

RECASTING CHRISTIAN AND CULTURAL RESOURCES FOR ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY

Randy J.C. Odchigue♦

Introduction

This paper seeks to address the contextual experience of the question on environment and sustainability in the Philippine milieu. From there, we will endeavour to self-reflexively examine how Christian discourse can overcome its own embedded presuppositions that may have contributed to the environmental colonization. Finally, we will explore what possible cultural resource within the context that may relate to a re-thinking of a Christian framework for just sustainability.

Context

When one speaks about the environment and sustainability in the Philippines, the debate on mining industry comes to mind. Environmental groups have been continually criticizing government policy and implementation that despite the promise of its benefits, the mining industry in the Philippines only wreaked havoc in the

♦**Randy J.C. Odchigue** is an ordained minister of the diocese of Butuan (Philippines). He is the Vice President for Academic Affairs at Fr. Saturnino Urios University, Butuan City, Philippines. He completed his doctorate in sacred theology at Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium, with a dissertation on "The Local Church in the Diverse Islands of Cultures: Towards a Filipino Ecclesiological Perspective" (2009). Among his publications are: "Bibo, Ergo Sum: Theo-social Reflections of the Taguibo Watershed Advocacy", in *Politics and Christian Tradition* [Hapag: Journal of Interdisciplinary Theological Research 7 no. 1], ed. Emmanuel de Guzman & Aloysius Cartagenas, Quezon City: SVST/AdU, 2010, 79-91; "Sacramental Relationality: Eco-Theological Possibilities," in *Re-imagining Christianity for a Green World*, ed. Randy J.C. Odchigue & Eric Genilo, Quezon City SVST/AdU, 2011, 113-133. Email: odchi@yahoo.com

island-eco-systems of the country. One study reveals that while the production value in mining rose from US\$568.7 million in 2001 to US\$912.4 million in 2005. The payment, however to the government within this duration only averaged at 4.64% of the gross production value. This reveals the gross disparity between wealth generation and wealth sharing.¹ There are many other issues and concerns in mining policy and implementation in relation to justice and sustainability.

According to a foundation for the protection of endangered bird species, in 2011 about 60% of key biodiversity areas (KBAs) and around 1/3 of the ancestral domains of the indigenous peoples overlap with the 23 mining projects in the country.² This indeed has implications on the issues of sustainability and biodiversity in the Philippines. Moreover, the fragile small-island ecological systems of the archipelagic set up of the Philippines can be irreversibly destroyed as the mining activities have ridge-to-reef impact. This is evidenced in the tragedy in Rapu-rapu in the Bicol Region of the Philippines where tones of toxic materials that spilled into the creeks and coasts of the island caused the killing of marine life.³ Besides the economic, environmental and health implications of the mining industry, there are other social and cultural concerns that are affected collaterally under such conditions.

Revisiting Colonial Background

Historically and culturally, the question of land and natural resources as it relates to the indigenous peoples and the environment is inextricably bound to the legacy left by the Spanish colonizers who were entrenched in the islands for almost 400 years. One such legacy is called the Regalian Doctrine. Legitimizing colonial interests through the Christian missionary discourse,⁴ the conquistadores assert that the Spanish Crown claim ownership on all conquered

¹"A Rich Seam: Who Benefits from the Rising Commodity Prices?" *Christian Aid* (2007) 28-29.

²*Birdlife International, Haribon Foundation, and Philippines Association for Intercultural Development*, 2011 as cited in *Alyansang Tigil Mina*, Position Paper on the Continued Adoption of the Aquino Government of the Revitalization of the Philippine Mining Industry Policy, 2011.

³"The two tailings spill incidents were the proximate cause of the health and environmental hazards in Rapu-rapu and coastal municipalities of Sorsogon." *Rapu-Rapu Fact Finding Commission (RRFFC) Final Report*, 2006.

⁴For a more nuanced reading on this see, William Henry Scott, "Demythologizing the Papal Bull 'Inter Caetera'," in *Philippine Studies* 35, 3 (1987) 348-356.

lands. When the archipelago passed into the hands of the Americans, the regalian doctrine seemed to form the basis of the American colonial agrarian laws. Based on this doctrine, the colonial government passed the Land Registration Act of 1902, the Public Lands Act of 1913 (amended in 1919 and 1925) and the Mining Act of 1905 that in effect declared the ancestral domains of the indigenous peoples as public lands.⁵ These laws form basis of the legitimation of the use of the natural resources in indigenous peoples' lands. "The more than 100 year-old mining companies in Benguet province in northern Philippines are the existing by-products of these colonial laws."⁶

There were indeed legal instruments that sought to protect the rights of the indigenous peoples. Under the Indigenous People's Rights Act of 1997 (IPRA), the CADT (Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title) serves as a mechanism where the Indigenous Peoples (IPs) can secure tenure to their ancestral lands. Two years before the IPRA was passed, the Philippine Mining Act provides that the State shall "recognize and protect the rights of indigenous cultural communities to their ancestral lands as provided by the Constitution." However, it also stipulates that the mineral resources are owned by the State and it has powers to decide as to how these resources are developed.⁷ What appears is the conflicted nature of the laws regarding environment and natural resources and the IP rights. And it seems that experience shows that in the clash between the two interests, the Regalian Doctrine would prevail.⁸

⁵Joji Cariño, Ma. Elena Regpala & Raymond de Chaves, ed., *Asserting Land Rights*, Baguio City: Tebtebba, 2010, 20.

⁶Joji Cariño, Ma. Elena Regpala & Raymond de Chaves, ed., *Asserting Land Rights*, 20.

⁷See, *The Philippine Mining Act (RA 7942)*: "Sec. 4 Ownership of Mineral Resources. - Mineral resources are owned by the State and the exploration, development, utilization, and processing thereof shall be under its full control and supervision. The State may directly undertake such activities or it may enter into mineral agreements with contractors." <http://www.psdn.org.ph/chmbio/ra7942.html>. Accessed: May 4, 2012.

⁸"There was an important jurisprudence in which former Supreme Court Justice Isagani Cruz, challenged the Department of Environment and Natural Resources over questions related to natural resources in indigenous lands. The court, however, upheld the Regalian Doctrine and ruled that natural resources in indigenous territories are owned by the State." Joji Cariño, Ma. Elena Regpala & Raymond de Chaves, ed., *Asserting Land Rights*, 23.

Reflections on the Response of the Hierarchy

Despite the ecclesiastical-colonial traces in the laws relating to environment and sustainability in the Philippines, the Catholic Church hierarchy seemed to have taken its role seriously in protecting the environment. In 1988, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines issued a pastoral letter on ecology, *What is Happening to Our Beautiful Land?* In the document they stated:

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.⁹

Individually, one could cite the appeal of the then CBCP President, Bishop Nerio Odchimar to the current president Benigno Aquino, Jr.: "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."¹⁰ Gaspar also mentions that the CBCP has set up an Ecology Desk at the National Secretariat for Social Action, Justice and Peace and the data from the office reveal that many dioceses throughout the archipelago are engaged in environmental advocacy ranging from waste management to anti-mining advocacy.¹¹

While these efforts are laudable, Gaspar contends that the ecological efforts of the official church seemed not hinged in a comprehensive framework at which the bishops can frame their various advocacies.¹² Moreover, he mentions that apparently, the response of the official church is not able to overcome the anthropocentric framework on the question of ecology. If indeed one would subscribe to the points raised by Gaspar, it would seem that he is hinting that the catholic

⁹Abdon Josol, *Responses to the Signs of the Times, Selected Documents: Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines*, Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1991, 306, 312-13.

¹⁰Evelyn Macairan, "CBCP asks Noynoy to stop large-scale mining" *The Philippine Star*, 17 July, 2010, 11. Quoted in Karl Gaspar, "To Speak with Boldness," in *Re-imagining Christianity for a Green World*, ed. Randy J.C. Odchigue & Eric Genilo Quezon City: SVST/AdU, 2011, 19-38, 31.

¹¹Karl Gaspar, "To Speak with Boldness," 31.

¹²Gaspar mentions the divided stance of the bishops in relation to the issues of toxic aerial sprays for the banana plantations in Davao (Mindanao). See, Karl Gaspar, "To Speak with Boldness," 31.

philosophical framework on environment has not yet gone beyond the subject-object dualism that has often been associated with the modern philosophical position.

Lynn White famously argues that at the root of the ecological crisis is the western Christianity's framework of anthropocentrism whose dualism warranted environmental exploitation "in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects."¹³ While White's position is not reflective of the official catholic position, Gaspar problematizes the ambivalence in the statements that manifest the stance of the Church on the matter. An example of this in Gaspar's estimation can be seen in Benedict XVI's statement:

A correct understanding of the relationship between man and the environment will not end by absolutizing nature or by considering it more important than the human person. If the Church's magisterium expresses grave misgivings about notions of the environment inspired by ecocentrism and biocentrism, it is because such notions eliminate the difference of identity and worth between the human person and other living things. In the name of a supposedly egalitarian vision of the "dignity" of all living creatures, such notions end up abolishing the distinctiveness and superior role of human beings. They also open the way to a new pantheism tinged with neo-paganism, which would see the source of man's salvation in nature alone, understood in purely naturalistic terms. The Church, for her part, is concerned that the question be approached in a balanced way, with respect for the "grammar" which the Creator has inscribed in his handiwork by giving man the role of a steward and administrator with responsibility over creation, a role which man must certainly not abuse, but also one which he may not abdicate.¹⁴

Following the position of Sean McDonagh, Gaspar contends that anthropocentrism has not completely disappeared from the catholic position. While the debate whether the catholic position is radical or not quite, will continue, it is important to bear in mind that the understanding of the interrelatedness in creation has moved beyond anthropocentric functionalism. Even the idea of sustainable development has been criticized (on the basis that its capitalist framework which supports a privatistic appropriation of natural

¹³Lynn White, Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic(AI) Crisis," *Science* 155 (10 March 1967) 1203-1207, 1205; (reprinted in Francis A. Schaeffer, *Pollution and the Death of Man*, Hodder & Shoughton, 1974, 70-81; and in *Thinking Green: An Anthology of Essential Writing*, ed. Michael Allaby, Barrie & Jenkins, 1989.

¹⁴Benedict XVI, *Message for the 2010 World Day of Peace* § 13.

resources¹⁵), to have not been able to overcome the mechanistic view of reality stemming from the Cartesian division between *res cogitans* (human person) and *res extensa* (nature).¹⁶ Despite the contemporary debate among the deep ecologists and the ecofeminists on the nuance between anthropocentrism and androcentrism (as the root of ecological destruction), both groups have a common position against hierarchical dualism that results from the mechanistic appropriation of modern philosophical categories.¹⁷

If the critique against the vestiges of anthro/androcentrism¹⁸ in the catholic stance is to be given credence then there is a challenge for an 'overcoming' in order to provide a framework of engagement that is responsive and relevant to the context where exploitation happens. In my view, this gambit of overcoming can happen in two moves: one philosophical-theological and two, cultural.

Philosophical-Theological Overcoming

The hierarchical dualism that buttresses a functionalistic view of creation leads to a worldview that posits humanity and environment on the seeming opposite sides of the fence (hence the importance of finding a middle way position).¹⁹ This seems to be the philosophical underpinning of Gaspar's and McDonagh's critique against the stewardship discourse of the catholic position. The epistemological layout of the binarism between *res cogitans* and *res extensa* posits that knowledge for example is a result of an act of adequation or

¹⁵Denis Duclos, "La nature: principale contradiction culturelle du capitalisme?" in *L'Écologie, ce Matérialisme Historique*, Paris: PUF, 1992, 41-58.

¹⁶See, Hyun-Chul Cho, "Interconnectedness and Intrinsic Value as Ecological Principles: An Appropriation of Karl Rahner's Evolutionary Christology," in *Theological Studies* 70 § 3 (2009) 622-37, 623; Ian Barbour, *Religion and Science: Historical and Contemporary Issues*, New York: Harper Collins, 1997, 12-13.

¹⁷See, Hyun-Chul Cho, "Interconnectedness and Intrinsic Value...", 636; Pamela Smith, *What Are They Saying about Environmental Ethics?*, New York: Paulist Press, 1997; Elizabeth Johnson, *Women, Earth and Creator Spirit*, New York: Paulist, 1993; Val Plumwood, "Androcentrism and Anthropocentrism: Parallels and Politics," in *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature*, ed. Karen J. Warren, Indianapolis: Indiana University, 1997.

¹⁸See for example, *the Statement of Asian Theological Conference on Indigenous People's Struggle for Justice and Liberation in Asia* by the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT). http://www.eatwot.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=33&Itemid=42.

¹⁹See for example, Archbishop Giampaolo Crepaldi, "Benedict XVI Offers Middle Ground on Environment." <http://www.zenit.org/article-28004?l=english>. Accessed: May 5, 2012.

Randy J.C. Odchigue

'grasping' – "a process of gathering information about the other being, i.e., by subjecting it to my observation which will lead to a description (establishing characteristics) and evaluation (establishing qualities and value of this being."²⁰ This epistemology relates to a metaphysics of objectivity. This metaphysics

culminates in a kind of thinking that identifies the truth of Being with the calculable, measurable and definitely manipulable object of techno-science. This conception of Being as a quantifiable object conceals the presupposition of the world as a total organization where even the human subject tends to be regarded as a raw material - a part of the general mechanism of production and consumption."²¹

In this epistemological and metaphysical infrastructure, the presupposition is that the individual becomes the centre of truth and there seems to be a real danger when the individual becomes the referent of all existence without regard for the other, his actions and relationships to an over-inflation of his role.²² Even the stewardship discourse can fall into the trap of anthropocentrism. McDonagh contends that the framework of stewardship can easily give an impression that creation is a reified property that to be managed and traded. This, according to McDonagh, seems to be based on a pretension that the *anthropos* has a comprehensive knowledge regarding the natural world in order to be able to administer it in its intricacy.²³

One theological approach in order to go beyond anthropocentric hierarchical dualism is provided by an orthodox theologian by the name of John Zizioulas. In his article entitled "Human Capacity and Incapacity: A Theological Exploration of Personhood," Zizioulas elaborates the ideas of ἐκστασις and ὑπόστασις as the two indispensable aspects whereby the person is essentially seen as a being in movement towards communion and that his/her mode of existence is absolutely unique and irreplaceable.²⁴ Zizioulas'

²⁰John Zizioulas, "Human Capacity and Incapacity," in *Scottish Journal of Theology* 28 (1975) 401-48, 427.

²¹Randy J.C. Odchigue, "The Radical Kenoticism of Gianni Vattimo and Interreligious Dialogue," in *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 16 § 2 (2006) 173-189, 176. See also, Gianni Vattimo, *Belief*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999, 31.

²²John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Press, 1985, 105.

²³Sean McDonagh, *Passion for the Earth: The Christian Vocation to Promote Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation*, Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1995, 133

²⁴John Zizioulas, "Human Capacity and Human Incapacity: A Theological Exploration of Personhood," 407-408.

methodology involves a reconsideration of the notion of person using the existential concepts of freedom and existence as 'being there' (*Dasein*).²⁵ Zizioulas' relational personalism is radically open-ended because it is characterized and constituted according to the dynamism of love, freedom and relationality. This is a far cry from the onto-theological static categories which define personhood in terms of substance and essential qualities. This liberation of the notion of person from Greek categories happened alongside the development of and reflection on the trinitarian doctrine of the Church. The anthropology of Zizioulas is also based on theological recuperation of Maximus' idea of *ἐκστασις* as God's continual out-pouring of Godself to all creation. Zizioulas is convinced that the persons in the Trinity are persons in communion. He asserts that through the notion of person as hypostatic and ecstatic, God is freed from the necessity of ontological monism and is acknowledged to act in radical freedom in relation to creation and the cosmos. God is, therefore, essentially a *koinonia* in love. The *being* of the church is intimately bound to the very nature of God which is communion. Thus Zizioulas believes that in and through the ecclesial being the individual becomes a person in communion. In the Church, therefore, the person exists in a way analogous to the existence of God namely, *koinonia*. In the ecclesial hypostasis, the person takes on God's way of being and thus he/she becomes an *imago Dei*. The significance of the thought of John Zizioulas at this point is that the retrieval of the radically open concept of personhood as based on love and freedom enables religious communion to be grounded once again on personal liberty. Implicit in Zizioulas' retrieval of personal liberty (as basis of religious communion) is the demand that one has to exorcise from the interior of theology the unmoved deity – the god of the philosophers; the god whom we cannot worship.²⁶ The God who is *koinonia* is a God who relates to us and to whom we can relate. In this schema, "*Hypostasis* signifies that in and through his communion, a person affirms his own identity and his particularity...The mystery of being a person lies in the fact that here otherness and communion are not in

²⁵See, Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson, London: SCM Press, 1962.

²⁶See, William Hanky, "Theoria vs. Poesis: Neoplatonism and Trinitarian Difference in Aquinas, John Milbank, Jean-Luc Marion and J. Zizioulas," in *Modern Theology* 15 (1999) 387-415, 393-394.

contradiction but coincide."²⁷ Epistemologically speaking, Zizioulas would argue that knowledge is "the outcome of an event of communion."²⁸

For Zizioulas, there are two important implications of this in relation to ecology. First, with the coincidence of *hypostasis* and *ekstasis* in the person, the human ceases to be an isolated "I" because relationality is what defines his identity. The human therefore is displaced as the sole referent of existence: he is placed within a vast web of interrelatedness within the whole of creation. Zizioulas' anthropological move is motivated by a belief that as long as the Cartesian subject of individualism is made the centre of everything, there can be no real and lasting remedy to ecological problems. In the fields of natural and biological science, Zizioulas points out that in the Western world, this man-centred and reason-dominated worldview of modernity has been put into question by the intellectual forces which for him acted in contrast with the modernist attitude. These intellectual forces, which for the most part are represented by the development of quantum mechanics, helped bring humans back to their organic place in nature. Through Einstein and the subsequent proponents of quantum physics, the dichotomy between nature or substance and event has been put to an end. This ended the subject-object duality because the observer and the observed form an unbreakable bond - one affecting the other.²⁹

The second implication of this framework in ecology lies in Zizioulas' idea of the sacredness of creation. This idea is hinged in what he calls a liturgical vision of the world. The term liturgical is used with an eye of the Orthodox tradition that the Eucharistic liturgy is the iconic representation of the communion at which eschatology irrupts into and interrupts history.³⁰ Through this irruption the existential becomes supernatural and the supernatural becomes existential. "There is no longer a dualism which separates the secular and the sacred because creation and her gifts, in and through the liturgy, are offered to God

²⁷John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 106.

²⁸John Zizioulas, "Human Capacity and Incapacity," 427.

²⁹John Zizioulas, "Preserving God's Creation. Three Lectures on Theology and Ecology I," in *King's Theological Review* 12 (1989) 1-10, 8-9.

³⁰John Zizioulas, "Church as Communion," in *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 38 (1994) 7-19, 15.

as Eucharist and thanksgiving symbolizing the cosmic communion with humanity and creation."³¹

Zizioulas believes that ecological crisis is also a spiritual crisis. He contends that it is important to stress the sacredness of all the aspects of creation. He is aware that "this may be easier in cultures and societies where oriental religions are predominant, but could prove to be much more difficult where the Judeo-Christian tradition is the main religious force either historically or actually. The fear of paganism and a strong tradition of rationalism will make it difficult to promote the idea of the sacredness of nature - or even of sacredness in general - in Western culture."³² On this point, Zizioulas distances himself from the facile labeling as pantheistic and paganistic any attribution of sacredness to nature. Moreover, he offers a chord of resonance to the indigenous belief systems whose connection to their ancestral lands are enshrined in orality, myths and their prayers.

In view of Zizioulas' plea to stress the sacredness of creation, Gaspar's critique of the official position of the Church remains relevant. The latter elucidates that in places where a significant number of indigenous people still hold their ancestral belief system, there seems to be a nagging worry about pantheistic religious practices. It is unfortunate, he writes, that despite our deep Filipino connection to a legacy that regards creation as sacred, we can no longer tap our inner resource as a people because of the interdict that we might transgress orthodox boundaries.³³ Despite this is it still possible to look back to our indigenous cultural resource and salvage some elements that will help us craft a framework of engagement that integrates indigenous elements and but still can reach out to the Christian articulation that we have mentioned above?

Cultural Ecology: Sustainability beyond the Colonial Box

One might realize that the analysis on the colonial traces of the legal matrix of the environmental questions corresponds to some extent with the analysis of Zizioulas regarding the different cultural

³¹Randy J.C. Odchigue, "Sacramental Relationality: Eco-Theological Possibilities," in *Re-imagining Christianity for a Green World*, ed. Randy J.C. Odchigue & Eric Genilo, 113-133,121.

³²John Zizioulas, "Ecological Asceticism: A Cultural Revolution," in *Sourozh* 67 (1997) 22-25, 23.

³³Karl Gaspar, "To Speak with Boldness," 36.

receptivity on the sacredness of creation. At the risk of getting ahead with ourselves, the final plea that we want to make is to broaden perspectives and allow for a creative diversity in both legal and theological framework-making in order to take into account the cultural practices and tradition (not just western legal and theological traditions) in defining legalities and theological orthodoxies. It might help us to explore some indigenous practices which seem to have been the direction some courageous indigenous peoples (IPs) are taking.

The *Talaandig* which number around 100,000 is a group of IPs mostly concentrated in northern and western part of Bukidnon (Central Mindanao), "are among the indigenous peoples in the Philippines who are asserting that their customary laws apply to local governance. They are also asserting the right of indigenous peoples to free and prior informed consent before any development or undertaking is done in their communities."³⁴ While other indigenous peoples are applying for their Certificates of Ancestral Domain Title (CADTs), the *Talaandigs* are fighting for something bigger. They want their indigenous laws to be recognized as a legitimate mechanism for asserting their connection to their land. They want to get out of the colonial box. They "want to be become liberated from the Western legal framework, which actually continues to put even indigenous people in a box."³⁵ They believe that their assertion of their native land titles which have established during the pre-colonial times is a call for a recognition that they are capable of governing themselves as people.

Another example is the justice system of the Teduray – a group of IPs in North and South Cotabato and Maguindanao (Southern Mindanao). Their highest governing body is called *Timfada Limud* (people's congress). Its function ranges from dispensing justice and conflict resolution, education, relations to other tribes and spirituality. Their justice and governance system "revolves around the principles of closeness, communal ownership, peace of mind, progressive pluralism and equal status for each community

³⁴Maurice Malanes, "Who Are the Talaandig," *Opinion, Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 03/01/2008. <http://opinion.inquirer.net/inquireropinion/talkofthetown/view/20080301-122219/Who-are-the-Talaandig>. Accessed: May 06, 2012.

³⁵Joji Cariño, Ma. Elena Regpala & Raymond de Chaves, ed., *Asserting Land Rights*, 20.

member.”³⁶ This is for example manifested in conflict resolution. Every member of the community has a space in the circular formation of the discussion. This accords everyone the right to manifest his/her standpoint. In recent months, some members of their tribe have been displaced because of the conflict situation in their locality. The usual bias for refugee Indigenous Peoples is their mendicancy for food and shelter. The UNHCR representatives were surprised that all that the *Teduray* asked was for them to have training and capability building so that they will be able to press for their rights in the government, so that they might be able to go back to their “sacred land” – the land of their ancestors.³⁷

A final example is the ecosystems approach of the Aytá. As they believe in spirits inhabiting their environment, the Aytá regard the forests as an extension of their lives. As they source out their food and sustenance in the forests, they have set rules about proper resource allocation: “Their hunting season lasts only from July to November each year to enable wild game such as boards and deer to reproduce and get fat before some of them are hunted for food. Gathering honey also starts in January and ends in May. This schedule allows the bees to have something to feed on during the rainy months when these cannot harvest nectar.”³⁸ Part of this ecosystems approach of protecting and sustaining their source of livelihood – the forests – they study the life cycles of the trees and other vegetation. They have instituted mechanisms to take care of disease-infested trees; to ensure proper cutting of timber; to monitor and guard the trees and other resources in their surroundings.

These examples not only illustrate the capacity of the IP’s for self determination and self governance but also hint at some common directions at which a framework of environmental engagement can be crafted.

The assertion of the *Talaandig* seems illustrative of an interdisciplinary critique that needs to be made in relation to frameworks that still operate from a highly westernized perspective. The *Talaandig* perspective challenges advocates of environment in

³⁶Joji Cariño, Ma. Elena Regpala & Raymond de Chaves, ed., *Asserting Land Rights*, 20.

³⁷<http://www.unhcr.org/4e92fc216.html>. Accessed: May 06, 2012.

³⁸Joji Cariño, Ma. Elena Regpala & Raymond de Chaves, ed., *Asserting Land Rights*, 38.

Asia towards a methodological shift that sees value in the cultural practices and traditions in our context. Without lapsing to a kind of cultural essentialism, it is important to recognize that there are resources within our midst that can still be harnessed in order for the frameworks to be responsive and sensitive to the cultural nuance of our environmental advocacy. The danger of exoticization is a threat. The labeling of indigenous approaches as unscientific is to be expected but it is imperative to realize that in the question of environment and sustainability, culture, understood as "the product of an open-ended process of interactions and continual exchange,"³⁹ is a process that needs to be factored into the equation.

The case of *Teduray* seems to me a manifestation of how external factors are displacing and threatening the cultural practices and traditions of the indigenous peoples. Their plight manifests their seeming inadequacy in dealing with the societal dynamics which the official government of the country has inherited from colonial history on the one hand and is influenced by the global dictates of economic and cultural hegemonies operative in the postcolonial era. The other direction of environmental engagement as hinted by the *Teduray* experience is capability building. Espoused by Amartya Sen, capability approach is a broad framework that can help evaluate the well-being of persons and societies in their functioning and capabilities in order to arrive at a fulfilling state of being and doing.⁴⁰ On the question of environmental sustainability (especially in the Philippine milieu), it is urgent that an integrative approach on land and natural resource use, human rights and well-being are taken into account. The link between human rights and well-being, environmental justice and sustainability needs to be established more clearly. There is then a need for support in building capabilities (in relation to the forces and dynamics of globalization) especially the marginal communities of the IPs, so that they may be able to articulate their own vision of well-being, put across with greater force the emancipatory discourse present in their indigenous belief systems and practices, and establish alliances with other discourses for sustainability and justice.

³⁹Claudia Jahnel, "Vernacular Ecumenism and Transcultural Unity Rethinking Ecumenical Theology after the Cultural Turn," in *The Ecumenical Review* 60 § 4 (2008) 404–425, 405.

⁴⁰Amartya Sen, *Inequality Re-examined*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992; Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom*, New York: Knopf, 1999.

The eco-systems approach of the Aytas based on their intimate relationship of their sacred land appears to hint at a possible interstitial convergence between what may be called relational sacrality as proposed by John Zizioulas and the indigenous regard for the environment as sacred place. This interstitial convergence is hinged on the intimate interconnection that looks at creation and environment as a sacred place of encounter or communion between the divine and the human. This sacred place since it holds life needs to be taken care of not only because of its functionality for human persons but for the intrinsic value that the environment has in the circle of life.

Theologically, one can speak in similar vein as Leonardo Boff when he proposes panentheism as a framework to understand the sacredness of creation. The term which means all is in God and God is in all is different from pantheism (all is God) as the former affirms the difference between God and creation. Boff describes the framework in the following words: "God and the universe are not like a single circle that has just one centre where they meet. There are related like an oval with two centres – God and world – but related and mutually implicated in one another."⁴¹ This affirms the intimate communion between God and creation without collapsing them in indistinguishable sameness. It seems however that Boff's framework seems to gloss over the qualitative difference humanity has with the rest of creation. This point seems important because in the calculus of sustainability, the heaviest responsibility to care for the earth and to ensure environmental justice fall on the shoulders of humanity. Since humanity seems to be the biggest problem in anthropocentrism against the environment, they might seem to be the biggest part of its solution.

Pakiglambigit: A Framework of Relational-Sacral Engagement

The word *pakiglambigit* which is part of the vocabulary of the Visayan language (spoken in Central and Southern Philippines) is first and foremost a relational category. The English translations are inadequate to express the richness of the term but its meaning would include (though not entirely captured in) phrases like: 'to be related to in an intrinsic way', 'to be integrally involved'; 'to participate in a deeply personal way'; it involves 'a plunge in order to be immersed

⁴¹Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, New York: Orbis, 1997, 147.

into the world of the other.⁴² The phraseological similitude enumerated above tells us that this term belongs to the sphere of the personal and the incarnational. In the late 80s this word was used in order to describe a wide range of experiences by a Redemptorist Mission Team in the Southern Philippines as they immersed themselves into the lives of peasants who were victims of oppression and militarization.⁴³

I argue that the praxis of *pakiglambigit* can be a potent framework in understanding not only the panentheistic intimacy between God and creation but also specifically stressing the sacred responsibility of humanity in caring for the environment. The term also necessitates humanity to get involved and be aware of the issues affecting the lives of the people sharing the same ecological space with them. The concept of *pakiglambigit* invites people to connect and “to be linked in solidarity with one another”⁴⁴ in living out the challenges of environment and just sustainability in a particular context. The idea of *pakiglambigit* involves an acknowledgement of plurality of experiences and cultures. The term is therefore corrective of any totalizing interpretation of cultural practices and traits. Such concept relates well to the sensitivity called for in the midst of multiplicity. In the words of Boeve: “Indeed, this irreducible multiplicity implies otherness as such, irremovable otherness that cannot be reduced to a single narrative nor subsumed within a particular totalizing perspective. Whatever we do to encompass otherness within a single narrative, it will always place itself beyond our grasp.”⁴⁵ This is important as we continuously remember that the cultural and intercultural play a huge part in sustaining the environment. There is not one glorified approach in framework-making in ecological

⁴²This point is also related to the epistemological framework of Zizioulas regarding the deep connection between knowing and relating. See John Zizioulas, “Human Capacity and Incapacity,” 427; John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 101.

⁴³Karl Gaspar, ed., *Pakiglambigit: Kasinatian sa Pakigduyog-Ambit sa mga Kabus ug Hinikawan*, Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1989. [Pakiglambigit: Experience of Participative-Solidarity with the Poor and the Deprived] – translation mine. This book which is written in the Visayan language seeks to mediate the experiences of the poor in the language of theology they can relate and understand. The book contains concrete experiences of solidarity, songs and poems of faith commitment with the poor and reflections on Basic Christian Communities.

⁴⁴Karl Gaspar, *Readings on Contemporary Mindanao Church*, Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1994, 39.

⁴⁵Lieven Boeve, *Interrupting Tradition*, Leuven: Peeters, 2004, 90-91.

engagement. As such, *Pakiglambigit* tries to empower one to reach out not in order to tame and strip the other of its otherness but to learn from it because the encounter itself already changes the landscape of the relationality in an irrevocable way that one can no longer honestly hold on to one's space without considering the other.⁴⁶ When one for example encounters the flesh and blood experience of the *Talaandig*, the *Teduray* and the *Ayta*, *pakiglambigit* initiates one into a process of self-reflexivity so that one might get disturbed, revise his/her own biases and presuppositions and, engage in a way that is relevant and just. Finally, *pakiglambigit* as a relational category essentially involves an incarnational aspect. Relations are particularized and concretized by becoming present and incarnated to a particular person or context. In Visayan reflections of the scriptures, the intimate and incarnate relationship with God to humanity and creation is almost always framed as *pakiglambigit*. One might say that as a framework of relational sacrality, *pakiglambigit* demonstrates the mystery of *admirabile commercium* – of God as bestowing the divine grace in all so that all may be taken up to God's glorious divine life.

Conclusion

In this contribution I have endeavoured to reflect on the environment and sustainability from a Filipino perspective. In this reflection I have tried to examine the underlying presuppositions not only in theology but also in culture and history as these were applied in environmental policies especially in relation to the indigenous peoples in the Philippines. The attempt at 'overcoming' those deeply embedded cultural and philosophical-theological biases are envisioned not only in order to de-colonize ecological engagement but aimed at a re-casting of cultural and religious resources in the continuing struggle not only for the future but for the present too where environmental justice and human rights belong to the most pressing tasks our generation needs to address.

⁴⁶See, Christopher Duraisingh, "Contextual and Catholic: Conditions for Cross-Cultural Hermeneutics," in *Anglican Theological Review* 82 (Fall 2000) 687.