

# **BIBO ERGO SUM: THEO-SOCIAL REFLECTIONS OF THE TAGUIBO WATERSHED ADVOCACY**

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*The article deals with a local ecological issue, the mining activities that threaten to destroy the Taguibo Watershed in Butuan, southern Philippines. Conversing with social theories, philosophical systems, and theological knowledge, the author examines the involvement of the “narrators of the Christian story”. The investigation reveals that the prevailing stance of the Church can be described as “disengaged pacifism” and “hegemonic engagement,” both tend to project a “triumphalist and self-exalting stance.” The essay argues for an active engagement of “dissenting particularity,” which the radical person of Jesus Christ exemplified for the sake of God’s Kingdom values and on behalf of the poor and marginalized. In the Butuan struggle to save the Taguibo watershed, the dissenting particularity of the Christian narrative calls for critical, creative and productive dialogue processes with the various and conflicting stakeholders, as the narrators also go through a conversion process that can make them truer to their vocation of opting for the poor.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

**H**istorically, political engagement (whether it is partisan, ideological or intellectual) seemed to be embedded in the Filipino Christian narrative. The First Manila Synod, the early MSPC, the CNL and EDSA 1<sup>1</sup> are watershed experiences of political involvement of the Filipino Church. Ecclesiological narrative in the Philippines is interlaced with socio-political, economic, cultural and

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1. The First Synod of Manila in 1582 was convened by Archbishop Domingo Salazar. This synod took up the issues of the abusive *conquistadores* and interrogated the legitimacy of the right-to-conquest argument as the basis of colonization. (See, John Schumacher, “Manila Synodal Tradition,” *Philippine Studies* 27 (1979): 285-348, 292ff.) The early MSPC (Mindanao-Sulu Pastoral Conference) in the

agrarian issues. This paper is on the environmental engagement of Christian narrative as it is being interpreted and lived out in the local church of Butuan. I will argue that the dissenting possibility that the Christian narrative possesses against the status quo remains pertinent and powerful. It remains powerful in so far as it does not regard itself independent and super imposed (as the radical orthodox would argue) from other dissenting narratives. It means that it becomes relevant when the narrative is articulated from the language and perspective of other discourses present in the locality. In the concrete this means the Christian narrative must form a strategic alliance and animate others as a credible comrade not as a condescending hegemonic ideological line. Tactically, this calls for a ground up movement based on a broad critical consensus of the civil society movements cutting across ideological lines and persuasions.

## **THE CONTEXT**

Butuan is nestled as it were at the base of a funnel below the lush forests of Agusan, Bukidnon and Davao provinces. A vast river also called Agusan (with tributaries from Bukidnon and Davao) runs through the provinces of Agusan and pours out into the Butuan City bay. It is in this river also where thousands of board feet of logs and timber are transported at the behest of those powerful enough to circumvent the law. For many years, Agusan has been plundered with reckless impunity and shameless abandon. In the recent months, the shadow of exploitative greed has been looming over the Watershed of Butuan. The Watershed was proclaimed officially as such by President Fidel V. Ramos in a presidential act in 1995. This act was supposed to ensure that the Watershed is protected

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70's was an experiment of re-appropriating the insights of *la nouvelle theologie* to the Mindanao church and its socio-political involvement. (See, Warren Kinne, *The Splintered Staff* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1990). The Christians for National Liberation (CNL) was a movement of religious men and women that was openly affiliated to the National Democratic Front in the late 70's. Among its most influential figures were the priests Edicio de la Torre, Luis Jalandoni and Conrado Balweg. (See, Jeffrey Riedinger, *Agrarian Reform in the Philippines: Democratic Transitions and Redistributive Reform* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 243.). Epifanio de los Santos Highway or EDSA was the major site of the first peaceful revolution in 1986 that toppled the dictatorial regime of Ferdinand Marcos after allegations of electoral fraud, corruption and human rights violation.

from all forms of environmental exploitation including mining and logging. However, the strength of this proclamation seemed to have been blunted and abrogated by a stack of legalese that in the end legitimized tree poaching and the mining of the manganese (reputedly one of the best ores in the Philippines) in the watershed area. The initial alarm was raised because of the rising turbidity level of the water supply of the city caused by the illegal road constructed to ferry out the ores and logs from the area to processing plants in Cagayan de Oro. The bigger problem if mining activities go unchallenged is the manganese contamination of the water supply of the city that is directly filtered out from the waters of the Taguibo Watershed.

## DISENGAGED PACIFISM

Paulo Freire observes that oppressors would have the oppressed believe that reality cannot be transformed since the latter can easily be manipulated if they can be subordinated to the consciousness of the master.<sup>2</sup> In the meetings held on the issue of the Taguibo Watershed, it appears that such subordination of consciousness has seeped into the mindset of some of the narrators of Christian story. It seems that the efforts of the local elite to domesticate what Metz<sup>3</sup> calls the dangerous memory of Jesus by bribing, cajoling and domesticating some quarters of the religious sector has finally paid off to their advantage. The interventions and actions of a few leaders give the impression that efforts to advocate for the stoppage of the activities in the Watershed are inutile and a danger to the interests of the church. Such position is inviting because it is comfortable. It is also a betrayal of one's identity as a chronicler of the Christian narrative of dissent. From an ecclesiological perspective, such position is untenable if one takes on the challenge laid out in *Gaudium et Spes* for the church to be continually relevant in its context by appropriating the gospel according to the signs of the times.<sup>4</sup> The disengaged, co-opted pietistic position is not only anti-Vatican II but also anti-poor

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2. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York/London: Continuum, 2008), 48-49, 72-73.

3. See, Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, trans. David Smith (New York: Seabury Press, 1980).

4. *Gaudium et Spes* § 4.

because no matter how one sees it, the oppressors have won the day. Methodologically, decoupling the Christian narrative from historical engagement suffers from the foundationalist bias that there is an uncontaminated essence of Christianity that can be transferred from context to context – that can be practiced and lived out in virtually the same manner everywhere. From this bias, the position of disengaged pacifism becomes a practice of a privatized, individualized faith without regard for its milieu and without remorse for its silence. If this happens, Christianity retreats to its own rationality<sup>5</sup> and cowers behind its pietistic devotions. Häring labels this as a Christianity that suffers from a serious case of historical alienation.<sup>6</sup> When reactionary, conservative and privatized devotions are promoted by both the elite and the religious in anesthetizing injustice, religion is stripped of its critical reflexivity, remains subservient and, functions as a docile apparatus of the rich to maintain and reinforce the status quo.

## **HEGEMONIC ENGAGEMENT**

The second quarter of 2009 saw increasing evidence about the illegal logging and extraction of manganese ores at the watershed. Tests show that the manganese content of the water distributed among the residents of Butuan City dangerously fluctuates close to the acceptable limit set by the World Health Organization. Given the urgency of the situation, those who were concerned were compelled to address the issue. The intensity and framework of engagement however differ. One dominant model springs from the alliance forged between the office of the diocesan bishop and the Caraga<sup>7</sup> Council for Peace and Development (CCPD). The aforementioned council (CCPD) is a creation of the National Security Agency (NSA)

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5. Gianni Vattimo, *After Christianity* (New York: Columbia Press, 2002), 97.

6. Bernard Häring, “My Hope for the Future of Petrine Ministry,” in *Papacy and the People of God*, ed. Gary McEoin (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1998), 19.

7. “Caraga” is an administrative region on the northeastern portion of Mindanao. It is composed of five provinces, namely, Agusan del Norte, Agusan del Sur, Dinagat Islands, Surigao del Norte, and Surigao del Sur, as well as six cities: Butuan, Surigao, Bislig, Cabadbaran, Bayugan and Tandag. Butuan City is the regional center of Caraga.

under the initiative of the President of the Philippines Gloria Arroyo. Its office in the regions of Caraga is housed at the bishop's residence of the diocese of Butuan. Because of the bishop's reputed close ties with the President of the Republic, appointees for the regional offices of government agencies attempt to curry favor with the bishop. Entrenched in this tremendously powerful position, the bishop together with the NSA empowered CCPD represent a formidable and influential force in Butuan. Sociologically, if one reads the position of the bishop from the perspective of Johan Galtung's analysis of center-periphery relationships,<sup>8</sup> one realizes that even if Butuan is in the periphery in relation to Manila, the literally direct line of the bishop to the president appears to indicate an alignment of orientation between the two. Politically, the bishop with the CCPD is a force to reckon with. His rapport with the national government puts him in a unique situation to "make things happen" as far as the government agencies are concerned. In fact in some instances, the local DENR would impound logs in the name of bishop or the CCPD. In relation to the issue at hand, the bishop appears to be supportive of the initiatives on the Taguibo Watershed advocacy. Because of his unique relationship with the national government, the bishop convenes multilateral meetings between the regional government officials and various sectors in order to address the watershed problem. It seems that the bishop uses his cordial ties with the national government to resolve local environmental problems. Methodologically, while one senses sincerity on the part of the bishop in using his influence and power to resolve the issue of the watershed, he seems to be operating from a "top-down" model of engagement. His association with the Arroyo administration and the power that this alliance exudes looks like a contemporary variant of church-state unity. The national political leadership saddled with allegations of corruption seems to understand it cannot survive long term if it is unable to convince the people to affirm its ascendancy to rule.<sup>9</sup> The national politicians seem

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8. See, Johan Galtung, "A Structural Theory of Imperialism," *Journal of Peace Research* 8 (1971): 81-118.

9. For example in the wake of the so-called "Hello Garci" scandal, the acquiescence of the bishops to categorically support the calls to oust Pres. Gloria Macapagal Arroyo could be interpreted as an implicit appeal to the people for sobriety and temperance in their protests against the Philippine president.

to have understood Durkheim's theory<sup>10</sup> that religion and its rituals have profound impact for social solidarity.<sup>11</sup> However, while Durkheim's objectivist sociological theory focuses only on the totemic function of religion vis-à-vis societal cohesion,<sup>12</sup> what seems to be happening in this alliance is a mutually beneficial relationship that protects the interests of the government and of the institutional church. In relation to the advocacy of the Watershed, this alliance appears to resonate, albeit in a grotesque manner, with the idea of leadership of priests as expounded in Max Weber's *Sociology of Religion*.<sup>13</sup> At its basic dynamics, however, it appears that this coalition has all the makings of what Antonio Gramsci<sup>14</sup> calls hegemony.

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10. Émile Durkheim (1858—1917) is a French sociologist. He developed a vigorous methodology combining sociological theory with empirical research. He is considered as the founder of the French school of sociology. Durkheim was influenced by the sociological positivist theories of the philosopher Auguste Comte. From Durkheim's perspective, ethical and social structures were endangered by technological-mechanical advances in the modern era. Generally viewed as a proponent of solidarism, Durkheim reflected on themes like anomie, or social disconnectedness and the role of education and religion as important means to reform humanity and create alternative social institutions. His anthropological study entitled *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912), which centers on the phenomenon of totemism, focuses on the origin and function of religion in producing social solidarity.

11. See, Carlos Alberto Torres, *The Church, Society, and Hegemony: A Critical Sociology of Religion in Latin America*, trans. Richard A. Young (Connecticut: Praeger, 1992), 36.

12. See, Émile Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of Religion*, trans. Joseph Ward Swain (New York: Free Press, 1967), 424.

13. Max Weber, *Sociology of Religion*, trans. Ephraim Fischhoff (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), 29. Max Weber (1864-1920) is a German sociologist and political economist. A prolific author and a deeply influential figure in sociological theory, Weber was known for his theory of the "Protestant Ethics" wherein he tries to link Protestantism and capitalism. His book *Sociology of Religion* looks at the connection between religion and society. The book is a comparative analysis of major religions in the world alongside their social ramifications in history. The book differentiates the role of the priest who is part of the organized, centralized structure of religion and the prophet who as an interrogator of traditional orthodoxy can effect change in societies.

14. Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) is an Italian political theorist. In 1921 he founded the Italian Communist Party. He became head of the party in 1924 and was elected to the national legislature. The party was under attack by the regime of Benito Mussolini in 1926, and Gramsci was imprisoned for 11 years. His influential *Letters from Prison* (1947) proposes a version of communism which is

Writing from a Latin American perspective, Carlos Alberto Torres argues that hegemony can refer to two things. On the one hand it refers to “a process of social and political domination in which the ruling classes establish their control over the classes allied to them through moral and intellectual leadership” and on the other “it can also refer to the dual use of force and ideology to reproduce social relations between the ruling and subaltern classes.”<sup>15</sup> While the fulcrum of both definitions is the Marxist social analysis, the first sense combined with the traditional sense of Filipino religiosity appears to be the function that the Butuan official catholic position plays in its partnership with the government. The church then seems to represent an organic force that lends a semblance of moral ascendancy in maintaining the status quo of the government. According to Gramsci’s framework (as interpreted by Louis Althusser also), in the partnership between the intellectual social-democrat church members with the present regime, the church functions as the organic intellectual for the governing class.<sup>16</sup> In this hegemonic dynamics, the church (as represented by the Butuan position and by social-democrat church members) functions both as an intellectual and moral legitimation for the political ends of the government. As Torres points out, religion through its pedagogical practice is a “perfect element for generating acquiescence and solidifying beliefs in an established historical bloc.”<sup>17</sup> *Religio instrumentum regni*. One could argue that the confrontation of interests between the state and religion is not as one sided as it looks like. Indeed, in the local level, things are moving for the resolution of the watershed issue. But the compliance in functionalizing the Christian narrative for political ends seemed too high a price to pay for vague promises of help from the national government in resolving the local issue.

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less dogmatic and authoritarian. His thinking has impact on sociology, political theory, and international relations. Noted for the originality of his thinking, Gramsci was concerned with the analysis of culture and political leadership. He is known for his idea of “hegemony” as a tool to maintain and reinforce the power of the state in the framework of capitalism.

15. Torres, *The Church, Society, and Hegemony*, 42.

16. Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, 1975-77, vol. 2:12-13.

17. Torres, *The Church, Society, and Hegemony*, 44.

## **TO BE OR NOT TO BE ENGAGED**

As early as the 70's, the theologian Joseph Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI) argued that with political and social reforms defining the agenda after Vatican II, the church has entered into a Babylonian captivity.<sup>18</sup> Ratzinger repudiates any functionalization of religion whether it be right or left of the political and ideological spectrum. He deplores theologians whose frameworks rely on philosophers ranging from Marx to Marcuse as not only accepting a particular philosophy but a whole understanding of existence where praxis becomes the criterion for the value or lack of value of theories.<sup>19</sup> Conversely for him, "where the Church becomes the state freedom becomes lost."<sup>20</sup> When the church becomes a functionary for the ideological state the result is totalitarianism. Ratzinger is concerned that in its relationship to politics, theology on the one hand, loses its autonomy and functions either as a silent collaborator or an active organic intellectual for the ideology, and on the other, becomes devoid of its *theo*-logical content as it no longer fulfills its transcendent function. In short, Ratzinger is apprehensive that Christian narrative in its engagement with politics either becomes positivist or ideological.<sup>21</sup> From the preceding point, one could surmise that in its political engagement whether left or right, the Christian narrative should retain and assert its identity not lose it. Ratzinger admits to a variant of Augustinian dualism as far as politics and Christian narrative are concerned. In this dualism however, he appears to put privilege on the transcendent than on the immanent. In his recent debate with Jürgen Habermas on the relationship between Christian legacy and politics in Western Europe, Ratzinger argues that politics owes much to the Christian narrative and the former must never forget its debt to the latter.<sup>22</sup> This seems to be affirmed in *Nachmetaphysisches denken*

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18. Joseph Ratzinger & Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Two Say Why: Why I am Still a Christian' and Why I am Still in the Church*, trans. John Griffiths (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1973), 65-91, 67, 69.

19. Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 4<sup>th</sup>ed. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 14-15.

20. Joseph Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism and Politics* (New York: Crossroad, 1988), 162.

21. Ibid., 164.

22. See, Joseph Ratzinger, *Dialektik der Säkularisierung: Über Vernunft und Religion* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2005).



where Habermas concedes that in the postmodern Europe concepts like freedom, emancipation, ethics and person can only be understood when one re-appropriates the substance of the salvation-historical thought that stems from the Judaeo-Christian narrative.<sup>23</sup> But while Habermas confirms the Christian contribution in the pre-political foundations of Europe, Ratzinger argues for the enduring relevance of Christian narrative and for its forceful assertion of its epistemological claim as the *religio vera* in its synthesis of reason, faith and life.<sup>24</sup> It appears that for Ratzinger, the Christian posture, in relation to political narratives and to other narratives for that matter, should be that of a courageous witnessing of its total claim as the guardian of Truth amidst the threat of the relativist truths of other narratives.<sup>25</sup> From the perspective of ecclesiological hermeneutics, Gerald Mannion observes that Ratzinger's method is not a hermeneutics of engagement but a hermeneutics of refusal.<sup>26</sup> It seems that Ratzinger's position bears resemblances to the proposals of Milbank<sup>27</sup> which according to some commentators dangerously qualifies to what Jean-François Lyotard calls master narratives.<sup>28</sup> Where it seems that in the contemporary discourses (be it philosophical, political or socio-cultural), religion is invited to re-embrace its kenotic particularity,<sup>29</sup> Ratzinger attempts to restore religion's privileged pedagogical position in relation to other narratives.

23. Jürgen Habermas, *Nachmetaphysisches Denken. Philosophische Aufsätze* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1988), 23.

24. Joseph Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance* (San Francisco: St. Ignatius Press, 2004), 137.

25. Seen from this perspective, it seems not an accident that in his ecclesiological pronouncements, Ratzinger appears to stress proclamation over dialogue.

26. Gerard Mannion, "Hermeneutical Investigations: Discerning Contemporary Christian Community," in *Christian Community Now: Ecclesiological Investigations*, Vol. 2, eds. Paul Collins, Gerard Mannion, Gareth Powell and Kenneth Wilson (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 76.

27. John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).

28. Jean-François Lyotard, *La condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1979).

29. For example, Randy J.C. Odchigue, "The Radical Kenoticism of Gianni Vattimo and Interreligious Dialogue," *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 16 § 2 (2006): 173-189. See especially, Gianni Vattimo, *Belief* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999); John Caputo and Gianni Vattimo, *After the Death of God*, ed. Jeffrey Robbins (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

## AFFIRMING CHRISTIAN PARTICULARITY

Why are these theoretical explorations important in an advocacy of the Taguibo Watershed? I believe it is important to understand and reflect upon the frameworks of engagement (or disengagement) in order to clarify the limits and the inherent problems of such frameworks. Against the position of disengaged pacifism, I argue that the Christian narrative acquires its enduring value through the process of re-contextualization. It has to engage history and context. Without what Hans-Georg Gadamer calls fusion of horizons,<sup>30</sup> Christian narrative suffers hermeneutical enclosure and historical alienation. However, in engaging with others, the Christian narrative cannot be complicit with totalitarian political narratives. Christian discourse cannot be seduced into becoming a power discourse that legitimizes status quo politics. It must not allow its dissenting possibility to be dissolved in the ebb and tide of cultural and political context. But in doing this, it must also be careful lest it might revert to its triumphalist and self-exalting stance.<sup>31</sup>

That Christian narrative should engage or disengage with other narratives is not the question. It should engage but not as a pretentious meta-discourse for it might only commit the same mistake of the violent meta-narratives of modernity. For it to fulfill its vocation, Christian discourse must first get in touch with its **dissenting particularity** – this being the radical person of Jesus Christ and his set of values (the Kingdom values of faith, hope, love, justice, solidarity and preferential option for the marginalized) that sustained and empowered the first Christian communities. In relation to the context, this dissenting particularity of the Christian narrative must interrogate a particular milieu in order to be able to come up with an articulation of a relevant faith-option and faith-action. In the process

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30. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 273.

31. This self-exalting stance is supported by theologians like Joseph Ratzinger and the proponents of Radical Orthodoxy notably John Milbank. He argues that his theological framework is set “to overcome the pathos of modern theology, and to restore in postmodern terms the possibility of theology as a meta-discourse.” (Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 1).

of articulation, the Christian narrative must actively position itself as a dynamic dialogue partner but always with the awareness and modesty that allow space for authentic conversation to happen with other narratives. This involves in an integral way a process of conversion towards an emptying and evacuation of epistemological pride.<sup>32</sup> Roger Haight argues that: “the interiorization of historicity encourages a certain humility or modesty in the Christian witness to ultimate truth.”<sup>33</sup> This historicity attests to the particular and local mediations that point “toward the manifold pluralism that marks our reality today in its religious, cultural, and intellectual forms alike.”<sup>34</sup>

In the concrete local experience of the local church of Butuan struggle to save the Taguibo watershed, the preceding point translates to the praxial challenge to dialogue with, animate and encourage other discourses represented by different civil society organizations (CSOs) into an awareness that there is a direct correlation between the exploitation of the earth and the violence to the poor. The advantage of engaging other narratives through a dialogical framework is that it emphasizes connectedness and relationality not only between humans themselves but between humans and the environment and the shared geographical space that defines our identity as Butuanons. Conceptually, this horizontal framework that tries to elicit from other narratives their practice and tactics opens up new spaces for creative engagement.<sup>35</sup> Concretely, this framework

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32. This point is very much similar with what Mannion terms as an “epistemic humility”. See, Gerard Mannion, *Ecclesiology and Postmodernity: Questions for the Church in our Time* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007), 127. The content of Mannion’s proposal is inspired by Farley’s concept of the “grace of self doubt”. See Margaret Farley, “Ethics, Ecclesiology and the Grace of Self-Doubt,” in *A Call to Fidelity: On the Moral Theology of Charles E. Curran*, eds. James J. Walter, Timothy E. O’Connell, and Thomas Shannon (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2002): 55-75.

33. Roger Haight, “The Church as Locus of Theology,” *Why Theology?, Concilium* (1994/6): 19.

34. Mannion, *Ecclesiology and Postmodernity*, 133.

35. As one notices, the network does not see itself as possessing a dogmatic framework for societal reform. Its vision of opening up spaces for protest and dissent may be akin to the “tactical” approach of Michel De Certeau. See for example, Michel De Certeau, *La culture au pluriel* (Paris: Seuil, 1974); *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans., Steven Rendall (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1984).

that calls for a broad-based consensus between the CSOs gives space for pedagogy of shared responsibility. The praxial methodology of dialogue and conversation creates an educative opportunity for the CSOs to own their responsibility in saving the watershed and to embrace the fact that they too are stakeholders of this protected environment. More importantly, the framework forges dialogue with the poor creating a space for an articulation of their own truth-claim.

The concrete result of this framework was a creation of a network of stakeholders involving sectors from the academe, business, Christian churches, IPs, Muslims, civil society movements and social-political groups from the different ideological spectrum. The function of the network was basically to act as a fluid web of influence to pressure, criticize, analyze and evaluate actions and orientations of those who have the mandate to put a stop to the illegal activities at the watershed.<sup>36</sup> While the network establishes contacts with politicians, government agencies, the military and church leaders in the locality of Butuan, its main role consists of putting across the urgent message of saving the watershed by bringing to end illegal activities there. Sociologically, the advantage that the network has over the engagement of the official church of Butuan is that it is not beholden in its relationship to the powers that be (either national or local government). The network does not act to primarily protect a corporate interest. If one follows Gill's rational actor theory in relation to the actions of the leaders of Latin American Churches,

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36. As of this writing, the Save Taguibo Watershed Network (STWN) has by far helped influence DENR's issuance of a cease and desist order against illegal logging and road construction in the watershed. The STWN has also spearheaded efforts for a multi-sectoral ocular investigation of the site that compelled the public officials and government agencies to address the watershed problem. The network has also compiled, researched and documented the progress and resistances from various groups (politicians, government agencies and businessmen). Information campaign through media and church sectors were done to foment public reaction and agitate people to pressure their civil leaders to act. The network has so far obtained the commitment of the DENR to seal off the mining tunnels permanently, to create a composite check point with representatives from the government, civilian and church sectors. The STWN is involved in the efforts to re-activate the Taguibo Watershed Management Council which oversees the restoration, repair and "rainforestation" of the damaged watershed.

the network becomes an effective agent because it also maintains a critical distance from the hierarchy and from the local civil servants.<sup>37</sup> Paraphrasing Gill's theory, Moreno states, "the calculus of costs and benefits is a determinant factor in the hierarchy's response or reaction to issues affecting its interests."<sup>38</sup> The advantage of the network is that it does not carry the cumbersome baggage of the hierarchical leadership so it is free to pursue its advocacy based on the Gospel principles of justice, option for the poor and the shared responsibility in upholding the integrity of God's creation.

### ***BIBO, ERGO SUM***

One of the slogans during the ecumenical prayer rally for the Save Taguibo Watershed Advocacy says: *Save Taguibo Watershed: Our water, Our life*. Water is life and the perpetrators of the illegal activities threaten the lives of Butuanons – especially the poor Butuanons who get their drinking water from a watershed under threat of manganese contamination. I drink therefore I am. This parody of the Cartesian *cogito* is not a plea for a strong individualistic "I" to exist. It is a protest made by the poor to let them have clean water because they want to live. It is a militant prayer that the Christian narrative becomes alive in our midst by awakening in us God's vision of solidarity and justice where everyone is given the chance to share in God's bountiful gift of creation.

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37. Anthony Gill, *Rendering unto Caesar: The Catholic Church and the State in Latin America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

38. Antonio Moreno, *Church, State, and Civil Society in Postauthoritarian Philippines: Narratives of Engaged Citizenship* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2006), 259.