



**Rivers Do Not Drink Their Own Water;
Trees Do Not Eat Their Own Fruit**

Living in Grateful Synodal Harmony with nature: rivers and oceans
Cardinal Charles Maung Bo., SDB – President of FABC

Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) President, Cardinal Charles Maung Bo shares three major concerns from the Asian perspective to the River Above Asia Oceania Ecclesial Network (RAOEN).

In his reflection, Cardinal Bo underscores how the process of Ecclesial Synodality can strengthen collaboration and commitment among local voices and Church and ecumenical leaders grounded on the common desire to care for the oceans and forests.

Dear friends of the Earth, friends of the Poor.

Warm wishes from Myanmar.

Just now I am returning from Hungary, attending the great Eucharistic Congress. I am very fortunate to be part of this very important Synodality Gathering, our fellowship with the earth and our poor. I warmly commend the efforts of Fr Pedro Walpole and other friends for hosting this very important and timely discussion on this issue.

All praises to the effort of RAOEN in collaboration with FABC, FCBCO, Global Alliance of Ecclesial Network, Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, Caritas aims to create a space for synodality through this dialogue between local voices and Church and ecumenical leaders.

I sincerely hope this meeting will strengthen collaborations and commitments among these groups grounded on the common desire to care for the oceans and forests. I shall address *three major concerns* from the Asian perspective:

1. ***The main socio-ecological concerns communities in Asia face today amidst the on-going struggle with the pandemic***

- ***Ecological Covid:*** Long before the Covid virus inflicted the dance of death through our streets, there was another dangerous virus, barely noticed by the world community. Forests are the lungs of the world, producing tons of oxygen to sustain life. The Book of Genesis says, God found all the creation good. But when corporate greed saw the creation, it saw



money. It destroyed the forests – the lungs of nature, infecting them with the Ecological covid.¹ Almost all the countries of Asia have lost thousands of acres of rain forests. The might is right when it comes to forests.

- **Asia and the mega three Cs** : The present Myanmar faces great crisis and we call it 4C crisis : *Covid, Coup, Collapse of the Economy and the Climate disaster*. But we look at Asia and its destruction of natural wealth. Once again, we have 3 C s – the three culprits of history : **Colonization, Capitalism, Communism**. They all took Asia’s indigenous lands. All contributed to destruction of nature. They monetized God’s creation, colonized the indigenous lands. Once Asia had the best rain forests of the world, now we face the grim prospects of water scarcity. Asia is very vulnerable. Studies reveal : *As a whole, water scarcity will increase in 74-86% of regions in Asia, with some 40% of the continent’s population facing severe water scarcity in the 2050s.* ² Unless there is a care for oceans and rivers, regional conflicts – especially India and China – will destroy thousands of lives.
- **Disturbance of the five life giving elements**: The Virus exposed the visceral attack on life giving systems; huge forests have been destroyed, forcing jungle life to spill over to human population. 8 Zoonotic Diseases – diseases that jumped from Animals to humans, emerged in this century. Asia is the origin of Covid Virus, killing millions, destroying the livelihoods of billions. Eastern religions worship five elements: fire, water, earth, air and space. All life is created of these and sustained by these. Man’s sad achievement is to pollute every one of those five elements.
- **Amnesia of Inter-Generational Debt** : This generation has no natural credit. It owes it debt to the next generation. Pope Francis talks about intergenerational obligations in *Laudato Si*.³ Nature is stolen from the next generation. And the youth are angry. They point out to the unbridled capitalism that is robbing them of their right to ecological rights. In a surprising survey 75% of the youth, believe the climate emergency is “specifically a capitalist problem.”⁴ Asian countries that opted for uncritical capitalism watch.
- **Big power rivalry in the Asia Pacific region**: Wars in Asia destroyed human beings and nature. Asia refuses to learn from the wounds of history. Now there is a big power rivalry in the Asia Pacific region. China, India, Russia and the USA are vying for commodifying human tears in the coming years.

2. The Church solidarity with local communities amidst current challenge of the Pandemic and worsening vulnerabilities and risks from social and ecological injustices happening in different parts of the region.

- **Mainstreaming the binaries of Justice** : Economic Justice and Environmental Justice : Moral anger comes only when Justice discourse is mainstreamed. God created the earth and heavens and formed a community of human beings based on Environmental Justice and Economic Justice. This is not a fringe option. This is the Core Option of our faith. We need to move on

¹ <https://www.ceh.ac.uk/news-and-media/news/tropical-rainforests-lungs-planet-reveal-true-sensitivity-global-warming>

² [https://iiasa.ac.at/web/home/resources/publications/options/Is Asia facing a coming water crisis .html](https://iiasa.ac.at/web/home/resources/publications/options/Is%20Asia%20facing%20a%20coming%20water%20crisis.html)

³ <https://catholicsocialthought.org.uk/the-church-property-rights-and-the-environment/>

⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/sep/20/eat-the-rich-why-millennials-and-generation-z-have-turned-their-backs-on-capitalism>



from the NGO discourse of ecology towards the justice of God perspective. Economic Justice and Environmental Justice are two eyes of the kingdom of God. Two eyes – one vision. Justice based faith.

- **Green Evangelization**: Evangelization has become an unsavory word. But Green evangelization has come of age. The sense of sacred in the creation is mainstream now and it opens to all Christians the task of Green Evangelization : Proclaiming the dignity not only of human being but of the integral evangelization of the sacredness of humanity and the sacredness of the created world. Go an preach : the whole world awaits you, disciples of Christ with your new message of Integral Evangelization.
- **Ecological conversion** : Church needs to be undergone an existential metanoia : from the social sin of reckless manipulation of nature towards a respect for all creation. The humility to hear the ‘Cry of the Earth and the Cry of the Poor’ (Leonard Boff). The Catholic moral calculus needs to be reformatted to include ecological sins, destruction of nature as mortal sins of the modern times. Ecological sins need to get as much press as the sexual sins get in many parts of the Catholic World.
- **Inter religious initiatives** : Asia is home to ecological religions which worshipped nature as the divine expression. Rivers and Mountains were holy to them. They mainstreamed the idea of inter being and inter dependance. The Christian concept of Justice as attributed in the Bible and the eastern sense of sacredness of the nature need to come together to form a formidable force against the onset of ecological apocalypse.
- **Learning from indigenous communities** : With great remorse the world acknowledges the great ecological stewardship role of the indigenous communities, their sense of harmony, their sense of sacred, their sense of frugality, their sense of contentment. Pope Francis said “ The Catholic Church “hears the cry” of the Amazon and its peoples during the Synod of the Amazon, a three-week meeting at the Vatican. With this Pope we have a green Pope, whose uncompromising stand against ecological disaster has won worldwide coming together of all people. We in Asia cannot lag behind. This is the moment. There is no tomorrow. There is no Planet B.

3. Possible Response and accompaniment of FABC with the People of Asia to protect the rivers and the Oceans to prevent the ecological apocalypse.

- **Special attention to the Indigenous Culture and areas** : While many believe the Indigenous community is present in the Amazon area, South America, we forget Asia is a one of the biggest indigenous continents. One of the largest remaining indigenous areas with great flora and fauna in the world, if not the largest, is in Asia. It is the vast expanse of uplands, variously termed the great mountain realm on the marches 14 HILLS, VALLEYS, AND STATES of mainland Southeast Asia, China, India, Burma, Thailand, the Philippines, Malaysia, Vietnam, Cambodia India, and Bangladesh sprawls across roughly 2.5 million square kilometers-an area roughly the size of Europe.



This land is called **Zomia**, similar to Amazonia is called.⁵ Rough calculations would put Zomia minority populations alone at around eighty million to one hundred million. As an Asian Church we need to learn a lot from this huge expanse of land and also from its great people who were once great stewards of God's Creation but now abused by every system on earth. Asian Church needs to be aware of this population and enter into a dialogue and learning from these great sons and daughters. Let us have an Asian Amazonia.

- **Special attention at the FABC level**

- Inspired by the prophet of the modern times, our Holy Father, Pope Francis, Asian Churches, FABC is seized of the urgency and relevance of this mission and as FABC enters into its 50th year, the concern for nature, the rivers, the mountains and the seas becomes a flagship initiative. A new Evangelization waits for all of us.

Let me end with a great quote from one of the indigenous community Wisdom.

Nothing in nature lives for itself. The rivers do not drink their own water; the trees do not eat their own fruit; the sun does not shine on itself and flowers do not spread their fragrance for themselves.

Living for others is a rule of nature. We are all born to help each other. No matter how difficult it is. Life is good when you are happy; but much better when others are happy because of you. — Indigenous Wisdom.

God bless you all. Let the earth and heavens sing the glory of God.

⁵ https://law.yale.edu/sites/default/files/documents/pdf/Intellectual_Life/LTW-Scott.pdf