



THE CHURCH-BASED ECOLOGICAL STRUGGLES AND THE BISHOPS' PASTORAL LETTERS ON ECOLOGY IN THE PHILIPPINES: ARE THEY INSPIRED BY VATICAN II?

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Vatican II has significantly influenced the Philippine theological scene. It is because the "mainstream theology," which has developed in the Philippine church since Vatican II, generally takes the magisterial documents as "source texts" (locus theologicus) and creatively applies them to the Philippine setting in the spirit of catholicity and contextualization. Without being anachronistic, it should be noted that today's ecological awareness is almost absent in the Vatican II documents, which give more focus on human beings rather than on creation in its full reality. Perhaps this is due to the fact that the ecological concerns were not yet considered an urgent global problem in the 1960s. When Vatican II ended in 1965, ecological consciousness and other new perspectives have not stopped emerging. Nevertheless, we acknowledge the significant influence of Vatican II on the Church-based ecological struggles that emerged in Mindanao in the 1980s. We can discern in the Filipino Catholic bishops' pastoral letters on ecology a consistent appropriation of Vatican II's ecological teaching on stewardship.

For many years the social justice agenda has tackled a range of issues in the Philippines. These have included advocacy of land reform, opposition to the growth of agri-business, the need to challenge militarization and expose exploitative practices at home and abroad. These have occupied the minds of 'church activists' to such an extent that they often downplayed or dismissed action to preserve the environment. It was easy to understand why this should be. Fighting poverty and militarization is such an all-consuming task that anything that might deflect attention was easily brushed aside. The 'activist' often insisted that environmental concerns could wait until the human structures were renewed first.¹

¹ Sean McDonagh, "Preface," in Karl Gaspar, *A People's Option: To Struggle for Creation* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1990), xv-xx, xviii.



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INTRODUCTION

There is no need to emphasize that ecological crisis is really an urgent global issue that challenges our theological reflection. It is obvious that we can no longer ignore the ecological issues after experiencing the tragedy wrought by tropical storm “Sendong” on December 16, 2011, which violently claimed more than 1,268 lives in Mindanao-Visayas and destroyed around PhP 1.7 billion in infrastructure and agricultural produce in Mindanao-Visayas.² We cannot also forget the tragic event on December 3, 2012 when a deadly typhoon “Pablo” violently hit 34 provinces of Regions IV-B, VI, VII, VIII, IX, X, XI, XII, and CARAGA which left more than a thousand people dead and displaced more than 6.2 million people. The estimated total cost of Pablo’s damages in infrastructure, agriculture, and private properties amounts to PhP 23 billion.³ These are just two cases from among the recent ecological calamities in the Philippines. In the face of the growing global climate change, we fear that more ecological calamities would happen again in the future if we fail to efficiently strengthen our adaptation and mitigation measures. This prognosis compels us to embrace an ecological perspective in doing theology.

It can be recalled that in 1987 some church-based ecological struggles emerged in the Diocese of *Malaybalay*. We honor the environmental activists for doing what ought to be done—to struggle for ecology. For a while, they have successfully caught the nation’s attention but, in the long run, their prophetic message was easily forgotten. The recent ecological tragedies have painfully awakened us from this slumber. It is hoped that our generation would continue the courage to struggle for the good of ecology.

² For a detailed report on Sendong damages, see Keith Bacongco, “The Path of Sendong,” in *Our Mindanao*, special edition, vol. II, issue 1 (February 2012), 17.

³ See Office of the President, “Situation report on the effects of typhoon Pablo (NDRRMC), December 17, 2012, as of 8 a.m.”; available from <http://www.gov.ph/2012/12/17/situation-report-on-the-effects-of-typhoon-pablo-ndrrmc-december-17-2012-as-of-8-a-m/> (accessed December 28, 2012).



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This paper revolves around the question of whether or not the church-based ecological struggles in the Philippines and our bishops' pastoral letters on ecology are inspired by the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II). To answer this, we need to review the climate of social engagement of the Philippine church before and after Vatican II. We also need to highlight the new Vatican II insights that we consider influential to the emergence of church-based ecological struggles and the "greening" of bishops' pastoral letters. Using the particular experience of the Diocese of *Malaybalay*, this paper attempts to show that the key theological insights of Vatican II have crucially shaped, either directly or indirectly, the minds and hearts of laity and clergy who opted to struggle for ecology. We end this paper by offering a critique on the local church magisterium's theology of stewardship which largely appropriated the Vatican II's social teaching on ecology.

THE CONTEXT OF THE CHURCH-BASED ECOLOGICAL STRUGGLE IN *BUKIDNON*⁴

The name "*Bukidnon*" is derived from a Cebuano-Visayan word "*bukid*," which literally means "mountain." Indeed, Bukidnon is a landlocked province located at the heart of north-central Mindanao. The province is a landscape of mountains and plateaus, where about 70% of its total land area has an altitude of 500 meters above sea level. Moreover, the entire province is ecologically significant as it also serves as "headwater province" in Mindanao.⁵ Study shows that, aside from its estimated 321 different tributaries that originate from different corners of the province. Bukidnon has also six major

⁴ This is a slightly different version of a text that appeared in Reynaldo Raluto, *Poverty and Ecology at the Crossroads: Towards an Ecological Theology of Liberation in the Philippine Context* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2014) [forthcoming].

⁵ See Antonio Sumbalan, "Conservation and Management of Watershed and Natural Resources: Issues in the Philippines, the Bukidnon Experience," in Ian Coxhead and Gladys Buenavista, eds., *Seeking Sustainability: Challenges of Agricultural Development and Environmental Management in a Philippine Watershed* (Los Baños, Laguna: PCARRD, 2001), 218-231.



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Mindanao rivers (the *Pulangui* River, *Tagoloan* River, Cagayan River, *Maridugao* River, Davao-*Salug* River, and Agusan-Cugman River) that flow towards the low-lying neighboring provinces.⁶ For this reason, about 94 per cent of *Bukidnon*'s total land area may technically be declared "watershed areas."⁷ These rivers, which proved to be a great blessing to Mindanao people, may eventually become a source of man-made ecological disasters if the watersheds are continually abused. Presumably, this prophetic consciousness and anticipation of the real ecological threat must have also moved the San Fernando people to struggle for ecology.

The Genesis of Environmental Activism in San Fernando(Bukidnon)

How did the church-based environmental activism emerge in San Fernando? Many factors have contributed to this historic phenomenon. In this account, let us highlight three important voices that attempt to tell the origins of the grassroots ecological struggle. Perhaps the most competent persons to be consulted on this matter are the Canadian Scarborough Missionaries, Frs. Pat Kelly and Charles Gervais, who had been assigned in San Fernando Parish from 1980 to the 1990s. At this juncture, it is instructive to listen to the testimony of Fr. Gervais:

By 1987, Fr. Kelly and I were getting more and more concerned [about the logging but] the people at that time did not seem to be too concerned. ... But by May of 1987, before Fr. Kelly and I [left] for our meeting in Canada, the Redemptorist Mission Team were coming in to help build the Basic Christian Community in the area. [Before we left] Fr. Kelly and I wrote a letter (about two or three

⁶ It should be noted that two of these *Bukidnon* watersheds have direct inter-regional implications: the Pulangui River, which becomes the Rio Grande of Mindanao, drains its water up to Region 11 and ARMM; the Salug River from San Fernando serves as aquifer for Davao City.

⁷ See Province of *Bukidnon*, "Compilation of Watershed Management Plans of 2 Cities and 20 Municipalities" (unpublished document of BENRO, Malaybalay City, 2003).



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thousand copies) ... to the parishioners and we challenged them. We said: ... 'we know that if we cut the forests there is erosion [in the hills] and floods in the lowland ... and yet we are doing nothing. The bureau of forestry is not doing anything, they are being bought off by the loggers, they are corrupt ... What does this have to do with you? Well, when the government is not doing anything to solve the problem, the problem goes back to the people—people power. ... If you don't do anything now, your children in the future will be your judges.'⁸

Apparently, this alarming message, together with their challenging homilies on ecology, must have served as an important spark of environmental activism that would grow into a diocese-wide advocacy.

Gervais' testimony significantly agrees with the claim of the members of the Iligan-based Redemptorist Mission Team (RMT) who arrived in March 1987 to do their mission, specifically to organize BCCs, in San Fernando.⁹ One of them was Brother Karl Gaspar, who published his insightful chronicles and reflections on the San Fernando Mission.¹⁰ The new situation challenged the RMT to be creative in incorporating ecology issues into the BCC program and seminars. As Gaspar modestly admitted, "We ourselves need to have more understanding of the world's eco-system and the seething environmental issues."¹¹ At that time, the pioneering works of Seán McDonagh and other Columban missionaries in Mindanao became a helpful resource in doing ecological theology in the Philippine context. The BCC prayer sessions that eventually deepened the message of Frs. Kelly and Gervais also proved to be powerful

⁸ This interview was taken from the documentary film, *So the Forest May Live: In Memory of Fr. Nerilito Sator [sic] and All Those Who Consecrated Their Lives in Defense of Creation*. [My transcription].

⁹ See Amado Picardal, "San Fernando Mission," in Ramon Fruto, Amado Picardal, and Karl Gaspar, *Being Sent: Redemptorist Missions in Mindanao, 1975-2005* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2006), 85-110.

¹⁰ Other researches on San Fernando case also include Jun Jabla, *Defending the Forest: A Case Study of San Fernando, Bukidnon, Philippines* (Davao City: Kinaiyahan Foundation, 1990); Ruth Esquillo, "Community Action on Forest Protection: The Case of San Fernando, Bukidnon," (Master's thesis, Faculty of Sociology, Ateneo de Manila University, 1992).

¹¹ Gaspar, *A People's Option*, 52.



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opportunities for them to discern the ecological problems from the perspective of Christian faith. In his account, Amado Picardal recalls:

The texts and themes for bible reflection and liturgies focused on the theology of creation, the care for the earth, and the need to preserve and protect the environment. We tried to make people aware that the droughts and floods that they had been experiencing were not punishments willed by God for their sins but rather the effect of the greed of the loggers who were denuding the forest.¹²

This conscientization on ecology was translated into the grassroots level with the help of the vigilant members of *Pagbugtan Sa Kamatuoran* (To Be Awakened to the Truth) or PSK, a parish-based organization of farmers. In fact, the homegrown ecological consciousness among the San Fernando peasants could be discerned in the deep insights that transpired during the BCC reflection-sharing: “Whenever I go out in the field, I hear God’s voice in the singing of the birds, the wind rustling through the trees, and the sound of the mountain streams. If there is no end to the logging, there will come a time when there will no longer be birds, trees, and streams in our barrio. When that day comes, I will no longer hear God’s voice.”¹³ This piece of reflection clearly reveals that the BCC in San Fernando was significantly infused by an ecological perspective.

The other equally competent person who could also tell us about the emergence of the church-based ecological struggle in San Fernando is Gaudencio Rosales, the Bishop of Malaybalay between 1984 and 1993. In addition to the foregoing account, Bishop Rosales argued that the church’s teaching on the Kingdom values enunciated in the Diocesan Vision-Mission pushed the San Fernando people to struggle for ecology. He recalled that, as early as 1985, the Diocese of Malaybalay had articulated its apostolic vision in the light of Vatican II that would direct and motivate “all the *Bukidnon* Church’s apostolates

¹² Picardal, “San Fernando Mission,” 90.

¹³ From Dodong, a peasant leader of San Fernando; quoted in Gaspar, *A People’s Option*, 26.



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(with their mission programs and tools).”¹⁴ Rosales claimed that the San Fernando people would not have reached this level of ecological commitment had they not imbibed first the apostolic vision of the Diocese, which proclaims the Kingdom values of justice, peace, and love. He insisted that the care for creation is integral to the apostolic vision of the Diocese, which sought to liberate the people “from the enslavement brought about by selfishness, vices and greed.”¹⁵ The diocesan apostolic vision, according to him, “included the responsibility to protect the earth’s natural resources”¹⁶ even if the word “ecology,” “environment,” or “creation,” could not be literally found in the current formulation of the diocesan vision. The apostolic vision of the local church of *Bukidnon* has instructed them to overcome evils in a Christian way, that is, to struggle for ecology in a nonviolent and peaceful way.¹⁷

In sum, it can be said that the emergence of a church-based ecological struggle in San Fernando was a confluence of the above-mentioned factors: the ecological concern of the Scarborough Missionaries, RMT’s ecological inputs during BCC seminars whose participants were mostly poor people with a homegrown ecological consciousness, and the inspiration from the diocesan vision-mission. It should be noted that this last factor is quite missing in the narrative of Gaspar and Picardal who recalled that the picketers were not conscious of the Vatican II ecological insights when they decided to stage their ecological protest. In fact, Gaspar did not even mention the existence of a diocesan vision in his account of the picket. In my judgment, however, each of these factors deserves to be recognized as having a particular contribution to the emergence of the church-based ecological struggle in San Fernando. Thus, it can safely be said that the ecological struggle that emerged in the Diocese of Malaybalay

¹⁴ Rosales, *Fr. Neri Satur and the Church He Died For*, 14. The apostolic vision of the Diocese of Malaybalay in 1985 states: “The total human and Christian development of the human person, through the building and strengthening of small ecclesial communities, alive in their faith in God, through an identification of Jesus Christ, Lord and Savior, lived in the concrete through a witness of truth, justice, peace and love.”

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 8-9, 109.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 15-16.



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was a product of the simultaneous movements from above and from below. The grassroots ecological awareness was strengthened and pushed by the leadership of their ecologically conscious pastors. The strategic combination of both complementary movements has led to a more effective ecological struggle.

A Narrative of the Grassroots Ecological Struggle

It is inspiring to know that a successful environmental activism humbly emerged among the grassroots of San Fernando (*Bukidnon*), one of the remote parishes of the Diocese of Malaybalay. Demographically, more than 90 percent of San Fernando people were peasants. In the 1980s, the indigenous people who belonged mostly to Manobo tribes comprised about 28.86 percent of its population. The remaining 71.14 percent of the people were migrants or settlers. In terms of religion, only about 47.42 percent of San Fernando people were Roman Catholics. The remaining 52.58 percent of its population were shared by some 20 various Protestant denominations and fundamentalist sects.¹⁸

A large part of the San Fernando municipality has been classified as watershed areas. As we have pointed out, the Salug River, which serves as major aquifer for Davao City, originates from the San Fernando Watershed. Unfortunately, the forest of this municipality has been systematically exploited. It has been reported that at least 8 of the 18 logging companies in Bukidnon had operated in San Fernando since the early 1970s.¹⁹ Because there was no reforestation taking place in the logged-over areas, only a few remaining trees were left by the 1980's onwards. This critical state of their environment activated their homegrown ecological consciousness.

Let us retell the story of the genesis of the San Fernando environmental activism. It has been argued that the "parliament of the streets," which was powerfully manifested during the EDSA

¹⁸ On this account, see Esquillo, "Community Action on Forest Protection," 30; cf. Gaspar, *A People's Option*, 26.

¹⁹ See Environmental Research Division (ERD), *Fasting for our Forest: A Study for Concerned Citizens of the Environment* (Quezon City: Manila Observatory, 1989), 5; see also Esquillo, "Community Action on Forest Protection," 30.



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People Power 1986, became a vogue only after Ninoy Aquino's assassination in 1983.²⁰ Accordingly, the positive effects of the EDSA experience must have inspired the San Fernando people and provided them with the climate of struggle in 1987. This perspective pushed many analysts to see this environmental activism as a continuation of the EDSA spirit.

The foregoing chronology of events seems to miss a very important detail in the San Fernando history of ecological struggle. It can be recalled that, as early as October 1981—which is about eight months after the revocation of martial law—the PSK had successfully staged a nonviolent resistance against the plan of the NAPOCOR to turn into a dam the *Pulangi* River for hydroelectric power.²¹ Were it not for their united action, this government project would have drowned a large portion of their town and displaced more than 35,000 of its local residents.²² This pre-EDSA memory of a successful protest movement would serve as an enduring inspiration for their subsequent ecological struggles.

When the local ecological issue resurfaced in 1987, the members of PSK played a very important role in facilitating the people's option. Their ecological conviction pushed them to send petition letters, first, to the local officers of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), then, to the DENR Secretary and finally to the President. They urgently asked the government to stop the operations of two logging companies in their area—the Caridad Cabahug-Almendras Logging Enterprises (CCALE) and El Labrador Lumber Company, Inc. (ELLCI). When the said government offices ignored and responded negatively to their petitions, they opted to consider “*metalegal*” means—picket!

Coincidentally, as the PSK was preparing for the picket, some 17 members of RMT from Iligan came to do their mission in San Fernando.²³ Their presence must have created an impact on the

²⁰ See Antonio Moreno, *Church, State, and Civil Society in Postauthoritarian Philippines: Narratives of Engaged Citizenship* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2006), 61.

²¹ Cited in Gaspar, *A People's Option*, 13.

²² See Jabla, *Defending the Forest*, 26-28.

²³ On this account, see Amado Picardal, “San Fernando Mission,” 85-110.



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people's preparations, but they had agreed "to take the pulse of the people's support for the picket" without co-opting the grassroots leadership."²⁴

The picket against CCALE started on July 20, 1987 along the main road of San Fernando's municipal hall, where a human barricade was prepared to block the logging trucks. About 200 people coming from about 20 *kapihyas* (chapels) participated in the picket. They were ready to risk their lives even to the point that "mothers put their babies on the road on which logging trucks were to pass."²⁵ On the 12th day of the picket, soldiers and policemen came to forcefully disperse the human barricade and violently beat them, including a pregnant parish secretary. This violent incident, however, failed to stop them. They just transferred to another picket site. This persistence moved the then DENR Secretary Fulgencio Factoran, Jr. to issue a Temporary Suspension Order to CCALE on August 16, 1987. This legal response from DENR, however, did not satisfy their demand.

Meanwhile, the newly formed *Nagpakabanang Katawhan sa San Fernando* (Concerned People of San Fernando) or NKSSF, together with the newly established BCC network in the parish, decided to stage a second picket in front of the DENR local office in Malaybalay on November 27, 1988.²⁶ It was reported that more than 300 sympathizers from the neighboring parishes, including concerned sectors, came to join the second picket.²⁷ They demanded for the cancellation of another logging company (ELLCI), which illegally cut trees and expanded its concession by covering even the critical watershed area. They also demanded for a total logging ban, including the closure of *all* lumberyards that processed the ill-gotten logs. They called for a clear DENR reforestation program, especially in the logged-over areas.²⁸

To make their picket more strategic and visible to the public, the protesters had to transfer their picket line to the national highway of

²⁴ Gaspar, *A People's Option*, 11.

²⁵ Gaspar, *A People's Option*, 20.

²⁶ Ibid., 34.

²⁷ "Anti-logging in Bukidnon," *NASSA News* (December 1988), 45.

²⁸ See Vicky Aquino, "Picket Against Logging Continues," in *Central Mindanao Newswatch Daily*, (first week December 1988), 1, 8.



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Sumpung, Malaybalay, where they formed a human barricade to stop *all* logging trucks, including trucks loaded with rattan. Expectedly, this angered the logging truck drivers whose trips had been paralyzed and, in effect, who had been deprived of their daily wages. The worsening situation forced the DENR Secretary to promise to come to Malaybalay for a dialogue. For the protesters, this was sufficient reason to lift the picket line. The dialogue happened on December 28, 1988. DENR Secretary Factoran did not grant all their demands, but some were happy that he at least cancelled the logging concession of CCALE and temporarily suspended the logging operation of ELLCI at the critical watershed area.²⁹ Meanwhile, a composite Task Force was also set up to monitor and investigate the logging anomalies in the province.

It was reported that the composite Task Force did not do their functions well.³⁰ This sad news pushed the Diocese of *Malaybalay* to reaffirm its original advocacy for a *total* logging ban in Bukidnon. Thus, on January 10, 1989, Bishop Rosales sent to the Senate a letter of appeal for the legislation of the total logging ban in the Province of Bukidnon. He also appealed to the 19 Mindanao-Sulu bishops and archbishops who subsequently endorsed his letter to the Senate on January 27, 1989. Unfortunately, there was still no legal response.

Rosales opted to raise the national ecological consciousness through prayer and fasting in Manila.³¹ This was led by a special group called “The Magnificent 13”—the thirteen NKSSF and BCC fasters from San Fernando—who accompanied Fr. Kelly to the DENR national office in Quezon City where they pitched tents between September 23 and October 4, 1989. Finally, the DENR Secretary and the “Magnificent 13” came up with a “Seven-Point Agreement” on October 4, 1989.³² The general implication of their agreement was to get the San Fernando people involved in the protection of their remaining forests. Six months after the signing

²⁹ See Gaspar, *A People's Option*, 144.

³⁰ See Karl Gaspar, Elpidio Lapad, Mary Ann Fuyentes, et al., *Behind the Growing Trees: An Evaluation of the San Fernando Integrated Forestation Project* (Davao City: Kinaiyahan Foundation, Inc., 1994), 2.

³¹ See Peter Walpole, “The DENR Fails to Do Homework,” in *TMC* (1 June 1989), 4-5.

³² See Moreno, *Church, State, and Civil Society in Postauthoritarian Philippines*, 162; cf. Esquillo, “Community Action on Forest Protection,” 38, 98.



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of the agreement, Secretary Factoran facilitated the reforestation project in the critical watershed areas of San Fernando's Pantaron Range through a three-year project called the San Fernando Integrated Forestation Project (SFIFP). To help the DENR implement this project, Factoran had to establish a partnership with the local residents through the *Kapunongan sa Pagpanalipod ug Pagpalambo Sa Kinaiyahan* (Organization for the Protection and Development of the Environment) or KPPSK, the newly registered name of NKSSF.³³ Given their united action to stop the logging operations, Factoran optimistically presumed that the people would maintain their activist stance even as they pressured and cooperated with the government to come up with a good reforestation project. In short, he decided to make use of their "people power" from the picket to the reforestation project.³⁴

A Clergy-led Ecological Struggle

While the KPPSK was busy implementing its reforestation project with the DENR, the Diocese of Malaybalay, under Bishop Rosales, fully assumed the ecological struggle by eagerly pushing for the fulfillment of the DENR's promise for a total log ban in Bukidnon. On March 14, 1990 Bishop Rosales sent to the then President Corazon Aquino a petition letter, expressing his worries about the rapacious logging operations in Bukidnon. He warned her that the people of Bukidnon were willing "to go to the streets soon...to stop those logging trucks from bringing down those logged timber."³⁵ A week later, he instructed the heads of the deaneries (groups of adjacent parishes) to prepare the whole diocese for a mass demonstration and mobilization, which would take place on May 10, 1990. The diocese was willing to utilize all peaceful means "to stop all these selfish destructions of the natural resources,"³⁶ if the DENR would not declare Bukidnon under logging moratorium.

³³ See Gaspar, Lapad, Fuertes, et al., *Behind the Growing Trees*, xv.

³⁴ See Howie Severino, "The Role of Local Stakeholders in Forest Protection," in Peter Utting, ed., *Forest Policy and Politics in the Philippines: The Dynamics of Participatory Conservation* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2000): 84-116.

³⁵ Rosales, *Fr. Neri Satur and the Church He Died For*, 60.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 131-132.



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Meanwhile, Rosales revealed that he was contemplating a legal case against DENR and the holders of timber license agreements (TLA) in Bukidnon for their mismanagement of the forest resources of the province.

Luckily, the planned mass mobilization was aborted as Secretary Factoran had issued a DENR Administrative Order (DAO), dated April 30, 1990—imposing a Logging Moratorium in the Province of Bukidnon. Later, Rosales also received DAO No. 42, Series of 1990, dated May 22, 1990, deputizing him as Forest Officer of the DENR with the following three police powers: (1) “to detect/investigate violation of forestry laws and regulations;” (2) “to arrest even without warrant any person who has committed, is committing or is about to commit in their presence any of the offenses defined” in forest law; and (3) “to seize/confiscate the tools and equipment used in committing the offense and the forest products cut, gathered or removed by the offenders.”³⁷

Bishop Rosales positively interpreted these DAOs as a serious government request for the local church’s assistance and an official recognition of its role in protecting the *Bukidnon* forests. Bishop Rosales, however, did not want to do this task by himself. Thus, he likewise asked the DENR to deputize as foresters all the 45 priests and deacons in the Diocese of *Malaybalay*. His request was officially granted on September 18, 1990 through DAO No. 80, Series of 1990. The forester-priests, in turn, willingly shared this task with the lay leaders down to the BCC level. In effect, these supposedly police powers of the DENR had become an extra-pastoral task of the whole Diocese of *Malaybalay*.

The clergy’s option to struggle for ecology angered those who were benefiting from the logging business. Thus, at the height of the clergy’s implementation of the logging moratorium, at least three of the *Bukidnon* diocesan priests³⁸ received death threats. This growing conflict exploded on October 14, 1991, when a group of three unidentified killers—presumably hired by some angry and offended

³⁷ Ibid., 63.

³⁸ The three priests who have received death threats are Rino Bargola, Danilo Paciente, and Nery Lito Satur.



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loggers—brutally ambushed Fr. Nery Lito Satur who was on his way home after saying Mass in a remote barrio of Magsal in Guinoyoran, Valencia.³⁹ Only 30 years old, Fr. Satur was just two years and four months a priest when he was martyred. Contrary to the presumption of Fr. Satur's killers, his martyrdom strengthened all the more the church's ecological commitment.

At this point, I think it is valid to ask whether or not we can rightly commend the clergy of the Diocese of *Malaybalay* for assuming the police power of the forester. Was this collective decision to lead the struggle for ecology still in line with the praxis of stewardship and the renewed vision of priesthood according to Vatican II? There are opposing opinions on this issue. Let us revisit and highlight two of them.

On the one hand, some people strongly disagree with the *Bukidnon* clergy's option to embrace the tasks of a forester. They argue that exercising police powers rightly belongs to the police and the military personnel. For them, the mixture of ecclesiastical and police powers in the priestly ministry would not go well in the long run. In fact, it has been claimed that the case of the *Bukidnon* clergy—that is, a priest with the police power of a forester—is “the first ever in the history of the church in the Philippines, and possibly in the whole world.”⁴⁰ This simply implies that their historic option to embrace the extra-pastoral work for ecological advocacy is an “anomaly” in the history of priestly ministry. In the *Bukidnon* context, this “controversial” option has exposed the clergy to a riskier situation. Traumatized by the violent death of Fr. Satur, Bishop Rosales humbly confessed that there were moments when he was visited by “the fearful thought as to whether he did the right thing in committing the diocese to the active prophetic care and protection of life and natural resources.”⁴¹

³⁹ See Rosales, *Fr. Neri Satur and the Church He Died For*, 91-92. The autopsy revealed that seven bullets of a shotgun wounded his bare chest and abdomen. His killers then finished him off by striking his skull with a rifle butt, which was strong enough to crush his head and spread his brain and blood all over the ambush site. On this account and other accounts of Filipino environmentalists being killed, see also HRWNRDC (Human Rights Watch and Natural Resources Defense Council), “Philippines: A Dangerous Environment for Activists,” in *Defending the Earth: Abuses of Human Rights and the Environment* (June 1, 1992), 87-88.

⁴⁰ Moreno, *Church, State, and Civil Society*, 168.

⁴¹ Rosales, *Fr. Neri Satur and the Church He Died For*, 93.



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On the other hand, the bestowal of “police powers” upon the clergy, according to Rosales, may be reconciled with the diocesan’s “desiderata” to rid the individual and community of all expressions of greed.”⁴² The *Bukidnon* clergy were increasingly getting suspicious of the law enforcers’ capacity to guard the remaining forests of *Bukidnon*, as they discovered that military personnel had staked a claim over many of the intercepted logs. Accepting the police tasks of the forester without neglecting the priestly ministry has been considered as the clergy’s “last resort” to save the remaining forests of Bukidnon. Francisco Claver, being a former Bishop of *Malaybalay*, could sympathize with the clergy’s option as he was convinced that “the uncontrolled destruction of trees and forests will bring on the destruction of the very things that sustain life, hence the destruction of people themselves.” Claver praised Rosales’ option to struggle for ecology that resulted in the martyrdom of Fr. Satur and even hoped “that more of us too will move beyond mere consciousness so that...we too will begin acting more positively for the life and salvation of all. ... Trees are worth dying for—and living for.”⁴³

Rosales, in the face of the church’s strong temptation to use violence to defend the life of the threatened priests, neither encouraged nor suggested the use of any violent means, either for self-defense or for preventing the cutting of trees. For him, the use of violence would betray and put to waste Fr. Satur’s legacy. He emphasized that “violence and killings might stop the cutting of trees for a short time; but the root cause of this issue of ecological destruction would not be solved.”⁴⁴ Thus, instead of encouraging revenge, Rosales reminded that, as Christians, “we are always ready to be harmed while we are giving Christ to the people. Victimhood is at the core of poverty which brings us to the very heart of his Kingdom—Love.”⁴⁵

⁴² Ibid., 63.

⁴³ Francisco Claver, “Foreword: Nery Satur,” in Gaudencio Rosales’s *Fr. Neri Satur and the Church He Died For* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1997), xii-xiii. [Emphasis in original]

⁴⁴ Rosales, *Fr. Neri Satur and the Church He Died For*, 16.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 104.



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VATICAN II INSIGHTS THAT INSPIRED THE CHURCH-BASED ECOLOGICAL STRUGGLES

The historic gathering of prelates from virtually every corner of the world at the Second Vatican Council (1963-1965) has been aptly described as an earth-shaking “event” in the history of the church. This Council, according to Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner (1904-84), was “the Church’s first official self-actualization *as* a world Church.”⁴⁶ The awareness of an emerging “world Church” would “avoid viewing Christianity as a European religion to be exported to the rest of the world along with European culture.”⁴⁷ In this context, let us single out some “revolutionary” ideas of Vatican II that might be considered influential for the emergence of ecological struggles in the Philippines and the existing Filipino church documents on ecology.

The Emergence of a Participatory Church

The new ecclesiological thinking brought about by the Second Vatican Council has made possible the emergence of a participatory church, both in its *ad intra* and *ad extra* dimensions. Presumably, the new ecclesiological climate since Vatican II has provided a space for inclusive participation among church members in the building of ecclesial and human communities. In this subsection, let us focus on the Vatican II insights that consequently promote a new way of conceiving communion and mission in the church.

The Vatican II event introduced a sort of “Copernican” shift in ecclesiological thinking: from a “hierarchological ecclesiology,”⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Karl Rahner, “Toward a Fundamental Theological Interpretation of Vatican II,” *Theological Studies* 40 (1979): 717.

⁴⁷ David Hollenbach, “Commentary on *Gaudium et Spes* (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World),” in Kenneth Himes, ed., *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries and Interpretations* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2005): 266-291, 285.

⁴⁸ On this account, see Yves Congar, *Ministères et communion ecclésiale* (Paris: Cerf, 1971), 10. Congar explained that “hierarchological ecclesiology” presents the church “as an organized society, constituted by the exercise of those powers invested in the Pope, the bishops, the priests.” Quoted in Bruno Forte, *The Church: Icon of the Trinity, An Introduction to Ecclesiology*, trans. C.G. Arevalo, E.P. Hontiveros, and F. Gustilo (Makati: St. Paul Publications, 1990), 44.



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which tends to reduce the church mainly to the members of the hierarchy, to a “total ecclesiology,” which emphasizes the truth that all baptized Christians are equally members of the “people of God.”⁴⁹ This Copernican shift is clearly symbolized in the arrangement of chapters of *Lumen Gentium*: the discussion on “The People of God” (chapter two) precedes the discussion on “The Church is Hierarchical” (chapter three).⁵⁰ This implies that before talking about what *separates* the members of the church community (i.e., ordination) we have to talk first about what *unites* us or what is in “common” among us (i.e., common baptism). Thus, in Vatican II, our common identity as Christians has become the new center of gravity. If the implication of this ecclesiological view is pushed further, what would eventually emerge is a church that promotes equality and “collegiality” among members: a church that enhances the “horizontal” dimension of ecclesial relationality.

To see the newness of Vatican II’s ecclesiology, let us review the two specific purposes of the council fathers for choosing the image of “people of God” (*Populus Dei*), which is a powerful biblical image.⁵¹ In one of his class lectures with us at the Loyola School of Theology in 1999, Luis Antonio Tagle explained that one specific purpose for this choice is to balance the dominant ecclesiology that we inherited from the Council of Trent: the kind of ecclesiology that pictures the church like a divided community of learners and teachers, of passive and active agents. Indeed, this pre-Vatican II ecclesiology tends to falsely identify the church mainly with the members of the hierarchy. The other specific purpose, according to Tagle, is to stress the inclusivity of the church. The members of “the people of God,” according to *Lumen Gentium*, constitutes all the baptized Christians—including the baptized “non-Catholic” Christians—who “in some real way joined to us in the Holy Spirit.”⁵²

⁴⁹ On this account, see Forte, *The Church: Icon of the Trinity*, 43-44.

⁵⁰ For the history of the priority of baptism, see Richard Gaillardetz, *The Church in the Making: Lumen Gentium, Christus Dominus, and Orientalium Ecclesiarum* (New York: Paulist Press, 2006), 8-27.

⁵¹ See *Exodus* 6:6; *Ezekiel* 11:19-20; *1 Peter* 2:9-10; *Galatians* 6:6.

⁵² See *Lumen Gentium* no. 15, in Austin Flannery, ed. *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, Volume 1 (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988).



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In a broader sense, the biblical image of “people of God” embraces all the people who are gathered together as community (*ekklesia*) by God’s gracious election and mercy. In any case, no church members should dare to say that they are either above or outside the fold of the people of God.

It should be emphasized that Vatican II did not at all eliminate distinction in the ecclesial community. But distinction should not be conceived any more in terms of “hierarchy/laity” and “religious/non-religious” polarities. Sad to say, however, Vatican II’s prevailing understanding of “laity” has not yet fully overcome the limitations of these polarities. *Lumen Gentium*, for instance, still describes “laity” as referring to “all the faithful except those in Holy Orders and those who belong to a religious state approved by the Church.”⁵³ It maintains that “a secular quality is proper and special to laypeople.”⁵⁴ In other words, a lay person refers to the baptized Christian who is *neither* a cleric *nor* a religious. Of course, this understanding of lay identity is much better than the pre-Vatican II’s view that falsely considers lay people as purely passive or simply sharers of the ministry of the clergy.⁵⁵ Since the understanding of laity in *Lumen Gentium* still builds on the problematic distinction between the temporal and spiritual domains, there is a need to conceive distinction among church members in a new way which would, at the same time, duly recognize the unique identity of the lay people.

Aware of this problematic, Bruno Forte offers a creative completion of Vatican II’s ecclesiological renewal of the laity. He retrieved the pneumatological dimension of the church which, for him, is the privileged space “where the Spirit is seen as acting through the entire community.”⁵⁶ In line with the Vatican II’s renewed understanding of sacraments, he affirmed that it is the Holy Spirit, received through the sacrament of baptism, which bestows charisms upon the baptized for the building up of the Church and in the service of its mission. He defined “ministry” as “a charism in state

⁵³ Ibid., 31.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Pope Pius X, who was pope between 1903 and 1914, wrote: “As far as the multitude is concerned, its only right is to let itself be led by its pastors, in all docility, to follow them.” Quoted in Forte, *The Church: Icon of the Trinity*, 43.

⁵⁶ Forte, *The Church: Icon of the Trinity*, 55.





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of service.”⁵⁷ But, although our diversity is deeply rooted in our charisms and the different types of ministries that we render within the Christian community, Forte warned us not to forget that this diversity also springs from communion. He pointed out that what Vatican II envisions is that all Christians are equally called to participate in various ministries of the church according to their charism. Eventually, when all the members of the church are given the opportunity to render their appropriate ministries, the church would truly become a ministerial community.

To depart from the pre-Vatican II ecclesiology, which emphasizes ordination to distinguish the clergy from the laity, Forte proposed that our different charisms and ministries would serve as the point of distinction among members in the church. In other words, the distinction among the members of the community is not whether one is a lay person or a cleric but is determined by unique personal charism and ministry in the church received during baptism. This led Forte to set in place a new doublet: “community/charisms-and-ministries.”⁵⁸ In his view, the particular task of ministerial priesthood, as presiders of the Christian community, is to awaken, to discern, and to coordinate the different charisms and ministries that the Spirit raises up in the church. Forte emphasizes that “The ordained ministry is a ministry of synthesis” rather than “the synthesis of all ministries (which would be clericalism).”⁵⁹ This emphasis simply affirms that no charism is useless in the church, thereby promoting a participatory church.

The Preferential Option for the Poor

The church consistently teaches its stance to be on the side of the poor. Aware of this fundamental Christian teaching, Pope John XXIII, the convener of the Second Vatican Council, expressed his vision of an inclusive church that would identify itself with the poor. In his radio message on September 11, 1962, he announced that “the Church presents itself as it is and wishes to be, as the Church of

⁵⁷ Ibid., 52.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 63.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 51.



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all, and particularly as the Church of the poor.”⁶⁰ This papal message was very much in the air and caught the attention of the council delegates. It was reported that the Cardinal of Bologna, Giacomo Lercaro (1891-1976), intervened at the 35th General Congregation on December 6, 1962 and made a daring request to make the “church of the poor” the fundamental topic of the Council.⁶¹ Apparently, this effort failed since *de facto* there is neither a document nor a separate section duly devoted to “church of the Poor” but it must be affirmed that “the concern for the poor is not totally absent”⁶² in the final document.

It is clear that the phrase “Preferential Option for the Poor,” which has become a landmark of liberation theology, explicitly emerged and became popular in Latin America only during the Medellín conference in 1968. It can be argued, however, that its seeds could be discerned in the Vatican II documents.

Let us cite four important passages from Vatican II documents that would support this claim. First, in the very opening line of *Gaudium et Spes*, the Council fathers beautifully expressed that

The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men
[and women] of our time, especially of those who are
poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief
and anguish of the followers of Christ as well.⁶³

Second, *Lumen Gentium* offers an excellent summary of the christological basis of the Church’s commitment to the poor:

Just as Christ himself carried out the work of
redemption in poverty and oppression, so the Church is
called to follow the same path if she is to communicate
the fruits of salvation to men [and women].⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Pope John XXIII, “Radio Message of September 11, 1962,” *The Pope Speaks* 8 (Spring 1963), 396.

⁶¹ On this account, see Marie-Dominique Chenu, “Vatican II and the Church of the Poor,” *Concilium* 104 (1977): 56-61.

⁶² Mathijs Lamberigts, “*Gaudium et Spes*: A Council in Dialogue with the World,” in Johan Verstraeten, ed., *Scrutinizing the Signs of the Times in the Light of the Gospel* (Leuven: Peeters, 2007): 17-40, 36.

⁶³ *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 1.

⁶⁴ *Lumen Gentium*, no. 8.



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Third, the Council fathers were aware of the fact that “so many people are suffering from want.” In response, “the Council asks individuals and governments” to feed the hungry people and “urges them according to their ability to share and dispose aid which will enable them to help and develop themselves.”⁶⁵

And fourth, the Council fathers expressed the willingness of the church to “give up the exercise of certain legitimate rights whenever it becomes clear that their use will compromise the sincerity of its witness, or whenever new circumstances call for a revised approach.”⁶⁶

Significantly, as the post-Vatican II magisterium became increasingly conscious of this Christian option for the poor, John Paul II officially declared: “the Church makes her own the ‘preferential option for the poor,’” which “initially emerged during the Second Vatican Council” but “stressed with particular strength by the episcopates of Latin America.”⁶⁷

The Theology of Liberation

Liberation theology is a post-Vatican II movement that emerged in the Third World context. However, it can be argued that Vatican II has also served as a “seedbed” of liberation theology. This claim would correct the presumption that Marxist ideology and utopia was the inspiration for the emergence of liberation theology’s option for the poor.⁶⁸ Without denying that Marxism could also serve as socio-analytic mediation in understanding capitalist oppression, we strongly maintain that the Christian awareness of oppression and injustices primarily serves as the initial impulse and enduring inspiration of the Church’s option for the poor.

⁶⁵ *Gaudium et Spes* no. 69.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 76.

⁶⁷ John Paul II, “Option for the Poor: Address to the Members of the Pontifical Household and the Roman Curia, December 21, 1984,” in *L'Osservatore Romano* (January 21, 1985), 7-8. This is based on his speech “To Cardinals, Members of the Pontifical Household and the Roman Curia” on 21 December 1984. Unfortunately, only the Italian version is available from http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/1984/december/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19841221_cardinali-curia-romana_it.html (Accessed December 15, 2009).

⁶⁸ On this issue, see Arthur McGovern, *Liberation Theology and Its Critics: Toward an Assessment* (New York: Orbis Books, 1989), 230.



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It should be maintained that the Church's dialogue with the modern world is an important factor for the emergence of liberation theology. It is evident that Vatican II critically appropriates the modern view of human person as an active "subject," a person who is not just rational and self-aware of his individuality but also as a relational person who assumes social freedom and responsibility for the lives of others in the community. In fact, Vatican II speaks of the birth of a "new humanism in which man is defined first of all by his responsibility toward his brothers and toward history."⁶⁹ Furthermore, the Council fathers creatively appropriated the modern notion of human persons "who are truly new and artisans of a really new humanity"⁷⁰ and of human societies, which "thirst for a full and free life worthy of men—one in which they can be subject to their own welfare all that the modern world can offer them so abundantly."⁷¹ When third world theologians creatively applied these modern anthropological insights to their particular context of poverty and oppression in the light of Christian faith and praxis, they eventually produced a theology of liberation.

We may ask whether or not the foregoing seminal Vatican II insights are enough to develop an adequate theology of liberation. To answer this question, it is helpful to highlight two interrelated *lacunae* of Vatican II's treatment of poverty. One is its lack of awareness of the third world context. It has been reported that many third world delegates of the Council were not satisfied with its prevailing perspective on poverty. As Indian council representative Cardinal Duraismy Simon Lourdusamy has critically remarked, the Third World problems had not been given sufficient attention during the Council deliberations. The Council, according to him, mainly focused on the human condition of the first world countries "that already enjoy the benefits of economic and technical progress and are excessively influenced by the effects of 'socialization,' 'industrialization,' and 'urbanization.'"⁷² The other lacuna has

⁶⁹ *Gaudium et Spes* no. 55.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 30.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, no. 9.

⁷² On this excerpt, see *Acta Synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Vaticani II*, IV/2 (Typis Polyglotis Vaticanis, 1970-2000), 380-81; as cited in Gilles Routhier, "Finishing the Work Begun: The Trying Experience of the Fourth Period," in



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something to do with Vatican II's lack of a Third World perspective on poverty. Cardinal Laurean Rugambwa, a council delegate from Africa, sadly testified that during the council deliberation the problems of the poor countries were "sometimes examined with Western eyes..."⁷³ In line with this critical assessment, a Latin American theologian also sadly remarked that Vatican II "was still very European in regard to Third World concerns."⁷⁴ In the judgment of one commentator, all these critical voices imply that Vatican II lacks "a fair analysis of the problems of this world" which would have improved its theological perspective on poverty.⁷⁵

Nevertheless, despite these inadequacies, there is no doubt that Vatican II has greatly inspired many poor countries to creatively apply the liberative insights to their particular contexts and perspectives. In their testimony, Latin American theologians Leonardo and Clodovis Boff have credited Vatican II for the birth of liberation theology in their continent:

The first theological reflections that were to lead to liberation theology had their origins in a context of dialogue between a church and society in ferment, between Christian faith and the longings for transformation and liberation arising from the people. The Second Vatican Council produces a theological atmosphere characterized by great freedom and creativity. This gave Latin American theologians the courage to think for themselves about pastoral problems affecting their countries.⁷⁶

Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph Komonchak, eds., *History of Vatican II. 5: The Council and the Transition: The Fourth Period and the End of the Council September 1965 - December 1965*. (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 122-177, 135.

⁷³ Cited in Routhier, "Finishing the Work Begun," 135.

⁷⁴ Segundo Galilea, "Latin America in the Medellín and Puebla Conferences: An Example of Selective and Creative Reception of Vatican II," in Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph Komonchak, eds., *The Reception of Vatican II* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1987), 59-73, 62.

⁷⁵ Lambergts, "*Gaudium et Spes*: A Council in Dialogue with the World," 30.

⁷⁶ Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, translated from Portuguese by Paul Burns (New York: Orbis Books, 1987), 68-69.



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Subsequently, Latin American liberation theologians, in critical collaboration with the *Consejo Episcopal Latino Americano* (CELAM), “pledged themselves to the search for the meaning of the Christian message in the context of poverty and oppression” in their local church.⁷⁷

The Ecological Teaching in Gaudium et Spes⁷⁸

The Catholic Social Teaching (CST) is a product of the Church’s ongoing inquiry on the impact of the Gospel on social conditions. To perpetuate this prophetic social tradition, the different popes, starting from Pope Leo XIII in 1891 to date, have issued social encyclicals and exhortations that progressively uphold the fundamental principles of human dignity and the integrity of creation. Along this line, Vatican II’s Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, which is also called *Gaudium et Spes*, does not only try to bring the Catholic Church into the modern world but also attempts to articulate human beings’ relationship with the created world. As one commentator keenly observed, *Gaudium et Spes* has contributed, although indirectly, to solid social teaching “concerning care for the environment that has consistently grown over the years.”⁷⁹ Let us highlight some of its important ecological teaching.

Building on the previous social teaching on ecology, *Gaudium et Spes* reaffirms the fact of “the increase in world population” but adamantly refuses to consider it as causing environmental problems. Like the previous social teaching, *Gaudium et Spes* is strongly critical towards those who tend to use ecological problems as a reason to necessarily curb the growing global population. For this reason, the

⁷⁷ Peadar Kirby, *Lessons in Liberation* (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1981), 61; cf. Leonardo and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, 69.

⁷⁸ This subsection is a slightly revised text of a portion of my article “The Catholic Social Teaching on Stewardship: Respect for Human Dignity and the Integrity of Creation” submitted to the module writers of the Catholic Social Teachings for Grassroots, a project of the St. Vincent School of Theology (Quezon City), in 2013.

⁷⁹ Marjorie Keenan, *From Stockholm to Johannesburg: An Historical Overview of the Concern of the Holy See for the Environment, 1972-2002*. (Vatican City: Vatican Press, 2002), 9.





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magisterium decidedly considered as “contrary to the moral law”⁸⁰ the government’s political intervention to radically reduce the population. Moreover, this document reaffirms the previous magisterial teaching on intergenerational responsibility for creation by calling the people to establish “a right balance between the needs of present-day consumption ... and the demands of investing for the generation to come.”⁸¹ As one may notice, the magisterium tends to reaffirm this view on ecological sustainability in its post-conciliar Catholic social teaching.

Furthermore, *Gaudium et Spes* reiterates more forcefully than the previous social teaching the anthropocentric perspective on stewardship, which is grounded on two interrelated claims. On one hand, this document controversially claims that “according to the almost unanimous opinion of believers and unbelievers alike, all things on earth should be related to man as their *center and crown*.”⁸² On the other hand, it claims that this anthropocentric perspective is based on the biblical teaching that the human being “was created ‘to the image of God.’”⁸³ It asserts that, being created in God’s image, human beings “received a mandate to subject to [themselves] the earth and all it contains.”⁸⁴ Furthermore, it emphasizes that human beings alone were “appointed by [God] as *master* of all earthly creatures that [they] might subdue them and use them to God’s glory.”⁸⁵ It positively exalts the “dignity proper to the human person, since he [or she] stands above all things”⁸⁶ by virtue of his or her being endowed with a human mind. Due to their rational capacity, according to this document, human beings spontaneously assume that they have a vocation and a divine mandate to “perfect creation and develop” it according to the divine plan.⁸⁷ In sum, this document subscribes to what we might call a “dominion” theology.

⁸⁰ Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 87; cf. John XXIII, *Mater et magistra: Encyclical on Christianity and Social Progress* (May 15, 1961), no. 123.

⁸¹ Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 70; cf. John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra*, no. 79.

⁸² Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 12 [emphases mine]. For a critique of this assumption, see McDonagh, *The Greening of the Church*, 176.

⁸³ Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 12; cf. *Genesis* 1:26-27

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 34.

⁸⁵ Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 12. [Emphasis mine].

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 26.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 57.



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Lastly, it is not quite accurate to say that the Council fathers' ecological concerns in *Gaudium et Spes* were purely a follow-up on what the magisterium's previous social teaching had already taught. There is actually something new in Vatican II's ecological teaching that must be magnified: the holistic relational perspective on sin. It can be recalled that the pre-Vatican II understanding of sin tends to unduly neglect the horizontal dimension or the sin against nonhuman creatures. To overcome this lacuna, *Gaudium et Spes* teaches that by "refusing to acknowledge God as his beginning, man has disrupted also his proper relationship to his own ultimate goal as well as his whole relationship toward himself and others and *all created things*."⁸⁸ Unfortunately, this seminal horizontal dimension of sin that flows out of the relational nature of human beings has not been sufficiently developed in the overall ecological teaching of Vatican II, presumably due to the magisterium's largely anthropocentric perspective on creation. Nevertheless, this initial affirmation would resurface in the post-Vatican II's Catholic ecological teaching.



THE FILIPINO APPROPRIATION OF THE VATICAN II INSIGHTS FOR ECOLOGICAL STRUGGLE



There is no doubt that Vatican II's ideas have significantly influenced the Philippine church and social movements. The members of the Philippine hierarchy, especially those who work with "mainstream theologians," generally take the magisterium documents as "source text" (*locus theologicus*) for theologizing. In defense of this methodology, Jesuit Filipino theologian Catalino Arévalo explained that this way of theologizing does not mean "a mere parroting of magisterium texts" but "a considerably creative and forward-looking use" of the magisterium documents in the Philippine context.⁸⁹ For him, the use of magisterium texts for theological reflection is "a source of greater assurance in discernment and decision."⁹⁰ He

⁸⁸ Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 13. [Emphases mine].

⁸⁹ Catalino Arévalo, "Filipino Theology," in Karl Müller, Theo Sundermeir, Stephen Bevans, et al., eds. *Dictionary of Mission: Theology, History, Perspectives*. New York: Orbis Books, 1997, 161-167, 163-164.

⁹⁰ Catalino Arévalo, "After Vatican II: Theological Reflection in the Church in the Philippines 1965-1987," *Landas* 2 (1988): 11-24, 16.





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affirms that magisterium texts “have given the overall direction to the life and work of the church in those areas of its mission which might be seen as new or as responses to new challenges” in the Philippines and in Asia.⁹¹

“The Church Goes to the Barrio”

We described in the previous section that the Second Vatican Council is an important “event,” well-known for its strong pastoral and social orientation. Without this event, many church activities after 1965 could not be adequately explained. For instance, the emergence of a church that allows the laity to actively participate in the building of the church could not be possible without the creative “interruption” of the Vatican II event. It was in the spirit of Vatican II that the Philippine church decided to “go to the barrios” in 1967. This revolutionary pastoral practice of going to the frontiers was largely a fruit of the Vatican II-inspired National Rural Congress (NRC), sponsored by the Philippine hierarchy, “to awaken everyone in the country to the crying needs of the rural population ... so that we may come to concerted action to alleviate these needs and to arrive at immediate solutions.”⁹² The NRC was held on February 4-11, 1967, in three places: Manila, Los Baños, and Cagayan de Oro.⁹³ The participants—principally composed of bishops, priests, and religious and other delegates from the academe, government agencies and farmers’ organization—came together to reflect on the theme: “Man and Land in the Philippines in the Light of Vatican II.” They chose the slogan: “The Church Goes to the Barrio,”⁹⁴ which became an imperative for the church to reach out to the poor who reside in the rural areas.

⁹¹ Arévalo, “Filipino Theology,” 163-164.

⁹² Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines, *Joint Pastoral Letter of the Philippine Hierarchy on Social Action and Rural Development* (January 8, 1967); available from: <http://cbcponline.net/v2/?p=154> (accessed September 14, 2009).

⁹³ Cited in Antonio Ledesma, “From National Rural Congress – 1 to NCR-2: Re-viewing the Factors of Rural Poverty and Development Process,” in *Dialogue with the Rural Poor: Book of Proceedings*, 2nd National Rural Congress, August 2007 – July 2008 (Manila: Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines, 2009), 8-14, 8.

⁹⁴ Cited in Ledesma, “From National Rural Congress – 1 to NCR-2,” 8.



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The immediate outcome of the NRC was very positive. Although Wilfredo Fabros criticized it as employing a “top to the bottom” approach to development, his assessment deserves a full quotation:

The Rural Congress showed that the Philippine hierarchy had become aware of the grave socioeconomic problems facing the country and of its responsibility to contribute toward their solution. It gave an official public recognition of the social consciousness that socially minded Catholics had long for been trying to communicate to the entire local Church. It also gave the same recognition to community development activities as a form of socioeconomic involvement proper to both the clergy and laity.⁹⁵

There is no doubt that this Vatican II-inspired Congress was instrumental for the strengthening of social apostolates in many dioceses all over the country.

Jesuit anthropologist Francisco Claver (1929-2010), Bishop emeritus of Malaybalay, took seriously NRC’s slogan to “go to the barrios.” He understood this as a church’s attempt to go beyond the town-centered approach which unduly neglected the struggles of the rural poor. In his words, “the *go-to-the-barrios* decision in 1967 was in effect the church’s ‘preferential option for the poor’” in the Philippine context. For him, this means that “the poor are now to participate fully in the life of the Church.”⁹⁶ He considered this pastoral praxis as the core *ethos* of the Vatican II ecclesiology.

Furthermore, Claver claims that the liberative strategy to “go to the barrios” has not only decentralized church presence and activity but also served as impetus for the irruption of Basic Christian Communities in rural areas, which, in the Philippine context, are concrete manifestations of a renewed and participatory church that embraces Vatican II’s “germinal ideas” of dialogue, participation,

⁹⁵ Fabros, *The Church and Its Social Involvement in the Philippines*, 99, 100.

⁹⁶ Francisco Claver, “The History of BCCs: The Philippines,” in Gabino Mendoza, ed. *Church of the People: Basic Christian Communities*, Bishops’-Businessmen’s Conference for Human Development (Makati: St. Paul Publications, 1988), 18-27, 23.





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and co-responsibility. He assumes that “any church community that tried making itself into a dialogic, participative, and co-responsible community was quite automatically forming itself into a Basic Ecclesial Community.”⁹⁷ Claver tried to prove this fundamental *ethos* throughout his thirty-five years of “episcopating.” He summed up his fundamental conviction in these words:

Broad change in people as in societies will not take place effectively unless the people themselves participate freely and consciously in the process from beginning to end, setting ends, deciding on means, planning actions, assigning tasks, doing those tasks, evaluating them when done, trying new approaches, and so forth.⁹⁸

In his years of “episcopating” (1969-1984) in the Diocese of Malaybalay, Claver instituted the basic mechanisms to put into practice the Vatican II’s *ethos* of a participatory church: regular clergy meeting, annual general meeting of *Alagads* (lay ministers), regular priests and religious meeting; and annual Diocesan General Assembly of priests, religious, and lay leaders.⁹⁹ These ecclesial activities serve as creative venues for forum of ideas and as spaces for developing a sense of communion. As a priest of the Diocese of Malaybalay, I can attest to the fact that these mechanisms persist today, although in a more modified manner.

Claver interpreted the “go to the barrio” slogan as a call for the church to reach out to the marginalized indigenous peoples. He

⁹⁷ Francisco Claver, *The Making of a Local Church* (Quezon City: Claretian Publication and Jesuit Communications, 2009), 107-08. Quite different from other theories of the genesis of Filipino BECs, Claver proposed that the Vatican II germinal ideas are the “immediate cause” and the “identical source” of both Latin American and Filipino BCCs—and not so much the direct contact between them. cf. Fe Mendoza, *Basic Ecclesial Communities: Context and Foundations of Formation* (Mandaue City: Mandaue Printshop Corporation, 2005), 49; cf. also Gaspar, Karl. “Localization Resisting Globalization: Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) in the Postmodern Era,” *East Asian Pastoral Review* 38 (2001): 316-350, 334.

⁹⁸ Claver, *The Making of a Local Church*, 1, 5-6. [Italics in original]; cf. Ward Hunt Goodenough, *Cooperation in Change: Anthropological Approach to Community Development* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1963), 5-6.

⁹⁹ See Francisco Claver, “Pastoral Administrative and Organization of the Prelature,” in *Quinquennial Report: Prelature of Malaybalay* (Malaybalay City: Prelature of Malaybalay, 1981), 5-7.



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knew very well that these people unduly suffer from various forms of marginalization. In Mindanao, their present marginalization was the immediate result of the vast migration which pushed them farther into the mountains and jungles for the sake of saving indigenous communities. Claver, who was himself a native of Bontoc, argued that Christians could learn a lot from the indigenous values of peace and sense of harmony with nature. In his words, “It is their respect for and sensitivity towards nature, their impelling concern to be in harmony with it—genuine ecological values that are largely missing in modern people’s control-of-nature ideology—that we should look into more carefully and learn from.”¹⁰⁰ He fully believed that “a return to a culture of respect for nature” is what we badly need today.

The CBCP’s Reception of Vatican II’s Culture of Ecological Teachings

There is an explicit commitment to ecology that runs through the pastoral teachings of the Filipino local church magisterium. We need to clarify, however, whether or not this commitment to ecology was influenced by Vatican II’s teaching. At the onset, it must be said that this magisterial document could not offer adequate answers to many urgent and complex ecological questions today. In fact, one may have the impression that Vatican II *seems* to be absent in our local magisterium documents on ecology. There are no Vatican II documents that could be found in the footnotes and citations of our local magisterium documents on ecology.

For instance, Vatican II was never cited in the first CBCP pastoral letter on ecology, *What is Happening to Our Beautiful Land?* Ironically, even the section on the “Integrity of Creation”¹⁰¹ in the *Acts and Decrees of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines 1991* (PCP II), which officially articulates the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, has not cited any of the Vatican II documents. The same case may

¹⁰⁰ Claver, “The Social Marginalization of Tribal Peoples and Their Contribution to Ecological Health,” 36.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP II), *Acts and Decrees of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines 1991* (Manila: Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines, 1992), nos. 321-324.



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be observed in *A Statement of Concern on the Mining Act of 1995*,¹⁰² a document which expresses the Church's concern for the ecological effects of mining operation both on the environment and on the people, particularly on indigenous communities and their ancestral domains. Moreover, the CBCP 2000 pastoral letter, *Water is Life*,¹⁰³ which addresses the critical environmental problem and the urgency to protect the remaining watersheds, does not also contain any references or citations from Vatican II documents. Lastly, Vatican II documents are also absent in the citations and footnotes of the pastoral letter, *Upholding the Sanctity of Life*,¹⁰⁴ a CBCP document which does not only reaffirm the magisterium's position on irresponsible mining and illegal logging operations but also expands the church's ecological concerns on the phenomenon of global warming and climate change.

Given the foregoing observations, they seem to imply, at least, two things: either the local magisterium is not aware of the existing Vatican II's social teachings on ecology; or the local magisterium does not find the ecological teaching in Vatican II relevant to the Philippine context. In any case, one may ask whether this seeming absence of Vatican II documents in the citations and footnotes reveals a certain lack of ecological consciousness on the part of the Philippine hierarchy. Nevertheless, it would be unfair to conclude simply based on this superficial observation.

It must be asserted that the factual absence of Vatican II in the citations and footnotes of the CBCP pastoral letters on ecology does not necessarily mean that they do not contain any insight from Vatican II's ecological teaching. Arguably, CBCP's theology of stewardship, as articulated in its pastoral letters on ecology, is a creative appropriation of and very much in line with the Vatican II ecological teaching. In fact, CBCP's explicit appropriation of the theology of stewardship is an explicit reaffirmation of the Council's teachings.

¹⁰² Cf. CBCP, "A Statement of Concern on the Mining Act of 1995" (February 28, 1998).

¹⁰³ Cf. CBCP, "Water is Life" (September 1, 2000).

¹⁰⁴ CBCP, "Upholding the Sanctity of Life: 20 years after the CBCP Pastoral Letter 'What is Happening to Our Beautiful Land?'" (5 November 2008).



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In line with Vatican II, CBCP's theological anthropology proposes the model of human being as a steward of God's creation and as protector of nature. It reaffirms that

God intended this land for us, his special creatures, but not so that we might destroy it and turn it into a wasteland. Rather he charged us to be *stewards of his creation*, to care for it, to protect its fruitfulness and not to allow it to be devastated.¹⁰⁵

The CBCP's endorsement of "stewardship," which flows from the biblical view of human being as image of God, tries to correct the erroneous presumption that a human being is the absolute master of creation. Its theology of stewardship emphasizes the view that God *entrusted* God's creation to human beings who must exercise their sovereignty in a "responsible dominion" over nature and with moral accountability before God—the absolute Master and owner of creation. The CBCP reaffirms the *Genesis* account of creation that emphasizes God's decision to put the human being "in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it."¹⁰⁶ This biblical revelation has been commonly interpreted in light of stewardship that calls for human responsibility to preserve and defend nature from harm. As image of God, human beings are expected to rule God's creation the way God rules it.

In the New Testament account, however, the notion of stewardship is interpreted in the context of the parables of God's Kingdom. In fact, most of the biblical texts in the New Testament that imply stewardship have something to do with the servant's right and responsibility to manage the property or money of an absentee master until he returns.¹⁰⁷ Like Vatican II, CBCP's teaching on stewardship is based on biblical notions of "steward" whom God entrusted to take care of the integrity of creation.

¹⁰⁵ CBCP, "What is Happening to Our Beautiful Land?", 209. [Emphasis mine].

¹⁰⁶ *Genesis* 2:15.

¹⁰⁷ As one parable of Jesus goes, the master "entrusted his property to them" and, afterwards, he would settle accounts with them. See *Matthew* 25:14-30; *Luke* 19:12-28.



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A CRITIQUE ON CBCP'S APPROPRIATION OF THE VATICAN II'S TEACHING ON STEWARDSHIP

Let us evaluate the soundness of CBCP's theology of stewardship, as well as the prevailing motivation of the Filipino ecological struggles. There are two important ecological theologians who could help us in this endeavor. First, there is Seán McDonagh, who had spent over two decades in the Philippines and influenced the drafting of the first CBCP pastoral letter on ecology. He is strongly critical about the anthropocentric overtones of the notion of stewardship. He finds it difficult to imagine God "as an absentee landlord who has put human beings in charge of the rest of creation."¹⁰⁸ To him, the analogy of an absent God, which is implied in the idea of stewardship, clearly contradicts the other biblical affirmations on the immanence of a God who is perpetually present in the world *through* the incarnation of the Son and *in* the indwelling of the Spirit in creation.¹⁰⁹ The implication of an "absent God" in the notion of stewardship, according to McDonagh, may ultimately lead one to presume that creation is stripped of God's presence and that nature is not sacred or not deserving of any reverence.

Moreover, McDonagh remarked that the analogy of stewardship gives an impression of a "reified earth," reducing it to a property to be managed or to be traded by humans till their master comes. Positively, however, to understand stewardship as "management of nature" can be interpreted as giving the human being a license to improve the undeveloped Earth. But, negatively, as McDonagh argued, by thinking ourselves as managers of God's creation, we pretend that "we have a comprehensive knowledge of the natural world," as if we are able to regulate its complex and interrelated systems.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Seán McDonagh, *Passion for the Earth: The Christian Vocation to Promote Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1995), 130.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. *Matthew* 28:20. Jesus assures his people: "I am with you always, to the end of time."

¹¹⁰ McDonagh, *Passion for the Earth*, 133. Along this line, James Lovelock insisted that it is strange to call ourselves as stewards of the earth. He argued that



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The other ecological theologian, who warned us about the danger of stewardship model, is Australian priest Denis Edwards. To situate his warning, let us call to mind CBCP's appropriation of the stewardship model of relating with nature that tends to exaggerate the necessity of human responsibility for creation before God. This is implied in its affirmation of human beings as "special creatures"¹¹¹ who, due to their being images of God, are uniquely related to God. From an ecological perspective, however, this view sounds very assuming, as if non-human creatures are not also God's "special" creatures. Edwards pointed out the danger of this presumption in his critique on the anthropocentric tone of stewardship:

[W]hen stewardship is used to characterize the human stance before other creatures, it can run the risk of suggesting an inflated view of the human as a necessary intermediary between God and other creatures. It can seem to suggest that other creatures do not have their own relationship with the living God or their own integrity.¹¹²

In other words, by exaggerating the paternalistic role of the humans and by presuming their indispensable agency in the event of creation and Creator relationship, stewardship tends to relate with nature in an anthropocentric way. To correct this tendency, the new cosmology reminds us that, long before the appearance of human being in the world, the community of non-human creatures had been continuously relating with God from whom they derived their intrinsic value and integrity as creatures.

My own critical reading of the CBCP documents on ecology also reveals a kind of anthropocentric view on stewardship that tends to assume that meeting the needs of human generations or

"We are not stewards of the Earth—we never could be. It's sheer foolish pride to imagine that we're clever enough yet to regulate the Earth. It is an unbelievably complex system, and we couldn't possibly take on the job." Quoted in Shirley Patton and Rosamund Kidman, eds. *Planet Earth, the Future: What the Experts Say?* (London: BBC Books, 2006), 219-220.

¹¹¹ CBCP, "What is Happening to Our Beautiful Land?", 209.

¹¹² Denis Edwards, *Ecology at the Heart of Faith: The Change of Heart that Leads to a New Way of Living on Earth* (New York: Orbis Books, 2006), 25.



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providing the good of humanity is the *raison d'être* of creation, as if God created everything solely for humans. In a number of cases, the CBCP pastoral teaching on ecology reveals that its main motivation for protecting and caring for the environment is centered on human security and interests.¹¹³ It advocates the urgency of caring for the natural environment mainly for purposes of addressing a lot of human security issues connected to poverty and natural disasters.¹¹⁴ Perhaps the most revealing portion of the CBCP's anthropocentric motivation for ecological advocacy may be shown in the conclusion of its pastoral letter on water crisis: "we must remember that the riches of Creation, the wealth of our land, have been given by God so that a life of dignity can be enjoyed by all the inhabitants of our country and by future generations. Our homeland has been entrusted to our care and we are responsible for passing on a sound environment to generations yet unborn."¹¹⁵ Of course, we cannot deny that the said adverse ecological effects are real human threats. However, we should not use them as though they are *the* main argument and motivation for our environmental action. Against this assumption, I agree with McDonagh who strongly insisted that the natural world "has its own dignity, its own rights and reasons for being, quite apart from its role in sustaining humans."¹¹⁶ As we have

¹¹³ The following are just a few of the lines which reveal this type of reasoning: "we must...resolve to cherish and protect what remains of this bounty for this and future generations;" "the scars on nature...mean less nutritious food, poorer health and an uncertain future." See CBCP, "What is Happening to Our Beautiful Land," 208. Elsewhere, the CBCP argues: "Chemicals are poisoning our lands and rivers. They kill vital organisms and in time they will poison us." Moreover, the CBCP calls for the protection of our marine resources as we are "gradually being poisoned when we eat seafood." (pp. 210-11). The CBCP sees that the degradation of watersheds "means the loss of sustained water supplies for the lowland communities." See the section on "Uplands and Lowlands" in CBCP, "Water is Life."

¹¹⁴ On this similar observation, see Gabriel Lamug-Nañawa, "Jesus, Evolution and the Environment: A Critique of the CBCP's Statement on the Environment," *Landas* 18 (2004): 244-264.

¹¹⁵ See the "Conclusion" in CBCP, "Water is Life." The view of CBCP here is similar to Holy See's statement submitted to Rio Earth Summit in 1992: "The ultimate purpose of environmental and development programmes is to enhance the quality of human life, to place creation in the fullest way at the service of the human family." Quoted in McDonagh, *Passion for the Earth*, 107.

¹¹⁶ McDonagh, *Passion for the Earth*, 133.



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repeatedly asserted, creation has more than its instrumental value. Its intrinsic value must be equally recognized in the overall agenda of our ecological advocacy.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we see the Second Vatican Council as an “event” that influenced both the social and ecological struggles in the Philippines. The *aggiornamento* brought about by Vatican II has, to a certain extent, become a watershed of church-based ecological struggles and our bishops’ pastoral letters on ecology. It continues to form the church to become increasingly participative both in the *ad intra* and *ad extra* activities.

We have emphasized, however, that the phenomenon of ecological struggles in the Diocese of Malaybalay may be adequately explained as a confluence of several interrelated factors, including Christian faith, economic interests and ecological consciousness. In this paper, we have highlighted the particular influence of the key teachings of Vatican II on the emergence of ecological struggles.

We have also shown in this paper that the CBCP pastoral letters on ecology appropriated Vatican II’s anthropocentric perspective on stewardship. We offered our critique on this stewardship model of relating with nature in light of the emerging ecological theology that duly recognizes the intrinsic value of all creatures. Hence, we propose to struggle for ecology not only for the sake of the common good of the human community but, more importantly, for the sake of a greater common good—the common good of the whole ecological community of creation.

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