

TO SPEAK WITH ALL BOLDNESS

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As soon as Peter and John were set free, they returned to their group... (Then)... the believers... all joined together in prayer to God: Master and Creator of heaven, earth, and sea, and all that is in them ... allow us, your servants, to speak your message with all boldness... When they finished praying, the place where they were meeting was shaken. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to proclaim God's message with boldness. (Acts 4: 23-31)

THE ECOLOGICAL LANDSCAPE

There is no denying the fact that the ecological crisis has deepened with the available new data that helps us to understand the serious implications of climate change. The scientific evidence arising since the 1980's that the overheating of the atmosphere being caused by the rapidly swelling emissions of greenhouse gases – that has arisen 31% from 1997 to 2008 - produced by the burning of fossil fuels and deforestation is a threat to nothing less than the human future on the planet given the increases in global temperatures.¹

The latest data released by scientists from Australia's University of New South Wales and the USA's Purdue University indicated that by 2300 or "within three centuries, climate change could make much of the world too hot for human habitation."² Data from the Asian

1. Michael McCarthy, "Missing: the most vital ingredient" in *The Tablet* (5 December 2009): 8-9.

2. AFP, "Earth may be too hot for humans by 2300 – study" in *(The Philippine Star*, 12 May 2010), A7.

Development Bank indicate that by 2030 Asia may account for more than 40 percent of carbon emissions; today 76% of the emissions in the atmosphere come from industrialized countries.³

In 2007, the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) indicated that the years since 1995 were among the warmest years caused by the gases emitted. We've experienced unpredictable changes in terms of the seasons as well as the regularity of destructive storms, floods and droughts. These calamities affected around 262 million people every year from 2000 to 2004; 98% of them were in Third World countries, thus indicating that "it is the poor, those who have done least to cause the problem, who are already suffering its consequences".⁴

To exacerbate the bad news, the world's response has been most wanting. Three Earth Summits (Rio de Janeiro in 1992, Kyoto in 2005, Copenhagen in 2010) dealt with this issue. Sentiments expressed at these events include: "the only way to stop global warming is by means of draconian reductions in carbon dioxide emissions"; however, "all we have to show for this devotion is a continuing series of unmet targets, along with a startling increase in a number of people who no longer think climate change is worth worrying about."⁵

We Filipinos should be very concerned about all these. One of the major causes of global warming is deforestation now accounting for 15% of global emissions by human activity. We continue to destroy our forests. At the peak of deforestation in the 1960s an average of 300,000 hectares were cut per year; in the 1990s, it was 100,000 hectares per year. By 2000, only 1 million hectares were left; today it is less than a million hectares.⁶ Is it surprising that floods are a regular occurrence these days?

Despite the crisis, the State continues to pursue the construction of dams, to allow aerial spray in plantations and encourage more

3. AP, "ADB Head: Asia must tackle poverty, climate change" in *(Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 5 May 2009), B5.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Marites Vitug Danguilan, *The Politics of Logging, Power from the Forest* (Manila: Philippine Center for Investigative Reporting, 1993), 13.

mining investments. With 17% of the world's nickel resources and the fact that we are the world's fourth biggest copper producer and third largest gold producer, foreign mining firms are attracted, thus investments are expected to rise to US\$9 B by 2011.⁷ But a series of ecological devastations resulting from mining – from Marinduque in 1993 to Rapu-rapu Bicol in 1996 – have shown how lethal the damages could be.

As the ecological crisis has become more intense so also the expressions of concern. The rise of eco-consciousness can be traced back to the “the end of the 19th century (when) the environmental movement rose up in protest against the exploitation of nature”.⁸ Starting as a romantic love of nature, this movement led to the setting up of organizations, parties and advocacy groups engaged in environmental campaigns guided by a “postmodern awareness of rapidly deteriorating ecosphere”.⁹

Still, one needs to ask the question: how far is the world convinced about the urgency of the ecological crisis faced by humanity today and the subsequent action to be taken? Naturally, the corollary question is relevant: is the average Filipino on the street concerned about the environment and is she engaged in dealing with the crisis?

Collectively, we who constitute the Philippine Church have to face the sad truth: in the words of Acts 4:29, we have not spoken with boldness on this urgent issue; consequently our collective action leaves much to be desired. Most of our isolated efforts are in the short-term mode. We have been quite hesitant to face the structural foundations of the immense, complex social and ecological landscapes. Not only have we missed out in the preaching part of our prophecy, but we seem unable to come up with a coordinated militant response.

7. Data from Report of the Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB) of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR).

8. Kees Waaijman, O'Carroll, “Spirituality as the Locus of Postmodernity” in *Lecture Series 6 on Spirituality* (Quezon City: Institute of Spirituality of Asia, 2007), 16.

9. Ibid.

Church Pronouncements

There has been no dearth of ecological exhortations from the Magisterium. Owing to the seriousness of the ecological crisis faced by humanity and the urgency given to this issue by governments and civil society, the Church has been pressured to speak up.

In his recent encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* (Love in Truth), Pope Benedict XVI wrote that “the environment is God’s gift to everyone, and in our use of it, we have a responsibility towards the poor, towards future generations and towards humanity as a whole”. In a statement he issued on 1 January 2010 – *If You Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation* – he asked: “Can we remain indifferent before the problem associated with such realities as, climate change, desertification, the deterioration and loss of productivity in vast agricultural areas, the pollution of rivers and aquifers, the loss of biodiversity, the increase of natural catastrophes and the deforestation of equatorial and tropical regions?” He posited that “the issue of environmental degradation challenges us to examine our life-styles and the prevailing models of consumption and production” as well as be engaged in individual and community action to save the planet.

Earlier before the Copenhagen Summit, he addressed those attending the meeting: “I wish to encourage all the participants within the United Nations summit to enter into their discussions constructively and with generous courage.”¹⁰ When nothing happened at the Summit, in a speech on 11 January 2010, Pope Benedict denounced the failure of world leaders to agree to a new climate change treaty in Copenhagen saying that world peace depended on safeguarding God’s creation.

Before Benedict XIV, there was John Paul II who took a strong stance to care for creation. On 1 January 1990 he issued – *Peace with God the Creator, Peace with all Creation* – which called attention to the moral and religious dimension of the environmental crisis. He posited that modern society will find no solution to the ecological problem unless it takes a serious look at its life style. On 17 January 2001, in a

10. Keith O’Brien, “Stewards of Creation”, 7.

statement he referred to the ecological reality as a “catastrophe” and called for an ecological conversion for everyone. Of all the documents of the Magisterium dealing with ecology, “this is the only document that has a sense of the overwhelming nature of the problem” with the rest giving “no overall sense of the magnitude of the current ecological crisis facing the planet, humankind and every other creature living on the planet”.¹¹

Then came the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church in 2004 which was devoted to protecting the environment. In 1991, John Paul II issued *Centessimus Annus* exhorting the faithful to “make important changes in established lifestyles, in order to limit the waste of environmental and human resources, thus enabling every individuals and all the peoples of the earth to have a sufficient share of those resources”.

It was the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) that first came up with a pastoral letter on ecology issued in 1988 titled *What is Happening to Our Beautiful Land?* Here they wrote: “To put it simply: our country is in peril. All the living systems on land and in the seas around us are being ruthlessly exploited. The damage to date is extensive and, sad to say, it is often irreversible... At this point in the history of our country it is crucial that people motivated by religious faith develop a deep appreciation for the fragility of our islands’ life-systems and take steps to defend the Earth”.¹²

PCP II’s Acts and Decrees also came up with an exhortation: “A true and just development must fundamentally be concerned with a passionate care of our earth... Our natural resources are not to be exploited as though they were inexhaustible... The sovereignty granted to us by the Creator is not a license to misuse God’s creation. We are but stewards of creation, not its absolute masters”. It also challenged “The Church... should develop a comprehensive theology of stewardship and, in the light of this theology, should make ecology a special concern of the social action apostolate”.

11. Sean McDonagh, “To Protect Creation,” 364.

12. Abdon Josol, CSsR, *Responses to the Signs of the Times, Selected Documents: Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1991), 306, 312-13.

It is to be acknowledged that the official ecological teaching of the Catholic Church is only in its infancy; however, I believe that there is already a need to critique these and I resonate with two main proponents who challenge the Magisterium's current stance.

McDonagh posits that the Magisterium's documents have failed to provide an overall sense of the magnitude of the crisis facing the planet and all its creatures since the Church leaders have failed to understand what the crisis is all about. Various reasons are behind this; one is the fact that despite the data-focused nature of ecology, these documents' reflections are not based on scientific empirical data. There is also the hierarchy's fear about an eco-centric and biocentric approach to the Earth where nature is absolutized and thus considered more important than the human person, where the difference between man and other creatures is eliminated leading to "an egalitarian vision of the dignity of all living creatures".¹³ Consequently, they are not clear as to the ensuing appropriate response.

Raluto also offers a critique of the Magisterium's ecological teaching: it has an anthropocentric perspective as "revealed in its emphasis on the uniqueness of human dignity, on the priority given to human ecology, and in the lack of ecological mediation".¹⁴ The Church engages the ecological crisis mainly to preserve humanity; since human ecology must be prioritized over natural ecology, emphasis should be made in defending humankind from human being's self-destructive forces. Owing to the Magisterium's lack of openness "to the emerging ecological worldview promoted by the new cosmological and ecosystem perspectives, which deepen the understanding of human and nature relationship", it holds firm to its anthropocentrism.

13. Sean McDonagh, "To Protect Creation," 364-367.

14. Reynaldo D. Raluto, "To Struggle for Human and Ecological Liberation: Towards an Ecological Theology of Liberation in the Philippine Context" (Dissertation, Catholic University of Leuven, 2011), 176.

Theologizing Done Through the Years

Before the official documents came out of the Magisterium, there was already a growing literature dealing with ecology as a number of theologians dealt with the theology of creation, including those of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT).

O'Brien states that "God created the earth and entrusted its care to us. We have seriously neglected this important responsibility. It is now time to restore a more sustainable relationship with our environment, so that all human beings have the opportunity to live in dignity."¹⁵

"(E)cological spirituality" in the words of the Dutch Carmelite, Waaijan "provides an alternative for the modern destruction of our ecosphere. The ... philosopher of ecology, Arne Naess pleads for everyone to attempt to decipher their environment within their own situation, motivated by a 'deep yes to nature'... (and as) Matthew Fox says: 'Where will God, where will the experience of the divine, be found in our time?'" Creation spirituality responds: the divine will be found in these places: "awe and wonder, darkness and nothingness, silence and emptying, letting go and letting be, imagination and suffering, in struggle for justice and celebration."¹⁶

"The creator-God of Christianity is often presented as the absolutely transcendent, the totally Other, absent from creation. New Age authors corrected this theistic notion of God by putting the stress of God's immanence. Matthew Fox proposes a 'pantheistic' notion of God, reconnecting with the vision of the mystics. God is *in* everything and everything is *in* God. There is a sacramental dimension in the whole reality. We are called for radical coming home to the world. Gloria Dei, *vivens homo*, the glory of God is the fullness of life of man and woman. As human beings, we are an "original blessing." This was written by Wostyn.¹⁷

15. Keith O'Brien, "Stewards of Creation," 7.

16. Kees Waaijam, "Spirituality as Locus of Postmodernity," 17.

17. Lode Wostyn, CICM, "Christians In Dialogue with Emerging Spiritualities", in *Lecture Series 5 on Spirituality* (Quezon City: Institute of Spirituality in Asia, 2006), 80.

Tinker, the native American EATWOT theologian wrote: "In Mark 1:15, Jesus' first audience is told that because the basileia (or kingdom of God) is near they are to be "repenting and be faithing in the gospel.... This understanding of basileia and repentance I want to argue, can become a powerful impetus for justice first of all and finally for peace... (I)f I image myself as a vital part of a community, indeed as a part of many communities, it becomes more difficult for me to act in ways that are destructive of the community".¹⁸

"Engagement in people's struggles" according to Filipino EATWOT theologians "is necessarily an integrated one. It is a holistic spirituality in touch with the movement of the Holy Spirit not only in the people's lives but in the whole of creation. It is a spirituality rooted in our Christian faith tradition and at the same time aware of our animist rootings which consider sacred our soil, forests and rivers, which are concerned with concrete bodily needs while caught up in the spirit world, which have produced a richness of popular symbols and rituals".¹⁹

One major prophetic voice in the environmental wilderness today is that of Leonardo Boff, an EATWOT theologian from Brazil whose liberative option comprises two levels: "an option *against* human and ecological forms of oppression and an option *for* the liberation of human and non-human creatures."²⁰ He indicated his shift towards this theological stance when he positioned himself vis-a-vis "the fight for the Kingdom which begins with the poor, the passion for the Gospel, compassion for the suffering, commitment to the liberation of the oppressed, the linking of the most critical thought with the most inhuman reality and the nurturing of the tenderness towards every being in creation".²¹

18. George E. Tinker, "Spirituality, Native American Personhood, Sovereignty and Solidarity" in *Voices from the Third World*, Vol XV, No. 1 (June 1992): 39-40.

19. Abesamis, Carlos et al, *A Philippine Search for a Liberation Spirituality* (Manila: EATWOT, 1989), 27-28.

20. Reynaldo Raluto, "To Struggle for Human and Ecological Liberation," Summary, 3.

21. Leonardo Boff. Cited in Reynaldo Raluto, "To Struggle for Human and Ecological Liberation," 188.

Being an EATWOT member myself, I have been drawn to the theology of creation that has inspired my engagement in environmental issues. My family background and childhood experiences may have provided the foundation of my future ecological concern. I grew up in a small town in Davao del Sur where our everyday lives were closely intertwined with the surroundings. Mt. Apo's peak was a constant reminder of nature's power. My playground was constituted by farms, rivers, mountains and the sea. We ate fresh food produced by farmers and fisher folk who were our neighbours. The passages of seasons impinged into the manner we organized our livelihood cycles, family gatherings and our rituals and ceremonies.

Having worked – for forty years - with indigenous peoples and the rural poor communities mostly in the island of Mindanao, I have been immersed among the poorest of the poor. I have shared their lives, listened to their stories, engaged in their struggles and participated in various pastoral programs aimed at responding to eco-political, socio- cultural and ecological issues. I have been a witness to how the poor have suffered because of their eco-political powerlessness, the government's indifference to their plight and lately owing to the climate change's impact.

I have been privileged to listen to the cry and lamentations of the most abandoned as they express their sentiments during their BEC's liturgical, sacramental and pastoral activities. I have been touched by their deep faith in God's providence and compassion. Despite their poverty, they continue to trust and depend on God's love for them. They are convinced that God is Creator of everything in creation and that we all share the responsibility of loving one another, and loving the whole of creation. This is why they can so easily be convinced of the need to work for human rights, social issues and ecological balance or what brings together justice, peace and the integrity of creation (JPIC).

On the part of the indigenous people I've met - including those who hold on to their practice of indigenous faith beliefs and traditions like the Arakan Manobo of Cotabato, the Dulangan Manobo in Sultan Kudarat and the Subanen across the Zamboanga peninsula - I have been very moved by their holistic view of their cosmic religion, namely, that everything in the universe is inter-related. There is a

wholeness in their respect and appreciation of creation; their belief in their Deity is such that nothing - human beings, forests, the soil, animals, trees, etc. - is to be destroyed and considered useless. All are intertwined and thus, we should all do our best to protect Mother Nature.

I share many of the beliefs and commitments of the poor to reverse what used to be the dominant discourse of most people, namely, that the world was created for peoples and that human beings can just decide what to do with nature. We have to change this mentality that has led to the environment's destruction as this has provided loggers, miners and owners of construction firms and fruit plantation firms with the sole power to decide on what we do with our natural resources. We should view the whole of the universe from the lens of those who have been provided by God with the wisdom to value the integrity of creation.

My own awareness of the ecological crisis and my faith commitment to help protect Mother Nature intensified in the late 1980's when I was immersed along with our mission team among the poor peasants who opposed the continuing logging operations in Bukidnon.²² With the people, we were able to stop the logging operations and encouraged tree planting among the communities. Our environmental advocacy continued in other areas. In Mahayag, Zamboanga del Sur, we opposed the construction of a hydro-electric plant that had very few safeguards. In nearby Lakewood, we campaigned against the destruction of the lake with a government plan to promote tourism that threatened the lake's eco-system.

In the recent years, I have joined ecology-oriented civil society groups campaigning against aerial spray, mineral resources' explorations and open pit mining, and setting up coal-fired power plants. I have also tried to live out a commitment in terms of a simple lifestyle and living gently with creation in the choices I make with regard to food, healing illnesses, forms of entertainment and

22. See Karl M. Gaspar, CSsR, *The People's Option, To Struggle for Creation* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1989) and Ramon Fruto, CSsR, Amado Picardal, CSsR and Karl Gaspar, CSsR, *Being Sent: Redemptorist Missions in Mindanao (1975-2005)* (Quezon City: Claretian Communications, 2006).

socialization, keeping fit and my over-all well-being. As with the web of life, all these are inter-connected.

In my earlier militant engagements as a church worker in the late 1960's through the 1980's, my focus was on connecting with the movement dealing with the economic and political root causes of poverty, advocating the empowerment of the poor sectors through conscientization and organization, denouncing human rights violations and promoting justice and peace programs. Reflecting on the Scriptures, the Church's social teachings and the writings of liberation theologians fuelled the passion behind such engagements.

When the first stirrings towards an expanded view of reality - incorporating what is seen in the horizon with an ecological eye - erupted in the late 1980's, we hesitatingly embraced this new view given our anthropocentric perspective then. It would take a while to shake off this perspective. What again proved useful in deepening this newly-acquired stance was being immersed among grassroots communities who dared to make a people's option, namely, to struggle for creation. A re-reading of Scripture texts and the availability of the early literature on the theology of creation made possible in Mindanao through the efforts of the Columban missionaries helped to quench the thirst for theological reflections that could guide praxis in the area of environmental action.

These engagements have not been easy as we have been faced with powerful enemies, especially those among the corporate elite as well as government bureaucrats who tend to be on the side of business interests. Unfortunately, not many from among our ranks are willing to take on a strong engagement so the ecological struggle could be lonely.

I hope to sustain my commitment because as a Christian, I fully believe that taking a preferential option for the poor today also means preferentially opting for creation, since the ones who suffer the most from this crisis are all creatures who are poor. I fully believe that all of God's creatures have a right to a fullness of life. This cannot be attained if the whole of creation is fragmented, disrupted and destroyed. The fullness of our life necessarily requires the full integrity of creation which is the locus of God's love for the whole of humanity.

As a Christian, I fully believe that God's gift of salvation for humanity is situated within God's gift of creation. We cannot be saved only from the perspective of a dream of a heaven beyond life on this earth. We are also saved in the here and now, in the joys and pleasures that we are able to enjoy with the persons, communities and landscapes we love. All these joys and pleasures are brought about by the beauty, goodness and generosity of the universe which is our abode, our home and locus of our being creatures of the one Creator.

As Church, What Have We Done So Far?

Like many other church people, my present lamentation is that we have done so little. Our creative initiatives in the JPIC field remain limited. There is no question as to where civil society is, especially ecology-oriented NGOs. They are better engaged in maintaining their vigilance in the evolving realities as they continue to be engaged in research and documentation, study sessions and advocacy work. Unfortunately, they have a limited mass base for the moment as their circles tend to be urban-based and of the middle class.

At the diocesan, parish and BEC levels, there is a dearth of such initiatives. Despite the exhortations of many church documents, the response at the ground level has been weak. There has not been an upsurge of interest in the field of promoting social analysis and concientization sessions on JPIC issues. Even as some initiatives arise, there is a problem of sustainability.

This is rather a pity as there were promising initiatives that went back to the Martial Law years. In the 1970's militant activists engaged in issues related to the Bataan Nuclear Plant, the Dam Projects (affecting, e.g., the Chico River in the Mt. Province and the Pulangi in Bukidnon). After EDSA 1986, there were the people power actions against logging. The Bishops came up with a statement in 1988. However, little action has ensued from such an urgent call even as the same concern was one of the major challenges raised during the 2000 Jubilee celebrations.

In fairness to the CBCP and individual bishops, there has been some positive action. In the area of mining, Bishop Nereo Odchimar,

the CBCP President, wrote to President Aquino “For more than a decade now, we have been asking our government to put a stop to large-scale mining since this not only permanently damages the delicate balance of our natural environment, it also makes our small farmers, fisher folk and indigenous people suffer.”²³ The CBCP also called for the abolition of the Philippine Mining Act of 1995 and opposed the E.O. 270-A or PGMA’s National Policy on the Revitalization of Mining issued in 2004.²⁴

In the field of advocacy to stop mining, the bishops of Dipolog-Ozamis-Pagadian-Iligan-Marawi (DOPIM) set up the DOPIM Commission on Mining Issues (DCMI). Their Social Action Centers have been monitoring both big- and small-scale mining and logging operations. The Diocese of Marbel through the SAC, along with its partners advocated for a ban on open-pit mining, targeting especially the operations of Saggitarium Mines, Inc. in Tampakan, South Cotabato. Their efforts led to the passing of the Environment Code by the *Sangguniang Panlalawigan*.²⁵

To concretize their concern, the CBCP set up an Ecology Desk at the office of the National Secretariat of Social Action, Justice and Peace (NASSA) with one full-time staff person serving as the Ecology Program Coordinator. From data provided by this Desk, some dioceses are engaged in ecological issues but with different priorities from waste management to anti-mining advocacy.²⁶ The data on the extent of the SACs’ ecological engagements need to be supplemented with a more comprehensive documentation to actually show the extent of their environmental response.

23. Evelyn Macairan, “CBCP asks Noynoy to stop large-scale mining”, (*The Philippine Star*, 17 July 2010), 11.

24. The CBCP’s stance to stop large-scale mining met with a lot of negative reaction from newspaper columnists who are supportive of economic liberalization. See, Carmen Pedrosa, “Mining in the Philippines and Galileo”, (*The Philippine Star*, 25 July 2010), 13; Alex Magno, “Torpedo”, (*The Philippine Star*, 24 July 2010), 10; and Bobit S. Avila,

25. Aquiles Zonio, “Gov signs open-pit mining ban, reveals pressure from Danding”, (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 1 July 2010), A20.

26. Based on correspondence I had with NASSA personnel through email on July 28, 2010.

A recent incident manifested the reality that the members of the CBCP are not always on the same wavelength when it comes to protecting Creation. This incident involved the conflicting stance between two groups of bishops on the issue of aerial spray.

On 26 October 2009, the Manila-based Cardinal Gaudencio B. Rosales, Bishops Deogracias Iniquez, Bernardo C. Cortez and Broderick S. Pabillo signed a letter addressed to Stephen A. Antig, Executive Director of the Pilipino Banana Growers and Exporters Association (PBGEA) imploring him “to join us in affirming the beautiful covenant between humans and ecosystems... and stop aerial spraying in your plantations now”. Around this time the *Mamamayan Ayaw sa Aerial Spraying* (MAAS) with its partners in civil society led by the National Task force Against Aerial Spraying (NTFAAS) and Interfacing Development Interventions, Inc. (IDIS) took the campaign from Mindanao to Manila to attract more support. In the process, progressive Congress persons began to push for legislation banning aerial spray.

A groundswell was already developing in the last quarter of 2009 to push for the ban. Even government agencies like the DOH and the CHR issued policy recommendations in favour of the ban considering the spray’s impact on the people’s health and the environment based on studies conducted by scientists and health experts.²⁷

To everyone’s surprise, on 16 March 2010, a paid advertisement appeared in a number of Davao-based and Manila newspapers which was the “Joint DADITAMA (Davao, Digos, Tagum, Mati) Pastoral Statement on Aerial Spraying” signed by Archbishop Fernando R. Capalla (Davao), Bishops George B. Rimando (Davao), Wilfredo Manlapaz (Tagum) and Guillermo V. Afable (Digos).²⁸ It indicated

27. See Letter of Dr. Francisco T. Duque III dated November 11, 2010 addressed to PGMA and Human Rights Advisory (CHR IV A 2010-001) issued on 22 January 2010. Also see Study Highlights prepared by IDIS – Health and Environmental Assessment of Sitio Camocan, Hagonoy, Davao del Sur indicating the findings of investigations conducted by Dr. Romeo Quijano, a toxicologist from the University of the Philippines as well as a DOH Statement taken up in a meeting held on 24 August 2009.

28. See (*Sun-Star Davao*, 16 March 2010), 3.

that “there are no sufficient data to warrant total ban on aerial spraying.”²⁹ With this statement, they rebuffed the stance of the Manila-based Bishops and those who had indicated the aerial spray’s harmful effects.

In the wake of the issuance of the DADITAMA Bishops’ statement, the members of the Davao Region Cluster (DRC) of the Philippine Misereor Partnership (PMP) called for a meeting on 23 June 2010 attended by 27 NGOs and church groups including the SACs of Davao, Digos, Tagum and Mati and also Bishop Afable. After their meeting they came up with a statement where they reiterated their “unequivocal support to the calls for an immediate ban on aerial spraying activities in agricultural plantations.”³⁰ Among those whose names appear at the bottom of the statement – and presumably, they approved this statement – were Bishop Afable and the representatives of the SACs of DADITAMA.

This incident may be an isolated case; however, this brouhaha over the hot issue of aerial spray in Davao serves as a significant case study to determine how far the bishops would go with their ecological stance when stakes are high. It is unfortunate that by issuing this statement as a paid advertisement, the bishops inadvertently took the side of the rich banana growers against the poor whose health are affected when their bodies are contaminated by the fungicides sprayed over their communities as well as the environment.

I also looked into what is being done by the religious congregations throughout the country in terms of their engagement under the JPIC. The first time I did it was in 2005 as part of the research that I did for the Institute of Spirituality in Asia.³¹ This study was focused on Mindanao. Using data from the 2004 Catholic Directory and primary data, I discovered that only about 5.2% of the religious were engaged in what I considered urgent pastoral ministries (to include JPIC, inter-faith dialogue and solidarity work

29. Ibid.

30. A copy of the statement was incorporated in an email posting of Mary Anne Fuertes to me, dated 6 July 2010.

31. The findings of the research study are in *Mystic Wanderers in the Land of Perpetual Departures* (Quezon City: Institute of Spirituality in Asia, 2005).

with the IPs). Most or 81.0% were involved in traditional ministries, 8.7% in formation and 5.1% in administration.

As part of the research I did for this paper, I made inquiries into how far the religious are engaged in ecological issues. My main source of information was Sr. Angie Villanueva RC, who is acting Chairperson of the Coordinating Council of the JPIC Commission of the AMRSP (JPICC-AMRSP). As mission partner, the JPICC-AMRSP is tasked with carrying out activities within the framework of the AMRSP Vision-Mission Statement, policies and guidelines. It was set up in 2006; its Constitution was approved in February 2010.³²

At present there are 26 congregations that maintain email connections with the Desk. Of these, 18 are active members. The members have been engaged in advocacy work vis-a-vis these issues: large scale mining and the Mining Act, the alternative Mining Bill, illegal logging, the Laiban Dam, nuclear reactors, the reconstituting of the Bataan Nuclear Power Plant and solid waste management.

The main activities of the Commission included: networking, attending meetings and Senate hearings, prayer rallies, pickets, Masses and vigils, lecture series, being part of the anti-mining solidarity group, visits to pilot organic farms, dialogue with CARP at DAR, environmental tours, prayer rally in Bataan, film showings, lobbying at Senate and Congress, circles of discernment on various bills in Congress, march to *Batasan* on Alternate Mining Law, support farmers on strike, anti-dam walk, tree planting and visit to LGU to discuss Eco/Solid Waste Management and attending conferences e.g. the National Climate Change Conference which was initiated by Archbishop Antonio Ledesma and Christian Monsod.

However, if one were to go from diocese to diocese, the religious congregations' engagement in ecology is far limited compared to apostolates that demand more resources and attention which tend to be the more traditional ministries. Despite the heroic efforts of the religious in this field, one cannot deny that only a small minority are actively involved.

32. The first members of the Coordinating Council were elected in February 2008.

How Come We Fail To Speak and Act Boldly on the Ecological Crisis?

We can theorize on what could be some of the reasons behind the weak action of the Church in the Philippines despite the catastrophic reality of the impact of climate change.

Earlier we highlighted McDonagh's theory who posited that as revealed in the documents that have so far been issued by the Magisterium, there is an absence of fully acknowledging the urgency and magnitude of the ecological crisis. To engage the reality of creation we have to deal with the science of ecology and the available empirical scientific data which are easily accessible from "reputable bodies such as the IPCC, or in the area of destruction of biodiversity, from the UN Convention on Biodiversity".³³

To probe into the hierarchy's ambivalence of dealing with scientific data, McDonagh cites the comments of the former Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Archbishop Gimpalo Crepaldi who posited that the Church expresses misgivings "about notions of the environment inspired by eco-centrism and biocentrism" leading to a new pantheism with neo-pagan accents which "would see the source of man's salvation in nature alone, understood in purely naturalistic terms."³⁴ The very same sentiments appear in the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church: "a correct understanding of the environment prevents the utilitarian reduction of nature to a mere object to be manipulated and exploited. At the same time, it must not absolutize nature and place it above the dignity of the human person himself. In this latter case, one can go so far as to divinize nature or the earth, as can readily be seen in certain ecological movements that seek to gain an international guaranteed institutional status for their beliefs".

McDonagh critiques this stance indicating that the "problem with (the) text is that they are based on an inadequate understanding of modern science" and the fact that while "the earth is almost 5 billion years old and that life on earth is about 3.8 billion years old; (h)umans

33. Ibid., 366.

34. McDonagh cites Crepaldi's reflection paper entitled, "Benedict XVI Offers Middle Ground on Environment"(www.zenit.org January 10,2010). Ibid., 367.

are probably less than 200,000 years old”.³⁵ McDonagh’s take is that the Vatican is suspicious of authors like Dr. John Feehan and Tomas Berry who are seen as denigrating the human leading to a “fear about a biocentric approach of the Earth”.³⁶

Despite the 333 years that have passed since the death of Benedict Spinoza who died on 21 February 1677, there remains a strong residue of the Church’s opposition to his pantheist philosophy. Where the pantheistic shadow is cast, the Magisterium has the tendency to go weak in terms of its ecological stance. In countries like the Philippines - where there remains a significant presence of IPs holding on to their indigenous belief system – the fear that Christian doctrine can possibly be compromised by pantheistic notions constantly arises. Since the belief in environmental spirits has persisted even among lowland Catholics, the Church takes an aggressive stance cautioning the faithful in terms of granting divinity to all of nature. It is both ironic and tragic that where a natural response to ecological issues can be triggered among us Filipinos – precisely because of our connectedness to a legacy that considers all of nature as sacred – the Church could not mobilize this energy source within us just because she is afraid to cross the orthodox doctrinal boundaries.

Ensnared in the pantheistic shadow, the institutional Church is not able to appropriate the notion of “*panentheism* (all-in-God or God-in-all) which articulates God’s presence in the whole of creation in a new way”; as differentiated from pantheism (all-is-God), it is “an acceptable theological notion in that it recognizes the difference between God and creation in the event of their mutual interpenetration”.³⁷ As Boff stated: “God and universe are not like a single circle that has just one center where they met; (t)hey are related like an oval with two centers – God and world – but related and mutually implicated in one another”.³⁸ How Scriptural texts (e.g.

35. Ibid., 372.

36. Ibid., 370. Dr. John Feehan is an Irish scientist who wrote the book – *The Singing Heart of the Universe, Creation, Evolution and Faith*, (Dublin: Columba Publications, 2010). Cited in Sean McDonagh, “To Protect Creation”, 368.

37. Reynaldo Raluto, “To Struggle for Human and Ecological Liberation”, 265.

38. Cited in Reynaldo Raluto. Ibid. See also Lode Wostyn, *In Search of a Human Jesus* (Manila: Lode L. Wostyn, CICM, 2010), 32, 72.

Genesis 2:15) have been interpreted leading to the privileging of human beings as creation's stewards is another hindering element.

Unfortunately, all of us from the hierarchy to our BEC leaders do little in terms of updating ourselves with current theories in both natural and social sciences, research findings in ecological studies and the latest literature on the theology of creation. We hardly attend conferences on these topics or dialogue with those who have expertise in these fields. A militant ecological engagement could also be compromised by our continuing fear to take a prophetic stance on various issues especially where we need to confront the powers-that-be who we do not want to upset for various reasons.

Could all these explain the limited space for a sustained ecological discourse among us? How thick is the literature written by our bishops, theologians and pastoral workers on the theology of creation? In the first place, unlike Latin America, we are not known in terms of our accumulated body of theological literature. It follows that in the field of creation, our Filipiniana remains limited. This leaves us hoping that at the level of oral discussions, there could be more. But if one were to do a study on how far ecology figures in the Sunday sermons of our clergy, it might make us realize it is there at the bottom. Could this be true in terms of discussions during Theology or Religious Studies sessions in our seminaries and schools?

If on the level of discourse, we are already found wanting, what more if we look for concrete action at the ground level. Just like in the field of justice and peace, the area of integrity of creation is not exactly where many of us are active. At the frontlines of the struggle to combat ecological devastation are but a few among us. Fortunately other sectors of civil society like the NGOs and media continue to radically pursue environmental issues.

Given our own limitations when it comes to the area of program management, we are more drawn to the everyday urgent needs, e.g. maintenance of our apostolate, raising enough funds to put body and soul together, projecting ourselves as dominant institutions through buildings, state-of-the art technology and the latest model of transport vehicles.

The friends we keep might have hindered St. Francis of Assisi in leading us to be on the side of nature. If one is to highlight a reason why there are some actions undertaken by Church people in their

local areas to wittingly or unwittingly support those who are aggressive exploiters of the earth's resources, it could be because they are beholden to them. Even our silence in the face of blatant attacks on nature for fear of unnecessarily antagonizing those in society's high positions is already a signal of our being on their side. Where the Church leadership's social capital is enhanced primarily through connections with the powers-that-be whose economic capital is derived from nature extraction, then the prophetic stance is unfortunately compromised.

And yet, we are supposed to be the ones to help form the conscience of the People of God. The provision of moral and ethical guidelines is supposed to be one of our most important tasks in the Christian community. With our vows and commitments, we have been tasked to help in the dissemination of the Church's best-kept secrets (namely the Church social teachings and now her ecological exhortations) and to act as prophetic witnesses to the Gospel's demands. Indeed, how bold have I been in terms of the message I am supposed to preach in word and deed?

The God we believe in is the same God that the apostles referred to as Master and Creator of heaven, earth, and sea and all that is in them! May this God empower us to speak the message God wants us to do today with the same boldness manifested by Peter, John and others in the wake of Pentecost! *Insallah! Harinawa! Hinant pa!*

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