

Toward the Sustainable Management of Ecosystems for the Filipino Church

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This article will discuss a case study on the sustainable management of ecosystems in the Philippines.¹ The first section will present a brief discussion on the ecological situation in the Philippines. The second section will delve on the biblical perspective and the Filipino belief of Creation. The third section will present an approach on the sustainable management of ecosystem for the Filipino church. In this view, the present study sets the goal of describing and critically analyzing the environmental landscape in the Philippines. In addition, this study project aims at determining the biblical perspective and the Filipino belief of Creation. The result of the study will be foundational in coming up with conservation and the sustainable management of ecosystems for the Filipino church.

Ecological Landscape in the Philippines

It seems apparent that pollution such as industrial wastes, improperly disposed garbage, and unscrupulous destruction of forest resources are adversely affecting the whole well-being of peoples and the Mother Earth. Tony Juniper has titled a chapter of his book as “Plundered Planet” to describe how human beings have transgressed the earth.² Human beings receive the greatest and immediate impact of pollution. The following was noted by John Houghton:

The 1980s and 1990s were unusually warm. Globally speaking, the decades have been the warmest since accurate records began somewhat over a hundred years ago and these unusually warm years are

1. By “sustainable management of ecosystems,” we mean the harmonious relationship between humans and nature. There, the human being is the center of concerns thereby entitling him/her to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature. John Houghton, *Global Warming: the Complete Briefing* (3d ed.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 198.

2. Tony Juniper, *Saving the Planet* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 177.

continuing into the twenty-first century. In terms of global average near-surface air temperature, the year 1998 was the warmest in the instrumental record and the nine warmest years in that record have occurred since 1990.³

Compounding the warm temperature is a remarkable rise of frequency and intensity of extremes of weather and climate. Windstorms and hurricanes are by no means the only two climate extremes that cause disasters. Floods, as in case of unusually intense and prolonged rains and drought as a result of reduced rainfalls, can also be devastating to human life and property. And “[s]ome of this increase can be attributed to the growth in population in particularly vulnerable areas and to other social or economic factors.”⁴ It was observed, “In meeting our needs for food, energy, water, shelter, and mobility, we have already transformed much of the earth’s surface and made profound alteration to ecosystems.”⁵ “Human behavior, which produces changes in the ecosystem’s pattern, brings man-made calamities.” This is rather apparent when careless exploitations of natural resources begin to threaten the very foundations of life.⁶ Houghton was quite candid when he said, “Humans are an important part of the global system; as the size and scale of human activities continue to escalate, so can the seriousness of the disturbances caused to the overall balances of nature.”⁷ We will face “environmental catastrophe, as complete, as irreversible, as any nuclear holocaust”⁸

3. Houghton, *Global Warming*, 2.

4. Houghton, *Global Warming*, 4.

5. Juniper, *Saving the Planet*, 177.

6. See the introduction in John Kerry and Teresa Heinz Kerry, *This Moment on Earth: Today’s New Environmentalists and Their Vision for the Future* (New York: Public Affairs, 2007), x.

7. Houghton, *Global Warming*, 197-198.

8. M. K. Tolba as quoted by Diane E. Sherwood, “Ecology and the Church: Theology and Action,” *religion-online.org*, <http://www.religion-online.org/show-article.asp?title=221> (accessed August 14, 2010). Cf. United Church of Christ, “Massachusetts Conference of the United Church of Christ, 2001 Directory and Minutes,” www.macucc.org/organizations/01environ.html (accessed August 12, 2010). For an updated link, see http://www.archive.org/stream/massachusettscon2001mass/massachusettscon2001mass_djvu.txt (accessed July 5, 2011). The United Church of Christ has resolved that, “A pattern of ecosystem changes produced by human behavior threatens human survival; and a suffering earth.” Cf. Lowell J. Greenberg (site owner), “Preserving & Cherishing the Earth: An Appeal for Joint Commitment in Science & Religion,” [earthrenewal.org](http://earthrenewal.org/Open_letter_to_the_religious.htm), http://earthrenewal.org/Open_letter_to_the_religious.htm (accessed August 24, 2010). “We are now threatened by self-inflicted, swiftly moving environmental alterations about whose long-term biological and ecological consequences we are still painfully ignorant.”

if and when human disregard of nature continues and increases. The imminent destruction of the earth is marked by “scientifically-attested evidence of climate change, ozone depletion, species extinctions, a rising incidence of natural disasters, and damaging impacts of toxic pollution on human health.”⁹ These stark realities have an immediate impact to the Philippines today.

Decades ago, the Philippines was a haven of ecological integrity. The *Philippine Daily Inquirer* reports,

In December 1999, the UNESCO World Heritage Committee inscribed the Puerto Princesa Subterranean River National Park in the World Heritage List, citing it as part of the irreplaceable natural heritage of the world because of its unique geological features and its globally significant biodiversity.¹⁰

Puerto Princesa exudes verdant hills, thick forests, and an underground river. The Park has a high degree of biodiversity. There are at least 149 vertebrates, all endemic to Palawan. This means that they exist nowhere else on earth. There are different types of forests such as lowland evergreen forests, karst forests, and beach forests that shelter the subterranean river and are part of the 22,000-hectare boundary of the Park. The island-comprising country was an outstanding vista of a vibrant ecological landscape. In sum, the Philippines demonstrates the ecological integrity of Genesis 1:1-2:3. The Philippines now belongs to the past. All those irreplaceable ecosystems fell “victim to coastal development or cleared to make ponds for aquaculture,” and the “growing population outside the boundaries of the Park lead to clearing of land in the upper watershed areas for agriculture.”¹¹ Coastal resources are rapidly declining as a result of agricultural inputs such as chemical fertilizers, pesticides, mixed with soil erosion. This supports the observation of Houghton that, “scientists are confident about the fact of global warming and climate change due to human activities.”¹² Thus, the Philippine government is intervening with strategic measures to conserve the natural heritage.

9. United Church of Christ, “Massachusetts Conference.”

10. Augusto Villalon, “Pride of Place: Philippine World Heritage Sites,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, September 29, 2008, <http://tinyurl.com/6hlm2m6> (accessed January 13, 2011). For an updated link, see http://services.inquirer.net/mobile/08/10/27/html_output/xmlhtml/20080929-163485-xml.html (accessed July 5, 2011).

11. Villalon, “Pride of Place.”

12. Houghton, *Global Warming*, 10.

The Park Management takes protection seriously. Within its protected zone, a management plan to maintain the integrity of the natural resources is carefully followed. . . . The management also limits tourist visits to designated areas. Tourists who visit the rainforest must stay on a wooden walk that makes a path through the forest. Only authorized bancas manned by certified local guides are authorized to take visitors into the Subterranean River under strict safety conditions.¹³

On another front, there is massive bleaching of coral reefs all over the archipelago. Marine scientists and divers have been witnessing and recording massive bleaching of coral reefs all over the Philippines.¹⁴ Bleaching is mainly caused by a change of temperature, according to this report. Another report stresses, “As global temperatures warm, the reef in tropical areas are increasingly stressed, particularly by coral bleaching.”¹⁵ Government agencies are needed to provide stimulus programs for post bleaching recovery through restoration and *effective reduction of man-made stressors* in affected coral reefs.¹⁶ The Philippines is one Asian country hard hit by ecological calamities. For instance, Negros Occidental, located in the central Philippines, have been experiencing for years heavy floods caused by climate change and unabated destruction of forest resources. The heavy floods on January 11, 2011 left “two dead from drowning, flooding the homes of 14,177 families, destroying and damaging 243 houses, and causing an initial P10.8 million in damage to crops and fishery products.”¹⁷

As a matter of fact, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies rated the Philippines as the fourth most accident-prone country in the world.

According to the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the Philippines was the fourth most accident prone country in the world. The two institutions arrived at this conclusion after finding

13. Houghton, *Global Warming*, 10.

14. Kristine L. Alave, “RP Scientists Note Massive Bleaching of Coral Reefs,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, September 6, 2010, A1.

15. “Ancient Reef Raises Hopes for Corals as Seas Warm,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, September 6, 2010, A22.

16. Alave, “RP Scientists Note Massive Bleaching of Coral Reefs,” A1. Cf. Hugh Collins, “Study: Mass Extinctions Could Shake Up Marine Life,” AolNews, September 3, 2010, under “Science,” <http://www.aolnews.com/2010/09/03/study-mass-extinctions-could-shake-up-earths-marine-life/> (accessed July 5, 2011). Study shows that, “Human activities such as fishing, agriculture and logging have greatly accelerated the rate at which species go extinct.”

17. Carla P. Gomez, “Floods Wreck 243 Houses, P10.8M in Fish, Crops Lost,” *Visayan Daily Star*, January 14, 2011, 1.

out that some 5,809,986 Filipinos were killed or injured as a result of disasters or man-made calamities over a ten-year period (1992-2001).

According to the Philippine Red Cross, 31,835 Filipinos were killed and 94,369,462 others were affected by natural disasters and calamities in a span of 20 years. "The Philippines was a natural laboratory for floods, typhoons, monsoon rains, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and landslides," Philippine National Red Cross governor Dante Liban said. (Source: *Philippine Daily Inquirer*)¹⁸

More than a decade ago, hundreds of school children and seven teachers were buried alive in delude of rains and landslides in Leyte province, Eastern Visayas.

The disaster happened after ten days of heavy rainfall. The rainfall dumped 27 inches of rain. Scientists but also survivors said that not only the weather, but also illegal logging on land above the village contributed to the disaster on land over the village contributed to the disaster.¹⁹

More recently, at least ten people were killed when flash floods and landslides hit eleven towns and two cities in Eastern Visayas.

A couple and their five children were asleep when their house was swept away 10 meters and then buried in mud and boulders at 2 a.m. yesterday in the mountain village of Cabalawan just outside Tacloban, said the office of Mayor Alfred Romualdez.²⁰

Serious floods and landslide have fatal consequences.

The Filipino environmentalist Angel C. Alcala has this observation on the disturbing current status of the Philippines.

In terms of the natural environment, the Philippines may be considered a badly damaged country. Wherever one goes in the country, whether on land or at sea, environmental damage in varying extent can be observed. Because probably more than 50 percent of our 92

18. TxtMANIA.com, "Philippine Disasters," TxtMANIA.com, <http://www.txtmania.com/trivia/disasters.php> (accessed March 22, 2011). See also Eric C. Jones and Arthur D. Murphy, *The Political Economy of Hazards and Disasters* (Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2009), 180, 199. They quote from the article, "Philippines Tops Disasters: Red Cross," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, November 16, 2003.

19. "Mountain Village Guinsaugon Disappeared by a Mudslide," *News from the Philippines*, February 17, 2006, <http://www.philippines.hvu.nl/News.htm> (accessed January 13, 2011).

20. Joey Gabieta, Jhunnex Napallacan, and Elvie Roman Roa, "Landslide Kills Family of 7 in Leyte," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, March 18, 2011, 1, 17.

million people depend directly or indirectly on natural resources for their livelihoods.²¹

This simply shows that the Philippines has failed in environmental sustainability, particularly in marine life.

We have failed to improve the conditions of our marine environment. First, we have protected and managed only three percent of the 25,000-km² coral reef ecosystem since the 1970s, the year the community-based coastal resource management was started. Our recent assessment of the Visayas region no-take marine reserves in 2008 showed that only 30 percent of the 564 reserves are functional, down from about 40 percent in 2004-2005 based on a small sample of marine reserves in the Central Visayas. In the Visayas, about 70 percent of these reserves have not been protected well by the local communities and local government units.²²

In another article, Alcala laments the fact that

[O]nly a third of 564 marine reserves has been considered successful. We have every reason to expect that this picture could be true for the whole country if an evaluation of marine reserves in other parts of the country is made.²³

This inductive statement demonstrates the limitedness of marine reserves as measures to save the environment.

Coastal areas are sinking too, and this was attributed to the punishing extraction of groundwater by the growing population and increasing economic activities.

According to the University of the Philippines' National Institute of Geological Sciences, low coastal areas at the Manila Bay, such as Caloocan, Malabon, Navotas, Valenzuela and several towns in Bulacan, Pampanga and Bataan have sunk one meter in the past 30 years or ten times than the rate of the global sea level rise in the last century.

In their paper "Flooding in Pampanga, Bataan, Bulacan and Camanava: Causes, Trends and Possible Solutions", geologists blamed the fast rise of water level at the Manila Bay to too much extraction of groundwater by a growing population and economic activities. There

21. Angel C. Alcala, "Private Reserves," *Visayan Daily Star*, January 25, 2010, <http://www.archives.visayandailystar.com/2010/January/25/starlife.htm> (accessed January 13, 2011).

22. Alcala, "Environmental Sustainability," *Visayan Daily Star*, June 28, 2010, <http://www.archives.visayandailystar.com/2010/June/28/starlife.htm> (accessed January 14, 2011).

23. Alcala, "Private Reserves."

are about 23 million people living around the Manila Bay, who experience flood during the rainy season.²⁴

We have every reason to believe that the Philippines is indeed hard hit by natural calamities and man-made catastrophes. How do these ecological realities in the Philippines relate to the biblical imperative and the Filipino belief of Creation?

Biblical Perspective and the Filipino Belief of Creation

The Bible teaches a worldview which articulates that God created the earth. This worldview is not in conflict with science but “any worldview that start without a creator.”²⁵ As Christians, we subscribe to the teaching that God created the earth.²⁶ In the Creation story, God “establishes the natural world as the proper context for human fulfillment.”²⁷ This makes Psalm 24:1 relevant to our study in this section. The earth is the Lord’s. Psalm 24:1 affirms the truth that the Lord God owns the earth. The Lord God created everything including the sky, the seas, the land, and the plants, animals, fish, and the birds therein (Gen 1:1-2:3). God made everything, and he made man (and woman) like himself. The psalmist says, “Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God” (Ps 90:2). We may not fully understand the complexity of how God did it. It will suffice to say that God is the sole owner of all creation. This biblical teaching on Creation finds similar teachings in the Philippine context. Creation myths do exist in the Philippines. One such Creation myth is called “Iloko Demiurge,” where “Namarsua, is the creator who by thought and action produces *Parsua* which can refer to humankind, or to the created universe as a whole.”²⁸ It is in the Creator-creature relationship that determines how the Filipino will respond or react to ecological calamities.

24. TxtMANIA.com, “Philippine Disasters.”

25. “Genesis: The Story of Creation,” in *Life Application Study Bible: New International Version* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1991), 5.

26. Cf. Robert W. Christopherson, *Geosystems: An Introduction to Physical Geography* (5th ed.; Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2003), v. Christopherson quotes here an ancient African proverb, “Earth is not ours, it is a treasure we hold in trust for our children and their children.”

27. Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright, and J. I. Packer, eds., *New Dictionary of Theology* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1988), 454.

28. AsiaPacificUniverse.com, “Indigenous Religious Beliefs and Cosmology of the Filipino,” AsiaPacificUniverse.com, <http://asiapacificuniverse.com/pkm/spirit.htm> (accessed March 22, 2011).

In a recent survey, Filipinos believe God's wrath is involved in environment catastrophes. Cyril L. Bonabente reports that these people number in the millions.

Millions of Filipinos believe God is punishing humans for their evil deeds by inflicting environmental catastrophes on them, results of a survey released yesterday showed.

Twenty-one percent of adults believe God is unleashing his wrath with landslides, typhoons and other disasters that regularly hit the country, according to polling group Pulse Asia.

A 'sizeable majority' (63 percent last month, up from 54 percent in July 2008) believe that recent calamities in the Philippines and in other countries, such as typhoons, flooding, landslides and earthquakes, were primarily caused by human abuse of the environment.²⁹

A Roman Catholic priest laments how people selfishly failed to take care of the environment.

The unabated emission of greenhouse gases by mankind has increased the warming of the earth, threatening the ecological balance and the health of humans, unbridled lifestyle emphasizing on consumption and production of unnecessary tools for life have likewise created pressure on environment.³⁰ The environmental crisis today is caused by the "greed and imprudence sowed in the past"³¹ and of "human greed, neglect and destructiveness."³²

We can deduce two things here. Firstly, God's creation is a gift to all humankind. This gift gives us a privilege to enjoy the earth and "everything that has the breath of life in it . . . God saw all that he had made, and it was good" (Gen 1:30-31). A hymn of praise from Youtube expresses it in part,

29. Cyril L. Bonabente, "Filipinos See God's Wrath in Environment Catastrophes," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, August 17, 2010, A1, A6.

30. Zoilo Dejaresco, "Even the Church Worries of Environment," *Manila Bulletin*, January 13, 2010, under "Business Options," <http://www.mb.com.ph/articles/238363/even-church-worries-over-environment> (accessed July 5, 2011).

31. Fredrick Nzwili, "Greed Destroying the Environment, Say Kenyan Church Leaders," Anglican Communion Environment Network-Newsposted August 14, 2009, <http://acen.anglicancommunion.org/news/index.cfm/2009/8/14/Greed-destroying-the-environment-say-Kenyan-church-leaders> (accessed August 14, 2010). The original article is unavailable online. It was posted on August 11, 2009 with a slightly different title, "Greed Destroying the Environment, Church Leaders Say," Ecumenical News International (ENInews).

32. United Church of Christ, "Massachusetts Conference."

For the beauty of the earth, for the beauty of skies,
 for the love which from our birth, over and around us lies
 Lord of all to thee we raise; this our joyful hymn of praise.³³

The hymn speaks of humanity's great appreciation of God's creation. Such appreciation is best expressed when one loves the earth.

Secondly, we are all called to be stewards of God's resources (Gen 1:28-30). Stewardship is a relationship between human beings and the earth. God, the Creator, commands we take care of the planet. We do not own the earth. We need "to treasure it and nurture it as a sacred trust."³⁴ Yes, we, humans, were created. We are part of nature with a mandate to be stewards for our earth's care and management. It was clear that "humans were created to care for the rest of the creation."³⁵ It is the responsibility for every person to look after the wellbeing of the environment.

On the basis of the foregoing discussions, we subscribe to the belief that environmental crisis is "religious as well as scientific dimension."³⁶ Environmental problems are both religious and scientific. The ecological imbalance we are facing today is both a transgression against God and a disregard of laws on healthy ecosystems. We are supposed to acknowledge and confess our sin against God and nature. People must first acknowledge that they have transgressed God's mandates by plundering the earth. In turn, humanity must seek the process of reconciling with the Creator. From here, I strongly encourage the Filipinos to reaffirm the sacred mandate of taking care of God's creation.

The Sustainable Management of Ecosystems for the Filipino Church

The Philippines is composed of more than 7,000 islands. There is a playful witticism that the exact number of islands depends on how high the tides are. Sometimes, it appears that there are as many religious groups in the Philippines as there are islands. In reality, there are at least forty-three religious affiliations among Protestants according to *Compassion International in the Philippines*. In addition to this, there are sectors within the Roman Catholic Church in the Philippines, which

33. See elizabeththia [pseudo.], uploaded the song "For the Beauty of the Earth," sung by the Paya Lebar Methodist Girls on Youtube on August 16, 2006. See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MHifRLNYUGw> (accessed September 19, 2010).

34. United Church of Christ, "Massachusetts Conference."

35. Houghton, *Global Warming*, 208.

36. United Church of Christ, "Massachusetts Conference."

are divided over environmental concerns. Danforth observes, “Deeply religious people come to different conclusions about how faith should influence public policy.”³⁷ It suggests how diverse and conflicting the theological stance of Christians are in the Philippines. This means that divergent theological positions among the Filipinos are roadblocks to attaining a unified church network of stewards for caring the earth.

Houghton believes that on the basis of personal motivation as Christians, we should be concerned with environmental problems.³⁸ The Filipino Church, in this respect, should be intentional in leading people of different religious persuasions to institutionalize to improve, if not, to arrest the downtrend of the ecological condition in the Philippines. What we mean by the Filipino Church is the ecumenical gatherings of the faithful as described by Danforth.

What do we mean by “the church”? I mean every level of Christendom. I mean ecumenical gatherings, denominations of all sizes, hierarchies, conventions, dioceses, independent churches and parishes. I mean two or three gathered together in Christ’s name³⁹

The Filipino Church, in this view, has to strategically narrow down, if not to eliminate, the gap of divergent theologies among church people, if only to signal a fresh energy to create local initiatives to manage and sustain ecosystems. At stake is the survival of humanity. There is no other way for the Filipino Church congregants to step in together to create a concerted intervention in order to mitigate the ecological crisis. What is necessary is to have “unity in diversity” among church people in order to effect a positive impact on all future generations. The positive impact of healing the earth lies in the hands of the coalition of church people who are transformed in the likeness of God, and at the same time, who are passionately undertaking the work of the sustainable management of ecosystems. Instead of driving each other further apart, the Filipino Church should be “pulling ourselves together”⁴⁰ and become a decisive force in managing ecosystems. Since the problem of ecosystem degradations is global, “all nations have to be involved in their solution,”⁴¹ and the Filipino Church has to be passionate and conscientious in undertak-

37. John Danforth, *Faith and Politics: How “Moral Values” Debate Divides America and How to Move Forward Together* (Reprint with a new preface; New York: Penguin Books, 2007), 10.

38. See “Preface to the Second Edition” in Houghton, *Global Warming*, xxvii.

39. Danforth, *Faith and Politics*, 133.

40. Danforth, *Faith and Politics*, 132.

41. See the “Preface to the First Edition,” in Houghton, *Global Warming*, xiii.

ing the three inter-related holistic approach to conserve, sustain, and manage ecosystems.

It was noted that the spiritual or sacred dimensions of life are essential components of political life, and transformational politics strives to unite the spiritual and the material.⁴² Transformation is premised on the fact that the coming of God into one's life impacts him or her *monumentally forever*. It involves the restoration of God's image in humankind. A person's transformation can be achieved with the constant reference to Christ. The Apostle Paul, in 2 Corinthians 5:17, views it as the passing away of the old and in turn, the coming of the new. A missionary puts it, "True spirituality has its genesis in the transformation that God's work of grace brings about in our lives. And this spirituality is sustained by the ongoing work of the Spirit in our hearts, lifestyle, and values."⁴³ Still another says,

Transformation which takes place in man/woman is holistic in nature . . . His life is no longer under the power of sin. Rather, through the power of the Holy Spirit, the new man has the freedom to experience dynamic changes in his life. He will live a fruit-full of life of service for the glory of God.⁴⁴

We ought to live out holistic transformations. One network of Christian churches declares, "we are part of the grand story of redemption and renewal as Jesus creates a new humanity in us as we incarnate, or flesh-out His love."⁴⁵ Holistic transformation is more than praxis where the state of spirituality is put into practice and vice versa. Holistic transformation is a state of spiritual uprightness, as a result of the encounter between human and God in Jesus Christ. Transformation becomes the "integrating core of reality and life,"⁴⁶ like a "a tissue paper

42. See the preface in Stephen Woolpert, Christa Daryl Slaton, and Edward W. Schwerin, eds., *Transformational Politics: Theory, Study, and Practice* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), xxiii.

43. Charles Ringma, *Whispers from the Edge of Eternity: Reflections on Life and Faith in a Precarious World* (Manila: OMF Literature, 2005), 116.

44. Fernando Tan, Jr., "Contextualizing the Gospel Message in Asia: An Adventist Approach," (paper presented at the International Faith and Learning Seminar held at Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, Silver Springs, MD, September 1993), 217. The online version can be found here: http://www.aiias.edu/ict/vol_11/11cc_211-226.pdf (accessed July 5, 2011). Originally accessed here: <http://groups.google.com/group/pendeta-advent/msg/4929fa8c30d416d?mode=print> (accessed May 27, 2008).

45. "Welcome to the 8th Day Community," 8th Day Community, under "Home," <http://8thdaycommunity.org/> (accessed July 4, 2009).

46. Asia Theological Association, *Asia Theological Association Manual for Ac-*

separating material from spiritual,” as the late George McLeod of the Iona Community would put it.⁴⁷ This means that Godly spirituality is interwoven in all aspects of life and in all the days of a lifetime. In practice, holistic transformation promotes life in its fullness and does not dichotomize human life into the spiritual and physical.⁴⁸ Jesus was “a real human being who healed and fed them because he was concerned with their physical health as well as the state of their souls.”⁴⁹ That is the essence of the Christian gospel. It requires one to embody in his or her behavior and lifestyle the sacred being of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is so because “no sacred source can persist without its concrete faces.”⁵⁰ Holistic transformation is compatible with the realm of personal and public life. Bruce and Katherine Epperly note that “a holistic perspective” is when “being and doing are intimately related.”⁵¹ Holistic transformation, therefore, is lived out as encroaching the presence of the Lord Jesus. This teaching finds concrete forms in the life, advocacy, and practices of people.

“The relationship of faith and politics is not about fashioning religious belief into political platforms. It is, instead, the way in which faithful people go about the work of politics,” Danforth believes.⁵² In a similar vein, Robert Byrd writes,

For me, as for so many others, my faith in the Wisdom of the Bible enriched my faith in the power of ideas and in the power of knowing history and literature. One fed the other, and still does to this day. My

creditation: Revised 2010 (n.p.: Asia Theological Association, 2010), 9. For an online version, see http://ataasia.com/downloads/resources/ATA_Manual.pdf (accessed June 13, 2010). See number 3 under “Theological Values.”

47. Cf. Benigno Beltran, *The Christology of the Inarticulate: An Inquiry into the Filipino Understanding of Jesus the Christ* (Manila: Divine Word, 1987), 221-222. Beltran says here, “In the Philippines, the sacred and the profane are not separated, though recognized as distinct.”

48. Cf. Tetsunao Yamamori and Kim-kwong Chan, *Witnesses to Power: Stories of God’s Quiet Work in a Changing China* (Missionary Life Stories Series; Milton Keynes: Paternoster Publishing, 2000), 5. Holistic is viewed here as “the cycle of reciprocity; namely, redemption leading to development, and further, development leading to redemption.”

49. See “Luke,” in *Life Application Bible*, 1865.

50. Woolpert, Slaton, and Schwerin, eds., *Transformational Politics*, 49.

51. Bruce G. Epperly and Katherine Gould Epperly, “A Time for Lasts,” Alban Institute, <http://www.alban.org/conversation.aspx?id=9411> (accessed March 22, 2011).

52. Danforth, *Faith and Politics*, 124.

faith also illumines my study of science; nothing that Charles Darwin wrote contradicts the story of Genesis.⁵³

In short, a holistic approach to the sustainable management of ecosystems would mean that no task is too trivial. Every task is sanctified by one's faith in God. This must be the underlying motivation in undertaking conservation and the sustainable management of ecosystems. When it is conscientiously done, "We can have rapid changes of behavior if people have the right motivations."⁵⁴ From here, I submit three inter-related holistic approaches to ecological sustainability.

Firstly, a reconciled life with God must be a fully transformed life. Transformation, as a result of being reconciled with Him, cannot be partial or be compartmentalized. Isn't it that the Gospel message of Jesus Christ concerns not so much with the heart, rather about the transformation of human life? Transformation must be holistic because the state of being changed in God becomes the integrating core of reality and life. It is incumbent for a reconciled life not to stay in the spiritual realm. A person's spiritual transformation must have permeated in all levels of lifestyle.⁵⁵ To affirm one's reconciliation with God, transformation must be translated into actions in terms of commitment with an unyielding and unbreakable resolve. Embodying the values of Godly transformation is always holistically manifested. It follows that one's spiritual transformation is best expressed as the presence encroaches every step in the sustainable management of ecosystems. Spiritual transformation is not something outside of one's self; it must be neatly woven into every facet of our lives especially in our lifestyle: holistic approach to the sustainable management of ecosystems.

Secondly, the sustainable management of ecosystems must be a community's commitment to change the downward spiral of the environment. Isn't it that we human beings are made for community (Gen 2:18)? Charles Ringma says that relationships form the very fabric of our existence. He adds, "In all of these relationships we both give and receive and the quality of this receiving and giving weaves the texture of

53. Robert C. Byrd and Steve Kettmann, *Letter to a New President: Commonsense Lessons for Our Next Leader* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2008), 18.

54. Hugh Collins, "Study: US Food Waste Is a Huge Energy Drain," AOL News.com, October 2, 2010, under "Nation," <http://tinyurl.com/2a2lur5> (accessed October 3, 2010).

55. Cf. Malcolm Gladwell, *What the Dog Saw: And Other Adventures* (New York: Little, Brown, 2009), 291. In the context of the Challenger tragedy (on January 28, 1986), Gladwell says, "We have constructed a world in which the potential for high-tech catastrophe is embedded in the fabric of day-to-day life."

our being.”⁵⁶ Such woven textures of human beings would have enabled a community to cohere. This is crucial for any advocacy to be successful. On another level, we need communities where people seem to “crave a sense of community, a feeling of being wanted and known,” where congregations are transformed into “sanctuaries and safe havens.”⁵⁷ The product is a cohesive community that is bound with “interpersonal connection and inclusivity”⁵⁸ in the Lord God.

It was noted that “churches and other religious institutions have often been viewed as structures in which to enact health interventions.”⁵⁹ I submit these structures are critical to improve the ecological sustainability status in the Philippines, if not to arrest its environmental crisis. There is more to it, though. The sustainable management of ecosystems must not only be part of a congregation’s legislative agenda, but more importantly, as a community’s commitment to healing the earth. Jim Denison laments the technological revolution and social net-working we experience today because they isolate instead of uniting people.⁶⁰ But the human condition today calls for us to draw closer as a faith-based community. To drive home the point, Denison cites a real life drama that unfolded in Chile. While waiting for their rescue 2,300 feet below the ground, the thirty-three Chilean miners trapped in a vault organized themselves into groups of three to watch over each other. They created a makeshift altar where they held worship services. Food was dropped through a four-inch hole four times a day, and no one ate until everyone had enough to eat. Since their rescue hole was being bored, they also organized themselves into shifts to do the work for the displaced boulders for twenty-four hours a day. What made the miners cohere as a community is the understanding that the only way to survive their ordeal was to face it together.⁶¹

The Chilean experience is crucial to the Filipinos in mitigating the ecological crisis. Filipinos are known to be deeply religious and are cohesively united in trying times. For instance, the whole Filipino people were united in 1986 in booting out the late strongman, Ferdinand

56. Ringma, *Whispers from the Edge of Eternity*, 80.

57. Niles Elliot Goldstein, “Craving Community,” <http://www.alban.org/conversation.aspx?id=9161> (accessed August 15, 2010).

58. Goldstein, “Craving Community.”

59. Bob Allen, “Study Says Clergy Neglecting Self-care,” Associated Baptist Press, August 13, 2010, under “Faith and Culture,” <http://tinyurl.com/2358aty> (accessed August 15, 2010).

60. Jim Denison, “Opinion: Chilean Miners, Cell Phones and the Community,” Associated Baptist Press, September 7, 2010, under “Opinion,” <http://www.abpnews.com/content/view/5676/9/> (accessed September 9, 2010).

61. Denison, “Opinion.”

Marcos. Filipinos from all walks of life and of different faith persuasions were one in their prayers to God and mustered concerted power in ousting the great dictator in Asia. This means that faith in God is the key to unity in overcoming a crisis. As a resolved community, the Filipino church will undertake the sustainable management of ecosystems in the Philippines as a practice of ministry. The Filipino Church will undertake the sustainable management of ecosystems as a matter of a calling, where congregant members feel inspired, gratified, and “feel highly energized and fulfilled in what they do.”⁶² Congregations and religious institutions may constitute as a community of faiths and encouraged “to exemplify in practice the indispensable knack for building and nurturing relationships.”⁶³ These communities of faith-believers must step up and expand current efforts in order to cope with proven and suspected threats to ecosystems and human health. These communities, in turn, must seek the healing of the earth and tend to the well-being of our environment holistically.

Thirdly, “peer supports” are needed in communities for ecological sustainability. It is difficult to achieve community goals as a single individual.

None of us has gotten on our own. We may have busted our butts, worked extremely hard, made lots of personal sacrifices, and brought some talent and ability to the table. I believe all that is true, but we didn't do it alone. We've all had people who have been there either directly or indirectly and made a difference.⁶⁴

Our world, though big, can also be small and crowded with people, “we live in one world in which the competing faiths, no longer separated and insulated by distance, jostle one another in every city and even in the minds of ordinary Christians.”⁶⁵ Under such circumstances, we can follow in a similar pattern one of the goals of the Institute of Theology and Ecology:

to establish and develop interreligious ecological dialogue (mainly between Christianity, Judaism, and Islam) on the complexity of eco-

62. Edna P. Franco, “Framing the Meanings of Work for Filipinos,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, September 6, 2010, B8.

63. Sergio A. Rojo, Jr., “Holistic Perspective of Work,” Sarj Schole’s Journal, posted August 11, 2010, <http://sarjschole.wordpress.com/2010/08/11/holistic-perspective-of-work/> (accessed August 18, 2010).

64. Bruce G. Gordon, Group President of Verizon, was quoted in Price M. Cobbs and Judith L. Turnock, *Cracking the Corporate Code: Revealing Success Stories of 32 Afro-American Executives* (New York: Amacom, 2003), 101.

65. Rojo, “Holistic Perspective of Work.”

logical problems of the Mediterranean and to formulate together and accept an ECOLOGICAL CHARTER OF THE MEDITERRANEAN with basic ethical principles and mutual affirmations for a long range cooperation toward ecological protection of the Mediterranean.⁶⁶

It is but of logical necessity for members of the Filipino Church “to move the solutions for environmental and developmental problems off the bench and into play.”⁶⁷ In fact, environmental crusaders must be open to new perspectives on the matter. The Filipino Church supports international organizations that bring together people of different faiths to work together on plundered ecosystems.

Today’s ecological sustainability is hindered by “lack of awareness, lack of cooperation, duplicated efforts, wasted resources, ineffectiveness, and outright conflict.”⁶⁸ It is much more pressing when, “the United States has not made significant progress to address climate issues and that international efforts to address climate have been sidetracked.”⁶⁹ To rephrase Bruce G. Gordon, we all need assistance, and along the way, we find people who are able to provide the guidance and analysis we surely need.⁷⁰ For instance, in campaigning for a world free of nuclear weapons, Tadatoshi Akiba, Mayor of Hiroshima, and Ramon Magsaysay Awardee for 2010, says that “People rarely suffer alone. The suffering of any individual is actually the suffering of at least a family (sic), if not a neighborhood . . . a city is vital, true, and personally relevant level of collective identity.”⁷¹ Akiba spearheaded in 1982 the Mayors for Peace Movement in order to mobilize citizens to become advocates for peace.

In the same breath, the peace advocacy of Akiba could be applied to the sustainable management of ecosystems on an organizational level (inter-religious as well) with international cooperation. In fact, a global meeting on the environment was put forward at the 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm. They stated over nearly four decades ago that the world needed “international coopera-

66. Orthodox Academy of Crete, “Institute of Theology and Ecology,” Orthodox Academy of Crete, under “Theology & Ecology,” http://www.oac.gr/html/tae_en.html (accessed April 1, 2011).

67. Christopherson, *Geosystems*, 656.

68. “Leadership for Effective Collaboration,” Bakke Graduate University. <http://tinyurl.com/2wtow96> (accessed August 25, 2010).

69. David Gushee, “Opinion: The Climate Changes and We Do Nothing,” Associated Baptist Press, August 15, 2010, under “Opinion,” <http://www.abpnews.com/content/view/5448/9/> (accessed August 18, 2010).

70. Gordon quoted in Cobbs and Turnock, *Cracking the Corporate Code*, 101.

71. Tadatoshi Akiba is referenced to by Ma. Ceres P. Doyo, “RM Awardee Dreams of Fest in Hiroshima,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, August 31, 2010, A4.

tion to consider our symbiotic relations with each other and with Earth's resilient yet fragile, life-support."⁷² In short, the world coalition of communities transformed in the likeness of God must undertake the work of ecological sustainability.

The underlying goal, therefore, especially in undertaking ecological sustainability on individual, corporate, and on inter-corporate levels, is to greatly impact the ecosystems to demonstrate God's works. Such works will bring glory to God.

Conclusion

The present study sought to understand the ecological situations in the Philippines. In view of the aforesaid problem, this research study has set the goals of describing and analyzing the ecological landscape in the Philippines and determined the biblical and theological perspectives of the Filipino belief of Creation. The ultimate goal for this study was to come up with a sustainable management of ecosystems for the Filipino Church. We have presented facts from the past and present on the environmental crises in the Philippines. Documents indicate that to a great extent, the Filipinos have plundered the earth and have transgressed creation, which was entrusted to them for care.

The bible teaches people to treasure God's creation and accept the sacred mandate to become stewards for the care and management of the earth. Christians must resolve to reconcile with God, and this reconciliation requires the Filipino Church congregants to commit themselves in the conservation and the sustainable management of ecosystems. Finally, it is proposed here that there are three inter-related holistic approaches to the sustainable management of ecosystems for the Filipino Church. If the Filipino people minister together, they can reverse ecological decadence.⁷³ The only way to mitigate the effects of plundered ecosystems is for us all to face them together.

72. Christopherson, *Geosystems*, 656.

73. See the preface in Kerry and Kerry, *This Moment on Earth*, ix.