

# An Analysis of Statements and Messages on Environmental Issues by the Catholic Church in Korea:

## Focusing on the Statements on the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation<sup>1</sup>

### 1. Introduction

As the damage to humanity caused by the destruction of the natural environment and abnormal climate spreads, various policies, actions, and educational initiatives aimed at protecting the environment and overcoming the climate crisis are expanding worldwide. The United Nations (UN) Environment Programme<sup>2</sup>, established by the 27<sup>th</sup> UN General Assembly Resolutions in 1972, and the Paris Agreement<sup>3</sup> adopted in December 2015, can be understood as part of these efforts, stemming from the realization that it is difficult to overcome the global crisis with the activities of certain countries or regions alone.

Religious communities have also been constantly raising their voices regarding environmental destruction and the climate crisis.<sup>4</sup> In the Catholic Church, which is the focus of this study, Saint Pope John Paul II warned of the dangers of environmental destruction in his Message for World Day of Peace in 1990 and urged changes in consumerist lifestyles. In 2015, Pope Francis issued the so-called “encyclical on ecology”<sup>5</sup> *Laudato Si'*, presenting environmental protection as a core task of faith. *Laudato Si'* is considered a groundbreaking milestone in the Catholic environmental movement. The 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the encyclical was commemorated in 2020 as the Special *Laudato Si'* Anniversary Year, followed by a seven-year journey called the *Laudato Si'* Action Platform as a concentrated effort to revive the global ecosystems and environment.

The Catholic Church has long been informing its believers about the importance of the environment and making continuous efforts to resolve environmental issues. The Catholic Church in Korea also perceived environmental movements as a practical task for believers starting from the year after Pope John Paul II's message (1991) and began environmental

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<sup>1</sup> The statement on the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation refers to “statement” rather than “discourse”. This study uses the original expression as it is while using “statement” to indicate the type of text as needed.

<sup>2</sup> This was founded as an operational entity for the Declaration on the Human Environment and the Action Plan for the Human Environment adopted at the UN Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm, Sweden in June 1972, by the 27<sup>th</sup> UN General Assembly Resolution 2997 (XXVII) in 1972. It coordinates and manages all activities related to the environment carried out by existing UN organizations and promotes international cooperation. ([NAVER Encyclopedia] UN Environment Programme (UN Overview, September 2015).)

<sup>3</sup> At the 21<sup>st</sup> UN Climate Change Conference (COP21) held in December 2015, 195 contracting parties adopted the final agreement known as the Post-2020 Climate Change Regime, which includes goals for temperature rise, review of reduction implementation, and financial support from developed countries to developing countries for climate action. ([NAVER Encyclopedia] Paris Agreement 2015 (Geo-Spatial Information System (GSIS), January 3, 2016, Lee & Son, Gumi Book)).

<sup>4</sup> Conradie et al. (2014) pointed out that even though the relationship between religion and the environment is an area of significant scholarly interest especially regarding the Catholic Church, there has been no comprehensive research on the ecological linguistic approach to religious texts. As cited in Rocca (2021:330).

<sup>5</sup> Encyclical refers to “a papal letter sent to all bishops of the Roman Catholic Church concerning issues related to the entire Church”. (*Standard Korean Language Dictionary*).

movements in earnest.<sup>6</sup> “Friends of Heaven, Earth, and Water (FHEW)”, the Committee of Eco-Ministry Caritas, the Committee for Ecology & Environment, and GCCM-KOREA are all groups and committees established within the Catholic Church in Korea for environmental movements. The Committee for Ecology & Environment in particular is an organization under the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Korea that conducts environmental movements. The Committee is expressing the Church’s stance on environmental issues by presenting the Statement on World Environment Day<sup>7</sup> on the World Environment Day every June 5<sup>th</sup> and issuing the Statement on the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation on September 1<sup>st</sup>.

A statement is defined as “a formal written or spoken announcement or declaration by a public figure to express their views or stances on certain issues” (*Standard Korean Language Dictionary*). The chairman of the Committee for Ecology & Environment, an affiliate of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Korea, is a religious leader guiding the environmental movement of the Catholic Church in Korea. The language used in the statements of this religious leader will best reflect the Korean Catholic Church’s perceptions attitudes towards environmental issues. Based on this premise, this study aims to analyze the linguistic characteristics of religious discourse by examining how the Catholic Church in Korea perceives environmental issues such as environmental protection and climate crisis and what solutions and responses it proposes from the perspective of disaster humanities.<sup>8,9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Catholic Times, June 5, 2016, p. 9. [Issue No. 2997] “Church environmental movements must take root at the parish level”.

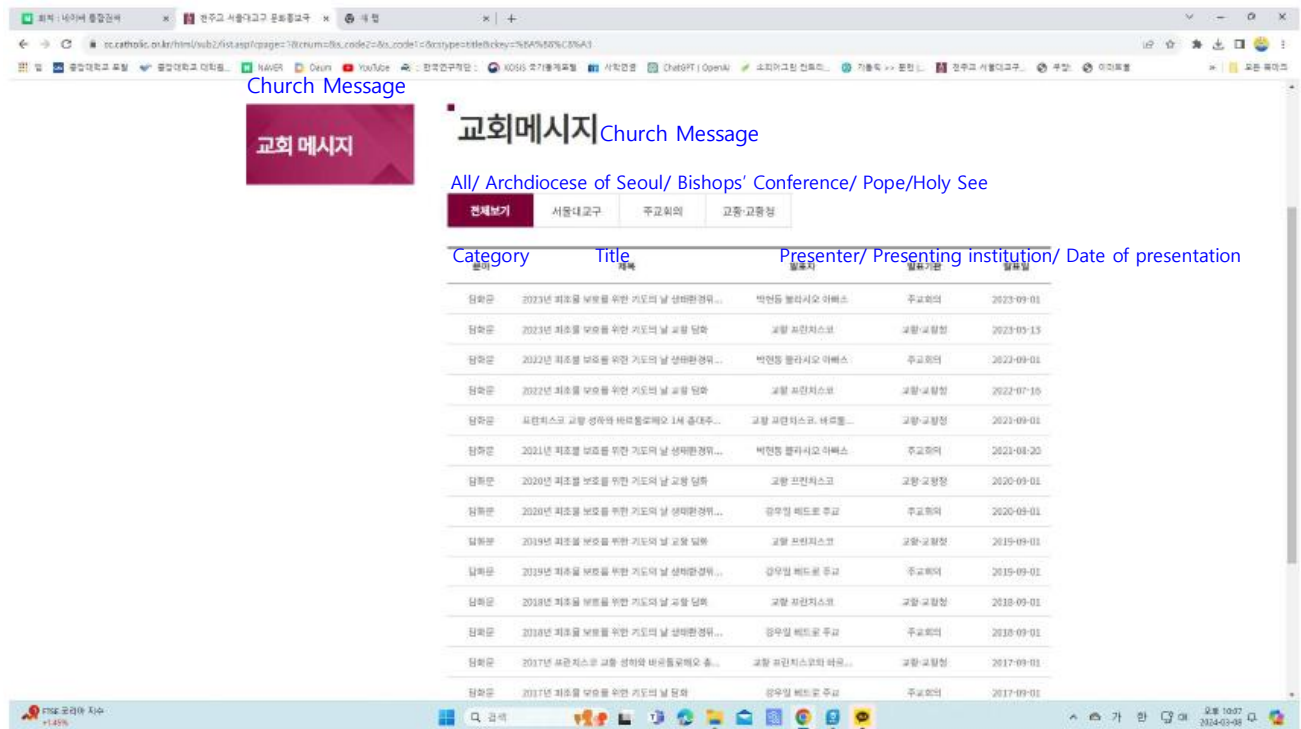
<sup>7</sup> The Statement on World Environment Day has been issued since 1998, as described in the 2016 Statement on the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation. The search results on the Archdiocese of Seoul’s website show that the Statement on World Environment Day can be found starting from 2010. The committee that issued the statement in 2010 was not the Committee for Ecology & Environment but the Committee for Justice & Peace. The name Committee for Ecology & Environment has been used starting with the 2017 statement.

<sup>8</sup> Kang (2020) claimed the need for research on disaster humanities and suggested the history of disasters, perceptions toward disasters, responses to disasters, and the aspects of narrativization as research areas.

<sup>9</sup> Domestic linguistic research on religious discourse includes Kang (2012, 2013) who compared and analyzed the sentence patterns, honorifics for the addressee, speech acts, and terms of address in prayers of Protestantism and Buddhism; Jung (2019) who compared and analyzed the greetings on the websites of Protestant and Buddhist organizations; Kang (2019) who expanded the research area by analyzing the discourse structure, characteristics, and strategies of pastors’ spoken sermons (Yang 2022:2); and Yang (2022) who compared the linguistic features of statements issued by religious leaders from Catholicism, Protestantism, and Buddhism during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## 2. Research subjects and methods

This study aims to analyze the statements issued by the Catholic Church in Korea to commemorate the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation. The statements on the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation can be found in the Church Message menu on the website of the Archdiocese of Seoul.



<Figure 1> Archdiocese of Seoul Church Message screen

Since issuing the “encyclical on ecology”, Pope Francis has been annually releasing the statements on the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation from 2016 to commemorate the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation (September 1). Despite the statement issued by Pope Francis under this title every year, the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Korea is also issuing a statement under the same title in the name of the chairman of the Committee for Ecology & Environment. This may be intending to convey a message tailored to the circumstances of Catholics in Korea.<sup>10,11</sup>

The statements on the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation<sup>12</sup> by the Catholic Church in Korea have also been issued since 2016, marking a total of 8 statements up to 2023. The eight statements selected for this study were issued under the name of Bishop Peter Kang U-il from 2016 to 2020, after which they were issued by Abbot Blasio Park Hyun-dong from 2021 to 2023 with the replacement of the chairman of the Committee for Ecology & Environment. The following

<sup>10</sup> The aforementioned Statement on World Environment Day is also on environmental issues, but it was initially issued under the name of the chairman of the Committee for Justice & Peace, which is why the statements on the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation were selected as the subject of this study. There are other statements on environmental issues such as the Climate Crisis Statement issued by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Korea on May 8, 2020, and the special pastoral letter titled “Let Us Learn and Practice the Encyclical Laudato Si” issued under the name of the Archbishop of Seoul on September 3, 2023.

<sup>11</sup> On major occasions such as Easter and Christmas, not only the Pope’s messages but also messages from local diocesan bishops are issued.

<sup>12</sup> The World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation was adopted by Pope Francis from the long-standing practice of the Orthodox Church.

are the opening lines of the statements that are either the titles or topic sentences of each statement.

#### (1) Opening lines of the statements

2016: Care of creation is a core task for believers

2017: Caring for and nurturing creation is a confession of faith in the Trinity

2018: We need the virtues of ecological repentance and temperance

2019: We and creation are brothers and sisters

2020: We need fundamental transformation

2021: Let us praise, pray, and act for God with creation in our common home!

2022: Let us listen to the cries of the world created with love!

2023: Let justice and peace flow<sup>13</sup>

The sentence types of the opening lines can be divided into those before and after 2020. Declarative sentences were used before 2020, whereas hortative sentences were used in 2021 and 2022, and an imperative sentence was used in 2023, making the speaker's tone stronger. This change can be attributed to the replacement of the speaker<sup>14</sup>, but it can also be interpreted that the type of sentences used conveys the importance and urgency of the speaker's claims due to the global pandemic that occurred in 2020.

This study first examines the linguistic expressions and features of the overall statements and analyzes the structure and content of each statement, through which it examines how the Catholic Church perceives and responds to environmental issues, and what changes are faced by the environmental movements by the Catholic Church in Korea.<sup>15</sup>

### 3. Linguistic expressions and features

#### 3.1. Linguistic features in text composition

The linguistic features in text composition can be mainly divided into three categories. First, as examined in Chapter 2, the opening line of the statement starts with a single sentence that contains the theme of the statement. A search on the Archdiocese of Seoul's website using the keyword "statement" reveals that around 20 statements are issued every year. Below are the opening parts of statements issued in 2020.

(2) a. 2020 Statement for the Day of Prayer for National Reconciliation and Unity: Reconciliation and Peace on the Korean Peninsula. "Together as one body, Christ reconciled both groups to God by means of his death on the cross, and our hostility toward each other was put to death." (Ephesians 2:16) Dear brothers and sisters, this year marks the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the outbreak of the Korean War.

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<sup>13</sup> Each statement shares intertextuality with the statements issued by the Pope and thus contains similar content in many cases. For example, the opening lines of the statements for 2022 and 2023 by the Pope start with "Listen to the voice of creation" and "Let justice and peace flow", respectively. The Pope's statements, however, are translations and thus are not selected as subjects of this study.

<sup>14</sup> As mentioned earlier, the chairman of the Committee for Ecology & Environment has changed in 2021.

<sup>15</sup> Yang (2022) comparatively analyzed the perceptions and responses to disasters, attitudes toward the government, and messages to believers through statements issued by Korean religious leaders during the COVID-19 pandemic based on the perspective of disaster humanities, and revealed the commonalities and differences.

- b. 2020 Statement for the 15th Education Week: “Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.” (Matthew 5:9) Greetings to all those promoting peace such as Catholic school education, educators, parents, and youth. First, I wish Christ’s peace and love to be with your family and school.
- c. 2020 Statement for the 10th Life and Dignity Sunday: “Only God alone is the Lord of life and death!” Dear brothers and sisters, this year marks the 10th anniversary of Life and Dignity Sunday, established by the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Korea to create a culture of life by upholding human dignity and inviolability of human life.
- d. 2020 Labor Day Statement: “Take care of my sheep.” (John 21:15) Who are the holy ones risking their lives to work all day in this polluted world, even when everyone else has locked themselves in fear behind closed doors?
- e. 2020 Statement for the 106th World Day of Migrants and Refugees by the president of the Committee for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Foreign Residents Living in Korea: To welcome, protect, promote, and integrate migrants. Everyone is welcome without discrimination “because God is love” (cf. 1 John 4:8).

The statements above are issued on specific commemorative days (Day of Prayer, Education Week, Life and Dignity Sunday, etc.) by the Catholic Church in Korea, showing the Catholic Church’s interest in various social issues such as “national reconciliation, education, life, labor, and migrants”. As seen in the opening, some statements begin by quoting Bible verses, which is one of the features of religious discourse<sup>16</sup>, while some others, as underlined, present the theme in a noun phrase or sentence. This method is adopted by the speaker to clearly present their main argument. The statements on the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation choose to clearly present the theme of the statement in sentence form.

The second compositional feature is that Pope Francis’s encyclical *Laudato Si’* is cited in several places.

(3) For example, Chapter 2 of *Laudato Si’* emphasizes that creation is a revelation of God’s goodness (section 85). The teaching that creation is one of the two books revealing the revelation of God along with the Bible is a long-standing traditional teaching of our Church, but it has not been well known to our believers. Chapter 6 of *Laudato Si’* states that that each creature bears in itself a specifically Trinitarian structure (section 239), and through the Eucharist, we shall become more active stewards of creation (section 236). The encyclical also teaches that, just as Mary mourned the death of Jesus, now she grieves for the sufferings of the crucified poor and for the creatures of this world laid waste by human power, presenting her as the Mother and Queen of all creation (section 241). These can be considered new teachings compared to the Catholic doctrines we have learned so far. As we celebrate the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, I hope that all our believers will take this opportunity to more diligently study and practice the encyclical *Laudato Si’*. (2016<sup>17</sup>)

(3) is a paragraph from the 2016 statement, and four individual sections from *Laudato Si’* are cited here alone. The encyclical is cited in all statements, and the 2021 statement also quotes the Pope’s Statement on the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation. This is why many of the terms or metaphors used in the statements are not originally from the speaker but are taken directly from the Pope’s linguistic expressions. In (3), for example, “creation” is compared to “revelation” and “book”, which are expressions adopted directly from the encyclical. Thus, the linguistic features of statements analyzed in this study are not so much the linguistic features of the individual speaker but rather the

<sup>16</sup> Yang (2022) pointed out that one of the compositional features of Catholic statements is the placement of Bible verses related to the content of the statement either at the beginning or the end.

<sup>17</sup> The year in which the statement was issued is indicated in parentheses. The same applies hereafter.

characteristics of Catholic discourse. Moreover, what we can see here is that the Catholic Church has a vertical structure. The very act of the Catholic Church in Korea holding the Day of Prayer follows the Pope's intentions, and as seen in (3), referring to the Pope's encyclical as a "teaching" and stating that it shall be studied also reveals this vertical structure of the Catholic Church.

The last structural feature of the statements is the use of Bible verses and prayers.

- (4) a. However, the reality is that the creations that should praise God are "groaning as in the pains of childbirth" (Romans 8:22) (2017)
- b. Especially in times like this, we must remember the loving voice of one who warns us to follow God's will that "you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die." (Genesis 2:17) (2022)
- c. Mary, Mother and Queen of all creation, pray for us! (2020)
- d. Virgin Mary, Mediatrix of all graces, bend your mind to us in weakness, and free us from our wrong habits. (2022)

However, Bible verses appear only twice among the eight statements. It seems that the Bible is cited less compared to other discourses since the encyclical *Laudato Si'* is cited many times. Moreover, as seen in (2), Bible verses are frequently used at the beginning of the statements, but the statements on the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation start with a topic sentence so Bible verses do not play the role of presenting the theme. (4c) and (4d) are examples of prayers commonly found in religious discourse.<sup>18</sup>

## 3.2. Features in terms of vocabulary and analogy

### 3.2.1. Relationship between humans and the natural environment (Earth)

The eight statements are written by Catholic bishops for their believers, so Catholic terms such as "Supreme Pontiff"<sup>19</sup>, "patron saints", and "Trinity" are frequently used. There are also many words reflecting the Christian worldview, typically "creation", which is used in the title of the statements. This helps us understand how the Catholic Church perceives the relationship between humans and the natural environment (Earth).

The term "creation" in the statements on the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation well displays how the relationship between humans and nature is perceived. "Creation" refers to "all things created by the Creator" (see *Standard Korean Language Dictionary*), and in Christianity, all things in nature including humans are referred to as "creation" based on the Bible claiming that God created the world (the Creator).

- (5) a. The teaching that creation is one of the two books revealing the revelation of God along with the Bible is a long-

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<sup>18</sup> Kang (2012) compared the sentence type, speech act, and hearer honorifics in Protestant and Buddhist prayers. For hearer honorifics, Protestantism most frequently used "haopseoseo" (47.2% (290/615)) and "hae juopseoseo" (44.7% (275/615)), while Buddhism predominantly used "hasoseo" (46.0% (133/289)) compared to other variants. Although there has been no research on hearer honorifics in Catholic prayers in Korea, it can be predicted based on these two examples that "hasoseo" would be commonly used, similar to Buddhism.

<sup>19</sup> According to *Standard Korean Language Dictionary*, "Supreme Pontiff" is "a term used in the past within the church, especially in prayer books, to refer to the Pope". The term "Supreme Pontiff" is used until the 2021 statement, while the term "Pope" is used from the 2022 statement.

standing traditional teaching of our Church, but it has not been well known to our believers. (2016)

b. It is time to repent for the reckless destruction of creation, our brothers and sisters, and resolve to change our lives to care for creation. (2016)

c. Mary, Mother and Queen of all creation, pray for us. (2020)

In (5a), “creation” is likened to a “book” like the Bible. By equating creation with the Bible, which is valued most in Catholicism, it emphasizes that creation is something God created. In (5b), creation is also referred to as “brothers and sisters”, indicating that both humans and other creations are made by God. (5c) also refers to Mary as the mother of both humans and other creations. Thus, humans and other creations such as nature are important entities created by God.

(6) a. This day is a precious opportunity for us to newly realize our vocation as guardians of creation (2016)

b. Through the Eucharist, we shall become more active stewards of creation. (2016)

c. This means no longer considering creation as an object of exploitation, but valuing it as a sacred gift from the Creator and renewing our relationship with it. (2023)

However, in (6a) and (6b), humans are likened to guardians and stewards of creation. This is based on the Bible and the Christian doctrine stating that God created mankind in his own image and gave them authority to manage other creations.

<sup>20</sup> The perception<sup>21</sup> of the dominant relationship that humans are guardians and stewards of nature reflects a Christian worldview. <sup>22</sup> In (6c), creation is likened to a gift received from the Creator, and thus must be cherished and valued.

The following are figurative expressions for the Earth, the Earth’s environment, and the world.

(7) a. The Earth, our common home, is falling apart. (2019)

b. Over the past five years, our Sister, Mother Earth has been severely damaged in several places. (2020)

c. The Earth’s environment is not a commodity that can be adequately protected or enhanced by market forces; it is a living organism with its own systematic structure of birth, growth, and survival. (2020)

d. We humans are entrusted by God to till and keep the garden of the world. (2017)

In (7a) and (7b), the Earth is likened to “common home, our Sister, Mother”. The analogy of “common home” <sup>23</sup> that

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<sup>20</sup> The following is an excerpt from *Life Bible Dictionary* (2006) explaining “creation”. “This creation includes not only all things in the world but also mankind. Mankind is also created by God, but they are completely distinct from all things in the universe. This is because God personally created mankind in his own image, and in the image of God he created them (Genesis 1:27). Thus, the first human was endowed with the authority to freely associate and converse with God, and to rule and govern other creations.”

<sup>21</sup> Roccia (2012:331) stated that Genesis was interpreted in medieval Northwestern Europe as legitimizing human domination over nature, while biblical scholars today interpret that protecting and caring for the Earth is the duty of humans.

<sup>22</sup> Meanwhile, there is a phrase in the 2017 statement stating, “The fact that we were created in the image of God and given domination over this Earth does not justify absolute domination over other creations.” Although this phrase warns against the absolute human domination of nature, it still reflects the same worldview that domination over nature is granted by God.

<sup>23</sup> The analogy of “common home” is a metaphor similar to “nature as community”. Regarding the metaphor “nature as community”, ecological linguists claimed that it has significance in setting a moral direction that can overcome a world where only humans exist, while keeping humans as part of nature (Kim et al., trans., 2018:162). According to Jo (2022:106), Leonardo Boff had earlier described Earth as “common home (Casa Común)”, meaning a space where all humanity must peacefully coexist.

indicates a home where all creations including humans live together is used throughout the entire statement. Comparing the Earth to a mother indicates that the Earth plays a role in giving birth to and nurturing life, which is an analogy used not only in Catholicism but also in various other religions and ethnic groups.<sup>24</sup> The analogy of the Earth's environment as a "living organism" in (7c) is a generalized analogy for the planet Earth, which has an optimal environment for existence of life. The analogy of the world as a "garden" in (7d) symbolizes that humans must till and keep the "Earth" as they would a garden, which can be understood in relation to the Garden of Eden.

The word "creation" and figurative expressions such as "guardians and stewards of creation" and "Mother and common home" illustrate how the Catholic Church perceives humans, nature, and Earth. The Catholic Church perceives that humans, who are entrusted with the duty to protect nature and the Earth as our Mother and common home where humans, nature (creation), and life (humans and creation) created by God live, must protect the Earth and natural environment as they would till and keep a garden.

### 3.2.2. The poor and nature

In the statement for the Day of Prayer to protect the destroyed nature, the terms nature (Earth) and the poor are used in the same context as follows.

- (8) a. Facing the fact that the sufferings of the poor and the Earth are sufferings originating from the same source (2016)
- b. We must actively and specifically protect nature and advocate for the poor in our lives, and build networks of respect and brotherhood. (2017)
- c. In this world, where the cries of the Earth and the poor reach up to the heavens, we Christians who proclaim God's love and confess the faith in the Trinity must take the lead in caring for the poor and protecting creation. (2017)
- d. It is about first listening to the cries of the poor and the Earth and practicing justice and fairness of God responding to the cries. (2019)
- e. Caring for the created world and caring for the poor are the same. (2020)

The logic is that those who suffer first from environmental destruction are the poor, and just as it is the Church's duty to care for the poor, it is also the Church's duty to care for nature. This indicates that the Catholic Church also acknowledges the social inequality where the poor are the first to suffer from environmental destruction.<sup>25</sup> This logic is used to persuade that environmental movements are, in the end, intended for human society.

### 3.2.3. Sin and task

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<sup>24</sup> Ecological linguists claimed that likening nature to a woman is controversial because it compares women oppressed by men to Earth oppressed by humans (Kim et al., trans., 2018:159). Berman (2001:267) also stated that associating women and femininity with nature in environmental discourse perpetuates patriarchal traditions and domination. Despite these critical views, the metaphor "Earth as mother and sister" has long been used in Catholicism, which can also be interpreted as stemming from the male-centered religious nature.

<sup>25</sup> The view that Pope Francis's encyclical is influenced by liberation theology is found in various places (Jo 2022). A leading Brazilian liberation theologian Leonardo Boff stated, "The poor and the oppressed all belong to nature and they are under ecological attack". (Roccia 2021:337)



The Catholic Church worldwide is actively disseminating messages and urging actions regarding environmental issues, centered around the Pope, which is significantly influenced by the Church's perceptions toward environmental issues. As examined earlier, mankind as the creation of the Supreme Being is given the mission to manage other creation. Although humans have been entrusted by God to manage creation, they have also destroyed nature, resulting in cries of creation along with the poor (3c, 3d). The statements refer to the destruction of nature as "sin" and the protection of nature as "task" as a persuasion strategy to actively engage believers in environmental movements.

- (9) a. It is necessary to perceive that it is also a sin to destroy and neglect nature due to human selfishness and greed. (2018)
- b. It is necessary to emphasize that destructive actions harming creation, excessive consumption, gluttony, and indiscriminate energy abuse are sins that we must repent and confess. (2018)
- c. When we look upon the gracious and merciful God who awaits the return of his children, we can realize our sins committed against creation, the poor, and future generations. (2021)
- d. The created world pours out not sweet praise for God but painful cries and bitter shouts due to our sins. (2022)

The perception that destroying and neglecting nature is a sin makes care of creation the "core task" as well as "immediate task" of believers.

- (11) a. Please come to realize that care of creation is the core task of our believers and actively participate in environmental movements. (2016)
- b. Please deeply understand that care of creation is the core task of our believers on the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation and actively participate in environmental movements. (2018)
- c. Our efforts to find the actions we must take are not only the immediate task but also the core task of believers. (2021)

### 3.2.4. Use of 'we/us/our'

The pronoun "we/us/our" is frequently used in the statements on the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation (135 times).

- (12) a. Starting this year, we Catholic Church in Korea also decided to follow the will of Supreme Pontiff Francis and observe this day annually as a special day of prayer for the care of creation. (2016)
- b. We were invited to strictly examine the risks and challenges faced by "our common home" amidst the global environmental crisis. (2020)
- c. I hope that all our believers will take this opportunity to more diligently study and practice the encyclical *Laudato Si'*. (2016)
- d. Under the circumstances, the "Korean Green New Deal" policy proposed by our government on July 14<sup>th</sup> is raising significant concerns. (2020)
- e. Viruses that had been quietly hidden in the backwoods quickly approached the living paces of us humans, mediated by animals displaced from their habitats due to reckless development led by humans (2020)

- f. We must gather our strength to take a more determined step against the destruction of creation by conversing and uniting with everyone in our society. (2022)

Such use of “we/us/our” is one of the lexical strategies intended to maximize the persuasive function, which is one of the functions of a statement<sup>26</sup>, and ‘we/us/our’ is used even when criticizing government policies such as “our government”. This use of “we/us/our” can be interpreted as an influence of Catholic doctrine, which highlights the importance of all communities such as nature, humans, and society.

## 4. Structure and content of the statements

### 4.1. Structure of the statements<sup>27</sup>

The statements on the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation are generally composed of “background – explaining the situation – presenting solutions – making a request”. There are no salutations or greetings at the beginning unlike Catholic statements during the COVID-19 pandemic analyzed by Yang (2022). Instead, the statements start with a topic sentence or a single sentence that represents the title as shown in (1). While the statements during the COVID-19 pandemic focused on delivering the Church’s stance on the suspension of Mass to priests and believers, the statements examined in this study emphasize the importance of the care of creation and tend to be persuasive, urging participation in several solutions for environmental problems.

The first section of the statements, which provides the background, remains rather consistent from 2016 to 2023. In sum, it typically mentions Pope Francis’s announcement of the encyclical *Laudato Si’* in 2015 and the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, in which the Catholic Church in Korea will also participate.

An analysis of the content based on the structure of the statements from 2016 to 2023 clearly reveals that the causes of environmental destruction are more specified after the changes in the Earth’s environment, particularly with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the solutions for environmental problems also shifted towards more active measures; and this change in proactive attitudes leads to increased criticism of Korea’s environmental policies.

The content of the 2016 statement can be summarized as follows based on the structure.

#### (13) Background: Introduction of the encyclical and the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation

Explaining the situation: Ecological destruction, environmental movements by the Catholic Church in Korea

Presenting solutions: A gospel lifestyle (that finds pleasure in living a frugal life, viewing the poor and creation as our brothers and sisters)

Making a request: Prayer, participation in environmental movements

The content of the 2020 statement can be summarized as follows.

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<sup>26</sup> Yang & Kim (2021:110) noted that the pronoun “we/us/our” is used as a lexical strategy to strengthen a sense of solidarity.

<sup>27</sup> Analyses of the structure of statements include Sung (2003) and Yang (2022). Sung (2003) divided the structure of statements into “defining the situation – setting the direction – taking required actions”, while Yang (2022) divided the structure of government statements to the public into “greetings - body (explaining the situation – presenting solutions – making a request) - closing remarks”.

(14) Background: 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the encyclical

Explaining the situation: Pandemic, Korean Green New Deal policy

Presenting solutions: Fundamental transformation of social and economic structures in addition to lifestyle

Making a request: To change and reform based on strong solidarity

Comparing (13) and (14), there is a significant change in the content of solutions and requests. The perception that environmental issues cannot be resolved solely by individuals passively changing their lifestyles has led to the suggestion of fundamentally transforming “social and economic structures” that are the causes of environmental issues. Moreover, the requests to believers have shifted from encouragement of prayer and participation to emphasis on action “to change and reform”.

## 4.2. Changes in perception and response based on keywords

This analysis aims to examine the changes in perception and response to environmental issues with focus on the keywords used in the structure of the statements from 2016 to 2023. The following is a summary of the main keywords used in explaining the situation that follows the background in the statements.

<Table 1> Keywords used in explaining the situation

Year	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Keywords in explaining the situation	Destruction of the ecosystem	Global warming, extreme weather, consumption-oriented lifestyle	Destructive behavior, excessive consumption, gluttony, indiscriminate energy abuse	Indiscriminate production and consumption, greenhouse gas, climate refugees, climate crisis	COVID-19 pandemic, Korean new deal policy, carbon emissions	Greenhouse gas, climate crisis, pollutant emissions, household waste, nuclear waste, discharge of contaminated water, nuclear power plants	Climate disaster, climate crisis, energy policy focused on nuclear power generation, new airport construction, destructive regional development	Climate crisis, food crisis, climate refugees

The section on explaining the situation mostly consists of descriptions of the phenomena and causes of environmental destruction. The keywords used in the phenomena include expressions related to climate, such as “global warming, extreme weather, climate refugees, climate crisis, climate disaster”. Moreover, the keywords for the causes of environmental destruction had initially included “consumption-oriented lifestyle, excessive consumption, indiscriminate production and consumption”, whereas the keywords after 2020 that marks the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic mainly include those related to government policies as the major causes, such as “nuclear waste, contaminated water, nuclear power plants,

regional development”.

Regarding changes in the content of the statements, this study focuses on the 2019 statement. The 2019 statement includes not just “extreme weather” but also keywords related to environmental movements such as “climate crisis, climate refugees”. It also discusses the climate crisis as follows.

(15) The climate crisis is fundamentally an ethical and religious issue. The crisis caused by the greed and irresponsibility of our generations is intergenerational injustice that cannot be justified as it will be passed on directly to future generations. Moreover, the endless competition to take possession of the Earth’s resources with indiscriminate desire is interregional injustice that causes violent conflicts domestically and increases the risk of war between nations. (2019)

Perceiving the crisis as an ethical and religious issue aligns with the concept of “climate justice.”<sup>28</sup> The climate crisis represents “intergenerational injustice” and “interregional injustice”, which leads to ‘climate action’. The 2019 statement introduces the UN’s Climate Action for Peace and the actions to address the climate crisis in Korea, and urges participation in “climate action” as a solution to environmental problems. The fact that these climate actions had begun before the onset of COVID-19 proves that humans can predict their own future to some extent. With the onset of COVID-19 in 2020, the Catholic Church seems to have perceived that resolving environmental issues is a realistic challenge beyond merely improving individual lifestyles.

This can be confirmed by the keywords used in solutions to the problems and requests to believers as shown in <Table 2> below.

<Table 2> Keywords used in solutions and requests

Year	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Keywords in solutions	Gospel lifestyle	Nature conservation, advocacy for the poor, building a network	Virtues of ecological repentance and temperance	Climate action, resistance against the domination system	Fundamental transformation of social and economic structures	Carbon neutrality, energy saving, renewable energy production, reducing household waste, nuclear waste, etc.	Policy centered on renewable energy, socio-political influence	Resolution for change in mindset, lifestyle changes, and public policy changes
Keywords in making a request	Studying the encyclical, turning it into	Prayer, repentance, way of life	Repentance, resolution to change the lifestyle, active	Participation in various actions, prayer	Upholding justice and fairness, prayer	Prayer, action	Solidarity, resolute and decisive	Making a request: world leaders, our

<sup>28</sup> Kang (2022) cited Han et al. (2020) to point out that the emergence of climate justice discourse was directly influenced by the environmental justice theory in the U.S., based on events such as the UN Climate Change Conference, international climate justice movements, and academic research. The climate justice movements began in 2002 in Bali, Indonesia, and gained momentum particularly after Swedish environmental activist Greta Thunberg’s solitary protest in 2018.

	practice, repentance, change in lifestyle, prayer		participation in environmental movements				action, prayer	government, Christians, prayer
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The solutions suggested from 2016 to 2018 focus on individual efforts such as lifestyle changes, repentance, and temperance. However, since 2020 after the emergence of “climate action” in 2019, the statements provide social changes as solutions, such as transformation of social and economic structures, socio-political influence, and changes in public policies. In line with these changes, the keywords in making a request also shifted from repentance, temperance, and prayer to “action”. The 2023 statement even includes requests addressing not only believers but also world leaders and the Korean government, indicating that the Catholic Church in Korea has become an active voice on climate crisis and environmental issues.

## 5. Conclusion

This study analyzed the linguistic expressions and features of eight statements issued annually by the Catholic Church in Korea on the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation since Pope Francis’s announcement of the encyclical on ecology *Laudato Si’* in 2015, and examined the Catholic Church’s perceptions and responses to environmental issues through text structure analysis and keywords. The discussions can be summarized as follows.

First, the compositional feature of the statements show that all statements start with a single sentence that represents the theme. Moreover, the Pope’s encyclical is cited multiple times, so the vocabulary and figurative expressions used are identical in many statements.

Second, the statements regard nature and humans as creation made by God, and perceive that humans are entrusted by God to protect and manage creation, and thus care of creation (protection of nature) is a task that must be naturally performed by humans. Moreover, it is stated that the poor and creation must both be protected, and that the destruction of nature is considered a sin of humanity, and it is the task of believers to protect them.

Third, the structure of the statements is composed of background – explaining the situation – presenting solutions - making a request. It was revealed that from the initiation of climate action in 2019 and the onset of COVID-19 in 2020, solutions to environmental issues have shifted from individual solutions (such as repentance, temperance, lifestyle changes, etc.) to taking action by actively participating in government policies. This is the result of perceiving that environmental issues are social, political, and economic issues.

This study aimed to critically approach what kind of perception and effort are required for religions to realistically resolve environmental issues based on linguistic analysis. Religions that value the omniscience, omnipotence, and will of God are likely to end up in complacency, not fulfilling human responsibilities and duties. Not only the Catholic Church but also other religions such as Buddhism are raising voices about the importance of the environment and resisting to the climate crisis, and are taking specific actions. Broader research can be conducted to explore how religions can resolve the challenges faced by humanity, and what their goals and limitations might be.



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