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BOOK REVIEW – INTEGRAL ECOLOGY MINISTRY: DOING ECOLOGICAL THEOLOGY AND ADVOCACY IN LIGHT OF *LAUDATO SI'*

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Book Title: Integral Ecology Ministry: Doing Ecological Theology and Advocacy in Light of *Laudato Si'*

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Author: Fr. Reynaldo D. Raluto

An old philosophical riddle asks the question, "which came first, the chicken or the egg?" By now, science – particularly evolutionary biology - has settled the question (read: the egg came first!) Nevertheless, this same riddle continues to challenge our thinking. Its value lies not in the answer it proposes; rather, it is the *questioning* that exposes dichotomies and binary distinctions so characteristic of the modern – and Western – mindset, including the theological enterprise.

Fr. Reynaldo (Rey) Raluto's latest *opus* serves as a beacon set against the backdrop of dichotomized and polarizing discourse on climate issues and ecological theology. The book's title is itself already a statement of what the author would like to offer: *Integral Ecology Ministry: Doing Ecological Theology and Advocacy in Light of Laudato Si'* (2025). This collection of Fr. Rey's published journal/academic articles and short

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reflections provides a wealth of theological reflections and pastoral insights from one of the country's foremost ecological theologians and environmental advocates.

The book's two parts delineate two facets of the *integral* ecological ministry. Part One is an exposition of the rich ecological theology framework borne through Fr. Rey's dialogue and reflections from the fertile ground of *Laudato Si'*. Part Two proceeds as the logical – and even, providential – consequence of any mature theological reflection: as advocacy and movement towards liberation, so dear and personal to Fr. Rey's priestly ministry and life. In both parts of the book, the operative word is *doing*. Yet "doing" here, as wont in dichotomized and binary thinking, has never been opposed to "being." Reading the articles in this book, one can find how both the *doing* of ecological theology and ecological advocacy express that "sublime communion" (to borrow a key term in the book's opening article) between theory and praxis. With the prevailing discourse on climate issues and ecological theology, this integral vision offers a potent antidote to the all-too-common temptation of reductionism. This work stays true to the spirit of *Laudato Si'*: "everything is interconnected" – especially theological reflection and advocacy!

On a more personal note, I can say that this book has already been written long before it was transcribed and published. The wealth of reflections and insights offered by Fr. Rey were first lived realities nurtured, challenged, and refined from the many years of teaching theology in the seminary, engaging with the marginalized Indigenous Peoples of Malaybalay, and working with and for Basic Ecclesial Communities of Mindanao and the rest of the country. The images included in this book are not just mere aesthetic or pictorial addenda; they speak of the actual history and the faces of engagements and struggles which a true integral ecology ministry entail. Working with Fr. Rey for many years at St. John Vianney Theological Seminary has provided myself – and the whole community of formator-priests, seminarians, co-missionaries, and partners in the apostolates – an integral view of ecological ministry lived reflexively, faithfully, and joyfully.

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Let it be clarified: this book is not another intimidating scholarly tome on a subject as complex as ecological theology, climate science, and Christian anthropology. The book may be viewed more properly as a kind of spiritual journal detailing Fr. Rey's heart as a theologian, priest, formator, companion, pastor, crusader, ecological advocate, mountain climber, tree grower, and many more.

I take note of Chapter 21 in Part Two, which stands out among the whole volume – particularly for its language, content, and intended audience (My only contention is that an English translation could have been provided for the benefit of non-Cebuano speakers – so that they can appreciate more Fr. Rey's "pastoral heart" exposed in this book!). Nevertheless, this must have been a deliberate choice. Contextual theology reminds us that the language-culture dynamic serves as another *locus theologicus* so essential in theologizing, including engagement in an Integral Ecology Ministry. Or to speak the language of *Laudato Si'*: "the indigenous communities and their cultural traditions…are not merely one cultural minority among others, but should be the principal dialogue partners" (no. 146). In this regard, the book has much to show and teach us.

In the very last page of the book, we are faced with a question: to move or to remain? This summarizes the whole impetus of this book. The concern is not a matter of resolving a philosophical riddle. There is no priority or mutual exclusivity between doing and being, moving or remaining. Fr. Rey begins by grounding us in the gift of communion and eventually leads us to ecological conversion and transition to integral ecology. This is not a question of what or which comes first. It is only a matter of moving forward as the Church's – and the earth's – synodal march continues. Echoing the continuing appeal *Laudate Deum*: "I ask everyone to accompany this pilgrimage of reconciliation with the world that is our home and to help make it more beautiful, because that commitment has to do with our personal dignity and highest values" (no. 69).

This book challenges us: our ecological commitment to integral ecology cannot remain half-hearted. We can only press onward *doing ecological theology and advocacy in light of Laudato Si'*!