

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The Catholic Church has always been engaged in international politics and social issues. The Catholic Church is active in promoting human rights and to bring justice in the social system. Among other established international organizations, the Catholic Church is known as the earliest and the oldest international organization in the world. The uniqueness of the Catholic Church in comparison with other religious actors is characterized by the existence of the Holy See and its headquarters in Vatican City.¹ The state of Vatican City as the physical base of the Church and Holy See as their diplomatic tools, the Catholic Church is allowed to contribute to international events and is recognized as part of international society.²

The Catholic Church is inseparable with the Pope, who holds the highest authority of the Church and is the one who creates papal encyclical documents.³ The Catholic Church has three primary ranks, which are the Bishops, Priests, and Deacons.⁴ The Catholic Church's soft power is represented by the Catholic people across the world, which has become the foundation of the Church. Catholic is one of the religions that has the biggest followers in the world, with approximately

¹ Jodok Troy. "The Catholic Church and International Relations." *Oxford Handbooks Online* 7 (June 2014): 6.

² Troy, "The Catholic Church," 8.

³ Charles Zech and Mary L. Gautier. "Catholic Parish Organizational Structure and Paris Outcomes." *Journal of Scientific Study of Religion* 1 (March 2004): 148.

⁴ Zech and Gautier, "Catholic Parish," 143.

1.313 billion followers.⁵ Brazil has the largest Catholic population in the world followed by Mexico in the second and Philippines as the third.⁶ Thus, the Catholic Church has more and strong influence in Catholic majority countries. The nature of hierarchy of the Church moves from the top, which is the papacy, downward to the regional and national organization of bishops.⁷ The regional or national bishops would implement the teaching that came from the papal within their jurisdiction.⁸

In countries with strong Catholic influences, the Catholic Church is actively involved in opposing human rights violations and other domestic aspects through their teachings and doctrines. The Catholic Church is believed to uphold peace and justice in the international systems. Furthermore, the Catholic Church also has an active role in responding to global issues, such as environmental problems. Along with the involvement of other international organizations and non-governmental organizations, the Catholic Church is considered to be one of the actors that has a significant role in responding to global environmental problems. The Vatican itself has become the world's first carbon neutral sovereign state.⁹ The Pope and the Catholic Church are actively promoting environmental protection through their

⁵ World Population Review. "Catholic Population," *World Population Review*. Available from <http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/highest-catholic-population/> ; Internet; accessed 22 February 2020.

⁶ World Population Review. "Catholic Population."

⁷ Thomas G. Sanders. "The Church in Latin America." *Foreign Affairs* 2 (January 1970): 286-288.

⁸ Sanders, "The Church in Latin America," 288.

⁹ Catholic Social Teaching. "How is the Church tackling climate change on the ground?" *Catholic Social Teaching*. Available from <http://www.catholicsocialteaching.org.uk/themes/care-creation/stories/church-tackling-climate-change-ground/> ; internet; accessed 12 September 2020.

encyclical document *Laudato Si'*, Catholic Social Teaching, and through Papal Prayer Intentions, the Pope's worldwide prayer network.¹⁰

Global environmental problems are considered as the poor conditions of the environment which is part of the non-traditional security threats for states. Although poor environmental conditions have been existing throughout history, however, it has become more concerning within the last few decades. Global environmental problems refer to the consequences of human actions that tend to exploit natural resources excessively that cause a decline in biodiversity, shortages of clean water and food, extreme climate change and extreme polluted air.¹¹ The expansion of human population and increase of activities in exploiting natural resources caused the environmental problem to be more complex.

The world today is facing various unavoidable new challenges in responding to environmental problems. As it has enlarged into global concern, environmental problems are now a top priority agenda for states and non-states actors. The Catholic Church believes in interconnectedness between human, nature and spirituality and has strongly stated that the environmental problems we faced today are the consequences of our actions.¹² The Catholic Church contribution in protecting the environment started since the authority of Pope John Paul II, and now continued by the current Pope, Pope Francis. The Catholic Church also criticizes

¹⁰ Global Catholic Climate Movement. "Pope Calls for Attention to Environment." *Global Catholic Climate Movement*. Available from <https://catholicclimatemovement.global/pope-calls-for-attention-to-environment/>; internet; accessed 12 September 2020.

¹¹ Peter and Andreas Diekmann. *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology: Ecological Problem*. Malden Blackwell, 2007.

¹² Pope Francis. 2015. "*Laudato Si' On Care for Our Common Home*." Vatican City: Sunday Visitor Publishing Division.

how the environmental problems used to be underestimated although they are relatively important for the life of human beings and other creatures.¹³

The impacts of environmental problems are felt by every region and countries in the world. The environmental problems in each country and region have different causes and effects. Environmental problems in developed countries are more likely caused by their high standard of living and their economic strengths.¹⁴ However, in a region that consists of developing countries, environmental problems are more likely caused by deforestation and other human activities to support their economic system.¹⁵ In writing this thesis, I will focus on environmental problems in Latin America, precisely within the Amazon rainforests.

Latin America is a region that consists of developing countries, where they constantly prioritize their economic development rather than environmental protection. Latin America is a home to six of ten biodiversity and a home of the Amazon rainforest. However, this resources-rich region has to face the bitter reality where their environmental conditions are threatening the lives of the people and other creatures. According to the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization, Latin America is a region that has lost most forests in the world due to exploitation activities such as deforestation, illegal operations of agriculture and

¹³ Pope Francis, "Laudato Si".

¹⁴ S. Vijay Anand. "Global Environmental Issues." *Department of Tourism, School of Management*, 2013: 2.

¹⁵ Anand, "Global Environmental Issues," 3-5.

mining, which has caused erosion and biodiversity loss and became threats for local indigenous people¹⁶

Deforestation of the Amazon rainforests remains at an alarming rate. The Amazon rainforests have an important role in regulating the world's oxygen and carbon cycles.¹⁷ It can create its own weather and influence climate change.¹⁸ They are also known for actively absorbing large amounts of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.¹⁹ The deforestation of the Amazon would bring the rainforest into an ecological tipping point, where the entire system collapses. It will impact the economy and the rainfall patterns in Latin America and other regions, and eventually affect climate change globally, thus this problem requires bigger response and attention from state and non-state actors.

This topic is interesting to be discussed to study how the Catholic Church under the authority of Pope Francis, uses their influence to solve environmental problems in Latin America. In discussing the topic, I will use neoliberalism theory followed by international organization, soft power and global environmental issues as the conceptual framework.

¹⁶ Bryan Andres Murcia. "The Alarming Rate of Latin American Deforestation." *Latin American Post*. Available from <https://latinamericanpost.com/18317-the-alarming-rate-of-latin-american-deforestation> ; Internet; Accessed April 12, 2020.

¹⁷ Tom Metcalfe. "Why is the Amazon Rainforest Important?" *NBC News*. Available from <https://www.nbcnews.com/mach/science/why-amazon-rainforest-important-ncna1051401> ; Internet; accessed April 12, 2020.

¹⁸ Metcalfe, "Why is the Amazon Rainforest Important?"

¹⁹ Metcalfe, "Why is the Amazon Rainforest Important?"

1.2 Research Question

Based on the information provided in the background, I suggest the following research question:

“In what ways does the Catholic Church use its influence to solve the environmental problems in Latin America?”

1.3 Research Objectives

The objective of this thesis is to find out and to analyze the contribution of Catholic Church in using its influence to solve environmental problems in Latin America. The outcome of this thesis will provide the perspective of the Catholic Church on global environmental problems, and what exactly the Catholic Church does in responding to environmental problems in Latin America.

1.4 Research Significance

I hope that the result of this thesis will bring an insight of Catholic Church as an international organization and its role towards environmental problems. This thesis will focus on the role of Catholic Church in using their influence to solve environmental problems in Latin America. I hope that the result of this thesis will be beneficial for the readers to develop their knowledge on the urgency to tackle environmental problems.

1.5 Structure of Writing

The first chapter, the introduction part, talks about the background of the thesis topic, research question that will be addressed, the objective of the research

as well as the research significance. The second chapter talks about the structure of ideas of this thesis that consists of literature reviews for the topic, along with the literature reviews on the theory and concepts in analyzing the influence of Catholic Church towards environmental problems in Latin America. The third chapter is the methodology, which explains the research approach, research method, data collection technique and data analysis technique in gathering data and information for this thesis. The fourth chapter is the analysis of the thesis. This chapter presents all data and information along with the analysis regarding the influence of Catholic Church on environmental problems in Latin America. The result of the analysis can be used to answer the research question of this thesis. The fifth chapter is the conclusion and summary of the analysis and the previous chapters. The fifth chapter will also mention the significance findings and result of this thesis for Latin America region and for the global world.

After providing the introduction part of this thesis in this chapter, the next chapter will be discussing the theoretical framework as well as literature reviews that will be used in writing this thesis. The theory and concepts that will be discussed in the following chapter are in order to answer the research question.