
KARANIWANG TAO: FILIPINO RESPONSE TO POPE FRANCIS' CHALLENGE ON CLIMATE CHANGE

民眾： 菲律賓人对教宗方济各应对气候变化的回应

Mark Pufpaff 濮漠泉

Abstract

When Pope Francis published *Laudato Si'* on 24 May, 2015, the Philippines was still recovering from the devastation of Typhoon Haiyan. In this encyclical, his challenge on the issue of climate change and the role of all people in caring for the environment prompted a number of responses from the *karaniwang tao* – the “common people” – of the Philippines. Building on the momentum generated during Pope Francis' visit to the country before the publication of *Laudato Si'*, the encyclical was received as welcome support for local efforts at recovery. This essay details three responses, as examples of the kind of work the *karaniwang tao* of the Philippines are doing to deal with the threat of climate change.

TYPHOON HAIYAN HITS THE PHILIPPINES

SOCIETY 社会

On 8 November, 2013, Typhoon Haiyan, or Yolanda as it is known among Filipinos, hit the coastal city of Tacloban, the provincial capital of Leyte, becoming one of the most destructive storms in the Philippines' recorded history. It attracted worldwide attention, not only because of its devastation and the need for international aid for the survivors, but also because it gave the threat of climate change, and the need to respond to it, a renewed

urgency. Although a direct link has not yet been made between general climate change trends and Typhoon Haiyan, progress in climate science is being made every day (Vidal and Carrington, 2013; Hannam, 2015). While climate scientists work to link climate change with particular storms like Haiyan, people on the ground need no such scientific confirmation. In fact, they need only look around (see figs. 1, 2).

Figure 1: Devastation in Tacloban after Typhoon Haiyan



Source: Kevin Frayer/Getty Images Asiapac

These images represent the damage Haiyan inflicted upon Tacloban City, so-called “ground zero”, for the effects of the storm. In total, it left 6,300 people dead, displaced 4.1 million and destroyed 1.1 million homes (Locsin, 2014; Britannica, 2016). The people of the Philippines have long known their country was at a higher risk of severe weather than most others. But Haiyan was not just another storm. It was an alarm that would galvanize the Philippines in the fight against climate change not 14 months later.

POPE FRANCIS VISITS THE PHILIPPINES

On 15 January, 2015, Pope Francis landed in Manila, the capital of the Philippines. His desire to be with the ordinary people—*karaniwang tao*—of the Philippines, and especially those still suffering from the effects of natural calamities like Haiyan, would not only permeate his visit, but also his work thereafter. In an ironic turn of events, during the Pope’s visit to Tacloban on 17 January, another typhoon hit the city (see fig. 3), causing the preparations for his day there to be abandoned and his time cut short (Gallagher, 2015). Standing courageously before a crowd

of over 200,000 people at a Mass at the Tacloban airport, Pope Francis stated during his homily:

I would like to tell you something close to my heart. When I saw in Rome that catastrophe [Haiyan], I felt I had to be here. And on those very days, I decided to come here. I’m here to be with you. (Francis, 2015a)

Figure 2: Pope Francis during a mini typhoon at the Tacloban airport



Source: APF/Jiji, Japan Times

He continued in the same homily:

So many of you have lost everything. I don’t know what to say to you. But the Lord does know what to say to you. Some of you have lost part of your families. All I can do is keep silence and walk with you all with my silent heart. Many of you have asked the Lord – why Lord? And to each of you, to your heart, Christ responds with his heart from the cross.... Forgive me if I have no other words to express myself. Please know that Jesus never lets you down. Know that the tenderness of Mary never lets you down. And holding onto her mantle and with the power that comes from Jesus’ love on the cross, let us move forward and walk together as brothers and sisters in the Lord. (Francis, 2015a)

The Pope communicated a message of hope, mercy, and compassion to the *karaniwang tao*, the people who needed it most (Francis,

2013). But his visit was also to plant the seeds of a sterner and more urgent message, namely, what we must do to address the perils of climate change.

KARANIWANG TAO RESPOND TO *LAUDATO SI'*

Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, which had been in preparation long before his trip to the Philippines, was promulgated on Pentecost Sunday, 24 May, 2015. The encyclical presents itself not as breaking new ground, but as the culmination of a concern with deep roots in the history of Catholic Social Teaching (CST). *Laudato Si'* seeks to address the clear and present danger of catastrophic climate change, while outlining an understanding of the ecology of

Laudato Si' inspired what was generally lacking in the Philippines, namely, a personal commitment by ordinary Filipinos, based on shared sense of responsibility to take action against climate change.

our “common home” capable of focusing efforts from diverse societies and religious communities toward equitable and sustainable human development (Francis, 2015b).

Laudato Si' inspired what was generally lacking in the Philippines, namely, a personal commitment by ordinary Filipinos, based on shared sense of responsibility to take action against climate change. While their responses are small, and seemingly unimportant when examined one by one, within the larger picture of the entire climate change movement they must be understood as part of an interconnected response hitherto unprecedented in the history of the country.

FIRST THINGS FIRST: MAKING COP21 COUNT

The publication of *Laudato Si'* in June, 2015, was meant to contribute to the dialogue that later that year would yield the COP21 (21st Conference of Parties) agreements in Paris concerning climate change and the coordinated efforts of most nations to mitigate climate change impacts. In response to the encyclical, many groups in the Philippines, from churches and environmental activists to artists and musicians began work to raise awareness about the dangers of climate change in the country, in hopes that their efforts might influence global leaders in Paris.

One such effort came from the Philippine Catholic Church, where a nationwide petitionary campaign began almost immediately after the publication of *Laudato Si'*, aimed at collecting one million signatures in support of climate action to present to decision-makers at COP21 (Page, 2015). This was part of an international Catholic movement named the Global Catholic Climate Movement, which was co-founded by a Columban priest working in the Philippines named John Leydon. At the time of the Paris meeting, the movement had collected 840,000 signatures, which representatives used to lobby their concern to overcome climate change (Global Catholic Climate Movement [GCCM], 2015).

At the global level, an international ecumenical movement titled, “The People’s Pilgrimage”, was started in preparation for COP21 and was joined by Yeb Sano, a Filipino climate negotiator turned climate activist, who gave the movement visibility and support in the Philippines. The pilgrimage began in Rome and ended in Paris. Participants walked the whole way and, upon arrival in Paris, delivered a petition of 1.8 million signatures, including many from Filipino supporters (GCCM, 2015).

In an effort to draw attention to the dangers of climate change in the Philippines at COP21, local Filipino artists and musicians, particularly AG Saño, Nityalila Saulo, and Micheline Rama of the advocacy group, DAKILA (Philippine Collective for Modern Heroism), amassed an impressive collection of art pieces, to present in

Paris and to raise awareness domestically. One such example during the event was a mural painted at Point Ephémère in Paris by Saño (see fig. 4). The mural consisted of a picture of Saño's friend, Agit Sustento, who was killed in Tacloban during Haiyan (Canlas and Montesur, 2015).

Figure 3: AG Saño painting a mural at Point Ephémère in Paris



Source: YouTube (Nityalila Sualo)

Even before Paris, the climate-related art movement in the Philippines was being recognised. But such local contributions were not focused primarily on advocating changes in public policy. The message of *Laudato Si'* was meant to reach a deeper level than advocacy, however worthy a cause advocacy actually is. It struck a transformational chord, bringing the *karaniwang tao* of the Philippines to an awareness that a lack of action is itself part of the problem, and that only by involving themselves in the solution can they begin to alleviate their troubles (Canlas and Montesur, 2015).

MINI CASE STUDY 1: TANAUAN MUNICIPALITY, LEYTE

Climate change is something we have to confront. The town of Tanauan was submerged. We cannot just leave. This is our home. We have to develop a plan to mitigate the impact of these disasters, to protect the people and be ready. - Pel Tecson, Mayor of Tanauan. (Page, 2015)

Tanauan was devastated by Haiyan (see fig. 5). Storm surges raised the water level by 15 to 20 feet, washing away the livelihoods of

those in its path. The waters rushed over a mile inland, making rescue and recovery work slow and arduous. But Tanauan was the *first* post-Haiyan municipality to adopt an adaptation and resiliency plan (Page, 2015). The plan was developed and enacted only two months after Haiyan subsided, and involved the entirety of the Tanauan community. Page (2015) summarised their achievements:

Streetlights have been restored and converted to energy-efficient LED. Schools have been rebuilt with second stories that can serve as evacuation centers. Fishing boats and pedicabs have been replaced. Rice farmers were given free high-yield seeds and fertilizers and in 2014 brought in record harvests. The number of completed resettlement housing units is about to reach 400, providing storm proof shelter, more than a mile inland, for nearly half of the estimated 880 families living in “danger areas” along the shoreline. The average resettlement rate elsewhere is less than 10 percent. (Page, 2015, p. 7)

Tanauan is an example of solidarity, collective responsibility and perseverance, especially because funding for the community's work was scarce. They had to be creative and work amongst temptations of despair, knowing that another super typhoon could very quickly wipe out all of their progress. But they kept hope and knew their work was not in vain. Page (2015) summarised Mayor Pecson on the role of *Laudato Si'* in inspiring his community:

Of course, the Church is integral, not merely in helping to restore the victims' faith, but also in charting a way forward. “It's great that there's advocacy from all sectors [now including the Church] because we need everybody. (Page, 2015, p. 8)

MINI CASE STUDY 2: MASIPAG AND CROP DIVERSIFICATION

“Mission: To improve the quality of life of resource-poor farmers.” – MASIPAG

Super typhoons like Haiyan are not the only consequence of climate change. On the other end of the scale are climate phenomena such as droughts, heat waves, flash floods and fires. The Philippines, unfortunately, is vulnerable to extremes at both ends: droughts during the dry season, typhoons and flooding during the wet (Pavarotti and Bondi, 2016). For farmers, who make up a majority of the *karaniwang tao* in the Philippines, these climate conditions result in serious issues of food security. A long drought can ruin a crop just as completely as a flood. After Haiyan, efforts to build resilience against such calamities took on a more urgent character.

MASIPAG, a farmer-led network of people’s organizations, NGOs and scientists working towards the sustainable use and management of biodiversity through farmers’ control of genetic and biological resources, agricultural production and associated knowledge, know from experience that their motto, “Rice is life,” is literally true. Their work of building resiliency and developing approaches for farmers to adapt efficiently to climate change is a matter of survival. Since external aid in the event of a climate calamity is often as scarce as it is unhelpful, Filipino farmers, especially those involved in rice cultivation, are left with nothing but their own capacity to recover and sustain their way of life.

Crop diversification is one of the primary ways that farmers can adapt to and build resilience against severe weather (Pavarotti and Bondi, 2016). According to a report by the International Cooperation for Development and Solidarity (CIDSE), a collection of Catholic social justice organizations from around the world:

[MASIPAG] encourage[s] farmers to plant different crops so the chance of survival in case of a calamity is higher.... Their back-up farm in Santa Rosa, with

an extension of 3 hectares, hosts around 2000 rice varieties. The main objective is to collect and preserve national rice farming practice in light of future natural disasters, but also for keeping the knowledge and passing it down to future generations. The rice cultivated in the national farm is not for sale but the production is meticulously stored [and] seeds [are] often sent for free to farmers experiencing calamities. (Pavarotti and Bondi, 2016)

Being farmer-led, MASIPAG is able to understand the needs of local farmers and empower them to innovate solutions that MASIPAG can assist in realising, such as crop diversification.

MINI CASE STUDY 3: ARCHDIOCESE OF PALO

If Mao Zedong has his ‘[Little] Red Book,’ we have our own red book: the ‘*Laudato Si*.’ This is our guide in our interventions. – Fr. Al Cris Badana (Page, 2015)

Fr. Al Cris Badana directs the Relief and Rehabilitation Unit (Caritas Palo) of the Archdiocese of Palo, a municipality just south of Tacloban City. The work of Caritas Palo is to help local communities recover from the effects of Haiyan, using the Community Managed Disaster Risk Reduction (CMDRR) model (Page, 2015). CMDRR is a concrete application of CST’s principles of solidarity and subsidiarity, which teach, in terms of climate change, that adaptation and mitigation strategies will only be sustainable when local communities are encouraged to work together and are empowered to innovate their own solutions based on local knowledge of the particular conditions affecting them.

Part of the work of Caritas Palo is to rebuild homes and provide for farmers’ livelihoods. However, instead of imposing what he thinks is best for them, Fr. Badana holds community meetings to understand the needs of those he aims to assist. The results, summarised by Page (2015), have been impressive:

First, we have to listen to what they really want....What they want is not always the most obvious thing. Many rice farmers...would prefer a water buffalo to a mechanical harvester. The latter requires gasoline, ongoing maintenance, and technical training, while the former can sustain itself simply by eating grass. The animal also provides milk and reproduces. For about USD \$700...the church can provide a water buffalo that serves five families, with a written agreement that the offspring is given to the next in line. (Page, 2015, p. 9)

In allowing farmers to guide the decision-making process of Caritas Palo, they have not only shown respect for the dignity of the people in their communities, but also discovered a less costly and more sustainable solution.

Another achievement of Caritas Palo, in solidarity with at least 200 Haiyan survivors, was the establishment of a bazaar, featuring organically grown food from local farmers (see fig. 6). The bazaar, titled “Caritas Cares,” was set up during the 2015 Christmas season at the Palo Cathedral (Henderson, 2015). Fr. Badana had this message for the public:

We at the Catholic Church believe in organic farming, and sustainable agriculture and livelihoods managed by empowered communities. This bazaar is just one way of caring for the environment by promoting organic products that reduce carbon footprints. (Henderson, 2015)

THE TRUE MEANING OF DIALOGUE

Laudato Si' differs from the Vatican's previous statements, not in its moral clarity, but in the urgency of its effort to mobilise all the world's *karaniwang tao* to re-examine their consciences and transform their lifestyles in ways that can sustain genuine solutions to the problem of climate change.

Pope Francis may have learned something

from reaching out in the Philippines to ordinary people, the millions of Catholics and non-Catholics alike. By the same token, the *karaniwang tao* apparently have learned something from him. They learned that the many little things they do really can make a difference. In countless ways they are beginning to respond to his leadership. As we have seen, they are ready, willing and able to do their part to change the way we live, for the sake of our children and grandchildren, and all those who will come after us on this earth, our common home.

MARK PUFFAFF is Project Director, Case Study Research, Rothlin Ltd.

REFERENCES 参考资料

- Canlas, K. (2015, December 10). Pinoy artists make impact at climate summit in Paris. Retrieved from *Trending & Features*, <http://www.wheninmanila.com/pinoy-artists-make-impact-at-climate-summit-in-paris/>
- Gallagher, T. (2015, September 26). Philippines cardinal Tagle talks to NCR about pope Francis, climate change. Retrieved from *National Catholic Reporter*, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/global/philippines-cardinal-luis-tagle-talks-ncr-about-pope-francis-and-climate-change>
- GCCM. (2015). Cardinal Hummes delivers 840,000 petition signatures in interfaith event. Retrieved from <https://catholicclimatemovement.global/cardinal-hummes-delivers-840000-catholic-climate-signatures/>
- Hannam, P. (2015, May 30). Ferocious typhoons of a warming planet may necessitate a new severity rating. Retrieved from *Climate Change*, <http://www.smh.com.au/environment/climate-change/super-typhoons-to-increase-in-strength-with-climate-change-researchers-find-20150529-ghcbfs.html>
- Henderson, J. R. (2015, August). Caritas Christmas bazaar features organic products of “Yolanda” survivors in Leyte. Retrieved from <http://www.caritasphilippines.org/2015/12/10/caritas-christmas-bazaar-features-organic-products-of-yolanda-survivors-in-leyte/>
- Locsin, J. (2014, April 17). NDRRMC: Yolanda death toll hits 6,300 mark nearly 6 months after typhoon. Retrieved from <http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/story/357322/news/nation/ndrrmc-yolanda-death-toll-hits-6-300-mark-nearly-6-months-after-typhoon>
- Montesur, M. N. (2015, October 12). Climate change expressed through arts. Retrieved from <http://www.climatechange.searca.org/index.php/climate-change-latest-news/philippines/2492-climate-change-expressed-through-arts>
- Page, D. (2015, November 30). The Philippines fights climate change with rice and religion. Retrieved October 5, 2016, from <http://www.takepart.com/feature/2015/11/30/philippines-fight-climate-change-religion-and-rice>
- Pavarotti, V., and Bondi, G. (2016, April 29). Building resilience and adapting to a changing climate in the Philippines. Retrieved October 5, 2016, from <http://www.cidse.org/blog/building-resilience-and-adapting-to-a-changing-climate-in-the-philippines.html>
- Pope Francis (2013, November 24). Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*: On the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today’s World. Libreria Editrice Vaticana. Retrieved on 14 March 2018 from http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html
- Pope Francis (2015a, January 17). Pope Francis’ homily, holy mass in Tacloban. Retrieved from <http://www.rappler.com/specials/pope-francis-ph/81106-full-text-pope-francis-homily-tacloban>
- Pope Francis (2015b, May 24). Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si’*: On Care for our Common Home. Libreria Editrice Vaticana. Retrieved from http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html
- The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica (2016). Super typhoon Haiyan | storm. In Encyclopædia Britannica. Retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/event/Super-Typhoon-Haiyan>
- Vidal, J., and Carrington, D. (2013, November 13). Is climate change to blame for typhoon Haiyan? *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/nov/12/typhoon-haiyan-climate-change-blame-philippines>