribution of participants across these educational levels, shedding light on the prevalence of each category.

Upon analyzing the data in Table 2, it is evident that the most frequently observed level of educational attainment among the participants was senior high school. This finding suggests that a significant proportion of the students involved in the study had completed their education up to the senior high school level. Conversely, the level of educational attainment with the lowest representation among the participants was junior high school.

Table 2.

Sample characteristics according to highest educational attainment (n=144)

Level of Education	Frequency	Percentage
Junior High School	28	19.45
Senior High School	69	47.92
College	47	32.63

4.1. Initial Query Result and Discussion

The CES survey asked the question, "Is there currently an environmental crisis?" The results showed that 81.25% of respondents (117 out of 144) strongly agreed with the existence of an environmental crisis, supporting the views found in literature sources. These findings also align with *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis' encyclical, which emphasizes the urgent need for environmental protection and the interconnectedness of ecological, social, and economic systems.

Additionally, the survey found that only 18.75% of respondents were uncertain about the existence of an environmental problem. This highlights the importance of further discussion and education to raise awareness about the severity of the crisis and bridge the knowledge gap. Research by Tamar et al. (2021) emphasizes the role of education and awareness-raising initiatives in promoting pro-environmental behavior. Their findings align with the current study, emphasizing the necessity of education and dialogue to promote a deeper understanding of the environmental crisis and encourage individuals to take action.

For a wider perspective, Table 3 presents the breakdown of results on the perception of an environmental crisis among youth ministers based on their education level. It shows that as educational level increases, the percentage of those perceiving an environmental crisis also increases. For example, among Junior High School youth ministers, 42.85% expressed belief in an environmental crisis, while among Senior High School youth ministers, the percentage rose to 86.96%, and among college-educated youth ministers, it reached 95.75%. Furthermore, there was an inverse relationship between educational level and uncertainty regarding the existence of an environmental crisis. Among Junior High School youth ministers, 57.15% were uncertain, compared to 13.04% among Senior High School youth ministers and 4.25% among college-educated youth ministers.

These findings suggest that education may influence individuals' environmental beliefs, with higher educational attainment leading to greater awareness and understanding of environmental challenges. Other studies have also explored the relationship between education and environmental beliefs among different populations, providing additional insights. For example, research conducted by Estrada-Araoz et al. (2023) found that higher levels of education are associated with a greater belief in the existence of an environmental crisis, which aligns with

the current study. Overall, the results presented in Table 3 provide valuable insights into the relationship between educational attainment and environmental beliefs among youth ministers.

Table 3

Analysis of youth ministers' responses to the initial query by level of education (n=144)

Level of Education	Is there currently an environmental crisis?						Total Responses
	Yes		No		Maybe		
	*F	**P	*F	**P	*F	**P	
Junior High School	12	42.85	0	0	16	57.15	28
Senior High School	60	86.96	0	0	9	13.04	69
College	45	95.75	0	0	2	4.25	47

Legend: *F – Frequency **P – Percentage

In summary, the survey results show a strong consensus among respondents about the existence of an environmental crisis. This supports literature and aligns with LS. The small percentage of uncertain respondents emphasizes the need for more discussion and education to raise awareness of the crisis. Overall, ongoing dialogue and education are crucial for addressing environmental challenges and promoting sustainability.

4.2. Christian Environmentalism Scale Results and Discussion

Table 4 provides a summary of the Christian Environmentalism Scale (CES) scores obtained from the survey responses of the youth minister participants. The table displays the CES scores, which are numerical representations of the participants' responses to the CES questionnaire. These scores serve as indicators of the degree to which the youth ministers align with Christian environmental values and exhibit environmental consciousness in their beliefs and behaviors.

Table 4.

Overall results of Christian Environmentalism Scale (n=144)

Statement no.	Strongly Disagree (SD-1)		Disagree (D-2)		Uncertain (U-3)		Agree (A-4)		Strongly Agree (SA-5)	
	*F	**P	*F	**P	*F	**P	*F	**P	*F	**P
1	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	6.25	135	93.75
2	0	0	0	0	0	0	18	12.5	126	87.5
3	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	6.25	135	93.75
4	0	0	0	0	0	0	36	25	108	75
5	0	0	0	0	7	4.86	11	7.64	126	87.5
6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	144	100
7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	144	100
8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	144	100
9	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	6.25	135	93.75
10	0	0	0	0	0	0	34	23.61	110	76.39
11	0	0	0	0	0	0	61	42.36	83	57.6
12	0	0	0	0	0	0	37	25.69	107	74.31
13	0	0	0	0	0	0	72	50	72	50
14	0	0	0	0	0	0	27	18.75	117	81.25
15	0	0	0	0	0	0	18	12.5	126	87.5

Legend: *F – Frequency **P – Percentage

The following presentations underscores the discussion of the results on the level of agreement and disagreement of the respondents on Christian Environmentalism Scale.

Statement no. 1: “God created the world.” The survey data reveals that CES statement 1, affirming the Christian belief in God as the Creator, received overwhelming agreement from

respondents. A significant 93.75% strongly agreed, while 6.25% agreed. This indicates a solid understanding of this fundamental Christian teaching on the universe's origin. The respondents' strong agreement is notable given the current environmental crisis. Environmental activism within the Catholic Church, as encouraged by Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si*, emphasizes treating the Earth with respect as a precious gift from God. The respondents' strong agreement suggests a likely motivation to advocate for environmental protection measures.

Statement no. 2: “God is the center of life.” The second CES statement, affirming that God is the center of our lives, reflects a core Christian belief expounded upon by theologians and scholars. In "The Divine Conspiracy," Willard (1998) argues that God is the center of all reality and the source of goodness and truth. Furthermore, 87.5 percent of respondents strongly agree with this second CES statement, aligning with findings from multiple studies on the role of religion in the lives of youth ministers (Aziz, 2019; Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2011; Cox, 2022). These studies consistently indicate that religion holds significant importance in the lives of many youth ministers, providing them with a sense of purpose and meaning in their work.

Statement no. 3: “God invites me to respect life.” The third CES statement receives overwhelming agreement from respondents, with 93.75 percent strongly agreeing and only 6.25 percent agreeing. This high level of agreement indicates that youth ministers deeply understand the value of life and the importance of protecting and preserving it. This aligns with the social teachings of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (2011), which prioritize human dignity. It has profound implications for the thoughts, emotions, behaviors, and interactions of youth ministers with diverse individuals. The strong consensus among respondents underscores the significance of valuing and defending human life, a central principle in various religious traditions, with significant implications for social and political contexts.

Statement no. 4: “Humanity and nature are related to God.” In CES statement number 4, the survey results show that a significant majority of respondents strongly agree (75%) and agree (25%) that there is an interconnectedness between God, nature, and people. This finding aligns with the common belief among Christians that the entire earth is special, and God's affection for all life can be observed in the creation (Genesis 1:31). The emphasis on environmental stewardship and the need for action on climate change by the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (2015) and Pope Francis (2015) further support this belief who have emphasized the need for environmental stewardship and have called for action to address the issue of climate change.

Statement no. 5: “God calls me to care for the earth like my home.” The majority of youth ministers strongly believe in the responsibility of individuals to preserve the environment (87.5%). A small percentage are uncertain (4.86%) and a minority agree (7.64%). This positive attitude towards environmental stewardship only shows that there is a strong belief in the importance of environmental stewardship among youth ministers. However, the small percentage of youth ministers who are uncertain about the statement indicates that there may be a need for further education and awareness-raising on the importance of individual responsibility for environmental conservation. This is in line with the study Tamar et al. (2018) that highlights the potential of education and awareness-raising initiatives to encourage pro-environmental behavior.

Statement no. 6: “I see creation as God's symbol of grace and delight.” CES statement 6 focuses on the perception or worldview regarding created reality. The survey results show that all 144 respondents strongly agree with this statement, indicating that they believe in the purity and sanctity of reality as it has been formed. This positive attitude towards the created world is

consistent with the teachings of the Catholic Church, which views nature as a manifestation of God's grace and delight (CCC, 341). Pope Francis has also emphasized the importance of caring for the environment and the need to recognize the sacredness of creation (Pope Francis, 2015).

Statement no. 7: “God loves all His creation.” The seventh CES statement aligns with the Christian belief that God is love, as emphasized in passages like 1 John 4:8 and John 3:16. This concept highlights God's unconditional love for all people, regardless of their actions or beliefs, as mentioned in Romans 5:8. The overwhelming agreement among respondents in the study regarding God's loving character is expected, given the significant emphasis on this aspect of God's nature in Christian teaching, particularly in youth ministry, where ministers aim to introduce God's love and foster a personal relationship with Him.

Statement no. 8: “I admire the beauty of God’s creation.” Youth ministers, who are typically more religious, unanimously express strong admiration for God's creation, as evidenced by a 100% response rate in the survey. This aligns with the findings of the National Study of Youth and Religion, which discovered that religious youth exhibit positive attitudes towards the environment and a desire to safeguard it (Smith et al., 2005). According to the Pew Research Center’s Forum on Religion and Public Life (2021), 63% of Americans believe in God as described in religious texts. This belief encompasses an appreciation for the beauty of God's creation. This is in line with a recent study published in the Journal of Religious Education, which found that individuals with higher levels of religiosity tend to perceive nature and the environment as manifestations of God's craftsmanship, indicating a heightened appreciation for them (Skalski-Bednarz et al., 2023).

Statement no. 9: “God wants and expects me to protect nature.” Christians believe they have a responsibility to care for the environment because they see it as God's creation entrusted to them. Verses like Genesis 2:15 reinforce this belief. Recent years have seen a growing recognition among Christians of the importance of environmental stewardship. In a 2020 survey by the Barna Group, 63% of practicing Christians viewed caring for the environment as a biblical mandate. The respondents of this study strongly supported this idea, with 93.75% strongly agreeing and 6.25% agreeing. Given their religious commitment and awareness of their obligations, it is not surprising that they are highly supportive of environmental protection.

Statement no. 10: “The world is good because God is good.” The belief in the goodness of God's creation is a fundamental tenet of Christianity. This belief has been embraced by Christians throughout history and is reflected in many religious traditions and practices. A study conducted by Exline et al. (2014) found that individuals who have a strong belief in the goodness of God are more likely to have positive attitudes toward life and feel a greater sense of purpose and meaning. This finding is consistent with the strong agreement expressed by the youth minister respondents in the tenth CES statement. In fact, 76.39% of respondents strongly agreed with the statement, while only 23.61% agreed. These individuals, who are likely to be more religious and have a greater awareness of their religious beliefs, would be highly supportive of the idea that God's creation is good.

Statement no. 11: “The world will prosper if we believe in God.” The belief that God is the source of blessings and prosperity is rooted in the idea that God is the creator and sustainer of all things. A study in Frontiers in Psychology highlights the importance of spirituality and religiosity for subjective well-being, indicating that they provide meaning, purpose, and connection to others. This contributes to greater well-being and happiness (Villani, et al., 2019). The youth minister respondents in the study strongly agreed with the eleventh CES statement, aligning with the belief in God's providence. Result shows that 42.36 percent agreed,

while 57.6 percent strongly agreed. These religious individuals likely strongly support the notion that true prosperity comes solely from God.

Statement no. 12: “Worship to God requires that I protect the earth.” CES statement 12 states that every devout follower of God is compelled to put their worship into action, such as protecting the world. This statement was strongly agreed with by 74.31% of respondents. There are many reasons why youth ministers might believe this. First, the Bible teaches that God created the world and that it is good. Second, the Bible also teaches that we are called to be stewards of the earth. Third, the world is facing many environmental challenges. Overall, the results of the survey suggest that youth ministers are committed to protecting the world. This is a positive development.

Statement no. 13: “Worship to God requires that I protect the earth.” The belief in the religious duty to protect the Earth can be traced back to various religious texts, such as Genesis 2:15 in the Bible. Pope Francis' encyclical letter, "Laudato Si'," further emphasizes the importance of environmental protection and sustainability, calling for a shift away from the prevalent "throwaway culture" of modern society. As a result, it is unsurprising that 50% of the respondents strongly agreed with CES statement 13, which asserts the religious obligation to protect the Earth. This belief is deeply rooted in numerous faith traditions and is also recognized as significant from a scientific standpoint. It is essential for individuals to take action in preserving the planet, and for religious and scientific communities to collaborate in pursuit of this common objective.

Statement no. 14: “God did not cause evil things to happen to us.” CES statement 14 reflects the Christian belief in God's omnibenevolence, affirming that He desires positive outcomes for people and the world. Supported by the Bible and Christian theologians, this belief holds that all of God's actions aim to promote good. The respondents (81.25% strongly agreed and 18.75% agreed) endorsed this statement, emphasizing its ability to provide solace and optimism during challenging times. This belief serves as a central tenet of Christianity, highlighting God's inherent goodness and kindness towards humanity. It encourages individuals to trust in God and maintain the belief that things will ultimately unfold for the better, even in the face of adversity.

Statement no. 15: “God made the world for humanity.” The findings from the survey on statement no. 15, "God made the world for humanity," reveal a strong consensus among the respondents. The results indicate that a significant majority, 87.5 percent, strongly agree with this statement, while the remaining 12.5 percent agree. These results provide insights into the religious and philosophical perspectives of the respondents. The belief that God made the world for humanity can have significant implications for how individuals perceive their role in the world and their relationships with others. It may foster a sense of responsibility towards the environment and the well-being of fellow human beings.

4.3. Environmental Consciousness Scale Results and Discussion

A pro-environment stance is expressed through the Environmental Consciousness Scale (ECS). The scale takes into account human stewardship, reverence for and protection of the environment, and equitable relationships between living and non-living objects. This scale includes eco-focused objects. The overview of the ECS responses is presented in Table 5.

Table 5.
Overall results of Environmental Consciousness Scale (n=144)

Statement no.	Strongly Disagree (SD-1)		Disagree (D-2)		Uncertain (U-3)		Agree (A-4)		Strongly Agree (SA-5)	
	*F	**P	*F	**P	*F	**P	*F	**P	*F	**P
1	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	2.78	140	97.22
2	0	0	0	0	0	0	54	37.5	90	62.5
3	0	0	0	0	0	0	13	9.03	131	90.97
4	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	4.86	137	95.14
5	0	0	0	0	0	0	17	11.81	127	88.19
6	0	0	0	0	0	0	35	24.31	109	75.69
7	0	0	0	0	0	0	22	15.28	122	84.72
8	0	0	0	0	0	0	15	10.42	129	89.58
9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	144	100

Legend: *F – Frequency **P – Percentage

The following presentation underscores the discussion of the results on the level of agreement and disagreement of the respondents on Environmental Consciousness Scale.

Statement no. 1: “We need to act now to reverse environmental damage.” According to the ECS results, 97.22% of respondents strongly agree and 2.78% agree that immediate action is required to tackle environmental damage. This aligns with scientific consensus and warnings from the IPCC (2018) about the catastrophic consequences of neglecting to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The high percentage of strong agreement suggests an increasing recognition of the urgent need for action. Previous studies have also shown a growing public awareness and concern about environmental issues (Gallup, 2021). The small percentage of agreement may indicate a lack of awareness or understanding of the severity of the environmental crisis. This highlights the importance of education and awareness campaigns to ensure everyone comprehends the urgency and takes necessary action.

Statement no. 2: “Global warming is due to high levels of greenhouse gasses in the atmosphere.” ECS statement 2 highlights the negative impact of excessive greenhouse gas emissions on the environment and global warming (EPA, 2021; NASA, 2023). With 62.5% strongly agreeing and 37.5% agreeing, the respondents demonstrate a high level of awareness and agreement with this statement. This aligns with scientific research that shows the detrimental effects of greenhouse gases, such as melting glaciers, rising sea levels, and more frequent and severe weather events (EPA, 2021; NASA, 2023). The significant level of awareness and agreement among respondents reflects the growing recognition of the urgency to address climate change and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. As more people become informed about the issue, there is an increased likelihood of taking action to mitigate the impact of greenhouse gases on the environment and global warming.

Statement no. 3: “We can address environmental problems by avoiding the use of single-use plastics.” The third statement highlights the consensus among respondents on the importance of reducing the use of single-use plastics to tackle environmental issues. The findings reveal that a vast majority of respondents (80.68%) strongly agree with the need to avoid single-use plastics, with an additional 17.6% in agreement. This aligns with the growing body of scientific research that demonstrates the harmful effects of plastic waste on the environment. Single-use plastics like bags, straws, and food packaging are major sources of pollution in oceans, rivers, and landfills, where they can persist for hundreds of years (Jambeck et al., 2015). Therefore, reducing the use of single-use plastics is imperative for addressing the environmental impact of plastic waste.

Statement no. 4: “We need to preserve the earth’s resources for future generations.” The majority of survey participants strongly supported the fourth ECS statement, which emphasizes

the importance of conserving the planet's resources for future generations. This result aligns with the growing global awareness of the negative impact of human activities on the environment and the urgent need for sustainable development. The strong agreement among respondents indicates an increasing recognition of the necessity to adopt sustainable practices in various areas of life, including individual actions, corporate initiatives, and governmental policies. These sustainable practices encompass actions such as reducing waste, conserving energy and water, promoting renewable energy, and safeguarding biodiversity, among others.

Statement no. 5: “Humans can improve and preserve the earth’s resources.” ECS statement 5 states categorically that people are essential to protecting and enhancing the earth's resources. There is no question that the respondents realized this. The respondents' 11.81% agree and 88.19% strongly agree indicate their support. The strong agreement among respondents on this statement suggests a growing awareness of the importance of individual and collective action in protecting and enhancing the earth's resources. This awareness has led to the adoption of various initiatives and policies aimed at promoting sustainable practices and protecting the environment.

Statement no. 6: “Human disregard for the earth is a serious error.” ECS statement 6 addresses human actions that disregard the value of the earth. The survey results reveal that a majority of respondents strongly agree (75.69%) and a significant percentage agree (24.31%) with the statement, acknowledging the serious consequences of reckless human interaction with the environment. This finding supports previous research that highlights the detrimental impact of human activities on the environment, such as deforestation, fossil fuel combustion, and industrial agriculture (Olander & Moore, 2018). The high percentage of strong agreement reflects a growing concern for the welfare of the environment. This concern aligns with the findings of a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center’s Forum on Religion and Public Life, which showed that a majority of Americans consider the environment a significant concern that requires immediate attention (Funk & Kennedy, 2023).

Statement no. 7: “Human disregard for the earth is a serious error.” ECS statement 7 received strong agreement, with 15.28% agreeing and 84.72% strongly agreeing. This indicates that a significant majority of respondents recognize the severity of human disregard for the earth. Previous research supports this, highlighting the detrimental effects of deforestation, pollution, and climate change on the environment and ecosystems (IPCC, 2018; WWF, 2021). The high percentage of strong agreement suggests a growing awareness of the need to prioritize environmental conservation and sustainability. This awareness is crucial in addressing environmental challenges, as individuals and institutions must understand the importance of preserving natural resources for future generations (UNEP, 2021).

Statement no. 8: “As students, we have the ability to contribute to the preservation of the earth and mitigate further damage.” ECS statement 8 urges students to play a part in preserving the environment. The respondents are definitely willing to assist. 10.42 percent of respondents agree, and 89.58 percent strongly agree, as evidenced by their response. This finding is consistent with previous research, which has highlighted the importance of youth engagement in environmental conservation and sustainability efforts (UNESCO, 2019; Kemeh et al., 2021). The high percentage of respondents who strongly agreed with the statement also indicates the growing awareness among young people about environmental challenges and the need to take action. This awareness is critical in addressing environmental issues, as young people's involvement can help drive positive change in their communities and beyond (UNEP, 2021).

Statement no. 9: “Planting more trees can help reduce global warming.” Scientific research acknowledges the significant role of trees in mitigating global warming (Crowther et

al., 2019; Hergoualc'h and Verchot, 2014). Planting trees has been proven to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and address climate change. Crowther et al. (2019) discovered that global reforestation has the potential to capture a substantial amount of carbon dioxide, capable of storing two-thirds of the carbon emitted since the Industrial Revolution. Tree planting also helps decrease methane emissions (Hergoualc'h and Verchot, 2014) and provides additional benefits such as temperature regulation, biodiversity conservation, and improved air and water quality.

The unanimous agreement among the youth respondents, with 100% strongly agreeing that planting more trees can help reduce global warming, aligns with the scientific consensus. Trees possess significant potential for carbon sequestration, emission reduction, and various positive outcomes, making tree planting an effective and sustainable strategy in combating global warming.

4.4. How Youth Ministers Respond to Open-Ended Questions

The section explores key findings from the open-ended questions, revealing shared perspectives and divergences among youth ministers. The interview revolves around various topics including aspirations and anxieties regarding the future, environmental worries, channels of environmental knowledge, perspectives on the origins of environmental challenges, and contributions to tackling these issues.

Exploring Aspirations and Anxieties for the Future. The initial open-ended question asks: 'What are your main aspirations and anxieties for the future?' Young participants primarily expressed aspirations for success, concerns about setbacks, apprehensions about opportunities, and worries about handling stress.

- “Prior to settling down, it is important for me to explore and travel.”
- “The thought of passing my exams is a source of worry for me.”
- “My goals include obtaining a quality education and securing a good job.”
- “I aspire to achieve personal growth and success.”
- “I strive for financial stability and security.”
- “I fear the possibility of not achieving anything significant in my life.”
- “Avoiding a job that I despise is a priority for me. I have witnessed individuals who loathe their profession, leading to a profound dissatisfaction with life, which often impacts their relationships, particularly with their children.”

Youth ministers' main focus areas include personal aspects of life such as relationships, careers, academic achievements, and finding meaning in society, as supported by previous qualitative research conducted by Davids et al. (2016). Interestingly, only a few youth ministers expressed concerns about the future of society or the environment, particularly regarding safety and its potential impact on their present lifestyles. In the absence of probing questions, most youth ministers did not display heightened levels of concern or skepticism regarding the future of the world or their capacity to effect meaningful change. These findings diverge from earlier studies conducted by Jeffrey & McDowell (2004) and Sloam (2014), which yielded contrasting results.

Environmental Concerns. When the questions turned to environmental matters, the youth ministers expressed deep concern regarding various ecological issues. The primary topic that arose was the presence of local air and water pollution. Here are some thoughts from the youth ministers:

- “Pollution in general is a major concern, with air pollution being the most significant problem since we all face its effects on a daily basis.”

- “If air pollution worsens and deforestation continues, we might have to wear gas masks just to breathe.”
- “Water pollution is an extremely serious issue because dumping substances like sewage into the ocean will result in the death of marine life.”

In contrast, the prevailing concerns revolved around local urban expansion and its encroachment on natural landscapes, along with the consequential effects on plants and animals. Here are some statements reflecting common responses:

- “Every day, we witness an influx of new houses. Additionally, there's a growing demand for living on large plots of land, resulting in the depletion of natural bushland.”
- “Housing developments are spreading rapidly, driven by the increasing population in the city. This leads to the loss of trees and an extended commute as the city expands.”

The youth ministers in Mabalacat City expressed deep frustration and pessimism about the rapid suburban sprawl and encroachment on bushland. They believed this situation to be unavoidable, with the perception that people always prioritize their needs over the environment. The primary concern among youth ministers in the city is the fear of a depleted environment due to ongoing development. They worry that future generations won't have the same natural experiences they had, as trees are replaced by industrialization.

However, they also recognized a tendency to focus on major issues while overlooking smaller ones. Emotionally, the youth ministers expressed frustration, sadness, and pessimism. They were frustrated by the lack of practical action and believed that harmful behaviors would persist despite discussions and efforts. Numerous participants expressed a sense of helplessness and frustration, believing that their status as young individuals limited their ability to make significant changes to address major problems:

- “I'm overwhelmed with a sense of helplessness. As a 16-year-old student sitting in a classroom, I question what impact I can truly have. I hold strong opinions, but I wonder if they can truly bring about any meaningful change.”
- “It's frustrating that I don't have any authority to take action.”
- “Recycling? But sometimes you wonder if it can truly make a difference.”

The youth ministers also conveyed a sense of sadness and pessimism, foreseeing a worsening state of the environment instead of improvement. Their pessimism is evident in statements such as: “I feel quite sad. We should be taking action now. It's disheartening.” and “Future generations may not be able to fully appreciate it.” Thus, the range of emotions expressed by the youth ministers was predominantly negative. Notably, no one mentioned positive feelings or expressed optimism about the possibility of environmental improvements. Collectively, these comments demonstrate the concerns and worries of the youth ministers regarding environmental problems. This sentiment aligns with previous research findings of Firinci Orman (2022).

Factors attributing to environmental issues as perceived by youth ministers. The youth ministers unanimously believe that human beings are primarily responsible for environmental issues. The participants specifically identified negative human traits like lack of motivation, apathy, selfishness, and lack of knowledge, and noted similar attitudes among government and industry representatives. Some of their thoughts included:

- “Humans themselves are the root cause. Pollution occurs when individuals take shortcuts or prioritize cost-saving measures at the expense of the environment.”

- “People often prioritize financial gain over environmental concerns because they perceive it as vital for our way of life.”
- “It is natural for greed to prevail, and we may unwittingly be on a destructive trajectory.”
- “We are responsible for our actions. Ignorance, greed, and economic factors contribute to pollution. We should actively seek alternatives to reduce harm.”

According to the youth ministers, a significant portion of the population demonstrates laziness and a lack of willingness to take responsibility for environmental conservation. They highlighted how individuals often prioritize personal comfort and convenience over proactive measures for the environment. Furthermore, these negative human traits impede positive action, with people typically responding only when faced with environmental disasters. Some of their observations included:

- “If a matter doesn't directly impact individuals, they tend to overlook it.”
- “Many people adopt an attitude of indifference, questioning the efficacy of their own contributions.”
- “Despite acknowledging the importance of environmental action, people often fail to take any meaningful steps, resorting only to complaining about the worsening situation.”
- “Time is frequently cited as a barrier. People desire convenience and a stress-free lifestyle, wanting to reach their destinations quickly.”

Overpopulation strains resources, impacting housing, transportation, and services, leading to local and global issues. That only one youth minister recognized the idea of disconnection from nature as a contributing cause to environmental challenges is an interesting finding. Instead, others criticized governments and big businesses for prioritizing financial gains over addressing the root causes. They highlighted government cover-ups, insufficient penalties for water pollution, and a lack of interest in enforcing regulations. However, it is worth noting that government and business were acknowledged as potential agents of change. This involves implementing and enforcing environmental regulations and encouraging businesses to adopt long-term, efficient practices.

The findings revealed that youth ministers tend to focus on individual causes of environmental problems and overlook the influence of social structures and institutions. Many believe that changing individual values can solve environmental issues resulting from government decisions and corporate profit motives. This aligns with previous research conducted by the National Research Council (1992). The study underscores how crucial it is to understand how structural and personal elements interact when tackling environmental concerns. It argues that accessible public transportation, affordable energy, and attitudes and beliefs all play significant roles in determining environmental outcomes.

Exploring Youth Ministers' Perspectives on Environmental Improvement. The youth ministers had diverse opinions on improving environmental quality. They agreed that changing people's attitudes towards the environment is necessary, but few acknowledged their own responsibilities or the need to change their lifestyles. Instead, they focused on raising awareness and educating others. In addition, local-level recycling was frequently mentioned as a key environmental effort. Personal actions and initiatives by industries and governments were rarely discussed. Conservation groups' awareness campaigns were also recognized as important.

Youth ministers recognized the need for significant efforts to improve the environment. However, they also highlighted the challenges individuals face in surpassing their current

actions, especially in areas like recycling. Some participants believed that stricter enforcement of existing laws by the government is necessary for progress. Consequently, they argued for the development of alternative ways of living, with both the government and industry taking crucial roles. This involves leading by example with their own behavior and lowering the cost of environmentally friendly goods and services so that they are affordable for typical working families. Sentiments expressed by participants include:

- "The need for the government to introduce more initiatives to encourage environmentally friendly practices."
- "Governments should enforce stricter environmental laws."
- "Governments should impose higher costs on environmentally harmful alternatives."
- "Making environmentally friendly products more affordable would encourage their usage and help individuals recognize the long-term benefits associated with their use."

The general view of low action or personal efficacy indicated by participants across all focus groups is indicative of the perception of insufficient societal support for individual environmental action. Nevertheless, they continued to value each person's input, no matter how tiny it could be. Additional comments in a similar vein included:

- "Many individuals tend to avoid this responsibility, but if each person focuses on addressing small actions rather than feeling overwhelmed by the magnitude of the issue, substantial transformations can take place."
- "Absolutely. I believe the future lies in our hands when it comes to preserving the environment because today's generation is gradually becoming more aware, but we [the youth] are the ones who are truly conscious."
- "Yes, it ultimately depends on ourselves to implement sustainable actions at home and actively listen to others' perspectives."

The concept of environmental efficacy was further explored when asked about their willingness to engage in local actions, such as writing letters, either presently or in the future. The youth ministers expressed overwhelming cynicism regarding the effectiveness of such endeavors. They believed that they wouldn't know who to address their letters to, that their letters would go unread, and consequently, their actions would have no impact. Some of their statements included:

- "I'll continue my environmental actions, but won't write letters or sign petitions. It's time-consuming, uncertain who to address, and they likely won't read or care. Complaining to the City Council isn't worthwhile."
- "In my opinion, taking personal action proves to be more impactful than merely submitting a report or complaint."
- "When filing a report or complaint, it often needs to be escalated to higher authorities. However, if they show indifference towards the matter, it is unlikely that any action will be taken. The same applies to writing a letter."

However, a distinct group of proactive college-educated youth ministers emerged. They recognize the importance of presenting alternatives and understand that people are more likely to change their attitudes and actions after experiencing environmental problems firsthand. Moreover, these youth ministers demonstrate political consciousness by leveraging consumer action as a means to influence companies towards implementing changes. The findings also highlight the youth ministers' recognition of the crucial role of government leadership in driving widespread change. They emphasize the need for the government to implement policies

and standards that promote environmental education and inspire people to be more receptive to change. This indicates the potential influence of collegiate school curricula in fostering political literacy among students. These findings raise intriguing questions about the variations observed among students at different educational levels and prompt further investigation into the impact of education on environmental and civic consciousness.

Unveiling the Youth Ministers' Environmental Outlook. The research findings suggest that youth ministers in Mabalacat City exhibit a sense of "action paralysis" when it comes to addressing environmental issues. They believe that only small actions, such as recycling, have a meaningful impact on the environment. They lack experience in engaging in public environmental actions and express doubt about the effectiveness of activities like letter or petition writing. Furthermore, they anticipate having limited influence as adults. This result indicates that youth ministers feel uncertain about environmental issues and their solutions. They are concerned about local environmental problems but also frustrated, pessimistic, and angry due to perceived inaction and limited prospects for change. By understanding their concerns and frustrations, policymakers, educators, and organizations can develop initiatives that empower youth ministers to make a meaningful impact and foster a sense combating environmental challenges.

5. Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into the perceptions and beliefs of youth ministers regarding the environmental crisis and their alignment with Christian environmental values. The findings highlight the importance of education and Christian beliefs in promoting environmental awareness and stewardship. The study contextualizes the results within the framework of *Laudato Si* and the post-COVID-19 era of environmental stewardship, emphasizing their relevance.

The research reveals a strong consensus among youth ministers regarding the existence of an environmental crisis, emphasizing the urgency of addressing environmental challenges. This consensus aligns with the principles outlined in *Laudato Si*, which emphasizes the need for environmental protection and recognizes the interconnectedness of ecological, social, and economic systems.

Furthermore, the study highlights the influence of education on environmental beliefs, with higher educational attainment fostering greater awareness of environmental challenges. This finding underscores the importance of education and knowledge dissemination in fostering pro-environmental behavior, consistent with previous studies.

The results of the Christian Environmentalism Scale (CES) indicate that youth ministers strongly align with Christian environmental values, resonating with the principles of *Laudato Si*. The study also reveals that the youth ministers have a deep understanding of the value of life, the importance of defending human dignity, and the interconnectedness between God, nature, and humanity.

In the context of the post-COVID-19 era, where there is growing awareness of the fragility of ecosystems and the need for sustainable practices, the findings highlight the role of youth ministers in shaping environmental consciousness within their communities. The study suggests that youth ministers are well-positioned to advocate for environmental stewardship.

Additionally, the analysis of responses to open-ended questions provides further insights. While the primary concerns and aspirations of young participants revolve around personal aspects of life, the youth ministers express deep concern about local pollution and the encroachment of urban expansion on natural landscapes. They emphasize the lack of practical

action being taken to address these issues and recognize the role of both individual behaviors and societal structures in tackling environmental challenges.

Overall, this study underscores the crucial role of education and Christian environmentalism in addressing the environmental crisis. It highlights the positive correlation between higher educational attainment and environmental crisis perception among youth ministers, as well as their alignment with Christian environmental values. The research contributes to the ongoing discourse on environmental issues, emphasizing the significance of ongoing dialogue, education, and awareness-raising initiatives. By incorporating the perspectives of influential youth ministers, this research offers valuable insights to shape environmental policies, promote sustainable practices, and ensure the well-being of our planet for future generations.

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