

**From Vatican II to PCP II to BEC Too:  
Progressive Localization of a New State of Mind  
to a New State of Affairs<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract:** This study deals with various creative appropriations of some relevant Vatican II teachings for the renewal of the churches in the Philippines. It presents Vatican II's influence on PCP II and how this is made concrete through the Basic Christian Communities. It looks into PCP II's influence on parish life (with the latter's traditional rituals and activities, its newly-organized ministries, programs, projects, and other practices) towards community organization, lay participation, and BEC formation.

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<sup>1</sup> This article was published in *Revisiting Vatican II: 50 Years of Renewal*, Vol. II, ed. Shaji George Kochuthara (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2015), 308-326; reprinted here with kind permission from the publisher.

A shorter version forms part of the Report on a Research Project on PCP II made possible through the generous support of missio-Munich: Ferdinand D. Dagmang, *Basic Ecclesial Communities: An Evaluation of the Implementation of the Acts and Decrees of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines in Ten Parishes in the Philippines* (Manila: missio-Munich, 2016), 1-13.

**Keywords:** Vatican II, PCP II, Basic Ecclesial Communities, Church of the Poor, culture, community organization

The Second Vatican Council produced 16 documents, two of which (*Gaudium et spes* and *Apostolicam actuositatem*) could be considered as the immediate great grandparents/precursors of offspring-documents born in America, Africa, and Asia.

Latin America, a frontrunner in localizing Vatican II, produced its path-breaking Medellin documents; Africa with its Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) documents,<sup>2</sup> and; Asia with the Federation of Asian Bishops Conference document *Evangelization in Modern Day Asia*.<sup>3</sup> These continental documents embodied

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<sup>2</sup> See, <http://secam-sceam.org/index.php?pg=documents#UaF74ZxfaSo>.

<sup>3</sup> *Evangelization in Modern Day Asia: The First Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC): Statement and Recommendations of the Assembly*, Taipei, Taiwan, 22-27 April 1974 (Hong Kong: Office of the Secretary-General, FABC, 1974).

The following are compilations of the FABC documents from 1970-2006:

- 1) Gaudencio Rosales and C.G. Arevalo, eds. *For All the Peoples of Asia, FABC Documents from 1970-1991*, volume 1 (Manila: Claretian Publications, 1997);
- 2) Franz-Josef Eilers, ed., *For All the Peoples of Asia, FABC Documents from 1992-1996*, volume 2, (Manila: Claretian Publications, 1997);
- 3) Franz-Josef Eilers, ed., *For All the Peoples of Asia, FABC Documents from 1997 to 2001*, volume 3, (Manila: Claretian Publications, 2002);
- 4) Franz-Josef Eilers, ed., *For All the Peoples of Asia, FABC Documents from 2002 to 2006*, volume 4, (Manila: Claretian Publications, 2007).

FABC has nineteen (19) Bishops' Conferences from the following countries: Bangladesh, East Timor, India – CBCI, India - Syro-Malabar, India - Syro-Malankara, India - Latin Rite, Indonesia,

Vatican II's pastoral spirit of "updating" and went so far as producing hybrid texts from the local ecclesial grounds of former European and American colonies. Such texts show not only signs of post-colonial struggle but also the quality of sensitivity to local socio-cultural contexts—a hallmark of pastorally-oriented post-Vatican II documents. Thus, whether coming from Latin America, Africa, or Asia, pastoral documents are shaped to address issues relevant to local provenance—producing, in the process, the grounded nature of their message.

The Church (or churches) in the Philippines came out with its own pertinent document—one of the youngest of the family of pastorally-oriented documents—formed at the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines in 1991. The document is now known as *The Acts and Decrees of PCP II*.

The PCP II document is a product of discussions among representatives from the church hierarchy, religious congregations, the academe, pastoral councils, community organizers, women, and other actively involved members of the local churches. They gathered together in 1991, twenty-six years after the last session of the Second Vatican Council. This gathering gave birth to a document that reflected not only the initial impetus of the Council but also its *new state of mind* which extended itself worldwide and engendered the conception, birth, and growth of *new state of ecclesial affairs* in various Christian parts of the world.

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Japan, Kazakhstan, Korea, Laos-Cambodia, Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei, Myanmar, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, ROC, Thailand, Vietnam.

FABC has nine (9) associate members, namely: Hong Kong, Macau, Mongolia, Nepal, Novosibirsk (Russia), Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan ; <http://www.fabc.org/mem.html> / accessed 26 May 2013.

## **PCP II Documents and the ‘Church of the Poor’ Theme**

On January 20 1991, the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines was formally convened. January 21<sup>st</sup> signaled the start of the enormous work, from presentation of drafts and position papers to a series of clarifications, discussions and deliberations. The succeeding days that followed were devoted to longer debates, deliberations, amendments, approval of amendments, resolutions, drafting of revised documents. Finally, on Feb. 15<sup>th</sup>, the votation on and approval of the whole document ensued. On February 17<sup>th</sup>, after 29 days, PCP II was formally closed.

The Acts and Decrees of the Second Plenary Council (PCP II) was completed 21 years ago at the San Carlos Lay Formation Center. Among the delegates were 96 Bishops, 180 Vicar Generals and Episcopal Vicars, 21 Major Superiors of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, 12 Rectors/Presidents of Catholic Universities and 24 Rectors of Ecclesiastical Faculties and Major Seminaries and Deans of Theology and Canon Law, and 156 lay delegates. That totals to 489 participants. Lay representation was about 33% of the delegates. There were 71 women delegates (12 nuns; 59 lay).

The Council was presided by Archbishop Leonardo Z. Legaspi OP, and actual sessions lasted for 26 days (excluding Jan. 20 opening ceremonies, Feb. 16<sup>th</sup>, Recognition Day, and Feb. 17, closing ceremonies). The final Conciliar document consisted of 671 paragraphs and 132 decrees (prepared by the ad hoc committee for the final drafting led by Bishops Quevedo, Bacani and Claver). It was overwhelmingly approved by the delegates: 313 consultative votes and 85 deliberative votes.

In the homily delivered on the closing day of PCP II, Bishop Legaspi has these lines:

It can then, be said that the first converts of the Council are its members themselves; that the first to be evangelized by the Council were its very own participants. In this way did Christ prepare and shape us to become the first evangelizers of the message of the Council to our people. (p.lxxxiii)

Further down his text he continued:

...the Council not only offers the Filipino a vision—but also a Church renewed. The Church has firmly entered the path of renewal because her hierarchy has stressed its role of service rather than of dominance. The Church is serious about renewal because she has invited the laity for greater participation in Christ's mission. The Church bears the marks of renewal in her body, because she has taken upon herself the sufferings of victims. Above all, the Church has become the sign of renewal in electing to be a Church of the poor. (p.lxxxv)

Bishop Teodoro Bacani, a prominent figure in the Council, wrote:

The Church of the Poor became in PCP-II one of the three key themes: Community of Christ's Disciples, Church of the Poor, and Renewed Integral Evangelization.

This is very clear from the Vision-Mission Statement for the Philippine Church formulated by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, and from the National Pastoral Plan to implement PCP-II. According to PCP-II, we come to true communion, to being a community of Christ's disciples, by becoming a Church of the Poor. Unless we become a Church of the Poor, communion, the innermost reality of the Church according to Vatican II will not be achieved by us Filipinos in the way the Lord desires. That is why Renewed Integral Evangelization must be geared towards human, temporal liberation, and seek social transformation. Evangelization in the Philippines must be a service of and for the Church of the Poor. The Church of the Poor is the centerpiece of the PCP-II vision for the Church in the Philippines.<sup>4</sup>

The following is a concise statement about its vision of Church renewal concretized through the Basic Ecclesial Communities:

Our vision of the Church as communion, participation, and mission, about the Church as priestly, prophetic and kingly people, and as a Church of the Poor – a Church that is renewed – is today finding expression in one ecclesial movement. This is the movement to foster Basic

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<sup>4</sup> Teodoro C. Bacani, Jr. " 'Church of the Poor': The Church in the Philippines' Reception of Vatican II," *East Asian Pastoral Review*, 42/1-2 (2005).

Ecclesial Communities. (PCP II 137)

Those texts vibrate with joy and hope because the delegates have enshrined in the PCP II documents their convictions that give witness to the BECs as concrete expression of the Church of the Poor.

**Layers of Discourses in PCP II Documents**

The whole PCP II document (composed of Acts, Conciliar Document, and Decrees) is a product of consultations, deliberations, and consensus. However, we do not usually regard this as composed of various layers of ideas that gave it its final shape. It is not also easy to identify the various processes and stages of discussions that would produce a one-whole package known later on as the PCP II documents.

The PCP II documents are statements loaded with multiple layers of other statements coming from various sources. It has initiated and formalized the process of document formation. This reminds us about the fact that the 489 Council participants educated one another and thus came up with a condensed patchwork-like formulation based on discussion and consensus—showing the multiplicity of sources and interests. Incidentally, even before the Council was convened, preparatory documents were already drafted by the various commissions composed of CBCP member-bishops. These were sent to some ten thousand respondents who gave their comments and ideas for the commissions to collate. Five successive drafts were prepared after the consultations, until the Position Papers were ready for the Council. In this light, the PCP II documents reflect a broader consultation than what the actual PCP II Council proceedings would suggest.

Knowing this background information (that assumes the background worlds of respondents) could help reconstruct traces of experiences and traditions that composed the PCP II statements. It is not unlike looking into the history of PCP II ideas. In this way, the background check of resources would help track down some of its central ideas, its link to heterogeneous or hybrid lifeworlds and practices, and its relevance to and impact on parish life. Discovering these sources may further foster awareness about the historical, variegated, and progressively developing nature of documents or doctrines.

A central idea that gives the PCP II documents its distinguishing stamp is that of the Church of the Poor. It is its key idea but it has a long history and is based on multiple sources and platforms: the Sacred Scriptures, Conciliar/Episcopal documents, Papal teaching, discussion groups, and local ecclesial knowledge/praxis. Eventually, the vision of the Church of the Poor found its localization in the Basic Ecclesial Communities in the Philippines; it is in the BEC where Church teachings are translated into reality.

### **Church of the Poor**

The 'Church of the Poor' became part of PCP II because of some foundational sources. Behind this central idea is a whole universe of texts/contexts dealing with poverty, the poor, and the poor Christ.

Few expected that the 'Church of the Poor' theme would become the centerpiece of PCP II because mainly, the delegates did not come from the poorer sectors of Philippine society. The theme did come out, but only towards the second half of the 26-day sessions. One could say that the image of the Church of the Poor did arise because many delegates were already informed by

several Church proceedings and documents that have touched the themes of option for the poor and poverty. (PCP II's exact source is not clear; it could have come from the drafts prepared by Bishop Quevedo, or Bishop Claver, or Bishop Bacani)

This theme of the Church and the poor was very much in the mind of Pope John XXIII. In his radio message of 11 September 1962, just a month before the opening of Vatican II, Pope John XXIII said, 'Confronted with the underdeveloped countries, the church presents itself as it is and wishes to be, as the church of all, and particularly as the Church of the Poor.' These words became the inspiration of a group, which came to be known as 'The Group of the Church of the Poor,' or 'the Belgian College Group' after the place where they usually met. Their meetings were under the patronage of Cardinals Giacomo Lercaro (Bologna) and Gerlier (Lyons) as well as of Patriarch Maximos IV. One of their spokesmen was Archbishop Helder Camara of Brazil. They sought to conscientize the Council fathers about the need to pay special attention to the needs of the poor and the developing countries.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the efforts of the Group of the Church of the Poor, no provisions about the Church of the Poor came out of Vatican II documents. However, themes revolving around poverty and the poor Christ abound,

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

although not as highlighted as in PCP II. A very important paragraph is found in *Lumen gentium*, which clearly expresses the influence of the Group of the Church of the Poor:

Just as Christ carried out the work of redemption in poverty and oppression, so the Church is called to follow the same path if she is to communicate the fruits of salvation to men. Christ Jesus, “though he was by nature God... emptied himself, taking the nature of a slave” (Phil 2:6-7), and “being rich, became poor” (2 Cor 8:9) for our sake. Likewise the Church, although she needs human resources to carry out her mission, is not set up to seek earthly glory, but to proclaim, and this by her own example, humility and self-denial. Christ was sent by the Father “to bring good news to the poor... to heal the contrite of heart” (Lk 4:18), “to seek and to save what was lost” (Lk 19:10). Similarly, the Church encompasses with her love all those who are afflicted by human misery and she recognizes in those who are poor and who suffer, the image of her poor and suffering founder. She does all in her power to relieve their need and in them she strives to serve Christ. Christ, “holy, innocent and undefiled” (Heb 7:2) knew nothing of sin (2 Cor 5:21), but came only to expiate the sins of the people (cf. Heb 2:17). The Church, however, clasping sinners to her bosom, at once holy and always in need of purification, follows constantly the path of

penance and renewal. (*Lumen gentium*, no. 8)

There are other Vatican II documents that appropriate the themes of poverty and the poor: *Gaudium et spes* 1, 63-86, *Ad gentes* 12 (Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity), *Gravissimum educationis* 9 (Declaration on Christian Education), *Apostolicam actuositatem* 8 (Decree on the Lay Apostolate), *Perfectae caritatis* 13 (Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of Religious Life), *Optatam totius* 8 (Decree on the Training of Priests), *Christus dominus* 13 (Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church). These documents, however, lacks the prominence of a liberationist praxis and a sense of urgency that one could feel in the post-Vatican II documents produced by Latin America's Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano (CELAM).

After the Vatican II Council, CELAM did its own version of *aggiornamento* or updating. The Latin American documents (CELAM's Medellin [1968] and Puebla [1979] documents) responded to the Latin American Continent's context of conflict, oppression, and poverty. As we all know, those documents dealt with the central issues of poverty and option for the poor. On such themes, CELAM documents proved to be more progressive (or aggressive) than Vatican II even if they have been inspired by the Vatican II documents especially by *LG*, *GS*, and *AG*. It is no secret that the CELAM documents further inspired other regional churches to produce their own versions of Vatican II. This was the time when the Latin American liberation theology's influence had already spread across continents. Yet that time, the Church of the Poor theme is no longer new in the Asian region. The document

issued by the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) in 1970 already called for the Church to be a Church of the Poor and has been consistent in working towards this vision (in its triple points of evangelization of cultures, religions, and the poor). In the Philippines, the Mindanao-Sulu Pastoral Conference spearheaded the thrust towards the building of progressive churches whose rallying cry was "preferential option for the poor". It was in Mindanao where the first BECs were organized by foreign missionaries.

In the late 1960s, immediately after Vatican II, foreign missionaries in the frontier mission areas in Mindanao and Negros formed the first BECs. The Mindanao-Sulu Pastoral Conference (MSPC) which was first held in 1971 and since then meets every 3 years was instrumental in propagating these BECs all over Mindanao with the local clergy and lay pastoral workers continuing what the foreign missionaries started. Some dioceses and parishes in Visayas and Luzon would soon adopt the formation of BECs as their pastoral thrust. The first wave of BECs that emerged were formed under the martial law regime of the dictator Ferdinand Marcos.<sup>6</sup>

Let us not forget that the Catholic Social Teachings corpus (from *Rerum novarum* to *Sollicitudo*

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<sup>6</sup> Amado L. Picardal, "The Basic Ecclesial Communities in the Philippines: Recent Developments and Trends," <http://cbcpbec.com/?p=397> / accessed 22 April 2012.

See R.J. May and Francisco Nemenzo, eds. *The Philippines after Marcos* (Beckenham, Kent: Croom Helm Ltd., 1985), 81ff.

*rei socialis*) has called attention to the plight of the poor, especially the working class and this whole body of teachings has been a very important influence on the workings of the minds of the PCP II delegates.<sup>7</sup>

The whole Church of the Poor theme, originally expressed by John XXIII, has become a very important key to the Catholic Church's tradition which traces its very origin from Jesus himself who ministered to the *anawim* (those who were put down by institutionalized religion/culture as well as by influential, powerful, and moneyed people) of his time. He called his disciples to serve the neglected and the marginalized and proclaimed the news that the Reign of God is in their midst. Today, the BECs witness to that good news that the Reign of God is indeed among us.

We thus have the foregoing instances reminding us that when we are appropriating the more global forms of discourse like the Vatican II documents or the Compendium of the Catholic Social Teachings, there is a duty to adapt them to local situations. Latin America did it in the face of their own challenges; the FABC bishops localized their statements and came up with the triple points of evangelization; and most important is that the PCP II delegates helped to bring focus on the call—to be the Church of the poor. We are thus, called to become creative readers full of insights and innovations for our local listeners.

The more successful implementation of PCP II documents depended so much on those who were able to profit from the inspiration of the theme of the Church of the Poor, muster courage and determination in facing

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<sup>7</sup> Leo XIII wrote: "God Himself seems to incline rather to those who suffer misfortune; for Jesus Christ calls the poor "blessed"; He lovingly invites those in labor and grief to come to Him for solace; and He displays the tenderest charity toward the lowly and the oppressed." (*Rerum novarum*, 24)

innumerable challenges and difficulties, recognize the creative potential of internal and external resources and pathways, welcome collaborations from all sides of the local ecclesial grounds, and pursue the Basic Ecclesial Communities thrust as the concrete expression of the Church of the Poor.

Thus, if we see local BECs promoted and organized as Churches of the Poor in Boac, Marinduque, or in other local parishes, from Aparri to Jolo, let us remember that many of these did not start because of PCP II. Nevertheless, PCP II, being rooted in the words and deeds of Jesus of Nazareth who struggled to fight for the well-being of the poor and has helped set priorities and directions to many dioceses/parishes in the Philippines.

### **Implementation: PCP II-imbued Church Life**

PCP II was approved by Pope John Paul II on April 11, 1992 and promulgated on April 25, 1992, through a Decree issued by Bernardin Cardinal Gantin, Prefect, Congregation for Bishops of the Vatican. Interestingly, the text of the promulgation was punctuated by the following lines:

With this promulgation, the Council decrees become *obligatory* in all the dioceses of the Philippines in accordance with Canon 8 # 2 of the Code of Canon Law.<sup>8</sup> (italics supplied)

After this, a more concerted effort to implement its directives is reflected in the waves of initiatives by the several Bishops. They spearheaded a more centralized crusade to make PCP II direct their vision

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<sup>8</sup>*Acts and Decrees of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines* (Pasay City: St Paul Publications, 1992), lxxxix-xc.

for Church renewal. Nothing short of a nationwide campaign was felt by parish priests and lay leaders to make PCP II shape pastoral plans and activities in all the churches in the Philippines. It is clear, however, that successful implementation does not just depend on the initiatives of ecclesiastical leaders. As this study would show, various factors contributed to success; like a rural environment, an antecedent community life (its cohesiveness based on kinship or barangay relations and imbued with centuries-old cultural traditions), availability of community members, presence of committed lay leaders, easier transmission of traditions, and the like. Clearly, ecclesiastical initiative is not the only condition for successful implementation. But even if it is more difficult to apply PCP II (through BEC organizing) in highly urbanized settings (where traditions and cohesive community relations cannot be assumed and private citizens are made un-available by everyday life defined by waged-work and commerce), an institutional push would make a difference.

The formulation of Archdiocesan and Diocesan directives/guidelines/norms based on PCP II Acts and Decrees marks the presence of an institutional guide or official directive for ecclesial organization, administration, direction and general operations and activities. The Bishop's role as leader, animator, and overseer is so crucial especially in setting the tone of ecclesial life (cf. Bishop Evangelista of Boac, Marinduque [he is now the Bishop of the Diocese of Imus]); that is, if he is imbued with PCP II principles, ecclesial life will stand on a solid PCP II platform and stamped with clear PCP II direction. Nevertheless, the vision and mission of the Archdiocesan Center cannot really move forward without an organized clergy who will have to embody the spirit of PCP II and translate this into programs/projects to be implemented with the

indispensable participation and cooperation of lay leaders/members of the churches as well as the presence of various socio-cultural conditions that make implementation more feasible.

### **PCP II and the Parish and Basic Ecclesial Communities**

The new state of ecclesial affairs (with its PCP II-inspired vision-mission of building the Church of the Poor through the BECs) has become evident at the level of the parish. This is not a reference to the filled churches on Sundays which do not necessarily represent a living parish, but would rather show mass-going individuals who, full of religious intentions/sentiments, are habituated to the Sunday mass—a case of “believing and ritualizing without belonging to a living community”. On the other hand, the new state of ecclesial affairs would refer to a mobilized community of faithful Christians who would not only go to mass but are also actively involved in organized activities and other non-pietistic practices of the parish, like those identified with the social ministry, education, and community organizing.

In the Philippines, the standard picture of a *living parish* consists of (1) a well-organized Parish Pastoral Council (PPC) which is composed of the Parish priest(s), lay leaders, and other pastoral workers who may be lay or those dedicated to the vowed religious life; (2) an effective pastoral plan, with its viable community projects and programs, that involves a greater participation among the laity—exemplified in the formation of Basic Ecclesial Communities; and 3) people’s belongingness—where people find themselves as friends, consociates, or fellows in a world imbued with habits of solidarity and mutuality.

This is not to say that before PCP II there were no living parishes or BECs in the Philippines. There were already BECs before 1991, but these were not part of a more vigorous and systematic promotion based on an official endorsement (mandated) coming from the highest ecclesiastical office. We may thus say that the *new state of ecclesial affairs* also depends on a ground-up/down-top case (not top-down) of ecclesial development, that is, from the grassroots clusters of the BECs up to the level of the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines. This new state of affairs has been in the mold since the first wave of BEC formation in some parts of Mindanao and Visayas in the late 1960s.

When the PCP II of 1991 endorsed the building of BECs as the concrete expression of the Church of the Poor, it had in mind this stock of experience and knowledge engendered by the earlier generations of BECs. This is one of the reasons why it is more difficult for church leaders who lack pastoral experience with or exposure to BECs to adopt the PCP II view of the Church of the Poor. The BEC could not just be learned through seminary training or expertise in theological sciences as formally taught in theological schools through books. Active involvement in communities is the only way of promoting and building the BECs.

### **Concrete Implementation in Boac, Marinduque**

Not all BECs in the Philippines are created equal. Some are “more equal” than others. The figure below shows Boac Diocese registering an exemplary number of BEC units and members per baptized Catholic population. Boac BEC experience may be considered a benchmark in BEC building but this does not mean that Boac is superior to all other Philippine BECs; to highlight Boac’s success in community-

building does not say that its BEC program has successfully mobilized and organized all the total 193,585 baptized Catholics, representing 89 percent of all 216,815 people in the territory. As a benchmark, it is not the “gold-standard” but merely serves as a reference point in terms of success relative to other Philippine parishes.

Total Number of BEC Units in the diocese	223 units (169 old areas and 54 new)
Total Number of BEC Families	5,256 Families
Total Number of Individual Members	26,280 Individuals

The Diocese of Boac is composed of the whole island province of Marinduque—a 959.2 square kilometers island province located 160 kilometers southeast of Manila.<sup>9</sup> Marinduque is located between the Bondoc Peninsula at the southeastern portion of Luzon, and Mindoro Island. The province is surrounded by four bodies of water: Tayabas Bay to the north, Mompog Pass to the northeast, Tablas Strait to the west and southwest, and the Sibuyan Sea to the south. The highest peak in Marinduque is Mount Malindig (formerly, Mount Marlanga), a potentially active volcano with an elevation of 1157 meters. Its mountainous covering occupies approximately half of the total land area. Coastal plain is found along the seacoast of the municipalities of Boac, Gasan and Buenavista on the western side of the province with alluvial plains on the western part of Mogpog to Buenavista and eastern portion of Sta. Cruz. To reach

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<sup>9</sup> Based on UCANEWS data: <http://directory.ucanews.com/dioceses/philippines-boac/397/> / accessed 14 May 2013.

Marinduque, sea and air travel options are available.

The common people's rootedness and dependence on the plains, hills, mountains, and seas of Boac (the physical world) account for the predominantly agrarian and maritime labor and the other forms of everyday life that saturate society. People deal with nature, reap its bounty, and are constrained by human limitations; nature, on the other hand, opens up to human needs as people are driven to work for their survival and provisions for security or comfort.

The people's shared beliefs, rituals, social organization, and habitual practices represent and reflect the world that generated them. Thus, Boac's ecology, the people's economic pursuits and their traditional barrio/village/barangay interactions have become the progenitor of a rural-provincial culture that actually pre-dated the Spanish colonizers.

Bishop Rafael Montiano Lim (Jan. 26, 1978 to Sept. 10, 1998) is credited for starting the BEC program of Boac, which used to follow the BCC-CO model of community organizing.<sup>10</sup> On May 7, 2012, it celebrated its 30<sup>th</sup> BEC anniversary of the formation and growth of BECs – locally referred to as Batayang Pamayanang Kristiano (BPK).<sup>11</sup> BEC building, however, is not just a

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<sup>10</sup> “The BCC-CO is a network of BCC members and workers which provides education, research and publication and alliance work on the building of BCCs. Chaired by Bishop Rafael Lim of Boac, it works independently of, but coordinates with, the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP).” “Basic Christian Communities Say PCP II is Great Impetus,” [http://www.ucanews.com/story-archive/?post\\_name=/1993/05/03/basic-christian-communities-say-pcp-ii-is-great-impetus&post\\_id=43258/](http://www.ucanews.com/story-archive/?post_name=/1993/05/03/basic-christian-communities-say-pcp-ii-is-great-impetus&post_id=43258/) accessed 18 April 2012.

<sup>11</sup> <http://cbcpbec.com/?p=494> / accessed 18 May 2013.

In July 2004, Bishop Jose F. Oliveros delivered a report before the First National Congress for Clergy.

“The Diocese of Boac started its BEC program through organizing activities in 1982, using the BCC-CO methodology/

result of episcopal choice, leadership, and commitment to service. Bishop Rafael Lim's efforts and the contributions of his successors (José Francisco Oliveros [Feb. 2, 2000 to May 14, 2004]; Bishop Reynaldo G. Evangelista [February 22, 2005-present]), with the assistance of the clergy and lay leaders, may have gained tremendous help from Marinduque's island-provincial-agricultural character. In other words, the geographical location and culture of Marinduque has provided the local church a huge backdrop/background support for all its efforts in building PCP II's Church of the Poor.

Marinduque's "isolation" from the urban and secularized centers of the National Capital Region (Metro Manila<sup>12</sup>) may not be too favorable to economic progress and development; but its island-agricultural character provides an environment that assists Basic Ecclesial Community-building.

To date, Marinduque has no existing shopping

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approach. This approach has three stages, namely: Awakening, Empowerment and Re-structuring. Every stage has corresponding activities.

After twenty (20) years of organizing, the BCC program has resulted in the formation of one hundred forty one (141) organized BCC units in 100 barrios/barangays throughout the province with 10-15 member families per unit. It has a total membership of 5,000 family units as of the year 2002. To date, about 20% of the BCC units are considered as self-sufficient/governing while 40% is in the sustaining level. On the other hand, 25% is in the initiating stage and remaining 15% has died down. For the integral faith formation of the member families, the BCC has initiated six development programs, namely, economic, health, agricultural, political, ecological and religious-cultural." "Thee Filipino Clergy in a State of Mission: Inculturation / Integral Faith Formation," <http://clergycongress2.org/?p=146>

<sup>12</sup> Composed of the Cities of Manila, Quezon, Caloocan, Pasay, Pasig, Makati, Mandaluyong, Marikina, Valenzuela, Muntinlupa, Parañaque, Las Piñas, Malabon, Navotas, Taguig, San Juan, and the Municipality of Pateros.

malls but there are some buildings devoted to commerce. Trans-national companies do not hold offices in the province hence the ratio of unemployment here is high since majority of the establishments employ only one (1) to four (4) personnel.<sup>13</sup>

The two major economic activities of the island-province are farming and fishing.

Coconut and rice are its primary crops. Agriculture remains the biggest sector-employer of the province providing 48.0% of employment. Of the total land area of 95,925 hectares, 58% or 53,587.05 hectares are devoted to crops; 66.06% of this area (or 35,399.61 hectares) are coconut plantations. Palay paddies or rice farms follow with some 10,056 hectares or 18% of the total cultivated area of the province. Of the 10,056 hectares devoted to palay, irrigated ricelands constitute about 18.5%, 58.3% are rainfed, and remaining 23.2% use the upland (non-irrigated) method.<sup>14</sup>

Other agricultural products are corn, vegetables, rootcrops, banana, coffee, cacao, legumes, like mungo and peanut, are planted to the remaining 29% of the total cultivated area of the island.

Poultry and livestock raising serve as a secondary source of farm-family income. Chicken, hogs, cattle, goats and carabaos are traditionally raised. Other supplemental sources of family income come from charcoal-making, honey culture or honey-gathering, and renting-out of local banca or small boats to tourists. Other minor cottage industries include fish sauce production, cloth-weaving and crafts from bamboo, palm trees, and other local wooden materials.

Since there are neither Makati City businesses

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<sup>13</sup> [www.marinduque.gov.ph/economicprof.html](http://www.marinduque.gov.ph/economicprof.html) / accessed 16 May 2013.

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.darfu4b.da.gov.ph/marinduque.html> / accessed 15 May 2013.

nor SM malls, there are no peak-hour traffic congestions, no stiff competitions for bus or train rides, and public space is not swarmed by buy-and-sell or market transactions. Everyday-life, among the poor farmers and fishers, is still defined by a laid-back 4-8 hr. work, one that is mostly determined by small- and medium-scale farming and fishing activities (not the mechanized mass production types) that bring modest income to families. Thus, majority of the people of the Diocese, including the townfolk of the town of Boac, do not belong to the middle-class income groups whose *capacities enable pursuit of resources and goals* that typically move towards sufficiency and autonomy, or towards affluence and power.

Consequently, the poorer people, the majority of the Diocese, do not have the resources and capacities to automatically become capable pursuers of careers in Metro Manila. Some of them may possess a future-oriented mentality characteristic of individuals raised in modern urbanized and secularized modern cities; but due to the island-provincial culture (one that is hundreds of years older than modern business culture), people are still predominantly enlivened by the shared island-provincial social disposition constantly shaped by years of dealing with the land and the sea. Most people of Marinduque belong to this farming and fishing lifeworld characterized by an island-provincial ecology.

This is what we mean by the BEC being assisted by the culture of the island-province: that even before Christianity has touched the shores of Marinduque, people are already imbued with the island-provincial culture of hospitality, reciprocity, solidarity, informal camaraderies, inter-personal trust, and simplicity supported by a material life which is neither considered destitute nor affluent—probably poor (but not entirely miserable) and simple (neither complicated nor disposed

to sophistication and consumerist behavior). Moreover, most of the poor are not preoccupied with commodities which capture/captivate the middle class and the moneyed.

With regard to the notion of poverty/simplicity, it is interesting to cite a study that uses non-BEC orientated measurements of poverty. Schreiner, a Westerner academician, concludes in his paper that one of every three Filipinos is poor.<sup>15</sup> He utilized some indicators of what he considered as standard non-poor lifestyles: like eating meat, dining in a restaurant, owning items such as a TV set, cellphone, car, having a medical insurance, bank deposits, investments, etc.—all items preferred and regularly consumed by the middle class or the affluent. This is an obvious middle/affluent classist skewer to fix notions of poverty in terms of absence of middle class material amenities/values. Besides, the search, pursuit, consumption, and accumulation of such amenities may actually be a cause of social fragmentation, disintegration of the island-provincial values of simplicity and the loss of shared practices of gratuitous mutual-help and solidarity that usually characterize the lives of the poor in Marinduque.

The case of fenced houses in middle-class subdivisions is one illustration of how the more successful citizens fence themselves inside their private properties, which effectively keep off neighbors from intruding into their lives—impoverishing themselves of the richness of intimate neighborliness. In this sense, middle-class success could also mean keeping a middle-class kind of neighborhood—where good neighbors are minding their own businesses. Neighborhood is thus a

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<sup>15</sup>Mark Schreiner, “A Simple Poverty Scorecard for the Philippines,” *Philippine Journal of Development* vol. 34/2 (2007): 43-70.

neighborhood of fenced, self-sufficient, and isolated neighbors who, ironically, would inadvertently constrict the facilitation of concourse, the most basic activity in a neighborhood. Inside their homes are found children who play by themselves—sitting in front of their electronic gadgets that keep their eyes, ears, and fingers constantly occupied—impoverishing themselves of the physical games with playmates in real playgrounds or fields. They are kept busy by the television where they explore the world by sitting down; they browse the internet that keep them active without sweating it out; they interact with their friends through the so-called social networking sites and keep themselves undisturbed by their neighbors' preoccupations or nature's forces. They keep their bodies animated through the use of technologies available in the market and built environments, like gyms or play rooms. By enclosing themselves inside their private or privatized lairs, middle-class citizens exercise their rights, affirm their autonomy, and maximize their independence. They secure themselves inside their gated homes, they hold on to their own resources, they guard their comfort zones against intruders or unlawful trespassers. Thus, by keeping themselves tuned to individualized or privatized activities, they place themselves in a comfortable distance far from the bigger group and from the ways of the poor and simple people who would belong to a lifeworld defined by the shared social dispositions of the folks who regularly negotiate the greeneries, traverse the various contours of the land, breathe through the briny air of the sea, and find belongingness among themselves.

Poor farmers and fishers who consume sufficient amount of food (which may be more backyard-grown vegetables than meat or smaller varieties of fish with minimal mercury content), who spend time with their

friends watching a shared “neighborhood” TV set or visit the local healer for a free *hilot*/indigenous massage and counseling, or ride on a *habal-habal*<sup>16</sup> motorcycle are really poor according to Schreiner’s standards. However, by setting the middle-class lifestyle as defining the non-poor parameter, he clearly missed the point that poverty is also relative to a society’s ways of pursuing what is contextually humane or a culture’s perspective regarding what counts as human flourishing. Middle class standards of non-poverty/sufficiency may refer to the presence of abundant material indicators which are appropriated and enjoyed by sovereign individuals—a result of privatistic accumulation and individualistic consumption of goods and services. On the other hand, the poor of Marinduque may clearly multiply the benefits derived from the otherwise limited supply of things through their sharing and creativity in apportioning goods, thereby accumulating more cultural health/capital than economic capital.

It is interesting to note that in urban settings, the poor are also known for their resilience coupled with their creative use or consumption of discarded items: *pagpag* (verb: *ipagpag*, to shake off)—a practice of trash collectors (or those who collect trash from fastfood chains like KFC or McDonalds) who “shake-off” dirt from the food that they find in trash; street foods—barbecued pig and chicken entrails; old tires—recycled or reused to create garden pots or weights to keep roofs from being blown away; spoiled/discarded food—boiled

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<sup>16</sup> The verb *habal* means “to mount on top of a partner in an animal copulation”. *Habal-habal* motorcycle is a single commercial motorcycle-transport with several mounted passengers taking a “linked” riding position—a transportation practice that multiplies the number of passengers in a single motorcycle (3-8 and sometimes 10 passengers in motorcycles with side-seats extensions). This is commonly practiced in less-developed/underdeveloped or poor places in the Philippines.

for feeding pigs; *ukay-ukay*—rummaging in second-hand stores; repair practices of third-degree-damaged items—repair of even the “unusable” umbrella, shoes, appliances, and the like.

For BEC building, the poor people’s socio-cultural dispositions may fit the requirements of community formation. The people’s pre-given moral<sup>17</sup> dispositions may dovetail with the expectations of community living or neighborliness. In other words, in Boac diocese, some socio-cultural sediments that promote belongingness and support community may already be in place. These refer to some of the shared *practices* of the poor.

For example, among the poorer members of a community, the practice of sharing of limited resources (like fish catch shared to neighbors or the *kakanin* or native delicacies/food shared during meetings or BEC gatherings) or sharing of adequate resources (time shared for a *Bayanihan*<sup>18</sup> project or the attention given

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<sup>17</sup> The concept of morals may refer to socio-cultural standards or culturally-normative practices. It refers 1) to the demands for uprightness or good conduct of one’s life and focuses on the concrete imperatives of a given moment or 2) to people’s practices insofar as these practices are fountainheads of righteous living. In such a case, practices, as emancipatory or liberating practices, are constitutive of an *ethos* (shared convictions, customs, social standards of behavior, etc. [cf. Latin term for custom: *mos-moris* from where morals is derived]), the reference of an ethical theory. Morals is rooted in its context—living community or group of persons from where an *ethos* may spring. José Luis L. Aranguren speaks of *êthos* (ἦθος) as “el suelo firme, el fundamento de la *práxis*, la raíz de la que brotan todos los actos humanos” (“the firm ground, the foundation of praxis, the root from which spring all human acts”). He distinguished ἦθος from ἔθος, the former having a wider social character from where ἔθος is derived as individual custom or habit. The proper etymology of *ethics*, he says, is from the term ἦθος. *Ética* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1986), 21ff.

<sup>18</sup> *Bayanihan* is a combination of two words, *bayan* (nation or town) and *anihan* (harvest)—it means neighbourhood work or

to a sick neighbor) or the multiplication of number of beneficiaries in the sharing of a limited resource (cf. hand-me-down clothes from the eldest to the youngest, *habal-habal*, or extending a small piece of meat or fish with plenty of soup and other extenders) are a common occurrence. One does not have to search for or to bring about the habits of reciprocity, sharing, and redistribution—these are not only *habits of necessity* inside the poor’s hut, but have become *habits of the poor’s heart*. Some of them who become well-to-do’s do not easily forget such habits, as they are also expected by custom to become the local benefactors.

Thus, gift-giving (*especially* the gift of one’s time or services), which is also an enduring practice among traditional cultures,<sup>19</sup> has proven to be a native ingredient that contributes to BEC success in Boac. This claim does not mean, however, that Marinduque culture is perfect or thoroughly “anonymous-Christian” in character. What we are saying is that Marinduque island-province society and culture has the moral-practical resource for any community-building program. Tapping this resource for BEC is one major task for the present—the past and the island-provincial milieu have handed-down that huge cultural resource which has become available for today’s BEC building as localization of Vatican II.

## Conclusion

Vatican II’s influence is made concrete through the Basic Christian Communities whose formation has become the standard approach to Church renewal in

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community work done voluntarily and without monetary compensation.

<sup>19</sup> See Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, New York: Norton, 1967.

many parishes in the Philippines. The centralized guidelines based on the PCP II documents have pushed parish life, with all its traditional rituals and activities, its newly-organized ministries, programs, projects, and other practices, towards community organization, lay participation and BEC formation.

Various generations of lay leaders and descendants in the more successful BEC-run parishes have become living witnesses to the gradual transformation of their ecclesial communities and personalities towards greater cohesion and solidarity.

The formation of BECs also characterizes the formation and identity of the Clergy in general, inasmuch as they have to be prepared, trained, and disposed towards the realization of PCP II's decrees.

The ideals/values of subsidiarity, decentralization, lay participation, solidarity with the poor, care for the environment, respect for women, and the like, have become more manifest standards because of the BEC structures that saturate and interlock Church institutions. Negative life-experiences and other critical issues (lack of support system, presence of abusive husbands, threat of illegal logging, and the like) have been addressed with far-reaching effects or deeper psychological impact because of the BEC.

Adults in BEC contexts would help bring up generations of BEC-sensitive children (from children who learn about the BECs to children who are part of the BECs) since BECs provide the most appropriate settings for learning, for acquiring new skills especially in socialization, for better emotional education, and for acquiring orientation and capacities. In other words, the BECs are themselves veritable "primary classrooms" where primary catechesis and religious education must start. What we have in our classrooms are mere secondary educations (we call it *schooling*) because

these are often detached from our students' life-settings and life-experiences. One might say, "But we always connect our lessons with real life situations." That's precisely the point; that's exactly the problem—we connect our lessons to real life situations. In the BECs, there is no need for that effort *to connect* because a BEC is not separate from the life-world of people. The activities, the organizational procedures, the celebrations, the meetings that deal with crises, etc.—these in themselves directly deal with life and these teach people, especially children, the mechanics of life. Besides, most BECs are giving formal lessons to children about the basics of our religion. What is working to the advantage of formal learning in a BEC setting is that it is practiced in the context of a living community (not in the context of a college or university) with its language, meanings, and activities meant for community living and not to prepare people for work in business or employment in offices or institutions that must subordinate life-world principles to commerce or legalities.

The basic and stable community that is the BEC becomes the life-platform for the dynamic creation of culture of shared dispositions and activities with shared meanings. When one is immersed within BEC context and in the presence of significant others, one learns all the time about how to be part of BEC culture on many levels. Meals are special meals because these are shared by fellows; celebrations get extraordinary fraternal orientations; issue-based collaborations are imbued with a prophetic spirit that go beyond the tactics of survival; and discussions are animated by Gospel values that further enrich a sharing community. Of course, not everyone would derive uniform meanings from one's context. We have to realize though that when a context is formed, such contexts, in turn, form their own

constructors. Those who find themselves in a BEC which is a tightly-knit group with community-constructed grids of traditional values (not modern/nuclear family values), cannot help but be woven into the groups' integrated network of interactional frames and scenarios for communion such as prayer meetings, monthly bible studies, social work, and the like. In turn, such interactional frames and scenarios would make up the indispensable conditions for the further development of successful BECs.