

Human Beings Relationship to Nature

The topic of ecological destruction and conservation has become a frequent topic of discussions and debate. Since the Vatican Council, the Roman Catholic Church has made pronouncements concerning environment and the call to responsible stewardship. In the Philippines, waste deposits and logging affect both human settlements and natural environment. The moral challenge begins with recalling the vocation we were given as human beings at the beginning of the Creation. Genesis 1:26 tells us that God created human beings to have "dominion" over all creation. However, the use of "dominion" in Genesis does not imply unrestrained exploitation; rather, it is a term describing a "representative" and how that person is to behave on behalf of the One who sends the representative. We are God's representatives. Therefore, we are not to treat nature as if we are gods.

Forest. The Philippine forests are rapidly disappearing. In the future, there may be no virgin forests anymore. This is not only because of falling trees but also because of logging. According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, "in 1934, 57 percent of the country or 42 million acres were forested, 26 million acres of which were virgin forests. In span of 50 years, the country's forests were down to only 16 million acres, and 1 million of which were virgin forests." (Michael Bengwayan, *Weak Laws in Philippines Exacerbates Deforestation*, @Earth Times 2001). As a result of deforestation, there is a severe soil erosion which causes landslides, less harvest of crops, and an increase in frequency of floods and drought. Deforestation also has caused the shortage of forest products. It has also caused extinction of many plants and animal species.

Fishing. In some incidents, people die from eating poisoned shellfish infected by red tide. Many industrial firms even until now are emptying into streams and rivers their toxic waste. "Since Marcos issued in 1975 a PD 704 which consolidated all fishery laws, the results have been disastrous. And since then, 70 percent of our coral reefs are endangered and near the point of absolute zero regeneration. Fishing with dynamite, poisons, muro-ami fishing, have greatly damaged more than half of the Philippines' 4 million hectares of coral reefs." (Leonardo Mercado, *The Filipino Mind*).

The survival of the planet depends on how we treat the environment. Livelihood for some is directly linked with the seas and forests. When these resources are destroyed, their means of livelihood suffer. Poverty is caused by the inequitable access to natural resources. It is often that large companies or selected elite are given the rights and license to exploit. This then causes the small farmers and fisherfolks to resort to illegal farming and fishing methods to maintain their livelihood. If they resort to illegal methods, would they wish to destroy the environment? They know that illegal methods are against nature, but should they let their families starve? If we want to prosper, there are no alternatives to maintaining and restoring ecology. We should reconcile ourselves to nature by constant steps of daily care, and realize that we are God's representatives. When I was a kid, the scene of mountains on fire was visible not only at night but also during the day. I must also confess that I joined my friends in fishing using poison to easily catch fish. Now I know that illegal methods of farming and fishing are against the environment.

(When I entered the Graduate School of Nanzan University's Theology Department, I decided to focus on Environmental Ethics via Moral Theology.)