Article

Kalikhasang Balaan: Elements of a Youth Specific Ecotheology in the Philippines

Rito Baring 1,2,* and Jeramie Molino 2,3,*

1 Department of Theology and Religious Education, De La Salle University, Manila 1004, Philippines
2 Religion Department, Saint Louis University, Baguio City 2600, Philippines
3 Correspondence: rito.baring@dlsu.edu.ph (R.B.); jnmolino@slu.edu.ph (J.M.)

Abstract: Scientific consensus points to human activity as the primary cause of global warming triggering climate change. Mitigations include technology-assisted interventions and education of human agents, such as changing the human mindset and behavior, to avoid impending, irreversible environmental damage, among others. Among the competent sectors, religious communities can boost formative human interventions through religious ideas. The present study content analyzes the conceptual elements of “Kalikhasang Balaan” as a youth-specific ecotheological view drawn from a unidimensional Filipino measure on Christian Environmentalism. Our analysis is deductive in approach, drawing theological aspects of a peculiar youth ecotheology driven by the notion of “Kalikhasang Balaan”, framed within creation theology and Christian stewardship driven by environmental ethics. We discuss the unique attributes of this Filipino notion in the light of local Philippine church and government responses to understand how the youth ecotheological voice may correspond to institutional views.

Keywords: ecotheology; Filipino youth; environment; climate change; religious attitudes; ecological justice; stewardship; Theocentrism; creation theology

1. Introduction

Ever since the controversial writing of Lynn White, Jr. (1967) on the ecological crises, discussions in Christian literature on environment and ecology have increased dramatically. These recent Christian writings show a marked difference in perspective from anthropocentric leanings towards environmental stewardship. This is evident in the recent writings of Pope John Paul II (1990), Pope Benedict XVI (2010) on creation, and Pope Francis’ (2015) Laudato Si’ which emphasized an urgent appeal to save the world from irreversible damage. Various religious denominations have openly declared their strong positions against environmental degradation. The recent writing of Laudato Si’ (Francis 2015) formally voiced the Christian vocation to care for the earth, “our home”. Prior to the writing of Laudato Si’ (LS), Pope Benedict XVI already emphasized moral responsibility towards creation as other religious leaders are committed to the evident relationship between religious confession and environmental commitment (Eckberg and Blocker 1989). Ellingson (2016) noted how the rise of religious environmental movements stimulated new theologies about the environment. For the most part, Ecotheologians see ecotheologies as a religious response to the urgent appeal of world leaders to deal with climate change.

When dealing with environmental impacts, we take into consideration how the current global ecological crises have greatly affected the global south for various reasons. The frequency of reported weather disturbances and their intensity has increased significantly in recent times. Super typhoons have become a frequent phenomenon in Asia, particularly for those located in the Pacific. While scientific attention is focused on varieties of mitigation technologies (Fawzy et al. 2020) to reduce carbon dioxide levels, among others, it is equally important to note that parallel initiatives should be invested in humanistic and religious
sectors to deal with climate change. Since the scientific consensus points to humanity as the major cause of global warming, the solution can begin with perspective change among human leaders and change in business practices and the consumer mindset to arrest impending irreversible global destruction. The religious sector can assist in facilitating the transformation of mindset side by side other sectors. Research points favorably to the significant influence of religion in social life and environmental issues (Hill 1998; Gottlieb 2004). Our previous studies show that the religious attitudes of Filipino youth predict certain prosocial outcomes (author) and, remarkably, carry environmentally oriented beliefs (author). Christianity’s moral position and advocacies towards environmental issues stir up collaborations and networks to build a growing mass of active social agents for environmental preservation, conservation, and promotion.

In the Philippines, Christianity’s sustained influence and presence at the grassroots level makes religious participation an arguable point to promote environmental awareness and sustainable programs. The Catholic Church can assist by promoting an ecotheology that is relevant to Filipinos to aid the internalization and integration of environmental stewardship as a fundamental Christian principle favoring ecological justice. In response, the present study content analyzes the conceptual elements of “Kalikhasang Balaan” as a youth-specific ecotheological view drawn from a unidimensional Filipino model of Christian Environmentalism in a previous study (author). CE as a model is empirically developed and obtained from a Filipino sample as a single dimension construct to assess Filipino student environmental attitudes. Our curiosity about CE evolved when we realized that this underlying dimension is loaded with youth-specific worldviews on ecotheology. Our analysis is deductive in approach and driven by the theological aspects of “Kalikhasang Balaan” as an appropriation of young Filipinos’ ecotheological mindset. In this light, we discuss youth ecotheology in the light of the Philippine local church response and Philippine environmental realities. Whereas biblical theological discourse (Och 1995) often leans towards redemption and eschatology at the expense of creation, our analysis of “Kalikhasang Balaan” sees the co-equal importance given to both creation and redemption seen through ecological justice and Christian stewardship. We shall show this in a later part of the study.

1.1. Philippine Context

Located along the ring of fire and typhoon belt, the Philippines is witness to numerous deadly typhoons, earthquakes, volcano eruptions, and natural disasters (Wingard and Brändlin 2013). Likewise, the country is confronted with water, air, and land pollution. The problem of pollution leads to environmental damage, thus affecting ecological balance, public health, and the national economy. This increasingly urgent situation led to the legal articulation of the “Writ of Kalikasan” (kalikasan means “nature”) by the Supreme Court in 2010. This Writ is a legal remedy under the Philippine law protecting one’s constitutional right to a healthy environment (Davide 2012). Several initiatives and efforts have been implemented to integrate the concerns of children and youth in the government’s planning and decision-making process, such as the Youth Conference for Sustainable Development in the 21st Century (United Nations n.d.). The government has put legal structures against pollution in place through the Clean Water Act (Republic Act [RA] #9275), Clean Air Act (RA #8749), and Ecological Solid Waste Management Act (RA #9003), among others. The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) is the implementing government agency of environmental laws through the Environmental Management Bureau (EMB). Non-government initiatives include “Sagip Kalikasan” (Save the Environment), the annual worldwide Earth Hour, Sagip Ilog Pasig (save the river Pasig), and the ABS-CBN (Media network) initiative to clean the esteros (creeks) of Manila leading towards Pasig River. There are private-public partnerships between the Asian Development Bank and local government unit to improve water quality, between funding agencies like the Japan Economic Cooperation Agency (JICA) and local firms, and environmental firms dealing with domestic wastes (author). There is also the partnership between schools and
LGUs for solid waste management (Ancog et al. 2012; Galarpe and Heyasa 2017; Japan International Cooperation Agency n.d.; Labog 2017). Yet, despite these initiatives, more action is needed with respect to the UN SDGs, as gleaned from the recent 2022 Biennial Environmental Performance Index (EPI) where the Philippines only ranked 158th out of 180 countries, garnering only 28.9 points out of 100 (Wolf et al. 2022). All 40 performance indicators were examined under 11 environmental categories including ecosystem vitality, climate change, and environmental health. Overall, the Philippines is confronted with pollution, sanitation, health, and hygienic issues that disproportionately affect the poor, children, and women (World Bank 2009). The country’s significant biodiversity resources are seriously degraded by ineffective management; water and air pollution levels exceed generally accepted health standards, transportation and power sector greenhouse gas emissions are increasing, and the country is ranked as one of the world’s most vulnerable to the effects of environmental disasters (USAID n.d.).

1.2. Towards a Contextually Relevant Ecotheology

Ecotheology, broadly speaking, underscores the relationship between ecology and theology. Such theology commits to discourses on the religio-moral aspects of ecological issues viewed from certain traditions, religious or otherwise. Traditional models articulate anthropocentric, biocentric/ecocentric, and theocentric ecotheologies. The anthropocentric framework recognizes the superior role and function of human beings toward the earth. Conversely, biocentrism sees the natural interdependence of living and non-living organisms in the world, thus viewing humanity as a co-equal responsible member of the natural order. In a biocentric mindset, humans are not superior to animal and plant life. A theocentric model identifies God as the reason for the world’s existence as well as its creator. Ecofeminist scholarship takes a different route as it interrogates role-inclined discourses and focuses instead on nurturance, thus avoiding trajectories found in traditional models. Ecofeminist research, in general, sees the parallelism between the exploitation of women and the exploitation of nature. In addition, liberationist models propose the praxis of doing ecological justice. Spencer (2015) views ecotheology as contextual theology representing a form of liberation theology since ecotheological reflection essentially deals with the dialogue of culture, human experience, and faith. Following traditional biblical discourse, 20th century ecotheology in the writings of Jurgen Moltmann and Sallie McFague leans toward the redemption of creation (Hiebert 1994). Others (Deane-Drummond 2008) see ecotheology’s recent accommodation of a pneumatological appreciation (Bieringer 2002), thus highlighting the Spirit’s role in ecotheological reflection. Beyond these diverse appreciations of doing ecotheology, theological research, in general, has tilted towards ecological justice and integrity of creation, whereas theology interprets the impact of environmental crises upon human lives. Ecotheologians vary in their analysis about ecological issues given their diverse presuppositions and theological materials used. Evaluating the religious implications and morality behind the crises is anchored in the assumption that human activities and technologies, which breed the crises, are not value neutral. The build-up of this moral appreciation coupled with the urgent nature of climate emergency has placed high value towards ecological justice in the last 50 years. It can be said that ecological integrity is the center of attention for ecotheologians today.

With ecological justice, there is the need to have contextually relevant ecotheologies given that regions do have peculiar religious, cultural, and economic concerns (Deane-Drummond 2008). Given her narrowed focus of literature on the global south, Deane-Drummond’s review of ecotheology in this region is driven by developmental considerations and is tempered by the cry for socio-economic justice within liberationist views and collective consciousness of Indigenous communities. This review is limited to traditional content often raised in typical socio-economic and liberationist discourses. What we missed seeing is the unaccounted voices of young people whose growing population in the global south make them inheritors of a new socio-economic order. The unique context of the global south in contrast to other regions raises the need for a contextualized appreciation
of ecotheology. Kirkpatrick-Jung and Riches (2020) argue that a contextual appreciation of using ecotheology to strategize practical reflection is needed. In context is our study of emergent Filipino youth religious worldviews manifesting religious undercurrents that promote de-institutionalized religious views and post-colonial undertones (author). It seems that religious sub-cultures among Filipino youth are dramatically taking shape in local studies (Lanuza 2000). Hence, in the present study, we wish to add the religious worldviews of Filipino youth as a collective contemporary voice behind an emergent yet unexplored youth ecotheology in the Philippines.

2. Kalikhasang Balaan as Ecotheology

The previous study of Baring et al. (2021) refer to Christian Environmentalism (CE) as an overriding concept of Filipino youth environmental attitudes. The valid and reliable CE measure containing 15 items rests behind a tested theocentric model that assesses Filipino students’ environmental attitudes. This model provides interesting ideas into the implicit meanings behind students’ environmental attitudes. A qualitative analysis of the items within the measure through content analysis indicates three essential themes behind students’ environmental attitudes: God as creator, sanctity of nature, and human moral responsibility. These aspects introduce three interlocking theological ideas that build on a youth specific ecotheology: theology of creation (nature is created), ecological justice (nature is good), and Christian stewardship (role towards nature). Below, Table 1 shows the implicit themes behind the configuration of items in CE.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Creator”</th>
<th>“Goodness”</th>
<th>“Responsibility”</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>God creates the world.</td>
<td>The world is good because God is good.</td>
<td>God invites me to respect life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God is the center of life.</td>
<td>Man and nature are related to God</td>
<td>God calls me to care for the earth like my home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God loves all his creation.</td>
<td>I see creation as God’s symbol of grace and delight.</td>
<td>God wants and expect me to protect nature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The world will prosper if we believe in God</td>
<td>I admire the beauty of God’s creation.</td>
<td>Worship to God requires that I protect the earth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God did not cause evil things to happen to us</td>
<td></td>
<td>We are responsible to God for abusing the earth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God made the world for humanity.</td>
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A closer look at the configuration of students’ religious environmental worldview (Table 1) suggests that God, being the source of life as creator, bestowed everything that nature and humanity needs. This Creation mindset bespeaks of students’ sense of God as a guarantor of creation. God is not indifferent to the world. As guarantor, God made the world for humanity and acts in benevolence. Overall, the youth participants’ views are aligned to New Testament readings of the world as God’s creation. The creation theme projects an intimate image between the creator and created things, thus tending to favor the second creation narrative in Christian scriptures (e.g., Genesis 2). In Genesis 2, there is the intimate connection between man and woman and the direct engagement of the creator upon the created. Psalm chapter 8 ascribes upon an intimate creator his authority, not through superiority but through his interest and care for creation.

Second, like humanity, nature is not devoid of the divine stamp of goodness. All that is in it reflect God’s goodness. Nature is not value neutral. Youth ecotheology revolves around a mindset that sees nature in its created and valued state. It acquires meaning in God and of God. The world is admired for its inherent beauty. All good things reflect divine grace and joy as fruits of the divine creative act. Humanity and nature are linked to
God by virtue of their inherent goodness. Ecological justice is anchored on an appreciation of the goodness of creation. Working for ecological justice favors an opposing attitude against market liberalism (Alroe 2005) since it decries destructive activities harmful to nature and exploitation of resources, among others. This argument reinforces moral philosophical views citing the need to preserve ecology for future human generations and the sustenance of biodiverse life conditions (Wienhues 2020). This is the hope embedded in the ecotheological views of young Filipino informants. While ecotheological hope may refer to the “willingness to change at all levels of human life” (Dalton and Simmons 2010, p. vii), embracing an unwavering optimism, humanity’s call to value the essence of created reality (John XXIII 1961, Mater et Magistra n.196–198) reinforces the youth voice.

The third theological idea points to the human vocation towards nature. Filipino youth environmental views present an opposing stance to Lyn White, Jr.’s appreciation of the divine command to subdue the earth and have dominion over it as the culprit for Christianity’s implicit endorsement of abuses committed towards the world. For them, humanity is called to be responsible for the world. This is made explicit in concepts such as respecting life, caring for the earth, and protecting nature. Humans are accountable towards God the creator. Benedict XVI emphasized this point earlier by saying that humanity is responsible for the environment (1 January 2010) in celebration of the World Day of Peace. Human responsibility is inherently directed to nature’s goodness rather than the divine command. Nature’s value does not point to an obligation but to stewardship of its goodness. Hence, for this analysis, the biblical notion of “subduing” can be viewed in terms of personal responsibility towards the earth. Citing biblical foundations endorsing humanity’s vocation towards nurturance, Deane-Drummond hints at a more profound biblical appreciation of “dominion” as care “in the light of humanities’ role as divine image bearing” (Deane-Drummond 2017, p. 23). Reading human dominion in the sense of control or manipulation without regard for responsibility is a “distortion” (Hill 1998, p. 42). Student ecotheology nurtures a practical sense of nurturance and care which articulates their sense of stewardship. With their ethically inclined view, students’ environmental mindset articulates a theology of creation that designates primary attention to divine compassion and care for creation. Espousing a culture of care, environmental ethics promotes a mindset that extols human responsibility towards creation. It presupposes “that moral priority had to be given to adequate functions of ecosystems” (Deane-Drummond 2017, p. 16).

Filipino youth ecotheology is set apart from traditional Western environmental views framed within developmental models. It is also distinguished from traditional biblical theology which sees the value of creation mostly in terms of redemption or eschatology. In our present study, we investigate the relationship of creation, Christian stewardship, and environmental ethics given the underlying meaning of “kalikhasang balaan” as youth ecotheology. We are led to a creation centered view with a theocentric grounding motivated by ecological justice and Christian stewardship as constitutive elements of Filipino youth ecotheology. Having completed that, we sought a Filipino conceptual appropriation that interprets this view.

The Filipino term for nature is “kalikasan.” Prior to Philippine colonization by Spain, Filipino natives in central and southern Philippines already viewed nature as something created (Lasco 2014) by a distant supreme creator known as “Bathala Maykapal” in the central region or “Laon” in the south, among others. This divine being was addressed in various names in different provinces prior to colonization. This supreme being created the seas, land, and life forms. The entire world is considered sacred which makes it unnecessary for dedicated worship places, such as a church, since spirit or deity worship can be performed in houses (2014). One of these deities is the “anito” who either exercises power over nature or their ancestors (Hislop 1971). Filipino natives were then fully conscious of the interaction between the spirit and material world. These pre-colonial views suggest that the perceived sanctity of “kalikasan” predisposes natives to worship deities in their own places (Scott 1994). Their observance of spirit worship arouses constant responsibility.
towards the supreme being through their deities. On the other hand, the Filipino term for “create” is “likha.” Likha is an act associated with the supreme creative act of “Bathala” (supreme being). This creative act emanates from the supreme being. To project the created state of nature, we inserted “likha” within the word kalikasan so that it should read now as “Kalikhasan”. With this combination, the first syllable “ka” is now introduced as a prefix, hence the word “ka-likha-san.” In Filipino linguistic application, the prefix “ka” suggests a relationship, and with it, an implied responsibility as created being. This sense of responsibility implicitly nurtures an upright character since “katarungan” (translated as justice), introduced by Diokno (Diokno 1987; Panganiban 2013), can be traced to a Visayan (southern region) word “tarung”, which means straight or upright. However, Zialcita (n.d.) views the notion of justice as a legal system of rights and obligations. Ecological justice may be rendered in the context of “tarung”, such as having an upright outlook and attitude towards order in nature. Conversely, it is also amending what has been rendered un-straight to suggest that respect and care for creation are active rather than passive words. Overall, “kalikha” underscores the relationship between the creator and all created life and non-life forms. Life and non-life forms have their being through God’s creative act. Hence, the combination of two words into one, such as “kalikhasan”, echoes a deeply intertwined profound meaning between nature and God. The word “balaan” is a concept in southern Philippines (Visayan region) which means holy or sacred. Incidentally, local theologian Carl Gaspar’s recent book (Gaspar 2022), “Diwang Balaan” (sacred word), presents a decolonial discourse on Filipino spirituality where ecological justice is attached to justice on behalf of marginalized Filipino communities, especially Indigenous communities. In some ways, Diwang Balaan’s proposition rhymes with our intent to articulate an emerging youth religious subculture on ecology aroused by ecological justice. Holiness (balaan) is a divine attribute of a God who is eternally good. In this peculiar ecotheological appropriation, “balaan” is introduced as an adjective to qualify “kalikasan” as sacred, hence good. Filipino theologian Jose de Mesa’s trichotomy of the sacred assigns beautiful (“Maganda”) as an attribute intertwined with something valued and good (Baring et al. 2017). “Kalikhasang balaan” thus captures the spirit behind a contemporary youth ecotheology anchored in creation theology, ecological justice, and Christian stewardship. As it is in contextual theology, we bring the dialogue between local or Indigenous theologies and the Judeo-Christian view of creation through this youthful appropriation. In Jewish literature, the world emanates from the creative acts of a benevolent sacred being (Job 12:7–10). The goodness of creation emphasized in Hebrew literature (Psalm 146) emanates from the eternal goodness of God, its creator.

3. Catholic Church and State Response in the Philippines

We shall now review the Philippine church and state responses to the climate emergency in light of “kalikhasang balaan”. Implicitly introduced in the prefix “ka”, ecological justice in kalikhasang balaan is not viewed in legal parlance but on an ethical commitment to care for an inherently good nature. We want to know if recent pronouncements and acts of the church and the state rhyme with kalikhasang balaan’s commitment of ecological justice in terms of Christian stewardship and goodness of created nature. To do this, we shall read the local responses with the three ecotheological reflection poles on nature (world) as created, good, and nurtured. More and more local institutions have heeded the call to act on behalf of ecological justice. The Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines’ (CBCP) urgent call for ecological communion exhorted Christians to hope in the face of climate emergency, care for the poor, and embrace ‘integral ecology’ for the sake of our common home (Valles 2019). This exhortation immediately brings to the table the urgent nature of the problem at hand. It sounds off a serious voice identifying the world as a gift humanity can treasure. The CBCP calls for a deeper appreciation of human rootedness to the earth and its resources.

The CBCP’s Pastoral Letter in 2018 recognized young people as vital members of the Body of Christ, describing them as beloved, gifted, empowered with a mission towards
the environment, and willing to engage in ongoing work within creation (CBCP 2018). Their ultimate calling is to carry out their important role as “protagonists of this change, as the dynamic force of the Church now” and to “reach out to the peripheries to bring Jesus and His message of salvation to the lost, the least and the last, including other young people . . . ” (CBCP 2018). This pastoral letter pins its hope on the youth and sees them as collaborators of the huge task ahead of healing the earth. Like the #FridaysForFuture movement [FFF] (https://fridaysforfuture.org/ (accessed on 24 May 2023) organized in the west, the Philippines has an active youth-led organization called Youth Advocates for Climate Action Philippines (YACAP) (n.d.) comprising youth volunteers from student councils and youth organizations calling for climate justice. Among YACAP’s activities are fund drives for climate action, relief efforts for destroyed ecologies, environmental advocacies, and sign-up petitions to stop ecological disasters and support sustainability efforts. Unlike FFF, YACAP is not school-based, church-based, or largely focused on student environmental activism. However, YACAP members include youth environmental activists with religious and non-religious leanings. In addition, the Catholic Church youth specifically formed a Philippine chapter of the Global Catholic Climate Movement called “Laudato Si generation” in 2019 (NASSA Caritas Philippines 2019). Indeed, these radical youth movements echo Pope Benedict XVI’s passionate insistence to “listen to the language of nature” during his speech before the German Assembly on 22 September 2011 (Benedict XVI 2011). The pastoral letter also echoes LS’s concern in paragraph 25, which cited massive dehumanization all over the world due to environmental concerns triggered by global warming. Global warming deeply altered farmers’ livelihood when their farm output was affected by changes in climate conditions. The Pope argued that “our lack of response to tragedies involving our brothers and sisters point to the loss of that sense of responsibility for our fellow men and women upon which all civil society is founded” (Laudato Si’, n.7). A profound sense of responsibility for the world is raised by these pronouncements. The CBCP did well in describing the youth as instruments of change and collaborators to save the environment. CBCP’s emphasis on human responsibility comfortably relates to youthful sentiments. Dehumanization is contrary to the human vocation to nurture the earth. The Pope’s reminder resounds youth appreciation of environmental care as a vital posture to be able to work for ecological justice.

In its 1998 pastoral letter entitled What is Happening to our Beautiful Land, the CBCP voiced church anxiety over environmental abuses that compromise its capacity to sustain future generations (CBCP 1988). The Pastoral Letter issued a timely alarm reminding people that the Philippines is now facing a critical point in history. All living systems on land and the seas around us are ruthlessly exploited. The damage is extensive and irreversible (CBCP 1988). The letter also noted how the young are used to destroy the environment when it speaks about the sea: “We still allow “muro-amí” fishing methods which take a terrible toll both on young swimmers and the corals” (CBCP 1988). This scenario offers two contrasting experiences about the youth: The youth are honored with a special vocation to work for ecological justice. However, they are exploited to be accomplices of an ongoing destruction of the earth’s resources. There is a misalignment between their calling and society’s treatment of the young. In our paper, their voices echo solid convictions about ecological justice and God’s role in creation. Honoring creation goes with human responsibility to care and nurture it.

On 16 July 2019, the CBCP issued a Pastoral Letter entitled An Urgent Call for Ecological Conversion, Hope in the Face of Climate Emergency (Gomes 2019) urging communities towards ecological conversion, to listen to the cry of the Earth and the poor, and to act together to mitigate the negative effects of climate change (CBCP 2019a, 2019b). The 2019 Pastoral Letter offers concrete suggestions such as encouraging Catholic institutions to disinvest from ‘dirty energy’, such as “coal-fired power plants, mining companies and other destructive extractive projects” (CBCP 2022). Obviously, this letter urges concrete actions in response to Pope Francis’ call. The nine-page document is divided into eight sections, with the first half offering a reflection on the state of the environment, followed by concrete ecological actions.
The 16 July pastoral letter is the eighth in a series of environment-related documents released over the past three decades, since 1988 (CBCP 1988). The key points hark back to the 1988 Pastoral Letter reminding humanity to be aware of environmental damage and avoid a fatalistic attitude. Obviously, this pastoral letter supports youth sentiments towards ecological care. Ecological justice cannot be realized without conversion, which is a necessary step towards justice.

The Philippine government’s response, on the other hand, includes legal and executive acts in response to urgent ecological issues. In a 2009 forum on environmental protection, the Supreme Court identified difficulties in prosecuting ecology-related crimes among the issues affecting the implementation of environmental laws. Thereafter, on 13 April 2010, the Supreme Court approved the “Rules of Procedure for Environmental Cases” (Puno 2010) which facilitated the enactment of the “Writ of Kalikasan” under Rule 7 section 2 penned by former Chief Justice Renato Puno. Since its approval and publication, several cases have been filed in Philippine Courts. Among the successful court decisions, favoring human rights to a clean and sustainable environment led to the clean-up of Manila Bay to protect the endangered marine mammals residing in the vicinity, moral and financial liability for damage of coral reefs by military vessels, and road sharing for carless people, among others (Bueta 2019). More courts dedicated for environmental cases were also assigned in Philippine law. The Writ of Kalikasan’s legal appeal was tested when environmentalist and activist groups filed a petition for a Writ of Kalikasan in the Supreme Court pertaining to the 2013 destruction of a section of the Tubbataha Reef in the West Philippine Sea when a United States Navy minesweeper ran aground (Philippine Daily Inquirer (PDI) 2014).

In addition to legal enforcement, national leadership creates agencies and task forces dedicated towards mitigating and providing schemes or solutions to climate-related issues. The Climate Risk Management Framework has Project NOAH (Nationwide Operational Assessment Hazard), a partnership between government and academe providing critical information on climate and weather-related data. Project NOAH was established in response to the country’s need for disaster preparedness and craft appropriate mitigations. Likewise, there is also the nationwide campaign banning the use of single-use plastics. The Sustainable Consumption and Production Action Plan was formulated to provide a coherent framework for climate action (Philippine Daily Inquirer (PDI) 2014). Unlike the church, the government’s role is enforcement. The government makes concrete an envisioned order driven by ecological harmony. The legal structures set in place through legislation, the implementation of laws, and climate monitoring activities are all ingredients of an intent to care for the environment and promote ecological justice. Bueta (2019), however, noted that litigation for climate change related cases remain in need of government action as this is a recent addition to the build-up of environmental–legal discourse in the country. The problem apparently lies in weak implementation and monitoring of laws.

The CBCP resolutions affirm the role of the youth and communities on climate mitigation for ecological healing. However, while faith-based communities (Peracullo and Quindoza 2022) show its power to campaign for sustainability (e.g., recycling, waste segregation, advocacy for clean energy, avoidance of plastic use), much consistent action is needed by calling for more concrete faith-based group engagements in parishes for environmental protection and care. Likewise, the government policies, however challenged in its present implementation, support youth voices through legislation and policies. They are not passive members but active stakeholders capable of enforcing the theological vision of care for the earth. The youthful assertion of human accountability to nature echoes the church’s invitation for collective action. Human communities have the duty, responsibility,
and moral imperative to act together decisively to save the environment (Valles 2019, p. 9). There is a need to include the youth sector in the dialogue about “our common home” (LS n.3) and in shaping the future of the planet (LS n.14). In saying this, the church echoes youth voices that cry for action.

4. Conclusions

In our investigation, we attempted an enculturated version of youth ecotheology as “kalikhasang balaan” based on a tested Christian Environmentalism model of young Filipino informants. We characterized “kalikhasang balaan” in terms of the Filipino youth’s appreciation of the goodness of creation, need for ecological justice, and human responsibility. While responsibility towards nature is underlined, Filipino youth ecotheology in the present study somehow resembles ecocentric models due to its attention to environmental care and the goodness of nature. However, its bias towards nature as created draws it more towards a theocentric appreciation; hence, it departs from ecocentrism. Nature is the subject and object of nurturance because it is good and created. Overall, we showed the alignment of church and legal pronouncements with Filipino youths’ ecotheological leanings. However, while private-public partnerships are forged and environmental policies are set in place, much remains to be seen in terms of policy implementation and monitoring of environmental laws by government agencies. The church, for its part, needs to enflish the call to ecological conversion through more concrete initiatives on top of environmental advocacies it initiated. Learning from the characteristics of this youth oriented ecotheology, educational institutions may consider crafting educational interventions that emphasize the goodness of nature, Christian stewardship, and ethical commitment to nurture ecology.

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