



Indonesian Eco-Ecclesiology: Defending Earth Against Ecological damage in Batak Land

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Abstract

This study focuses on efforts to build an eco-ecclesiology of liberation in Indonesia. The idea of restoring the earth is based on Leonardo Boff's ecological spirituality and KSPPM's ecological praxis. Ecological damage is a logical consequence of exploitative-destructive attitudes and actions of humans. This study promotes the spirit of defending or protecting the earth from the clutches of ecological destruction in Batak Land, Indonesia. This study uses a descriptive qualitative method with a comparative study approach on the ecological work of Boff and KSPPM and serves as the basis for the development of liberating eco-ecclesiology. Ecology must become an integral part of Christian theology and it must offer a new perspective on the relationship between humans and the earth. The sacrifice of Christ who was crucified and suffered for the redemption of the world (John 3:16) should be a spirit for the Christian community to initiate strong multi-faith and cultural cooperation to save the earth which has been granted to us. The church is also responsible for building an eco-literacy movement as a manifestation of faith in the context of vast ecological destruction, thus, the church as an ecological community should embrace the earth and the oppressed people through a transformative diaconia which is inspired by the love of Jesus Christ as the Saviour of the world. The church must expand its ministry mandate to answer the struggles of all creation.

Keywords: eco-ecclesiology, liberation, defending earth, ecological damage.

Introduction: The Sacrificed Earth

The relationship between humans and the universe is experiencing major problems. Ecological degradation is caused by exploitative and mainly destructive human actions. Humans contribute significantly in triggering global ecological damage today. Awareness of human involvement has long been raised by academics and other concerned observers. Sallie McFague, an eco-feminist theologian, emphasized that humans are cunning enemies and criminals for the ecological crisis that they perpetuate (McFague, 1993:3). Nash asserts that the root of the ecological crisis is essentially human character (Nash, 1991:89). Borrong also said that environmental damage is the result of human behavior which is limited but assumes that it is unlimited, so that humans act almost without norms and any ethics (Borrong, 1999:64). Wells emphasized that human beings selfishly don't care if we destroy the planet (Wells, 2019:13).

Ecological crisis symptoms occur in various parts of the world on a daily basis. The causes of ecological damage consist of various forms, such as: increasing population, deforestation, industrialization, etc. Exploitative-destructive corporate activities contribute to reduced quality of life. Ecological principles are often ignored for the sake of increasing economic value. Natural or earth resources are exploited without any limits. In fact the action arises from a



fallacy of thinking. We must realize that the words ecology, economy, and ecumenism come from the same Greek word, namely the word *oikos*.

Disregard for norms and conscience breeds selfishness which leads to acts of destroying the earth in order to satisfy human desires. The rate of forest destruction, extinction of animals and plants, scarcity of certain species, poor waste management, toxic gas leaks, and other acts of destruction are happening fast. Wells narrates the effects of global warming – a temperature rise of up to two degrees causes the ice caps begin to disintegrate, an increase of 400 million people experiencing water shortages, even some big cities around the equator will not be livable, because in the northern regions the heat wave has the potential to kill thousands of people every summer (Wells, 2019:13).

The massive ecological destruction threatens the life of all creation. The world community must join hands in carrying out a movement to save the earth. Religion is expected to play an important role in overcoming the threat of an ecological crisis. The church as a global community is also responsible for ecological issues. The question is whether the church has played its role adequately? White emphasized that Christianity has an arrogance towards nature that must be stopped. Scientific and technological progress cannot overcome the ecological crisis, until we have found a new religion, or reexamined our Christian teachings (White, 1967: 28-30). This harsh accusation struck at the heart of Christianity, causing pros and cons for Christian scientists and theologians. On the one hand, White's thesis is interpreted as a momentum to review church teachings, especially regarding the relationship between humans and other creatures, but on the other hand, they also reject it and accuse White of spreading hoaxes. Singgih responded critically to White's thesis and said that its a valuable legacy to consider, as well as being an auto-critic for the Christian community in understanding their own identity (Singgih, 2020:113). Singgih pushed for the church to reconstruct its theology and ministry in response to the danger of the growing ecological crisis.

The church needs to interpret White's thesis as a challenge to reformulate human relations with God and the universe. Humans and other creations are related and interdependent. The ecological crisis with all its consequences becomes a shared ecological concern that demands shared awareness, construction, and ecological praxis that can be packaged in various scientific fields and religious traditions. Church practitioners can encourage ecological awareness of church members and their involvement in conservation efforts, through public policies related to various ecological issues (Setyawan, 2021:262-275). Wieren emphasized the importance of church involvement in carrying out ecological restoration (Wieren, 2013:68-69). "Self-centrism is associated with a materialistic secular existence that flies in the face of Christian spirituality and teachings. We are called to be custodians and good disciples of the world and to genuinely care for the planet and its peoples. to develop the potentiality of Christian ethics and spirituality in business" (Nicolaidis, 2020: 9).

The previous study was conducted by Singgih on ecology and disaster mitigation in Southeast Asia. He emphasized that the success of disaster management policies is their ability to minimize the harm they cause (Singgih, 2014: 237-253). Setyawan gave a theological contribution about the church as an ecological community that should contribute to building ecological awareness and encouraging the birth of environmentally friendly policies (Setyawan, 2021:91-107). Pasaribu try to narrate all of creation as *Imago Dei* which is based on Genesis 1:26-28 (Pasaribu, 2020:1-7). Based on the explanation above, the author wants to emphasize that the eco-ecclesiological movement is an ecological imperative for Christians to contribute to protect the earth as a common home for all creation. This is what has prompted researchers to construct a liberation eco-ecclesiology based on Leonardo Boff's ideas on ecological liberation and the ecological praxis of the Community Initiative Study and Development Group (KSPPM) which is oriented towards saving the earth in the Batak Lands.



This means that this study has novelty because the relevant research has not conducted an in-depth study of building liberating eco-ecclesiology in the context of the Batak Lands.

Research Method

This study used a qualitative research method with a comparative study approach to the ecological ideas of Leonardo Boff and KSPPM as ecological praxis. The researcher explored and describes the ecological spirituality that is lived and set forth in Boff's theological works. Next, the researcher explored the spirit that drives KSPPM's ecological praxis in fighting for harmony among creatures in a context in Batak Land. Data related to the KSPPM work program was collected through observation and in-depth interviews with KSPPM figures. The results of the comparison will be synthesized into principles in formulating eco-ecclesiology in the context of the Batak Lands. Furthermore, these principles will be promoted and it is hoped that the church will be able to use them to realize their wider mandate within the framework of transformative diaconia to protect and restore nature in the Batak Lands.

Ecological Portrait in Batak Land

Biodiversity in Batak Land has its own character. The ecosystem habitat is grouped into two parts, namely: terrestrial habitat and aquatic habitat. In the mainland habitat there are various types of flora and fauna that are very diverse. According to Jhamtani, biodiversity includes diversity of ecosystems (habitats), diversity of species (types), and diversity of genetics (diversity of traits within one species). Biodiversity is the backbone of life, both from ecological, economic, social and cultural aspects (Jhamtani, 2001:79). The existence of wild animals has a very important function and role, both as a counterweight to natural ecosystems and for human life (Kuswanda, 2018:1). That is why the maintenance of all living things is mandatory and is a shared responsibility.

The Batak land has endemic plants that should need to be looked after and cared for, but ironically these plants are now endangered. According to Sitanggang, the endemic plants in the Lake Toba area are continuously decreasing due to encroachment, land clearing, use of pesticides, and fires (Sitanggang, 2015: iv). The potential for biodiversity is an important element in the assessment and determination of the area to become a global scale earth park known as the Toba Caldera UNESCO Global Geopark. The presence of the Samosir Botanical Garden in Tomok village, Samosir district is a representation of the protection of endemic plants. This botanical garden seeks to carry out the process of conserving Sumatran highland plants, especially in Batak Land. The Botanical Garden, which is located in Eden Park 100, Toba district, is carrying out conservation of the typical Toba orchid. A wide variety of plants and animals, including the increasingly rare Sumatran tiger, can be found in this park. The monkey breeding area is in the Parapat area. Unfortunately, the rate of deforestation forces the monkeys to take to the streets looking for food and their population is gradually decreasing. The disturbance of the monkeys habitat forced them to take to the Parapat – Medan highway. They begged for mercy from motorcyclists and cars that pass by on the road to get some food.

Lake Toba as The Heart of Batak Land

Batak land is in the province of North Sumatra. This area has a variety of tourist objects with great potential, consisting of natural, cultural and spiritual tourism potential. Lake Toba is one of the tourism icons of Indonesia. It has a uniqueness and allure for tourists. The enchantment of its natural beauty is very soothing, and the expanse of the Barisan mountains surrounding it is also very impressive. The fresh air and water complement the attractiveness of Lake Toba. Another charm is Samosir Island which is in the middle of Lake Toba which has extraordinary cultural wealth. The government designated the island of Samosir as an autonomous region from the division of the main Toba Samosir district with the hope of improving the quality of life



of the surrounding community. The North Sumatra provincial government continues to improve in order to develop the tourism industry in the Lake Toba area. Infrastructure development in the form of: roads, airports, Ihan Batak Ship, and various other facilities.

Lake Toba has a long history. The supervolcano explosion which was very powerful made the lake known in global conversation. The explosion of Mount Toba 74,000 years ago was felt in various parts of the world. The explosion formed a large caldera and then filled with water from the tributaries of the Barisan mountains. The lake has an area of up to 2,700 km with a depth of up to 500 meters. Geological sites as evidence of the mighty history of volcanic eruptions are in the Batak Lands. Recently this geological site is known as the Toba Caldera which functions as the largest volcanic laboratory in the world. Various expeditions from Europe tried to find the origin of the eruption, teams were dispatched several times, but they were unable to enter the interior of the Batak lands. In short, in July 1853 Van der Tuuk reported his success to Amsterdam, so he was the first European to set foot on Lake Toba, at that time the Dutch only controlled the coast, and the inland Batak people were still independent (Situmorang, 2004:372).

Lake Toba is greatly admired by domestic and foreign tourists. Simanjuntak (2011) says that Lake Toba is loved and missed because of its beauty and coolness. Lake Toba is the 'heart' that gives a fresh view, the 'heart' that gives water of life to the people around it and also the heart that pours out its water through the Asahan river for vital industrial life for millions of Indonesians (Simanjuntak, 2011:303). The beauty of Lake Toba has inspired the birth of various works of art and science (Simanjuntak, 2011: 321). The topographical conditions of the Batak Lands, which are dominated by hills and the Bukit Barisan mountain range, add to the exoticism and beauty of Lake Toba. The Batak people who live around the Lake Toba area have a livelihood as farmers, traders and fishermen. The description above is an illustration of how vital Lake Toba is for people's lives, not only for the surrounding residents but the wider community has also enjoyed the existence of this lake.

One of the best choices to implement sustainable tourism is to maintain a balance of ecological and economic values. Good governance is expected to contribute to improving the quality of people's lives. The Indonesia government realized this potential, so that it designated Lake Toba as the national strategic areas. The designation of Lake Toba as strategic areas is stated in the Presidential Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia Number 81 of 2014 concerning Spatial Plans for the Lake Toba Area and its Surroundings. In chapter I, article 1 paragraph 5 it says that: "National Strategic Areas are areas whose spatial planning is prioritized because they have a very important national influence on state sovereignty, state defense and security, economic, social, cultural, environmental, including areas that have been designated as world heritage."

Ecological Damage in Batak Land viewed from a Theological Context

Ecological damage is a global problem caused by human interference. According to Boff, the reason is that the modern approach uproots people from nature (Boff, 1997:10-11). This condition is exacerbated by indifference to people's lives, human rights, especially children and women communities, the poor and marginalized, aspects of human spirituality, and neglect of the earth as a common home for all creation (Boff, 2008:2-4). Indonesia is no exception as a tropical country or often dubbed as the lungs of the world. The beauty of nature gives it great potential for the development of sustainable tourism or eco-tourism. This potential is a driving factor for the designation of the Lake Toba area as a national strategic area for Indonesia. Then UNESCO designated it as a world park or the Toba Caldera UNESCO Global Geopark. The Toba Caldera is a prestigious achievement. Unfortunately, the existence of both of them also offers the opportunity to experience obstacles because of various daily activities that are not friendly towards nature and have the potential to damage their natural beauty.



Gatot Pujo Nugroho has explained that the Lake Toba area has a vulnerability to various activities around it. Negligence in its management can cause environmental degradation. At present the water catchment area is not well protected, so the quality of lake water tends to decrease, and consequently biodiversity becomes threatened (Sitanggang, 2015: 20). Small mistakes in the process of managing Lake Toba can have fatal consequences for the sustainability of the region's biodiversity. It is a shame that this warning was not heeded, business and industrial activities continued, and it has the potential to cause ecological problems.

The various activities which have the potential to cause ecological decline are carried out by the community and the business world. According to Sulistya Ekawati, et al (2016), there are several corporate activities that cause ecological damage, namely: PT. Toba Pulp Lestari, PT. Allegrindo Nusantara, PT. Inalum, hotel and restaurant business, PT. Aquafarm Nusantara, PT. Suri Tani Pemuka and domestic waste contribute to the pollution of Lake Toba (Ekawati, 2016:2). The granting of operational permits should receive strict supervision from the government and related parties. Monitoring aims to avoid ecological damage that is counter-productive to the designation of the Lake Toba area as a strategic area, a world park, and various efforts are made by the government in order to prepare the Lake Toba area as an international tourist destination.

Ecological problems in Batak Land can be grouped into two parts, namely: problems in the upstream and downstream areas of Lake Toba. The upstream area of Lake Toba, covering all forest areas in the Batak Land area which functions as the Lake Toba Catchment Area. The area of hills and mountains functions as a catchment area for rainwater, which is then channeled through tributaries that empty into Lake Toba. This area was best allowed to grow into a natural forest, but is now experiencing devastation. The forest has become deforested due to illegal logging, forest fires and other ecological problems. Lake Toba's water quality is also determined by the upstream area, which has a very strategic function for the survival of this lake. Deforestation is a process of changing the function of natural forests to other uses. You do this by logging trees and burning either intentionally or not. Deforestation is an ecological issue that is still ongoing in various countries. In fact, the negative impact it causes is very dangerous for human and animal survival alike.

Forests are part of the support system to keep the water fresh in the Lake Toba. Tourists come to enjoy its natural beauty. Ironically, forest areas have experienced a decline in quality due to exploitative human actions. Tinambunan stated that the massive destruction of trees in Sumatra has been increasing rapidly in the last twenty years and the rivers in Tanah Batak have decreased their water discharge by around 60-70% in the last 30 years (Tinambunan, 2014:101). The decrease in river water discharge and fluctuations in water discharge between the rainy and dry seasons are bad indicators of the hydrological condition of catchments or water catchments in the Lake Toba area. Even though the government is promoting the Batak land as an international tourist destination, the fact is that forest destruction in various parts of the archipelago is still ongoing. Ecological problems in the downstream are related to the use of Lake Toba water. Fresh fish farming technology has developed very significantly using various models. Floating net cages are one of the models that are widely used by the community and corporations.

The results of field observations show that there are still many floating net cages in the Lake Toba area. The cages were scattered in various locations. Based on the narratives of the research informants, apart from being owned by the company, there are also many cages owned by the community. Adolf Sihaloho (Samosir, 22 April 2023) said that it is true, currently there are still many floating net cages in this lake, but there have been far fewer of them than before. The reduction was caused by the government's policy of making Lake Toba a tourist



destination, so that regulations related to the banning and reduction of cages were stipulated. Then Titian Hutagalung (Samosir, 23 April 2023) also said that their family used to have marine cages, but they had been dismantled after the government banned this practice.

One of the corporations engaged in fisheries in Lake Toba is PT. Aquafarm Nusantara. This company received a license to cultivate freshwater fish using Lake Toba water. Lake Toba's water pollution has long been a topic of conversation in the community and has received attention from various groups of people. Panjaitan's study concluded that the remains of fish feed that was spread left waste in the form of nitrogen weighing 6.42 tons and 2.26 phosphorus every day which settles to the bottom of Lake Toba (Panjaitan, 2009:290-300). These nitrogen and phosphorus compounds have the potential to threaten the Lake Toba ecosystem. The author sees that there are demands from several community groups that love Lake Toba to encourage this company to be closed.

Rocky Pasaribu, as the coordinator of the KSPPM Study and Advocacy Division (Siborongborong, 07 July 2023) said there were five potential hazards caused by ecological damage in Batak Land, namely: First, water availability: KSPPM assisted communities in various regions experiencing difficulty accessing water clean. Second, the deprivation of space: animals that have lost their habitat due to massive deforestation, eventually come to look for food in people's gardens. This causes the community to work both in the day and at night to look after their gardens. Third, changes in the economic space: many people have changed their agricultural system from perennials to pulses which are very dependent on fertilizers and pesticides. Fourth, women's double burden: the community assisted by KSPPM in the corporate concession area means that it is not enough for women to just work in the fields or paddy fields, but they have to source water in a river which is quite far from where they live.

Ecological Liberation based on Boff and KSPPM Insights

Ecological spirituality is a Christian theological discourse that is oriented towards strengthening the basis of ecological recovery. Ecological spirituality seeks to find the roots of caring for and restoring the earth based on Christian theology. Ecological spirituality is expected to encourage ecological imperatives that manifest as nature-friendly practices. If the collective movement for ecological recovery takes root and grows in the churches, it will become stronger and be inherent in one's spiritual growth.

Spirituality is not just a word that describes one's spirituality, but it also has a broader dimension. Edwards formulated the notion that Christian spirituality is a journey in the middle of the earth. The journey to follow Christ in the 21st century must involve the ecological discourse which includes new perspectives, ways of thinking, and actions in various aspects of life (Edwards, 2011:108). Then Banawiratma said that spirituality is a way of going on a pilgrimage to become a friend of God. He quoted the idea of Francis Assisi that spirituality is not a teaching that can come out of anyone's mouth. Spirituality based on the Gospel, the person of Christ, the Son of God who became human, and who in His Spirit walks with mother earth and all that is in it (Banawiratma, 2017:14). The idea that affirms that being God's friend and loving Him, means living a spirituality that embraces the earth and all of creation as a responsibility of faith in the world created by God and bequeathed to humanity.

Ecological spirituality is a deep theological reflection from Boff on his concern for ecological damage. Ecological spirituality is a living principle and a feeling of respect for the earth. Boff invites people to understand and actualize the value of feeling, loving, and thinking as earth (Boff, 1997:10-11). Boff emphasizes the importance of being aware of our existence in the middle of the universe. Then he invites us to be in solidarity with the body (earth) in all conditions. The body is part of the world in which we live, the human body is formed from the



dust of the ground (Boff, 1997: 2-4). This means that humans must realize themselves as part of the ecosystem of life on this earth. Humans were created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1: 26-27). Humans who are similar to and are created in the image of God should bear the responsibility in carrying out the task of caring for and restoring the earth from its wounds or suffering caused by human misconduct.

Boff describes four stages of eco-theological liberation, namely: First, the need to experience the 'screams' of the poor. Second, carrying out a logical analysis of ecological crimes or sins and their various causative factors. Third, pro-active involvement and transformational action that organizes or repairs structures that cause ecological sin. Fourth, celebrating and giving thanks to the poor and all of creation (Boff, 1997:10-11). Boff offers a new paradigm or perspective, namely liberation eco-theology. Eco-theology must become a movement that liberates the universe and the poor. This idea aims to unravel the relationship between theology and ecology, as well as establishing a track record in the discourse on eco-theological liberation.

The current fact of ecological damage requires new ideas in building positive relations between creatures. Boff promotes a new paradigm that posits the atonement with Jesus Christ and the ecological crisis that is destroying the world. Ecology must become an integral part of Christian theology and offer a new perspective on the relationship between humans and the earth (Boff, 1995:89). The sacrifice of Christ who was crucified and suffered for the redemption of the world (John 3:16) should be a spirit for the Christian community to initiate cross-faith and cultural cooperation to save the earth. Simangunsong said the church is responsible for building an eco-literacy movement as a manifestation of faith in the context of ecological damage (Simangunsong, 2021:262-275).

Boff proposes ecological – social – democracy (Boff, 1995:84). This idea as a new form of democratic life that is currently developing along with other forms, both universally and integratively in managing people's lives. Ecology is related to the relationship between human beings and the environment in which they live. The important principles based on ecological-social-democracy are: First, humans must go beyond the deep anthropocentric views attached to Western culture and affirmed in the Jewish and Christian traditions. Boff says this is a model of aggression against the universe (Boff, 1995:85-86). Second, ecological reflection can help people understand the journey of human life as an integral part of nature and the biosphere, not the center of life in this world. Through the character of its moral entity, humans are able to assume responsibility for preserving the earth and promoting all forms of life, especially oppressed groups (Boff, 1995:86-87). Third, humans must accept the reality of the existence of other creations. Everything, whether alive or has value attached to it and all of it has the right to live and exist in this world (Boff, 1995:87-88). This idea remained us of the intrinsic value inherent in all creation.

Fourth, social ecology is related to ecological justice. Poor people find it difficult to get something they really need to survive amid the exploitation of nature. Poverty is seen through the lack of infrastructure and a dignified life, such as: air pollution, poisoned water, unhealthy life, transportation pollution, and social violence. Ideally social justice should go hand in hand with ecological justice (Boff, 1995:88-89). Fifth, the discussion on environmental rights must be expanded to include poor people, including communities experiencing other threats (Boff, 1995:89-90). The implementation of the five principles above can only be realized if the religious community synergizes in conducting ecological education so that people learn how to live side by side with all creation.

The practice of liberating the oppressed in Batak Land was carried out by KSPPM. KSPPM's concern and alignment with the environment is the implementation of the principle of ecological liberation which should be the responsibility of the churches. The essence of Christian diaconia



must be understood as an opportunity for us to be used by God through His Spirit to bring all of creation towards the kingdom of God. This call must be responded to through ways of thinking, speaking, and acting as God's partner in realizing His kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. Christian diaconia must be interpreted as a willingness to limit and give oneself (kenosis) by making room for others through the act of self-emptying. *Kenosis*, meaning to empty or empty, is a term in Christian theology that talks about the concept of self-emptying based on the word *ekenocent* (Philippians 2:7). This text shows the apostle Paul's warning to the community of believers in the Philippians to put thoughts and feelings that are also in Jesus Christ.

The concept of self-emptying in Christianity was originally associated with dogmatic discourse. Changes in society encourage the dynamics of theology in responding to world struggles. Doncel suggests that the Christian idea of *kenosis* is based on a verse in the book of Philippians. Nowadays *kenosis* is applied in Christian theology which is associated with God the Creator which brings a shift in the emphasis on the concept of God from absolute power to absolute love (Doncel, 2006:5-13). This idea bears a resemblance to God's word in 1 John. 4:8 about God is love. Atkinson interprets *kenosis* as self-emptying which must be followed by respecting others (Atkinson, 2015:115-121). According to McFague, the essence of the whole story of Jesus Christ's life is *kenosis*, self-emptying, in order that He may live with us and for others (McFague, 2013:84). The ideas of the above experts emphasize that one of the important dimensions of Christ's *kenosis* is respect for others. This means that God's *kenosis* must be interpreted as a human *kenosis*. Human *kenosis* pays homage to all of God's creation.

The existence of Jesus as the Messiah contains three important principles, namely: First, liberation for prisoners of war, because the Gospel is interpreted as a proclamation of liberation from shackles. Second, restoration or vision for blind people, because the presence of Jesus Christ brings a paradigm shift towards a better order. Third, the coming of Jesus Christ brings the proclamation of the year of God's grace. The presence of God through His Son confirms God's willingness to make peace with the world (Latumahina, 2013:111-124). Jesus' words in this text emphasize that the Messiah's ministry is not just talking about the kingdom of God, but rather bringing liberation theology to the poor and oppressed and caring for creation.

KSPPM consistently lives out the theology of liberation by providing assistance to indigenous peoples in the Batak Lands. Naomi Simarmata as a pastor and KSPPM activist (Tarutung, 17 June 2023) explained that Luke 4:18-21 was the text that inspired KSPPM. The Gospel of Luke encourages KSPPM to be pro-active in carrying out their duties and responsibilities in preaching the good news/salvation to the poor and oppressed communities. KSPPM believes God accompanies them with His Spirit to liberate oppressed and marginalized communities. It is interesting to provide a review of Luke, a text that is full of transformative-liberative diaconia efforts in the midst of a world that has a relationship with the Creator. Rocky Pasaribu (Siborongborong, 07 July 2023) emphasizes that Mark 1:15 and Luke 4:18-21 are the biblical basis for KSPPM's struggle to present God's kingdom on earth.

KSPPM also provided assistance to the people in Batak land to fight back by rejecting the presence of PT. TPL for carrying out the wrong policy by grabbing people's land. The Batak people offer cultural resistance which is carried out openly and face to face. KSPPM's movements with the people demanding their rights has led to accusations that KSPPM was anti-development so that the authoritarian regime of the Soeharto government dissolved it officially. Even though the capitalists and the government put pressure and threats on the people and KSPPM, they still fight for their rights (BA. Simanjuntak, 2008:426-460). KSPPM consistently strives to accompany liberation actions in Batak Lands.

KSPPM's transformative diaconia does not only provide assistance in various actions for the struggle for the rights of indigenous peoples, but KSPPM is also pro-active in providing



assistance to create community self-reliance in Batak Land, such as: First, building a movement of sovereign farmers (ST. Situmorang, 2008:440-441). KSPPM carries out a movement that is oriented to developing the initiatives of farmers, and empowering them to change oppressive systems. Assistance is carried out through critical education and building independent farmer groups and building access in various domains, such as: economics, culture and politics. Second, assistance in the manufacture of natural pesticides. Natural pesticides aim to reduce farmers' dependence on chemical pesticides which have the potential to cause disease and damage soil chemical elements. The farmers were trained to use leaves and various plants around the village as natural pesticide ingredients. Third, building credit unions or cooperatives. This aims to increase the community's ability to manage finances and prevent farmers from being trapped or dependent on middlemen or capitalists. Fourth, provision of livestock seeds. Rocky Pasaribu and Darwin Manullang (Siborongborong, 07 July 2023) argues that the institutions that should contribute to protecting the environment are churches, universities, and the government.

Eco-Ecclesiological Liberation: Defending Earth against the 'Cunning Enemy'

Boff and KSPPM's ecological thoughts and practices show deep concern for ecological damage, the poor, and the oppressed. The oppressed group is a reality that has always existed in the middle of the earth. Matthew 26: 11 reads: "because you always have the poor with you..." From an ecological perspective, the poor in this text can be broadly interpreted as the victims. Jesus set an example of caring and helping people who suffer, people who are looked down upon, and people who are marginalized, Jesus also said he would take them into account. His words: "...indeed, everything you did for one of the least of these my brothers, you did for Me (Matthew 25:40). This text calls on the church to show concern and support for oppressed and suffering communities. Responsibly fulfilling vocations is an integral part of the church's existence (Simangunsong et al., 2021:262-275). The Christian community is called to carry out a transformative diaconia that transcends and penetrates barriers. The church must expand its ministry mandate to answer the struggles of all creation. Since the time of the prophet Jeremiah there have been problems. In Jeremiah 2:7 we read "And I brought you into a plentiful land to enjoy its fruits and its good things. But when you came in, you defiled my land and made my heritage an abomination"- we have a duty to care for what God has provided for us.

Solidarity with the oppressed can be reflected in the spirit of Boff's liberation eco-theology and KSPPM's ecological praxis. Enjoying the pilgrimage of life with indigenous peoples and nature, who often become victims of natural management policies, this is often in the name of development for the sake of the people, but in reality they sacrifice nature and local communities to satisfy the desires of the owners of capital who are protected by the authorities. KSPPM's persistence in advocating for indigenous peoples and nature in the Batak Lands is a liberating play of faith.

The struggle with indigenous peoples has been successful. Some indigenous peoples have reclaimed their customary lands through a long process. KSPPM and indigenous peoples have held meetings and negotiations with relevant state apparatus. The handing back of 7,200 hectares of land/huta to indigenous peoples in Batak Land is a partial form of success. The indigenous peoples received it directly from Joko Widodo, the President of the Republic of Indonesia. According to Rocky Pasaribu, the struggle is based on the local wisdom of the Batak people themselves. In fact, the Toba Batak people have a very interesting philosophy about land, where the ancestors of the Batak people formulated a view about land, that: "*tano na marmarga - marga na martano*" means no land without a clan and no clan without land in the context of society Batak.



The church has a strategic role in the movement for change in the Batak Land, including the preservation of the natural environment. According to Lumbangaol (Siborongborong, 07 July 2023) KSPPM realized the strategic role of the church in building processions in protecting and restoring nature. The church's important contribution is felt in the struggle of indigenous peoples in the Batak Land. The church really functions as a center for organizing people's struggles. Church pulpits are used by church leaders to increase the spirit and fighting power of the community. Then the action plans for the struggle are conveyed through congregational newsletters and the church really becomes an information center. However, KSPPM has recently seen that the church seems reluctant to get involved or take part in the mentoring processes carried out by KSPPM. Finally, the information center shifted to roadside stalls and social media, especially the whatsapp group.

The church's ecological praxis is expected to increase the congregation's ecological awareness and involvement in conserving nature and making public policies related to ecological issues (Setyawan, 2021:91-107). The portrait of ecological damage in Batak Land is an undeniable fact. The cause is unlimited and unethical management of nature. This model of human-nature relations gives rise to exploitative actions. The community of faith should open up, embrace, and bind up the wounds of this earthly 'sister' who is hurting and screaming in pain. Based on the analysis by KSPPM researchers, the Christian community should serve themselves on the ground as it were, not just by mere rhetoric. The church should be present and act to bandage the wounds of the earth as a concrete manifestation of its alignment with the oppressed. This act of solidarity reminds us of the words of Christ: "Truly I say to you: what you did to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me" (Matthew 25:40). This means that KSPPM's struggle in protecting the earth and advocating for indigenous peoples is an action desired by Jesus Christ as the head of the Church.

The existence of KSPPM is an inseparable part of the faith community. They should have the support of the churches in the Batak Lands. The church doesn't need to feel inferior studying with KSPPM to build the church as an ecological community. The church must use theological methods by utilizing an interdisciplinary approach from the contributions of other sciences as partners in equal dialogue towards right practice. This means that Christian theology is not the only source of critical reflection on the reality and experience of faith. Perrin said that theology is an unwavering commitment to man's relationship with God and his presence in the world. Having theology means actively seeking the manifestation of God's unexpected presence and acting transformatively in all dimensions of life (Perrin, 2007:18-19). The struggle of KSPPM to provide assistance to indigenous peoples to maintain the existence of forests as a source of life and as an effort to present the kingdom of God in the Batak Land.

Nicolaides (2010) argues that we are custodians of the earth, our God-given gift as His *Ecclesia* (Church) and we have an obligation to care for what we are blessed with. "The 'people of God' are the *pleroma* of the church, or the congregation of God's people" (Nicolaides, 2010:2) and have a duty to care for mother earth. Psalm 24:1 says "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein", so we need to look after it.

Earth's groans call on the church to carry out interactions and collaborative cross-faith and cultural work programs to promote and increase awareness and the importance of taking part in concrete actions for ecological restoration in the Batak Lands. What KSPPM has done has is to identify itself as the guardian of the earth in the Batak Lands and this approach can be used as an inspiration and serve as a dialogue partner for churches in this region. Setyawan has stated that the responsibility and mission of the church as an ecological community in ecological restoration is a crucial aspect that must be realized by the church (Setyawan, 2021:91-107).



Conclusions: Defending Earth as Church Responsibility

Boff's ideas and KSPPM's ecological praxis show partiality towards nature and the oppressed. Boff and KSPPM showed their commitment and consistency through the struggle of their thoughts and actions. A struggle inspired by love The Rescue seeks to embrace and empower nature and communities affected by ecological destruction. What Boff and KSPPM have done is in essence a representation of responsible faith. The church must be responsible for helping the poor and oppressed to struggle to release the yoke that shackles life (Isaiah 58:6-7). This text must be interpreted in a new way according to the current context and reflecting people's experiences and ecological damage in the context of Batak Land ecological destruction.

Eco-ecclesiology is the embodiment of a fluid and down-to-earth church in giving support and urgency as well as responsibility for the current phenomenon of ecological damage to be addressed. The church must use the teachings in its various pulpits to proclaim salvation to all of creation, not just relating to humans. The church must proclaim and teach the gospel which is liberating and which invites and involves everyone in actions to save the earth. Every element of creation has intrinsic and symbolic value, and is a teaching principle that must be respected by the church and needs to be stated in sermons and various categorical services of the church. The church also needs to design worship in ecological nuances in various cosmic celebrations in order to internalize the liberating values of ecological spirituality.

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