The Constant Struggle to Become a Church of the Poor: Fifty Years after Vatican II[1]

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ABSTRACT: The notion of the "Church of the Poor" is oftentimes assumed to be simply based on the Vatican II ecclesiology. To clarify this presumption, this paper attempts to revisit the expression "Church of the Poor" in the context of its conciliar and postconciliar developments, especially in the Philippine Church. This paper also clarifies the conciliar meaning of the church of the poor in contrast with the Third World perspective on the preferential option for the poor. Furthermore, this paper attempts to expand the meaning of "the poor" in light of the new insights offered by social and ecological sciences. Doing so opens the way for the idea that *the poor* is an analogous notion which may refer to the economically poor, the racially oppressed, the sexually discriminated, and the ecologically poor. This paper argues that these human and ecological faces of poverty have to be creatively included in understanding the meaning of the church of the poor.

KEYWORDS: Vatican II, church of the poor, PCP II, poverty, struggle, women

Introduction

The Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP II) was convened in 1991 to officially articulate the teaching of the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II) and its implications for the Philippine Catholic Church. In the "Message of the Council to the People of the Philippines," the delegates remarkably declared: "Christ bids this community—ourselves, the laity, religious and clergy of the Catholic Church in the Philippines—to be a Church of the Poor" (PCP II 1992, xcvi). There is no doubt that the expression church of the poor has become the core message of PCP II. Did

this ecclesiological vision really originate from the final documents of Vatican II? How does one become a church of the poor in the Philippine context? Who are the poor to which the church herself must identify with? These are the main questions that this paper attempts to answer.

This paper has three main parts: The first part tries to do a critical remembering of the Vatican II event; the second part attempts to give a brief account of the contextualization of the church of the poor agenda in the Philippines; and the third part proposes an expanded meaning of the poor in the light of emerging insights from the social and ecological sciences.

A Critical Remembering of Vatican II

The concerns of poor countries are "not totally absent" in the final documents of Vatican II. However, far from stating the obvious, it is important to emphasize that the Third World perspective of the poor is not well developed in the overall framework of the Vatican II documents. In this light, revisiting, if only in a brief way, the odyssey of the church of the poor at the council might be beneficial for the purpose of this paper.

A call for renewal

On 28 October 1958, the conclave of cardinals met to elect a successor to Pius XII and chose the seventy-six-year-old Patriarch of Venice, Angelo Roncalli (1881-1963), son of a humble working-class family of Bergamo, who took on the name John XXIII. Considering his old age, it was expected that this septuagenarian pope would not live very long. Presumably, he was elected as a sort of an interim pope.

This pope, however, surprised the whole church on 25 January 1959 when he suddenly announced his intention to call for an ecumenical council which was to be known as the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). Many people could not see why he had to call for a council, as there seemed to be no outstanding heresy to be refuted. At any rate, according to the prevailing ecclesiology at the time, the pope can practically do everything by himself. So what was his point of bringing together bishops from all over the world?

The pope's decision to gather the bishops from all corners of the world was very revealing of his new style of taking on the papacy. At least two important gestures are worth noting here. First, the very choice of the name John XXIII—and not another name in line with Pius—implied that this pope wanted to be different from his predecessors. As his chosen name suggests, he did not simply want to be an apostle of love—like John the Evangelist—but also wished to be a humble prophet—like John the Baptist—who had to decrease so that Christ might increase (Pieris 2010, 3). Indeed, contrary to the triumphalist posture of his predecessors, John XXIII wanted "to shake off the dust of the empire that has gathered since Constantine's day on the throne of St. Peter" (Congar 1964, 168). This is very revealing of his programmatic vision of the church and the papacy.

Second, John XXIII explicitly called this ecumenical council as Vatican II to signal that he was not just re-convoking the First Vatican Council (Vatican I) which had been interrupted in 1870 due to the Franco-Prussian war. He made it clear that he was convoking a new council and not simply intending to continue Vatican I. As Joseph Komonchak (2000, 72) recounted, Vatican II was called in order "to meet the demands of the day" in a pastorally effective way.

This council has been described as "the greatest event in the last four centuries of Catholicism" which caused a sort of a "Copernican shift" in ecclesiological thinking (Cleary 1985, 168). In Vatican II, the magisterium rediscovered the church as people of God, developed the theology of the local church, and emphasized the praxis of collegiality in church leadership (Forte 1990, 43-104). With John XXIII's new style of papacy, the church deliberately opened its window to the modern world and allowed fresh air to enter into it.

An encounter of "worlds"

The historic gathering of prelates from practically every corner of the world at Vatican II has been described as an earth-shaking "event" in the history of the church. As the Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner (1979, 717) asserted, the council was "the Church's first official self-actualization *as* a

world Church." This awareness of the "world Church," according to David Hollenbach (2005, 266-291, 285), would "avoid viewing Christianity as a European religion to be exported to the rest of the world along with European culture." According to the official report, out of the 2,904 expected participants coming from 116 different countries, about 2,449 or 89.34 percent showed up in the first session of the council (Raguer 1997, 171). In terms of demographic identity and economic background, unofficial statistics revealed that the council fathers coming from poor countries comprised the majority of the participants. The composition of participants according to continents are as follows: thirty-one percent of the council fathers came from Western Europe, twenty-two percent from Latin America, twelve percent from North America, twelve percent from Asia and Oceania, nine percent from Africa, and three percent from the Arab world (Raguer 1997, 171-72).

Given the diverse background of the participants at the council, it would not be sufficient to simply polarize them between liberals and conservatives. For this reason, I propose to see the Vatican II event as an encounter of "worlds." Many people today conveniently speak of three different worlds within one world. The First World comprises of Western Europe, North America, Australia, and Japan; the Second World consists of the former Soviet Union, its several Eastern European satellites, and Communist China; and the Third World (also sometimes called "Two-Thirds World" due to its relative population weight of the global inequalities) includes the so-called developing nations of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Nevertheless, some writers even speak of the existence of a "Fourth World." In his writings, John Paul II describes it as "the bands of great or extreme poverty in countries of medium and high income" (John Paul II, no. 31). The existence of a Fourth World simply shows that poverty is a global phenomenon and that it crosses beyond geographical boundaries.

Some people, however, tend to polarize the world in terms of "developed" and "developing" countries. Others use the terms "North" and "South" due to the fact that most of the rich countries are in the North and most poor countries are in the South. Still others have begun using the terms "Majority" and "Minority" worlds simply because, as Seán McDonagh (2006, 8-9, note

8) explains, "[m]ost of the poor people on the planet live in the Majority World. Most of the rich live in the Minority World."

In any case, all these worlds—both rich and poor—were represented at Vatican II. The participants of the poor world in the council outnumbered significantly those who came from the rich world. But being the majority in numbers did not necessarily ensure dominance at the council. On the contrary, the perspective of the minority rich prevailed over the perspective of the majority poor.

The disappearance of the church of the poor

Pope John XXIII, who played a significant role in the genesis and preparation of the council, expressed his vision of an inclusive church that would identify herself with the poor. This was explicitly revealed in his radio message on 11 September 1962 when he declared:

> Confronted with the undeveloped countries, the Church presents itself as it is and wishes to be, as the Church of all, and particularly as the Church of the poor; … the miseries of social life which cry for vengeance in the sight of God: [A]ll this must be recalled and deplored (quoted in Wittstadt 1995, 438).

Accordingly, this message was very much in the air, opening up a different perspective for the council. As a matter of fact, there was an informal working group called *The Church of the Poor*, which had been meeting regularly at the Belgian College in Rome.[2] Its main desire was to overcome the gap between the church and the poor which, according to its analysis, was caused by the church's inordinate attachment to wealth. Lyons Cardinal Pierre Gerlier particularly made this point when he spoke to this group on 26 October 1962. Gerlier said: "It is indispensable that the Church, which has no desire to be rich, be freed from the appearance of wealth. The Church must be seen for what it is: the Mother of the poor, whose first concern is to give her children bread for both body and soul" (Raguer 1997, 202).

In the unfolding of the council, it was reported that the Cardinal of Bologna, Giacomo Lercaro, intervened during the 35th General Congregation on 6 December 1962 and made a daring request to make the church of the

poor the fundamental topic of the council (Alberigo 1991, 116-32; Raguer 1997, 200). Along this line, there was also a motion by that same group, together with the then bishop of Laghuat (Africa) Georges Mercier, to draft a document on poverty. It was reported that Cardinal Lercaro submitted this motion to the Vatican Secretary of State for a review. Unfortunately, all these efforts to advance the perspective of the poor "have disappeared into the sands of time," as there is no single discussion solely devoted to the topic church of the poor in the final document (Tanner 2003, 85). Norman Tanner (2003, 383) reported that the content of the second motion is supposedly most significant since it would have given "priority to an apostolate among the most needy, those often farthest from the church and yet the most favorably disposed toward the gospel, including those of the Third World; it also recommended a revival of the worker-priest movement."

Retrieving the Christian option for the poor

It has to be reaffirmed that "the concern for the poor is not totally absent" in the final document (Lamberigts 2007, 17-40). The council fathers were certainly aware of the fact that the vast majority of humankind "are deprived of the bare necessities" and "have to live and work in conditions unworthy of human beings" (*Gaudium et spes*, no. 63). At least four important passages explicitly show the council fathers' concern for the poor.

First, in *Gaudium et spes*, the council fathers expressed the church's desire to share the situation and struggles of the poor by claiming them as her own:

> The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men [and women] of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well (no. 1).

It has been argued that the subsequent Catholic social teaching on "preferential option for the poor" may be taken to mean as an articulation of this powerful statement.

Second, there is the important passage from *Lumen gentium* which offers an excellent summary of the christological basis of the church's commitment to the poor:

> Just as Christ himself carried out the work of redemption in poverty and oppression, so the Church is called to follow the same path if she is to communicate the fruits of salvation to men. Christ Jesus, 'though he was by nature God…emptied himself, taking the nature of the slave' (Phil. 2:6, 7), and 'being rich, became poor' (2 Cor. 8:9) for our sake. Likewise, the Church…is not set up to seek earthly glory, but to proclaim, and this by her own example, humility and self-denial. Christ was sent by the Father "to bring good news to the poor…to heal the contrite heart" (Lk. 4:18), "to seek and to save what was lost" (Lk. 19:10). Similarly, the Church encompasses with her love all those who are afflicted by human misery and she recognizes in those who are poor and who suffer, the image of her poor and suffering founder. She does all in her power to relieve their need and in them she strives to serve Christ (no. 8).

This passage reveals that the church believes that her knowledge and vocation to follow Jesus Christ cannot be real without bringing justice to the poor whom she preferentially loves. The vision of the church of the poor is based on Jesus' praxis of preferential option for the poor, and not the Marxist ideology of class struggle.

Third, in *Gaudium et spes,* the council fathers issued a politically explosive statement on social inequality based on the ethical position of Thomas Aquinas:

> God destined the earth and all that it contains for the use of all men and all peoples so that all created things would be shared fairly by all mankind under the guidance of justice tempered by charity. Therefore every man has *the right to possess a sufficient amount of the earth's goods* for himself and his family.… When a person is in extreme necessity he has *the right to supply himself with what he needs out of the riches of others.* Faced with a world today where so many people are suffering from want, the [c]ouncil asks individuals and governments to remember the saying of the Fathers: 'Feed the man dying of hunger, because if you do not feed him you are killing him,' and it urges them according to their ability to share and dispose aid which will enable them to help and develop themselves (no. 69; cf. Hünermann 2006, 400).

Here, the council fathers made a correct judgment when they declared that an excessive accumulation of property and means of production by the few is deeply linked with the inequitable distribution of the goods of

the earth. Responding to the needs of the poorest, as well as the Christian obligation to help them are challenges for the rich to limit their right to private property.

And fourth, also in *Gaudium et spes,* the council fathers expressed the church's desire to be on the side of the poor as they witnessed the life of evangelical poverty. They challenged the church to be the model of her own appeals. As the document declares,

> [The church] never places its hopes in any privileges accorded to it by civil authority; indeed, it will give up the exercise of certain legitimate rights whenever it becomes clear that their use will compromise the sincerity of its witness, or whenever new circumstances call for a revised approach (no. 76).

The wisdom behind this renunciation of church privileges and detachment from the patronage offered by rich people is to maintain a posture of freedom in taking a prophetic stance on social issues involving wealth and power.

Limited perspective on poverty

Many of the Third World delegates were not satisfied with the council's prevailing perspective on poverty. This was the feeling particularly of those who looked for an explicit appropriation of the Third World perspective on poverty. To them, the final documents have failed to adequately appropriate the perspective of the poor. Cardinal Laurean Rugambwa (the first African cardinal in history) critically remarked that the problems of the poor countries were "sometimes examined with Western eye" (Routhier 2006, 135). The Indian Cardinal Duraisamy Simon Lourdusamy also noticed that the Third World problems had not been given sufficient attention during the council deliberations. The council, according to him, mainly focused on the human condition of the First World countries "that already enjoy the benefits of economic and technical progress and are excessively influenced by the effects of 'socialization,' 'industrialization,' and 'urbanization'" (quoted in Routheir 2006, 135). Aware of this limitation, a Belgian commentator concluded that Vatican II needs "a fair analysis of the problems of this world" in order to improve its theological perspective on poverty (Lamberigts 2007, 30).

Moreover, many theologians from Latin America, where the majority of the people were impoverished by the oppressive ideology of liberal capitalism, criticized the council's analysis on poverty as inappropriate for the Third World context. Recall that Vatican II tends to view poverty mainly as a lack of development—a view which is unacceptable to the majority of Latin American theologians (Gutiérrez 1988, 16-25). Segundo Galilea (1987, 62) concluded that Vatican II "was still very European in regard to Third World concerns." Gustavo Gutiérrez (1983, 193) further clarified that the main problem in the Third World countries is the fact that the poor are being treated as "non-person(s)." He argued that the poor need more liberation than development. Faced with various forms of oppression, the main problem in the Third World, according to him, is how to tell the oppressed people "that God is love" (Gutiérrez 1978, 241).

Presumably, the foregoing critiques have been brought to the attention of the ecclesial magisterium. This is discernible in the subsequent postconciliar Catholic social teaching which, to a certain extent, tries to take up many of the unfinished agenda pertaining to the church of the poor and the liberative perspective of the Third world theologians (Dorr 1992; Dorr 2007). Note here that the goals of the church of the poor movement at the council and the pro-poor perspective of the Third World are not contextually the same. As Gutiérrez (1978, 241) has clarified: "Liberation theology's first question cannot be the same one that progressivist theology has asked since Bonhoeffer." The former originated in the First World context; the latter emerged in the Third World. Nevertheless, it can be argued that both movements have significantly contributed to the magisterium's appropriation of the celebrated phrase, preferential option for the poor.

The Postconciliar Struggle

Despite its contextual limitations, Vatican II made a strong theological impact on Third World countries. In Latin America, for instance, Vatican II has strengthened the local church magisterium (*Consejo Episcopal Latino*

Americano or CELAM) which provides theologians "the courage to think for themselves about pastoral problems affecting their countries" (Boff and Boff 1987, 68-69). In Asia, Vatican II has also served as an impetus for the inception of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) during the first meeting of Asian Bishops in Manila in 1970. It was during this historic meeting that the Asian bishops committed themselves significantly to building up the church of the poor (Arevalo and Rosales 1992, 5-6).

Meanwhile, Vatican II has become the watershed of renewal in the Philippine church. It was in the spirit of the council that the Philippine church decided to "go to the barrios" in 1967 (Fabros 1988, 99). This revolutionary pastoral practice to reach out to the rural poor was the fruit of the National Congress for Rural Development held in Cagayan de Oro City in the same year. Such congress was intended "to awaken everyone in the country to the crying needs of the rural population…so that [the local magisterium] may come to concerted action to alleviate these needs and to arrive at immediate solutions (CBCP 1967; 2007). Francisco Claver (1988, 23) claimed that, on the side of the Philippine hierarchy, "the go-to-the-barrios decision in 1967 was in effect the Church's 'preferential option for the poor.'" This goes without saying that, for Claver, the pro-poor movements in the Philippines had predated that of the CELAM's Medellín Conference, which coined the phrase *preferential option for the poor* only in 1968. Elsewhere, Claver (1983, 75-81) argues that the Vatican II "germinal ideas" on dialogue, participation, and co-responsibility were responsible for the birth of Basic Christian/ Ecclesial Communities (BCCs/BECs) in Mindanao and the formation of the Mindanao Sulu Pastoral Conference (MSPC). Both ecclesial movements may be seen as manifestations of the church of the poor.

Perhaps the most significant magisterial appropriation of the church of the poor agenda in the Philippines occurred during PCP II in 1991. In this historic event, the delegates asked themselves: "What kind of a church must we be to meet the challenge of our society as we turn into the third millennium?" (PCP II, no. 87). In response, they boldly declared: "In the Philippines today, God calls us most urgently to serve the poor and the needy,"

and so "we need to become the 'church of the poor'" (PCP II, nos. 122-124). Thus, to advance this less developed ecclesiological theme in Vatican II, the PCP II has substantially devoted one section on the Church of the Poor in its final document (nos. 122-136). Luis Antonio Tagle (1993, 54) commented that "the discussion on the 'Church of the Poor' [is] the most original and powerful contribution of PCP II to ecclesiology." He, however, lamented that the perspective on the "Church of the Poor" has not been utilized "as the main interpretative key for understanding the church" (Tagle 1993, 54). It can then be said that PCP II's appropriation of this particular agendum was a timely attempt by the Philippine church to realize John XXIII's ecclesiological vision which Vatican II had failed to develop.

Recently, the Philippine church renewed its commitment to dialogue with the poor by sponsoring the Second National Rural Congress in 2007. The focus on the rural poor is quite understandable since according to Asian Development Bank Report (ADB 2005) poverty in the Philippines remains a rural phenomenon. Why is this so? As Antonio Ledesma (2009, xii) has explained, the rural poor "are trapped in a vicious cycle of slavery, dependence and hopelessness mainly due to lack of access to resources." It is a sad reality that landlessness still dominates the rural landscape in the Philippines even after the decades of agrarian reform. This alarming issue cannot be ignored in the church's ongoing dialogue with the rural poor.

Having done a cursory review of the struggles to be a church of the poor, we are now going to highlight three important liberative attitudes toward the poor. Firstly, if we wish to understand the reality of poverty, we have "to sit at the feet of the poor," as the poor "know best from their lot and experience" the existential meaning of poverty and oppression (Labayen 1995, 159-60). The church has to learn from the poor and enable the poor to participate in the process of evangelization. Secondly, we have to liberate the poor by taking up their cause according to the standard of Christian praxis. And thirdly, the poor should not be treated as mere passive objects of charity of the rich; on the contrary, they should be empowered as active subjects of their own liberation and social transformation (PCP II, no. 130).

Expanding the Notion of "Poor"

In Third World countries like the Philippines the poor may be categorized into four: The economically poor, the racially discriminated, the sexually oppressed and the ecologically poor. These faces of poverty are produced by the corresponding forms of oppression that perpetuate them. Seeing these different faces of poverty is imperative to our inclusive understanding of the church of the poor.

The economically poor

When John XXIII announced in 1962 that the church wished to be the church of the poor he most probably had in mind the socioeconomically poor: Those who have been deprived of the basic human necessities and the conditions to live a dignified human life. They are poor because of oppressive economic system. As a dominated "class," the poor occupy the lowest level in the pyramidal structure of the neoliberal capitalist society (Boff and Pixley 1989, 6). Today, we see them in the faces of the migrants, rural and urban poor, landless peasants, fisher folks, disabled people, unemployed, underemployed, uneducated, technologically illiterate, and many more.

In our present globalized society, the poor are no longer simply on the bottom or on the margins of society; they are *excluded* or being forced to live outside the society. In the Aparecida Conference (2007), it is stated that "[t]he excluded are not simply 'exploited' but 'surplus' and 'disposable.'" Since they are not useful in the economic system, the dominant class disposes them like "waste" outside the society (Bauman 2004, 24-62). How can the church of the poor be able to reach out to the excluded and to discern the suffering face of Jesus Christ in them?

The racially discriminated

If the socioeconomically poor belong to an indigenous tribe, they are doubly poor. In the words of Virgilio Elizondo (2007, 159), the poor indigenous people (IP) are at once economically oppressed and existentially poor in that their cultural poverty "has more to do with the very reality of who [they] are,

where they were born, the color of their skin, the shape of their body, the language they speak, the ethnicity that radiates through every fiber of their being." Perhaps this is the painful experience of the poor *Lumad* and Muslim Filipinos in Mindanao. The dominant and powerful ethnicities label them as inferior, uncivilized, backward, unworthy, and undignified. Consequently, many of the IPs have very low self-esteem. It seems that the injurious racial attitude toward the IPs has deeply penetrated their collective psyche to the effect that many of them tend to fatalistically accept any form of oppression, as though being a "dominated culture" is naturally part of the social reality.

The negative residues of our colonial approaches are still operating in the present dominant cultures that force the IPs to abandon their colorful pre-Christian praxis and animistic religions. On this issue, one theologian argues that it would be seriously inconsistent for the church not to recognize the authenticity of indigenous religions, considering that the church magisterium itself understands religion as the wellspring and heart of local cultures (De Schrijver 2002, 318). If it is true that "no one culture is superior or inferior to other cultures," as Elizondo (2007, 161) has insisted, then it is not right to accept only the positive aspects of the ancestral cultures and uncritically reject the indigenous religions from which their rich cultures originate. Given this sad reality, how are the IPs to be empowered so that they may also actualize their charism of leadership both in the church and in their own cultural communities?

The sexually oppressed

In our present mindset, a poor indigenous person who happens to be a woman suffers the highest degree of poverty. This is true in our patriarchal culture where a poor indigenous woman painfully embodies three layers of marginalization: 1) She belongs to the lowest class; 2) She suffers racial discrimination from both non-indigenous men and women; and 3) She is being viewed as sexually inferior by both indigenous and non-indigenous men. Needless to say, the poor indigenous women may rightly be considered as the "poorest of the poor" (Gebara 1987, 110-117). This reality leads to the "feminization of poverty," as though "poverty has a woman's face" (Tamez 2007, 102).

The globalized culture alarmingly promotes different distorted "ideological currents" (for example, male chauvinism) that subject women to "new slaveries," as well as oppressive ideologies of gender (patriarchal and androcentric ideologies) that falsely deny the full humanity of women. The Latin American bishops have condemned these oppressive gender ideologies as these are not based on authentic Christian anthropology that affirms the equal dignity of man and woman who are equally created in God's image and likeness. The vision of the church of the poor, therefore, should promote gender sensitivity and mutual partnership in a way that, as the Aparecida Conference (2007) declares, forms "a community of equals in difference." Are women ready to participate *fully* in ecclesial, family, cultural, social, and economic life?

The ecologically poor

Without being anachronistic, today's ecological awareness is practically absent in Vatican II documents, which focuses more on human beings rather than on creation in its full reality. Perhaps this is understandable considering that the ecological concerns were not yet urgent global problems in the 1960s. Nevertheless, *Gaudium et spes* reminds the reader that the "conciliar program…will have to be pursued further and amplified because it often deals with matters which are subject to continual development." This posture of openness has led to the eventual recognition of the ecological crisis as an urgent issue in the subsequent Catholic social teaching.[3]

Why do we have to care for God's creation? Let me propose three theological reasons which correspond to three ecological perspectives. To begin with, there is the perspective endorsed by the magisterium that sees the human being as "a steward and administrator with responsibility over creation" (Benedict XVI 2009). This theology of stewardship flows from the biblical view of the human being as the image of God. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) reaffirms this perspective by emphasizing that God "charged the human beings to be *stewards of his creation*, to care for it, to protect its fruitfulness and not to allow it to be devastated" (quoted in McDonagh 1990, 209). In my view, the problem

with the magisterium's stewardship perspective lies in its anthropocentric treatment of ecological issues. As some commentators have critically pointed out, the Catholic magisterium is "ecologically conscious" but its perspective on addressing the ecological crisis remains anthropocentric (Smith 1995, 79).

Moreover, there is the ecological perspective proposed by liberation theologians who consider the care for God's creation as part of the preferential option for the poor. Perhaps the best representative of this perspective is the Brazilian theologian Leonardo Boff. His preferential option for the poor includes "all the poor with all their many faces, and the great poor one, the Earth" (Boff 2001, 86). Boff does not only listen to the cry of the oppressed human beings but also to the groaning of "Mother Earth," who grossly suffers due to global warming, poisoned waters, devastated forests, mineral extraction, endangered species, and destroyed ecosystems. Boff rightly argues that with these ecological crises, our option for the poor has to become an option for the earth—an option for *all* creatures threatened by anthropogenic calamities.

It is good to know that the Filipino bishops have rightly included the liberationist concern for the oppressed creation in their quest for justice. In its most celebrated pastoral letter on ecology, the CBCP declared: "The commitment to work for justice and [the task] to preserve the integrity of creation are two inseparable dimensions of our Christian vocation to work for the coming of the kingdom of God in our times" (McDonagh 1990, 213). Here, we need to emphasize the perspective that, like social domination (that is, domination of human by human), ecological domination (that is, domination of nature by human) is also contrary to God's kingdom.

Finally, there is a less dominant ecological perspective inspired by St. Francis of Assisi whose religious experience has made us realize that "our sister, mother earth" is also our "common home." The Franciscan ecological perspective proposes that the sense of communion enjoyed by human beings has to be extended to the whole of creation. The "mere existence" of creation gives glory to the Creator and calls for human beings to contemplate and to make use of them with care and sensitivity. This perspective blends well with the animistic beliefs of the IPs who spontaneously recognize their oneness with nature and the sacred presence of God in the environment.

John Paul II has rightly recognized St. Francis as a model of bearing witness to a "sort of kinship of man with his creaturely environment, fostering in him an attitude of respect for every reality of the surrounding world" (John Paul II 1997). For him, St. Francis offers an example *par excellence* of "a sense of 'fraternity' with all those good and beautiful things which Almighty God has created" (John Paul II 1997). The care for God's creation that this "celestial patron of ecologists" exemplifies is based on his mystical experience of a universal kinship with all creatures: The realization that everything, including the most insignificant creatures, "had the same source as himself" (Boff 1997, 214). St. Francis cared for God's creatures because *all* creatures, and not only human creatures, are literally his brothers and sisters in God. Today, in the light of the emerging earth sciences, we can certainly claim that all creatures are brothers and sisters of one another *not in a metaphorical sense*, for we know that "we have all evolved from a common ancestry in ways that are increasingly well-understood" (Feehan 2010, 55).

Conclusion

In this paper, the dramatic event of Vatican II using the notion of the church of the poor as a heuristic devise has been revisited. John XXIII initially proposed this ecclesiological vision but Vatican II failed to develop it in its final documents. This lacuna, however, did not prevent the Third World ecclesiastical regions (for example, CELAM and FABC) from contextualizing it. As has been pointed out, in the Philippines, the PCP II officially appropriated it as its core magisterial message.

The meaning of the church of the poor as creatively appropriated in the Third World context has also been clarified. To advance this perspective, the meaning of "poor" has been broadened in order to include the economically poor, the racially discriminated, the sexually oppressed, and the ecologically poor. In this ecclesiological vision, the church is not only the church of the economically poor but also the church of the racially discriminated, the church of the sexually oppressed, and the church of the ecologically poor.

In sum, it has been shown that the term "poor" is analogous as it applies to the poor in terms of class, race, gender, and ecology. Our expanded notion of the poor has significantly broadened our understanding of the church of the poor. This realization allows us to dream of a church that includes *all* the poor; a church that welcomes all the poor, both the saintly and sinful ones. This ecclesiological vision challenges us to transcend our tendency to build exclusive Christian communities. It calls us to form inclusive human communities. Thus, an inclusive church of the poor is not only a *Christian* community within the larger human community but also as a *human* community within the whole *ecological* community of creation. After all, God's kingdom, as well as God's gift of community, is not only for human beings but also for the whole community of creation.

Notes

1 This paper was delivered in the gathering of the Association of Women Religious of the Archdiocese of Cagayan de Oro (AWRACO) on 4 August 2012.

2 The group of the "Church of the Poor" was inspired by Fr. Paul Gauthier's book *Les pauvres, Jésus et l'Église* (1962) and the Palestinian movement *Les compagnons de Jésusc charpentier*. On this account, see Desmond O'Grady, *Eat from God's hand: Paul Gauthier and the church of the poor* (Derby: St. Paul Publications, 1967).

3 I have done a substantial study on the Catholic social teaching on ecology in Reynaldo Raluto's, *To struggle for human and ecological liberation: Towards an ecological theology of liberation in the Philippine context* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Faculty of Theology, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2010), 171-196.

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