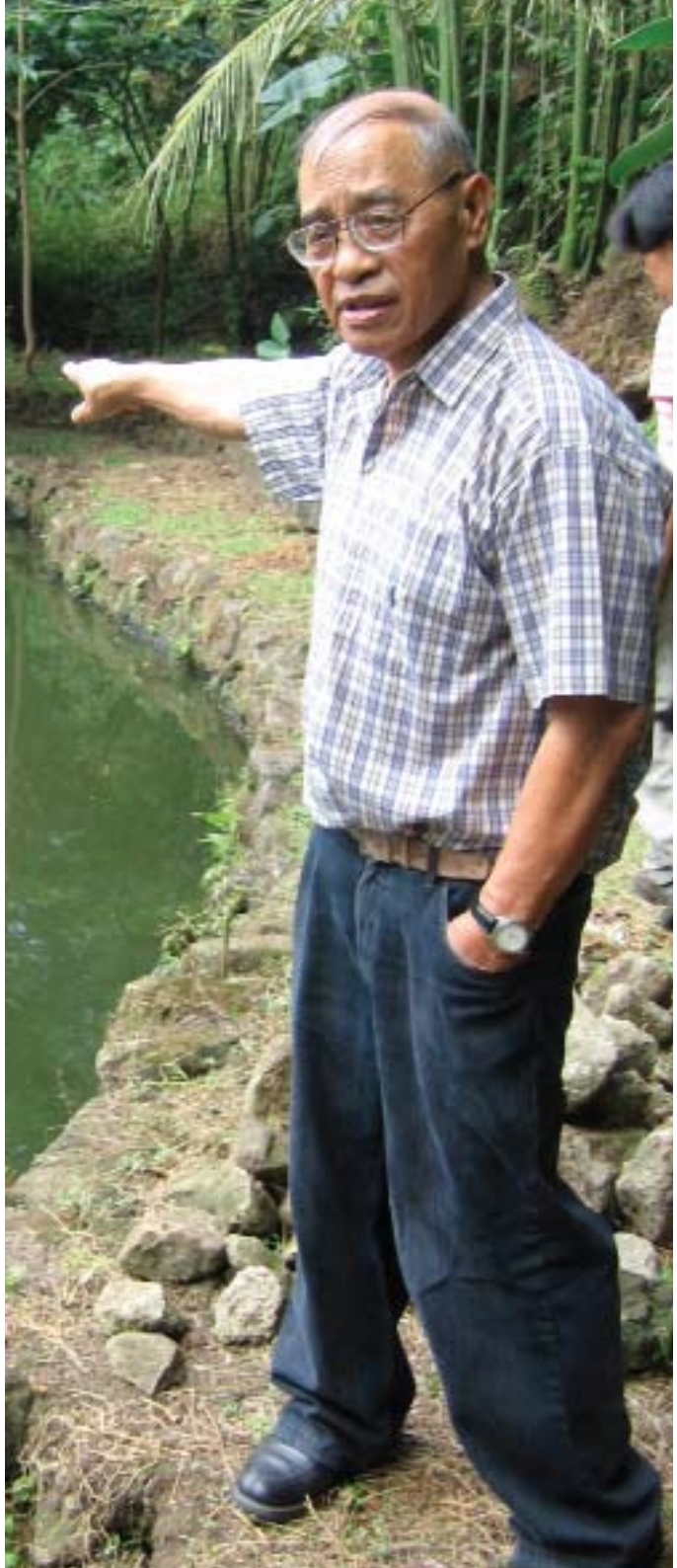
Aware of our identity in a global world

BISHOP FRANCISCO CLAVER, S.J., D.D.

The images that Bishop Francisco Claver remembers from when he was growing up in Bontoc, Mountain Province, connect the land, the population growth through the years, and where the landscape changed from the shifts in land use and the movement of people. Quoting from an earlier paper[1] of his, the crucial part that "culture plays in any scheme of social change" is also envisaged as he related aspects of the Cordillera. Bontoc, his cultural origins, and how the other cultures of the region increasingly live and struggle with the present state of the lands, the water, and the forests in a global world.

"The entire Mountain Province and the whole land (Cordillera) had a population of around 300,000-400,000. Now over a million people live in the Cordillera. In 1904, the population census in Bontoc registered about 4,000; now the population is 10,000. The population of the entire country was 6 million then, now it's 80 million. If Bontoc followed the national rate of growth, there should be around 60,000 people, but Bontoc can't support such a population. The carrying capacity is really only 4,000. Baguio City, pre-war, had a population of 20,000, and it's now 400,000.

"Traveling between Bontoc and Baguio, there were no towns then between Sabangan (the town after Bontoc) and La Trinidad (the town before Baguio), a distance of over 140 kilometers. There were just forests, big pine forests. All the towns that are there now are all new, and that means these areas were forests before. The roads were exuding moisture, with many brooklets along the way as you travelled. Approaching Baguio from the lowlands, what struck the traveler then was the smell of pine trees. The traveler now will be welcomed by the smell of gas fumes."



Further describing the landscape, Bishop Claver shares that "the vegetable farms that you see now as you travel the stretch of Benguet were started in the 1950s and the farmers came from Western Bontoc, not from Benguet. The original people had to move out, as the place cannot support them. But what was good for farming was bad for the rivers as these decreased in time. The water levels of the Agno and Chico Rivers drastically went down between 1995 and 2005. How do you restore all these water sources? I don't know.

"Yes, from a distance, I can still see there are still forests, but the valleys are all cleared and converted, full of vegetable farms. When I was still with the Apostolic Vicariate of Bontoc-Lagawe, we wanted to plant trees. But then came the ancestral land concept through the IPRA (Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act) that defined the ancestral land in the concept of private property. In this I cannot see now where the real sense of preserving the forest is. One of the problems with reforestation is that it now encourages the privatization of ancestral lands. Those who grew up with a sense of private property are transferring this concept to ancestral land as the IPRA is implemented. For example, after IPRA, people started to subdivide the riverbanks, and many people who know how to use the law are now staking their claims as the owners. Before, it was easy to get stones from the river to use for *tuping* (stonewalling) as there was a sense of the *taian* (common resource). Now you have to ask permission or pay up. If you are from Bontoc, they would be ashamed to charge; if you are a foreigner (not from Bontoc), the attitude of charging for the stones evokes no cultural hesitation."

Bishop Claver, however, believes that IPRA contributed to stopping the mining, in the sense that the government generally assumes people's ready acceptance and acquiescence. "But in Benguet, where most of the mining went on and is still going on, people were weak. In the Mountain Province there is gold, but there is no mining. I remember an event that I always shared with people. In the 1930s, there were prospectors doing the surveying, and people were mad and wanted to attack them. The women said 'No, don't do that, we'll handle this our way.' One day, the women came down from the ridge above the campsite where the prospectors were, yelling and screaming while taking off all their clothes. All the campers fled never to return."

The observation is that when the Cordillera says "no," the government listens. Bishop Claver explains that "this is so because people in government who are from the Cordillera understand and know the power of the people and the protests. The Chico River Dam protests sprung from this land. But as this government becomes weaned from the culture, it becomes manipulative. Native people still have that sense of community and right."

He views the efforts in "saving" the *payeo* (rice terraces) as futile, when these are all done for tourism purposes. Keep the people poor and you will keep the terraces; they are too much hard work and people would rather leave. "The educated Igorots have no more concern in terms of what's happening in the ricefields, because they know it's the end. Educated people, like me, are the ones interested in doing tourism. It is the educated who have gone out and seen the potential of mining that invest in it. Then, once people develop skin diseases in the rivers below, the response is to sue people in the upper areas where the mining is taking place."

He also points out the impact of class distinctions in the relationship with the land. "In Ifugao, there are more tenants in the field than in Bontoc. There is a class of tenants and this class distinction is stronger in Ifugao than in Bontoc. In Bontoc, people have their own fields. In Ifugao, they are more class-conscious."

Patterns of settlements within a community and the type of leadership contribute to how changes in the social landscape can occur. "In Kalinga, the notion of a *pangat* (headman) continues to prevail. In Ifugao, the pattern of settlements is family clan clusters set apart so it is the headman or head family that is of importance. In the Mountain Province, houses are clustered more as a village

with less distinction of class and the *ato* (elders) or *dap-ay* (group of elders) traditionally lead. It is observed that it is easier to form BECs (Basic Ecclesial Communities) in the Mountain Province, while the charismatic movement can take an easier hold in Ifugao. But definitely, the Ifugaos are more artistic," the Bishop from Bontoc concedes.

With the revival of autonomy discussions for the Cordillera region as a development vehicle, his view is that "if the Cordillera is autonomous, IPRA can be better implemented. But I am not supportive of this move, as I would prefer federations and keeping the Cordillera as one. The LGUs are wary of Cordillera governance, because of loss of contact with the people on the ground. This is so because the context of the 'autonomy' being discussed is that of the national government, which is just a huge milking cow. Federations will also allow senators to come from the regions, not just from Manila."

Bishop Claver values the establishment of Schools of Living Traditions (SLT)[2] in Mountain Province schools, because even if the students graduate as professionals, their sense of roots and of the environment are retained.

Asked as to whether the bishops are active in the environment, he clarified that "it's not the bishops, it's the social action centers (SACs) that define the environment agenda in the respective dioceses, because bishops will always do what the SACs tell them to do."

For today's youth, "I want to bring in the idea of culture while getting along in a globalized world. The more you are globalized, the more you have to be aware of your identity. You can have and share a common culture, but you have to have your own identity."

Towards the end of our conversation, Bishop Claver asks questions. "When I hear people saying no to mining, that's impossible, as we've been mining since the Stone Age. In the vicariate, we've always been against the quarrying for a long time. But when roads were to be

built, sand was needed that will be taken from the rivers. So this was our question, 'Can you still get the sand to build new roads?' Can you do mining, without too much damage? If the vegetable gardens stop, the forests can possibly come back, but is that the approach?"

The bishop then brought us to the fishpond he built behind the seminary and he has been building stone paths, walls and banks out of the local adobe. He diverts the water from a creek that originates from three ponds and storm water of the university campus. During the dry season, he uses all the water. Running it over the stones and creating a flow improves the quality of the water and allows for lush bank vegetation and a regenerated environment.

Bishop Claver retired as the Apostolic Vicar of the Apostolic Vicariate of Bontoc-Lagawe in 2004. He holds an STB and STL from Woodstock College and a PhD degree in Anthropology from the University of Colorado. He served as chairman of the Episcopal Commission for Indigenous Peoples and of the Commission for Justice and Peace of the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines.

[1] *Pope John Paul II and the Church of Asia by Francisco F. Claver, S.J. from http://eapi.admu.edu.ph/eapr005/f-claver.htm*

[2] *A School of Living Tradition is one where a living master/culture bearer or culture specialist teaches skills and techniques of doing a traditional art or craft. The mode of teaching is non-formal, oral, and with practical demonstrations. The site may be the house of the living master, a community social hall, or a special center constructed. The group of learners is limited to the young people from the same ethno-linguistic community. The SLTs is a program under the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA) and is a response to UNESCO's call for cultural heritage preservation through a living form that can be transmitted to the next generations. (Source: NCCA website)*

The human face to Philippine forests

BEN MALAYANG III

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Forests were part of Ben Malayang's environment as a child growing up in Mindanao. "Where I was growing up in Oroquieta there was a river that already had some forest fringes. And I remember going to that forest to regularly inspect a water gauge that my grandmother was in charge of collecting readings from once a month. My favorite bird to listen to and hear was the *kalaw* at that time. And so it was taken for granted, it was really part of where I was growing up. And when I went to Dumaguete (in Negros Oriental), the forest was also not strange, because it was part of where we lived five kilometers from the city. That's where we held high school Boy Scout camps or summer church camps in a town called Siaton. And these were two different kinds of forests, because the one that was in Dumaguete was slightly elevated, with moist forests and there were some pines. The one in Siaton was slightly dry and resembled that of a savannah. But these were all part of my growing up."

When Ben entered college, his degree was in philosophy, and the mental nurturing continued. By the time he took graduate studies in Berkeley, Ben was asked what his research proposal was as part of the entrance requirements. "And I thought of connecting the crisis then that I was seeing in agriculture in the Philippines, with the change in forests that I was seeing, relating this with

was familiar to me in childhood. And I realized that at that time, around the mid-1980s, there was no specific, major literature yet on that connection between agriculture and forests, at least in the Philippines.

"So I went into looking at the possible forest-related drivers, or agriculture-related drivers of deforestation. And that was how I began to look at forests from a perspective of policy, not as a forester, but from a perspective of policy. So when I got back into the country, my view of the forest was not the view of the forester, but was more about what were the power relations in society, including what drivers there are in terms of other activities, economic activities, society, and agriculture. That gave me the basis to explain why we're having the crisis in forestry."

Ben's earlier work looked at the socio-political drivers of forest laws, and where he collaborated with Granger, Ernie Ong. His first consultancy project when he got back was the Sectoral Loan Adjustment Program with Percy Sajise. They did the pre-implementation and determined the critical watersheds for focus.

"So to me, that's my view of forests. That the forest, the foundations of our forests, or whatever forest remains in the country, is not a matter of technical forestry, but rather a symptom, or an indication, or a measure, of the failure of our political and social systems. For example, an illustration is the power relations between the dominant Christianized communities against the non-dominant."

There's also Ben's interest in the role of forests as part of the mental and cultural landscapes by which people relate with their past and their understanding of the country they come from.

"My wife and I invited her uncle to go to Bataan, as he would always tell us about the beautiful people there, to get a good sense of what it feels like to be a Filipino. He had never visited Bataan since the war in 1945. But when we got to Bataan, he could no longer

relate, he could no longer even tell where he was, because of the loss of forests. Could you imagine? To me, that was a very dramatic portrayal of how the trees in the landscape changed also the mental and cultural landscape, including the nationalistic landscape in the mind of my uncle."
"And how many Filipinos are like that, other than the indigenous peoples, who are no longer familiar with their place because of the loss of these important defining elements of their culture?"

"So when I went to DENR (Ben used to be a DENR Undersecretary), everybody was talking only of the standing forests, not of how to recover the lost stands and when there was a greater loss, the loss of culture, the loss of sense of place, the loss of sense of identity. I lost my sense of what my past was now that the landscape and stories of the 31 kilometers from our place into the countryside are no longer there; they are now subdivisions."

"So, that is where the greater tragedy of forestry is in the Philippines. We keep on looking at the loss of the standing stocks, not the cultural implications or dislocation from the sense of being Filipino. And for many of us who were brought up going to the forests, traveling through Mindanao, we always take for granted that we will be going to forested areas. But they're no longer there."

Even with the establishment of the forestry schools and the forestry department that ensured the supply of professionally well-trained people, Ben is aware that something went wrong along the way.

"The whole curriculum, the whole rationale for establishing a forestry school in the Philippines was in order to provide the technical personnel for the commercial forest enterprises of the Americans when they were coming, when they were in control of the country. And so it was not forestry in relation to nation-building. It was to develop people who can be in the lumberyard, who can be in this and that. So, forestry education was exactly to produce people who can help exploit and find wealth from felling trees, not from finding wealth in the sense of culture and nationalism in the establishment of forests, and in relation not just to the biology of forests, but also to the security of the forests. To me, that's the whole gamut of forestry education for the Filipinos, which also has very strong implications in terms of education and policy."

"Now it's very hard for me to say this because I was brought up in the forestry tradition. But I'm very pleased to see people like Delfin Ganapin and Rene de Rueda who are products of this education, and who see the greater dimensions beyond."

Ben further explains that most people now don't feel any real affinity with the forests. It has become something that's exotic, something that's outside of them, rather than inside. "It's a romance, it's an object of romance. Just like old churches, but with no spirit, no belief, no sense of belonging. In Bohol, I always feel very sad. I am not a Catholic and I feel very sad to see people looking at these old churches as objects of tourism. How many people go in these places with a whole sense of self, because of the church? That's lost, just like with forests."

"All this time, we have only looked at forests in terms of the commercial value, the timber. And then we romanticize that we are also looking at the non-timber products, but we never do, and that's where we never see the totality of it."

But there are points of hope and change, Ben says.

"First of all, we could elevate the political relevance of indigenous peoples. I see that there has been an elevation of political relevance of indigenous peoples (IPs) over the past several years. Unlike in the 1960s and 1970s, they were totally politically irrelevant. The Cordillera people were revolutionary, and precisely this agitation assisted in transforming them to be a focus of legitimate political attention. The more they become regular, the more they will begin

to assert themselves. We have seen a lot of IPs asserting themselves and my hope is that this translates to them asserting their lost traditions, including having the forest as part of their environment. That's the first hope."

"The second hope is that for all of these pressures on the environment right now, as we have seen also in the last 20-30 years, there is the need to mainstream forest recovery as a legitimate political agenda. And to be honest, I don't see any of this happening. But the level of discourse emerging and the level of pressure have been going up. But this has not been brought to a particular threshold where people, and society in general, are willing to put in social and financial capital for their actual recovery. So we're seeing this in small patches, but not in the bigger ones."

"The greater hope is that in the higher tragedy that's going to be associated particularly with climate change, we can start looking at forests as part of our major difficulty, and as part of the mitigation and adaptation measures that we're trying to change. In the Kota Kinabalu meeting, I was pushing for re-thinking the forest management programs and our protected area management. We must go beyond merely perusing the repository habitats for biodiversity and instead start looking at protected areas as the incipient instruments for adaptation to other things. It could be climate change, social change, and political change."

And Ben's argument is that to make forests a national policy focus, it is necessary to link forests to the current policy imperatives of the State, such as poverty, particularly rural poverty and security. He is not referring to environmental imperatives such as mining, which is really an economic imperative, but the imperatives of politicians.

"Yes, there are also economic growth imperatives, particularly in the rural areas, because there is a fringe in the Philippines, even parts of Southeast Asia, where there is a very strong linkage with political control or lack of control. This is felt in the areas that are

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in the fringes where you have shelters of secessionist movements resulting from poverty. So you link rural poverty with a sheltering of terrorist groups that are posing a threat to national security."

"What I'm saying is, from the point of view of policy-makers, this where they are putting in major attention. And other attention is focused on trying to make political capital by being able to meet obligations under certain treaties. My sense is, these are not necessarily all the imperatives, but at least forests are part of the imperatives that will catch the attention of policy-makers."

"The challenge is to make forests and forest recovery relate to these imperatives as a mechanism for mainstreaming forestry. Forestry for its own sake will never become a policy imperative."

"Even with the episodal events of flooding and landslides, the only thing that sticks is when it touches the nerve of the policymakers and political leaders whose stay in power are threatened by certain conditions that they want to control. And those conditions that they want to control are what constitute what I call the de facto policy imperatives of the State."

"The key is to link forestry to this. And this white paper that I have prepared is an attempt to do that. I'm not saying I'm successful. This is an attempt to do that because I believe that unless we are able to link forestry into this galaxy of politics, the universe of immediate concerns of the politicians, especially at the national agenda, we will never get forestry into the mainstream."

And Ben hopes that community forestry, at least the way he sees it, has the potential to become an instrument that will get politicians to say "Ah, here is a tool to help us."

"Other than this approach, I'm sorry, the prospects are very poor. Because even with climate change, what are the mitigations, what

are the adaptive measures people have to take, whether you're in Europe or in the US or Asia? There must be attention given to engineering this, which is insufficient at the moment."

On local governance, Ben shares that local governments are taking advantage of linking up forestry as an investment. "We had a conference in Silliman University (where Ben is the president) last summer, about how autonomous our local governments really are – and they are not! Too many of them are highly dependent, by over 60%, on their internal revenue allocations (IRAs). How can we talk of local autonomy when they are dependent on the IRA?"

"Many of them were talking about availing of the national wealth, the portion of the national wealth which is the IRA. So we started talking and I presented the idea that, even if a municipality or a city starts with say 10 hectares of forest establishment for the next 10 years, after the tenth year, they can go back if they want and can harvest. That's a lot of money; people were enthusiastic.

"My hope is local governments will think of these initiatives not because of some higher national goal, but because of purely selfish local goals. There are local governments establishing trees along riverbanks in order to stabilize rivers. There is the tree farming in forestlands and seeing to what extent the value of timber gets really high, thus making it sensible now for farmers to go into tree farming, especially when the CBFMs are not moving.

"A rational person not only looks at the rate of return, but also the security of the returns. Now CBFM is not offering that security. The farmers saw that if they do CBFM, the rate of returns is very high, just like investing in coconut. The problem is they keep on changing these policies of CBFM, and people are not seeing that they will actually acquire the returns."

"And ultimately the DENR is still a giveaway department, a residual department. The President will always make sure that the following departments are "his" or "hers": Finance, Education, Public Works, Defense, Interior, Budget and Management, perhaps even Agriculture, because of the political implications. All the rest are really giveaway departments. And that's exactly what the DENR is."

On a more positive note, Ben values how certain local groups or communities actually took the initiative to do something with their environmental conditions.

"For example, in Southern Leyte, a town established mangroves because they were losing their fishery, their shellfish. And without the mangroves, the shellfish are gone. So that's one. The other one is Lopez Jaena in Misamis Occidental, where in order to stock the municipal fisheries, they actually entered into an agreement among themselves, the fisherfolk and the local government, to enforce this policy pact where there are certain times you cannot use certain types of nets."

Ben acknowledges that the greatest destruction has been in fishery, and yet the fishery communities are making some of the greatest advances because there is not the regulation and the sense of ownership by the government. "It's much more immediate than forests. And many of those who are in forests are also marginalized politically, while the fishers, who are in the shoreline, they too are marginalized, but they can make the boats."

As a university president teaching in the 21st century, Ben joked that he tells his students to "be cynical, you can be cynical but don't lose hope. But seriously, the way we are teaching now, we have courses in environment, and I'm teaching. I'd like to drive home this point, that environment is not just scientific and technical. I'm pushing for case studies, and it's the students themselves who discover the

Negros has its forest dependent communities

dimensions of empowerment, the dimension of local people taking advantage. I keep on telling them, who is actually making the decisions? Who are the dominant decision makers who need to confirm any decision that have to be made? That is the kind of language needed."

"And what I tell my children and grandchildren is the same. Take it upon themselves to do something. Do not wait for grandiose networks, alliances. Do it. And if you have to poach, poach out. Don't poach resources. Poach power. Students do it all the time. They'd like to get away from their assignments," Ben laughs.

We ended the talk with Ben on his comments on a college textbook on environmental science that is being prepared and that he reviewed. "What's interesting is that the book got out of the usual topics, where it's all about chemistry, physics, biology. There are actually sections about making a legitimate problematique out of environmental education, political relationships, and power flows that affect allocation of natural resources. And for me, that's a very welcome thing for a textbook for undergraduate students. Our mistake I think in the Philippines is that we have thought for too long that environmental science is in the realm of science, and the social component was set aside. Environmental science became another domain, another science, and not about human relations and culture. They became adjunct. The human aspects were but collateral."