

# Indigenous Liberation Theology and Spirituality: Looking to the Past for Answers in the Present

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## **Abstract**

Pope Francis's *Laudato si': On the Care of Our Common Home* offers a framework for dealing with poverty, ecological degradation, and climate change in the Philippines. His interconnected and holistic ecological spirituality shares some commonalities with indigenous spirituality where the earth is a gift from God to be taken care of—not taken advantage of or taken for granted. In this paper, we explore how this integrated approach of indigenous spirituality and liberation theology offers some long-term solutions to the problems of poverty and climate-change. Taking the position of being politically engaged in the world accords well with indigenous spirituality, this

political engagement is thereby defined by loving and taking care of all of God's creation. Diametrically opposing this political engagement to political opportunism—attempts to maintain power and influence without regard for ethical or political principles—views human and non-human sentient animals and all living life forms as interconnected and sacred. A brief explanation of climate change in the Philippine context suggests the idea of rekindling a love for “earth houses”—a term earlier coined by the Egyptian architect, Hassan Fathy (1900–1989). Fathy envisioned earth homes as an affordable way to house the poor, heal, and give new life to the natural environment.

**Keywords:** *Earth Architecture, Ecumenical Movement, Ecological Liberation Theology, Climate Change Disasters, Indigenous Spirituality, Sustainable Development*

## Introduction

Pope Francis's love for the poor and embrace of ecological liberation theology resonates strongly with core sacred beliefs and practices of indigenous spirituality. The term ecological liberation theology (eco-liberation theology) was defined in the early 1980s, by Leonardo Boff,<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Leonardo Boff, “Liberation Ecology,” interview by Allen White, *Great Transition*, August 2016, <http://www.greattransition.org/publication/liberation-ecology>.

who, among others, wrote about the close connection between the exploitation of the poor and the exploitation of the earth. He explained that eco-liberation theology envisions a new paradigm that is rooted in cosmology, biology, and complexity theory. Eco-liberation theology considers humans and every other living creature made by God to be connected with each other and the environment. They generally view the exploitation of poor people and the natural world, in large part, as a remnant of a past colonial mentality and the contemporary acquisitive mindset of consumer-oriented and for-profit capitalists. Liberation theology is based on faith in a God who acts in history. As in Philippine theologies of struggle, an interchangeable term, liberation theology is more a *praxis* (practice) than stagnant theory. Practitioners develop their theology by learning, dialectically, from the situation of the poor.<sup>2</sup>

Pope Francis, in his eco-liberation theology approach, calls us to see the natural environment—forest and plant life, human and non-human sentient animals (land and sea life)—as beings in and of the sacred, much like the approach to the meaning of life of indigenous cultural communities, who behold nature as “a sacred space with which they need to interact if they are to maintain their identity and values.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Kathleen Nadeau, *Liberation Theology in the Philippines, Faith in a Revolution* (Westport, Connecticut and London: Praeger Press, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> Francis, *Laudato si'*, encyclical letter, Vatican website, May 24, 2015, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html), sec. 149.

The pope explains that human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbor, especially the poor, and with the earth itself.<sup>4</sup> The poor, living in an “unstable neighborhood” or informal settlements in the mega-cities, are not just objects of pity, but subjects of learning for our children. Their conditions “are able to weave bonds of belonging and togetherness which convert overcrowding into an experience of community in which the walls of the ego are torn down and the barriers of selfishness overcome.”<sup>5</sup> Our children can learn in the rural farms of the Philippines and can imbibe the belief that the earth is essentially a shared inheritance, whose fruits are meant to benefit everyone. For believers, this becomes a question of fidelity to the Creator, precisely because God created the world for all. Hence, every ecological approach needs to incorporate a social perspective that takes into account the fundamental rights of the poor and the underprivileged.<sup>6</sup> These children will learn that “the Spirit of life dwells in every living creature and calls us to enter into relationship with God”<sup>7</sup> and realize that “nature is a constant source of wonder and awe. It is also a continuing revelation of the divine.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Francis, *Laudato si'*, sec. 149.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 66.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 93.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 88.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 85.

## Indigenous Spirituality

When Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio became Pope Francis, he took the name Francis, “after Francis of Assisi, the man of poverty, the man of peace, the man who loves and protects creation.”<sup>9</sup> This is a created world that “we do not have such a good relationship with,” stated Pope Francis in his inaugural address at Saint Peter’s Square.<sup>10</sup> During his first homily given at the Mass of the Petrine Ministry, the newly elected pope elaborated on our human calling to protect and love creation and work tirelessly for a compassionate and just (more equitable and fair) global society for our children and all God’s creatures, large and small, for future generations to come:

The vocation of being a “protector,” however, is not just something involving us Christians alone; it also has a prior dimension which is simply human, involving everyone. It means protecting all creation, the beauty of the created world, as the Book of Genesis tells us and as Saint Francis of Assisi showed us. It means respecting each of God’s creatures and respecting the environment

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<sup>9</sup> Cindy Wooden, “Pope Francis Explains Why He Chose St. Francis of Assisi’s Name,” *Catholic News Services* (March 17, 2013), no. 3, accessed December 4, 2017, <http://www.catholicnews.com/services/englishnews/2013/pope-francis-explains-why-he-chose-st-francis-of-assisi-s-name.cfm>.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

in which we live. It means protecting people, showing loving concern for each and every person, especially children, the elderly, those in need, who are often the last we think about. It means caring for one another in our families: husbands and wives first protect one another, and then, as parents, they care for their children, and children themselves, in time, protect their parents. It means building sincere friendships in which we protect one another in trust, respect, and goodness. In the end, everything has been entrusted to our protection, and all of us are responsible for it. Be protectors of God's gifts!<sup>11</sup>

One of the early founding Latin American liberation theologians, Leonardo Boff, remarked that the “pope chose Francis not just as a name but, rather, as a plan for the Church that is poor, simple, gospel-centered, and devoid of all power.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Francis, “Full Text of Pope Francis’s Inauguration Homily,” *Catholic Herald* (March 19, 2013), no. 6, accessed November 11, 2018, <https://catholicherald.co.uk/news/2013/03/19/full-text-of-pope-franciss-inauguration-homily/>.

<sup>12</sup> Wen Stephenson, “How Pope Francis Came to Embrace Not Just Climate Change Justice but Liberation Theology, And How That Poses a Radical Challenge to Both Climate Change Deniers and Mainstream Liberals,” *The Nation* (September 9, 2015), no. 7, accessed December 4, 2018, <https://www.thenation.com/article/how-pope-francis-came-to-embrace-not-just-climate-justice-but-liberation-theology/>.

Pope Francis is the first pope in history to speak truth to power at a joint session of the United States Congress in 2015 when, standing up for justice, he declared:

Government leaders must do everything possible to ensure that all can have a minimum spiritual and material means needed to live in dignity and to create and support a family, which is the primary call of any social development. In practical terms, this absolute minimum has three names: lodging, labor, and land; and one spiritual name: spiritual freedom, which includes religious freedom and the right to education and other civil rights.<sup>13</sup>

He then argued with great eloquence against the logic of arms proliferation: “war is the negation of all rights and a dramatic assault on the environment.”<sup>14</sup> He defended those people being pushed to the fringes of society by war and other man-made disasters, as well as natural disasters, by saying, “our common home must be built on a foundation of respect for the sacredness of every human life . . . [which] must also be built on the understanding of a certain sacredness of created nature.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Tony Magliano, “Pope Francis Speaks Truth to Power.” *National Catholic Reporter, An Independent News Source* (September 28, 2015), accessed December 4, 2017, <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/making-difference/pope-francis-speaks-truth-power>.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

One way of understanding Pope Francis's message that the church has a spiritual nature—not a political one—while simultaneously speaking this truth from his political position as a world leader, is from an indigenous spirituality perspective. Beck and Walters, in their study of Navajo religion, explained that it is impossible to define everything definitively from an indigenous spirituality perspective and to do so can even be potentially harmful.<sup>16</sup> In other words, one of the common aims of sacred ways of seeking knowledge is not necessarily to explain everything but, rather, to guide the student and teacher alike through the mysteries of the cosmos and the unknown. Sacred ways of seeking knowledge means to recognize that we do not know everything and that life lessons may come through experiences that we can relate to and learn from 'in nature': A child can feel and experience God's love in the world through gardening, as plants unfold over time with loving care.

Western social science approaches, by contrast, often use an analytical and reductionist method as opposed to the more intuitive and holistic perspective found in traditional knowledge. From an indigenous spirituality viewpoint, the religious or spiritual aspect is not separated from the scientific aspect of society. In other words, to do science

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<sup>16</sup> Peggy Beck and Anna Walters, *The Sacred, Ways of Knowledge, Sources of Life* (Tsaile, Arizona: Navajo Community College, 1977).

from an indigenous perspective means to observe animals and other living life forms in their natural settings and learn from them, while taking their needs—not just one’s own—into account. Luther Standing Bear, author of *My Indian Boyhood*, discussed, among other examples, how ‘his people’ (the Oglala Lakota) would not consider putting a heavy saddle on their horses for the sake of their own comfort, rather they, traditionally, used blankets and would walk with their horses when the horses were tired. Indigenous knowledge takes a holistic perspective much like that of traditional Chinese healers, who consider the whole person when treating someone and not just the injured body part. They developed acupuncture, which uses many of the same techniques today as it did thousands of years ago. Ancient Chinese healers and keepers of medicinal knowledge, for example, learned that stingers of blowfish caused paralysis and that by putting pressure behind certain gills it caused the fish to blow up. This inspired them to identify corresponding acupuncture points in the human body.

Everything is intertwined, not departmentalized, as we live our lives holistically and do our work with sensitivity, respecting the dignity of others, including other non-human sentient animals and life forms and the natural environment. Doing science from an indigenous spirituality perspective takes a holistic approach to solving the problems of our times. From an indigenous spirituality perspective, nature,

and all that lives within her, is a sacred and holy domain. The indigenous spirituality perspective used here should not be mistaken with that of pantheism. While pantheism, typically, embraces nature spirits and many gods and goddesses, the kind of indigenous spirituality that we are referring to recognizes, at root, the existence of only one God, who is one in all and all in one—an all-encompassing God who is genderless and larger than our limited human understanding. To use a Hindu story, prayer is like the rain, which falls in many droplets that flow into one ocean for all the different ways people pray around the world, ultimately, go only to one God.

The capitalist culture of the dominant society in the Philippines that objectifies and commodifies nature for profit starkly contrasts local indigenous and traditional cultures, each being a unique culture, yet sharing a common view that nature and life, in all its manifest and diverse expressions, is sacred. Indigenous wisdom keepers such as the traditional Aeta shamans and healers of the Philippines, are creative and innovative thinkers and scientists in their own right, who are using a non-Western scientific approach to problem solving. Aeta leaders were earlier hired by the U.S. military at Clark Airbase, before it closed down after the horrific eruption of Mount Pinatubo, to teach American soldiers how to survive in the jungle. These soldiers were taught such skills as recognizing herbal medicinal plants and edibles, reading footprints made by animals, including

human animals, and recognizing their smells. In Philippine tropical forests during World War II (1939–1945) and later in the jungles of Vietnam during the American-Vietnam war (1955–1975), many U.S. soldiers managed to return home alive, thanks to their Aeta teachers. Without doing untoward harm to any living creature other than eating those for which life depended and not taking more than that which was needed to survive, indigenous male and female wisdom keepers are at present the ones to whom local people turn to for healing and advise on how to adapt to change, crises, and the unexpected.

In liberation theologies around the world, a preferential inclusion of indigenous beliefs and practices becomes yet another meeting of the horizons for interpreting the significance of indigenous spirituality. According to Father Jojo Fung, S.J.,

Indigenous peoples form a majority of the many poor who subscribe to many world religions but a substantial number of them adhere to the primal religions. This ancient civilization is represented by a complex system of beliefs that has been termed indigenous shamanism, primal and traditional religions, and indigenous spirituality in theology. Engaging with the ever-resilient primal religions represents yet another moment of

‘bursting in’ of a subaltern people in the theological landscape.<sup>17</sup>

Pope Francis, in his address, “Meeting with the Indigenous Peoples of Amazonia,” at Puerto Maldonado, Peru, on January 19, 2018, affectionately called indigenous people “the heart of the church,”<sup>18</sup> and bowed his head for their blessing, saying, “we need your wisdom and knowledge to enable us to enter into, without destroying, the treasures that this region holds. Upon meeting you, we can hear an echo of the words spoken by the Lord to Moses, ‘remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground’ (Exodus 3:5).”<sup>19</sup>

Pope Francis’s eco-liberation theology also resonates with post-enlightenment secular notions of social justice, as exemplified by Woodrow Wilson’s vision of the post-World War I world, which helped bring about the 1920 founding of the League of Nations. Wilson’s approach to telling history,

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<sup>17</sup> Jojo M. Fung, “An Asian Liberation Theology of Sacred Sustainability, a Local Theology in Dialogue with Indigenous Shamanism,” *Asian Horizons* 4, no.2 (2010): 1.

<sup>18</sup> Associated Press, “Pope Tells Indigenous People of the Amazon, You are the Heart of the Church,” *Boston Globe* (January 19, 2018), no. 1, accessed November 14, 2018, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/news/world/2018/01/19/pope-tells-indigenous-people-amazon-heart-church/ILdEKGRqwzmhWxK7nDIO4O/story.html>.

<sup>19</sup> Pope Francis, “Meeting with Indigenous People of Amazonia,” Papal address, Coliseo Regional Madre de Dios (Puerto Maldonado), January 19, 2018, accessed November 14, 2018, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2018/january/documents/papa-francesco\\_20180119\\_peru-puertomaldonado-popoliamazonia.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2018/january/documents/papa-francesco_20180119_peru-puertomaldonado-popoliamazonia.html).

consisting of listening to the individual stories of people whose voices are seldom heard by the powerful, finds some reference as well with non-dogmatic and creative approaches to the study of social life. This is illustrated in the post-Vietnam War work of the American anthropologist, Eric Wolf, who, in 1982, wrote *Europe and the People Without History*,<sup>20</sup> which may also be partly seen as an original synthesis of the French Marxist mode of production theories.

While some scholars dogmatically interpreted Karl Marx's mode of production theory to refer to the economy as the base, and all other aspects such as religion, art, education, and politics as the superstructure of society, the French Marxists argued to the contrary that in some societies the economic aspect was expressed through religion or the family. They argued that Marx's mode of production theory best not be used like a blueprint to understand social change. Rather, each cultural mode of production had to be looked at contextually in terms of the specific history and society in which it was grounded.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Eric Wolf, *Europe and a People Without History* (Berkeley: University of California, 1982).

<sup>21</sup> Kathleen Nadeau, "Marxist Anthropology," in *21<sup>st</sup> Century Anthropology, A Reference Handbook*, Vol. 1, ed. Birx (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2010), 473–479.

The pope's liberation theology and ecology formulated in *Laudato si'* has the potential to serve the world as a method, or theory, of interpretation recognizing humanity as part of the web of life—not as something separate from it—and humans as stewards responsible for the ongoing evolution of all life. It is to a discussion of some of the roots of the economic and ecological crisis in the Philippines, today, to which we now turn.

*The Present Economic and Ecological Crisis in the Philippines*

The Philippines is made up of 7,100 islands located in Southeast Asia. It is a developing country with a population of 105 million people.<sup>22</sup> Approximately, 26 percent of all Filipinos live in poverty.<sup>23</sup> The sea is an integral component of life in the islands, and more than 3 billion people live along the coastline or within 200 kilometers (125 miles) of one. The coastal population may double by 2025.<sup>24</sup> The Philippines was ranked, in 2018, among the top ten countries most at risk of experiencing future disasters in the Climate Change Index produced by *German Watch*.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Worldometers, *Population of the Philippines*, accessed December 4, 2017, <http://www.worldometers.info/world-population/population-by-country>.

<sup>23</sup> Philippine Statistics Authority, *Official Poverty Statistics of the Philippines: Full Year 2015* (Quezon City: Philippine Statistics Authority, 2016).

<sup>24</sup> World Watch Institute, "Harmonizing Population and Coastal Resources in the Philippines," *World Watch Magazine*, Vol. 17, No. 5 (September/October 2004): paragraph no. 4, accessed November 14, 2018. <http://www.worldwatch.org/node/558>.

<sup>25</sup> David Eckstein, Vera Künzel, and Laura Schäfer, *Global Climate Change Risk Index 2018: Who Suffers Most From Extreme Weather Events? Weather-related Loss*

Over the years, the islands have become more vulnerable and less prepared to deal with and prevent typhoon related disasters. Climate change is precipitating a new wave of super typhoons that are increasing in magnitude and occurring more frequently and unexpectedly from different pathways than before. Climate change-related disasters are largely caused by mal-development practices and the misuse of local resources that continue to eradicate the once ecologically and biologically rich protective forest cover that, in the past, better buffered local communities from strong winds, waves, and rains. The natural and organic fertility of the soils in the earlier ancient ecosystem had more deeply rooted plants and trees that played an immensely important role in preventing disasters from typhoons. Deep roots of plants and trees help to keep the soil in place, which effectively prevent flash floods and landslides, during the typhoon season. Before colonialism and modern globalization-and neo-liberalization, the Philippines, as a whole, was better prepared to successfully adapt to weather changes because its forests were still intact.

Father Reynaldo Raluto, in his pathbreaking 2015 *Poverty and Ecology at the Crossroads*, who is credited here for the following discussion, explained why present deforestation and poverty in the Philippines are making local communities

more vulnerable targets of climate change related disasters than before. While the Spanish colonial regime (1521–1898) cleared areas of trees to make way for its haciendas (plantations, mines, and factories), it was mainly the United States’ American colonial administration (1898–1946) that most dramatically denuded the Philippine forests. The United States’ colonial government designated some 84 percent of the Philippine forests as part of the public domain, without regard for the local people, whose identities and livelihoods were intertwined with the life flow and creatures of the wilderness and its rivers and seas. The American colonial forest policy was to rapidly and mindlessly cut as many trees as possible for export and sale on the international market, to meet the high demand for hardwood that was fueling the construction industry in the United States.<sup>26</sup>

During the postwar years (1950–1973), big logging concessions became more technologically advanced, and systematically cut the remaining forests. According to the *United Nation’s Food and Agriculture Organization*, only 40 percent of the Philippines’ total land area was covered with forest in 1963. Later on, the late President Ferdinand Marcos (1965–1986) gave out timber license agreements to

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<sup>26</sup> Reynaldo Raluto, *Poverty and Ecology at the Crossroads, Towards an Ecological Theology of Liberation in the Philippine Context* (Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2015), 25–26.

reward his cronies.<sup>27</sup> Many of the human and environmental tragedies that happened, during the Marcos era, then as now, could have been avoided if development practices were regulated.

Presently, local disasters occur whenever mudslides flow quickly down bare hills and over the surrounding communities. These common tragedies could be prevented, if only investment agents and developers were banned from rambunctiously bulldozing the mountains and hills of vegetative cover. Typically, they consequently dislodge the villagers residing there from their land and livelihoods, which, otherwise, would likely have deeply rooted plants and vegetative cover in tree lined areas to better prevent mudslides from happening to begin with. The rapid depletion of forested areas continues to seriously concern current environmentalists and conservationists. Philippine wilderness areas, with ecologically diverse and wild animals, insects, and plant species are in danger of becoming totally extinct. They continue to be diminished by on-going legal and illegal logging and mining concessions that pollute the environment and cause violent conflicts over land rights. The forests are also disappearing as a result of the increase in tree plantations (especially palm oil)<sup>28</sup> and overpopulation.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>28</sup> Jo Villaneuva, “Oil Palm Expansion in the Philippines, Analysis of Land Rights, Environment, and Food Security Issues,” *Oil Palm Expansion in Southeast Asia, Trends and Implications for Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples*

The reckless clearing away of everything green in the Philippines is aggravated and encouraged by current unsustainable construction and mal-development trends. The remaining green zones around cities and towns are being cleared faster of all vegetative life, as new housing suburbs and fancy gated communities, with large areas of rolling golf courses and recreation resorts for the better off, are becoming increasingly popular in a contemporary Philippines that is, at the same time, stricken by poverty, oppression, and pollution (water, land, and air). The national capital of Metro Manila, for the most part, is nearly treeless, and what little green areas remain are covered in soot, as mega shopping malls, old historic buildings, new skyscrapers, and makeshift housing structures keep rising upwards with air conditioner boxes protruding from windows over bare, congested, and badly polluted thoroughfares. The reality is that the present Philippines no longer exports hardwood to the international market. The *Philippine Forest Management Bureau* estimated that the once rich forests now cover about 7.17 million hectares or 24 percent of land area.<sup>30</sup> As Raluto argued in *Poverty and Ecology*

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(2011), *Forest Peoples Programme*, web: [www.forestpeoples.org](http://www.forestpeoples.org), and *Sawit Watch*, web: [www.sawitwatch.or.id](http://www.sawitwatch.or.id).

<sup>29</sup> Rhett Butler, "Philippines Environment," Mongabay, accessed July 17, 2019, <https://rainforests.mongabay.com/20philippines.htm>.

<sup>30</sup> Forest Management Bureau, *Philippine Forestry Outlook Study*, no. 6 (Bangkok: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2009), accessed November 14, 2018, <http://www.fao.org/3/am255e/am255e00.pdf>.

*at the Crossroads*, the on-going destruction of the last remaining forests and poverty are the real culprits that place the Philippines in danger of climate change disasters.<sup>31</sup>

There is a strong link between poverty and environmental degradation, which makes poor people more vulnerable to climate-change related disasters. They have livelihoods that require access to natural resources, such as fertile soil and clean water. Environmental deterioration will diminish their ability to meet their basic needs. As Broad and Cavanagh stated:

To live, poor people eat and sell the fish they catch or the crops they grow—and typically those who manage to subsist in this way do so with very little margin. Natural resource degradation often becomes a threatening crisis—a question of survival.<sup>32</sup>

#### *Disaster Relief Workers in the Ecumenical Movement*

Relief workers in the ecumenical movement of the Philippines are struggling today to organize local faith-based communities that are team-oriented to rebuild their lives and livelihoods. The ecumenical movement aims to promote worldwide Christian unity and cooperation. It seeks to recover the apostolic sense of the early Christian church for

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<sup>31</sup> Robin Broad and John Cavanagh, *Plundering Paradise: The Struggle for the Environment in the Philippines* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 814.

<sup>32</sup> Broad and Cavanagh, *Plundering Paradise*, 814.

unity in diversity.<sup>33</sup> Millions of coastal populations have lost everything as a result of the impact of typhoons. Most notoriously, the most powerful storm on record named Yolanda (also called Super Typhoon Haiyan) hit the Philippines on November 8, 2013. Damage from Yolanda was estimated at more than \$830 million. Twenty-one fishing provinces and over 145,000 fishermen were affected. The storm negatively impacted populations in 471 municipalities and 51 cities.<sup>34</sup>

The Philippine ecological theology and disaster relief movement at the intersections of the various and different cultural, religious, and atheistic human and environmental rights movements, reflects not only a strategy for more environmentally attuned reconstruction efforts that have the potential for better buffering and preventing future climate change related disasters from occurring, but also the right of local communities to take ownership of their decision-making and individual and cultural identities, as well as, collectively-inspired world views that differ from that of globalization coming down from above. Many organic intellectuals and local ecclesial community organizers believe that they can change the structural roots of poverty and

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<sup>33</sup> Matt Stefon, assoc. ed., "Ecumenism," Encyclopedia Britannica (2011), accessed March 17, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/ecumenism>.

<sup>34</sup> William Holden, Kathleen Nadeau, and Emma Porio, *Ecological Liberation Theology, Faith-Based Approaches to Poverty and Climate Change in the Philippines* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer Press, 2017), 20.

create communities oriented toward justice by working to change poor villages and neighborhoods into compassionate and collaborative self-help communities. Sometimes, a community organizer's role is to work with local people by holding workshops and networking to help individual members and the community, as a whole, to better identify and make the best possible use of all available resources that they otherwise may not have known about, or known how to access. They effectively learn how the system works and how to better work the system. By serving as role models, organizers make themselves available to answer any questions, review and comment on written applications and forms, and can interactively guide people on how to access and make the best use of appropriate resources.

Father Nathaniel Lerio, SSJV, of the Archdiocese of Cagayan de Oro, Northern Mindanao, explained that one of the important roles of the churches today is to facilitate community building for community resilience to climate change related disasters. His firsthand account described the impact of 2011 Typhoon Sendong on the Cagayan de Oro river basin area and one particular community that was vanquished—with whom he, subsequently, partnered with to help raise needed funds for relocation and rebuilding.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Kathleen Nadeau, "Eco-Theology and Gender Spirituality: Case for Climate Resilience in the Philippines," in *East Asian Pastoral Review* 51, no. 4 (2014): 363–371.

His account reminds us of how important authentic relationships of trust are for having resilient communities, participation in good governance, and environmentally sustainable development.

Top-down reconstruction efforts, without having a foundation of trust, may cause division within a community by marginalizing organized groups and their knowledge and expertise. Outside agencies and funding poured into the Philippines after it was hit by the notorious Typhoon Haiyan. Yet, aid used to bring in temporary housing structures sometimes only caused more suffering as not everyone was given shelter and many had to wait long periods for more permanent housing. Father Lerio's bottom up community-based approach in Cagayan de Oro, by contrast, illustrated how a community facilitator can build relationships of trust that empower traumatized people in the affected communities to work together to build a better life for themselves. They were able to produce well-constructed, good quality, and permanent homes within a reasonable time period.

*Indigenous Spirituality: Alternative for Rebuilding a Greener Philippines*

The disasters occasioned by climate change facilitate our humble recourse to indigenous spirituality. The indigenous communities believe that nature is sacred, suffused with the "spiritual powers," which sustain the earth and all life-

forms.<sup>36</sup> Thus the earth is “enspirited or divine.”<sup>37</sup> With its diverse and complex religious beliefs, sacred rituals, legends and myths, indigenous spirituality orients the communities to revere nature as a sacred web of interdependent interrelations.

In rural Philippine villages, which still have some traditional homes made of bamboo floors, weaved palm leaf sidings, and thatched roofs. Family houses made of natural materials in the upland areas of Cebu often are constructed on stilts. This is a practical design because food can be dropped below for the family pigs and chickens to feed on and raised houses reduce mosquito bites.<sup>38</sup> These traditional homes are lovely to behold as they accord well with scenic landscapes. They can also be inexpensively made and kept in good repair by the farmers who use materials available in the local environment and work together to help each other as neighbors.

Unfortunately, in the past, local people were taught by the American colonizers<sup>39</sup> to look down on their cultural identities

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<sup>36</sup> John Grim, “Native North American Worldviews and Ecology,” in *Worldviews and Ecology: Religion, Philosophy, and the Environment*, eds. Mary Evelyn Tucker and John A. Grim (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1994), 48–49.

<sup>37</sup> J. Baird Callicot, “Toward a Global Environmental Ethic,” in *Worldviews and Ecology: Religion, Philosophy, and the Environment*, eds. Mary Evelyn Tucker and John A. Grim (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1994), 32.

<sup>38</sup> Derek J. Charlwood, et. al, “Raised Houses Reduce Mosquito Bites,” *Malaria Journal* 45, no. 2 (2003): 1.

<sup>39</sup> The United States colonized the Philippines from 1898–1946. As explained by Mark Moberg in *Engaging Anthropological Theory*, published by Routledge Press in 2013, almost every anthropological volume published in the United States (and Britain) between 1879 and 1910, employed some kind

and traditional homes as being ‘primitive.’ But, in reality, they were more civilized and advanced from an indigenous spirituality and liberation theology perspective. Traditional earth houses were breezier, more beautiful, and naturally attuned to a tropical lifestyle than the homes with cement floors and tin roofs or the closed-in ‘American’ buildings that need to be cooled down by using highly inefficient and energy consuming A/Cs that really only serve to pollute the environment. The Philippines had unique architecture in the nineteenth and twentieth century that represented a fusion of the old and new (e.g., Bahay na Bato or Stone House). These Spanish Colonial houses are beautiful, appropriate for a tropical country like the Philippines, and are an updated and improved Bahay Kubo.<sup>40</sup>

These houses may hold a key to rebuilding happier, healthier, and more equitable communities of resilience for many of the world’s poor and those who have lost their home due to climate-change related disasters. Pope Francis, during his 2015 Philippine visit, reminded us that we are being called to immerse ourselves in the real world to begin the difficult work of rehabilitation and restructuring of

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of evolutionary scheme in which Anglo-Saxon cultures were marked ‘higher’ than non-white colonized parts of the world. The American colonial teachers indoctrinated local Filipino students to look down on their traditional way of life as being less than the so-called modern American way. For a synthesized discussion on US colonial rule and racism in the Philippines, see Nadeau 2008, 54–58; Weisman, “At Home with Mother Earth.”

<sup>40</sup> “Bahay Kubo” or Nipa Hut is a derivative from the Spanish term for a Cube House.

society to solve the interrelated problem of poverty, environmental degradation, and climate-change.

David Weisman documented that the earth house movement has grown increasingly more popular in some of the better off parts of the world such as in the wine country of central California and in parts of northern France. Building codes have been eased to allow for the construction of earth houses in France. For the case of California, building codes are more restrictive due to the dominance of the powerful cement industry. Still, some earth houses are being experimented with and built in the West in an effort to change people's views, around the world, about them. Indigenous communities, like the *pueblos* of New Mexico, have for centuries maintained their homes made of mud and clay. Earth houses may hold a key for solving the problems of climate change and housing the poor masses of the world.<sup>41</sup> They encourage more planting of trees, gardening, and the cleaning up of wastes—we need to stop using and producing plastics—polluting and harming life on our planet.

With Pope Francis's embrace of indigenous spirituality in mind, how can this spirituality ground all collective efforts for the promotion of environmental care and sustainability? Is there a practical way to use indigenous knowledge today? Can we rebuild the natural environment?

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<sup>41</sup> James Steele, *Hassan Fathy* (London and New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), p. 7.

## Conclusion

The current ecological crises have challenged humankind to imbibe an emerging worldview that beholds the cosmos and earth as a sacred web of interdependent interrelations. Pope Francis' promulgation of *Laudato si* has given impetus to the clarion call of ecological liberation theology that the various authorities and agencies heed the sacred wisdom of the earth. This wisdom is communicated through indigenous spiritualities that urge humankind to realize that the current and future sustainability of livelihood of humankind depends on a heightened sensitivity and inclusivity of the poor, all endangered life-forms, and the wounded earth. Humankind needs to hear the cries of the poor and act in collaboration with them for a more dignified and resilient life (in their coastal and rural villages) with the hope of living in more affordable homes like the "earth-houses." Solidarity with the poor will hopefully motivate humankind to desire a deeper communion with our common home—this sacred "enspirited" earth—destined for greater and fuller flourishing as an earth-community of diverse life forms.

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