

THE CHURCH'S NEED FOR INTEGRAL ECOLOGICAL RESPONSE TO THE PANDEMIC CHALLENGES AND CLIMATE CRISIS

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*The phenomena of the COVID-19 pandemic and climate crisis may be seen as two equally urgent challenges of our time. Unfortunately, the former has been given an exaggerated priority by many countries around the world to the effect of unduly neglecting the latter. With an emphasis on the Philippine context, this paper attempts to offer an ecological analysis that would allow the readers to see both interrelated challenges as one complex reality and, hence, must be addressed simultaneously. Using the integral ecological perspective, this paper affirms that both challenges are arguably interrelated as they have common anthropogenic origins in the prevailing unsustainable model of development and the exploitative attitude towards nature. In this light, this paper affirms Pope Francis's theological appropriation of integral ecology in *Laudato Si'* as a crucial move for the Church's holistic interpretation of the complex challenges of the pandemic and climate emergency. Moreover, it highlights the influence of the Holy Father's integral perspective as shown in the emergence of the Church's integral ministries and advocacies in the Philippine Church. Hopefully, this emerging holistic praxis in the papal teaching will guide the discernment of the Church towards the post-pandemic world and the sustainable future.*

"A healthy planet, thriving nature, and a prosperous society are the ultimate goals and the best shield against any future threats."¹

¹ Eva Palacková, "Two Birds with One Stone: Greening the EU's Post-Coronavirus Recovery," *European View* 19, no. 2 (2020): 138-145.

INTRODUCTION

Towards the end of 2020, while many people were at the height of protecting themselves from the lethal attacks of the Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), a series of deadly landfalling tropical storms (local names: Siony, Tonyo, and Ulysses) hit the Philippines. This sad reality is a painful reminder that, aside from the pandemic, this planet is also in a state of climate emergency. It is unfortunate that, until now, these global crises are often seen as unrelated phenomena and have not been given equal attention. Overcoming this prevailing view is one of the main concerns of this paper.

This paper begins by highlighting the prevailing tendency among global leaders to prioritize the concerns of pandemics over the challenges of the climate crisis. This is followed by a brief ecological analysis on the emergence and spread of the pandemic, which emphasizes its intimate link with the global warming phenomenon. To interpret this analysis, the next part appropriates the framework of integral ecology, which is useful for an eco-theological reflection on the need to treat both global crises as one complex reality. Using the perspective of integral ecology, the last part of the paper focuses on the Church's responses to the challenges of pandemic and climate crisis. This perspective allows the concluding part of this paper to single out some imperatives toward a post-pandemic world.

CLIMATE EMERGENCY OUT, PANDEMIC IN

Before the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, the ecological concern for climate change and global warming was considered urgent and priority. In *Laudato Si'* (LS), for instance, Pope Francis recognizes it as "a global problem with grave [environmental, social, economic, and political]

implications” and as “one of the principal challenges facing humanity in our day.”² This is supported by the report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) which reveals that by 2030 our planet may reach “the tipping point” of 1.5°C above the pre-industrial temperature if we continue the business-as-usual attitude. Alarmed by this report, Pope Francis declared a *climate emergency* on June 14, 2019.³

The following year, however, the concern for climate emergency has been relegated due to the emergence of COVID-19. In a press conference during the “*Laudato si’ Week*” celebration (from 16 to 24 May 2020), Cardinal Peter Kodwo Appiah Turkson, prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, stated that “the pandemic has given a special focus to the activities of the Dicastery and created a ... *Vatican COVID-19 Commission* [that] attends to the incidence of COVID-19 in the world.”⁴ This sense of urgency made a significant repercussion among church people down to the grassroots communities.

Meanwhile, in the international political scene, climate policy has been sidelined as many governments opted to prioritize their focus on slowing the spread of the virus. In fact, in April 2020, “the British government announced that the COVID-19 crisis is forcing it to postpone the planned COP26 global climate summit, due to take place in Glasgow

²Francis, *Laudato Si’: On Care for Our Common Home* (May 24, 2015), no. 25, accessed June 2, 2015, <http://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco20150524enciclica-laudato-sien.pdf>.

³ Francis, “Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Participants at the Meeting Promoted by the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development on the Theme: The Energy Transition and Care of Our Common Home,” June 14, 2019, accessed May 15, 2021, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2019/june/documents/papa-francesco_20190614_compagnie-petrolifere.html.

⁴ “Press Conference on COVID-19, Food crisis and integral ecology: The Action of the Church,” *Summary of Bulletin: Holy See Press Office* May 16, 2020, accessed May 15, 2021, <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/publico/2020/05/16/200516a.html>

in November [2020].”⁵ Globally, people have acted swiftly to limit the spread of Covid-19, even faster than the urgency to prevent climate change. As one commentator rightly observed, “the buildup in attention and momentum for global action on climate change over the last few years is being dissipated by the coronavirus crisis.”⁶ This trend simply affirms the prevailing view that climate crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic are unconnected phenomena and have, therefore, to be responded separately.

Furthermore, despite the obvious link between COVID-19 health issues and air pollution,⁷ other countries like the United States and South Africa have decided to relax their air pollution standards during the pandemic, presumably, for fear of a deep economic recession. Following this trend, many politicians around the world have argued in favor of postponing the introduction of environmental rules and regulations. In fact, some member states of the European Union (EU) even explored the possibility of back-tracking on their climate commitments.⁸ Unfortunately, the threats of global warming are being perceived as less urgent to the effect that the climate agenda has pushed to the backburner.

⁵ Cited in Catherine Collins, “COVID-19 is cutting air pollution, but it will not slow climate change,” *Science/Business*, April 1, 2020, accessed May 15, 2021, <https://sciencebusiness.net/covid-19/news/covid-19-cutting-air-pollution-it-will-not-slow-climate-change/>.

⁶ Renee Cho, “What Can We Learn from COVID-19 to Help with Climate Change?” *State of the Planet*, March 26, 2020, accessed May 15, 2021, <https://blogs.ei.columbia.edu/2020/03/26/covid-19-lessons-climate-change/>.

⁷ See Arvind Kumar, Jane Burston, and Josh Karliner, “The deadly link between COVID-19 and air pollution,” *World Economic Forum*, April 15, 2020, accessed August 4, 2020, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/the-deadly-link-between-covid-19-and-air-pollution/>.

⁸ See Palacková, “Two Birds with One Stone,” 138–145.

AN ECOLOGICAL ANALYSIS ON THE EMERGENCE AND SPREAD OF THE PANDEMIC

The ultimate source of COVID-19 is something natural, as this pathogen naturally circulates among non-human vectors. As the scientists explain:

The process by which a pathogen moves from one host population (or environmental reservoir) to another host population is referred to as spillover and arises from complex bidirectional interactions among people, animals, pathogen communities, and environments.⁹

However, like today's climate change, the emergence and spread of natural pathogens may be seen as anthropogenic or human-induced in two ways. On one hand, its emergence is connected to anthropogenic global warming (i.e., the abnormal concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere due to human activities) whose subsequent "climate or extreme weather events are able to drive host and pathogen distributions and disease occurrence."¹⁰ On the other hand, its way of spreading is anthropogenically mediated and amplified as human beings transmit it "across great distances, thereby becoming globalised, and ... when reaching vulnerable populations, generates widespread morbidity and significant numbers of fatalities."¹¹ Since these

⁹ Kathleen Alexander, Colin Carlson, et al., "The Ecology of Pathogen Spillover and Disease Emergence at the Human-Wildlife-Environment Interface," in Christon J. Hurst, ed., *The Connections Between Ecology and Infectious Disease* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 267-298.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 281.

¹¹ Thomas Heyd, "Covid-19 and Climate Change in the Times of the Anthropocene," *The Anthropocene Review* 8, no. 1 (2021): 21-36.

human causes are preventable, the human role of controlling this contagious disease is extremely crucial.

Although “the spread of environmental or animal pathogens into human populations is a natural and perpetual process that dates back as far as human records extend,”¹² the anthropogenic mediation on the abnormal rate of the emergence and spillover of this zoonotic disease largely explains why it is accelerating in more recent history. It has been reported that over 300 documented emerging infectious diseases occurred between 1940 and 2004.¹³ More than sixty percent of the emerging infectious diseases that affect humans are zoonotic and more than two-thirds of those have their origin in wildlife.

In the case of COVID-19, it has been claimed that its transmission to humans took place at a “wet market” in the city of Wuhan, China where wildlife was being sold. There is no consensus, however, as to its specific transmitter. Many researchers say that “bats are the probable reservoirs of Ebola, Nipah, SARS, and the virus behind COVID-19.”¹⁴ Furthermore, some have suggested that the transmission of this natural pathogen originated in bats which apparently passed it on to pangolins (anteaters) sold in Wuhan wet market.¹⁵ Thus, zoonotic viruses can infect people either

¹² Alexander, et al., “The Ecology of Pathogen Spillover and Disease Emergence,” 268.

¹³ See Kate Jones, Nikkita Patel, Marc Levy, et al., “Global Trends in Emerging Infectious Diseases,” *Nature* 451 (February 21, 2008): 990-993, accessed December 21, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1038/nature06536>.

¹⁴ Andrew P. Dobson, Stuart L. Pimm, Lee Hannah, et al., “Ecology and Economics for Pandemic Prevention,” *Science* 369, no. 6502 (24 Jul 2020): 379-381, accessed December 29, 2020, <https://science.sciencemag.org/content/369/6502/379>.

¹⁵ Kristian Andersen, Andrew Rambaut, et al., “The Proximal Origin of SARS-CoV-2,” *Nature Medicine* 26 (March 17, 2020): 450-452, accessed December 21, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41591-020-0820-9>. A disease ecologist explains how this virus may be transmitted from animals to humans: “It is likely that a bat dropped a piece of chewed fruit into a piggery in a forest. The pigs

directly, like when they handle live wildlife (or their meat) or indirectly, when there is human contact from infected farm animals such as chickens and pigs.

It has been proposed that the increasing number of new infectious diseases affecting humans is a symptom of a deep ecological concern as it “may be linked to habitat loss due to forest area change and the expansion of human populations into forest areas, which both increase human exposure to wildlife.”¹⁶ In this sense, deforestation and habitat destruction are the chief reasons why zoonotic diseases have quadrupled in the last half-century largely. In the words of Thomas Heyd: “with (a) increasing encroachment of natural spaces, (b) ever denser populated areas, and (c) continuously increasing interactions of people across continents for business and leisure, and due to migration pressures, zoonotic epidemics and pandemics can be expected to continue increasing in frequency....”¹⁷ As some scientific researchers have confirmed, humans have felled 46% percent of all the trees on Earth. “Humans and their livestock are more likely to contact wildlife when more than 25% of the original forest cover is lost, and such contacts

became infected with the virus, and amplified it, and it jumped to humans” who have the capacity to spread around the globe very quickly with air travel. See Jim Robbins, “The Ecology of Disease,” *New York Times*, July 14, 2012, accessed May 15, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/15/sunday-review/the-ecology-of-disease.html>.

¹⁶ FAO and UNEP, “Executive Summary,” in *The State of the World’s Forests 2020: Forests, biodiversity and people* (Rome: FAO and UNEP, 2020), xix, accessed May 15, 2021 <https://www.unenvironment.org/resources/state-worlds-forests-forests-biodiversity-and-people>.

¹⁷ Heyd, “Covid-19 and Climate Change in the Times of the Anthropocene,” 28. For a similar view, see Rory Gibb, David Redding, Kai Qing Chin, et al., “Zoonotic Host Diversity Increases in Human-dominated Ecosystems,” *Nature* 584 (August 5, 2020): 398–402, accessed January 9, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-020-2562-8>.

determine the risk of disease transmission.”¹⁸ Furthermore, it is believed that about 10,000 mammalian viruses are potentially dangerous to people. They will be unleashed once the forest ecosystems are destroyed.

In addition to the above analysis, many ecological advocates have pointed out that the COVID-19 pandemic is a human-induced disaster brought about by hazardous modernization that produced air pollution primarily coming from road traffic, shipping, agriculture, domestic heating, and power generation.¹⁹ This infectious disease quickly spreads in a dirty environment as the “particles of pollution might even serve as a vehicle to carry the virus further.”²⁰ As a type of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), the coronavirus disease of 2019, which is also called SARS CoV-2, primarily attacks the lungs and causes other upper-respiratory tract illnesses, including the common colds. It has been shown that the lungs inflamed by pollutants are highly susceptible to catching the virus. Thus, this pandemic is exacerbated by air pollution that negatively affects especially those with respiratory issues and compromised immune systems.

Lastly, it has been proposed by environmental activists that this pandemic emerged out of the unsustainable model of economic development that largely produced the climate change phenomenon. According to their analysis, both the COVID-19 pandemic and the global climate change have their common roots in unrestrained capitalist production and unlimited consumption patterns fueled by the ideology of

¹⁸ Andrew P. Dobson, Stuart L. Pimm, Lee Hannah, et al., “Ecology and economics for pandemic prevention,” *Science* 369, no. 6502 (July 24, 2020): 379-381, accessed May 20, 2021, <https://science.sciencemag.org/content/369/6502/379>.

¹⁹ Bogdan, “How a Deadly Pandemic Cleared the Air,” 294.

²⁰ Damian Carrington, “Is air pollution making the coronavirus pandemic even more deadly?” *The Guardian*, May 4, 2020, accessed January 8, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/04/is-air-pollution-making-the-coronavirus-pandemic-even-more-deadly>.

infinite growth at the expense of the environment. As Vijay Kolinjivadi has clearly remarked:

The need for more natural resources has forced humans to encroach on various natural habitats and expose themselves to yet unknown pathogens. ... The failure to contain [the COVID-19] is also due to the capitalist drive of the global economy.²¹

Accordingly, the unsustainable attitude of neo-liberal capitalism that looks at nature as dispensable has been identified as the common root cause of both pandemics and climate change.²² Based on this analysis, transforming the unsustainable practices of neo-liberal capitalism is integral to the human solution to this pandemic and climate crisis.

THE NEED FOR AN INTEGRAL ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

To find an adequate working definition of the term *integral ecology*, it is helpful to briefly revisit the emergence of this interdisciplinary concept in the current literature. As is well known, the noun *ecology* comes from the Greek word

²¹ Vijay Kolinjivadi, "The coronavirus outbreak is part of the climate change crisis," *Jazeera*, March 30, 2020, accessed May 20, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2020/3/30/the-coronavirus-outbreak-is-part-of-the-climate-change-crisis>.

²² On this analysis, see Joan Benach, "We Must Take Advantage of This Pandemic to Make a Radical Social Change: The Coronavirus as a Global Health, Inequality, and Eco-Social Problem," *International Journal of Health Services* 51, no. 1 (2021): 50-54; see also Jane Goodall, "COVID-19 Should Make us Rethink our Destructive Relationship with the Natural World," *Slate*, April 6, 2020, accessed January 9, 2020, <https://slate.com/technology/2020/04/jane-goodall-coronavirus-species.html>.

oikos, which may be translated as *home* or *household*.²³ The German biologist, Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919), has been credited for coining the word *Ökologie*, which publicly appeared in the scientific scene with his publications in 1866.²⁴ His original intention was to study the biological properties of organisms in their natural setting outside the confinement of the laboratory.²⁵ As a biologist, he envisioned that ecology would focus its study on the *total relations* of organisms to their *household*. Building on this view, *ecology* may be defined today as “the study of the earth’s ‘households’ including plants, animals, microorganisms, and *people* that live together as interdependent components.”²⁶ Thus, ecologically, the human being is considered “part of nature.”²⁷

The adjective *integral* has several meanings, depending on its context and application. In the *Cambridge English Dictionary*, for instance, a thing is considered integral if it is an important “part of a whole” or if it is “contained within something; not separate.”²⁸ Moreover, *integral* can also mean holistic, comprehensive, inclusive, non-marginalizing, or all-embracing. Which of the two meanings applies to the notion of *integral ecology*? Apparently, it is the latter since the term *Integral ecology* initially emerged as an attempt to unite *all*

²³ For the Greek usage of the term “ecology,” see Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, translated by Richard Hope (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1960), no. 1075a 11-25.

²⁴ See Ernst Haeckel, *Generelle Morphologie der Organismen: Allgemeine Grundzüge der organischen Formen-Wissenschaft, mechanisch begründet durch die von Charles Darwin reformirte Descendenz-Theorie* (Berlin: Reimer, 1866); as cited in Stauffer, “Haeckel, Darwin, and Ecology,” 140.

²⁵ On this account, see Robert Clinton Stauffer, “Haeckel, Darwin, and Ecology,” *Quarterly Review of Biology* 32 (1957): 138-44.

²⁶ Eugene Odum, *Ecology: The Link Between the Natural Sciences and the Social Sciences*, 2nd edition (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1975), 1.

²⁷ *Ibid.* 1.

²⁸ “Integral,” in *Cambridge Dictionary*, accessed April 12, 202, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/integral>.

ecologies into a coherent perspective. For Ken Wilber, a framework is integral when it seeks “to include as many perspectives, styles, and methodologies as possible within a coherent view of the topic.”²⁹ This presupposes that the more perspectives are included the more integral is the framework.

Today, due to the emerging various approaches to ecological reflection, many authors propose to come up with an integral ecology, “a framework that allows all aspects of reality to connect with what has traditionally been associated with the scientific study of ecology.”³⁰ Accordingly, “integral ecology unites, coordinates, and mutually enriches knowledge generated from different major disciplines and approaches.”³¹ Although this term was probably used for the first time in 1958 by Hillary B. More,³² it became popular only in the 1990s with the publication of the respective writings of Ken Wilber, Leonardo Boff, and Thomas Berry. Among these three authors, Boff deserves a particular focus here due to his significant influence on understanding the concept of integral ecology that has become part of the present Catholic social teaching.

The Latin American liberation theologians, Leonardo Boff and Virgil Elizondo, persuasively argued that recent ecological reflection has (1) moved beyond conservationism and preservationism, (2) criticized environmentalism, (3) pointed out the limitations of human ecology, (4) issued in a

²⁹ Cited in Sean Esbjörn-Hargens and Michael E. Zimmerman, *Integral Ecology: Uniting Multiple Perspectives on the Natural World* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2009), 39.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 42.

³¹ Sean Esbjörn-Hargens and Michael Zimmerman, *An Overview of Integral Ecology. A Comprehensive Approach to Today's Complex Planetary Issues*, Integral Institute Resource Paper 2 (2009), 2.

³² Hilary B. Moore, *Marine Ecology* (New York: John Wiley and Sons; London: Chapman and Hall, 1958).

social ecology, and (5) developed mental or deep ecology.³³ Integral ecological reflection, according to these authors, seeks to

articulate all these aspects with a view to founding a new alliance between societies and nature, which will result in the conservation of the patrimony of the earth, socio-cosmic well-being, and the maintenance of conditions that will allow evolution to continue on the course it has now been following for some fifteen thousand million years [sic]. ... Society and culture also belong to the ecological complex. ... In this holistic perspective, economic, political, social, military, educational, urban, agricultural and other questions are all subject to ecological consideration.³⁴

This overarching claim of ecology is crucial in *Laudato Si'*'s appropriation of the term integral. It also implies what the term *ecological* basically means in the Church's response to the complex challenges of the pandemic and climate emergency.

THE CHURCH'S APPROPRIATION OF INTEGRAL ECOLOGY

It has been argued that Boff's notion of integral ecology may have "provided a direct inspiration for Pope

³³ See Leonardo Boff and Virgil Elizondo, "Ecology and Poverty: Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor," *Concilium: International Journal of Theology* (1995/5): ix-xii.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, ix-x. It is significant to note that "ecological thinking" becomes synonymous with "holistic thinking." As some authors describe it, "To think ecologically is to think comprehensively, to think across the boundaries of natural science and the humanities. Thinking ecologically means *synthesizing* the many fields of human knowledge into a coherent worldview." See David Keller and Frank Golley, "Afterword," in David Keller and Frank Golley, eds., *The Philosophy of Ecology: From Science to Synthesis* (Athens: University of Georgia, 2000), 320.

Francis”³⁵ as shown in the latter’s appropriation of the expression “cry of the Earth and cry of the poor.”³⁶ It can be recalled that Boff had published a book *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* in 1995, twenty years before the release of *Laudato Si’*. Accordingly, the Holy Father creatively appropriated Boff’s expression to emphasize the integral ecological view in *Laudato Si’*.

To strengthen the foregoing claim, there are three important insights from Boff that may have influenced the integral ecology of *Laudato Si’*. First is the contention that the preferential option for the poor has to embrace “all the poor with all their many faces, and the great poor one, the Earth”³⁷ (see LS 2). Second is the proposal that concern for ecology is a social imperative “since the decline in the quality of their surroundings produces social tensions, violence, disease, malnutrition and even death.”³⁸ And third is the affirmation of the causal connection between poverty and exploitative ecological practices (see LS 92, 196). For Boff, both negative realities systematically stem from the same logic of oppression used by the proponents of unlimited growth.

Similar to Boff, *Laudato Si’* define *ecology* as the study of “the relationship between living organisms and the environment in which they develop” (LS 138). It adds that “Nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live. We are part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with

³⁵ Ryszard Feliks Sadowski, “Inspirations of Pope Francis’ Concept of Integral Ecology,” *Seminare*, 35, no. 4 (2016): 69-82.

³⁶ Francis, *Laudato Si’*, no. 49; see Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997).

³⁷ Leonardo Boff, “El pobre, la nueva cosmología y la liberación: Cómo enriquecer la Teología de la Liberación,” in *Alternativas* 18/19 (2001): 75-89. [my translation].

³⁸ Boff and Elizondo, “Ecology and Poverty: Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor,” x; see Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, 107.

it” (LS 139). The encyclical creatively appropriates the term *ecosystem* to describe how “the different creatures relate to one another in making up the larger units” (LS 140).

Furthermore, Pope Francis repeatedly affirmed the ecological principle that “*Everything is interconnected*” (LS 70, 138, 240), which is another way of affirming the *integrity of creation* that became part of the vocabulary of the present Catholic social teaching. Building on this principle, the notion of integral ecology tries to bring together the environmental, economic, social, cultural, and everyday life ecologies (see LS 138–55), including the ethical principles of the common good, human rights, intergenerational justice, and the intrinsic value of nature (see LS 140).³⁹ To enhance its religious and theological elements, Pope Francis emphasizes that the content of integral ecology includes “taking time to recover a serene harmony with creation, reflecting on our lifestyle and our ideals, and contemplating the Creator who lives among us and surrounds us” (LS 255). To give it a sacred face, he declares Saint Francis of Assisi as “the example par excellence of ... an integral ecology” that testifies the inseparable bond “between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace” (LS 10).

VATICAN'S INTEGRAL RESPONSE TO THE PANDEMIC CHALLENGES

In the face of the pandemic, it is instructive to revisit Pope Francis's invitation to see “everything [as] closely interrelated and [to listen to his] ... call for a vision capable of

³⁹ For a good explanation of integral ecology, see Thomas Reese, “Integral Ecology: Everything is Connected,” *National Catholic Reporter*, August 27, 2015, accessed October 14, 2015, <http://ncronline.org/blogs/faith-and-justice/integral-ecology-everything-connected>.

taking into account every aspect of the global crisis” (LS 137).⁴⁰ In light of the papal teaching on integral ecology, it is clear that the solutions to the complex causes of the pandemic “will not emerge from just one way of interpreting and transforming reality” and “cannot be dealt with from a single perspective or from a single set of interests” (LS 110). Thus, aside from scientific theories and interdisciplinary mediations, the Pope insists that there is a need to critically include “various cultural riches of different peoples, their art and poetry, their interior life and spirituality” (LS 63). This holistic framework pushes him to be integral with his proposed solutions to the pandemic that include human and ecological concerns.

In his encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis reiterates his call to embrace the perspective of integral ecology in the face of the pandemic challenges: “To care for the world in which we live means to care for ourselves ... as a single-family dwelling in a common home.”⁴¹ Elsewhere, the Pope strongly declares that “no one is saved alone; we can only be saved together.”⁴² This holistic view can be interpreted ecologically to mean that, in times of pandemic, people cannot save themselves without caring for their common home. The fate of humankind is inseparable from the fate of the planet Earth.

As a Church leader, Pope Francis has been actively vocal in committing the Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development to funding projects and initiatives that respond not only to the victims of pandemic but also to the causes of climate crisis. Along this line,

⁴⁰ For a good article on this topic, see Guillermo Kerber, “‘Everything Is Interrelated’: The COVID-19 Pandemic and Integral Ecology,” *The Ecumenical Review* 72, no. 4 (October 2020): 596-608.

⁴¹ Francis, *Fratelli Tutti: On the Fraternity and Social Friendship* (3 October 2020), no. 17, accessed October 10, 2020 https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.pdf.

⁴² *Ibid.*, no. 32.

Reverend Augusto Zampini-Davies proposed that, in addressing the global need for food in the face of pandemic, people should support these two important activities: “accelerate improvements in agricultural productivity but link it with the protection of natural ecosystems and sustainable practices” and “support and promote policies which address the Climate Emergency to counter its effects on the poorest communities and countries, particularly its impacts on food production.”⁴³ Accordingly, both human and ecological concerns have to be operationalized simultaneously at this time of pandemic and climate emergency.

HOW INTEGRAL ARE THE RESPONSES OF THE PHILIPPINE CHURCH TO THE PANDEMIC?

In responding to the social and ecological challenges, it is sad to know that the upward approach to discernment and decision-making has not yet been sufficiently developed in the institutional Church. As one theologian affirms, the members of the Philippine hierarchy generally take the magisterium documents, not only as a “source text” for theologizing but also as “a source of greater assurance in discernment and decision.”⁴⁴ To balance this downward approach, the Philippine Church magisterium is challenged to listen also to the voices from the ground that offer various perspectives of caring for our Common Home. The Church’s participation in responding to the challenges of the pandemic can become integral by inviting her members to use their charisms not only for the building up of the ecclesial community but also for the sustainability of the ecological community of creation. While the Church has a particular

⁴³ “Press Conference on COVID-19, Food crisis and integral ecology: the action of the Church.”

⁴⁴ Catalino Arévalo, “After Vatican II: Theological Reflection in the Church in the Philippines 1965-1987,” *Landas* 2 (1988): 11-24.

contribution to the integral solution of the complex problems of the pandemic and climate emergency, she is challenged to creatively promote integral ministries that are responsive to the present challenges of the pandemic and climate emergency.

SPIRITUAL/LITURGICAL CONCERNS

The leadership role of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) is crucial in discerning and communicating the appropriate and unified Church activities at this time of the pandemic. CBCP's published letters and circulars reveal that its most important concern during the pandemic is to maintain the spiritual and liturgical life of the faithful. In the words of Archbishop Romulo Valles, the CBCP President and an expert in liturgy, as pastors, it is

... our duty is to provide the faithful with spiritual nourishment especially in times of crisis. Every diocese must therefore provide for the celebration of the Eucharist, other liturgical services, and spiritual activities, transmitted live through the Internet, Television, or Radio. We should encourage the faithful to avail themselves of these and pray together in their homes as a family or in their small Christian communities (BECs).⁴⁵

The priority given to the spiritual and liturgical life of the church is clearly revealed in the subsequent eight CBCP

⁴⁵ Romulo Valles, "Public Health Emergency, Code Red Sub-level Two—COVID-19," *CBCP News*, March 13, 2020, accessed March 15, 2020 <https://cbcnews.net/cbcnews/public-health-emergency-code-red-sub-level-two-covid-19/>.

Letters/Circulars related to worship and celebrating the sacraments in times of pandemic.⁴⁶ As long as the CBCP does not abandon or remain silent to the social concerns of the poor, this stress on safe liturgical and sacrament procedures is perfectly understandable in the context of avoiding possible infection of this contagious disease.

SOCIAL CONCERNS

In terms of social concerns, there are two very important lines of action that promote CBCP's preferential option for the poor: (1) "We need to create programs and systems that will translate the effects of the Celebrations of the Paschal Triduum in our care for the poor among us."⁴⁷ (2) "As dioceses and parishes, can we start assisting them [frontline medical personnel] by providing facilities for them to go home to, some place for rest and sleep, and perhaps some meals – a second home for our dedicated medical front liners – like some available buildings and rooms in our dioceses and parishes, for example, formation centers,

⁴⁶ The subsequent Circulars/Letters pertaining to spiritual/liturgical life of the faithful in times of pandemic include: "Recommendations for the Celebrations of the Holy Week During the Quarantine Period (2020)"; "A Call and Invitation to a Special Day of Prayer for our Frontline Medical Personnel"; "CBCP circular on public health emergency due to COVID-19"; "A Call and Invitation to a Special Day of Prayer for our Frontline Medical Personnel"; "Supplement to the Recommendations for Holy Week and Paschal Triduum Celebrations in Time of Covid-19"; "Recommendations and Guidelines for the Liturgical Celebration in 'New Normal' Condition"; "Anticipating to celebrate our liturgy in the 'new normal' condition; and Instructions on the celebration of Aguinaldo Masses, Misa de Gallo or Simbang Gabi." To read the full version of these CBCP Statements, see CBCP News. Online: <https://cbcnews.net/cbcnews/cbcp-statements/>.

⁴⁷ Romulo Valles, "Recommendations for the Celebrations of the Holy Week During the Quarantine Period (2020)," *CBCP News*, March 20, 2020, accessed March 25, 2020, <https://cbcnews.net/cbcnews/recommendations-for-the-celebrations-of-the-holy-week-during-the-quarantine-period-2020/>.

retreat houses, and pastoral centers?”⁴⁸ In effect, many dioceses and Catholic institutions throughout the country have positively responded to this call according to their respective creativity and resources.

In this connection, the Philippine Church commends the initiative of Ann Patricia Non to set up a small “pantry” on April 14, 2021 in Maginhawa, Quezon City that seeks to revive the *Bayanihan* spirit—the Filipino practice of helping needy families communally without expecting anything in return. Her motto is quite simple: “take what you need and give what you can.” Through her prophetic example, she has inspired many communities to set up their own pantries of food, hygienic products, and other necessities. The communal spirit of pantries encourages mutual help rather than dole out approach in helping the poor victims of pandemic. As Bishop Pablo Virgilio David has remarked, the *Bayanihan* spirit of community pantries reminds us that “we are responsible for one another, following the example of the first Christian communities” (see Acts 2:44-45).⁴⁹ In this light, the CBCP encouraged parishes to put up their respective community pantries that would “help needy families, especially with food and other basic necessities,” at this time of the Covid-19 pandemic.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Romulo Valles, “A Call and Invitation to a Special Day of Prayer for our Frontline Medical Personnel,” *CBCP News*, March 26, 2020, accessed April 1, 2020, <https://cbcpnews.net/cbcpnews/a-call-and-invitation-to-a-special-day-of-prayer-for-our-frontline-medical-personnel/>.

⁴⁹ Robin Gomes, “‘Community Pantries’ for Needy Mushrooming in the Philippines,” *Vatican News*, April 23, 2021, accessed April 25, 2021, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2021-04/philippines-community-pantries-bishops-caritas-kindness-stations.html>.

⁵⁰ Cited in CBCP News, “CBCP Praises ‘Bayanihan’ Spirit amid Pandemic,” *CBCP News*, April 21, 2021, accessed April 25, 2021, <https://cbcpnews.net/cbcpnews/cbcp-praises-bayanihan-spirit-amid-pandemic/>. For similar story, see Benadette Tamayo, “Church to Parishes: Set Up Community Pantries,” *The Manila Times*, April 21, 2021, accessed April 25, 2021

NASSA/Caritas Philippines—the humanitarian, development and advocacy arm of the CBCP that serves as the national secretariat to 85-strong Diocesan Social Action Centers—is also known for its revitalized “Kindness Stations” (i.e., the earlier counterpart of community pantry) in many places to help the poor cope with the necessities in times of pandemic. It was reported that, in general, the Catholic Church in the Philippines consistently offers the expected services in difficult and desperate times: “Helping the poor and the vulnerable sectors in society amid the life-and-death threat from the COVID-19 pandemic.” Many initiatives from the national to the local levels are being done “to help the poor and the vulnerable sectors cope with the debilitating health and economic crisis caused by COVID-19.”⁵¹

ECOLOGICAL CONCERNS

So far, there were no explicit initiatives from the CBCP circulars concerning the COVID-19 pandemic either in relation to climate crisis or in understanding it as an ecological issue in itself. Nevertheless, it officially endorsed the activities of the Global Catholic Climate Movement (GCCM)-Pilipinas to celebrate the Season of Creation (from September 1 to October 11). One of its important activities was the webinar on September 2, 2020 that substantially explored the crucial connection between pandemics and climate crisis, namely: (1) “Celebrating the Season of Creation in the Context of

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2021/04/21/news/national/church-to-parishes-set-up-community-pantries/866168/amp>.

⁵¹ Ernesto M. Hilario, “Philippine Church relentless in pro-poor programs amid pandemic,” *Licas News*, May 1, 2020, accessed May 2, 2020, https://philippines.licas.news/2020/05/01/philippine-church-relentless-in-pro-poor-programs-amid-pandemic/?fbclid=IwAR0RBTvO2yKlxtfBSvvg6Qnapv5O77eEma0Zk_obOdogd9NLFPE2PIZs.

Laudato Si' Year and COVID 19" by Fr. Joshtrom Kureethadam, a representative from the Vatican Dicastery for the Promotion of Integral Human Development; and (2) "Climate Justice in the time of the Pandemic: The Philippine Experience" by Fr. Edu Gariguez, former Executive Secretary of CBCP-NASSA.⁵²

Significantly, on April 22, 2021, which is also the global Earth Day celebration, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources-National Capital Region (DENR-NCR), together with some ecological advocates, timely launched the Community Pan-TREEs that would expand the existing *bayanihan* initiatives by giving away seedlings instead of food.⁵³ These ecological version of community pantries aim to help people cope with pandemic stress through tree planting/growing and urban greening. They raise people's consciousness of the need for an integral solution that addresses both the pandemic and climate crisis. In the words of DENR-NCR Regional Executive Director Jacqueline Caancan, "Just as we worry about our health during these times, we also need to worry about the health of Mother Earth."⁵⁴ This means that observance of health

⁵² See "Season of Creation 2020, September 1-October 11 Calendar of Activities," *GCCM-Pilipinas*, accessed February 12, 2021, https://drive.google.com/file/d/1bCaEVcpXLB7C5LVncvhinUCak_PWhgjq/view?fbclid=IwAR3SFyfOWw-QupKRISNTcRH6ME8r3kcwc4RH9eiQlNpJ8ZMYR5C9nmul8Yo. See also NASSA/Caritas-Philippines, "Statement on Earth-Day: COVID 19 and Call to Protect our Common Home," *Caritas Philippines*, April 22, 2020, accessed April 25, 2020, https://www.nassa.org.ph/earth-day-covid-and-call-to-protect-our-common-home/?fbclid=IwAR1SiLjSwZfNh-eA0EtQs4oUF7yFMSH7mLAWf9W_NsSkVaZRcZ23Bjz06E.

⁵³ See CNN Philippines Staff, "DENR to Open Community 'pan-TREE' with Free Seedlings for Urban Gardeners," *CNN Philippines*, April 21, 2021, accessed April 25, 2021, <https://cnnphilippines.com/news/2021/4/21/DENR-pan-tree.html>.

⁵⁴ Catalina Ricci Madarang, "PSA: DENR-NCR is Giving Away Free Fruits, Vegetables Seedlings in 'Community Pan-TREE'," *Interaksyon*, April 23, 2021, accessed April 25, 2021 <https://interaksyon.philstar.com/trends->

protocols and sharing of food with the poor victims of pandemic should be coupled with planting more native trees and other activities that reduce ecological footprints.

To creatively promote the ecological version of community pantries, many church institutions contextually appropriated this ecological approach of community Pan-TREE in their respective localities. For instance, on April 25, 2021, St. John Vianney Theological Seminary (SJVTS) in Cagayan de Oro launched its own version of Community Pan-TREE that “shares ‘PAN’ (Visayan term for bread) to re-affirm that food is necessary for our survival and offers ‘TREE’ to recognize our need for the ecosystem services of forest.”⁵⁵ Sharing pan (bread) is one way of responding to short term needs; offering trees is a long term solution to prevent the future emergence of pandemic. In any case, this ecological initiative is also SJVTS’s expression of support for Pope Francis’s integral ecological view that we are facing “one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty ... and at the same time protecting nature” (LS 139).⁵⁶ Thus, doing Community Pan-Tree is like hitting

spotlights/2021/04/23/190424/ psa-denr-ncr-is-giving-away-free-fruits-vegetables-seedlings-in-community-pan-tree/amp/.

⁵⁵ Reynaldo Raluto, “Promoting Community Pan-TREE,” *MindaNews*, May 12, 2021, accessed: May 13, 2021 <https://www.mindanews.com/mindaviews/2021/05/integral-ecology-promoting-community-pan-tree/>. For similar news story, see CBCP News, “Seminary Spearheads ‘Community Pan-TREE’ Initiative,” *CBCP News*, 13 May 2021, accessed May 14 2021, <https://cbcnews.net/cbcnews/seminary-spearheads-community-pan-tree-initiative/>.

⁵⁶ For this news story, see Aizel Dolom, “Seminarians to Plant ‘Jubilee Trees’ for 500 Years of Christianity in the PH,” *My Pope Philippines*, May 23, 2021, accessed May 25, 2021, <https://www.mypope.com.ph/seminarians-to-plant-jubilee-trees-for-500-yoc/>; see also Diocesan Reports, “Catholic seminary in Cagayan de Oro launches ‘community pan-TREE’,” *Licas News*, May 14, 2021, accessed May 15, 2021 <https://philippines.licas.news/2021/05/14/catholic-seminary-in-cagayan-de-oro-launches-community-pan-tree/?amp;> <https://www.>

two birds with one stone: it does not only rehabilitate the forest ecosystem to prevent the emergence of future pandemic; it also mitigates the increase of global warming.

SOME INTEGRAL ECOLOGICAL IMPERATIVES TOWARD A POST-PANDEMIC WORLD

The foregoing analysis and interpretation of the experience during pandemic and climate crisis has challenged the church to embrace the ecological perspective. In this paper, a perspective may be called *ecological* if it critically appropriates the best ecological insights from Earth sciences that creatively promote the value of sustainability and overcome the limitations of anthropocentric perspective. Though not exhaustive, the following activities are considered imperatives for a church that ops to embrace an integral ecological perspective.

Embrace the sustainable solutions to the pandemic and climate crisis. After COVID-19, the path forward should include massive global transition from fossil fuels and radical change of production and consumption habits that are responsible for the emergence and spread of this zoonotic disease.⁵⁷ Thanks to the emerging ecological economics,⁵⁸ the new normal can now be creatively addressed by promoting a renewable energy economy that would seriously reduce air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions. Clean and non-polluting renewable energy could save lives as it improves air

ucanews.com/amp/philippine-community-pantries-spur-environmental-offshoot/92468.

⁵⁷ See Kumar, Burston, and Karliner, “The deadly link between COVID-19 and air pollution.”

⁵⁸ “Ecological economics” may be described as “The union of economics and ecology, with the economy conceived as a subsystem of the earth ecosystem that is sustained by a metabolic flow or ‘throughput’ from and back to the larger system.” See Herman Daly and Joshua Farley, *Ecological Economics: Principles and Applications* (London: Island Press, 2004), 431.

quality and mitigates global warming. However, embracing clean energy transition process to reduce pollutants and greenhouse emissions should be done in a sustainable manner. Over-regulation that will lead to a drastic economic slowdown cannot be a sustainable option due to its damaging social consequences. As Eva Palacková has argued, "Turning off the economy hardly constitutes a viable climate policy."⁵⁹ Thus, integral solution to the pandemic and climate concerns requires a coherent response that integrates sustainable and resilient solutions to both crises.

Treat both the pandemic and climate crisis as equally urgent concerns. Many people tend to underestimate the urgency to address climate crisis and think that this ecological concern could wait until the pandemic is over. Against this view, some environmental philosophers argue that "climate change should be seen with *equal*, and probably even greater, *urgency* because of its increasing, planet-wide, and in many ways permanent, foreseeable problematic impacts."⁶⁰ Scientists have repeatedly warned this generation that time is almost running out if people wish to avoid the devastating effects of tipping points, which is to keep global warming to well below two degrees Celsius. For this reason, other scientists like Jane Goodall recommend treating climate change "as if it was a pandemic."⁶¹ The main point is that it would be very detrimental not to tackle both urgent concerns simultaneously.

Emphasize the preventive rather than the curative measures. The prevailing approach to solve the pandemic is

⁵⁹ Palacková, "Two Birds with One Stone," 141.

⁶⁰ Heyd, "Covid-19 and Climate Change in the Times of the Anthropocene," 27.

⁶¹ Cited in Kirsten Diprose and Matt Neal, "Jane Goodall says Global Disregard for Nature brought on Corona-virus Pandemic," *MSN News* April 12 2020, accessed 20 April 2020, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-04-11/jane-goodall-says-disregard-for-nature-has-brought-coronavirus/12142246>.

heavily curative: observing physical distancing in social context, avoiding mass gathering, wearing face masks and face shields, washing one's hands thoroughly, contact tracing, diagnostic testing, isolating the infected people, enforcing quarantine, limiting the travels, implementing focused lockdowns of social activities and interactions, and injecting vaccines. Although these have proven to be effective in containing the infectious disease, many critics rightly insist that the pandemics could have been avoided if "greater attention had been given to measures directed at [their] prevention and anticipation."⁶² Along this line, many environmental advocates argue that the emergence of future zoonotic diseases could be prevented by addressing the declining forest cover and maintaining healthy forest ecosystems. Thus, to augment the limitations of curative measures, reforestation must be included in the long-term response to the pandemic.

Prioritize the concerns of the poor. Whether there is a pandemic or none, the poor are always exposed to unhealthy situations that make them vulnerable to sickness and untimely death. Moreover, at this moment of the pandemic, they are doubly vulnerable to the attacks of this lethal virus due to their lack of access to clean water, soap, and masks and difficulty in maintaining physical distancing. Furthermore, the threats of the poor in the Global South are tripled as they unjustly suffer the worst effects of ecological disasters brought about by climate emergencies. These layers of vulnerability suffered by the poor compel the decision-makers to prioritize their concerns. To have a preferential option for the poor is imperative at this time of pandemic and climate emergency.

⁶² Heyd, "Covid-19 and Climate Change in the Times of the Anthropocene," 28; see Richard Horton, "Coronavirus is the Greatest Global Science Policy Failure in a Generation," *The Guardian*, April 9, 2020, accessed April 21, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/apr/09/deadly-virus-britain-failed-prepare-mers-sars-ebola-coronavirus>.

Promote a sustainable lifestyle. Those who are critical and skeptical of the promises of sustainable development under the prevailing neo-liberal capitalist agenda have embraced the praxis of sustainable lifestyle launched by *Earth Charter* in 2000. As one of its proponents explained it, a lifestyle is sustainable when it “allows Earth, with its beauty and integrity and its abundant but limited resources, to meet the current needs of all humankind in a way that will allow Earth to reproduce itself, to regenerate itself, and to continue its evolution as it has done for four and a half billion years.”⁶³ In the context of climate emergency, it compels the present generation not simply to conserve Mother Earth or to allow her to recover so that people can resume plundering her again to meet the demands of the dominant model of development. Rather, the imperative is to liberate her from the type of development paradigm that incurably plunders the natural resources.

Make appropriate restitution/reparation for the ecological damages. It is not enough to plant/grow trees, adopt low emissions lifestyles, install extensive solar panels, buy local food, become a green consumer, manage our wastes, and other sustainable practices. There is a need to advocate for climate justice and ecological healing by going after the perpetrators and by helping the vulnerable victims of ecological oppression. Among the victims of complex forms of oppression, the tribal/indigenous peoples suffer the worst effects of the cultural and ecological damages. Compelling the perpetrators to make appropriate *restitution* for their ecological sins is an essential requirement for justice and healing. The Church maintains that asking forgiveness is not enough.⁶⁴ Perpetrators are obliged to give justice to their

⁶³ Leonardo Boff, “Respect and Care for the Community of Life,” 43-46, 44.

⁶⁴ See John Paul II, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Ecclesia in Oceania* (November 22, 2001), no. 28, accessed June 7, 2021

victims and should equitably shoulder the cost of repairing their ecological damages and the expenses from preventing future calamities.⁶⁵

Recognize the indigenous people's ecological wisdom. The ecological perspective of IPs arguably remains very relevant despite current advances in ecological sciences. IP communities are commonly known for their special relationship with the ancestral land and for their value of harmony with nature. In the face of modern people's control-of-nature ideology, Francisco Claver remarked that it is the IP's "respect for and sensitivity towards nature, their impelling concern to be in harmony with it ... that we should look into more carefully and learn from."⁶⁶ Along this line, Pope Francis also speaks of the "cultural ecology" of IPs to counteract the unsustainable practices of the modern societies. He wants us to learn from IPs who treat land not as a commodity but as "a gift from God."⁶⁷ Their religious rituals for healing the land and people should be given appropriate space in our integral response to the pandemic and climate crisis.

CONCLUSION

This paper has shown the limitations of the prevailing perspective that tends to see the COVID-19 pandemic and climate crisis as unconnected phenomena. To overcome them, it highlighted the ecological nature of this pandemic

http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_20011122_ecclesia-in-oceania.html

⁶⁵ On this imperative, see Dominic Roser and Christian Seidel, *Climate Justice: An Introduction*, translated by Ciaran Cronin (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 90, 94.

⁶⁶ Francisco Claver, "The Social Marginalization of Tribal Peoples and Their Contribution to Ecological Health," in *FABC Paper*, no. 80 (1995), accessed September 14, 2020, <http://www.ucanews.com/html/fabc-papers/fabc-80.htm>.

⁶⁷ Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 146.

and its relation to the ongoing climate crisis. It also emphasized that both urgent ecological concerns have their common root in the unsustainable development model that rapaciously exploits the ecosystems. Moreover, it affirmed the usefulness of the perspective of integral ecology in dealing with the complex challenges brought about by this pandemic in the face of climate crisis. This perspective has enabled this paper to show that most of the responses of the Philippine hierarchy to the pandemic challenges are still anthropocentric. There is an insufficient concern for integral ecological interest that embraces both the challenges of the pandemic and climate crisis.

To address the limitations of the dominant anthropocentric perspective, this paper has proposed to embrace an integral ecological response to the pandemic challenges that would simultaneously advance the climate agenda. This cannot be done if the church ministries are not themselves integral. Responding to the cry of the poor and the Earth remains a constant challenge especially for the church. Integral ecological perspective is not the only concern for the health and safety of the people but also works for the preservation of the sustainability of the Earth's ecosystems. In this sense, pandemic prevention should not merely revolve around following the health protocols and banning global wildlife trade; it must also involve the healing of damaged ecosystems and the common habitats of wildlife. Yes, we need to heal as one, but together with our planet.

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