



RELIGION AND SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

*Journal of the
Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication*

VOLUME 23 NO. 1, JAN. - JUN. 2025



"Still life" by Thang Duc Nguyen

Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication
St. John's University
Ladprao, Bangkok 10900
Thailand

E-mail: arcstjohns.bkk@gmail.com
URL: www.asianresearchcenter.org



RELIGION AND SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

Journal of the
Asian Research Center
for Religion and Social Communication
St John's University, Thailand

Vol. 23 No. 1, Jan. - Jun. 2025

ISSN 3057-0883 (Online)

EDITORIAL BOARD

Roderick Evans M. Bartolome, Dcomm (*Far Eastern University, Philippines*)
Kamaruzzaman Bustamam-Ahmad, PhD (*Universitas Islam Negeri, Indonesia*)
Yoel Cohen, PhD (*Ariel University, Israel*)
John T. Giordano, PhD (*Assumption University, Thailand*)
Keval J. Kumar, PhD (*Mudra Institute of Communications, India*)
Chaiwat Meesanthan, PhD (*Thammasat University, Thailand*)
Padtheera Narkurairattana, PhD (*Mahidol University, Thailand*)
Michael Quang Nguyen, SVD, PhD (*Good Shepherd Seminary, PNG*)
Gnana Patrick, PhD (*University of Madras, India*)
Chandrabhanu Pattanayak, PhD (*Institute of Knowledge Societies, India*)
Norman Melchor R. Peña, Jr, SSP, PhD (*St Paul University, Philippines*)
Sebastian Periannan, PhD (*Annai Vailankanni Arts and Science College, India*)
Paul A. Soukup, SJ, PhD (*Santa Clara University, CA, USA*)
Phramaha Chakrapol Acharashubho Thepa, PhD (*Mahamakut Budd. Univ., Thailand*)
Imtiyaz Yusuf, PhD (*Shenandoah University, VA, USA*)
Daniella Zsupan-Jerome, PhD (*St John's Univ. School of Theo. and Sem., MN, USA*)

EDITORIAL TEAM

Editor-in-Chief: Anthony Le Duc, SVD, PhD (*Saengtham College, Thailand*)
Assist. Editor: Kenneth E. Rayco, LPT, MA (*St Jude Catholic School, Philippines*)
Associate Editor Rico C. Jacoba, LPT, PhD (*St Louis University, Philippines*)
Copy Editors: Sarah Tran & Theresa Tran

RELIGION AND SOCIAL COMMUNICATION is published twice a year by the Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication, Saint John's University, Bangkok, Thailand

Copyright © 2025 by the Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication.
ISSN 3057-0883 (Online)

Address all reviews, communications, and manuscripts to:

Anthony Le Duc, SVD, PhD
Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication
St. John's University
Ladprao, Bangkok 10900 Thailand
Email: arcstjohns.bkk@gmail.com

TABLE OF CONTENTS
Vol. 23 No. 1, Jan. - Jun. 2025

EDITOR'S COLUMN

- Bridging Tradition and Modernity in the Asian Context**
Anthony Le Duc SVD 5

ARTICLES

- Exploring Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) in Kalinga Province: Practices, Preservation, and Perspectives**
George Canilao Tumbali 9

- A Comparative Study of the Peace Concept of Christ in Colossians 1:15-23 and the Peace Pact Concept of Lumawig in Bontoc Mountain Province, Philippines**
James Lee D. Wanchakan 36

- Eco-spirituality in Papua New Guinea's Traditional Beliefs and Christian Teachings:
A Response to the Contemporary Ecological Crisis**
Tuan Viet Cao, CM 54

- “Daga mi kataguan mi”: Discoursing *Laudato Si'* Toward a More Meaningful Indigenous Theology of Land in the Cordilleras**
Joefrey M. Almazan and Kurt Wanas Klyde Peningeo 80

- The Authenticity of Cultural Ways of Life:
A Hermeneutic of the Ifugao Social Practice *Gotad***
Joernie Mar U. Bistol 101

- Cybertheology from a Theoretical Approach:
Conceptual Considerations and Proposals**
Edson Real 123

The Role of the Catholic Church in the Philippines on Youth Development: A Revisit of Badiou's Existential Philosophy
Jedu Arcaina 150

Edith Stein's Phenomenology of Empathy in Parish Ministry
Elvis P. Ballacay Jr. 176

BOOK REVIEWS

Andrew Hemingway. *Can We Zoom into God?*
Paul A. Soukup, SJ. 200

Mary Frohlich. *The Heart at the Heart of the World: Re-visioning the Sacred Heart for the Ecozoic Era*
Vien V. Nguyen, SCJ 207

Vu Anh Ta. *Communication Theology in the Context of Intercultural Communion*
Solomon A. Patnaan 210

Sam T. Rajkumar. *Resounding Faith: Embracing Modern Music in Children's Ministry*
Santhosh G 213

Daniella Zsupan-Jerome. *Speak Lord, Your Servant Is Listen-ing: Reflections on Faithful Communication in a Digital Age*
Roderick Evans Bartolome 216

EDITOR'S COLUMN

Bridging Tradition and Modernity in the Asian Context

In this issue, we are privileged to present a diverse collection of scholarly articles that delve into significant intersections between religion, ecology, culture, and social communication. These contributions present multifaceted insights and reflections on contemporary concerns and challenges at the local and global level. Reading through the entire issue, one will discover that these articles reflect the dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity, spirituality and ecology, and culture and technology. They invite us to engage with pressing contemporary issues through new lenses and explore the transformative potential of religious and cultural values along with philosophical insights in shaping sustainable, just, and compassionate societies.

George Canilao Tumbali's "Exploring Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) in Kalinga Province: Practices, Preservation, and Perspectives" examines the profound connection between the Kalinga community and their natural environment. The paper demonstrates how sustainable resource management and the preservation of traditional knowledge can be carried out amidst the forces of globalization and modernization. It reinforces what many have recognized as the importance of integrating traditional ecological wisdom with modern scientific approaches to address environmental issues effectively. It also calls for the inclusion of TEK in educational curricula to inspire environmental consciousness and collective responsibility.

James Lee D. Wanchakan, in "A Comparative Study of the Peace Concept of Christ in Colossians 1:15-23 and the Peace Pact Concept of Lumawig in Bontoc Mountain Province, Philippines," bridges theological and cultural hermeneutics by comparing the mediatorial peace concept of Christ with the Indigenous peace pact Pechen concept of Lumawig. The study suggests that many Indigenous cultures have approaches for addressing societal conflicts that ought to be considered when devising peacemaking initiatives. This comparative approach underscores the potential of integrating Indigenous justice systems into efforts towards global peace, justice, and strong institutions.

Tuan Viet Cao, in “Eco-spirituality in Papua New Guinea’s Traditional Beliefs and Christian Teachings: A Response to the Contemporary Ecological Crisis,” explores the synergy between Indigenous eco-spiritual beliefs and Christian teachings in the context of Papua New Guinea. The author’s analysis offers valuable insights into how these spiritual perspectives can inspire sustainable environmental practices and policies, fostering a harmonious relationship between humanity and the cosmos.

Joefrey M. Almazan and Kurt Wanas Klyde Penningo’s article, “*Dagami kataguan mi: Discoursing Laudato Si’: Toward a More Meaningful Indigenous Theology of Land in the Cordilleras*,” raises critical discussions on Indigenous land rights and theology. Drawing on the principles of Pope Francis’ encyclical *Laudato Si’*, the study advocates for a theology of land that respects Indigenous cultures and promotes dialogue in the face of developmental challenges. The article underscores the profound cultural and existential significance of land for Indigenous communities.

Joernie Mar U. Bistol’s exploration of “The Authenticity of Cultural Ways of Life: A Hermeneutic of the Ifugao Social Practice Gotad” provides a nuanced understanding of cultural authenticity through the lens of hermeneutics. By examining the Ifugao Gotad practice, the study reveals how cultural traditions can be recontextualized to address contemporary challenges while maintaining their transcendent authority and meaning.

Edson Real’s “Cybertheology from a Theoretical Approach: Conceptual Considerations and Proposals” delves into the relatively new and rapidly evolving field of cybertheology. The article analyzes how digital technologies transform faith, pastoral actions, and religious experiences. By proposing cybernetics as an epistemological basis, the article facilitates interdisciplinary dialogue and offers critical perspectives on the ethical and theological dimensions of technology.

Jedu Arcaina’s “The Role of the Catholic Church in the Philippines on Youth Development: A Revisit of Badiou’s Existential Philosophy” examines the Church’s mission in empowering Filipino youth amidst the challenges of globalization. Drawing on Badiou’s existential philosophy, the article highlights the Church’s role in fostering meaningful existence, spirituality, and social justice among young people, promoting transformative development rooted in truth and active citizenship.

Finally, Elvis P. Ballacay Jr., in “Edith Stein’s Phenomenology of Empathy in Parish Ministry,” proposes that Edith Stein’s philosophical insights can help to enhance interpersonal relationships within Catholic

parish ministry. By emphasizing empathy as foundational to intersubjectivity, the study provides a holistic paradigm for fostering understanding and values in parish communities, addressing challenges in pastoral communication and relationships.

Based on these brief introductions, the reader can see that this issue serves as an invitation to dialogue, reflection, and action. The insights offered here blend theory with praxis, enhancing both academic discourse and practical applications in these vital areas. In the global context, the themes explored in this issue underscore the universal relevance of religion and culture as instruments of transformative change. The studies highlight how traditional ecological knowledge and wisdom, Indigenous practices, and theological insights can inform global strategies for sustainable development, conflict resolution, and environmental safeguarding.

By integrating ancient wisdom with contemporary frameworks, these contributions offer possibilities for approaches to address ecological crises and social injustices that transcend national and geographical boundaries. The interdisciplinary nature of these studies echoes the call for more robust and intentional global dialogue and collaborative efforts to harmonize spiritual, cultural, and technological dimensions in addressing humanity's shared challenges. As digital technologies continue to make their impact on culture, redefine religious experiences, and present a challenge for more creative pastoral responses from religious leaders, the reflections on cybertheology provide a critical framework for navigating the ethical and theological implications of our increasingly interconnected world.

As always, the journal prioritizes topics directly related to the Asian religious, cultural, and social milieu. In the Asian context, these articles highlight the region's rich and dynamic cultural and spiritual heritage. The emphasis on Indigenous practices, land theology, and eco-spirituality reflects the lived realities of Asian communities, where religion and culture are intricately—and often inextricably—woven into daily life. The insistence on integrating traditional knowledge with modern scientific and theological perspectives addresses the unique challenges faced by Asian societies, such as rapid urbanization, environmental degradation, and cultural disintegration.

While Western philosophical and theological frameworks continue to influence Asian scholarship (as reflected in several articles in this issue), Asian scholars have increasingly emphasized the importance of engaging with the region's diverse spiritualities and religious traditions to develop

contextually relevant theological and ecological frameworks. Ultimately, this discourse challenges dominant paradigms by re-centering the voices and experiences of the peoples of Asia, proposing a vision of development and theology that is not only sustainable but also deeply interconnected with the spiritual and cultural dimensions of life in the region.

Anthony Le Duc, SVD

Chief Editor

Submitted: Aug. 17, 2024; Accepted: Oct. 16, 2024; Published: Jan. 10, 2025
DOI: 10.62461/GCT101624

Exploring Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) in Kalinga Province: Practices, Preservation, and Perspectives

*George Canilao Tumbali*¹

ABSTRACT

This study delves into the traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) of the Indigenous People of Kalinga, Philippines, while also examining similar practices and challenges faced by other indigenous communities worldwide. The study highlights the universal themes and unique adaptations of TEK across cultures, providing a broader perspective on the significance of traditional knowledge in addressing contemporary environmental issues. It aims to identify and document the traditional practices, rituals, and beliefs that demonstrate the community's deep connection with nature and their efforts in sustainable resource management; it explores the challenges faced in preserving TEK, such as the impact of formal education, globalization, and modernization, and provide recommendations for safeguarding and promoting TEK among the Kalinga people for future generations. It uses a pure qualitative research method with interviews as the primary tool; the elders of the different Kalinga sub-tribes are the study participants. Ethical considerations were followed; the researcher sought the elders' approval before being interviewed. The results

¹ **George Canilao Tumbali** is a political and social science professor at St. Louis College of Bulanao. He is currently the College of Arts and Sciences department head and a graduate school faculty member specializing in governance and public administration.

of this study were also returned to them so they could concur with the translation of their answers.

The findings highlight the community's profound reverence for nature, reflected in their cultural traditions and environmental stewardship practices. By advocating sustainable actions like refraining from burning and employing natural farming techniques, Kalinga communities contribute to climate resilience and biodiversity protection. Ultimately, this study seeks to contribute to the ongoing dialogue about the role of TEK in sustainable development and environmental stewardship, advocating for the integration of traditional knowledge with modern scientific approaches. Additionally, the study underscores the impact of formal education and globalization on Kalinga traditions, emphasizing the need to balance modernity with heritage preservation. Recommendations include involving youth in traditional activities, integrating old and new farming methods, documenting TEK, and incorporating it into the education curriculum to ensure longevity and relevance. This holistic approach aims to cultivate a sense of collective responsibility, sustainability, and environmental consciousness across Kalinga communities.

Keywords: *Traditional ecological knowledge (TEK), Kalinga Province, sustainable development goals, cultural preservation, environmental stewardship, Indigenous practices*

1. Introduction

Climate change is a global issue affecting everyone, with some areas experiencing heavy rainfall and others facing droughts (Filho et al. 2021). The impacts are evident in Tabuk City, Kalinga, Philippines, as some municipalities produce less rice due to reduced water supply. There is increasing awareness that traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) of Indigenous Peoples (IPs) can help address climate change and conserve nature (Mukhopadhyay and Roy 2015). Many scholars emphasize combining traditional knowledge with scientific approaches to mitigate

climate change effectively. This study aims to investigate how the IPs of Kalinga use their TEK to preserve their environment and tackle climate change challenges.

Kalinga is located within the Cordillera Administrative Region in Luzon, Philippines. It is known for having acquired two world Guinness records for the highest number of people playing the gongs and the highest number of women dancing with pots. It is also known for its mountainous terrain, longest river (Chico River), and rich indigenous culture. It has six municipalities and one city. The IPs of Kalinga come from diverse ethnic groups and have diverse dialects.

Indigenous communities worldwide have a rich heritage of TEK developed over centuries, offering valuable insights into local ecosystems. This knowledge is crucial in managing protected areas, including geoparks, and ensuring long-term sustainability. Studies by Halim et al. (2017) and Negi et al. (2021) highlight the significance of indigenous knowledge in preserving natural heritage sites and conserving biodiversity.

Indigenous knowledge holds valuable insights on sustainable resource management practices that can inform more holistic and effective solutions (Patterson et al. 2023). Research has demonstrated that conservation efforts led by or developed in partnership with indigenous communities tend to yield better outcomes for both the environment and people. Inclusive approaches that incorporate multiple ways of knowing, including both Western science and indigenous knowledge, can lead to novel solutions and mitigation strategies to address longstanding environmental issues (Patterson et al. 2023).

Particularly in forest management, indigenous knowledge offers deep insights into local environments, crucial for protecting natural resources (Yahaya 2013). Including traditional practices in geopark management enhances community appreciation and involvement in preserving cultural heritage (Halim et al. 2017).

Moreover, TEK is vital in mitigating climate change, as indigenous communities often experience its effects first. Their generations of knowledge on ecosystems, climate patterns, and sustainable resource use provide invaluable insights. A study by Klein (2011) emphasizes how this traditional knowledge aids effective climate adaptation and mitigation strategies by revealing historical climate patterns, assessing the impacts of climate change, and promoting responsible resource management. Integrating TEK with scientific approaches leads to a more comprehensive

understanding of ecosystems and improves ecological restoration efforts, demonstrating that TEK is essential for building a sustainable future.

1.1. Research Gap

While many studies have been published on TEK, more research needs to be done on the specific practices, preservation efforts, and perspectives of indigenous communities in Kalinga Province.

1.2. Significance of the Study

TEK plays a crucial role in addressing climate change, and it can be even more effective when combined with modern science and technology. Integrating TEK with scientific research and technological advancements can create a more comprehensive approach to mitigating climate change. This collaboration respects and values traditional practices and enhances our ability to combat climate change effectively. This study holds significant implications for various stakeholders. Documenting the TEK practices of different sub-tribes in Kalinga helps protect their unique cultural histories and environmental management methods. It also empowers Indigenous People by highlighting the importance of their knowledge in natural resource management, giving them a stronger voice in policy decisions affecting their lands.

Future researchers will find this study valuable as it provides insights into integrating traditional knowledge with modern science, which can aid local communities in adapting to climate change and promoting sustainability. Additionally, Local Government Units can develop more effective and culturally appropriate environmental policies and programs by understanding the traditional practices and perspectives of the Kalinga people. This approach will foster more sustainable and equitable environmental outcomes for everyone.

1.3. Theoretical Framework

Using resilience theory, we can examine how socio-ecological systems respond to environmental changes, including biodiversity and ecosystem services. This theory suggests that these systems can withstand shocks while maintaining their essential functions. When applied to TEK, it reveals the depth and practicality of indigenous knowledge in managing environmental changes. Indigenous Peoples possess an inherent

understanding of protecting biodiversity and sustainably using resources, contributing to ecosystem resilience against natural events, climate change, and human impacts (Mumbly et al. 2014).

In Kalinga, resilience theory illustrates how communities adapt to environmental changes while preserving essential functions. The Kalinga people have a strong tradition of protecting their natural surroundings, vital for maintaining biodiversity. They designate sacred groves and protected areas that conserve habitats for various plants and animals, helping preserve ecosystems during environmental changes like climate change. Additionally, Kalinga communities practice traditional agroecology using organic fertilizers, such as compost, and natural pest control methods. This approach enhances soil health and reduces reliance on chemicals, resulting in more sustainable farming. Terraced farming is another crucial technique, as it prevents soil erosion, conserves water, and supports diverse crops, improving food security and ecosystem health. Kalinga cultural practices further illustrate their environmental understanding. They have rituals and taboos governing resource use, promoting sustainability and ecological balance. They also utilize local knowledge to monitor environmental changes, such as weather patterns, allowing for quick adaptations to challenges like pest outbreaks or droughts, thereby enhancing their resilience to environmental issues.

2. Review of Related Literature

A study published by Tengö et al. (2014) demonstrates the power of integrating TEK with scientific methods and technology for effective climate change adaptation. Through workshops and interviews, researchers working in Australia's Wet Tropics documented indigenous knowledge about weather patterns, plant use, and resource management. This TEK was then combined with scientific data on climate projections and ecological modeling, visualized using Geographic Information Systems. This collaborative approach led to the identification of vulnerable areas for conservation and the development of culturally appropriate, community-based monitoring programs, showcasing the value of TEK in creating more holistic and successful environmental management strategies.

Another study by Paneque-Galvez et al. (2017) found that indigenous communities are embracing small consumer drones for mapping and monitoring their territories. The authors explore case studies from various

countries to understand the initial experiences and analyze the potential benefits and challenges these innovations offer for environmental justice and sustainability. Early findings are positive, with many indigenous groups recognizing drones as valuable tools to safeguard their lands and support their claims related to environmental concerns and justice issues. The paper provides a critical analysis of the opportunities and challenges associated with using small drones for indigenous territorial mapping and monitoring based on these findings and existing research.

In her study, “Can Indigenous Knowledge Contribute to the Sustainability Management of the Aspiring Rio Coco Geopark, Nicaragua?” Martina Pásková examined indigenous environmental knowledge in the southern Rio Coco Geopark. She aimed to explore how this knowledge could enhance sustainable tourism management and other activities in the area. The study revealed that knowledge about land use, rocks, and plants is well-preserved, but the spiritual aspects of this knowledge are fading. This indigenous knowledge is crucial for decision-makers in the geopark, offering insights for sustainable management, tourism, and geological interpretation.

Research shows that Indigenous and local communities use resources sustainably and conserve biodiversity. For example, a 2021 study by Negi et al. highlighted the importance of indigenous knowledge in protecting natural resources and maintaining ecological balance. Additionally, Yahaya’s 2013 study noted that integrating traditional cultural practices into geopark experiences can increase local appreciation and involvement in heritage conservation, a finding also supported by Halim et al., in their 2017 research.

The study by Berkes, Colding, and Folke (2000), titled “Rediscovery of Traditional Ecological Knowledge as Adaptive Management,” examines how local communities can use their knowledge to monitor and respond to ecosystem changes. It focuses on understanding and utilizing TEK to improve ecosystem management and resilience. Key findings show the importance of local management systems and their interaction with the environment. The study discusses traditional practices like managing multiple species, rotating resources, and creating varied landscapes. It also explores the social aspects of knowledge sharing, local institutions, and cultural values. The goal is to blend local knowledge with scientific ecology to develop adaptive management strategies that promote resilience in complex systems.

In the study “Integrating Traditional Ecological Knowledge into Habitat Restoration: Implications for Meeting Forest Restoration Challenges” by Haq et al. (2023), researchers focused on gathering TEK about tree species in the Dering-Dibru Saikhowa Elephant Corridor. They aimed to use this knowledge to prioritize reintroducing 31 tree species in degraded forests. The study combined traditional knowledge with modern techniques to aid in ecosystem restoration, species selection, and monitoring. It showed how TEK can enhance ecological restoration efforts, including adaptive and sustainable forest management, while supporting local communities and biodiversity (Haq et al. 2023).

Similarly, Uprety, Devkota, and Shrestha (2012), in “Contribution of Traditional Knowledge to Ecological Restoration: Practices and Applications,” highlighted the role of traditional knowledge in ecological restoration. Key contributions included identifying reference ecosystems, selecting species and sites for restoration, managing invasive species, and monitoring outcomes. The study stressed that combining traditional knowledge with scientific methods strengthens restoration projects, making them more socially accepted, economically feasible, and environmentally sustainable.

The study “Traditional Ecological Knowledge on the Slope of Mount Lawu, Indonesia: All About Non-Rice Food Security” by Sumarwati (2023) explored the TEK of the Tawangmangu community related to non-rice food security. It focused on how the community communicates and passes down this knowledge through folktales, rituals, and resource management. It emphasized the importance of non-rice crops, terraced farming, and forest preservation for local food security and sustainability. The findings highlighted three main themes of TEK: (1) communication through folktales and rituals, (2) community philosophy regarding spirituality and nature, and (3) sustainable resource management practices. Locals actively protect the forests on Mount Lawu and around Pringgodani Cave, viewing them as vital to their lives by prohibiting tree cutting and promoting reforestation (Sumarwati 2023).

In a related study, Sharifian et al. (2022) in “Dynamics of Pastoral Traditional Ecological Knowledge: A Global State-of-the-Art Review” examined the usage and importance of pastoral TEK worldwide. The study aimed to understand its influence on pastoral practices and the amount of research done on pastoral TEK compared to other knowledge types. It highlighted the need to recognize and protect pastoral TEK for sustainable

land management and biodiversity conservation. The authors acknowledged their limited perspective, as they are not part of pastoralist communities. The study found that pastoralists adapt their knowledge effectively to social and ecological changes due to various factors, including changing cultural norms and shifts toward market economies. The authors recommend that future research focus on understanding how pastoral knowledge transitions affect traditional practices (Sharifian et al. 2022).

The study “Traditional Ecological Knowledge in Restoration Ecology: A Call to Listen Deeply, to Engage With, and Respect Indigenous Voices” by (Robinson, Rota, and Dee 2023) emphasizes the vital role of TEK in restoration ecology. The study aims to empower indigenous leaders and communities in reclaiming their land and resources. It highlights the need for ethical engagement, active listening, and respect for indigenous voices in restoration projects. The authors propose creating common principles and a moral code for partnerships in restoration ecology, stressing protecting indigenous rights and lifestyles to preserve their knowledge, language, biodiversity, and ecological functions. The study advocates for acknowledging the diversity of both ecology and culture in restoration efforts, promoting responsible practices that foster positive cultural change. Ultimately, the study calls for respectful and responsible restoration efforts guided by shared principles, including meaningful collaboration with TEK. It underscores the importance of Indigenous leadership and ethical partnerships to ensure that restoration activities are culturally sensitive and beneficial for ecological and cultural well-being (Robinson, Rota, and Dee 2023).

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study used qualitative research design. An in-depth interview and FGD were used. Three primary research objectives guided the study:

1. To document the various forms of TEK held by the indigenous communities in Kalinga Province.
2. To assess the role of TEK in the sustainable use and management of local natural resources in Kalinga Province.

3. To examine the current threats to preserving TEK among the Kalinga people and the factors contributing to knowledge erosion.

3.2. Population and Sample

Participants were the elders of the different sub-tribes of the province of Kalinga, with 24 respondents.

3.3. Data Gathering Instrument

The instrument utilized in this study included qualitative data collection tools, mainly interviews, designed to capture and document TEK in Kalinga Province, its Practices, Preservation, and Perspectives.

3.4. Data Gathering Procedures

This study selected participants from various sub-tribes within the Kalinga community, focusing on elders with extensive knowledge of traditional practices and ecological wisdom. Face-to-face interviews created a personal and engaging atmosphere, using open-ended questions to encourage detailed responses. Key questions included: “Can you describe traditional practices your community uses to manage natural resources?” “What plants do you use in traditional medicine, and what are their purposes?” and “How do you perceive the impact of modern education and globalization on your traditional practices?” A follow-up question prompted further discussion: “Can you give an example of specific beliefs important for environmental stewardship?”

With participants’ consent, the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for thorough analysis. The researchers used a formal coding process to identify key themes from the transcriptions, assigning codes to segments of text that represented specific ideas related to TEK. Similar codes were grouped into broader themes, and the researcher revisited the data multiple times to refine these codes. To ensure accuracy, the researcher returned the findings to the participants for review, allowing them to confirm that their views were represented correctly and to clarify or expand on their responses.

3.5. Analysis of Data

The data collected through interviews aimed to document the TEK perspectives, preservation methods, and practices in Kalinga. It assessed the role of TEK in the sustainable management of local natural resources and identified current threats to its preservation, as well as factors contributing to knowledge erosion. Interview responses were systematically reviewed and categorized to create a detailed inventory of TEK practices across different municipalities in Kalinga. This analysis provided insights into TEK preservation challenges, highlighting strengths and potential areas for improvement.

3.6. Ethical Consideration

The study prioritized ethical considerations by ensuring that all participants willingly consented to participate. Researchers clearly explained the study's goals, potential risks, and benefits, especially regarding using audio recording devices during interviews. All responses were securely stored on a password-protected computer. The researchers consulted school administrators to confirm the study's ethical relevance and obtained permission from community elders and barangay chairpersons, fostering trust and support for the research.

3.7. Rigor of Qualitative Research

Several methodological strategies were employed to ensure the rigor of the qualitative study: Participants were selected from Kalinga community elders to provide comprehensive insights. Qualitative data collection tools, like interviews, allowed in-depth exploration of TEK practices and perspectives. The researcher enhanced data credibility by interviewing multiple participants and using audio recording equipment to capture responses accurately. Obtaining permission from community elders added legitimacy to the research process, ensuring ethical conduct and collaboration.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1. What Plants Are Used in Your Traditional Medicine Practices, and for What Purposes?



Makabuhay. The community uses these plants to treat malaria and stomach aches. A respondent from Tanudan reported success in using the plant for malaria, and another mentioned using it for stomach pain relief.



Buwa. Elders used betel nuts as a remedy for oily diarrhea. One elder from Tinglayans mentioned chewing betel nuts (Mama) to stay alert and energized, while another elder from Lubuagan noted its use to aid digestion after meals.



Sky Lab. All Kalinga sub-tribes use certain plants to stop bleeding from cuts caused by sharp objects. A Tinglayan respondent confirmed the plant's effectiveness, sharing how it stopped bleeding from a foot injury. Another respondent noted its ability to prevent infections in open wounds.



Utol Di Gayabat. Respondents used this plant for wound cleansing and healing. A respondent from Balbalan mentioned it was also used for treating diarrhea and stomach aches, while another from Pasil said it was used to manage diabetes.



Dangla. Respondents used these plants to treat influenza, arthritis, and rheumatism. A respondent from Pinukpuk noted its use for arthritis, while one from Rizal mentioned its effectiveness in curing dry cough and asthma.



Tagumbao. The community used this plant to reduce fever. A respondent from Pasil mentioned it was also used for headaches, stomach aches, and arthritis. Another respondent from Balbalan stated it was effective in expelling intestinal parasites (“bulate”).



Lotan Di Apaya. Respondents from Tanudan used these plants as anti-rabies medicine. A respondent from Pinukpuk mentioned they treated skin rashes, wounds, and insect bites with it. Additionally, respondents from Balbalan used the plants to relieve muscle pain and treat bacterial and fungal infections.



Lingwa. Respondents used these plants to treat skin conditions like white marks and ringworm. A respondent from Pasil mentioned using them for healing wounds and burns, while an elder from Lubuagan noted their use in treating coughs, colds, and headaches.

These practices illustrate the strong connection between Indigenous People and their environment, emphasizing their deep knowledge of the healing properties of local plants. The study on TEK in Kalinga Province reveals the significance of medicinal plants for the Kalinga people's culture, health, and identity. These plants serve as natural remedies where access to modern healthcare is limited and are crucial for their cultural heritage. The Kalinga community practices sustainable resource management to protect these plants, vital for maintaining local biodiversity and ecological balance. Combining traditional knowledge with modern medicine can lead to new treatments. This knowledge also fosters community empowerment by promoting self-reliance in healthcare and providing educational opportunities about cultural practices and biodiversity.

The study by Fabricant and Farnsworth (2001) highlights the link between traditional plant knowledge and modern drug discovery through ethnobotany, which studies how cultures use plants for medicinal purposes. This research shows that local communities have valuable insights into the healing properties of plants based on their long history of use for treating ailments. By understanding these traditional practices, scientists can identify potential new drugs and improve modern medicine. The study demonstrates the scientific relevance of local knowledge in

pharmaceuticals and reveals that utilizing indigenous wisdom can significantly enhance healthcare and lead to new treatments.

4.2. What Traditional Farming Methods Are Used for Rice Cultivation in Your Community?

1. *Preparing the land:* The respondents shared that they first clear the land by removing weeds and vegetation, a process they call “*Sagawsaw*,” where farmers manually remove dirt and unwanted divots from the paddy field. “*Lenas*” or “*Pinas*” refers to cutting bamboo trees, which are then used to flatten the paddy field surface in preparation for the next step. Afterward, they plow the soil using traditional wooden plows drawn by carabaos (water buffaloes). This is called “*Bay-bay*,” where farmers use 5 to 10 water buffaloes to tread the paddy field for cultivation, as no machinery was available in the olden times.
2. *Planting:* The farmers carefully select the indigenous rice varieties best suited to the local climate and soil conditions. They plant the rice seedlings in rows, carefully spacing them to allow for optimal growth.
3. *Maintaining the fields:* The farmers carefully manage the water flow, ensuring that the fields are properly irrigated throughout the growing season. They also manually weed the fields to prevent competition with the rice plants. This process, called “*Olag*,” involves manually planting rice seedlings in the paddy fields by the farmers.
4. *Harvesting:* After planting, farmers wait around four months for the harvest, known as “*Ani*.” They use pounded sunflowers as a traditional alternative pest control method, driving away insects and then burning them.
5. *Tools and processes of Harvesting:* During the harvest (“*Ani*”), farmers use a knife (“*Lakom*”) to harvest rice, which is then tied with “*Anos*” (called “*Binatok*”) and hung on “*Aladoy*” to dry in the sun.
6. *Storage:* The dried rice (“*palay*”) is stored in “*Alang*,” a traditional rice storage house.

Kalinga farmers use eco-friendly methods to protect the environment and combat climate change. They avoid synthetic fertilizers and pesticides, reducing harmful greenhouse gases and improving soil health to store more carbon. They practice intercropping, planting different crops to control pests, reduce chemical use, and maintain soil fertility. Terraced fields help

manage water runoff, prevent soil erosion, and conserve water, making farming more resilient to droughts and climate change.

4.3. What Are Some of the Community-Led Techniques Used for Forest Conservation and Water Resource Management in Kalinga Province?

Community governance structures in Kalinga are vital for managing natural resources and supporting conservation. The Council of Elders is essential in decision-making, conflict resolution, and educating members about conservation practices. Some communities form local committees focused on specific issues like forest protection or water management, which monitor conservation compliance. Customary laws guide resource use and establish penalties for violations enforced by leaders. These structures align with national laws, like the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA), which recognizes indigenous rights to manage their lands. Communities work with local and national agencies for resources and support, ensuring they follow environmental regulations.

4.3.1. Prohibits cutting of trees, garbage dumping, and burning

The Kalinga community protects tree species such as Luppa, Alimit, Tabbeg, and Liw liw because they are crucial for maintaining clean spring water. These trees grow near water sources like creeks and waterfalls and cutting them down is prohibited to ensure uninterrupted water flow. Local settlers can only selectively harvest mature trees during certain “Ber months.” Community-led conservation projects foster cooperation and empower residents to address climate-related issues effectively. By adhering to traditional farming and land management practices, the Kalinga community prevents land use changes that could lead to deforestation and habitat loss, contributing to greenhouse gas emissions.

The Kalinga community has a long history of forest conservation, committed to keeping their environment clean with strict rules against dumping garbage and burning waste, with penalties for violators. Similar conservation practices are seen in Indonesia’s Dayak Mualang community, where communal forests are managed according to customary laws (Seli, Rindarjono, and Karyanto 2021). The Dayak Kotabaru community follows the Bera system, allowing cyclical forest use and recovery (Seli, Rindarjono, and Karyanto 2021; Ifrani et al. 2019). Additionally, protecting

sacred areas that are off-limits to general use is part of local conservation efforts, as demonstrated by Tigawasa Village, where traditional beliefs and regulations help preserve the integrity of their customary forest ecosystem (Seli, Rindarjono, and Karyanto 2021).

In Kalinga, the community takes essential steps to protect the environment, aligning with various United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). They prohibit tree cutting, garbage dumping, and burning waste, which helps protect forests essential for biodiversity (SDG 15) and preserves water quality (SDG 6). The Kalinga community also promotes sustainable waste management by reducing waste and encouraging responsible consumption, supporting SDG 12. By avoiding harmful practices like burning, they contribute to climate action (SDG 13). Their collective efforts to prevent pollution and promote sustainability reflect SDG 11, which focuses on creating sustainable cities and communities.

4.3.2. Reverence for nature

Before cutting down trees, the Kalinga community conducts rituals to honor forest spirits and ensure the safety of everyone involved. They offer butchered chicken as a sign of respect and seek protection from sickness and accidents. They believe that “*idaw*” and snakes can pose dangers, so they avoid dumping waste in water sources to prevent angering the spirits. This highlights the Kalinga people’s belief in respecting nature and caring for their land and water. A similar tradition, Ngasuh Gumi, is observed in the Tanjung District of North Lombok, Indonesia, where people perform rituals and ceremonies to maintain harmony with the environment (Sarjono and Fakhri 2023).

In the town of Atok, located in Benguet, Philippines, the wise elders believe educating the younger generation about the importance of ecological restoration is essential. They emphasize the significance of local practices contributing to this restoration, such as carefully regulating tree cutting for cultural purposes, like the traditional practice of making coffins.

The Kalinga people have a “*Songa*” tradition, offering butchered chicken and blood to spirits before cutting trees. If a tree is entangled in vines, it is left alone as a sign that the spirit does not allow it to be cut. They also avoid butchering dogs near water sources to prevent scaring the spirits, which could disrupt water flow. This practice resembles Tigawasa Village, where the forest is considered sacred and only used for traditional

ceremonies. The Munanese Ethnic group in Indonesia follows a related belief, prohibiting cutting large trees near rivers as they believe spirits inhabit these trees (Sarjono and Fakhri 2023).

Additionally, Kalinga community members believe in fertility wells found in Lubuagan, Tinglayan, and barangay Naneng in Tabuk City, which are thought to grant the wishes of couples who cannot have children. They maintain these wells for future generations, ensuring they are clean and preserved. This is akin to the Dayak Mualang community's practices, which include customary laws for managing communal forests, viewing the forest as a sacred space to be preserved for its spiritual and ecological value (Leo et al. 2021).

4.4. What Practices from Your TEK Are or Could Be Beneficial in Adapting to or Mitigating the Effects of Climate Change?

4.4.1. Climate sensitive policies

The community has a strict anti-burning policy to combat climate change, recognizing the harmful effects of burning on endangered wildlife, plants, and trees. Before cutting down trees, they follow specific practices to prevent illness and bad luck, which helps protect forests.

In Indonesia, the Dayak Kotabaru community employs a Bera system for cyclical forest use and recovery, which could be an effective strategy for sustainable forest management amid climate change (Ifrani et al. 2019). Similarly, the Tigawasa Village community upholds its customary forest ecosystem through traditional beliefs and regulations, showcasing the effectiveness of community-led conservation efforts.

The anti-burning policy supports several United Nations SDGs. By prohibiting burning, they reduce carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions, aiding climate action (SDG 13). Moreover, reducing burning helps the community become more resilient to extreme weather events caused by climate change. It also protects ecosystems and preserves critical habitats for plants and animals, aligning with SDG 15: Life on Land, which focuses on conserving terrestrial ecosystems.

4.4.2. Organic farming practices

The community employs traditional methods like “*Ambay*,” a tobacco roll made with various roots, to naturally keep away pests such as small

farm rats (“*Inggi*”) and grasshoppers (“*Dudun*”), avoiding harmful chemicals. This practice helps maintain the soil’s nutrient balance and showcases their commitment to environmentally friendly approaches that combat climate change. Their TEK includes insights on weather, soil management, and suitable crop choices, aiding their adaptation to climate changes.

Similarly, smallholder farmers in Ghana practice irrigation, mulching, and growing improved crop varieties, demonstrating how TEK can enhance climate-smart agriculture (Berkes, Colding, and Folke 2000).

Organic farming contributes significantly to the UN SDGs. It helps achieve SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) by providing nutritious food without harmful chemicals. It supports SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) by promoting natural resource use and waste reduction. It also impacts SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) by offering chemical-free foods that reduce health risks. Lastly, the rising demand for organic products contributes to SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) by creating jobs and boosting local economies.

4.5 What Traditional Beliefs or Values Influence How Your Community Interacts with the Environment?

4.5.1. Practice of moderation

The community practices moderation, taking only what they need and guided by rules passed down from their parents about forestry and hunting. This mindset fosters unity and brotherhood among them and aligns with the Dayak Mualang community’s traditional laws that emphasize protecting their shared forests, viewed as sacred spaces.

Their respect for nature is evident in ceremonies held before cutting down trees or approaching water sources, highlighting their understanding of the connection between people and the environment. In Tigawasa Village, the customary forest is seen as holy and is reserved for traditional events.

This practice of moderation supports SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production, encouraging responsible resource use, reducing waste, and promoting sustainable consumption. By advocating for moderation, communities can use natural resources wisely, ensuring long-term ecological balance.

4.5.2. *Observing traditional practices*

The traditional practices of “*Paniyaw*,” “*Ngilin*,” and “*Bain*” (PNB) are essential for preserving cultural heritage and promoting environmental stewardship in Kalinga province. These practices highlight the Kalinga people’s deep connection to their ancestral land and commitment to ecological balance.

Paniyaw is a customary law that governs the sustainable use of land, water, and forest resources. *Ngilin* involves rituals to honour the spirits of the land, reflecting the Kalinga belief in the sacredness of their environment. *Bain* celebrates communal farming, fostering unity and shared responsibility for caring for natural resources.

Maintaining these traditions safeguards Kalinga culture and benefits the province. The Bodong justice system links these practices, emphasizing harmony within society and nature. Similarly, the Ngasuh Gumi tradition in North Lombok, Indonesia, illustrates the importance of cultural traditions and local knowledge in sustainable development. The cultural landscape of Pura Batukaru in Bali showcases the interconnectedness of traditional practices, cultural heritage, and environmental preservation. The Tri Hita Karana Formal education often emphasizes Western knowledge, which can conflict with Indigenous worldviews, making it harder for these communities to engage with school and retain their traditional practices. Integrating TEK into school curricula could enhance environmental stewardship and help combat climate change.

4.5.3.. *Decline of traditional practices*

The introduction of formal education has contributed to the gradual fading of certain traditions. As societies modernize and attitudes shift, practices such as “*Dawak*” (respect for elders) and “*Sissiwa*” have dwindled over time. Environmental stewardship is becoming less popular among younger people in the community because they want to work in regular jobs.

Maluku folklore and culture in Indonesia are also on the decline. This is because young people have different reading tastes and find that standard textbooks must cover Maluku culture more. A lack of local cultural elements in formal education can make it harder for young people to connect with traditional knowledge and ways of doing things (Rijoly 2022).

4.6. How Do Globalization and Modernization Impact the Transmission and Practice of TEK in Kalinga Province?

4.6.1. Bridging cultural divides

Social media and modern technology have globally exposed the indigenous practices and TEK of the Kalinga people. Platforms now showcase cultural songs like “*Uwawi*” by Arnel Banasan and dances such as “*Awong chi gangsa, adtun di banga*” (“The sounds of a thousand gongs and dance of a thousand pots”), which earned Kalinga a Guinness World Record. The Tinglayan rice terraces and the Chico River, protected by elders, are also widely shared online, encouraging the younger generation to appreciate and continue their heritage.

Anacin, Enrique, and Ty (2015) found that the Ibaloi community in the Philippines has successfully blended their traditional practices with modern elements, preserving their culture despite modernization. Similarly, the Semai people of Malaysia use digital technology to preserve their endangered languages and traditions (Renganathan and Kral 2018).

However, there are concerns about how indigenous communities are involved in the digital preservation process and whether they control the portrayal of their culture. Still, the Indian government’s initiatives to digitally preserve cultural heritage show how technology can help safeguard these traditions (Singh 2012).

4.6.2. Advancements in agriculture and environmental protection

Modernization has significantly improved traditional farming practices, reducing the workload for farmers and increasing overall efficiency. As a result, communities are better able to adhere to local regulations, contributing to cleaner and healthier environments. According to Ngidlo (2014), combining modern and traditional farming techniques can enhance food security and promote sustainability in indigenous communities. Additionally, a study by Gomez et al. (2013) examined how integrating traditional and modern knowledge systems can strengthen community resilience, particularly in Indonesia. This study explores how indigenous communities utilize TEK and digital technologies to manage their natural resources and sustainably adapt to climate change. The findings highlight that when digital technologies are combined with local ecological knowledge, indigenous communities are empowered to more

effectively monitor and manage their resources, which ultimately helps them adapt better to the challenges posed by climate change.

4.6.3. Destroys communal bonds and traditional cultural practices

Modernization and globalization weaken communal bonds and traditional practices, reducing unity, cooperation, respect for elders, and community interactions. Children now prefer digital devices over outdoor activities or cultural practices like playing gongs and flutes. Zort et al. (2023) highlight that while technology helps share cultural values, it also challenges preserving intangible heritage. The study shows that technology has reduced face-to-face communication and the chance for younger generations to learn traditional skills from elders. Additionally, respect for elders and community structures has declined due to growing individualism and materialism.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Various Medicinal Plants

The Kalinga people utilize plant-based medicines to address various health concerns. The community protects these medicinal plants and propagate them because of the many health benefits they give to the people. These traditional practices highlight the deep connection between the community and their natural environment. The plants serve many purposes, from treating wounds and infections to relieving pain and addressing internal ailments.

5.2. Traditional Rice Farming

Traditional rice farming in Kalinga is a labour-intensive process deeply intertwined with local knowledge and respect for the environment. The traditional methods provide valuable lessons in sustainability, cultural preservation, and maintaining a harmonious relationship with nature.

5.3. Community Techniques Used for Water and Forest Conservation

The people of Kalinga demonstrate a profound respect for nature through its community-led conservation efforts. By prohibiting burning

activities, performing rituals to appease spirits, and respecting natural signs, they have safeguarded their environment for generations.

5.4. TEK Use in Mitigating Climate Change

The Kalinga people's TEK practices have contributed significantly to climate change adaptation and mitigation. Their strict policies against burning, reverence for trees, and commitment to organic farming demonstrate a deep understanding of environmental balance and sustainability. The Kalinga people exemplify a way to address the challenges of climate change.

5.5. Values and Beliefs

The Kalinga community's connection with the environment is built on traditional beliefs of respect, reciprocity, and responsibility. Practices like moderation, rituals, and reverence for nature, passed down through generations, promote environmental stewardship and strengthen community bonds. The Kalinga people show that TEK can guide sustainable living and coexistence with nature, reflecting the core values of PNB.

5.6. Impact of Formal Education

The introduction of formal education has presented opportunities and challenges for transmitting TEK in the Kalinga community. While it has facilitated the documentation and preservation of cultural practices, potentially reaching a wider audience through books and research, it has also coincided with a decline in the practice of some traditions, e.g., respect for elders and care of the environment in the context of traditional beliefs.

5.7. Impacts of Globalization and Modernization

Globalization and modernization have good and bad impacts on the transmission and practice of TEK in Kalinga province. While they offer valuable tools for cultural exchange and advancements in agriculture and environmental protection, they also destroy communal bonds and traditional practices. Modern entertainment, technology, and changing values have made people forget their traditional ways of life.

5.8. Recommendations

1. Public and private schools can incorporate lessons on TEK, emphasizing a change in the worldview of Nature from strong anthropocentrism, “human as the center,” that considers Nature as an “object” to be manipulated by humans to Nature as a “subject” to be respected. This can raise awareness among the younger generation about the importance of traditional practices and foster a sense of pride in their cultural heritage.
2. The Matagoan Bodong Council can create programs for youth that involve traditional cultural and environmental activities like tree-planting ceremonies, workshops on music and dance, and hands-on lessons in sustainable farming.
3. Local government units (LGUs) should support blending traditional and modern farming methods to boost productivity and maintain ecological balance. They can also promote organic farming and traditional pest control practices.
4. Elders and LGUs must encourage community members to actively participate in documenting their traditional knowledge, practices, and rituals. They should also establish local archives or digital repositories to store this information for future generations.

REFERENCES

- Aclan, Eunice M., et al. "Alangan Mangyans' Values That Shape Their Young Generations' Thinking Skills, Technology Use, and Their Relationship to the Lowlanders: A Mini-Ethnographic Case Study." In *Proceedings of the International Conference on Economics, Business, Social, and Humanities (ICEBSH 2021)*, Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research. Atlantis Press 570 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.210805.236>.
- Adedeji, O. O., B. O. O. Ekundayo, and I. O. Olajide. "An Ethnobotanical Study of Plant Species Used for Medicine by the Eegun Indigenous Tribal Group of Lagos State, Nigeria." *Notulae Scientia Biologicae* 10, no. 3 (2018): 318-27. <https://doi.org/10.15835/nsb10310306>
- Anacin, Emily, Enrique Oracion, and Ty Matejowsky. "Syncretism in Rituals and Performance in a Culturally Pluralistic Society in the Philippines." *The Social Science Journal* 52, no. 1 (2015): 40–45. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.soscij.2014.08.005>
- Berkes, Fikret, Johan Colding, and Carl Folke. "Rediscovery of Traditional Ecological Knowledge as Adaptive Management." *Ecological Applications* 10, no. 5 (2000): 1251–62. [https://doi.org/10.1890/1051-0761\(2000\)010\[1251:ROTEKA\]2.0.CO;2](https://doi.org/10.1890/1051-0761(2000)010[1251:ROTEKA]2.0.CO;2)
- Fabricant, Daniel S., and Norman R. Farnsworth. "The Value of Plants Used in Traditional Medicine for Drug Discovery." *Environmental Health Perspective* 109, Supplement issue 1 (2001): 69–75. <https://doi.org/10.1289/ehp.01109s169>
- Filho, W. L., J. S. Pereira, E. Begotti, and A. L. S. Teles. "Impacts of Climate Change to African Indigenous Communities and Examples of Adaptation Responses." *Nature Communication* 12 (2021): 6224. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-021-26540-0>
- Gómez-Baggethun, Erik, Esteve Corbera, and Victòria Reyes-García. "Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Global Environmental Change: Research findings and policy implications." *Ecology and Society* 18, no. 4 (2013): 72. <https://doi.org/10.5751/es-06288-180472>
- Halim, Che, Wan Nurul Mardiah Wan Mohd Rani, and Nurul Asma' Mokhtar. "Examining Community Engagement in Heritage Conservation Through Geopark Experiences from the Asia Pacific

- Region.” *Kajian Malaysia* 35, supplement 1 (2017): 11–38.
<https://doi.org/10.21315/km2017.35.supp.1.2>
- Haq, S.M., et al. “Integrating Traditional Ecological Knowledge into Habitat Restoration: Implications for Meeting Forest Restoration Challenges.” *Journal of Ethnobiology Ethnomedicine* 19, no. 33 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13002-023-00606-3>
- Hopping, Kelly A., Ciren Yangzong, and Julia Klein. “Local Knowledge Production, Transmission, and the Importance of Village Leaders in a Network of Tibetan Pastoralists Coping with Environmental Change.” *Ecology and Society* 21, no. 1 (2016): 25.
<https://doi.org/10.5751/es-08009-210125>
- Ifrani, Fathul Achmadi Abby, Abdul Halim Barkatullah, Yati Nurhayati, and M. Yasir Said. “Forest Management Based on Local Culture of Dayak Kotabaru in the Perspective of Customary Law for a Sustainable Future and Prosperity of the Local Community.” *Resources* 8, no. 2 (2019): 78.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/resources8020078>
- Klein, Richard J. T. “Adaptation to Climate Change.” In *Climate. NATO Science for Peace and Security Series C: Environmental Security*, edited by I. Linkov and T. Bridges, 157–68. Dordrecht: Springer, 2011. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-1770-1_9
- Leo, Hendri, Joni Hartono, and Wahyu Sasongko. “A Description of Dayak Iban’s Traditional Knowledge on Customary Forest Management in West Kalimantan, Indonesia.” *Earth and Environmental Science* 940 (2021): 012074.
<https://doi.org/10.1088/1755-1315/940/1/012074>
- Mukhopadhyay, P., and S. Roy. “Traditional Knowledge for Biodiversity Conservation, Maintain Ecosystem Services and Livelihood Security in the Context of Climate Change: Case Studies from West Bengal, India.” *Journal of Ecosystem & Ecography* 6, no. 1-2 (2015): 22–29.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09766901.2015.11884752>
- Mumby, J., Peter, Iliana Chollett, Yves-Marie Bozec, and Nicholas H. Wolff. “Ecological Resilience, Robustness and Vulnerability: How Do These Concepts Benefit Ecosystem Management?” *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability* 7 (2014): 22–27.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cosust.2013.11.021>
- Negi, Vikram S., Ravi Pathak, Shinny Thakur, Ravindra K. Joshi, Indra D. Bhatt, and Ranbeer S. Rawal. “Scoping the Need of Mainstreaming Indigenous Knowledge for Sustainable Use of

- Bioresources in the Indian Himalayan Region.” *Environmental Management* 72 (2023): 135-146. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00267-021-01510-w>
- Ngidlo, Robert T. “Modern Farming Technologies: Impact on Farm Productivity and Food Security in the Rice Terraces of the Cordillera Region, Northern Philippines.” *Journal of Experimental Agriculture International* 4, no. 8 (2014): 913-921. <https://doi.org/10.9734/ajea/2014/9202>
- Panda, T., Nirlipta Mishra, Bikram Pradhan, Shaik Rahimuddin, and Rajballav Mohanty. “Sacred Groves in Conservation of Biodiversity in Odisha.” *The Holistic Approach to Environment* 10, no. 1 (2020): 10-15. <https://doi.org/10.33765/thate.10.1.2>
- Paneque-Gálvez, Jaime, Nicolás Vargas-Ramírez, Brian M. Napoletano, and Anthony R. Cummings. “Grassroots Innovation Using Drones for Indigenous Mapping and Monitoring.” *Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute* 6, no. 4 (2017): 86. <https://doi.org/10.3390/land6040086>
- Pásková, Martina. “Can Indigenous Knowledge Contribute to the Sustainability Management of the Aspiring Rio Coco Geopark, Nicaragua?” *Geosciences* 8, no. 8 (2023): 277. <https://doi.org/10.3390/geosciences8080277>
- Patterson, Heather, Ella Bowles, Susan Chiblow, Deborah McGregor, Cory Kozmik, and Jesse N. Popp. “Environmental and Socio-Cultural Impacts of Glyphosate-Based Herbicides: Perspectives from Indigenous Knowledge and Western Science.” *Frontiers in Conservation Science* 4 (2023): 1186399. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fcosc.2023.1186399>
- Renganathan, S., and M. Kral. “Digital Preservation of Language, Cultural Knowledge and Traditions of the Indigenous Semai.” *SHS Web of Conferences* 53 (2018): 02001. <https://doi.org/10.1051/shsconf/20185302001>
- Rijoly, M. H. “How Ambonese Read: Challenges and Opportunities to Preserve Maluku Folklore and Culture.” *Pejlac Journal* 2, no. 1 (2022): 91–100. <https://doi.org/10.30598/pejlac.v2.i1.pp91-100>
- Robinson, Melissa K., Christopher T. Rota, and Laura A. Dee. “Traditional Ecological Knowledge in Restoration Ecology: A Call to Listen Deeply, to Engage with, and Respect Indigenous Voices” *Restoration Ecology* 29, no. 4 (2021): e13381. <https://doi.org/10.1111/rec.13381>

- Sarjono, Kadri, and Mohammad Fakhri. "The Sacredness of Communication in the Ngasuh Gumi Tradition of the North Lombok: An Ethnographic Analysis." *Jurnal Komunikasi* 15, no. 1 (2023): 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.20414/jurkom.v15i1.7033>
- Seli, M, Y, M G Rindarjono, and Puguh Karyanto. "The Concept of Forest Natural Resources Conservation on Traditional Dayak Mualang Community." *Earth and Environmental Science* 83 (2021): 012087. <https://doi.org/10.1088/1755-1315/683/1/012087>
- Sharifian, Abolfazl, Álvaro Fernández-Llamazares, Hussein T. Wario, Zsolt Molnár, and Mar Cabeza. "Dynamics of Pastoral Traditional Ecological Knowledge: A Global State-of-the-Art Review." *Ecology and Society* 7, no. 1 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.5751/es-12918-270114>
- Singh, Sonia. "Digital Preservation of Cultural Heritage Resources and Manuscripts: An Indian Government Initiative." *The Information Society* 38, no. 4 (2012): 289–96. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0340035212463139>
- Sumarwati, Sumarwati. "Traditional Ecological Knowledge on the Slope of Mount Lawu, Indonesia: All about Non-Rice Food Security." *Journal of Ethnic Foods* 9, no. 9 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s42779-022-00120-z>
- Tengö, Maria, Eduardo S. Brondízio, Thomas Elmqvist, Pernilla Malmer, and Marja Spierenburg. "Connecting Diverse Knowledge Systems for Enhanced Ecosystem Governance: The Multiple Evidence Base Approach." *AMBIO* 43 (2014): 579-591. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13280-014-0501-3>
- Uprety, Bharat R., Mohan P. Devkota, and Krishna B. Shrestha. "Contribution of Traditional Knowledge to Ecological Restoration: Practices and Applications." *Ecoscience* 19, no. 3 (2012): 225–37. <https://doi.org/10.2980/19-3-3530>
- Vicerra, Miguel Paolo, and Jem R. Javier. "Tabi-Tabi Po: Situating the Narrative of Supernatural in the Context of the Philippines Community Development." *Manusya: Journal of Humanities* 16, no. 2 (2013): 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1163/26659077-01602001>
- Warta, Ketut. "Tri Hita Karana and Natural Resources Exploring a Way How This Nature is Preserved and Potected in Bali and Lombok Islands." *Delhi Business Review* 13, no. 2 (2012): 91-97.
- Yahaya, Abdulai. "Indigenous Knowledge in the Management of a Community-Based Forest Reserve in the West District of Ghana."

Ghana Journal of Development Studies 9, no. 1 (2012).

<https://doi.org/10.4314/gjds.v9i1.8>

Zort, Çağın, Esra Karabacak, Şevket Öznur, and Gökmen Dağlı.

“Sharing of Cultural Values and Heritage Through Storytelling in the Digital Age.” *Frontiers in Psychology* 14 (2023).

<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1104121>.

Submitted: May 17, 2024; Accepted: Oct. 1, 2024; Published: Jan. 10, 2025
DOI: 10.62461/JLW100124

A Comparative Study of the Peace Concept of Christ in Colossians 1:15-23 and the Peace Pact Concept of Lumawig in Bontoc Mountain Province, Philippines

*James Lee D. Wanchakan*¹

ABSTRACT

The study proposes that indigenous peace pact concepts can be a source for theological-cultural hermeneutics. It highlights the interaction between the peace pact “Pechen” concept of Lumawig’s and peace concept of Christ, which can be utilized as a redemptive analogy in the peacemaking endeavors in the province. The connection of these concepts of making peace in the areas of creation, redemption, and reconciliation makes a good substance on God’s salvific presence in the world. A comparative study is needed to examine the role of mediator, “Pinakarsu,” in the traditional peacemaking processes of the peace pact Pechen concept of Lumawig and the mediatorial peace concept of Christ in Colossians 1:15-23. In this paper, the concept of peace authenticates the desire of God to be glorified in the gracious act of providing a pact holder or a mediator in order to restore broken divine-human relationship. Hence, the Bontoc Pechen concept can be interpreted through the lens of the Gospel message of Christ. This study also aims to promote traditional justice systems in support of Sustainable Development goal 16 which is on peace, justice, and strong institutions.

¹ **James Lee D. Wanchakan** earned a B.S in Forestry from Benguet State University, a Master of Divinity from Philippine Baptist Theological Seminary, Baguio City. He is a Campus Minister and Pastor at Hosanna Christian Church, Balili, La Trinidad, Benguet, Philippines. He is also currently enrolled at Benguet State University taking Master of Arts in Social Studies.

Keywords: *peace concepts, conflict resolution, indigenous peace pacts, tribal conflict, indigenous peace making*

1. Introduction

Since its inception over 50 years ago, peace research has been grappling with the criticism that it is overly focused on war and violence (Gleditsch et al. 2014). Consequently, peace itself is under conceptualized (Olivius and Åkebo 2021). A culture of peace is a relative concept, varying across time and place. It can only be truly understood and appreciated through dialogue, reflection, and action within relevant and meaningful contexts (Brenes 2002).

Contemporary studies on peace concepts in conflict resolution in the Philippines have highlighted the significance of peace education (Cremin 2016) in fostering peace through the integration of principle-based indigenous cultural practices (Leyaley 2016). Indigenous systems of conflict resolution can be incorporated in local government agencies such as *katarungang pambarangay* (barangay justice system) (Ty and Ruiz 2022), as well as educational institutions (Balatong et al. 2022), and police negotiations (Lafadchan and Marrero 2023). Furthermore, indigenous peace-keeping methods employ mediators in negotiations to resolve conflicts, stresses the role of women or *bai*, and provide peace zones or place of refuge. Lastly, leveraging cultural backgrounds in inter-faith/religious dialogue is vital to promoting peace and evangelical ministry, which may lead to the growth of Christian faith among indigenous peoples.

At present, the indigenous community in the Philippines remains unchanged in their primal pursuit for peace while adapting to globalization and technological advancement (Lafadchan and Marrero 2023). In keeping with this tradition, various Indigenous Peoples' traditional peacemaking processes, including *Bodong*, *Tongtong*, *Inayan* and *Pechen* in Luzon, and *Adat* and *Binunbungan* in Mindanao, remain effective tools for achieving peace and justice. Recent studies have shown that the cultural practices in peacemaking and conflict resolution of Indigenous Peoples (IPs) have contributed to the growth and use of the Barangay Justice system, especially in Luzon. However, the Moro communities in Mindanao are less

eager to adopt the national Barangay Justice program because they prefer to use their own justice systems (Barnes and Magdalena 2020).

Since tribal conflict is a serious problem, the IPs in the Philippines highlight the role of mediatorial intervention in their traditional peacemaking processes and rituals. It has been observed that several of the IPs of Luzon discuss the role of mediation and mediators in the peacemaking as a part of their culture (Barnes and Magdalena 2020). For instance, the Bontoc people of the Cordillera region of Luzon have a category of leaders called *Pinakarsu*. The *Pinakarsu* were the “go-between” (mediators) who settle inter-village conflicts, requiring intervention from individuals with authority and leadership as institutionalized by Lumawig in the *Pechen* or peace pact system of Bontoc, Mountain Province (Sumeg-ang 2005).

Past research has consistently supported the need for engendering discussions on missionary approaches among IPs (Layugan 2016). However, there have been few studies on the role of mediators in the traditional peacemaking processes of the peace pact concept as a redemptive analogy in presenting the work of God to the IPs. Under these provisions, the writer believes that the peace pact or *Pechen* concept of Lumawig can be interpreted through the lens of the concept of Christ making and establishing peace. Furthermore, tracing their distinctive similarities and differences will reveal a clear redemptive analogy in presenting the work of God to the IP of Bontoc, Mountain Province, Philippines.

2. The Peace Concept of Christ in Colossians 1:15-23

The pathway of Christ in making and establishing peace can be conceptualized in three main parts. First, Christ the agent in creation focuses on the relation of Christ to God and to all created things. Second, Christ the agent in redemption aims to emphasize the author, means, and effects of redemption. Lastly, Christ the agent of reconciliation underlines the nature, extent, effect, and divine purpose of reconciliation.

2.1. Christ the Agent in Creation

The relation of Christ to God is considered significant for it may lead to a proper understanding of His role as the Son and in relation to the

created order. The hymnic passage of Colossians 1:15-23, was aimed to address and explain the unique role of Christ as the one in, through, and for whom God created and reconciled the world (Matera 1999, 136). Paul's conception of Christ as "true image of the invincible God," as written in Colossians 1:15a, emphasizes Christ's relationship to God. The word "image" involves concepts of representation and manifestation. Human being is said to be the representation of the image of God; while the incarnate Word, in nature, attributes, and actions, is the true manifestation of the unseen Deity (Barlow 1914, 392). Hence, Apostle Paul reveals the pre-existence of Christ, and that Christ holds the key to creation (Simpson and Bruce 1972, 196).

The phrase "first born of all creation" (Col. 1:15b) designates the relationship of Christ to creation and that Christ is the reason behind the whole creation came to being. The created world becomes a revelation of the majesty and self-sufficient power of Christ that "all things were created by Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:16b-17). Therefore, Barlow (1914, 392) rightly confirmed:

Christ is the center of life, force, motion, and rest; around Him all things revolve. He imposes their limits, gives to them their laws, strikes the key notes of their harmonies, blends and controls their diverse operations. He is All-perfect in the midst of imperfection, the Unchanged in the midst of change. He is the Author of Human redemption and reconciliation, became incarnate, suffered, died, and rose again, and reigns with the Father in the glory everlasting.

2.2. Christ the Agent in Redemption

The central theme of redemption in this hymnic passage is that God has taken the initiative to act compassionately on behalf of those who are powerless to help themselves. Divine redemption embraces God's identification with humanity. Since humankind is held captive to sin, it requires the payment of a price from which only the atoning death of Christ can liberate through the obedience, suffering, death, and resurrection of the incarnate Son (Elwell 1996, 665). Therefore, our redemption, according to this passage in Colossians, identifies no one but Christ as the sole mediator of redemption.

The means of redemption can be deeply understood if Christ's redemptive work is properly viewed in relation to the effects of evil to

human condition (what we are to be saved from), as well as the possibility of the divine-human relationship (what we are to be saved for) (O'Collins 1995, 280-281). The real evil in the human situation, rests in the unwillingness of human beings to recognize and acknowledge their creatureliness and dependence upon God and their effort to make their own life independent and secure (Niebuhr 1996, 137-138). Undeniably, humanity's situation must be put right with God; human beings needed to be ransomed not with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but the precious blood of Christ shed on the cross. Thus, Christ's death is described as the payment price for the deliverance of those held captive by sin. The certainty of this redemption points to the relevance of the death of the Son of God on a cross as a unique and unrepeatable event.

The *Wycliffe Dictionary of Theology* identifies redemption as a specific term because it denotes the means by which salvation is achieved, namely, by the payment of a ransom (Harrison et al. 2000, 438). The ransom price of the shed blood of Christ, has an eternal effect on the provision of deliverance that involves not only blessing of pardon but also newness of life (Walter Elwell 1996, 664). Moreover, the perpetual effect of redemption also eliminates the hindrance between divine-human relationship so that goodness may overflow. On the whole, redemption rest entirely on what God has done in Christ (Everette Harrison et al. 2000, 438). Hence, with the atoning work of Christ, humans are triumphantly saved.

2.3. Christ the Agent in Reconciliation

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Colossian believers: "For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him" (Colossians 1:19), asserting the entirety of the grand self-expression of God in Christ. It is believed that in reconciliation, Christ was presented as the one in whom God in all totality of divine essence and divine purpose summates all things up in Christ. Additionally, it is the good pleasure of God that none other than Christ should be the Reconciler of the universe.

The phrase "to reconcile to Himself" in Colossians 1:20, which describes the nature of reconciliation centered around God's love and Christ's death, is an affirmation of God's gracious activity as expressed in the death of Jesus Christ on Mt. Calvary. Consequently, the source of reconciliation is found purely in the love of God achieved through Christ (James Denney 1959, 232).

The expanse of reconciliation is universal. According to apostle Paul, the eternal goal of Christ is “to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven” (Colossians 1:20a). Apostle Paul particularly proclaims an absolute and complete reconciliation effected through the mediation of Jesus Christ done in history, and on a cross of shame; and it was completed through physical dying. It is perhaps necessary to remark that this reconciliation was bridged by the appointed Son to act as reconciler between God and sinful creatures on earth. To conclude, God’s eternal Son and equal became man in order that in two natures, human and divine, he might be all that we need for our help and all that God required for his vindication (Peter Lewis 1992, 216).

The means of Christ peace-making work was “through his blood, shed on the cross” (Colossians 1:20). The emphasis of the term blood shed on the cross speaks of the purposeful yielding up of Christ life in violent death. Furthermore, the source of every blessing is centered around the shed blood of Christ on the cross which secures the justification and reconciliation of the sinner.

The phrase “to present you holy, without blemish and free from accusations” (Colossians 1:22) explains the condition of humanity as approved of God and beyond the accusations of human or demon. James Denny (1959, 158) remarked that “the power that rules this age, that is, death, sin, the law, and the flesh has already reached its zenith; it is abolished by the shed blood of Christ on the cross.” Thus, the divine purpose in reconciliation is to promote human moral purity, personal blamelessness, and freedom from censure.

3. The Peace Pact, or *Pechen* Concept of Lumawig in Bontoc, Mountain Province, Philippines.

The Bontoks of Mountain Province had a belief system with regards to Lumawig. In the Bontoc myth, the ruler of the sky world, Kabunian, had three sons. The eldest and the youngest were satisfied with working in their father’s field; but the second son, Lumawig, was not. He would often neglect his work and look down at the earth for hours, then thought of visiting the lower region (Mallari and Wilson 1958, 7). Seeing the dissatisfaction among one of his sons, Kabunian blessed Lumawig and permitted him to go down to earth, bringing with him all his possessions so

that his children may have something to inherit. Thus, Lumawig descended from heaven to Mount Kalawitan.

3.1. Lumawig the Agent in Creation

Lumawig's relation to all created things started when Lumawig came to earth. The Bontoc myth describes him as a traveler who went far and wide crossing rivers, mountains, and from village to village, until he reached Bontoc. While he was resting, Lumawig caught sight of two sisters at work and was impressed by the hardworking ability of the younger lass named Fukan, the daughter of Batanga. Lumawig courted Fukan and at the same time made a good impression to his father-in-law; hence, Fukan was allowed to marry Lumawig. Thereafter, Lumawig of the sky world lived among the people of the earth like an ordinary man. He established the *ato*, or meeting place, where social and ritual functions were carried out and where common problems were tackled as well. Above all, Lumawig provided the people of Bontoc with specific guidelines for behavior. These unwritten rules became a cornerstone of their ethical code, significantly shaping their customs and promoting peaceful coexistence (Varona 1982, 118).

On the other hand, taboos, rituals, and ceremonial rites are considered legacies from Lumawig. Additionally, these well-known teachings of Lumawig will explain why he is more popular than his father, Kabunian (Kate Botengan 1976, 21). One outstanding example of Lumawig's legacy is the peace pact, or *pechen*. Under this idea, the relationship of Lumawig to all creation is cemented in this *pechen* concept that he introduced. Moreover, the Bontoc myth also relates that Lumawig had decided to return to the sky world after the people of the earth were sufficiently taught.

3.2. Lumawig the Agent in Redemption

The idea of redemption was authored by Lumawig through the concept of *pechen*, which seeks to establish and preserve friendships as well as to stop or prevent wars and killings among the people (Arsenio Sumeg-ang 2005, 19). While Lumawig instituted the concept of redemption, he was not the redeemer. This role, instead, belonged to the *pinakarsu/inanak*, or the go-between. To become a qualified Bontok *pinakarsu*, a person must be an adult male who intermarries with women from another tribe. The *pinakarsu* has a special task of mediating during conflict between two

warring villages. Prill-Brett (1987, 6-7) who studied the *pinakarsu*'s traditional role, observed:

During this period of conflict, the *pinakarsu* is the only person who can move from village A to village B without being in danger since he has dual citizenship. Thus, he has diplomatic immunity. Moreover, any communication to or from either of the villages in conflict is coursed through the *pinakarsu* whose traditional role becomes active during the conflict period. The *pinakarsu* acts as the diplomat and must maintain his neutrality at all times. He is the messenger for both hostile communities. Should peace talks commence the *pinakarsu* becomes the official bearer of messages. However, the Bontok go-between has no power to make decisions on inter village political matters, he merely relays messages and tries his best to establish peace since he and his kinsmen in both villages would be those most affected by any conflict situation.

The means of redemption is placed upon the informal institution called "*ato*," which is governed by the *amam-a* and the *inanak*, or the go-between serving as judge or settlers of disputes. In the area of forming peace pact, the *pinakarsu*'s role is seen as an important function due to his relationship with both tribes by virtue of intermarriages, thus, becoming the only qualified redeemer in forging friendships between his clan in both villages. June Prill-Brett (1987) has discussed extensively regarding the procedure of pact-forging as well as the breaking or rupturing of a pact. Under this system, the stages involved in leading to the establishment of a pact include the following:

First, sending of a gift or token as peace offering; second, acceptance of the peace pact proposal; third, initial meeting to settle past differences or grievances; and lastly, discussion and consensus on the various provisions of the pact. It is also worth noting that when the *warang* (the gift given as peace offering) is rejected, there can be no means of redemption or deliverance among the warring tribes. Therefore, the only means of redemption is when the Council of Elders, or *amam-a*, decides to accept the peace offering given by the *amam-a* of the other village by channeling it to their *pinakarsu*.

Generally, when the peace pact is forged by both tribes through mutual agreements as mediated by the *pinakarsu*, peace and friendship will now exist between the two. Thus, freedom to travel, intermarry, carry out economic trades, etc. are the resulting effects of redemption. In addition,

the *pinakarsu* also enjoys the honor and eminence conferred to him by both villages involved in the conflict (Prill-Brett 1987, 7). Conversely, when both tribes cannot settle on peace, retaliation happens between the offended victim and the offending tribe. Usually, justice is gained when the aggrieved party evens up the score (Sumeg-ang 2005, 21).

3.3. Lumawig the Agent in Reconciliation

Lumawig may be credited as the agent of reconciliation due to his legacy in establishing the concept of *pechen*. It is also worth mentioning that Lumawig was never remarked in the Bontoc myth as the one doing the work of a reconciler. Rather, the reconciler falls on the peacemaker, which is the go-between, or the *pinakarsu*.

The nature of reconciliation revolves around the mediatorial work of the *pinakarsu*. This *pinakarsu* is usually appointed by the Council of Elders due to his duty to both his natal and affinal communities (Bagayao 2003, 4). Thus, he is tasked with reconciling or standing as go-between during negotiations and must remain neutral to both sides. There are also times “when he will be made to return the head/body of a slain enemy or to present the *warang* (symbolized by the presentation of a head-axe or a spear) to the *ator* or the victim of the last animosities” (Prill-Brett 1987, 7). If the *warang* is accepted, the *pinakarsu* will be responsible for announcing their decisions, and *senglep* will eventually follow. *Senglep* is a stage where both parties negotiate their past allegations and agree on the conditions of the pact. After agreeing upon the general provisions of the pact, *Chuwar*, or gift-giving follows. In this event, both parties are reminded of the conditions of the peace pact contract and their duty to contribute to the peaceful relationship between their villages. The *Chernat/pau-os*, which means “warming up of the pact,” usually happens annually, or every 2-3 years, depending on the agreements made during the *senglep* or *chuwar*. Again, the conditions of the pact are enumerated, and if any amendments are suggested by one group, they are discussed during these occasions. There is also an exchange of gifts between the two parties to the peace pact. However, when a breach occurs in their contract, *eret* which means “to tighten” will be held through a ceremony consisting of a ritual, and settlement of the conflict is performed to prevent the rupturing of the pact (Sumeg-ang 2005, 22). In all the above-mentioned process, the involvement of the *pinakarsu* or the go-between is greatly desired due to

his role as binding factor to the restoration, building, and strengthening of the peace pact.

Under the concept of *pechen*, the extent of reconciliation ends when there is an act of murder that has occurred. The peace pact contract is no longer existent, thus, *nafakas nan pechen* (“the pact is ruptured”). The pact will no longer be effective, and its benefits written in “the contract will be automatically omitted when a killing of a person has taken place” (Sumegang 2005, 22). Moreover, Prill-Brett (1987, 7-9) asserted in her research findings that any act of murder automatically dissolves a peace pact. The ward guardians wash their hands of the responsibility of upholding the pact contract. Their last responsibility is to warn their citizens that the pact is broken and they are now in a state of war, and to exact the full penalty from the individual(s) who caused the rupturing of the pact. The pact guardian ward members cannot kill the offender since it is taboo among the Bontoks to kill a fellow villager, internal killing is rarely, if ever, carried out to punish the person who caused the breaking of the pact.

The *Northern Philippines Times Newspaper* (13-19 July 2008), published a paper regarding the appeal of the government to village elders to maintain peace and order in villages by properly assessing tribal pacts. This was urged by the government due to the peace pact’s inability to settle certain communal disputes and crimes resulting in unjust punishment or maltreatment. They feel that peace pact may have the possibility of losing its usefulness. Moreover, it may also be unconstitutional due to its doubtful institutional legality and constitutionality (Zigzag Weekly 2006). On the other hand, despite the serious examination by the government regarding the purpose of the indigenous justice system, traditionally known as *pechen*, the indigenous practice still proves to have consistently preserved the indigenous identity and self-sufficiency of the Cordillera community (Bagayao 2003, 1).

4. Comparing Lumawig’s Peace Pact Concept of *Pechen* Concept and the Peace Concept of Christ in Colossians 1:15-23

The interaction between Lumawig’s peace pact concept of *Pechen* and peace concept of Christ demonstrates a need for interpretation in the areas of culture and context, as well as the formulation of a new understanding that addresses the here and now (Tano 2007, 3). The process of reinterpreting these two concepts of peace and discovering their

connections conveys God's work of salvation, which surpasses description. Consequently, many different terms and metaphors are used to express the wonder of what God has accomplished through Christ (Schreiner 2008, 379).

The peace pact concept of Christ and the peace pact concept of Lumawig have something in common. The shared characteristic lies in the relationship that Lumawig and Christ have with their Fathers and their relation to the created things. First, the researcher would like to present their common grounds in terms of their relation to their fathers. Thomas Schreiner (2008, 323) argued that "God is identified as the Father of the historical Jesus Christ who was sent to earth and came to exist when he was born. In line with this, he argued that when a person is being sent, it has a previous existence." Thus, the sending of Jesus the Son indicates that he shares divinity or existence with his Father, who has no beginning and no end. Similarly, Lumawig also shares divinity with Kabunian, his father. Moreover, Lumawig was also looked up to by the people as a god because he did not only do wonders but he also did good and taught the people what they must do from day to day (Dizon 1999, 13).

However, the divinity of Lumawig and Kabunian was challenged by William Scott (1969, 127), who asserted that "Kabunian is a class or place of deities; that Lumawig is a culture hero turned into a god; and that either or both have become the subject of *apo-dios* concept through religious acculturation." Additionally, the term "Kabunian" can be understood differently from one tribe to another. In the Cordillera region, several natives from different tribes thought that Kabunian was a sun or the sky, a group of deities, or a place of deities, but could not be certain (Scott 1969, 126).

As a result of religious acculturation, Kabunian can also be interpreted as "God the Creator" in English. However, in the Bontoc area, their overall deity is referred to as "Intutungtso" (Kate Botengan (1976, 203). In this context, it can be assumed that Bontocs do not have a specific name for their supreme deity, simply referring to him as the "One from above" or Intutungtso. Thus, equating or naming the Bontoc overall deity, Intutungtso, as Kabunian is evidence of religious acculturation.

Lumawig may have been regarded as an early pioneer of the Cordillera region, possibly a resident of Mount Kalawitan, whose fame spread throughout the area due to his extraordinary abilities that surpassed those of ordinary men of his time. Over time, Lumawig was likely considered a

cultural hero and eventually deified as a god, becoming a subject of religious acculturation. Additionally, the Bontoc myth mentions Lumawig's ascension to the sky world, though no witnesses are recorded, unlike the ascension of Jesus Christ (Mallari and Wilson 1958, 13). Hence, the idea of Lumawig being equated to the son of *Intutungsto* and equal to Jesus Christ is also a product of religious acculturation.

The study reveals that Jesus Christ is God, holding absolute priority and sovereignty over the entire universe. In contrast, Lumawig does not hold such a position of absolute priority over creation. The Bontoc myth affirms that Kabunian never entrusted Lumawig with absolute power over creation. Instead, the myth narrates that Lumawig was blessed by Kabunian and allowed to pursue his journey. At the same time, Kabunian instructed Lumawig to bring his belongings with him so that he could share them with the earth dwellers (Dizon 1999, 11).

Thomas Schreiner (2008, 369) stated that redemption is the liberation from sin that has come through the work of Christ. It is important to note that the cost of redemption is implicit in Christ's self-giving and the life He gave on behalf of others. This was made possible because Christ was sent to be a mediator between the divine and the human. In contrast, Lumawig is never depicted as a mediator in the Bontoc myth, though he is credited as the author of *Pechen*, or the peace pact. In short, Lumawig is not considered a mediator.

Moreover, the peace pact concept highlights the role of a *pinakarsu*, or go-between, in mending or creating peace. The *pinakarsu* was sent by the Council of Elders to the offended tribe to offer the *warang*, or gift. If the gift was accepted, negotiations would proceed. Accordingly, the writer proposes that Christ's mediatorial role can be illustrated through the role of the *pinakarsu*, as the one sent to offer the gift of peace. Hence, just as Christ's blood is the cost of redemption, for the Bontocs, it is the giving and accepting of the *warang* that signifies peace.

The separation between human beings and God is a result of human transgression. Humanity became enemies of God due to hostile minds and evil deeds, making reconciliation essential. In Colossians, reconciliation is deeply rooted in the symbol of the cross, where Jesus made peace by his blood. This peace and restored friendship with God stem from Christ's physical death on the cross, which satisfied God's wrath, allowing friendship to be restored. Thus, the entire process of reconciliation was

initiated and accomplished by God through the cross of Christ (Schreiner 2008, 364).

Having emphasized the role of Christ in reconciliation, it is also worth drawing a parallel with the role of the Bontoc go-between in the peace-making process. In the Bontoc *Pechen* concept, peace can only occur when the gift, or *warang*, is accepted. Similarly, reconciliation through Christ can only happen when an individual accepts God’s gift of peace by believing in His Son, Christ. Therefore, both concepts require a mediator to bring about reconciliation. Moreover, the *pinakarsu*’s willingness to risk his life by going to the other village for the sake of peace can be contextualized as a reflection of the same sacrificial love seen in Christ, the mediator.

The Peace Pact Concepts of Christ and Lumawig are Presented in 3 Areas	Jesus Christ	Lumawig
<p>1. Creation</p> <p>a. Relationship to the Father</p> <p>b. Relationship to the Created Things</p>	<p>➤ Pre-existent Christ with the God the Father (Existed before His incarnation)</p> <p>➤ Christ is sovereign over all creation. (Christ was there when creation began, and it was for Him as well as through Him that the whole creation was done).</p>	<p>➤ Holds the position of a son of a supreme deity Kabunian.</p> <p>➤ Lumawig’s great contribution was in teaching life skills and giving rules to the people.</p>
<p>2. Redemption</p> <p>a. Author</p> <p>b. Means</p>	<p>➤ Christ the Redeemer</p> <p>➤ Christ the sole mediator of redemption.</p> <p>➤ Unique and unrepeatable Christ death as payment price for deliverance from sin.</p>	<p>➤ Lumawig authors redemption but not as the redeemer.</p> <p>➤ A Bontok <i>pinakarsu</i>, or a go-between, must be an adult male who intermarries with a woman from another tribe.</p> <p>➤ The only means of redemption is when the “Council of Elders or <i>amam-a</i> decided to</p>

c. Effects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Provides eternal effect on blessings of pardon, newness of life, and restoration of divine-human relationship. 	<p>accept the peace offering given by the <i>amam-a</i> of the other village by channeling it to their <i>pinakarsu</i>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ When the peace pact is forged by both tribes through mutual agreements as mediated by the <i>pinakarsu</i>, peace and friendship will exist between the two.
<p>3. Reconciliation</p> <p>a. Nature</p> <p>b. Extent</p> <p>c. Means</p> <p>d. Purpose</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Christ the Reconciler ➤ Centers around God's love and Christ's death. ➤ Christ in human and divine natures became all we need for help and God's requirement for vindication. ➤ Christ as mediator shed His blood on the cross so that peace will be achieved. ➤ Promotes human's moral purity, personal blamelessness and freedom from censure. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Lumawig established reconciliation in the concept of <i>Pechen</i>. ➤ Revolves around the mediatorial work of the go-between in restoring, building and strengthening the peace pact. ➤ Extent of reconciliation will find its end when there is an act of murder that had happened. ➤ Not emphasized in the Bontoc Peace Pact concept. ➤ The peace pact system, proves to consistently preserved the indigenous identity and self-sufficiency of the Cordillera community.

Table 1: The Distinctive Similarities and Differences in the Peace Concept of Christ and Lumawig

5. Conclusion

Humanities imprisonment in a culture of violence, which undermines the efforts of any tribal group seeking harmonious relationships, can be resolved through a mediatorial intervention. The *Pechen* peace pact concept of Lumawig and peace concept of Christ both emphasize the role of a mediator in achieving peace. In this context, the apostle Paul used metaphorical language to express God's and Christ's mediatorial saving work, highlighting God's efforts to restore the broken divine-human relationship. It was through Christ Jesus that this restoration was made possible.

Since culture has a religious dimension containing essential matters in life such as peace, meaning, community and ritual. Indigenous cultures can be used to interact with Christian faith which leads to a significant contribution in the understanding of human existential realities. Additionally, human salvation, in its fullest sense, cannot be understood through a single dimension of God's saving work. Thus, the Bontoc *Pechen* concept can be interpreted through the lens of the Gospel message of Christ, particularly in the areas of creation, redemption, and reconciliation, with an emphasis on mediatorial intervention. This research leads to the conclusion that Christ is the mediator (the *pinakarsu*) and the gift (the *warang*) of God. All other hopes, grounded elsewhere, will inevitably fade and vanish.

REFERENCES

- Bagayao, Richard. *Cordilleran Autonomy: A Historical Journey*. Baguio City: Easter College Inc., 2003.
- _____. *Modern vs. Customary System of Justice and Conflict Resolution*. Baguio City: Easter College Inc., 2003.
- Balatong, Leony, et al. "Tongtong Practices of Bakun Benguet: Its Historical and Political Relevance." *European Online Journal of Natural and Social Sciences: Proceedings*, 11, no. 4 (2022): 270. https://european-science.com/eojnss_proc/article/view/6716
- Barlow, George. *A Homiletic Commentary of the Epistles of St. Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and I and II Thessalonians*. New York: Funk and Wagnals Company, 1914.
- Barnes, Bruce, and Federico Magdalena. *Traditional Peacemaking Processes Among Indigenous Populations in the Northern and Southern Philippines. Conflict Resolution in Asia: Mediation and Other Cultural Models*. Maryland: The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc., 2018.
- Botengan, Kate. *Bontoc Life-Ways: A Study in Education and Culture*. Philippines: Capitol Publishing House, Inc., 1976.
- Brenes, Abelardo. "Multi-Faceted Education Toward a Culture of Peace." *SangSaeng*, no. 7 (Summer 2023): 5-11. <https://www.unescoapceiu.org/post/3236>
- Butry, Daniel. *Christian Peacemaking: From Heritage to Hope*. Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1994.
- Cremin, Hilary. "Peace Education Research in the Twenty-First Century: Three Concepts Facing Crisis or Opportunity?" *Journal of Peace Education* 13, no. 1 (2016): 1–17. DOI:10.1080/17400201.2015.1069736
- Denny, James. *The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation*. London: James Clarke & Co., LTD., 1959.
- Dizon, Gina. *Learning From the Spirits of the Cordillera Tales*. Guisad: Easter College Inc. Printing Press, 1999.
- Elwell, Walter. *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Company, 1996.
- Gleditsch, Nils Peter, Jonas Nordkvelle, and Havard Strand. "Peace Research—Just the Study of War?" *Journal of Peace Research* 51, no. 2 (2014): 145-158. DOI:10.1177/0022343313514074

- Hays, Richard. *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation; A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers Inc., 1996.
- Harrison, Everette, Geoffrey Bromiley, and Carl F. Henry, eds. *Wycliffe Dictionary of Theology*. Grand Rapids: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000.
- Lafadchan, Claire, and Ben Marrero Jr. "The Changing Dynamics of Peace Pact." *Psychology and Education: A Multidisciplinary Journal* 7, no. 8 (2023): 659-665. DOI:10.5281/zenodo.7750366
- Layugan, Michael. "The Kalinga Peace-Pact Institution, Bodong: Forging Relationships, Resolving Conflicts, and Fostering Peaceful Co-existence." *MST Review* 18, no. 2 (2016): 1. <https://ejournals.ph/article.php?id=11308>
- Leyaley, Rhonda Vail. "Inayan: The Tenet for Peace among Igorots." *International Journal of Advanced Research in Management and Social Sciences* 5, no. 2 (2016): 239-256.
- Lewis, Peter. *The Glory of Christ*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1992.
- Mallari, Ismael, and Laurence Wilson. *Tales from the Mountains*. Manila: McCullough Printing Company, 1958.
- Matera, Frank. *New Testament Christology*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999.
- Niebuhr, Reinhold. *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation, Vol. 1, Human Nature*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996.
- Northern Philippines Times* (Philippines), July 13-19, 2008.
- O'Brien, Peter. *Word Biblical Commentary; Colossians and Philemon*, Vol. 44. Waco: Word Books Publisher, 1982.
- O'Collins, Gerald. *Christology: A Biblical, Historical, and Systematic Study of Jesus Christ*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Olivius, Elisabeth, and Malin Åkebo. "Exploring Varieties of Peace: Advancing the Agenda." *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development* 16, no. 1 (2021): 3-8. DOI:10.1177/1542316621995641
- Prill-Brett, June. "CSC Working Paper 05." *A Survey of Cordillera Indigenous Political Institutions: A Revised Version of the Paper Presented During the Conference on Issues on Cordillera Autonomy*, May 22-24, 1987, Inn Rocio. Baguio City: CSC Working Paper Series, 1987.
- Schreiner, Thomas. *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008.

- Scott, William. *On the Cordillera: A Look at the People's Cultures of the Mountain Province*. Manila: MCS Enterprises, Inc., 1969.
- Simpson, Edmund Kidley, and Frederick Fyvie Bruce. *Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes*. Grand Rapids: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1972.
- Sumeg-ang, Arsenio. *Ethnography in the Major Ethnolinguistic Groups in the Cordillera*. Quezon City: New Day Publisher, 2005.
- Tano, Rodrigo. *Issues in Filipino Theology*. Manila: By the Author, 2007.
- Ty, Rey, and Alma Bibon-Ruiz. "Indigenous Peoples, Conflicts, and Peacebuilding: A Case Study of the Aetas of Central Philippines." *Journal of Research for International Educators* 1, no.1 (2022): 1-9.
- Verora, Levi. *Unreached Peoples '82: Reaching the Igorots*. Makati: Progressive Printing Palace, 1982.
- Weaver, Denny. *The Nonviolent Atonement*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001.
- Zigzag Weekly* (Philippines), September 17, 2006.

Submitted: Jun. 18, 2024; Accepted: Oct. 1, 2024; Published: Jan. 10, 2025
DOI: 10.62461/TVC100124

Eco-spirituality in Papua New Guinea's Traditional Beliefs and Christian Teachings: A Response to the Contemporary Ecological Crisis

Tuan Viet Cao, CM¹

ABSTRACT

Like many other countries, Papua New Guinea (PNG) faces significant environmental challenges, including deforestation and climate change impacts. This research responds to these ecological issues by analyzing traditional beliefs and religious practices in PNG, emphasizing the interconnectedness of all life forms and their intrinsic relationship with the cosmos, and integrating them into Christianity. Using qualitative interviews, ethnographic fieldwork, and textual analysis, the research reveals that the holistic perspectives of indigenous and Christian beliefs and their eco-spirituality can inspire meaningful dialogue and action in addressing pressing environmental issues and nurturing spiritual well-being. Key findings indicate that these integrated spiritual perspectives can lead to more sustainable environmental practices and policies. By showcasing the wisdom embedded in PNG's indigenous knowledge and its alignment with particular Christian spiritualities, the research underscores the relevance of these belief systems to current academic and practical discourses on environmental sustainability. This research not only enriches the understanding of eco-spirituality in a specific cultural context but also offers valuable insights for global efforts to harmonize human-environment relationships, emphasizing the role of spirituality in fostering sustainable futures.

¹**Tuan Viet Cao, C.M.** is a Vietnamese Vincentian missionary priest working in PNG, serving as the Vocation Director of the Vincentian International Community.

Keywords: *Indigenous religion, Christianity, eco-spirituality, traditional beliefs, Papua New Guinea, ecological crisis.*

1. Introduction

In the early morning of May 24, 2024, while most residents of Yambali village in Enga Province, Papua New Guinea (PNG), located 595 km northwest of the capital Port Moresby, were fast asleep, a colossal landslide occurred, causing parts of a mountain to collapse onto the village. According to The National Disaster Centre, the landslide had buried over 2,000 people and affected over 70,000. Several factors were believed to have contributed to the landslide, including the village's geographical location, deforestation, climate change, heavy rainfall, and earthquakes.² Additionally, Red Cross PNG's Interim Secretary General Janet Philemon noted that the area is known for gold mining, and activities related to gold mining might have destabilized the mountain.³ Nevertheless, PNG is grappling with an ecological crisis mainly driven by human activities.

PNG, often called the "land of paradise," is an island nation in the southwestern Pacific Ocean. It is known for its incredible biological diversity, characterized by expansive tropical rainforests, mangroves, and coral reefs. Additionally, PNG is rich in mineral resources like gold, copper, and oil, with mining being a significant economic driver through projects. Marine resources, including fisheries and aquaculture, are vital for local communities and the national economy.⁴ Unfortunately, PNG faces

² Alind Chauhan, "Geographical Location, Deforestation, Climate Change: What Led to the Deadly Landslide in PNG," *The Indian Express*, June 3, 2024, <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-climate/landslide-papua-new-guinea-reasons-9369851/>

³ "PNG: Large Landslide Causes 'Loss of Life and Property,'" *Le Monde*, May 24, 2024, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/05/24/papua-new-guinea-large-landslide-causes-loss-of-life-and-property_6672528_4.html

⁴ William Standish and Richard T. Jackson, "PNG," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, June 7, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Papua-New-Guinea>; Simon A. Kawagle, "The Mineral Resources of PNG," *Resource Geology* 55, no. 3 (2005): 285–288; PNG Forest Authority, *PNG Forestry Outlook Study* (Bangkok: The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2009), 5-7; "PNG Fisheries Industry," *National Fisheries Authority*, accessed 8 June 2024, <https://www.fisheries.gov.pg/fisheries-industry>.

many environmental crises, with deforestation and significant biodiversity loss. Mining activities exacerbate environmental degradation, water pollution, and habitat destruction. Coastal and marine resources are declining due to over-harvesting, destructive fishing methods, and coastal pollution, while mangrove loss threatens coastal protection and biodiversity. Climate change poses further risks, with rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and shifts in temperature and precipitation patterns impacting ecosystems, livelihoods, and national vulnerabilities.⁵

PNG is renowned for its rich cultural diversity, with over 800 distinct groups, each exhibiting unique language, cultural practices, traditions, social structures, and religious beliefs, coexisting alongside Christianity, the dominant religion.⁶ PNG people have always been deeply religious, with traditional religions playing a crucial role as an integral part in personal and communal life.⁷ In PNG, cultures, religion, and social organization are intricately intertwined.⁸ PNG people have a holistic view of the cosmos, encompassing all living and non-living entities, including humans, plants, animals, rocks, rivers, oceans, spirits, gods, and ancestors.⁹

This paper explores integrating traditional eco-spiritual beliefs in PNG with Christian teachings to offer practical solutions for addressing the ecological crisis. Drawing on Pope Francis' call for diverse cultural and spiritual perspectives, the paper underscores the importance of incorporating various forms of wisdom, including religious insights, to tackle

⁵ Stephen Nicholls, *The Priority Environmental Concerns of PNG, IWP-Pacific Technical Report* (Apia, Samoa: SPREP, 2004), 3; "People vs. The Climate Crisis in PNG," *Cool Earth*, February 22, 2023,

<https://www.coolearth.org/news/people-vs-climate-crisis-png/>

⁶ Standish and Jackson, "PNG," *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

⁷ Joe Gaqurae, "Indigenization as Incarnation: The Concept of Melanesian Christ," in *Christ in Melanesia: Exploring Theological Issues* (Point 1997), ed. James Knight (Goroka: The Melanesian Institute, 1977), 147.

⁸ Gilbert Herdt, "Self and Culture: Contexts of Religious Experience in Melanesia," in *The Religious Imagination in New Guinea*, eds. Herdt, Gilbert and Michele Stephen (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 16.

⁹ Gaqurae, "Indigenization as Incarnation," 147; Philip Gibbs, "Getting to Know Our Neighbours," *Common Theology* (Spring 2011): 5; Darrel Whiteman, "Melanesian Religions: An Overview," in *An Introduction to Melanesian Religions* (Point Series No. 6), ed. Ennio Mantovani (Goroka, PNG: The Melanesian Institute, 1984), 93.

environmental challenges.¹⁰ By embracing the sacredness of nature and committing to the principles of stewardship and reverence, as outlined in both indigenous traditions and Christian values, PNG can develop a holistic approach to its ecological crisis. This integrated framework respects and honors the natural world and paves the way for achieving environmental harmony.

2. Traditional Beliefs in PNG

2.1. Animism and Nature Worship

Animism is the belief that natural objects, places, and creatures possess a spiritual essence concerned with human affairs and can influence human interests by helping or harming them.¹¹ Animism is a foundational aspect of traditional PNG beliefs in recognizing a complex hierarchy of spirits, ranging from supreme to lower ranking, such as bush and ancestral spirits.¹² There are also beliefs in sky gods who dwell on high, but believing in God as Creator or sky gods and supreme beings is not widespread in PNG. Instead, the focus is often on more localized spirits directly associated with the immediate environment and daily sustenance.¹³

In animism, the natural environment is seen as alive with spirits and supernatural beings. Mountains, rivers, trees, and animals are not just physical entities but are imbued with spiritual significance. This belief fosters a deep connection between the people and their surroundings, encouraging a respectful and harmonious relationship with nature.¹⁴ Depending on the area and way of living, the people of PNG have diverse methods of worshiping and respecting the spirits who assist them in their daily activities, such as hunting, fishing, and planting.¹⁵

¹⁰ Francis, *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015), no. 63.

¹¹ Cf. George Kerlin Park, "Animism," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, November 25, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/animism>.

¹² Theo Alerts, *Traditional Religion in Melanesia* (Port Moresby: University of PNG Press, 1998), 18.

¹³ Ennio Mantovani, "A Fundamental Melanesian Religion," in *Christ in Melanesia: Exploring Theological Issues* (Point 1997), ed. James Knight (Goroka: The Melanesian Institute, 1997), 163; Philip Gibbs, "Indigenous Spirituality: Expanding the View," 54; Alerts, *Traditional Religion in Melanesia*, 36.

¹⁴ Mantovani, "A Fundamental Melanesian Religion," 163.

¹⁵ Alerts, *Traditional Religion in Melanesia*, 11-24.

In the highland regions of PNG, where hunting is a primary source of sustenance, the ritual practices are deeply intertwined with a belief in spirits and gods, which are considered essential for a successful hunt. These supernatural beings are regarded with awe and reverence as integral parts of the natural world.¹⁶ In certain regions, hunters create carvings believed to be living beings and to possess magical properties. Hunters engage in rituals of reverence and prayer with these figures, believing that the spirits within them embark on nocturnal hunts or battles, slaying the souls of their prey. The following day, hunters expect a successful catch, interpreting it as a direct result of the spirits' nocturnal endeavors. Parts of the hunted animals are offered to these carvings as tokens of respect and gratitude.¹⁷

In coastal and island regions, where communities derive sustenance from lakes or seas, there is a belief in gods caring for aquatic animals. Fishermen may offer prayers and libations to these spirits, asking for calm seas and bountiful catches. Rituals might be performed at specific times, such as the beginning of the fishing season, and involve the entire community. The communities conduct ceremonies to honor the spirits of the sea symbolized by rocks, sharks, or giant sea snakes. Offerings are made to ensure safe passage and a bountiful catch. Fishermen often attribute their success or failure to the favor or disfavor of these spirits, integrating their religious practices closely with their daily lives.¹⁸

In agricultural communities, where planting and harvesting are vital, people share variations on familiar themes in their myths and tales about agriculture-related gods and spirits. These spirits and gods are believed to guide people in making gardens and planting crops, ensuring fertility and growth.¹⁹ Thus, the people pay homage to the spirits of the land and crops and perform various rituals to honor these agricultural spirits, seeking their blessings for abundant harvests. Farmers engage in planting ceremonies that involve blessing seeds and the land itself. These rituals might include offerings, dances, and communal prayer, with the expectation of fertility and a good harvest. The spirits of the Earth are invoked to protect the crops from pests and natural disasters and to encourage growth and abundance.²⁰

¹⁶ Aerts, 12.

¹⁷ Alerts, 11-14.

¹⁸ Alerts, 14-16

¹⁹ Alerts, 35-36.

²⁰ Alerts, 20-24

2.2. Ancestor Worship and Dema-Deities

Ancestor worship is a fundamental aspect of PNG's spiritual and cultural practices. This reverence connects the living with their deceased forebears, maintaining a continuum between past and present generations. This spiritual connection ensures that the wisdom and experiences of past generations are honored and preserved.²¹ The ancestors can be broadly categorized into two types: historical ancestors and mystical ancestors.

2.2.1. Historical ancestors

Historical ancestors refer to individuals who were once community members and are remembered through oral histories, genealogies, and collective memory. These ancestors have a clear genealogical link to current community members. Their identities, life stories, and deeds are often well-documented within the oral tradition. Even while they were still alive, people perceived them as the embodiment of gods.²² Historical ancestors are revered for their contributions to the community's history, whether through leadership, wisdom, bravery, or other notable qualities.²³

In numerous communities across PNG, ancestors hold revered status as potent spirits capable of offering guidance, protection, and blessings to their descendants. Regarded as steadfast guardians, they vigilantly watch over the well-being of their kin and community, acting as intermediaries between the earthly realm and the spiritual domain. Ancestral spirits are believed to influence various aspects of life, from health and prosperity to social harmony and conflict resolution. They are invoked in rituals to provide guidance, protection, and blessings. Specific rituals are performed to honor these ancestors, including offering food, drink, and other valuables. The stories and traditions associated with historical ancestors are passed down through generations, ensuring the preservation of cultural heritage and societal values.²⁴

²¹ Alerts, 51-54.

²² Harvey Whitehouse, *Inside the Cult: Religious Innovation and Transmission in Papua New Guinea* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 41.

²³ Mantovani, "A Fundamental Melanesian Religion," 104-105.

²⁴ Mantovani, 104-105.

2.2.2. *Mystical ancestors*

Mystical ancestors are often mythological figures or deified beings who may not have a direct genealogical connection to the current community members. These ancestors represent primordial forces, cultural ideals, or significant mythical events. They may embody characteristics or powers that go beyond human capacities. Mystical ancestors are believed to have a broader influence on the natural world and cosmological order. They are often associated with creation myths, natural phenomena, and supernatural powers.²⁵

Mystical ancestors serve as archetypes that represent foundational cultural and spiritual ideals. They are invoked to ensure harmony with the cosmic order and to connect with the spiritual world. Ceremonies involving mystical ancestors may include complex rituals to invoke their power and ensure cosmic balance. These rituals often involve symbolic acts, dances, chants, and the use of sacred objects. The stories of mystical ancestors are integral to the community's mythology and explain the origins of the world, human beings, and natural phenomena. These narratives often provide moral lessons and cultural norms.²⁶

There is a group of mystical ancestors known collectively as dema deities, representing ancestral spirits who played crucial roles in the creation and transformation of the world. Dema-deities are a concept found in the religious beliefs of various Melanesian cultures, particularly among the Marind-Anim people of New Guinea. Mantovani explained:

Dema is an ancestor who, due to some difficulty, is either killed violently or willingly chooses to die. However, shortly after being laid to rest, a miraculous event occurs. From the body of this deceased ancestor, essential plants or animals, such as a coconut tree, yam, sweet potato, or other crucial resources, begin to grow. These new life forms are vital for the community's sustenance and livelihood.²⁷

A common theme in myths involving dema deities is the idea of sacrifice and regeneration. This sacrificial act is seen as a necessary process for life and fertility. Dema deities are often viewed as cultural heroes who have established the laws, customs, and rituals that govern society. They are revered and remembered through various ceremonies and oral

²⁵ Mantovani, 104-105.

²⁶ Mantovani, 105-106.

²⁷ Mantovani, 106.

traditions. By honoring these deities, communities seek to ensure the land's continued fertility and the society's well-being.²⁸

Anthropologists and scholars studying Melanesian cultures interpret the myths of dema-deities as reflecting deep-seated beliefs about the interconnectedness of life, death, and rebirth. They highlight how these myths and rituals reinforce social cohesion, cultural identity, and the relationship between humans and the natural world.²⁹

2.3. Bio-cosmic Religion

The traditional beliefs of PNG are characterized by a profound reverence for life and the interconnectedness of all beings, leading scholars to describe them as a bio-cosmic religion.³⁰ Philip Gibbs explains that bio-cosmic religion does not focus on an ultimate called God (*theo*) but rather on the ultimate experience of life (*bios*), something essential for existence, in which everything participates. Life in the bio-cosmic religion context is material, biological, and spiritual.³¹

The term “cosmic” signifies that everything partakes in this universal life to varying extents, creating an interconnected whole. This interconnectedness means that the more a reality participates in cosmic life, the more robust, healthier, and richer it becomes. Although distinguishable from humans in many ways, animals and plants are integral components of this cosmic network. Regardless of its form, each entity contributes to and draws from the same life force that sustains the universe. This shared existence underpins the concept of “bio-cosmic,” a recognition that all living things are bound together in a delicate balance.³²

²⁸ Mantovani, 106-107.

²⁹ Alerts, 28.

³⁰ Philip Gibbs, “Getting to know our Neighbours,” 5; Whiteman, “Melanesian Religions,” 93; Ennio Mantovani, “Discussion: Is There a Bio-cosmic Religion? A Reply to Dr. Garland,” *Catalyst* 16, no. 4 (1986): 352-366.

³¹ Philip Gibbs, “Indigenous Spirituality: Expanding the View,” in *Dreaming a New Earth: Raimon Panikkar and Indigenous Spiritualities*, ed. Gerald Hall and Joan Hendriks (Victoria, Australia: Mosaic Press 2012), 54-55.

³² Sam Tukidia, “Oceanian Indigenous Religions and Christianity: Decolonizing the Philosophy of Religion for Oceania,” accessed 8 June 2024, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/368636863_Oceanian_Indigenous_Religi ons_and_Christianity_Decolonizing_the_Philosophy_of_Religion_for_Oceania

Thus, the bio-cosmic religion requires proper relationships between humans, nature, and spiritual beings.³³ Central to the bio-cosmic religion is the continuation, protection, maintenance, and celebration of life. This core principle manifests in various aspects of cultural practices, spiritual rituals, and social structures, reflecting a holistic worldview where every element of existence is interrelated and sacred.³⁴

With the focus on life, traditional beliefs in PNG emphasize life's cyclical nature, where birth, death, and rebirth are part of an eternal cycle. Rituals for birth, initiation, marriage, and funerary rites celebrate each life stage. Birth rituals welcome new life with blessings from ancestors and spirits. Initiation ceremonies mark the transition to adulthood, reinforcing community bonds and cultural traditions. The belief in life's continuation extends to spiritual existence, with ancestral spirits guiding the living.³⁵

Additionally, PNG people regard life as a supreme value, making its protection a paramount concern in their traditional beliefs. This protection is not limited to human life but includes animals, plants, and the environment. Rituals and practices safeguard the community's well-being, ensuring harmony with nature and the spirit world.³⁶ For instance, hunters seek permission from animal spirits before a hunt, and farmers perform ceremonies to bless the land and crops. This respect for all life forms fosters a sustainable and balanced relationship with the natural world.

Moreover, protecting life in PNG traditional beliefs extends beyond human existence to encompass all living beings and the natural environment. Sacred sites such as groves, rivers, mountains, and specific trees or stones are protected from exploitation and desecration.³⁷ These sites are seen as the abodes of spirits and ancestors, and their preservation is crucial for maintaining ecological balance and biodiversity. Taboos and

³³ Whiteman, "Melanesian Religions," 93.

³⁴ Whiteman, 91.

³⁵ Pascale Bonnemère, "Actions, Relations and Transformations: The Cycle of Life According to the Ankave of Papua New Guinea," *Oceania* 88 (114): 41-42, DOI:10.1002/ocea.5180.

³⁶ "Preserving Traditional Culture Systems in PNG," *Act Now Blog*, July 10, 2015, <https://actnowpng.org/node/25621>

³⁷ Rachel A. Dickie and Kenneth E. Maly, "Indigenous Traditions and Sacred Ecology in the Pacific Islands," *UW-L Journal of Undergraduate Research VIII* (2005): 4-5, <https://www.uwlax.edu/globalassets/offices-services/urc/jur-online/pdf/2005/dickie.pdf>

cultural restrictions governing these areas prevent overexploitation and promote conservation.

The main practical concern is to keep the channels of life open, which involves maintaining and strengthening relationships with people and other elements of the cosmos. This concern entails practices that ensure health, prosperity, social harmony, the long-term availability of resources, and the well-being of the community and environment. Traditional healing practices, agricultural rituals, and community gatherings all contribute to the sustenance of life. These practices are deeply rooted in the belief that life must be nurtured and sustained through respectful interaction with the world's visible and invisible aspects.³⁸

Concretely, life is maintained primarily in two ways: through the right relationships with human and spirit beings, with both the living and the dead, and through the accumulation of indigenous wealth in the such forms of pigs and shells.³⁹ Thus, community members engage in activities promoting physical and spiritual well-being, reinforcing the importance of maintaining stability. It is crucial to create and perpetuate satisfactory relations within the inner circle of kin, to cope with the dangers from outside, and to ensure a prosperous existence for the group and the individual in the group.⁴⁰ Traditional hunting, fishing, and agriculture practices are designed to be sustainable. These activities are conducted with an understanding of natural limits and cycles, ensuring that resources are used in a way that does not deplete them.

Celebrating life is central to PNG's traditional beliefs. Festivals, dances, and ceremonies honor life-giving forces, nature's abundance, and the interconnectedness of all beings and the spiritual world. Seasonal festivals align agricultural and hunting activities with natural rhythms through feasts, dances, and spirit invocations. Ceremonies for births, initiations, marriages, and funerals celebrate life's cycle, strengthen social bonds, transmit cultural knowledge, and affirm the community's cosmic connection.⁴¹

³⁸ Philip Gibbs, "Indigenous Spirituality," 54.

³⁹ Whiteman, "Melanesian Religions," 93.

⁴⁰ Robert B. Lane, "The Melanesians of South Pentecost, New Hebrides," in *God, Ghosts, and Men in Melanesia*, eds. Lawrence and Meggitt (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1965), 276.

⁴¹ Donald E. McGregor, *The Fish and the Cross*, 2nd edition (Point No.1) (Goroka: Melanesian Institute, 1982), 1.

3. Synthesis of Eco-spirituality in PNG's Traditional Beliefs and Christianity

3.1. Brief History of Christianity in PNG

Most of PNG remained largely unexplored by Europeans and Asians until the early 16th century when Portuguese and Spanish explorers arrived.⁴² Despite these early encounters, the dense jungles, rugged terrain, and diverse, often isolated indigenous communities posed significant challenges to exploration and mapping. Thus, they did little to penetrate the vast and complex interior of the island until the late 19th century when the British and Dutch colonized PNG.⁴³

The first Catholic missionaries came to PNG in 1847, but malaria and influenza severely afflicted the missionaries, leading to the mission's abandonment by 1852. The London Missionary Society came to PNG in 1871 and established missions in the southeastern regions of Papua.⁴⁴ Other denominations, including Lutherans, Methodists, and Anglicans, also established missions and schools, contributing to the widespread growth of Christianity across PNG.

Initially perceived as conflicting with traditional beliefs, Christianity has, over time, found common ground with the indigenous respect for nature, becoming deeply integrated into PNG's society. Today, it is the dominant religion in the country, with the majority of the population identifying as Christian. However, introducing Christianity also led to significant cultural changes, including suppressing traditional beliefs and practices. Despite these changes, the faith is practiced alongside traditional

⁴² Philip Gibbs, "Papua New Guinea," in *Globalization and the Re-shaping of Christianity in the Pacific Islands*, ed. Manfred Ernst (Suva: Pacific Theological College, 2006), 81; John Dademo Waiko, *A Short History of Papua New Guinea* (Melbourne, Oxford University Press: 1993), 17.

⁴³ "Papua New Guinea History," Papua New Guinea Embassy in Japan, accessed July 1, 2024, <http://en.png.or.jp/about-png/history-of-png/>

⁴⁴ Gabriel Pinda, "The Early Years," in *Alive in Christ: The Synod for Oceania and the Catholic Church in Papua New Guinea, 1998-2005* (Point No. 30), ed. Philip Gibbs (Goroka, PNG: The Melanesian Institute, 2006), 14-15; Paul B. Steffen, *Sios bilong Yumi long Niugini: Catholic Mission History in Mainland New Guinea, 1896-1945* (Madang, PNG: Society of Divine Word, 2022), 32.

beliefs, creating a unique religious landscape where indigenous spirituality and Christian doctrines coexist and influence one another.⁴⁵

Pope John Paul II observed that the Oceanian peoples had a profound and ancient sense of the sacred long before the arrival of missionaries. Their religious practices and rituals were integral to their daily lives and deeply embedded in their cultures. Therefore, the Pope emphasized the need to discern what aligns with the Gospel and does not, identify what is essential and secondary, and purify authentic indigenous traditions from external influences.⁴⁶

3.2. Integration of Cosmic and Biological Realms

PNG's traditional beliefs deeply integrate the cosmic and biological realms, creating a worldview where the natural and supernatural are intertwined. Within this framework, humanity inhabits a tangible realm encompassing the physical environment, animals, and fellow humans. Simultaneously, individuals navigate the intangible influence of gods, spirits, ancestors, demons, and totems. This interplay between the visible and invisible realms is intricately tied to the cosmic order, emphasizing their interconnectedness. PNG people believe that all those elements influence each other, and they explain the phenomenon in an integrated way. For instance, Whiteman illustrates how healing practices in PNG encompass herbs and medicinal plants and involve spiritual dimensions such as witchcraft and sorcery.⁴⁷

The concept of interconnectedness between humans and nature is deeply embedded in Christian teachings. This idea emphasizes that humans are not separate from nature but are part of a larger, divinely created ecosystem. The Bible's creation narrative in Genesis depicts God creating the heavens, the Earth, and all living beings, highlighting that humans, made in God's image, are given responsibility to steward the creation (Genesis 1:26-28; 2:15). The Psalms celebrate the beauty and majesty of creation, affirming that the Earth belongs to God and praising the diversity and complexity of life (Psalm 24:1; 104). In the New Testament, Jesus

⁴⁵ Some local religious movements, such as the Pomio Kivung Movement, integrate Christianity with indigenous beliefs. Cf. Whitehouse, *Inside the Cult*, 41-47.

⁴⁶ John Paul II, *Ecclesia Oceania: On Jesus Christ and the People of Oceania* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana), no. 7.

⁴⁷ Whiteman, "Melanesian Religions," 88-91.

often uses nature in His parables to illustrate spiritual truths, emphasizing God's provision and care for all creatures, thus fostering a perspective that values and respects all life as part of God's creation (Matthew 6:26-30). In *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis confirms that human life is deeply rooted in three essential and interconnected relationships: with God, our fellow human beings, and the natural world.⁴⁸

PNG's traditional beliefs and Christian teachings emphasize the profound interconnectedness between humanity, the natural world, and the spiritual realm. This perspective fosters a harmonious coexistence and respect for all creation, urging a shift from human dominance over nature to stewardship and reverence. It emphasizes the importance of recognizing the intricate relationships within ecological systems and extending this understanding to encompass the divine. Therefore, harming one aspect of the environment can have far-reaching consequences. This vision of nature challenges anthropocentric worldviews and advocates for a more sustainable and ethical relationship with the Earth, recognizing that the planet's health is inseparable from the well-being of humanity and the fulfillment of spiritual principles.

3.3. Sacredness of Life and the Universe

In PNG cultures, everything is seen as living and imbued with the divine, reflecting a vision of the universe where all elements are interconnected. This perspective emphasizes the sanctity of existence and the interconnectedness of all cosmic elements.⁴⁹ Stones, trees, flora, and fauna are viewed as manifestations of spiritual entities, treated with profound respect, and often regarded as kin. Traditional knowledge and spiritual practices guide the sustainable use of natural resources, recognizing the landscape, including rivers, forests, and mountains, as living entities with spiritual dimensions. Animistic beliefs underscore a reverence for all life forms, shaping rituals around hunting and agriculture to honor nature spirits and emphasize gratitude and respect in environmental interactions. Symbolic representations in totems and cultural artifacts highlight the sacred significance of certain animals and plants, reflecting their integral role in the community's worldview. Across cultures, natural landscapes are revered as sacred realms inhabited by

⁴⁸ Francis, *Laudato Si* ', nos. 66-67.

⁴⁹ Tukidia, "Oceanian Indigenous Religions and Christianity."

potent spirits, with sacred sites serving as vital conduits between the tangible and spiritual realms.⁵⁰

While Christians do not view nature as divine, they believe that the world is God's creation, imbued with His love and care (cf. Genesis 1:1; Psalms 24: 1-2; 104: 24). God created the universe through the Word of God, who became human flesh and dwelled in the universe (cf. John 1: 1-3; 1:14; Colossians 1:16). Jesus Christ is the only source of life (John 1:4; 10:10; 14: 6) and the ultimate purpose of the universe (Colossians 1: 16-17; Hebrew 1: 1-3; Revelations 22: 13). According to the Christian faith, creation is fundamentally an act of divine love, with God's love being the driving force behind all created things (cf. Wisdom 11:24). Every creature, regardless of its size or lifespan, is an object of the Father's tenderness, each having its rightful place in the world. This perspective highlights that all creation is cherished and valued by God, recognizing it as a reflection of divine love and care. It leads us to see creation as open to God's transcendence, within which it evolves. Faith enables us to interpret this unfolding process's meaning and mysterious beauty.⁵¹

The convergence between PNG's indigenous beliefs and Christianity lies in their reverence for life and the environment rooted in their religious beliefs. In PNG traditional culture, life in trees, animals, and especially humans is sacred. All lives participate in the Life of the Universe. Harming the life of an animal or plant is harming the Life of Cosmos. Thus, PNG people approach life and nature with reverence.⁵² This attitude is close to the Christian faith in viewing life and nature as sacred because life comes from God, and nature is God's creation. Both PNG traditional beliefs and Christian teachings promote environmental care firstly not because of utilitarianism but because of the intrinsic value of the environment. Caring for the earth becomes a spiritual way of living religious beliefs. In the Message for the 1990 World Day of Peace, Pope John Paul II reminds the Christians to "realize that their responsibility within creation, and their duty towards nature and the Creator, are an essential part of their faith."⁵³

⁵⁰ Whiteman, "Melanesian Religions," 93

⁵¹ Francis, *Laudato Si'*, nos. 76-79.

⁵² Whiteman, "Melanesian Religions," 92-93.

⁵³ John Paul II, *Message for the 1990 World Day of Peace*, 15, quoted in Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 64.

3.4. The Role of Humans in the Universe

In PNG's traditional beliefs, humans perceive themselves as integral components of nature, deeply interconnected with the surrounding environment. This worldview emphasizes a profound sense of harmony and respect for all living beings and elements of the natural world.⁵⁴ Within this integrated universe, humans occupy a central position, serving as the focal point of cosmic life. However, this centrality does not isolate humanity but acknowledges its interdependence with the diverse array of beings that comprise the universe. From plants and animals to spirits and ancestors, rocks and rivers to mountains and oceans, every entity is regarded as part of the intricate tapestry of existence, where humans play a vital yet inclusive role.⁵⁵

The narrative of Genesis reveals that God created humans in the image of God and entrusted humans the authority (dominion) over the creation (cf. 1: 27-28). However, authority over creation should be understood as caring for creation: cultivating and guarding the land (cf. Genesis 2:15). Care for creation includes preserving, protecting, and maintaining the land.⁵⁶ The *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* explains: "The Lord entrusted all of creation to their (humanity's) responsibility, charging them to care for its harmony and development. This special bond with God explains the privileged position of the first human couple in the order of creation."⁵⁷ In other words, by the command of the Creator, humans have the responsibility to care for the environment. And when humans fail to care for the creation, they fail to live their faith fully. Thus, the North Carolina Council of Churches sees that all environmental problems are moral and spiritual.⁵⁸ Similarly, the African bishops'

⁵⁴ Mantovani, "A Fundamental Melanesian Religion," 163.

⁵⁵ Whiteman, "Melanesian Religions," 92.

⁵⁶ Fred Van Dyke *et al.*, *Redeeming Creation: the Biblical Basis for Environmental Stewardship* (Downers Grove IL: IVP, 1996), 39.

⁵⁷ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 451, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html#II.%20MAN%20AND%20THE%20UNIVERSE%20OF%20CREATED%20THINGS

⁵⁸ "The Environmental Crisis Is not Environmental. It is Spiritual," *NC Interfaith Power & Light*, October 25, 2017, <https://ncipl.org/environmental-crisis-not-environmental-spiritual/>

statement describes climate change as “a tragic and striking example of structural sin.”⁵⁹

In reality, humans significantly impact the physical environment with freedom and creativity through various activities such as overpopulation, pollution, burning fossil fuels, and deforestation. Global environmental risks from human activities are becoming increasingly complex and interconnected, profoundly impacting people, economies, and ecosystems.⁶⁰ Recognizing the special position in the creation, according to PNG culture and Christian faith, PNG people should be aware of their responsibility in the environmental crisis resulting from their activities. They adjust their behaviors based on their awareness of their unique role in the universe to maintain harmony within the natural world and secure the stability of the environment.⁶¹

4. Practical Suggestions for the Environmental Crisis in PNG

4.1. Reviving and Educating Traditional Beliefs

In PNG, the essence of cultural preservation lies in the oral traditions maintained by the elders, such as chiefs, grandparents, and community leaders. These figures are the caretakers of the rich tapestry of stories, legends, and myths that define the cultural and moral fabric of their tribes. Through engaging narratives, they impart essential moral lessons and values, fostering a deep connection between the people and their environment.

However, modernization has introduced significant challenges to this age-old tradition. Though the PNG people appreciate their Indigenous

⁵⁹ Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar, *African Climate Dialogues Communiqué*, Nairobi, October 17, 2022, quoted in Francis, *Laudate Deum*, 3, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/20231004-laudate-deum.html

⁶⁰ Nathaniel Matthews and Patrick Keys, “Humans Have Caused This Environmental Crisis. It Is Time to Change How We Think About Risk,” *World Economic Forum*, September 9, 2019, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/09/humans-have-caused-this-environmental-crisis-it-s-time-to-change-how-we-think-about-risk/>

⁶¹ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 459-60.

identity, smartphones, social media, and the Internet have connected them to the global world. Global cultures increasingly influence the younger generation in the urban areas of PNG. Consequently, the knowledge of their ancestral teachings in traditional myths and legends, which once played a pivotal role in shaping their identity and ethical framework, is now at risk of fading into obscurity.⁶²

Understanding and preserving these traditional stories is not merely about cultural heritage but also about maintaining a respectful and sustainable relationship with nature. The legends often encompass themes of respect for the land, the importance of community, and the intricate balance of ecosystems. These narratives offer valuable insights into sustainable living and environmental stewardship, which are crucial in today's global environmental challenges. Thus, young people need to be educated about their traditional values.

Collecting, publishing, and incorporating local legends and myths into the school curriculum can give students a rich understanding of their cultural heritage. Schools can offer a holistic education that respects and preserves traditional knowledge by including these stories alongside conventional subjects. Storytelling sessions, where elders are invited to share their wisdom, can link generations directly, fostering a sense of identity and continuity. These sessions can be integrated into history, literature, and social studies classes, making learning more engaging and relevant to the students' backgrounds. Additionally, involving elders in the educational process can instill respect for their role as cultural custodians and strengthen community bonds.

Community centers dedicated to cultural education can preserve and share traditional knowledge. These centers can host interactive workshops and storytelling events that engage community members of all ages. By creating spaces for regular cultural activities, communities can ensure that traditional knowledge is continuously passed down. Mentorship programs that pair elders with young people can facilitate intergenerational dialogue and learning. These programs can include activities like traditional crafts,

⁶² Alex Golub, "Crisis and Identity in Contemporary Papua New Guinea," *Society for Cultural Anthropology*, October 27, 2016, <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/crisis-and-identity-in-contemporary-papua-new-guinea>; Nicole Polier, "Culture, Community and the Crisis of Modernity in Papua New Guinea," *Political and Legal Anthropology Review* V22, No. 1 (May 1999): 55-65.

music, dance, and language lessons, providing a comprehensive cultural education. Such initiatives can also foster a sense of community pride and solidarity, reinforcing the value of traditional practices in contemporary society.

4.2. Integrating Ecological Spirituality in PNG's Christian Education

Christianity offers profound teachings on ecological spirituality, emphasizing the interconnectedness of all creation and the responsibility of humans to care for the Earth. These teachings can significantly enrich the faith of Christians by guiding them in their relationship with nature. In other words, caring for the environment is an integral part of living one's faith, urging Christians to respect and preserve the natural world as an act of worship and gratitude to God. Ecological spirituality education should be integrated into Christian education in Christian schools and other formation programs in church-based organizations.

In PNG, a shortage of religious educators hinders the spread of Christian values, including environmental stewardship, especially in remote areas. This shortage leaves young people needing to be more connected to the ecological aspects of their faith. Programs to train local catechists, pastors, and community leaders in ecological spirituality are crucial to address this. In addition, environmental education is more science-oriented. Thus, teachers and catechists should be trained in basic knowledge of ecology, besides biblical and theological stewardship foundations and traditional beliefs promoting caring for the environment.

Due to rapid modernization and secularization, many PNG people forget their environment as sacred. They are worried that the environmental crisis will cause a social and economic crisis.⁶³ Young people are ignoring traditional beliefs and the Christian faith. Thus, faith education is the foundation for caring for the common home, which becomes ecological spirituality. Christian schools and churches form an ecological conscience for the young people through education of PNG traditional beliefs and Christian faith. So, ecological spirituality is part of Christian education.

⁶³ Timothy Kwara, "Toward an Ecotheology for PNG: Relating Biblical Environmental Stewardship with the Melanesian Cultural Concept of Inseparability and Interrelatedness of Humankind and Nature," *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 30, no. 2 (2014): 60.

Christian education must be directed to forming attitudes and behaviors of sustainable development based on the Gospel teachings. The teachers and catechists may show movies and pictures about environmental disasters, particularly in PNG, such as ocean pollution, landslides, and plastic rubbish. The educators must raise the students' concerns about the ecological problems in PNG. Then, Christian educators help students become aware of their responsibility in ecological crises so that they may have a concrete vision and plan. Besides the theory classes, students need to practice some activities to improve the quality of their environment.

4.3. Fostering Community Engagement

Traditionally, PNG people have a strong sense of community among those who speak the same language (*wantok* – “one talk” in the country's *lingua franca*) and have the same culture. Those kinship-based communities formed a system of leadership, rules, and disciplines. Most leaders of the traditional communities are the chiefs, who strongly influence the community.⁶⁴ Thus, it is crucial to raise awareness among the chiefs and community leaders of the ecological crisis and its consequences to communities. Through the workshops, training programs, and meetings with the community's leaders, the church and non-government organizations provide them with information on the global environment and orientations to have concrete plans for their communities.

However, due to colonization, decolonization, Christianization, and nationhood, the PNG communities have changed from a “*wantok*” traditional group to a mixed and open society. For example, the parishes are divided into sub-parishes or Basic Christian Communities (BCC), including members from different tribes. In towns and cities, the people live with their neighbors from different provinces, speak different languages, and have different cultures.⁶⁵ Building and strengthening new-style communities and fostering community engagement is a big challenge to PNG people. The new style of leaders is challenged more in their leadership by calling for collaboration among all community members. Therefore, good leaders with ethics, skills, visions, and approaches are

⁶⁴ Murray Prideaux, “Leadership in Papua New Guinea: Exploring Context and Barriers,” https://www.anzam.org/wp-content/uploads/pdf-manager/2233_PRIDEAUX_LEADERSHIP.PNG.PDF, 4-8.

⁶⁵ Michael Unage, *Community Empowerment Policy Research Framework* (Port Moresby: The National Research Institute, 2011), 4.

necessary in fostering community engagement rather than kinship-related concerns.

The PNG people recognize that they belong to a bigger family besides their blood family (*wantok* family) through the new institutes and organizations such as schools, parishes, devotional groups, and associations of youth, mothers, and fathers. Teachers and church leaders should help the people to extend their concerns to national and global problems, including ecological and social issues that directly or indirectly affect their lives, families, and communities. At the same time, the action plans of parishes, BCC, and associations include caring for the environment, such as cleaning the streets and communities, collecting rubbish, and planting more trees on parish grounds in the community.

During the apostolic journey to PNG, in the meeting with the Authorities, Civil Society, and the Diplomatic Corps on Saturday, September 7, 2024, Pope Francis calls for great responsibility in protecting PNG's environmental and cultural treasures. That great responsibility requires "everyone, civil authorities and all citizens, to promote initiatives that develop natural and human resources in a sustainable and equitable manner."⁶⁶ Nobody is excluded from this responsibility of fostering environmental sustainability because natural resources benefit and affect everyone.

4.4. Advocating a Policy of Integration

The government of PNG oversees mining, logging, fishing, and other impactful projects. The government needs to maintain sustainable development and biodiversity preservation in its policies. Integrating traditional ecological knowledge with modern environmental science is crucial to creating effective resource use and conservation strategies, honoring cultural heritage, and utilizing local ecosystem understanding.

Protecting sacred natural sites is vital to preserving cultural heritage and environmental integrity. These sites often hold profound spiritual significance for local communities and are crucial for maintaining cultural identity and practices. Support for legislation that safeguards these areas is essential. PNG government should recognize the cultural importance of these sites and ensure that they are preserved from industrial activities such

⁶⁶ Francis, *Address of His Holiness*, handout, Meeting with the Authorities, Civil Society, and the Diplomatic Corps, September 7, 2024, Port Moresby, PNG.

as mining, logging, and development projects. By legally protecting sacred natural sites, the government can demonstrate respect for indigenous cultures while also preserving critical habitats and biodiversity centers. These protected areas can serve as refuges for various species and act as criteria for ecological health.

Sustainable land and resource use policies are fundamental to balancing economic development with environmental conservation. Advocacy efforts should focus on promoting legislation that encourages responsible practices in industries such as mining, logging, and fishing. Those efforts include implementing strict environmental regulations, enforcing sustainable harvesting quotas, and requiring companies to conduct thorough environmental impact assessments before initiating projects. Policies should also encourage the use of renewable resources and sustainable methods. PNG can ensure long-term prosperity and environmental stability by fostering an environment where economic activities do not compromise the region's ecological health.

Policies must align economic activities with environmental sustainability to protect ecological harmony. Those policies include preserving habitats, restoring ecosystems, protecting wildlife corridors, and promoting sustainable agriculture like agroforestry and permaculture. Responsible tourism that respects ecological limits and benefits local communities is also vital. Prioritizing these practices ensures that PNG's natural resources are used sustainably and equitably.

Effective environmental governance in PNG needs the involvement of local communities, capitalizing on their traditional ecological knowledge. Collaborative governance with indigenous leaders ensures policies reflect community needs. Community-based monitoring empowers locals, fostering ownership and responsibility and enhancing conservation efforts.

5. Conclusion

PNG stands at a critical point where environmental degradation threatens its rich biodiversity and the well-being of its people. As highlighted, deforestation, climate change, and unsustainable mining practices have worsened the ecological crisis. Nevertheless, amid these challenges lies a profound opportunity: the potential synergy between traditional indigenous

beliefs and Christianity to foster a sustainable and harmonious relationship with the environment.

This paper underscores the intrinsic connection between PNG's traditional beliefs and their reverence for nature. With its deep-rooted eco-spirituality, indigenous spirituality views the natural world as a sacred entity interwoven with the cosmos and human existence. This perspective is a cultural treasure and a vital blueprint for environmental stewardship. Similarly, Christian teachings, emphasizing stewardship and respect for God's creation, complement the traditional reverence for nature, offering a unified front against ecological degradation.

The intersection of traditional and Christian eco-spirituality encourages a holistic view that transcends mere resource management, advocating for a deeper, spiritually informed engagement with the environment. In addressing the ecological challenges, governments, schools, churches, and other organizations should collaborate to revive and educate traditional beliefs and Christian teachings on ecological spirituality. The local communities and parishes need to engage more in environmental conversation and urge the government to develop and maintain sustainable and biodiversity preservation policies.

In conclusion, this research highlights the potential synergistic relationship between indigenous and Christian eco-spiritualities in addressing PNG's environmental challenges. When harmonized with Christian values, indigenous knowledge's enduring significance provides a robust framework for fostering environmental sustainability and spiritual well-being. By honoring the sacredness of nature and committing to the principles of stewardship and reverence, PNG can address its ecological crisis with a unique and holistic approach, paving the way for a sustainable and harmonious future. Finally, this paper also calls for further research into the practical implementation of these integrative spiritual perspectives and for policymakers to incorporate these insights into environmental strategies.

REFERENCES

- Alerts, Theo. *Traditional Religion in Melanesia*. Port Moresby: University of PNG Press, 1998.
- Bonnemère, Pascale. "Actions, Relations and Transformations: The Cycle of Life According to the Ankave of Papua New Guinea." *Oceania* 88, no. 1 (2018): 41-54. DOI:10.1002/ocea.5180.
- Chauhan, Alind. "Geographical Location, Deforestation, Climate Change: What Led to the Deadly Landslide in PNG." *The Indian Express*, June 3, 2024. <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-climate/landslide-papua-new-guinea-reasons-9369851/>
- Dickie, Rachel A., and Kenneth E. Maly. "Indigenous Traditions and Sacred Ecology in the Pacific Islands." *UW-L Journal of Undergraduate Research VIII* (2005). <https://www.uwlax.edu/globalassets/offices-services/urc/jur-online/pdf/2005/dickie.pdf>
- Dyke, Van Fred, David C. Mahan, Joseph K. Sheldon, and Raymond H. Brand. *Redeeming Creation: The Biblical Basis for Environmental Stewardship*. Downers Grove IL: IVP, 1996.
- Francis. *Address of His Holiness*. Handout. Meeting with the Authorities, Civil Society, and the Diplomatic Corps. September 7, 2024. Port Moresby, PNG.
- _____. *Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015.
- _____. *Laudate Deum: On the Climate Crisis*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2023.
- Gaqurae, Joe. "Indigenization as Incarnation: The Concept of Melanesian Christ." In *Christ in Melanesia: Exploring Theological Issues* (Point 1997), edited by James Knight, 146-53. Goroka, PNG: The Melanesian Institute, 1977.
- Gibbs, Philip. "Getting to Know Our Neighbours." *Common Theology* (Spring 2011). <http://www.philipgibbs.org/pdfs/Getting%20to%20know%20our%20Neighbours.pdf>

- _____. "Papua New Guinea." In *Globalization and the Reshaping of Christianity in the Pacific Islands*, edited by Manfred Ernst, 81-158. Suva: Pacific Theological College, 2006.
- _____. "Indigenous Spirituality: Expanding the View." In *Dreaming a New Earth: Raimon Panikkar and Indigenous Spiritualities*, edited by Gerald Hall and Joan Hendriks, 54-66. Victoria, Australia: Mosaic Press, 2012.
- Golub, Alex. "Crisis and Identity in Contemporary Papua New Guinea." *Society for Cultural Anthropology*. October 27, 2016. <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/crisis-and-identity-in-contemporary-papua-new-guinea>.
- Herd, Gilbert. "Self and Culture: Contexts of Religious Experience in Melanesia." In *The Religious Imagination in New Guinea*, edited by Gilbert Herdt and Michele Stephen, 15-40. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989.
- John Paul II. *Ecclesia Oceania*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2001.
- Kawagle, Simon A. "The Mineral Resources of PNG." *Resource Geology* 55, no. 3 (2025): 285-288.
- Kwara, Timothy. "Toward an Ecotheology for PNG: Relating Biblical Environmental Stewardship With the Melanesian Cultural Concept of Inseparability and Interrelatedness of Humankind and Nature." *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 30, no. 2 (2014): 43-73.
- Lane, Robert B. "The Melanesians of South Pentecost, New Hebrides." In *God, Ghosts, and Men in Melanesia*, edited by Lawrence and Meggitt, 270-79. Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1965.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *The Raw and the Cooked*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983.
- Mantovani, Ennio. "A Fundamental Melanesian Religion." In *Christ in Melanesia: Exploring Theological Issues* (Point 1977), edited by James Knight, 154-65. Goroka: The Melanesian Institute, 1977.
- Mantovani, Ennio. "Discussion: Is There a Bio-cosmic Religion? A Reply to Dr. Garland." *Catalyst* 16, no. 4 (1986): 352-366.
- Matthews, Nathaniel, and Patrick Keys. "Humans Have Caused This Environmental Crisis. It Is Time to Change How We Think About Risk." *World Economic Forum*, September 9, 2019.

<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/09/humans-have-caused-this-environmental-crisis-it-s-time-to-change-how-we-think-about-risk/>

McGregor, Donald. E. *The Fish and the Cross*, 2nd edition (Point No.1). Goroka, PNG: The Melanesian Institute, 1982.

Nicholls, Stephen. *The Priority Environmental Concerns of PNG, IWP-Pacific Technical Report*. Apia, Samoa: SPREP, 2004.

“Papua New Guinea History.” Papua New Guinea Embassy in Japan. Accessed July 1, 2024. <http://en.png.or.jp/about-png/history-of-png/>

Park, Kerlin George. “Animism.” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, November 25, 2023. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/animism>.

“People vs. The Climate Crisis in PNG.” *Cool Earth*, February 22, 2023. <https://www.coolearth.org/news/people-vs-climate-crisis-png/>

Pernetta, John C., and Lance Hill. “A Review of Marine Resource Use in Coastal Papua.” *Journal de la Société des Océanistes*, no. 72-73 (1981). *La pêche traditionnelle en Océanie*: 175-191. doi: 10.3406/jso.1981.3059 http://www.persee.fr/doc/jso_0300-953x_1981_num_37_72_3059.

Pinda, Gabriel. “The Early Years.” In *Alive in Christ: The Synod for Oceania and the Catholic Church in Papua New Guinea, 1998-2005* (Point No. 30), edited by Philip Gibbs, 14-18. Goroka, PNG: The Melanesian Institute, 2006.

“PNG Fisheries Industry.” *National Fisheries Authority*. Accessed June 8, 2024. <https://www.fisheries.gov.pg/fisheries-industry>.

PNG Forest Authority. *PNG Forestry Outlook Study*. Bangkok: The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2009.

“PNG: Large Landslide Causes ‘Loss of Life and Property.’” *Le Monde*, May 24, 2024.

https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/05/24/papua-new-guinea-large-landslide-causes-loss-of-life-and-property_6672528_4.html

Polier, Nicole. “Culture, Community and the Crisis of Modernity in Papua New Guinea.” *Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 22, no. 1 (May 1999): 55-65.

Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*. Accessed September 20, 2024.

https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/do

cuments/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html#II.%20MAN%20AND%20THE%20UNIVERSE%20OF%20CREATED%20THINGS

“Preserving Traditional Culture Systems in PNG.” *Act Now Blog*, July 10, 2015. <https://actnowpng.org/node/25621>

Prideaux, Murray. “Leadership in Papua New Guinea: Exploring Context and Barriers.” https://www.anzam.org/wp-content/uploads/pdf-manager/2233_PRIDEAUX_LEADERSHIPPNG.PDF.

Standish, W., and Richard T. Jackson. “PNG.” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, June 7, 2024. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Papua-New-Guinea>.

Steffen, Paul B. *Sios bilong Yumi long Niugini: Catholic Mission History in Mainland New Guinea, 1896-1945*. Madang, PNG: Society of Divine Word, 2022.

“The Environmental Crisis Is Not Environmental. It Is Spiritual.” *NC Interfaith Power & Light*, October 25, 2017. <https://ncipl.org/environmental-crisis-not-environmental-spiritual/>

Tukidia, Sam. “Oceanian Indigenous Religions and Christianity: Decolonizing the Philosophy of Religion for Oceania.” *Research Gate*, February 2023. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/368636863_Oceanian_Indigenous_Religions_and_Christianity_Decolonizing_the_Philosophy_of_Religion_for_Oceania

Unage, Michael. *Community Empowerment Policy Research Framework*. Port Moresby: The National Research Institute, 2011.

Van Baal, Jan. *Dema: Description and Analysis of Marind-Anim Culture*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966.

Whitehouse, Harvey. *Inside the Cult: Religious Innovation and Transmission in Papua New Guinea*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

Whiteman, Darrel. “Melanesian Religions: An Overview.” In *An Introduction to Melanesian Religions* (Point No. 6), edited by Ennio Mantovani, 87-122. Goroka, PNG: The Melanesian Institute, 1984.

Wagner, Roy. *The Invention of Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975.

Waiko, John Dademo. *A Short History of Papua New Guinea*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Submitted: Jul. 17, 2024; Accepted: Nov. 6, 2024; Published: Jan. 31, 2025
DOI: 10.62461/JAKP110624

“Daga mi kataguan mi”: Discoursing *Laudato Si’* Toward a More Meaningful Indigenous Theology of Land in the Cordilleras

Joefrey M. Almazan¹ and Kurt Wanas Klyde Peningeo²

ABSTRACT

*There have been several instances in the Philippines where the government, sometimes in collaboration with private entities, has taken advantage of Indigenous lands for development projects. These situations often involve conflicts between the need for national development and the protection of Indigenous rights. These situations highlight the ongoing struggle between the government’s development agenda and the need to protect the rights and lands of Indigenous Peoples in the Cordillera and other parts of the Philippines. While development is necessary, it should be balanced with respect for Indigenous cultures, rights, and the environment. With these pressing problems, this study is an attempt to raise the level of discussion on the imperative of restoring the Cordilleran land theology and to propose some general suggestions on how to shape a more relevant and meaningful Indigenous land theology through *Laudato Si’*. *Laudato Si’* claims a necessity to show particular concern for Indigenous communities*

¹ **Joefrey Mariano Almazan** holds a doctorate degree in Theology from the University of Santo Tomas, Manila. He is full-time Professor and served as Department Head of the Department of Religion, SLU, Baguio City (August 2015-July 2017). He is the past Graduate Program Coordinator for Liberal Arts, School of Advanced Studies, SLU, Baguio City from 2017-2021.

² **Kurt Wanas Klyde Peningeo** is an aspiring researcher focusing on environmental theology and the relationship between land and life. He is currently affiliated with Saint Louis University in the Philippines and aims to inspire a deeper understanding of the deep connection between the land and human existence.

and their cultural traditions. They are not merely one minority among others, but should be the principal dialogue partners, especially when large projects affecting their lands are proposed. For them, land is not just a physical space or economic resource but a vital part of their cultural identity, livelihood, and way of life. Losing their land would mean losing a significant part of their existence.

Keywords: *Indigenous Peoples, theology of the land, Cordillera, Laudato Si'*

1. Introduction

The issue of land is at the heart of the conflicts between the government and the Indigenous people. Land is immensely important to both sides. For the Indigenous Peoples (IPs), land is intimately connected to almost all parts of their lives—their livelihood, culture, home, and identity.³ Losing it means taking most of what they have. It is no secret, however, that the lands of the IPs are very rich in natural resources, and there is great potential for hydro-electric development projects.⁴ Developing these rich lands would eventually lead the government into butting heads with the IPs. Though development does not always mean the loss of land or cultural identity for Indigenous communities, failure of the government to explore alternative development avenues that are inclusive, sustainable, and culturally appropriate can deter the protection of the rights and well-being of IPs. Development should be a partnership that respects the unique contributions and needs of Indigenous communities, ensuring that they benefit from and are not harmed by the process.

The struggle of upland ethnic minorities for the recognition of their ancestral land rights reached a plateau with the Rio Summit of 1992 with an explicit agreement among participating countries that ethnic minorities

³ Christopher Skene, “The Global Economy and the Erosion of Civil Rights: The Case of the Philippines,” *Philippine Political Science Journal* 27, no. 50 (2006): 61.

⁴ Skene, “The Global Economy and the Erosion of Civil Rights,” 66.

play a crucial role in the conservation of the environment.⁵ Since then, the literature has been replete with studies exploring various aspects of environmental development including the ethical and spiritual dimensions of land management. While a few pioneering social scientists have pointed out resource management as an area of spiritual and theological discourse, no study in this area has been conducted in the Cordillera region.

*Laudato Si'*⁶ asserts that particular concern must be shown for Indigenous communities and their cultural traditions. They are not merely one minority among others but should be the principal dialogue partners, especially when large projects affecting their lands are proposed.⁷ For them, land is not a commodity but rather a gift from God and from their ancestors who rest there, a sacred space with which they need to interact if they are to maintain their identity and values. When they remain on their land, they themselves care for it best. This study attempts to raise the level of discussion on the imperative of restoring the theology of land in the Cordilleran region and propose some general suggestions on how to shape a more relevant and meaningful Indigenous land theology through *Laudato Si'*.

2. Results and Discussion

2.1. The Land and the Cordillerans

Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR) is an administrative region in the Philippines situated within the island of Luzon. The only landlocked region in the country, it is bordered by the Ilocos Region in the west and southwest, and by the Cagayan Valley on the north, east, and southeast. The region comprises six provinces: Abra, Apayao, Benguet, Ifugao, Kalinga and Mountain Province. The regional center is the highly

⁵ Skene, "The Global Economy and the Erosion of Civil Rights," 70.

⁶ *Laudato Si'*, written by Pope Francis in 2015, is an encyclical that addresses environmental degradation and its impact on both the planet and humanity, urging global action to care for creation. The document calls for a shift towards sustainable living, emphasizing the interconnection between ecological, social, and economic issues, and the moral imperative to protect the Earth for future generations.

⁷ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*, 2015, 146.
https://www.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_encyclica-laudato-si_en.pdf (accessed September 9, 2024).

urbanized city of Baguio. The region, officially created on July 15, 1987, covers most of the Cordillera Central mountains of Luzon, and is home to numerous Indigenous Peoples collectively known as the Igorot. Indigenous Peoples believe that land was granted to them by Kabunian⁸ and entrusted to them to harness, cultivate, develop, take care of, sustain, and patronize. To them, private property is non-existent because they adhere to the value of collectivism. In fact, peaceful co-existence and harmonious relationship with nature define the people's role as stewards or guardians of the land. Since time immemorial, the IPs have been occupying the territory that they are presently in. Historical accounts show that even before the coming of the colonizers, the people were already in possession of the land. They have developed systems of how to exploit the resources within the land. They have built permanent settlements, constructed rice terraces, identified territories, and they were living peacefully. They have developed a culture that defined their actions and behaviors to survive.⁹

Each of the Indigenous groups in the Cordilleras claims to have ancient ties to the land, claims that are enacted in both oral history and contemporary rituals. In Benguet, there are always ongoing issues with regards to ancestral domain among Christians and non-Christians; and according to local informants, the process to actually get declared ancestral domain is extremely complicated. The concept of dwelling is well articulated in the Cordillera Indigenous people's cultural mentality of ancestral domain. Many Cordillerans conceive the world as a sacred garden into which God places human beings to look after on behalf of the Creator.

The land explains the human person's intimate relationship with others and to the natural world. Our rootedness as human beings arises from our identity and purpose as being created to inhabit and care for God's physical creation. The notion of "land is life" is central to the Indigenous way of life. For the Cordillerans, like the ancient Israelites, land is granted by God. It is not just the physical space but a place in which they build and

⁸ Kabunian is a deity in the mythology of the Cordillera region in the Philippines, particularly among the Igorot people. He is often regarded as the supreme god and creator, associated with the mountains and the natural world. Kabunian is believed to govern the spirits of the ancestors and is invoked for protection, guidance, and blessings.

⁹ NCIP, Benguet. n.d. <http://www.benguet.gov.ph/index.php?Itemid=301> (accessed April 2015).

express their sense of self through their Indigenous knowledge and belief system. It is at the heart of their identity and belonging.

It is noted that, despite the so-called “modern,” “scientific,” and “progressive” learning methods, there are still epistemological and institutional barriers that hinder the recognition and integration of Indigenous knowledge and practices concerning natural resource stewardship. In Indigenous worldview, land is a covenant. Theodore M. Ludwig (2006, 389) asserted that God created all things good; humans have the privilege and obligation to enjoy and enhance life. In Gen. 15:5, God makes a covenant with Abraham and tells him that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars in the sky. This very idea is expressed in Deut. 10:14-22: “Although heaven and the heaven of heavens belong to the Lord your God, the earth with all that is in it, yet the Lord set his heart in love on your ancestors alone and chose you, their descendants after them, out of all the peoples, as it is today.”

2.2. Present Issues: Land Problems and Aspirations of the Cordillerans

Due to the rapid expansion of the now commercialized region and the mega migrations of people across the country, Cordillera, especially Baguio City, currently houses a bigger and more diverse population of a mixture of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples, and migrants. Occupied in their own homelands, the aboriginal peoples of the region remain marginalized. The following are the common forms of violations of the integral rights and self-determination of the IPs of the Cordillera:

2.2.1. Mining industries and operations

The Cordillera region is rich in mineral reserves such as gold, copper, silver, zinc, and non-metallic minerals like sand, gravel, and sulphur. It is home to the three longest operating mining giants in the country, namely, Benguet Corporation (116 years), Lepanto Mining Corporation (83 years), and the Philex Mining Corporation (63 years). Therefore, the very rich and prosperous region has been subjected to development aggression and imposition of destructive socio-economic projects in the name of “national development” or “national interest” such as the large-scale mining operations mentioned. Today, one-third of Cordillera’s land area of more than

1.8 million hectares is covered by mining operations, mining permits, and applications.

With these mining operations, several compromises needed to be made, including sacrificing watersheds, animal reserves, wood and trees, plantations, etc. In the areas of Mountain Province, watersheds are especially threatened are communal watershed forests, which serve as the water sources of main rivers. Cordillera was, in fact, dubbed as the “Watershed Cradle of North Luzon.” Sagada, Abra, and some of the nearby municipalities of Cordillera are water sources of the main rivers flowing down to the lower provinces. Water from Sagada, for example, flow down to the Chico River toward Kalinga and irrigation channels in Cagayan. They also nourish thousands of hectares of rice fields in the provinces of Abra, Ilocos, and Quirino.

2.2.2. Dams

Cordillera is also a major energy producer through its mega dams, providing about seventy percent of Luzon’s energy needs. Thus, the region is not only targeted for mining applications but also large infrastructures of dams. Two of the oldest dams have already been built in Benguet, namely, the Ambuklao dam in Bokod built in 1956 and the Binga dam in Itogon, which opened in 1960.

According to Allad-iw, the people affected by the construction of these mega dams remain displaced.¹⁰ Despite government promises of compensation and jobs, these have been proven to be mere deception and lies to quell opposition. In addition, local people were forced to relocate to unfamiliar areas like Palawan and Nueva Ecija, which were already inhabited, disease-ridden, and without access to electricity. These issues remain unsolved. Despite promises of substantial payments for the taken lands, displaced families have received no substantial amount to date.¹¹ Moreover, plans are still pending for more hydropower projects in the region. The question remains: Who benefits from these projects? Is it for

¹⁰ A. Allad-iw, Retrieved from Bulatlat News: <http://www.bulatlat.com/2007/08> (accessed August 12, 2007).

¹¹ Ronalyn Olea, “Large-scale Mining, Energy Projects Devastated Cordillera,” *Bulatlat*, October 11, 2013. https://www.bulatlat.com/2013/10/11/large-scale-mining-energy-projects-devastated-cordillera/#google_vignette (accessed September 9, 2024).

the people of the Cordillera or the greater population, or is it primarily for corporate interests?

2.2.3. Land grabbing

Over the years, the Cordillerans, among other IPs, have faced numerous violations of their land systems. Due to the region's rich natural resources, people's rights to collective ownership, priority use, and management over the ancestral lands and resources have been consistently denied and unrecognized. Many foreign and locally funded projects have infiltrated these lands, leading to displacement of countless inhabitants. To date, many of these displaced individuals have not received proper compensation.

The origins of these violations against IPs can be traced back to the arrival of various foreign colonizers. These colonizers imposed their own foreign policies and laws, including land systems. The Regalian Doctrine, for instance, arrogantly asserted that the lands, due to colonization, would be owned by the Spanish Crown. This doctrine became the foundation of the nation's land laws.

Even after the American regime replaced Spanish rule, the Regalian Doctrine remained in place, with only the owner changing from Spain to America. To further strengthen colonial control over the islands' resources, the Public Land Act was enacted in 1902, granting the American government the authority to confiscate all public lands. This act subjected all lands to the Torrens system, a land title registration process, leading to the commodification of land resources. The Philippine Commission Act No. 178 of 1903 followed, declaring all unregistered lands as part of the public domain and reserving the State's right to classify and exploit them. Two years later, the Mining Law of 1905 was enacted, granting Americans the right to acquire public land for mining purposes and revealing their intention to extract resources from Indigenous territories.

2.2.4. Commercialization

Environment and development are inextricably linked. After all, humans are tasked with cultivating and developing the land, and advancements in science, technology, and infrastructure are helping these efforts. However, the misuse of science and technology, coupled with excessive infrastructural development, can lead to land degradation.

Commercialization often comes at a significant cost to land and other environmental resources. Beyond the loss of subsurface resources, biodiversity also suffers.

Due to the barrage of western legal influences, the traditional land tenure systems have ceased drastically, leading to the commercialization of land and its products. Land and wood have become commodities that could be easily bought and sold, as people have been increasingly drawn into money traps. Even previously untouchable communal and sacred lands have been slowly privatized by specific clans or individuals. Once privatized, these lands often become targets for development, with buildings being constructed to maximize profits.¹²

2.3. Cordilleran Vision of the Land

According to Cordilleran worldview, land represents identity, being, and life. It is not merely a plot that can be owned, titled, and exploited at will. As a Cordilleran saying goes, “Only the tribe can ‘own’ the land, because all its members are free to occupy and till any piece of land.” A person who insists on individual ownership of the land through a title is akin to someone claiming exclusive ownership of a piece of the sky. Unlike the biblical narrative of Israel, land is not a commodity. The Bible says in Leviticus 25 that the land is an inheritance for the Israelites, and it was core to God’s covenantal promises. God’s people are not to abuse their inheritance but to treasure it. It cannot be bought and sold.

The identity of the IPs, rooted in their relation to the land, also defines their social structure at the family and community levels. This distinctive identity is the core of their vision, goals, purpose, and way of life. For the Cordillerans, land and territory are life and worship, a stark reality that outsiders could hardly understand. While the Cordilleran Indigenous community may lack the luxuries and amenities of technological society, they have maintained a cultic relationship and harmonious coexistence with humanity’s only habitat. Practical theology can see in the Cordillerans’ sense of absolute dependence to the land a sacred inheritance from Kabunian (God), a paradigm of theistic holism. Belonging to the land,

¹² Padmapani L. Perez, “Governing Indigenous People: Indigenous Persons in Government Implementing the Indigenous Peoples’ Rights Act,” <https://thecordillerareview.upb.edu.ph/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/perez-53-86.html> (accessed Sept 28, 2024).

a Cordilleran is never autonomous from the reality of the sacred. Land, life, Kabunian, and the spirits of the kaappoan (ancestors) are communing essences in the world of the Cordillerans.

2.3.1. *Land as life*

The struggle for land and ecological crises is urgent issues that challenge our theological reflections, not just in the Philippines but worldwide. Aware of these crises and the worsening conditions of our ecology here, the people's choice to strive for ecological well-being and liberation is indubitably a positive "sign of the times" that theologians should scrutinize in the light of faith.¹³ It is significant to note that in the Philippine context, the magnitude of our ecological struggles originates largely from our rural grassroots, including our Indigenous poor peoples in the Cordilleras.

It is a conviction that oppressive relationships in the Philippines produce not only human poverty but also ecological crises. This implies that the oppression of the people leads further to the oppression of ecology and the environment. It results from the oppressive ideology of the modern paradigm of textual legalities that promotes human dominion over nature. "In other words, an anthropocentric liberation theology does not fully listen to the cry of the poor as it tends to be deaf to the groaning of the exploited earth."¹⁴

One cannot truly say that he/she is promoting the well-being of the poor while neglecting their land and ecological well-being. The ongoing crises of the oppression of IPs cannot be addressed as separately from the ecological crises. In fact, the oppression of the peoples stems from and is worsened by exploitations of their ecological turfs. This means that addressing the oppression and poverty of IPs ultimately requires dealing primarily with ecological and environmental concerns. It goes without saying that the land of the people and their ecological welfare are directly correlated to their holistic well-being because the land contains the very essence of life itself. It is here that everything that supports life is found. Therefore, land is life.

¹³ Reynaldo Raluto, *Poverty and Ecology at the Crossroads: Toward an Ecological Theology of Liberation in the Philippine Context* (Quezon City: ADMU Press, 2015), 2.

¹⁴ Raluto, *Poverty and Ecology at the Crossroads*, 4.

For the Cordillerans, collectively known as Igorots (“mountain people”), “Land is Life” is a long-held belief that remains relevant today. They believe in the interconnectedness of their lives and the presence and richness of the land. Land is where they obtain food, water, and shelter. It is the essential foundation of their way of life.

To claim a place is the birthright of every man. The lowly animals claim their place, how much more man. Man is born to live. *Apu Kabunian*, lord of us all, gave us life and placed us in this world to live human lives. And where shall we obtain life? From the land. To work the land is an obligation, not merely a right. In tilling the land you possess it. And so land is a grace that must be nurtured. Land is sacred. Land is beloved. From its womb springs our Kalinga life.¹⁵

These are the very words of Macliing Dulag, a Cordilleran warrior chief from Kalinga province. They effectively summarize the worldview of IPs land in the region. Like IPs across the planet, the Cordillera people have equated land with life itself.

2.3.2 *Land as inheritance*

IPs, including the Cordillerans, have been the longest caretakers of the lands. Throughout history, they have developed their own cultural systems, especially land systems rooted in collectivism, to support their existence. There is consensus among the Cordillera people that the land was created by a Creator (linked with other deities and spirits)¹⁶ and is, therefore, sacred. From the Creator, known as Kabunian, Lumawig, Umay-ayong, Mahnongan, or Wigan, the land was inherited by their ancestors. Thus, since time immemorial, generations of Indigenous Cordillerans have inherited, tilled, and sustained the land for life. With its divine origin, it is an inheritance and is sacred; it cannot be subjected to ownership, sale, purchase, or lease. “The Cordillerans have a widespread belief that the land was held usufruct and cannot be removed from the community’s use.” Based on their varied communal needs, they established a system of communal ownership.

¹⁵ Jose Mencio Molintas, “The Philippine Indigenous People’s Struggle for Land and Life: Challenging Legal Texts,” *Arizona Journal of International & Comparative Law* 21, no. 1 (2004): 275.

¹⁶ Molintas, “The Philippine Indigenous People’s Struggle for Land and Life,” 275.

During earlier times, the people of the Cordilleras all had a land to cultivate. They each owned a piece of the land and its resources, which were primarily acquired through inheritance. Inherited lands were highly valuable, especially residential lots, rice fields, and nearby gardens. Aside from inheritance, land could also be acquired through sale, compensation, or barter. Selling land was considered a last resort and was traditionally permitted only in times of extreme emergencies. Land could be used as compensation for damage inflicted on another member of the community, seemingly as a peace offering.

2.3.3. *Land as identity*

Land provides not only food and shelter but also a place of belonging. Physical landmarks do not simply give a name to a particular geographical location; they also provide grounding and shape the character of their inhabitants. Identity is rooted in the culture and values formed in people's lives as they live together on a land they call home. For many IPs like the Cordillerans, their self-identity is rooted in the values and meanings formed in their life-systems in their homelands, rather than just the land features.

Cordillerans are proud people, particularly in their identity as Igorots.¹⁷ Their diverse and beautiful cultures, societal, and political systems, which spring from and are further developed in their relationship with the land, provide them that sense of pride. The lands do not only provide food, water, and shelter but also shape the culture and ways of life of inhabitants, giving them an identified uniqueness and therefore an identity.

2.4. Learning the Lessons of *Laudato Si'* and the Cordilleran Indigenous Land Theology

The world faces increasingly daunting environmental challenges. Global warming has caused climate changes, disrupting natural cycles and weather patterns. Hurricanes are becoming stronger, while droughts are longer and more intense. Mountain glaciers worldwide have receded, raising sea levels and threatening to submerge low-lying islands. Global warming is partly caused by greenhouse gases released by natural phenomena. However, large quantities of these gases come from

¹⁷ *Igorot* is a local term which means "people of and from the mountains". It is however taken to only refer to those people from the mountains of the Cordillera Administrative Region.

anthropogenic activities like the burning of fossil fuels. Changing rainfall patterns lead to local food shortages, health problems, and even armed disputes. Many water sources are threatened by faulty waste disposal, industrial pollutants, fertilizer run-off, and saltwater intrusion into underground aquifers, leading to unsafe drinking water and depletion of groundwater. Soil has been contaminated by excessive salts and hazardous chemicals. Erosion, exhaustion of nutrients and trace elements have degraded soil quality, resulting in poor crop harvests. Deforestation and mining are among human activities that have adversely affected biodiversity.

Laudato Si' summarizes Pope Francis' challenge to seek sustainable and integral development to protect our common home. A new dialogue about the future of the planet is needed. While he acknowledges the efforts of individuals to address environmental degradation and social injustice, he also recognizes that this work must be shared by more people, as these concerns affect us all. Through the challenges presented in *Laudato Si'*, this section attempts to reconstruct the new image of the Cordilleran land theology (response). In the following section, we present the themes of *Laudato Si'* as recommendations for inclusion in Cordilleran land theology.

2.4.1. *Land as a sacred space*

Land is sacred, and the people of the Cordilleras believe intently in the interconnectedness of nature and the spiritual world. Cordillerans perceive a reciprocal interconnectedness between the spiritual land and the earthly land, including the forests, rivers, mountains, plains, and humans as their stewards. This worldview compels the people to treat the land with utmost sanctity. In contrast, viewing the land as simply a mass of soil without any sacredness or spirituality attached to it makes it easier for people to take the land for granted (for commercialization, resource extraction, land grabbing, etc.).

Before taking any action, spiritual beings were consulted through rituals and sacrifices. Inhabited places were often off-limits, and people needed to ask for permission before trespassing to avoid disturbing any entity. In Mountain Province, this practice is called *Inayan/Paniyew*.¹⁸ Careful deliberations were necessary to avoid violating any taboos.

¹⁸ June Brett, *Tradition and Transformation: Studies on Cordillera Indigenous Culture*, ed. Delfin Tolentino, Jr. (Cordillera Studies Center, UP Baguio, 2019), 12.

Disturbing or violating the spirits was believed to invite misfortune for individuals or even the entire community. Essentially, these practices permeated the relationship between humans and the spiritual world, forming an interconnectedness not only with the land and spirits but also with the Supreme Creator.

Indigenous Peoples share a common vision, especially regarding land. “For those who come from a Judeo-Christian background, it might be helpful to view Aboriginal peoples as an Old Testament people. Like them, they (Cordillerans or any aboriginals for that matter) come out of an oral tradition rooted in the Creator and the creation.”¹⁹ Like any other central figure in the Old Testament, the IPs understand their own story and history about the sacredness of the earth and the promise of the land. They know the power of the Creator and the goodness of creation. They can see themselves as “the people” in their sense of being chosen.

Indigenous spirituality around the world centers on the notion of interconnectedness with all creation. The earth is their mother, and the animals are their brothers, sisters, and relatives. As co-creatures of creation, IPs and animals are part of the interdependence and connectedness of all life. Furthermore, understanding the gift of creation as the fullness of life makes it difficult to express individual ownership in Indigenous spirituality. If all of creation (living and non-living) are interdependent, it follows that it is not possible to speak of ownership.²⁰ Life is understood as a gift, and it makes no sense to claim ownership of any part of creation. Leaders of IPs worldwide often describe the absurdity of laying claim over the skies, air, or land, as these cannot be tied to an individual’s life. The land is their life. It is meant to be shared, and they know the Creator intends it for future generations.

Nurturing ecological spirituality among the Igorots of the Cordilleras is essential, given their deep connection to the land and natural environment. The Igorots, with their rich cultural heritage and traditional practices, already embody many principles of ecological spirituality. However, formalizing and enhancing these practices could promote more sustainable living and environmental stewardship. In the daily life of IPs,

¹⁹ Stan McKay, “An Aboriginal Perspective on the Integrity of Creation,” *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment*, edited by David G. Hallman (New York: Orbis Books, 1994), 84.

²⁰ McKay, *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment*, 84.

the belief in the Great Spirit and other spirits translates into respect and care for Mother Nature, which is the foundation of ecological spirituality.

Indigenous Peoples view themselves as integral parts of nature and believe in living in productive harmony with it. Unlike the prevailing worldviews of the capitalists and socialists, the IPs do not view nature as something to be dominated. They live with the land. The land is viewed not as a resource to be exploited for profit but the source of their group's existence. The thought that one is a mere part of nature, when taken seriously, can be a very humbling experience.

For Indigenous Peoples, the emphasis is not on human power over fish, birds, and animals for self-serving purposes, but on the image and likeness of God. This means that God has created humans as stewards of His creation: "I am putting you in charge of the fish, the birds, and all the wild animals." Diarmuid O'Murchu lamented this reality, saying: "From a religious perspective, the aliveness of the nonhuman world (animals, etc.) is often perceived as a secondary life form, existing for the use and benefit of humans."²¹ This form of reductionism is dangerously anthropocentric, undermining not merely the spiritual empowerment of all life but also relegating humans to a cosmic and planetary superiority that seems to be at the roots of many of the major problems confronting humanity today.

From the religious point of view, the aliveness of the nonhuman world (animals, etc.) is a secondary life form, frequently perceived to exist for the use and benefit of humans. This form of reductionism seems dangerously anthropocentric, undermining not merely the spiritual empowerment of all life but relegating humans to a cosmic and planetary superiority that seems to be at the roots of many of the major problems confronting humanity today.²²

This kind of spirituality, which is the belief in the Great Spirit, is akin to Christianity's Pneumatology. Quoting German theologian Jurgen Moltmann, O'Murchu observed:

God and the Holy Spirit...is in all created beings...if we understand the Creation his creation, and the goal of that creation in a Trinitarian sense, then the Creator, through this Spirit, dwells in his creation as a whole, and in every individual created, but by virtue of his Spirit holding them

²¹ Diarmuid O'Murchu, *God in the Midst of Change: Wisdom for Confusing Times* (New York: Orbis Books, 2013), 71.

²² O'Murchu, *God in the Midst of Change*, 71.

together and keeping them in life. The inner secret of creation is this indwelling of God.²³

For Indigenous Peoples, being present in all creation is not just an idea but a way of life. Their spirituality is a lived experience, not something confined to institutions. This can be understood as incarnational spirituality. Incarnational spirituality refers to the human spirit being situated and rooted within the human flesh. Through this orientation, we shift our understanding of spirituality from something institutionalized to something embodied, from being associated with an institutional way of the living to being rooted in our common humanity.²⁴

The value of Indigenous spirituality is its emphasis on wholeness.²⁵ Authentic spirituality is rooted in wholeness and integrality. Everything is considered in a full circle. It's a worldview that does not separate or compartmentalize. There is an awareness that we are all part of all life, and that everything is part of a cosmic order. Living faithfully with creation means living in the rhythm and natural flow of this ordered cosmos.

2.4.2. Land as a gift and a responsibility

Preserving ecology and, essentially, all of creation is a responsibility. Due to human self-interest, nature, originally good, "becomes hidden and unseen." However, it is through human selflessness that nature can be saved and preserved for future generations. In the Jewish tradition, cosmic harmony was first established at creation, when the cosmic elements were fixed and bound to maintain order. But this order was breached and threatened by other forces and beings that were hostile to God and to humankind. These includes the myth of the great flood and its subsequent re-creation.²⁶

Pope Francis recognizes the role of Indigenous cultural communities in practicing a sound cultural ecology based on the notion that land is of divine origin and is sacred. He stated:

²³ O'Murchu, *God in the Midst of Change*, 139.

²⁴ Julio Xavier Labayen quoted in Joefrey M. Almazan, "The Relevance of Laudato Si' in the Cordilleran's Search for Autonomy," *Philippiniana Sacra* 52, no. 157 (September-December 2017): 873.

²⁵ Almazan, "The Relevance of Laudato Si' in the Cordilleran's Search for Autonomy," 873.

²⁶ Robert Murray, *The Cosmic Covenant* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1992), 14-16.

In this sense, it is essential to show special care for Indigenous communities and their cultural traditions. They are not merely one minority among others but should be the principal dialogue partners especially when large projects affecting their land are proposed. For them, land is not a commodity but rather a gift from God and from their ancestors who rest there, a sacred space with which they need to interact if they are to maintain their identity and values. When they remain on their land, they themselves care for it best. Nevertheless, in various parts of the world, pressure is being put on them to abandon their homeland to make room for agricultural or mining projects which are undertaken without regard for the degradation of nature and culture.²⁷

A new vision of life must be founded on the conviction that humans are embedded in nature and nature is also embedded in human beings. Dianne Bergant argued, “We are truly children of the universe, made of the same stuff as are the mountains and the rain, the sand and the stars. We are governed by the laws of life and growth and death as are the birds and the fish and the grass of the fields. We thrive in the warmth of and through the agency of the sun as does every other living thing.”²⁸

2.4.3. *Land as a common home*

Indigenous Peoples are often neglected and even deprived of their rights as original settlers and caretakers of their lands. They are being stripped of their titles as legitimate owners/residents of their traditional lands, their common home. With their land rights taken away, their cultural, economic, societal, and land tenure systems are also being deprived. Since their means of living are being expropriated, they are essentially deprived of their right to live. For these reasons, Indigenous communities appeal to both local/domestic and international laws for land protection.²⁹

In the book of Genesis, God made the land appear from the waters and put in it many living creatures as well. This reminds us of the sacrament of baptism in which new life comes after being baptized with water. God commanded, “Let the water below the sky come together in one place, so that the land will appear”— and it was done. He named the land “Earth,”

²⁷ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, #146.

²⁸ Edgar Javier, “The Earth is Sacred,” *Religious Life Asia* 12, no. 4 (October-December 2010): 5.

²⁹ Lindsey Wiersma, “Indigenous Lands as Cultural Property: A New Approach to Indigenous Land Claims,” *Duke Law Journal* 54, no. 4 (2005): 1061.

and the water which had come together he named “Sea.”³⁰ And God was pleased with what he saw. Then he commanded, “Let the earth produce all kinds of plants, those that bear grain and those that bear fruit”—and it was done... Then God commanded, “Let the water be filled with many kinds of living beings, and let the air be filled with birds.” Then God commanded, “Let the earth produce all kinds of animal life: domestic and wild, large and small”—and it was done. So, God made them all, and he was pleased with what he saw.³¹

Land is life! Land is sacred! That is the undeniable creed of the IPs. Land is life, and land is sacred—it is a worldview that threads through their spiritual rituals and worships and their worldviews. The ethnicity of IPs is the most significant aspect of their claim to land and life. Their life has a vital link to their land. Their world consciousness and the continuity of their way of life are firmly rooted in their birthplace. Their land of origin is not only the source of their sustenance, but also their identity and culture. Their ancestral land is the repository of their knowledge and worldviews. Their clear awareness of the environment and their keen respect for its natural processes constitute for them a kind of intellectual and spiritual identity.

Ancestral land is defined by law as follows:

Land occupied, possessed and utilized by individuals, families and clans who are members of the ICCs/IPs since time immemorial, by themselves or through their predecessors-in-interest, under claims of individual or traditional group ownership, continuously, to the present except when interrupted by war, force majeure or displacement by force, deceit, stealth, or as a consequence of government projects and other voluntary dealings entered into by government and private individuals/corporations, including, but not limited to, residential lots, rice terraces or paddies, private forests, swidden farms and tree lots.³²

³⁰ Macli-ing Dulag, Chieftain of the Kalinga Tribe (quoted in Ponciano L. Bennagen, “Tribal Filipinos,” in *Indigenous View of Land and the Environment*, ed. Shelton H. Davis, the World Bank Discussion Papers, No. 188, pp. 71-72.) Also quoted by J. Kapunan in his separate opinion in *Isagani Cruz and Cesar Europa vs. Secretary of DENR, et al.*, G.R. No. 135385, December 6, 2000.

³¹ Aurea G. Micalat-Teves, “Land is Life: Reclaiming the Ancestral Domain of the Aetas for Food Security,” *Promoting Indigenous Knowledge for Food Security*, <https://www.coursehero.com/file/75454049/7-IP-of-the-Philippinesdocx/> (accessed September 9, 2024).

³² Republic Act 8371 (IPRA Law).

Rex Reyes, secretary general of the NCCP (National Council of Churches in the Philippines), stated in an interview: “It is foolishness to say we own the land. The land owns us!” Indigenous Peoples around the world have affirmed this statement time and again in defense of the land from wanton abuse. This springs from a profound understanding that the Earth’s resources are to be shared for the sustenance of all life, not exploited to satisfy the greed of the few. Such Indigenous perspectives resonate with the Christian understanding of responsible stewardship. Responsible stewardship and Indigenous spirituality uphold the reverence for life, the good interrelationship that should define a community, and sensitivity to the well-being of future generations. These practical knowledge and foresight explain why IPs defend the land. Ironically, the active articulation of these life-affirming and life-sustaining principles has become the reasons for their marginalization and the suffering imposed on them.

Apo Pangat Makliing Dulag of Kalinga articulated clearly that land is sacred as an element of Indigenous spirituality when he said:

You ask if we own the land. . . How can you own that which will outlive you? Only the race own the land because only the race lives forever. To claim a piece of land is a birthright of every man. The lowly animals claim their place; how much more man? Man is born to live. Apu Kabunian, lord of us all, gave us life and placed us in the world to live human lives. And where shall we obtain life? From the land. To work (the land) is an obligation, not merely a right. In tilling the land, you possess it. And so land is a grace that must be nurtured. To enrich it and make it fructify is the eternal exhortation of Apu Kabunian to all his children. Land is sacred. Land is beloved. From its womb springs . . .life.³³

3. Conclusion

Dwelling should be an expression of their cultural integrity. As beautifully expressed, ancestral land and domain are at the heart of Indigenous identity, longing, and belonging. The notion of dwelling posits that an essential characteristic of authenticity is “homeliness” or being oneself in one’s environment. Home is where your heart is. It is invested with meaning and identity.

³³ Molintas, “The Philippine Indigenous People’s Struggle for Land and Life,” 276.

As human beings, our relationship with the natural world is, by definition, a social one. How we perceive and use nature is shaped by how society is organized and how we, as members of that society, view nature's value. In other words, our relationship with nature is socially constructed and patterned. While earlier approaches to the study of human ecology attest to the character of this relationship, there is a need to see religious and spiritual factors as a strong undercurrent to the relationship between users and resources. In the latter, the user's linkages with the broader processes, including the state and its apparatuses, structure the physical and social environment and complicate the relationship between society and nature.

The struggle for ancestral land, as a discourse, pertains not just to legal and political strategies about land ownership but also to spiritual processes whereby understandings, interpretations, and meanings of the land are constituted and contested through social practices such as ritual and belief. The official view of how ancestral lands should be addressed may deviate from the actual situation, resulting in a gap between "what should be" and "what actually happened." This gap can also be a venue for negotiation of power and meaning among the stakeholders.

The concept of an Indigenous land theology involves an interconnected system of Indigenous knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and practices about land and ecology. This can be contrasted with Judeo-Christian environmental theology. Approaching these two spiritualities as a dialogue could enrich both perspectives. Such a dialogue may inspire and illuminate the struggles of Indigenous Peoples for their ancestral lands, creating a communicative theological action that is empowering and liberating.³⁴

³⁴ Leonardo Boff, *Ecology and Liberation* (New York: Orbis Books, 1996), 10.

REFERENCES

- Allad-iw, A. *Bulatlat News*. <http://www.bulatlat.com/2007/08> (accessed August 12, 2007).
- Almazan, Joefrey M. "The Relevance of Laudato Si' in the Cordilleran's Search for Autonomy," *Philippiniana Sacra* 52, no. 157 (September-December 2017): 857-876.
- Arcellana, E. "A Theory of Philippine Politics and its Implications for National Development." *Philippine Political Science Journal* 3, no. 3 (1976): 61 - 69.
- Boff, L. *Ecology and Liberation*. New York: Orbis Books, 1996.
- Brett, June. *Tradition and Transformation: Studies on Cordillera Indigenous Culture*, edited by Delfin Tolentino, Jr, 1-27. Baguio City: Cordillera Studies Center, UP Baguio, 2019.
- Javier, Edgar. "The Earth is Sacred." *Religious Life Asia* 12, no. 4 (October-December 2010): 1-9.
- Mckay, Stan. "An Aboriginal Perspective on the Integrity of Creation." In *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment*, edited by David G. Hallman, 84-167. New York: Orbis Books, 1994.
- Merriam-Webster. m-w.com: <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/development> (accessed August 12, 2024)
- Miclat-Teves, Aurea G. "Land is Life: Reclaiming the Ancestral Domain of the Aetas for Food Security." *Promoting Indigenous Knowledge for Food Security*. <https://www.coursehero.com/file/75454049/7-IP-of-the-Philippinesdocx/> (accessed September 9, 2024)
- Molintas, J.M. "The Philippine Indigenous Peoples' Struggle for Land and Life: Challenging Legal Texts." *Arizona Journal of International & Comparative Law* 21, no. 1 (2004): 269-306.
- Murray, Robert. *The Cosmic Covenant*. London: Sheed and Ward, 1992.
- NCIP, B. (n.d.). <http://www.benguet.gov.ph/index.php?Itemid=301> (accessed April 2015).
- Olea, Ronalyn. "Large-scale Mining, Energy Projects Devastated Cordillera." *Bulatlat*, October 11, 2013. <https://www.bulatlat.com/2013/10/11/large-scale-mining-energy-projects-devastated-cordillera/> (accessed September 9, 2024).
- O'Murchu, Diarmuid. *God in the Midst of Change: Wisdom for Confusing Times*. New York: Orbis Books, 2013.
- Perez, Padmapani L. "Governing Indigenous People: Indigenous Persons in Government Implementing the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act."

<https://thecordillerareview.upb.edu.ph/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/perez-53-86.html> (accessed Sept 28, 2024).

Pope Francis. *Laudato Si': On the Care for Our Common Home*, 2015.

https://www.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si_en.pdf (accessed September 9, 2024).

Raluto, Reynaldo. *Poverty and Ecology at the Crossroads: Toward an Ecological Theology of Liberation in the Philippine Context*. Quezon City: ADMU Press, 2015.

Skene, C. "The Global Economy and the Erosion of Civil Rights: The Case of the Philippines." *Philippine Political Science Journal* 27, no. 50 (2006): 61-88.

Wiersma, L.L. "Indigenous Lands as Cultural Property: A New Approach to Indigenous Land Claims." *Duke Law Journal* 54, no. 4 (2005): 1061-1088.

Submitted: Jul. 22, 2024; Accepted: Oct. 16, 2024; Published: Jan. 10, 2025
DOI: 10.62461/JMB101624

The Authenticity of Cultural Ways of Life: A Hermeneutic of the Ifugao Social Practice *Gotad*

*Joernie Mar U. Bistol*¹

ABSTRACT

This study examines the Ifugao Gotad cultural practice to distinguish the valued transcendent meaning and the normative values that are faithfully lived. It builds on Ginev's hermeneutic theory of social practices that determines the nexus of authenticity in human agency participating in configured practices. It is argued that an integral and authentic identity is achieved through reflexive appropriation of possibilities in routinized practices of everyday life and heeding the call of the cultural lifeform's transcendent authority. In doing so, the study first shows how a hermeneutic of social practices provides an explanatory view of our culture. Second, the study examines how the hermeneutic of social practices allows the determination of human subjectivity and the cultural lifeform as existentially authentic or inauthentic. Lastly, a hermeneutic of the Ifugao cultural Gotad practice reveals the authenticity of the cultural lifeform through the members heeding the call of its transcendent meaning and authority. The reconfiguration of the traditional Ifugao Gotad practice into an institutionalized ethnocultural thanksgiving gathering represents the contemporary Ifugao cultural way of life, re-establishes and recontextualizes the people's agency in the face of competing ways of life, encourages the people to continue to find ways of ensuring

¹ **Joernie Mar Bistol** earned his Bachelor's degree in Philosophy at San Pablo Major Seminary, Baguio City. Currently, he is pursuing a Master's degree program in philosophy at the School of Advance Studies (SAS), Saint Louis University, Baguio City, Philippines. His main interest is in the philosophy of culture and Indigenous philosophies.

their well-being, allows the members to resolve tensions arising from conflicting ways of life, and rediscover their cultural rootedness.

Keywords: *transcendent meaning, transcendent authority, institutionalize, ethnocultural thanksgiving*

1. Introduction

Human existence is being in social practices (Ginev 2018). We are all engaged in practices in any shape or form, whether it is personal or social. There are unique assemblages of social practices that constitute and reveal ways of life and identity. It refers to a particular group of people's cultural life form, an encompassing way of thinking, feeling, and behaving in the present (Javier 2018). It is where we are brought up and, in the process of enculturation, learn to acquire a cultural identity.

Understanding human existence cannot avoid culture that contextualizes human agency. It is not unfamiliar to anthropology and the philosophy of culture. In the former, Kottak distinguishes the sociocultural, archeological, biological, and linguistic studies in anthropology, which informs our understanding of the differences between human societies and cultures (Kottak 2011). In the latter, culture is a horizon of meaning upon which individuals make use of conceptual resources in their interpretive experience and linguistic communications (Lafont 2005). Particularly, philosophical hermeneutics affirms the role of culture in the historical progression of human consciousness that implicates individuals within an already stream and web of interlocution. In both instances, the human being is a meaning-making and self-interpreting animal.

The theoretical view of culture lets us see that we share sets of values, ideas, and judgments and that any changes may influence the whole social life and practices of cultural communities (Javier 2018). For instance, there are interrelated social practices that reveal a way of life, and they will only make sense when they are understood in the context of their configurations (Ginev 2019). Some actions, when isolated, seem to appear ordinary and mundane, but in view of their cultural context, they may provide us with

nuances in understanding the world. It is instructive to our observation that what we are doing together shapes our moral and intellectual sentiments.

One of the important roles of cultural practices is precisely to bring cultural consciousness to the surface level and for the members to understand and take gratitude for what ties our community together. Our source and measure of moral and intellectual solidarity is always referential to our culture. However, individuals tend to be overdetermined by social practices, while social practices seem to be taken for granted in the individualistic pursuit of self-realization. This leads to the issue of how we can get a hold of a genuine sense of subjectivity, balancing the influence of culture and the pursuit of fullness. It becomes more challenging when we encounter diverging ways of life that demand the resolution of differences.

The study contributes to a perspective of how authenticity is achieved through heeding the call of our cultural lifeform transcendental authority. Our membership in a cultural group is not simply a taken-for-granted label but an adherence to a consistent existential possibility. In the context of Ifugao society, the reception of modern secular conditions resulted in the reconfiguration of the Gotad practice, which aims to anchor the Ifugaos' authentic self in a cultural way of life. The study is a modest attempt to distinguish the nature of Ifugao culture and the relevant normative values that they continue to choose as an existential possibility.

2. A Hermeneutic of Cultural Practices

A philosophical hermeneutic approach to culture can provide us with an existential understanding of a shared way of life, particularly the transcendent authority of the cultural life form, which allows the determination of the authenticity of human subjectivity and the cultural life form. In this case, philosophy allows us to gain insights into how our cultural frameworks shape our understanding of ourselves and the world. It is characterized by unrestricted speculation about the reality of the world, human existence, and social arrangements (Russell 1972). It is no longer about acquiring knowledge but questioning and seeking certainty and truth, even in the most obvious or elusive aspect of reality.

Philosophy makes it clear that culture is something close and too familiar to us and that we are dealing with an inquiry that is a process of self-understanding. For instance, Plato's suspicion of convention and social

norms in his time is guided by his familiar understanding of his culture. He was committed to a rational discourse, or what he calls dialectic, with the hope of influencing and facilitating his vision of change. In this case, philosophy must realize its place as reactionary (Rennesland 2021). It is through a reflexive attitude that we critically engage with cultural expressions of human subjectivity, the wisdom we adhere to, and the values we constantly practice in our shared ways of life.

We can proceed better to an evaluative mode of inquiry of social normativity in cultural practices if we are aware of the explanatory view of its cultural thought. In this case, anthropological and sociological studies can provide us with a readily understanding of a cultural way of life. However, an ontological conceptualization of the transcendental authority of a cultural lifeform has to proceed through a hermeneutic inquiry. It has to move beyond the thick descriptions of ethnographic works, and thus, it is a double hermeneutic or an interpretation of interpretations. The hermeneutic tradition was initially concerned with text interpretations, but it evolved in the social sciences and philosophical tradition as an interpretive procedure and a region of inquiry (Smith 2004). In particular, hermeneutics in Anglo-Saxon philosophy signifies the epistemological problems of the validity and objectivity of textual interpretation and translation. In Philosophy, Heidegger considers interpretation to be primordially a mode of being or part of the human condition that is relative to a concrete historical setting (Dobos 2010). It is the unsurprising idea in philosophy that man is simply a self-interpreting animal.

As an outlook of the world, hermeneutics treats reality like a text that is readable and already constituted in meaning (Ginev 2011). The hermeneutical method is viewed as a circle between parts and the whole. To understand a linguistic expression means to look at details within its broader context, and in the same way, one cannot understand the context without going through the details. Thus, a hermeneutic philosophy of social practice demonstrates how a particular practice is understood in terms of the interrelatedness of social practices, which can disclose cultural meanings and ways of life. Ginev described it as our existential hermeneutic situation upon which meaning articulation proceeds from our ineluctably being in social practices.

We can understand the interplay of the normative forces and the influence of human agency in social practices through the sociological and philosophical distinction between human agency and action against social

structures. It is among the significant debates on social normativity and order (Scott 2006). On the one hand, the study of interpretive sciences identifies normative forces as those that typically sanction agential behavior in social life (Ginev 2019). The role of the social structure points to “the normative frameworks in which norms for performing social roles take shape, the semiotic-communicative codes of social integration” (Ginev 2018, 66). On the other hand, it is always the priority of human subjectivity that we find in social theories. For instance, the self’s dialogical nature emerges from an inescapable cultural background (Taylor 1989). Self-understanding remains intersubjective and relational so that no matter how we think about ourselves, it only finds its legitimacy when expressed and recognized by others (Taylor 1991).

However, the driving force of human social life is not exclusively traced to either human agency or social normativity. Against the tendency of a teleological determination, Ginev argued for a remainder or a phenomenon to be saved in the interplay of human agency in concert with configured practices. He refers to the ontological conceptualization of interrelated practices that constitute an emancipated way of life, creating its routine everydayness (Ginev 2018). It is because we all have to deal with empirical and transcendental concerns since human agents will inevitably encounter all sorts of normative patterns, beliefs, and various practices beyond their determination.

The idea of human subjectivity and intersubjective relations in the articulation of meaning is retained, but the ontological claim about the trans-subjective reality of socio-cultural practices needs to be made more explicit. It is the endogenous reflexivity of the practice that calls for the practitioners to immerse in a kind of life (Ginev 2018). When practitioners situate themselves in ensembles of configured practices, the practice has its reflexivity that specifies a form of life. This is typically understood within the normative frame of the social practice. But again, normative forces do not account for themselves as already existing either in the social structure or are determined by collective motives and agency. Instead, it is an ontological account within the hermeneutic situation that fore-structures understanding.

Ginev makes it clear that human agency and social normativity are related in ecstatic unity. It is a characteristic of being in social practices to which the idea of hermeneutic situation has expounded this unity. Understanding is always influenced by pre-existing fore-structures such as

preconceptions and prejudices that cannot be entirely stripped out of the process of interpretation within a historical concrete setting (Heidegger 1999). Through reflexive decisions, we can further develop and revise our preconceptions and perspectives. For Ginev, the being of meaning is in the ongoing fore-structuring of human actants' understanding of the potentiality for being in social practice. He avoids the causal determination of social normativity by prioritizing possibilities that constitute the trans-subjective reality of the practices. Instead of tracing social normativity in agency and assuming it as something operating behind agential behavior, it is an ecstatic unity (Ginev 2018). He tried to account for the pre-normative force or the non-normative aspect that fore-structures understanding in what becomes articulated when the practitioners engage in practices entering into configurations that open up a cultural life form's horizon of possibilities.

One of the important consequences of Ginev's view is infusing the existential analytic in the hermeneutic of social practices in order to disclose the people's choice of a consistent existential possibility within a cultural lifeform. He allows the cultural lifeform and the cultural bearers to be determined in the sense of authenticity and inauthenticity in everyday social life. All in view of how interrelated practices are emancipated cultural life forms capable of creating its everydayness. He goes as far as claiming that there is nothing beyond the projected horizon of possibilities laid out in our cultural lifeform. This is a valid point of departure to look at further how we come to acquire an authentic self and form of life.

3. Authenticity of the Self and Cultural Form of Life

Ginev not only allows the self but also cultural life forms to be determined as authentic or inauthentic through a hermeneutic of social practices. To proceed with his view, authenticity was one of the significant developments related to modern individualism. Taylor makes a helpful understanding of the development of authenticity and why it remains crucial to a meaningful life. Although Heidegger's view of authenticity is directly linked to Ginev's determination of the authenticity of cultural life forms, Taylor's account of the conditions of human subjectivity will help us understand the authenticity bequeathed by modern culture of inwardness. Meanwhile, Heidegger's perspective on authenticity will be more refined in Ginev's

view of an emancipated way of life. All are linked to the idea of culture as something that contextualizes human agency.

Centering on the self is one of the developments of our modern secular age. Taylor puts in context how society moves from a primitive porous self towards a civilized buffered self (Taylor 2007). The distinction is not a deliberate discrimination but an explanatory attempt. The former lives in a magical and enchanted world. Unbelief was unthinkable. He described the primitive self as porous or vulnerable to deified cosmic forces. The social boundary is not defined between human and non-human entities, including the overlap of the mind and the world. On the other hand, modern secular conditions have opened new realms of possibilities. Unbelief and belief are simultaneously a possibility in a society. He described the emergence of the buffered self as being capable of disengaged thinking and instrumental rationality. This characterizes the centering of the self, which is “individualism of self-fulfillment” (Taylor 1991, 14).

For good reasons, self-fulfillment relates to authenticity, but unfortunately, it tends to get superficial. Taylor traced the internalization of the moral force in Descartes’s radical disengaged thinking (Taylor 1989). Reason rules the self, but its hegemony is not to discard desires but to subsume them under the force of reason. Rational control has become the source and measure of self-esteem and dignity, which depends on doing what we judge as the best course of action and practice. In other words, mastery of rational thinking makes us see things as instrumental and moves us toward heuristic and procedural judgment as the basis of our actions. The significance of the individual’s control and freedom in looking for a sense of fulfillment was the prelude to the talk about authenticity.

For Taylor, authenticity is a moral ideal that we all share in any time and space. There is an impulse to be true to oneself coming from the call of our conscience and moral feelings (Taylor 1991). Self-exploration does not go about rationally objectifying the self but instead allows the individual to find his originality. It is directed to a profound balance that does justice to our nature as humans instead of lamenting our failure in fashioning ourselves according to an impersonal standard of order and good. No one apart from ourselves can lead our lives (Taylor 1991).

This immediately calls attention to the implication that valuation falls under the subject’s determination. There is a naïve restriction that no one has the right to question how we lead our lives. For Taylor, it is a slippery slope that we might fall and be misled to think that our quest for authenticity

will deprive each other of talking about our ideal commitments. While we become in touch with our moral feelings, it does not mean that it is not answerable to reason (Taylor 1991; Smith 1994). The moral ideal of authenticity is not a disengaged process of self-understanding but a dialogical relation within a horizon of significance that provides our basic valuation of things. From this view, the thread of our culture becomes more vivid and robust.

Meanwhile, Heidegger's view of authenticity is about commitment to an ideal and confronting possibilities that resist the tendency of becoming anonymous in everyday life (Heidegger 1999). We need to realize that we are not just a genuine expression of our self-making but also called for a greater purpose. Heeding the call of conscience frees us from the suppression of routine life and conformity. The call of conscience comes about in our deepest desire for a temporal and meaningful existence. It does not depart from how Taylor characterizes the quest for authenticity because it has an individualistic character. However, Taylor leans towards the dialogical self. Nevertheless, they acknowledge the social as the condition for the emergence of authentic selves.

For Ginev, authenticity is not the continuous awareness and resistance to everyday life. We cannot avoid routine life. Authenticity is not just simply emerging out of the crowd but taking upon the possibilities along the lines "laid out by certain paradigmatic stories circulating in our cultural world" (Guignon 2006, 287). Ginev accentuates the role of cultural life forms and practices and affirms that the shift toward authenticity can only be guided by reflexivity. It is a matter of personal choice according to the possibilities laid out in our thrownness. The everydayness of human existence is not some discreet and separate arbitrary activities. There are paradigmatic socially accepted behaviors. A personal choice that wills authenticity could only be maintained within an authentic cultural life form capable of creating its everydayness (Ginev 2018). Authenticity is not exclusively an individual agential enterprise, but it is in concert with the practice's horizon of possibilities.

The consequence of Ginev's view reiterates that cultural lifeform is not some reified object of thought or a free-floating entity that is simply ready to be internalized. Appropriating a possibility within the horizon of a cultural life form "resists the leveling and unificationists everydayness of average existence" (Ginev 2018, 1545). Each decision will always be subsumed into a routine everydayness, but such decisions should be

consistent with the transcendent meaning of the cultural lifeform. The transcendent meaning is often the most abstract and general view of human fullness. It provides an inexhaustible way for the cultural bearers to actualize into their daily lives. Ginev provides a good example of a ceremonial and exegetical practice that discloses a religious life that hinges on a transcendent meaning that sanctions righteous behavior but can never be expressed completely (Ginev 2019).

Individuals participate in a life form that projects an ultimate meaning and transcendent meaning to human existence. For Ginev, it is the potentiality for being or existential possibilities within the configured ensemble of interrelated practices that the ultimate meaning of a life form resides. In this case, “mutual reinforcement of the articulation of lifeform’s ultimate meaning and the constitution of the everydayness of configured practices defines the characteristic hermeneutic situation of the lifeform’s articulation” (Ginev 2019, 142-143). The potentiality for being that it projects drives the ongoing process of contextualization and recontextualization of agency within a social world. For this reason, cultural life forms are not static, and identity is a continuous process of actualizing possibilities through engagement with configured practices.

Ginev acknowledged the sociological process, but he insists that it remains the individuals who determine the constitution of meaning in their participation with practices. Cultural changes can be traced in the deliberate reconfiguration of practices, which allows other existential possibilities to be open and anticipated within the framework of their culture. By contrast, cultural changes by way of an external authority that imposes, controls, and manipulates the process of articulation can never be a free choice that elicits an authentic self and form of life. In this way, we can look into social practices that represent a way of life and the transcendent meaning they hold for a group of people living faithfully within the possibilities of their heritage. This is sufficient to provide an explanatory view of the transcendental authority and meaning of a cultural lifeform as a basis for a positive re-evaluation and re-articulation of cultural thought.

4. Institutionalization of the Ifugao traditional practice *Gotad*

It is not uncommon for significant social practices to be institutionalized in a society. In institutional theory, “a system of action is said to be institutionalized to the extent that actors in an ongoing relation oriented

their action to a common set of normative standards and value patterns.” (Cooper et al. 2008, 676). It is an activity where agents or actors adopt normative patterns that find their legitimacy in certain social and political contexts. In the social constructionist view, institutionalization involves the “emergence, maintenance, and transmission of social order” (Burger and Luckmann 1966, 70). It is a habituation of human activity, and therefore, reality is constructed through social processes and practices in everyday life (Berger and Luckmann 1966).

The primacy of linguistic expressions and communication results in the objectification and typification of the world and others. Hence, we know and understand how things usually go. In this case, language is experienced as external to the self as it typifies everyday life (Medina 2003). It is something we learn in the shared and common meanings that structure everyday life. Social order and stability are necessary because human existence moves beyond typifications and pragmatic motives for survival. It is through the habituation of human activities and various typifications that an institutionalized pattern of conduct is formed. It is a directed and specialized human activity that is subsumed under control (Berger and Luckmann 1966). This repeated, cumulative, and reciprocal process becomes objective and is treated as a social reality.

Ginev claims that even habitualization is grounded in facticity, particularly in the interrelatedness of practices (Ginev 2018). We can maintain that the institutionalization of practices holds normative patterns that the practitioners are able to internalize and externalize, but this is also guided by the agent’s subjectivity and the practice’s trans-subjective reality. In other words, people will come to know that certain practices disclose a form of life aside from the fashioned reasons or intentions that a practice is configured. More importantly, it points to a transcendent meaning that sanctions the agential behavior of the practitioners.

In the context of the Ifugaos, the entry of modern institutions and different worldviews from colonial encounters have changed their everyday lives, including their cultural practices. The Ifugao’s social reality is virtually not the same as in the past (Medina 2003). In the institutionalization of their traditional ritual practices, new modes of possibilities are incorporated. The reconfiguration of traditional practices has resulted in changes in the normative patterns being more defined and explicit. This is consistent with the hermeneutic theory of practices that

suggests the appropriation of possibilities and the ongoing meaning articulation that contextualizes and recontextualizes agency.

One of the most important cultural practices in contemporary Ifugao society is their founding provincial celebration, *Gotad* (Lihgawon 2022). It was originally part of *Uya-uy*, a ritual prestige wedding celebration. It is when someone is elevated to the status of *Kadangyan*, or wealthy person. At present, *Gotad*, as a provincial fest, is meant to enhance the elements of the Ifugao culture and identity (Sembrano 2016). It typically involves “gottadan (ethnic parade), traditional sports, hudhud chanting, ethnic dances, and songs, gong beating and winemaking, among others” (UNESCO 2008, 40). It spans for a few days to allow the expression of the variety of Indigenous knowledge, systems, and practices through thanksgiving gathering of culture and identity.

The shift of understanding and reconfiguration of the practice of *Gotad* from a prestige wedding rite to a Provincial celebration corresponds to the elevation of the status of Ifugao as a province. The *Kadangyans* do not simply hold status because of the abundance of their resources. They are primarily entrusted with great responsibility and authority for their agricultural systems and social relations (Roldan 2018). In this sense, adopting *Gotad* signifies the establishment or elevation of Ifugao as a province, explicitly affirming its authority over its land and culture.

Moreover, the *Gotad* practice is an exemplary celebration of the ongoing reconciliation of different cultural influences. Within the province, different ethnic tribes of Ifugao, such as the *IAYangan*, *ITuwali*, *Ihenanga*, and *IKalanguya*, have come together to recognize each other’s valuable contribution to enriching their culture. While the *Gotad* practice was fashioned towards cultural awareness and encouraged the younger generation to an internalized sense of valuing their culture, it has become increasingly political, economic, and secular activity. The institutionalization of the *Gotad* shows how the people move from their view of social totality towards the disentanglement of the dimensions of social life.

Unless the people realize the transcendent meaning of their culture in their social practices, their social totality will be freed from its entanglement and become autonomous in determining the life of the people. It is not bad that life has become easily identified in terms of political, professional, economic, and technological life. Still, it is better to realize that it is an open possibility to find its complementarity or consistency to the nature of their

cultural lifeform. If not, then it becomes a regulative force that will make the people reject virulent practices that risk the existence of their culture.

5. *Gotad* as *Punhanaan*: Understanding the Transcendent Meaning

The Ifugao *Gotad* can be understood as a *Punhanaan* practice. The familiar local term helps in elucidating how the Ifugao social practices are thought and expressed. It might be an unpopular term or even unfamiliar to most younger generations of Ifugaos. However, the nature of language, according to Taylor, is “Making new purposes possible, new levels of behavior, new meanings” (Taylor 2016, 4). It is a modest attempt to understand how *Punhanaan* captures the meaning of the reconfigured traditional practice. A closer look at the etymology of *Punhanaan* brings us to the idea of good. It comes from the root word *hana*, which, according to Lambrecht (1978),

“Hana” is a predicative affirmation followed by the conjunction *ta*, or *t*, a being eliminated (cf. under *ta* (2), or under *t*). In current speech as well as in *hudhud* chant, *hana ta* (*hana't*) introduces that which the speaker or the soloist wishes to approve for it means, “it is good that”, and is the equivalent of *maphod ta* (cf. under *pohod*”); if *hana* is reduplicated, its meaning is, in some way, reinforced, eg. : *hanahanat imbangad na* (cf. under *bangad*) Bugan, “it is really good that he brought Bugan (his wife) at home.

In Hohulin’s account, it could also mean an invocation for something good, such that *hana ot* means “may it be so” (Hohulin and Hohulin 2016, 300). Lambrecht and Hohulin relate the word to *maphod*, which describes any experience, person, or thing as good. In response to what is good, *munhana* is an expression of gratitude or recognition and valuing of a certain good. In the early observation of Florent Joseph Sals, he claimed that the early Ifugaos did not know gratitude because they were ignorant of strangers’ kindness and benighted by their lack of encounters with other civilizations (Sals 1955). The expectation of Joseph Sals might be gestures of gratitude, but he immediately pointed out that the ways of the early Ifugaos in acknowledging a favor or benefit typically evoking gratitude were saying, “I will remember it” (Sals 1955, 83).

However, it should not be taken as a reason for the seemingly ungrateful attitude of the Ifugaos when they do not remember it or they do not give an immediate exchange and show expressive gestures. For

instance, the Ifugaos' recognition of the *maphod* is manifested in their unique expression of ritual thanksgiving celebrations. It is important to note that kindness or goodness in their interpersonal relationship is deemed natural or expected as they operate in a close kinship bond. This explains why anyone in their tribe can expect help from his community in times of need and difficulties, like their practice of *baddang* and *ubbu*. If gratitude is understood as indebtedness, it is directed to the community because of their communal cooperation for one person or a certain family in need. The reciprocity does not end because they do not see their practice as an equivalent exchange but as an intergenerational commitment or a continuous way of fulfilling their sense of gratitude to everyone present during their time of need. In this view, the individuals' expressions and actions are always oriented to the good of the community.

When *munhana* is nominalized by the prefix *pun*, which expresses the manner or reason for an action, *Punhanaan*, signifies an avenue of thanksgiving or recognizing the good. It was particularly exemplified when Ifugao became a province, and they institutionalized their traditional practice of *Gotad* as a thanksgiving gathering of cultural identity (Lihgawon 2022). It expresses their self-determination and hope for cultural continuity. It comes from their strong sentiments of gratitude and loyalty to their inherited culture and identity. It is not a surprise that all the municipalities followed and institutionalized other traditional practices that would appropriately signify their cultural values. The ethnocultural thanksgiving practices of the Ifugaos are the following: *Gotad ad Hingyon*, *Gotad ad Kiangnan*, *Igkhumtad ad Majawjaw*, *Rambakan jay Lamut*, *Ammung ad Alfonso Lista*, *Kulpi ad Asipulo*, *Kulpi ad Lagawe*, *Urpil ad Banaue*, *Apar ad Aguinaldo*, *Keleng di Tinec*, and *Tungoh ad Hungduan* (UNESCO 2008). The practices emphasized the aspects of Ifugao culture to deliberately promote cultural values and knowledge for the present and future Ifugao generations.

In plain language, the Ifugao *Gotad* practice as *Punhanaan* reveals that it is fashioned to ensure the well-being of the community. However, arriving at the idea is inevitable and, for some, unsurprising. Still, it should be made explicit that the transcendent meaning of the Ifugao cultural way of life is well-being. Its peculiarity is how religious belief and tradition confer its significance. Human culture is at once and will continue to be social and religious. Javier states, "There is no culture without religion. There is no religion without culture" (Javier 2018, 53). Understandably, the

Ifugaos primarily understood well-being in ritual practices. The study of Remme demonstrates how the Ifugao's extended sociality is constantly renewing the plurality of their relations through ritual celebrations (Remme 2017).

The injunction of the community is the renewal of relations because it serves as the condition of well-being to be expressed and achieved. It is characterized by maintaining relations through the strict observation of traditions and proper ritual sacrifices. The idea is simple and practical; the people cannot celebrate or live in an atmosphere of hostile relationships. While ritual celebrations are a common characteristic of primitive life, relating it to *Punhanaan* makes it an existential attitude that is open to creating, renewing, and valuing relations as a measure of attunement to harmony. In another sense, Enkiwe-abayao describes the desired way of the Ifugao *henanga* tribe as *ap-aphochan chi pi'takhuwan*, which means having abundant resources, practical needs, traditional knowledge, and life skills (Enkiwe-Abayao 2010). It is true for all the Ifugaos since it refers to a good way to be, but it also points to the most important part of Ifugao life, the sustenance of family and community relations. Even in death, the renewal of relations continues. This is exemplified in the practice of knowing kinship ties. It means knowing the *nun-apuh* or ancestor's spirits, which is considered a significant characteristic of the Ifugao sense of being so that a person's death does not end with its possibilities because his life is remembered, celebrated, and continually made part of the community in any ritual celebrations (Remme 2017).

The *Gotad* practice was adopted from a particular ritual gathering, which marks the important events and stages of their temporal existence to strengthen their communal ties practically. Thus, the idea of well-being is fundamentally experiential and understood from how they conduct themselves according to their beliefs and relations. In this case, there is something proverbial in Ifugao society in terms of how they relate and understand that their behavior is harmonious and desirable. In view of the *Gotad* practice, the people participate in not just one single practice but interrelated practices that have a certain emergent relational value. This demonstrates that the expression of well-being as a transcendent meaning is open to new formations and re-configurations of the normative forces and existential possibilities. It happens in the cultural members' orientation, anticipation, and expectations to secure their cultural continuity and social cohesion.

5.1. Heeding the Transcendent Authority

Towards the modern social transformation of Ifugao society, the disentanglement of the social domains of life has become deliberate. The new generation is delivered in a context of diverging interests of the life forms. Life is no longer tied to the traditional religious framework and domain of possibility, which makes it necessary to maintain solidarity in any attempt at cultural survival. People today can find other modes of life outside their places. Societies are becoming multicultural and multireligious because “traditional standards, contrasts, groups, boundaries, and identities are opening up, reaching out, and also breaking down” (Javier 2018, 52).

On a positive note, even if the Gotad practice was meant to highlight the cultural elements of Ifugao culture, it encouraged modern progressive developments that would enrich the place. However, there are significant studies that are critical to the modern social transformations of Ifugao. Tensions arise between cultural ways of life and the trends following modern secular progress. The proliferation of different institutions and the outpouring of other cultural influences has elicited a mistaken view that reduced the Ifugao culture as antiquated (Jocson 2018; Nantes et al. 2022). Historically, the Ifugao colonial encounters introduced Western culture through a new social order in terms of political organization, economic industry, education, and Christian life.

The Ifugaos did not risk rigidity, but there are conflicting forms of life that need to be resolved. To be clear, reconciling different cultural lives presupposes a genuine encounter to allow one culture to be transformed by another. It is not about domination and assimilation that results in the dissolution of other ways of life. To reconcile outside influences with the Ifugao culture is clear. There are impacts of colonial history and daily intercultural exchanges that challenge the cultural way of life. The important thing is to heed the call of the cultural life form’s transcendent authority. It comes from the ethos of the culture and the ultimate meaning it projects for the members. Thus, the measure of cultural continuity is not to crystallize or substitute the culture, but it lies in the continuous expression of the transcendent meaning of the culture.

We do not only participate in one but in various cultural life forms, hence the proliferation of the “Self I-positions” within which the Self encounters others, including various ways of life (Ginev 2019, 201). In this case, it is up to the individual to come to terms with the plurality of his I-

positions that correspond to different forms of life, and it would be enriching for the cultural form of life if individuals choose to take it as their horizon of existential possibilities and appropriate it as their way of life. For instance, the *Gotad* practice encourages the well-being of the community in each relational dimension of social life. This means that any virulent practice that disintegrates and destroys environmental, communal, and spiritual relations shall be rejected. For instance, excessive capitalizing on environmental resources at the expense of their rice fields, demonization of culture for Christian conversion, distortion of cultural identity to assimilate into the dominant culture, and modern self-priority that is indifferent or above community life.

5.2. Cultural Values in Practice

The existential possibilities in the Ifugao way of life can be made explicit in the choices of the people to retain their traditions. We can observe that their rice culture appeared consistent in the repeated practice of *Gotad*. Their rice culture is the reason why Ifugao became well-known outside of the place. UNESCO (2008) considers the rice terraces to be a testament to the unity of humanity and the landscape. Its ingenuity may strike us with awe and inspiration to value humanity's common heritage. Most importantly, it retains the sentiments and solidarity of the community that have grown throughout their history. The *Gotad* practice makes this understanding vivid through a deliberate promotion of faith and obedience to keeping traditions, communal cooperation, and collective responsibility. In this way, we can understand how cultural values are constantly being practiced.

The importance of keeping their heritage cannot be divorced from the Ifugao identity. Culture is dynamic, and traditions change, but it does not mean it is diminishing the cultural way of life. Even the reconfiguration or abandoning of practices and old beliefs is a process of anticipation and expectation from the cultural members. A cultural lifeform meets its end when it no longer offers a potentiality for being, which is absurd because it remains inexhaustible (Ginev 2019). The shattering of cultural lifeforms can only be forced by an external authority. Thus, it is only right that the *Gotad* retains the valued traditional practices as a viable existential possibility. Some would secularize culture and assume that it is still efficient as a humanistic principle, but it becomes diminished by the lack of sentiments among the people.

The Ifugaos ritualized the phases of rice planting to properly enact their relation to their god with reverence and gratitude. This requires faith that after renewing good relations, the deities will confer abundance and peace to the community. That is why obedience to follow the ritual celebrations and the taboos properly is strictly observed. However, Christianity superseded the traditional belief. Today, the *Gotad* practice allows interreligious worship from all the various Christian churches. Although it allows their belief in God to be expressed in different faith communities, their spirituality unites them in their desire for God’s providence and protection.

Meanwhile, communal cooperation is valued as true living in the community—for instance, *ubbu* and *baddang*. The former refers to laborious work for maintenance and utilizing rice fields. Here, environmental relations are fundamentally grounded in pragmatic survival and care that arises from loss or displacement. However, it can also be motivated through a sense of attachment, like gratitude to their ancestors and loyalty to their community. In the latter practice, it is a more encompassing way of helping individuals or families. It is a virtue common among the Indigenous groups in the Cordillera region, which is “a sharing of burden to finish a communal task” and for the members to “come out from his/her comfort zone to help in the community concern, problem, or issue” (Placido 2024, 175). This links their collective responsibility for their environmental and communal relations.

Each is an important member of the community. It is almost a single entity that is sensitive to each other’s needs. Their institutionalized *Gotad* practice shows how people can develop communal cooperation in different ways. It can be a collaboration and concerted effort of political, economic, and educational institutions. The important thing is that the shift in understanding retains the relational values of communal cooperation and collective responsibility, which allows the Ifugaos to find ways to ensure the well-being of their community. It would imply that the Ifugao sense of subjectivity is not entirely individualistic, but it always finds its source of strength and motivation in the community that raised him or her.

5.3. Rediscovering Cultural Rootedness

The *Gotad* practice is a part of self-determination, consolidating the people’s aspirations on cultural, political, and economic developments. It is not just to alleviate their condition but also to let the Ifugao people

determine the future of their culture and community. In this case, the present generation's engagement in the *Punhanaan* social practice helps them to deliberately identify the relevant beliefs, values, and norms that would remain a positive aspect of their identity. While not all the Ifugao traditions are considered good and practical in the present, the same could also be said for accommodating other influences. It is rediscovering their cultural roots that provides an avenue for a balanced and selective process of cultural change and will contribute to the maturity and development of the Ifugao community.

The transcendent meaning of well-being is not to claim an absurd point that people should go back to their traditional cultural mode of thinking. Instead, we must be keen to look at the historical connections, the existential validity, and the practicality of our cultural practices amidst the emerging issues and possibilities of life. Even if the process leads to changes that require a shift in understanding and practices, this should not only be done through raising the standard of their living but also accompanied by growth and refinement of understanding that extends to promote the welfare of other people and future generations.

People are initially concerned at the level they are uncomfortable with, and it takes compromise and initiative to engage in practice and internalize normative forces that make agential behavior inclined toward the well-being of the community. It is not a problem for people who understand the value of promoting the common good and have pride in their culture. However, it is no longer obvious how individual actions have repercussions for the whole community. The impact of individual choices is felt almost immediately in Ifugao's previous social life. The transcendent meaning of well-being encompasses every dimension of relations, but the challenge today is how each relation becomes freed and proceeds to dictate the lives of the people. It is more tragic when people are disconnected from their cultural roots because the sacrifices and efforts of their ancestors will be brought to naught if the present cannot value what they share and do not find meaning in what they are doing together.

6. Conclusion

The *Gotad* cultural practice of the Ifugaos is paradigmatic to a profound existential concern as people realize that there is a reality beyond their intentional participation in social practices. We always participate in social

practices, and seeing the role of culture in this way can encourage members towards a deeper self-understanding and aspire for cultural continuity. It signals the reflexive aspect of cultural practice that there is a transcendent meaning it hopes to inscribe to the members. This is possible because human culture provides a plenitude for how people address the vicissitudes of life. It also calls for the member's reflexivity towards an authentic mode of life that is faithful in enriching their cultural identity. It is inevitable because human existence is always motivated by the pursuit of meaning and value.

The relevance of a hermeneutic of social practices is not limited to an explanatory view of authentic cultural life forms. From the point of view of the cultural bearers, it is the ground upon which individuals measure other cultural influences as desirable or pernicious. Also, the functional values and efficient practices of a cultural community can be navigated towards positive social action. In the case of the relevance of the Ifugao *Gotad* practice, it will remain indicative of the Ifugao expression of well-being. Their values of keeping faith and traditions, gratitude and loyalty, communal cooperation, and collective responsibility can be navigated toward a normative approach to interculturality. There is a need to find complementary values that would encourage people's sentiments towards wider solidarity of human cultures. It starts with an explanatory view and continuous practice and articulation of our own.

Thus, we can influence the changes in the normative forces of our culture as long as they come from our anticipation and expectations. A rigid cultural practice that often treats outside influences as a threat prevents the emergence of profound possibilities. While change is too risky, the openness of knowledge and practice exchanges provides an avenue for social transformations. It requires receptivity and creativity to reinvent oneself with the ingenuity of each cultural influence. This can be through the reconfiguration of cultural practice or institutionalization of new practices so that the members can be guided by the transcendent meaning and normative forces of their culture.

REFERENCES

- Berger, Peter L., and Thomas Luckmann. "Institutionalization." In *The Social Construction of Reality*, 65-107. USA: Penguin Books, 1966.
- Cooper, David J., Mahmoud Ezzamel, and Hugh Willmott. "Examining 'Institutionalization': A Critical Theoretic Perspective." In *The Sage Handbook of Organizational Institutionalization*, edited by Royston Greenwood, Christine Oliver, Roy Suddaby, and Kerstin Sahlin, 673–701. London: Sage Publications, 2008.
- Dobos, Attila. "The use of Hermeneutics in Dealing with Cultural Diversity." In *Building Intercultural Competences*, edited by Maria Giovanna Onorati and Furio Bednarz, 55–66. Leuven: Uitgeverij Acco, 2010.
- Enkiwe-Abayao, Leah. "Ifugao Knowledge and Formal Education Systems of Learning in the Philippines." *Cultural Survival Massachusetts Avenue Cambridge* (May 2010).
<https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/ifugao-knowledge-and-formal-education-systems-learning>.
- Ginev, Dimitri. "Ensembles Practices and Cultural Forms of Life." *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia* 74, no. 4 (2018): 1537-1562.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/26563369>.
- Ginev, Dimitri. *The Tenets of Cognitive Existentialism*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2011.
- Ginev, Dimitri. *Scientific Conceptualization and Ontological Difference*. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2019.
- Ginev, Dimitri. *Toward a Hermeneutic Theory of Social Practice*. New York: Routledge, 2018.
- Guignon, Charles. "Authenticity, Moral Values, and Psychotherapy." In *Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, edited by Charles Guignon, 215–239. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- Heidegger, Martin. *Ontology-The Hermeneutics of Facticity*. Translated by John van Buren. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1999.
- Hohulin, Richard M., and E. Lou Hohulin. *Tuwali Ifugao Dictionary and Grammar Sketch*. Manila: Linguistic Society of the Philippines, 2014.
- Javier, Edgar. *Anthropology and Mission: A Primer for Incarnational Missionaries*. Manila: Logos Publications, 2018.

- Jocson, Ellisiah. "Inclusion and Cultural Preservation for the Ifugao people." *Journal of Southeast Asian Human Rights* 2, no. 2 (December 2018): 421–447. <https://10.19184/jseahr.v2i2.8232>.
- Kottak, Conrad Phillip. *Cultural Anthropology: Appreciating Cultural Diversity*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2011.
- Lafont, Cristina. "Hermeneutics." In *A Companion to Heidegger*, edited by Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall, 265–284. Malden, Massachusetts, USA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005.
- Lambrech, Francis Hubert. *Ifugao-English Dictionary*. Baguio City: The Catholic Vicar Apostolate of the Mountain Province, 1978.
- Lihgawon, Marcelo. "PLGU Bares Activities of Gotad ad Ifugao 2022." *Philippine Information Agency*, June 8, 2022. <https://pia.gov.ph/news/2022/06/08/plgu-bares-activities-of-gotad-ad-ifugao-2022>.
- Medina, Carlos R. *Understanding the Ifugao Rice Terraces*. Saint Louis University, Baguio: Cordillera Research and Development Foundation, 2003.
- Nantes Jr, Felipe, Keneth Maslang, and Samuel Damayon. "Translocality and Cultural Differentiation: Challenges and Opportunities Among Indigenous Ifugao Migrants." *World Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 8, no. 1 (2022):1-8. DOI: 10.12691/wjssh-8-1-1.
- Placido, Dennis. Jumpstarting Ethno-philosophy in Context: Ethics discourse on Gawis ya Ngawi. *Journal of the Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication* 22, no.1 (2024):169–191. www.asianresearchcenter.org.
- Remme, John Henrik Ziegler. "Human at Risk: Becoming Human and the Dynamics of Extended Sociality." In *Human Nature and Social Life: Perspectives on Extended Sociality*, edited by John Henrick Ziegler Remme and Keneth Sillander, 191-210. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.
- Rennesland, Anton Heinrich. "Five (5) Assumptions on the Illusion of 'Filipino Philosophy': A Prelude to a Cultural Critique." *Suri: Journal of the Philosophical Association of the Philippines* 9, no. 1 (2021): 76-89. https://suri.pap73.org/issue13/rennesland1_suri_april2021.pdf.
- Roldan, Christopher. "Agency in Ifugao Society: Social Mobility and the Kadangyan." *Philippine Quarterly of Culture and Society* 46, no. 1/2 (2018): 124–152. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26951215>.

- Russell, Bertrand. *A History of Western Philosophy*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1945.
- Sals, Florent Joseph. "Primitive Education Among the Ifugaos: Religious and Moral." *Philippine Studies* 3, no. 1 (1955): 70–89.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/42719125>.
- Scott, John. *Sociology: The Key Concepts*. London and New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Sembrano, Edgar Alan M. "Ifugao to 'Purify' Annual Gotad Celebration; Mass Feeding Tradition Revived." *Lifestyle Inquirer*, June 27, 2016.
<https://lifestyle.inquirer.net/231613/ifugao-to-purify-annual-gotad-celebration-mass-feeding-tradition-revived/>.
- Smith, Nicholas H. "Taylor and the Hermeneutic Tradition." In *Charles Taylor*, edited by Ruth Abbey, 29–51. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Smith, Nick. "Charles Taylor, Strong Hermeneutics and the Politics of Difference." *Radical Philosophy* no. 68 (Autumn 1994):19–27.
https://www.radicalphilosophyarchive.com/issue-files/rp68_article3_charlestaylor_smith.pdf.
- Taylor, Charles. *A Secular Age*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007.
- Taylor, Charles. *Ethics of Authenticity*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991.
- Taylor, Charles. *Sources of the self*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989.
- Taylor, Charles. *The Language Animal: The Full Shape of the Human Linguistic Capacity*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016.
- UNESCO. *The Effects of Tourism on Culture and the Environment in Asia and the Pacific: Sustainable Tourism and the Preservation of the World Heritage Site of the Ifugao Rice Terraces, Philippines*. Bangkok: UNESCO Bangkok, 2008.

Submitted: Apr. 7, 2024; Accepted: Sept. 23, 2024; Published: Jan. 10, 2025
DOI: 10.62461/EDR092324

Cybertheology from a Theoretical Approach: Conceptual Considerations and Proposals

*Edson Real*¹

ABSTRACT

Apps, Artificial Intelligence (AI), internet, Internet of Things (IoT), metaverses, social networks, and virtual assistants are changing our faith, ecclesial communities, pastoral actions, religious experiences, and theology, especially accelerated by the coronavirus pandemic. Although the emergence of a new discipline that studies the mediation of faith in digital technologies and its pastoral impacts is widely accepted, a systematized reflection on it is still lacking. However, in recent years, cybertheology approach is emerging in the Catholic academic field to explain all these phenomena; and for this reason, researchers are developing its object of study as well as concepts or methodologies of this new subject.

In this article, cybernetics science is proposed as a significant epistemological basis for cybertheology because it facilitates dialogue with other disciplines for building conceptual knowledge. In particular, it is relevant in two main issues: first, cybernetics has biblical, ecclesial, communicational, epistemological, philosophical, and scientific bases. Second, cybernetics is a well-funded inter-transdisciplinary science. With both of these topics, it is possible to study the complex relationships between God, believers,

¹ **Edson Real, SVD** is a Divine Word Missionary from Mexico. He studied Philosophy, Theology and MSc in Geomatics (Geographic Information Science). He is interested in digital religion, cybertheology and youth communication. Currently, he collaborates at Librería Verbum Guadalajara with Editorial Verbo Divino and pastoral work at St. Albertus Magnus Parish, Tlaquepaque, Jalisco. He can be reached at edears@gmail.com.

communication, and technologies. In this paper, the concept of the noosphere proposed by Teilhard de Chardin is appropriated for modeling all these complexities in a critical, ethical, and prophetic standpoint.

Keywords: *cybertheology, cybernetics, noosphere, theology, technology*

1. Introduction

From a Catholic approach, Karl Rahner (1978) defined theology as the “*science of the faith*” that processes revelation in an epistemological, rational, and systematic construction to make it comprehensible (transmissible) to believers. However, for Gustavo Gutiérrez, theology is a “second act,” because first is the commitment (praxis), and later, the rationality of this praxis into a community (1982, 82). This shows that theology is not closed, isolated, or static from its geographical, historical, social, technological, and cultural settings; it is in constant development and in dialogue with other sciences and contexts. In this, since the advent of computers, internet and social networks, God’s experience, faith celebration, and theological thinking have been fully transformed. In this sense, researchers recognize the emergence of a new academic field that explores the relationship between theology and communication technologies. However, there has been no consensus on a common name or methodology. Examples of this are: *teología de la comunicación* (Martínez 1994), cybertheology (Herring 1997; Marroquín 1999; Spadaro 2010); cyberspace theology (Cobb 1998), digital theology (Steinhart 2012), (Sadiku et al. 2022, 2070); internet theology (Bennet 2012), online theology (Byers 2013), networked theology (Campbell and Garner 2016), media theology (Blondheim and Rosenberg 2017), *teología comunicativa* (Felton 2017; Amaro 2021); AI theology (Kruger and Braconnot 2017), *teología conexas* (Puntel and Sbardelotto 2017), theology of the digital age (Schmidt 2020), *tecno-evangelización* (Gargevcich and Olivera 2021), postdigital theologies (Savin-Baden 2022), or techno-theology (Ugboh 2023).

In all these academic proposals, cybertheology and digital theology are the most advanced as seen in books, conferences, courses, publications, social networks, and postgraduate studies. Cybertheology is known in the Catholic arena (Mediterranean-Europe, Latin-America), while Digital theology is more prevalent in Anglo-Saxon non-Catholic contexts (Amaro 2021).

2. A Brief History of the Study of Technology and Theological Thinking

The study of the impacts of technologies on faith and theology was noticed early in *God and Golem, Inc.* by Norbert Wiener (1964). In this book, Wiener presented a cybernetic approach to the control and communication processes of human purposes and religious ethics, and he asserted that computers would ease communication between religions. In the same year, Pope Paul VI was amazed at how technology had digitalized the Bible and Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*. The Pope (1964) mentioned:

Science and technology, twinned once again, have offered us a wonder [...] the fact of observing how this very modern service is made available to culture [...] how the mechanical brain comes to the aid of the spiritual brain; and the more it is expressed in its own language.

In those years, propelled by the Second Vatican Council reforms, theologians dialogued with others social sciences (anthropology, behavioral sciences, cybernetics, political sciences, sociology) to understand the organization and mission of the Church (Phan 2001, 60). In this context, sister Mary Virginia Orna stated that technological advances would develop a “cybernetic era,” with serious repercussions on culture, society, and the Church, which computers would realize major changes in theological works, so theologians should pay more attention to this (1969, 147). William Everett (1972) approached cybernetics to understand the symbolic analogy of the body applied to the Church. For him, ecclesial corporation is a living system, which self-regulates, hierarchizes, and seeks homeostasis to conserve and survive.

The first theologian that systematically studied the Church by a cybernetic approach was the Benedictine Patrick Granfield. In his essay, “Ecclesial Cybernetics: Communication in the Church,” he defined

ecclesial cybernetics as “the science of communication of the Church” (1968, 678). He modeled the Church as an open system to understand how it communicates their dogmas, documents, and rites among believers, hierarchy, media, and the world. Also, he analyzed how the Church maintains its union (communion) and balancing its doctrinal development with pastoral and ecumenical tasks.

Later years, Granfield published his masterwork, *Ecclesial Cybernetics: A Study of Democracy in the Church*, which investigated the organization and governance of the Church, “...understanding the problem of communication and control in church is basic to its future, maintenance and development” (1973, 5-6). Therefore, he studied the history of synods, councils, and conferences from a cybernetic perspective to understand communication-control mechanisms in the Church. Likewise, he considered that the electronic computer would be “an invaluable instrument of research and analysis” (1973, 43) to communicate the Church’s teachings and practices, and perhaps would facilitate the realization of a *consensus fidelium* in next decades in controversial topics such as birth control, female ordination or priest celibacy, matters that the Second Vatican Council could not gain consensus.

Decades later, William Gibson introduced the neologism “cyberspace” in the novel *Neuromancer* to describe an experiential reality generated by neural-computational interconnections (1984, 69). In the rise of the internet and hypertext, the terms “cyber” and “cyberspace” have been popularized in entertainment, media, culture, and science. Theology was not an exception. For this reason, D. O. Berger questioned, “...if the electronic media and related rhetorical devices radically alter the way we communicate, even think, how they affect the way theology is done” (1996, 195). Then, Debbie Herring (1997) addressed the term “cybertheology” for the first time in academia:

...Theology cannot ignore the internet, nor can it assume that cyberspace is just an extension of normal life [...] You must devise a cybertheology with a digital hermeneutic that can address the complexity and the subtlety of computer mediated communication in its own terms.

In Latin America, Enrique Marroquín analyzed webpages and chatrooms about theology. Even though those sites were not as advanced as current theological social networks, he intuited that the internet would be the main “place” for theological discussion. He posited, “Could it be thought that the internet would be gestating a new secular religious

discourse? Could we talk about an incipient ‘popular cybertheology’?” (1999). Both Herring and Marroquín were the first to name this new field as cybertheology, even though they did not define its epistemological and methodological scope. Jennifer Cobb discussed the impacts of cyberspace and computers on the way of doing theology, including its language and methodologies (1999, 11-15). Margaret Wertheim asserted that interactions in cyberspace are changing experiences and thinkability of faith, which surpass a “physicist” theology, as has been done for centuries (1999, 217-218). In the following years, Pope Benedict XVI (2011) inquired:

If the new languages have an impact on the way of thinking and living, this in some way also concerns the world of faith and the understanding and expression of it. According to a classical definition theology means the understanding of faith and we know well that understanding, perceived as reflective and critical knowledge, is not alien to the cultural changes that are under way [...] what challenges does “digital thought” pose to faith and theology?

Likewise, Antonio Spadaro discussed the topic of cybertheology at the 2010 Italian Bishops’ Conference and defined it as the “theological reflection to understand digital technologies” (Amaro and Gripp 2021, 138). In 2012, Spadaro published *Cybertheology: Thinking Christianity in the Times of the Network*, the first book on this issue in academia. Hereupon, cybertheology has developed as an emerging discipline. While it does not have a unanimous definition, four main dimensions are clearly recognized:

A. Cyberspace. Since the beginning of this field, the term cyberspace was suggested as its *locus*. For example, Herring proposed cybertheology as “the study of theology in cyberspace, theology of cyberspace and theology for cyberspace” (1997), which means how theology understands media phenomena and validates theological knowledge in cyberspace as sites, groups, or forums of the web (Spadaro 2014, 23).

B. Experience. This pertains to how technologies impact the development of spiritualities, phenomenology, and transcendental interactions in media. For Aupers and Houtman, cybertheology is a new spirituality expressed in and through the internet (2005, 81-88).

George understood it as “phenomeno-logical map of the presence of the religious on the internet” or “how to trawl the Web, is understood as a place with spiritual capacities” (2006, 182). Spadaro defined it as “the study of the faith experience or spirituality expressed through internet and networks” or “reflection on the change in the relationship with God and with transcendence” (2011). Finally, Arboleda suggested that cybertheology is not only religious content or media, but rather the theological reflection about the experience of faith in cyberculture (2016; 2017).

C. Techno-communication. This dimension refers to theological/faith content processed by technology: “Theology of technology” (Formenti 2000, 59); “The theology of the meanings of social communication in the era of the Internet and of advanced technologies [...] pastoral reflection on how to communicate the Gospel through the Web’s own capacity” (George 2006, 182); “The study of ways in which God can be revealed and represented in cyberspace [...] how Theology can adapt, express itself and make itself more present on the internet” (Estrella 2016, 575); and “reflection of the revelation that occurs in human action through virtual platforms” (Velásquez 2021, 8-9).

D. Theology-faith. This is perhaps the best defined conception, which studies the reflection of faith (theology) and its transmission through media technologies: “the intelligence of faith in the cybernetic age” (Singh 2009); “...the intelligence of the faith in the era of the Internet, that is, reflection on the thinkability of the faith in the light of the Web’s logic” (Spadaro 2014); “the systematic reflection on the transformative impact of the digital age on the various dimensions of one’s faith life and his/her response to this ever changing milieu” (Le Duc 2015, 140). “The theological field that provides the basis for reflection on the impact of the Internet on our way of living, teaching and communicating the faith [...] that dialogues, inculturates and builds relationships with a society immersed in the digital culture” (Amaro and Gripp 2021, 140). According to Spadaro, cybertheology is a new/emerging branch of theology, not mere sociological or communicative reflection (2014; 2016). From a Latin American perspective, cybertheology stands out

as “critical reflection of faith in the digital environment” (Rosolino and Rosales Busch 2022, 511).

3. The Main Foundations for Cybertheology

The term “cyber” is not a “fashion” or “fad” word. Unfortunately, cyber/cybernetics is misinterpreted as synonym for computer, engineering, internet, robotics, or technology, which they are not. Perhaps this confusion began when Gibson’s “cyberspace” neologism became popular. However, as show, cybernetics has four main foundations for constructing an epistemological basis of cybertheology:

3.1. Philosophical

Cybernetics originates from the Greek prefix “cyber” (*Κυβερνήτης-kybernétes*), meaning to navigate, pilot, or steer a ship. In ancient times, a navigator’s knowledge and experience were indispensable: he had to understand the routes, ports, weather, seasons, stars, winds, ocean currents, crew, and cargo weight. His knowledge and leadership skills were crucial for navigating the sea. These cybernetic skills influenced Mediterranean cultures, particularly Greek and Latin. Epic literature, such as Homer’s *Odyssey* and Apollonius Rhodius’ *Argonautica*, portrays the captain’s heroism and tenacity to lead his crew through adversities (gods, kings, monsters, naval armies, storms) to achieve his goals. These works also exemplified ideals of virtuous manhood (*paideia*) (Werner 1995, 22).

Philosophically, Plato defined cybernetics as the “technique and art of the helmsman” (1985; 1988) or “the art of governing sailors” (1987; 1988). Aristotle similarly referred to cybernetics as “the art of navigation,” linking practical wisdom expressed in prudence, rectitude, and moderation to a virtuous life (1985). This cybernetic concept extended to Latin philosophers like Seneca, who emphasized purposeful living and appropriate conduct (1989), or the stoic Marcus Aurelius, who advocated for virtue and rectitude in life (1977). Nonetheless, in Plato’s *Republic*, the meaning of leadership is used as an analogy for the government of the *polis*. The philosopher-king, like a pilot, steers the city toward peace and justice through wisdom and morality. Plato argued that not everyone possesses the requisite political skill to lead and could lead to the city’s downfall (1988). From this Platonic conception, *kybernetes* evolved into the word *guberno*,

or *gubernare* in Latin, which means to govern or rule in current modern languages.

3.2. Biblical

In the Old Testament, particularly in the Septuagint, derivatives of *kibernétes* appear in the Book of the prophet Ezekiel, who presents an allegory of Tyre's fall as a ship carrying treasures that sinks into the sea (Eze. 27:8, 27, 28). Similarly, Proverbs describes steering life through wisdom, prudence, and intelligence, gifts from God enabling a righteous life (Prov. 12:5; 23:34; 24:6). The Wisdom of Solomon further employs the cybernetic concept for a life guided by wisdom and justice. This book depicts God as the helmsman of the ship (human life), which sails despite high waves and storms (vicissitudes), but finally reaches safe harbor (security). These meanings convey that the believer's life is guided by God, as with Noah and Job's salvation from flood and storm (Wis. 10:4; 14:3, 6).

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul uses *kybernésis* to refer to church leadership, direction, or government: "Some people God has designated in the Church to be, first, apostles; second, prophets; third, teachers; then, mighty deeds; then, gifts of healing, assistance, administration, and varieties of tongues" (1 Cor. 12:28). This shows how the Platonic cybernetic concept came to early Christianity. In those times, Christian churches were pluralistic, and divisions and persecutions occurred. A hierarchy was then necessary to lead the community (1 Tim. 3:1-13). Paul considered this leadership a Holy Spirit charism serving the community, not for personal gain, as all are united in Christ (1 Cor. 12:12).

3.3. Ecclesial

The Church Fathers continued Plato's cybernetic notion. Ignatius of Antioch exhorted Polycarpus to be like "the pilots who steer through tempest" (persecutions/divisions) (1991). Clement of Alexandria taught that authentic philosophy leads us toward God's image and divine guidance (2018). John Chrysostom equated the pilot-ship analogy to the shepherd-leader role in the local church (2002). Pope Gregory the Great compared bishops and priests as shepherds/pilots guiding the community with intellectual and moral values (2001). In his sermons, homilies, and letters, Augustine of Hippo employed the Platonic piloting metaphor extensively.

For example, in Sermon 252, he equated the ship's tempestuous journey to believers' struggles against world temptations (1983). Basil the Great compared believers to brave martyrs and calm pilots, emphasizing endurance through persecutions (2007). Gregory of Nyssa likened Christians to sailors correcting their course with divine guidance, like a ship using landmarks (1993). Gregory Nazianzen (1995) wrote that every Christian must know how to head toward God, just as a good sailor who knows how to navigate the seas and avoid errors (heresy).

The Desert Fathers and Mothers such as Abba Poemen, Abba Theodore, John the Dwarf, and Mother Syncletica also adopted this cybernetic concept, comparing the spiritual journey to steering a ship through storms, using fasting, prayer, and penance (*The Sayings of the Desert Fathers, The Alphabetical Collection*, 1975). This widespread use of the navigation analogy in the Patristic tradition reveals a rich understanding of Christian life as a guided journey. This early Christian cybernetic conception is a valuable treasure for cybertheology.

3.4. Scientific-Communicative

This foundation has its roots in the ideas of Ampère, Maxwell, and Couffignal on the regulation and control of machines and the rise of "thinking machines" that make their own decisions (Barbosa 2015, 175). However, the recognition of cybernetics as an empirical science began with Arturo Rosenblueth, Julian Bigelow, Manuel Sandoval Vallarta, and Norbert Wiener (Wiener et al. 1943, 19-22), who studied feedback mechanisms and behaviors between the environment, living organisms, and electronic machines (computers). Wiener named this new field cybernetics (known as first-order cybernetic approach) and defined it as "the entire field of control and communication theory, whether in the machines or in the animal" (1948, 11; 1989, 17).

This new interdisciplinary field required diverse approaches from anthropology, communication, computer science, philosophy, physics, engineering, mathematics, neurology, psychology, robotics, sociology, and zoology, thanks to remarkable works from Ashby (1957), von Newmann (1958), Beer (1959), Pask (1961), Shannon and Weaver (1964), Bertalanffy (1968), among others. Consequently, cybernetics gained recognition as a science in the academic world (Correa 2008, 11-14).

Furthermore, a new epistemological construction began, known as second-order cybernetics approach or "cybernetics of cybernetics,"

propelled by von Foester (2003). Here, the observer studies complex systems while recognizing their own role within the system. This gave rise to new cybernetic branches such as anthropology (Mead 1968), psychology and psychotherapy (Bateson 1972), biology—autopoiesis or self-organization (Varela and Maturana 1973), social cybernetics or socio-cybernetics (Luhmann 1995), and complex thinking (Morin 2008). Cybernetics was subsequently recognized as a valid science in sociology in 1994 (Maas et al. 2012, 26-28).

The emergence of third-order cybernetics or “metacybernetics” has been discussed in recent years, focusing on the complex interplay of behavior, knowledge, and consciousness within systems involving multiple agents. At this level, intentionality and actions are crucial for creating, maintaining, or destroying parts of or entire systems (Yolles 2021; Mancilla 2021). Recent advances in AI and metaverses are rapidly expanding this cybernetic level (chatbots, face recognition, smart assistants) and increasing the intricacy of communication and decision models between agents and machines.

4. A Cybertheology Proposal

Having presented the four main foundations of cybernetics, it is possible to define cybertheology as *the art and knowledge of how to steer inside-outside the noosphere*. In this sense, the central theme of cybertheology is not just the technology or communication: is *how to steer* through the complex interactions between God, believers, messages, and technologies that occurred inside-outside the noosphere. To defend this position, four conditions for cybertheology are presented below:

4.1 Transversal: Inter-Transdisciplinary

It can be argued that if cybertheology is a new field in theology, it could be another contextual theology alongside Black, decolonial, ecological, feminist, Indian, liberation, or queer theologies. According to Stephen Bevans, there are six contextual models of theology: 1) Translation or inculturation; 2) Anthropological; 3) Praxis; 4) Synthetic; 5) Transcendental; and 6) Countercultural (2004, 66-67). However, it is a fact that AI, IoT, or metaverses transcend spatial, cultural, and social contexts worldwide. Herring agreed that cyberspace exceeds Bevans’ “physical” or

“situated” contextual model and called for a new theological model for virtual environments (2005). This argument is supported by Mújica (2016), Le Duc (2016), and most strongly, Spadaro, who remarked:

[It] is not sufficient to consider cybertheological reflection as one of the many cases of contextual theology [because] the context of the network tends not to be (and will be less) isolable as a specific and determined context; but it also tends (and will do so more) to integrate into the flow of our ordinary existence. (2016, 14)

Similarly, from a Latin American standpoint, even though cybertheology has a global character, “it cannot exclude specific socio-cultural contexts of each region.” Hence, cybertheology has an ethical commitment to its social and ecclesial reality, not only to “stay” in networks (Rosolino and Rosales Busch 2022, 515). Therefore, it is essential that theological knowledge emerging from the web impacts social, cultural, and ecclesial locations.

Because the relationships among God, believers, technologies, and messages cannot be reduced to a single paradigm, cybertheology surpasses Bevans’ contextual model. While cybertheology can be considered a certain type of inculturated theology in digital media, this inculturation has limitations because of the complexity of lithosphere-biosphere-noosphere interactions. Therefore, cybertheology is not merely contextual but a transversal model, resembling neural networks with intricate connections (Puntel and Sbardelotto 2017) as modeled in third order cybernetics.

Therefore, cybertheology is both interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary, depending on the complexity of the model. First, it is interdisciplinary because it connects theology and cybernetics. Second, it is interdisciplinary when modeling the noospheric relations holistically from other fields, in particular, systems theory, epistemology, and philosophy of science. Notably, “interdisciplinary” and “transdisciplinary” are not interchangeable. It is not a simple fusion of knowledge or a jigsaw puzzle of all fields; interdisciplinary involves epistemic integration of ideas, methods, and approaches from disciplines with common ground, such as biochemistry or biophysics. Conversely, transdisciplinary transcends disciplinary barriers to study complexity holistically and make ethical decisions (Paoli 2019, 351-354), as “truth to be scientific, has to become praxis, and therefore, ethics” (Martínez 2018, 98).

For this inter-transdisciplinary field, it is recognized that no single discipline, point of view, or logic can fully exhaust all distinct levels of

reality and its complexity. According to Nicolescu, “the transdisciplinary attitude therefore presupposes both thought and interior experience, both science and consciousness; effectivity and affectivity” (2002, 87-88). This implies a genuine dialogue between disciplines, not merely exchanging opinions, as it involves a sincere search for truth and knowledge (Charter of Transdisciplinarity 1994), (Martínez 2018, 96-97). Ultimately, the challenge of cybertheology is to build these inter-transdisciplinary bridges, enabling advancements in its epistemological status, methodologies, and approaches in the future.

4.2 Object of Study: Steering in the Noosphere

One of the greatest epistemological difficulties facing cybertheology is defining its object of study because many definitions focus on technology, communication, or faith as its *locus theologicus* (Barga 2022, 524). Thus, a broader object of study encompassing these areas is required. A transversal category linking biblical, ecclesial, philosophical, scientific, and communicative frameworks is Teilhard de Chardin’s “noosphere,” proposed as a level of consciousness, communications, thoughts, and knowledge, all interconnected as a single brain. The noosphere is a third emergent stage of life and intelligence evolution, encircling the planet and is preceded by the lithosphere (energy-matter layer) and the biosphere (plants, animals, human life). As a scientific, theologian, and mystic, Chardin suggested the noosphere is continually evolving due to the *amorization* and perhaps, it is developing a new stage that englobes all: the theosphere (divine sphere), where the “Omega Point,” the Parousia of Risen Christ will assume the ultimate unification of matter, life, spirit, and consciousness. This is the Total Synthesis for cosmic, evolutionary, and eschatological history of salvation (cf. Col. 1:15-20 and Eph. 1:9-10), (1967a, 206; 1967b, 103; 1974, 290-292).

While considering the noosphere for cybertheology is not new in academia (Cobb 1998; Friesen 2009; Spadaro 2014, 101-103), this proposal goes beyond mere description to position cybertheology as the art and science of navigating within and beyond the noosphere (and its interactions with the lithosphere and biosphere). Also, the noosphere as object of study transcends the offline/online dualism that other approaches struggle to overcome.

Therefore, cybertheology is a know-how approximation, a *techné* that encompasses knowledge, art, and experience with direction (Aristotle

1994). This is not only rational-intellectual but also emotive-volitional, expressed in decisions and actions, and transformed into epistemological, mathematical, or narrative models. An outstanding example is spiritual discernment in Church Tradition, which can be understood as a cybernetic approach because steering is necessary to make correct decisions that align with God's will. This includes listening and accompaniment, whether media or personal interaction (Velásquez 2021; Dicastery for Communication 2023, nos. 41-44).

4.3 Critic-Prophetic and Praxis

Cybertheology not only studies the complexity of theology and media in the noosphere but also, building on the steering meaning (Plato, Aristotle, St. Paul, Church Fathers, Wiener, Foester, Yolles, and others), pursues how to make decisions (ethical choices) for a correct navigation within and beyond the noosphere, particularly regarding valid knowledge construction from chats, social networks, forums, and online meetings (Marroquín 1999; Puntel and Sbardelotto 2017).

As a branch of theology, cybertheology possesses critical, prophetic, and praxis interest, in addition to systematic or methodological concern. At this stage, if theology disdains critical and prophetic perspectives, it risks becoming ideological or alienated (Francis 2015). Furthermore, the task of theology is to preserve awareness of the past, be sensitive to the present, and offer hope for the future through continuous discernment and denunciation of everything that is not evangelical (Le Duc 2023). At this point, cybertheology converges with digital theology, providing ethical guides for theological and technological research (Phillips et al. 2019).

Admittedly, the noosphere hosts non-evangelical activities, including hidden interests, rampant consumerism, the digital divide, trafficking, gory violence, espionage, the dark web, and recently, AI-generated fake news (Francis 2021; Francis 2024ab). Given this reality, cybertheology cannot be impartial or neutral because it must side with truth and justice. Considering Chardin's thought, everything against humanity and the natural environment is incompatible with God's project. Thus, cybertheology extends beyond technology or media to also include a commitment to social, ecclesial, and environmental transformation according to the Gospel (Francis 2019). This ethical principle is imperative and facilitates visibility for excluded sectors in the noosphere, as media is

not merely a tool but a means for transforming situations (Caldas 2014; Rosolino and Rosales Busch 2022).

4.4. Cybernetic Orders in Cybertheology

To construct a cybertheology with epistemological bases, it is necessary to consider the three cybernetic orders:

Cybernetic order	Cybernetics object of study	Cybertheology focusses	Approximations	Example
First	Systems	Know-how steer of contents, messages, and technologies inside-outside noosphere	Digital theology Digital inculturation Pastoral theology	The Pope Video
Second	Systems and observer	Know-how steer of the experience of God and believers inside-outside noosphere	Midiotheophanies	Rezando voy app
Third	Intentions and agreements between observers and systems	Know-how steer of Complex relationships between God, believers (not believers) and AI inside-outside noosphere	Complex communication, Inter/transdisciplinary metamodels, rules & agreements. Discernment-Ethics	Rules in social network, forums. Church Synod 2021-2024 processes

Chart 1. Cybernetics and cybertheology levels.

The first level of cybertheology is interested in communication-feedback mechanisms among God and believers (even non-believers) expressed by contents/messages (audio, image, video, virtual) in technologies (apps, devices), both inside and outside the noosphere. An example of this level is The Pope Video, which uses audio, video, and images to share the Pope’s monthly prayer intentions and encourages feedback. This exemplifies digital inculturation: embedding a religious message within digital culture to resonate with all audiences (Conferência do Bispos do Brasil 2014). The challenge here is to avoid confusing evangelization with proselytism or apologetics within the noosphere. The

goal is to simultaneously adapt, preserve, and discern the evangelical kerygma through messages and media technologies.

Only at this first and second cybertheological level can cybertheology be considered an inculturated theology, but the feasibility of this at the third level is unclear due to the complex philosophical-epistemological modeling of the noosphere and its relation to other sciences. This proposal includes communication pastoral theology and digital theology within the first cybertheological level because both focus on media and pastoral issues representing a subset of the broader communication modeling complexity (Sutinen and Cooper 2021, 61-90). Research methodologies at this stage draw from computer science (quantitative techniques, data mining or AI analysis), qualitative methodologies (digital ethnography, surveys, and questionnaires), and theological processes (see-judge-act; exegesis, or hermeneutics), among others.

A current debate centers on whether to name this new discipline “digital theology” or “cybertheology.” While both may share pastoral objectives and pursue similar goals (Sutinen and Cooper 2021, 1,13), their philosophical and epistemological foundations differ (Barga 2022, 525). Fundamentally, since the origins of cybernetics at the Macy Conference from 1946 to 1953, the conceptual definition of “digital” (from the Latin *digitus*, fingers) emerged as the processing of discontinuous signals based on the binary code used by electronic computers (McCulloch 2016, 719-725).² If restricted to the digital realm, digital theology must focus exclusively on communicative devices and machines (Sutinen and Cooper 2021, 1,13-16).

While digital theology’s contributions are undeniable, full development, especially in epistemological construction, necessitates incorporating philosophy (classical and scientific), the Bible, Church Tradition, cybernetics, empirical and social sciences, and both theory and practice. Consequently, further arguments, investigations, and clarifications between cybertheology and digital theology are needed in academia. This discussion remains open to future dialogues across various fields and social-ecclesial contexts worldwide.

The second level of cybertheology focuses on experiences of God in the noosphere through interactions (audio, image, video, immersive

² From an engineering approach, analog is the opposite of digital. Analog processes continuous signals such as radio.

sensations) termed “midiotheophanies” (Sbardelotto 2016). Believers widely engage with these spiritual experiences through platforms and social networks, particularly in online celebrations, prayers, rosaries, online Eucharistic adorations, and masses, even religious experiences within metaverses. At this cybertheological level, describing the experience of faith (phenomenologically) is insufficient. Equally important is how believers live, interpret, and share their religious experiences, especially young digital natives. The Rezandovoy app exemplifies this level, applying inspirational music, images, biblical text, and narration to cultivate a spiritual atmosphere (Riezu 2015).

One challenge at this cybertheological level is building mature faith and a robust God-image while fostering engagement with the ecclesial community, as some believers remain in devotional, intimate, and subjectivist “religiosity” without a social commitment, potentially leading to fanaticism, hate, superstitions, and neo-conservatism (Francis 2019). John Laracy proposes Lonergan’s Generalized Empirical Method as second-order cybernetics for this level, focusing on the interactions between information, actions, and observer’s insight in constructing theological knowledge (Laracy et al. 2019). He also links Gilson’s Thomistic realism with the second-cybernetic level, especially in epistemological constructivism for cognitive processes (Laracy and Laracy 2021). At this stage, research methods such as computational AI analysis, phenomenography, case studies surveys, and semiotics could be employed in future research projects.

The third level of cybertheology turns out to be the most complex. First, it seeks to define clear mechanisms and rules facilitating plural communication and understanding among agents connected within and beyond the noosphere. Second, it studies the construction of metamodels with other sciences and humanities. Here, each agent-node connects within an extensive network converging in ecclesial communion. Third, it explores how these metamodels guide decisions, processes, and ethical actions (know-how steering).

As noted, the main challenge for this cybertheological step is to distinguish between opinions and perceptions from truly theological arguments, which preserve the faith core and Church fraternity. Examples include rules governing dialogue, feedback, and knowledge construction in blogs or Facebook groups. The current Church Synod (2021-2024) can be understood as a third-order cybernetics process because its internal rules

and peer listening between bishops, theologians, and laity can be modeled transversally as neural networks, surpassing classical top-down or bottom-up epistemic construction. This Synod demonstrates the complexity of ecclesial communication and communion, necessitating novel approaches.

This complex level integrates methods of previous cybertheological levels and from other sciences, such as AI analysis, engineering signal processing, learning machines, multi-agent systems, and psychotherapeutic techniques for communication (e.g., active listening). Remarkably, interreligious, ecumenical, and intercultural dialogue also offers valuable methodologies for this third cybertheological level. Incorporating these inter-transdisciplinary approaches will enrich cybertheology and its conceptual and practical production in academia and the Church.

5. Conclusion

We are transitioning from a “textual theology” (originating with Gutenberg’s press in the 16th century) toward cybertheology, constructed through blogs, chats, hashtags, video calls, podcasts, Zoom meetings, YouTube videos, and AI like ChatGPT. Theology is no longer controlled by “experts” found in such things as the *imprimatur*, the *nihil obstat*, peer-reviewed literature, classrooms, official texts, cathedrals, or encyclicals. Similarly, universities no longer hold an exclusive monopoly on knowledge generation due to the proliferation of free discussion networks. This signifies that theology and experiences of God are now being shaped by laypeople in a horizontally networked environment. The appointment of a layperson like Paolo Ruffini as Prefect of the Dicastery for Communication in the Church, along with several Brazilian cybertheologists, confirms this assertion. All these examples validate Marroquín’s idea that laypeople will create significant theology across the web.

In particular, researchers must advance to clarify, compare, and differentiate cybertheology, digital theology, and other proposals in theory and practice to build a robust epistemic foundation for this new field in the coming years, also building bridges between academic and ecclesial sectors. This article contributes to constructing this dialogue with a cybernetic approach: it is not only a field of knowledge but a know-how steering, with a praxis and ethical commitment to transforming reality, both inside and outside the noosphere, with a critical and prophetic attitude. It is

essential not to remain solely within digital media or networks; it is truly urgent to transform the world with the impulse of the Gospel.

This paper is dedicated to Fr. Manuel Myvett, SVD (1931-1997) Belizean missionary that brought social cybernetics approach to Mexico and applied it to pastoral and ecclesial fields. Unfortunately, his writings have been lost.

REFERENCES

- Amaro, Aline. *Catequese Digital: Por Onde Começar?* São Paulo: Paulus, 2021.
- , and Andréia Gripp. “Cybertheology and Digital Theology: The Development of Theological Reflection on the Digital in Brazilian Catholic Theology.” *Cursor Zeitschrift Für Explorative Theologie* 1, no. 3 (2021): 2-18.
<https://cursor.pubpub.org/pub/j0c68ls5>
- Apollonius of Rhodes. *Las Argonáuticas*. Madrid: Gredos, 1996.
- Augustine of Hippo. *Obras Completas Tomo XXIV, 184-272B, Sermones Sobre los Tiempos Litúrgicos*. Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1983.
- Aupers, Stef, and Dick Houtman. “‘Reality Sucks’: On Alienation and Cybergnosis.” *Concilium: International Journal of Theology* 1, no. 309 (2005): 81-89.
<https://repub.eur.nl/pub/1815/SOC-2004-005.pdf>
- Arboleda, Carlos. “*Hablemos de Ciberteología*.” Interview, January 26, 2016, Universidad Católica del Norte de Chile, 10 min., 16 sec.,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Er5pIZnPy-s>
- . “Evangelizar la Cibercultura: Los Retos de la Ciberteología.” *Veritas. Revista de Filosofía y Teología* 1, no. 38 (2017): 163-181.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.4067/S0718-92732017000300163>
- Aristotle. *Ética Nicomáquea*. Madrid: Gredos, 1985.
- . *Metafísica*. Madrid: Gredos, 1994.
- Ashby, Ross. *An Introduction to Cybernetics*. London: Chapman & Hall, 1957.
- Barbosa, Omar. “Evolución de Una Idea: de la Cibernética a la Cibercultura. La Filosofía Griega y la Cibernética.” *Cuadernos de Filosofía Latinoamericana* 25, no. 91 (2015): 172–179.
<https://doi.org/10.15332/s0120-8462.2004.0091.01>
- Barga, Timothy. “Cybertheology in the Age of Digital Revolution and its Impact on Christianity”. In *Theology, Philosophy and Education in the 21st Century*, edited by Anthony Kanu, Gideon Pwakim and Stanley Igboeschi, 523-541. Jos University Press, 2022.
<https://acjol.org/index.php/jassd/article/view/3140/3088>
- Basilius of Caesarea. *Panegíricos a los Mártires*. Madrid: Ciudad Nueva, 2007.

- Bateson, Gregory. *Steps to and Ecology of Mind*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972.
- Beer, Stafford. *Cybernetics and Management*. London: English Universities Press, 1959.
- Benedict XVI. *Address to Participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications*. Vatican City: Editrice Vaticana, 2011.
- https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2011/february/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20110228_pccs.html
- Bennet, Janna. *Aquinas on the Web? Doing Theology in an Internet Age*. London: T&T Clark, 2012.
- Berger, David, "Theology in the Brave New World." *Concordia Journal* 1, no. 22 (1996): 189-200.
- Bertalanffy, Ludwig von. *General System Theory; Foundations, Development, Applications*. New York: George Braziller, 1968.
- Bevans, Stephen. *Modelos de Teología Contextual*. Quito: Verbo Divino, 2004.
- Blondheim, Menahem, and Hananel Rosenberg. "Media Theology: New Communication Technologies as Religious Constructs, Metaphors, and Experiences." *New Media & Society* 19, no. 1 (2017): 43-51. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444816649915>
- Byers, Andrew. *TheoMedia. The Media of God and the Digital Age*. Eugene: Cascade Books, 2013.
- Caldas, Mariel. "Las Tecnologías Actuales en las Comunidades Pastorales Mirándolas como TEP." In *La Transmisión de la Fe en el Mundo de las Nuevas Tecnologías. XXXII Semana Argentina de Teología*, edited by Sociedad Argentina de Teología, 353-365. Buenos Aires: Ágape, 2014.
- Campbell, Heidi, and Stephen Garner. *Networked Theology: Negotiating Faith in Digital Culture*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016.
- Chardin, Teilhard. *El Porvenir del Hombre*. Madrid: Taurus, 1967a.
- . *La Energía Humana*. Madrid: Taurus, 1967b.
- . *El Fenómeno Humano*. Madrid: Taurus, 1974.
- Charter of Transdisciplinarity*. First World Congress of Transdisciplinarity. Convento da Arrábida, Portugal, 1994. <https://ciret-transdisciplinarity.org/chart.php#en>

- Clement of Alexandria. *The Stromata or Miscellanies*. Ramsey: Lighthouse Publishing, 2018.
- Cobb, Jennifer. *CyberGrace. The Search for God in the Digital World*. New York: Crown, 1998.
- Conferência do Bispos do Brasil. *Diretório de Comunicação da Igreja no Brasil*. Brasília: Edições CNBB, 2014.
- Correa, Mauricio. *Fundamentos de la Teoría de la Información*. Medellín: ITM, 2008.
- Dicastery for Communication. *Towards Full Presence: A Pastoral Reflection on Engagement with Social Media*. Vatican City: Editrice Vaticana, 2023.
https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/dpc/documents/20230528_dpc-verso-piena-presenza_en.html
- Everett, William, “Cybernetics and the Symbolic Body Model,” *Zygon* 7, no. 2 (1972): 98-109. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9744.1972.tb00199.x>
- Estrella, Fernanda. “Do Nascimento da Rede Até a Ciberteologia.” *Revista Encontros Teológicos* 31, no. 3 (2016): 561-579.
<https://doi.org/10.46525/ret.v31i3.517>
- Felton, Daniel. “The Unavoidable Dialogue (Five Types of Relationships between Theology and Communication).” In *Communication in Theological Education: New Directions*, edited by Michael Traber, 75-102. Delhi: ISPCK, 2005.
- Formenti, Carlo, *Incantati Dalla Rete. Immaginari, Utopie e Conflitti nell'Epoca di Internet*. Milano: Raffaello Cortina, 2000.
- Francis. *Video Message to Participants in an International Theological Congress Held at the Pontifical Catholic University of Argentina [Buenos Aires, 1-3 September 2015]*.
https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2015/documents/papa-francesco_20150903_videomessaggio-teologia-buenos-aires.html
- . *Message for the 53rd World Communications Day*. Vatican City: Editrice Vaticana, 2019.
<https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2019/01/24/190124b.html>
- . *Message for the 55th World Communications Day*. Vatican City: Editrice Vaticana, 2021.
<https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2021/01/23/210123a.html>

- . *Message for the 57th World Day of Peace. Artificial Intelligence and Peace*, Vatican City: Editrice Vaticana, 2024a.
<https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/peace/documents/20231208-messaggio-57giornatamondiale-pace2024.html>
- . *Message for the 58th World Communications Day*. Vatican City: Editrice Vaticana, 2024b.
<https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/communications/documents/20240124-messaggio-comunicazioni-sociali.html>
- Foerster, Heinz von. *Understanding Understanding: Essays on Cybernetics and Cognition*. New York: Springer, 2003.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/b97451>
- Friesen, Dwight. *Thy Kingdom Connected: What the Church Can Learn from Facebook, the Internet, and Other Networks*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009.
- George, Susan. *Religion and Technology in the 21st Century. Faith in the e-World*. London: ISP, 2006.
- Gibson, William. *Neuromancer*. New York: Ace Books, 1984.
- Granfield, Patrick. "Ecclesial Cybernetics: Communication in the Church." *Theological Studies* 29, no. 4 (1968): 662-678.
- . *Ecclesial Cybernetics: A Study of Democracy in the Church*. New York: McMillan, 1973.
- Gregory Nazianzen. *Los Cinco discursos Teológicos*. Madrid: Ciudad Nueva, 1995
- Gregory of Nyssa. *Sobre la Vida de Moisés*. Madrid: Ciudad Nueva, 1993.
- Gregory the Great. *La Regla Pastoral*. Madrid: Ciudad Nueva, 2001.
- Gutiérrez, Gustavo. *La Fuerza Histórica de los Pobres*. Salamanca: Ediciones Sígueme, 1982.
- Herring, Debbie. "Hypertext–Hypergod?" Dissertation at The International Christian Internet Conference, 1997.
https://www.academia.edu/65170838/Herring_D_Hypertext_Hypergod
- . "Virtual as Contextual: A Net News Theology." In *Religion and Cyberspace*, edited by Morten Hojsgaard and Margit Warburg, 149-165. New York: Routledge, 2005.
- Homer. *La Odisea*. Madrid: Gredos, 1993.
- Ignacio de Antioquía. Epístola a Policarpo. *Padres Apostólicos II*. Sevilla: Apostolado Mariano, 2004.

- John Chrysostom. *Diálogo sobre el Sacerdocio*. Madrid: Ciudad Nueva, 2002.
- Kruger, Elias. "AI Theology." August 20, 2017. <https://aitheology.com/>
- Laracy, Joseph, et al. "Cybernetics of Observing Systems and Lonergan's Generalized Empirical Method." *Systemics, Cybernetics and Informatics* 17, no. 5 (2019): 65-70.
<https://www.iiisci.org/journal/PDV/sci/pdfs/IP080LL19.pdf>
- , and John Laracy. "Reconceiving Cybernetics in Light of Thomistic Realism." *Journal of Systemics, Cybernetics and Informatics* 19, no. 4 (2021): 24-39.
<https://www.iiisci.org/journal/sci/FullText.asp?var=&id=IP140LL21>
- Le Duc, Anthony. "Cyber/Digital Theology: Rethinking about Our Relationship with God and Neighbor in the Digital Environment." *Religion and Social Communication* 13, no. 2 (2015): 132-158.
https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3057507
- . "Cybertheology: Theologizing in the Digital Age." *SSRN eJournal*, 2016.
https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3056269
- . "Prophetic Dialogue as Approach to the Church's Engagement with Stakeholders of the Technological Future." *SSRN eJournal*, 2023.
https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4461295
- Luhmann, Niklas. *Social Systems*. Stanford: University Press, 1995.
- Maass, Margarita, et al. *Sociocibernética, Cibercultur@ y Sociedad*. México: CIICH-UNAM, 2012.
- Mancilla, Roberto. "Introduction to Sociocybernetics (Part 1): Third Order Cybernetics and a Basic Framework for Society." *Journal of Sociocybernetics* 9, nos. 1-2 (2011): 35-56.
https://doi.org/10.26754/ojs_jos/jos.20111/2623
- Marcus Aurelius. *Meditaciones*. Madrid: Gredos, 1977.
- Marroquín, Enrique. *Dios en el Amanecer del Milenio*. México: Dabar, 1999.
- Martínez, Felicísimo. *Teología de la Comunicación*. Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1994.
- Martínez, Julio Luis. "Inter(trans)disciplinarietà y Ética." In *La Tecnocracia*, edited by José Manuel Caamaño, 95-128. Maliaño: Sal Terrae, ICAIC-ICADE Comillas, 2018.
- McCulloch, Warren. "Appendix I. Summary of the Points of Agreement Reached in the Previous Nine Conferences on Cybernetics." In

Cybernetics: The Macy Conferences 1946-1953: The Complete Transactions, edited by Claus Pias and Joseph Vogl, 719-726. Berlin: Diaphanes, 2016.

Mead, Margaret. "Cybernetics of Cybernetics." In *Purposive Systems*, edited by Heinz Von Foerster, 1-11. New York: Spartan Books, Institute of Intercultural Studies, American Society for Cybernetics, 1968.

Moran, Edgar. *On Complexity*. New York: Hampton Press, 2008.

Mújica, Jorge Enrique. "El estatuto Epistemológico de la Cyberteología a Partir del Libro Homónimo de Antonio Spadaro." *Ecclesia. Revista de Cultura Católica* 30, no. 1 (2016): 109-122.

<https://riviste.upra.org/index.php/ecclesia/article/view/2202/1586>

Nicolescu, Basarab. *Manifesto of Transdisciplinarity*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002.

Neumann, John von. *The Computer and the Brain*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958.

Olivera, Diego. "Tecno-Evangelización: Evangelizando en la web." May 18, 2012.

<http://tecnoevangelizacion.blogspot.com/2012/05/tecnoevangelizacion.html>

Orna, Mary Virginia. *Cybernetics, Society and the Church*. Dayton: Pflaum Press, 1969.

Paoli, Francisco. "Multi, Inter y Transdisciplinarietà." *Problema. Anuario de Filosofía y Teoría del Derecho* 1, no. 13 (2019): 347-357. <https://doi.org/10.22201/ijj.24487937e.2019.13.13725>

Paul VI. *Discurso al «Centro de Automación de Análisis lingüísticos» del Aloisiano de Gallarate*, 1964. https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/es/speeches/1964/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19640619_analisi-linguistica.html

Pask, Gordon. *An Approach to Cybernetics*. London: Hutchinson & Co., 1961.

Phan, Peter. "Social Science and Ecclesiology. Cybernetics in Patrick Grandfield's Theology of the Church." In *Theology and the Social Science: The Annual Volume of the College Theology Society 2000*, vol. 46, edited by Michael Horace Barnes, 59-87. Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001.

Phillips, Peter, Kyle Schiefelbein-Guerrero, and Jonas Kurlberg.

"Defining Digital Theology: Digital Humanities, Digital Religion and

- the Particular Work of the CODEC Research Centre and Network.” *Open Theology* 5, no.1 (2019): 29-43.
<https://doi.org/10.1515/opth-2019-0003>
- Plato. *Diálogos I. Ion*. Madrid: Gredos, 1985.
- . *Diálogos II. Eutidemo*. Madrid: Gredos, 1987.
- . *Diálogos IV. La República*. Madrid: Gredos, 1988.
- Puntel, Joana, and Moisés Sbardelotto. “Da Reforma Histórica à ‘Reforma Digital’: Desafios Teológicos Contemporâneos.” *Estudos Teológicos* 57, no. 2 (2017): 350-364.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.22351/et.v57i2.3114>
- Rahner, Karl. “Teología.” In *Sacramentum mundi: Enciclopedia Teológica, Tomo Sexto*, edited by Karl Rahner and Juan Alfaro, 532-534. Barcelona: Herder, 1978.
- Riezu, Xabier. *Los Medios de Comunicación Digital y la Religión. El Caso de Rezandovoy*. Donostia: Universidad de Deusto, San Sebastián, 2015.
- Rosolino, Guillermo, and Alina Rosales Busch. “La iglesia en la era digital ¿Cómo hacer Ciberteología “desde América Latina y Argentina?” “Busco a mis hermanos...” (Gn 37,16) *Fraternidad y Sinodalidad desde una Ecclesia Semper Reformanda. XLª Semana Argentina de Teología*, edited by Sociedad Argentina de Teología, 503-519. Buenos Aires: Agape, 2022.
- Savin-Baden, Maggi. “Landscapes of Postdigital Theologies.” In *Postdigital Theologies. Technology, Belief, and Practice*, edited by Maggi Savin-Baden and John Reader, 3-20. Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland, 2022.
- Sadiku, Matthew, et al. “Digital Theology: An Overview.” *International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development* 6, no. 6 (2022): 2068-2071.
<https://depot.ceon.pl/handle/123456789/22106>
- Sbardelotto, Moisés. *E o Verbo se Fez Bit. Uma Análise de Sites Católicos Brasileiros como Ambiente para Experiência Religiosa*. São Leopoldo: UNISINOS, 2016.
- Shannon, Claude, and Warren Weaver. *The Mathematical Theory of Communication*. Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1964.
- Seneca. *Epístolas Morales a Lucilio II*. Madrid: Gredos, 1989.
- Septuaginta. Rahlfs-Hanhart. Editio altera*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2019.

- Schmidt, Katherine. "La Generación Milenial y la Teología Pública en una Era Digital." *Revista Internacional de Teología Concilium* 1, no. 387 (2020): 123-128.
- Singh, Peter. *Cybertheology*. Delhi: SPCK, 2009.
- Spadaro, Antonio. "¿Hacia una 'Ciberteología'?" *Mensaje* 1, no. 59 (2011): 26-32.
- . *Ciberteología. Pensar el Cristianismo en Tiempos de la Red*. Barcelona: Herder, 2014.
- . *Compartir a Dios en la red*. Barcelona: Herder, 2016.
- Steinhart, Eric. "Digital Theology: Is the Resurrection Virtual?" In *A Philosophical Exploration of New and Alternative Religious Movements*, edited by Morgan Luck, 133-152. New York: Routledge, 2012.
- Sutinen, Erkki, and Anthony-Paul Cooper. *Digital Theology: A Computer Science Perspective*. Bingley: Emerald, 2021.
- The Sayings of the Desert Fathers. The Alphabetical Collection*. Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1975.
- Ugboh, Godspower. "The Church and Techno-Theology: A Paradigm Shift of Theology and Theological Practice to Overcome Technological Disruptions." *Journal of Ethics in Entrepreneurship and Technology* 3, no. 2 (2023): 59-78. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JEET-02-2023-0004>
- United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. "The Holy Bible". <https://bible.usccb.org/bible>
- Varela, Francisco, and Humberto Maturana. *De Máquinas y Seres Vivos: Una Teoría Sobre la Organización Biológica*. Santiago de Chile: Editorial Universitaria, 1973.
- Velásquez, Edgar. "Acompañamiento Espiritual Virtual: Alcances y Límites". *Theologica Xaveriana* 1, no. 71 (2021): 8-9. <https://doi.org/10.11144/javeriana.tx71.aeva>
- Werner, Jaeger. *Paideia. Los Ideales de la Cultura Griega*. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1995.
- Wertheim, Margaret. *The Pearly Gates of Cyberspace: A History of Space from Dante to the Internet*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1999.
- Wiener, Norbert. *Cybernetics or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1948.
- . *God and Golem, Inc., A Comment on Certain Points where Cybernetics Impinges on Religion*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1964.

———. *The Human Use of Human Being: Cybernetics and Society*.
London: Free Association Books, 1989.

———, Arturo Rosenblueth, and Julian Bigelow. “Behavior, Purpose
and Teleology.” *Philosophy of Science* 10, no. 1 (1943): 18-24.
<https://doi.org/10.1086/286788>

Yolles, Maurice. “Metacybernetics: Towards a General Theory of Higher
Order Cybernetics.” *Systems* 9, no. 2 (2021): 2-29.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/systems9020034>

The Role of the Catholic Church in the Philippines on Youth Development: A Revisit of Badiou's Existential Philosophy

*Jedu Arcaina*¹

ABSTRACT

This article discusses the role of the Philippine Catholic Church in promoting development among Filipino youth. Despite the benefits of globalization, its negative consequences were more pronounced. However, engaging and responding effectively to challenges caused by the impacts of globalization can lead to a meaningful existence. This indicates that young Filipinos constantly strive for what is most beneficial for themselves, as long as they are instilled with values that genuinely encourage them in such a pursuit. Such can be understood by investigating the relationship between Catholic social teaching on spirituality and social justice awareness with Alain Badiou's existential philosophy found within his notion of maximal existence. Badiou's notion of maximal existence is characterized as the being that maximally exists due to its meaningful participation in the situation it is in. The author explores the Church's mission of spirituality and social justice awareness and its effective influence for a meaningful existence among the Filipino youth. The Catholic Church is perceived as embodying Badiou's concept of maximal existence through its role on spirituality and social justice, which stands as a framework for young Filipinos' recognition for their worth and ability to make a

¹ **Jedu Arcaina** is taking his Master of Arts in Philosophy at Saint Louis University, Baguio City, Philippines and currently working as an Instructor at the Department of Social Sciences and Philosophy-College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Northern Philippines. He can be reached at jeduarcaina626@gmail.com.

positive impact on both their lives and the Philippine society. The article seeks to increase consciousness regarding the Church's spirituality and social justice in relation to the development of Filipino youth, promoting transformative development focused on truth, service, and active citizenship in them.

Keywords: *Filipino youth, logic of existence, maximal existence, spirituality, social justice*

1. Introduction

Young individuals may encounter various obstacles in globalization that positively or negatively influence their development period. Technology, which is a part and parcel of globalization, poses particular risks for young individuals (Panahi 2015, 16). Positively, smartphones and laptops are beneficial tools in improving their education, providing easier access to learning resources and creating an engaging virtual environment. But negatively, relying excessively on them can lead to misuse, such as mismanaging the use of AI tools for learning and personal use. Given this, technology has an influential function, both helpful and harmful, in their pursuit of a meaningful existence. As a result, young individuals may face challenges in addressing crucial matters and acquiring essential life skills.

The Catholic Church is renowned for its highly effective participation in numerous development initiatives at both global and local levels, including healthcare, education, conflict resolution, and disaster assistance. Empowering youth with essential skills to fulfill their dreams arises from acknowledging the Church's function as a supportive community that assists them in molding their destiny and contributing to society. Trabajo (2016, 47) argued that the "Church's role in youth development may include steering them away from negative behaviors." Pope Francis articulated the dissemination of the Gospel, which has the potential to foster a more inclusive community. This can be observed in the Catholic Church's initiatives to encourage spirituality and raise awareness about social justice among young Filipinos. Further, the attempt to empower Filipino youth mirrors Alain Badiou's philosophy of maximal existence.

Badiou's philosophical system explores situation, event, subject of event in his seminal book "Being and Event" to challenge traditional philosophies constrained by "tyranny of the One", promoting human rationality and multiplicity for pursuing meaningful living. However, the key issue here is, how can someone build a meaningful life in a society where unfair systems make it difficult to reach their desired quality of life? Badiou's subsequent work "Logics of Worlds", which expands on concepts introduced in his book "Being and Event," presents a novel perspective on the question through his existential philosophy. Despite facing credibility issues, the Catholic Church's initiatives to safeguard and empower young Filipinos illuminate their active role in creating the present and future of the Philippines. This can be achieved by examining the relationship between Badiou's concept of maximal existence and the Catholic Church's influence on the development of the youth.

This study explores the role of the Catholic Church in the Philippines toward the development of the youth. In particular, it examines the relationship between Catholic social teachings of spirituality and social justice awareness with Badiou's existential philosophy, specifically on maximal existence, and how it contributes to the development of Filipino youth. This paper concentrates on investigating three main sectional elements. Firstly, it discusses the situation of Filipino young people towards the impact of globalization and their exposure to its negative effects. Secondly, it explores Badiou's existential philosophy centered on maximal existence which is an alternative approach to finding meaning in a given situation. Thirdly, it discusses the Catholic Church's identity in society by exploring its mission principles on spirituality and social justice awareness. The societal identity of the Church, through its spiritual role and commitment to social justice, reflects Badiou's concept of maximal existence, representing it as an element of the Catholic Church that has a significant role in fostering transformative development among Filipino youth. The relation between Badiou's maximal existence and the Church's role on spirituality and social justice awareness promotes fostering of truth, service, and civic engagement among the youth, emphasizing solidarity and community values over individualism.

2. The State of the Youth in the Philippines

The world is undergoing a swift and comprehensive shift across multiple disciplines. Individuals are presented with numerous benefits, including task optimization to augment efficiency and practicality, promote agility, and cultivate cognitive skills (Magistra 2022, 126). Social networking platforms in contemporary society have enabled the dissemination of research ideas and offered dependable grammar checkers for the precise articulation of concepts. Although globalization offers advantages, the quest for ease has resulted in unforeseen detrimental effects on environmental, social, political, mental health, and ethical dimensions that influence human flourishing. The concerning issue is the possible risk to the development of Filipino youth resulting from the problems of globalization to which they are susceptible. This section examines the substantial impact of globalization on Filipino youth, focusing on its adverse effects.

During youth, the brain rapidly develops, making individuals highly impressionable and eager to learn (Joshi 2022). This time of transition is a critical juncture where young individuals face different obstacles as they develop. Commonly, when they commit to their objectives, and embrace particular beliefs, they are encouraged to form significant relationships with others in adulthood. Contrastingly, a young person who struggles with basic needs understands that these difficulties often hinder their ability to achieve a good quality of life. Even with access to resources, a majority of young Filipinos today face greater negative effects of globalization like reduced education quality, lack of environmental awareness, and increased harmful social media usage compared to others. Mesa (2007) stated that in the Philippines, some young people are still facing unequal access to education opportunities (digital or traditional), which leads to greater inequalities and lack of social responsibility, despite education being a key priority in the country since independence in 1946 (Bai 2023). A negative attitude towards implementing environmental policies has caused a lack of regard for the environment, despite widespread knowledge of issues such as improper waste disposal practices (Punzalan 2020). Children and adolescents who have unrestricted access to social media are at risk of being exposed to the unfiltered explicit content and inappropriate behavior that are prevalent on online platforms, resulting in decreased ability to communicate effectively in person (Azuike 2017).

Rapid advancements in the economy and technology are believed to diminish the significance of the family's role in society. This means that some families have minimal impact on their children, especially the youth, due to the clash between technological and economic values and the traditional values they were raised with. Subsequently, "young people are being influenced and led by external factors such as nightclubs, negative peers, and harmful conversations" (Sultana and Bukhari 2020, 87). Such is most common among individuals aged 18 to 24, who made up 52 percent of the country's social media users (De Sagun et al. 2023). Here, "lack of communication between parents and children is identified as the cause of moral decline and deterioration" (Sultana and Bukhari 2020, 87). A lack of family responsibilities due to overreliance on technology hinders moral education among the youth by weakening their cognitive skills and promoting social isolation. Evidently, the absence of social accountability in education exacerbates these problems due to an overreliance on technology, such as television and video games, for inappropriate purposes. Many students, both children and youth, have not been reading for enjoyment for many years due to a shift toward visual literacy over print literacy (Wolpert 2009).

The importance of critical thinking, analysis, and creativity for visual literacy is often unrecognized, leading to decreased clear thinking and the spread of misinformation. A lack of comprehensive scrutiny on digital literacy content can contribute to the intentional spread of false information, known as disinformation, which can negatively impact the reputation and emotional health of youth (Fajardo 2023). In fact, "risk factors for consuming and believing fake news includes from lack of education or digital literacy, skepticism towards the media, limited cognitive abilities, strong social media connections, biased opinions, and political or ideological biases" (De Sagun et al. 2023, 1). For example, individuals who are confident in their ability to detect fake news are more likely to vote, with a 152 percent higher chance for very confident individuals compared to those with no confidence. This trend is also seen at lower confidence levels, with increases of 28 percent for not very confident individuals and 74 percent for somewhat confident individuals. With this, educated Filipino youth are more likely to vote, with a 9 percent increase in voting likelihood for those with a higher Real News Score and an 8 percent increase for those with a higher Fake News Score (Mendoza et al. 2022, 22). Being exposed to misinformation can lead to feelings of hopelessness and anxiety,

particularly when political tensions are high, such as before elections (Cabañes and Santiago 2023).

Additionally, Filipino youth have been exposed to increasing screen time, with a negative impact on language skills and social interactions, particularly if they use screens for more than two hours daily (Dy et al. 2023). Excessive use of social media by young Filipinos can disrupt their sleep patterns, resulting in lower academic achievements and heightened levels of anxiety and self-doubt (Angwaomaodoko 2024). While anime and other forms of media can promote positive values such as friendship and family, their impact on the values of young people is often unclear because of concerns about the violence and inappropriate content they may be exposed to (Pinili 2017). Medina's research indicated potential connections between the rise in sex crimes like sexual assault and rape and the availability of sexual content in mass media, along with the easy availability of online pornography leading to an increase in 'cybersex' among young people (Lanuza 2004). This may also refer to the growing trend of using mobile devices to access child pornography, a serious issue that is becoming more prevalent (Nuncio 2019). Young Filipinos' misuse of social media causes mental health issues like depression and anxiety, leading to violence as a solution to real-life conflicts.

Young people often overlook environmental issues caused by globalization, focusing only on its benefits like "smartphones, tablets, and laptops that have revolutionized the way we live. But there is no denying that these everyday technologies have significant environmental impacts" (Okafor 2024). The main problem facing young individuals is not their inability to utilize social media to tackle environmental issues efficiently. Instead, what is particularly worrying about their situation is the impact from "environmental degradation in the Philippines caused by the damaging activities of both foreign and local corporations, affluent individuals, politicians, government officials, and certain individuals" (IBON Foundation 2020). For instance, a tragic garbage avalanche at Payatas Dumpsite in Manila in July 2000 caused loss of lives and economic instability for underprivileged families, affecting the youth responsible for supporting their families. Thus, as the condition of the environment worsens, achieving sustainable development becomes more difficult, leading to the continued marginalization of youth in rural areas (Broad and Cavanagh 1993).

Globalization negatively affects Filipino youth by lack of parental guidance, limited social responsibility in education, and declining morals from social media misuse. However, positive impact can come from meaningful relationships and social skills development in the societal role of the Catholic Church. Encouraging spirituality and social justice through the Catholic Church can help young people creatively engage with globalization, becoming ethically active citizens in Philippine society. Further, exploration of Badiou's notion of existence is needed to understand the influence of these two mission principles on Filipino youth development.

3. Badiou's Existential Philosophy

According to Badiou, "being is fundamentally linked to events, in which a being changes upon the chance occurrence of a significant event and is acknowledged by subjects faithful to it" (Sandhya 2020, 22). Events happen unexpectedly within complex interconnected situations controlled by fundamental rules. Efficiently structured situations are perceived consistent, devoid of any "voids" among their elements, as exemplified by the bourgeoisie thriving in capitalism (Sahin 2012, 84; 88), whereas historical events are inherently unpredictable and develop due to particular gaps or voids within situations (Sahin 2012, 91). According to Badiou, this "lack" in a situation represents the void, which eludes direct observation. It is a locus where vision is obstructed or an absence in a certain situation manifest (Sahin 2012, 85). In this way, Truth can manifest unexpectedly, as it does not consistently emerge in predetermined situations (Sandhya 2020, 23). Badiou's theory deconstructs social disparities and advocates for human development through intellectual advancement and a transformation of values.

Badiou believes that overlooked parts of a situation can reveal truth through intentional efforts, transforming inconsistency into consistency. These neglected elements are key for personal growth and new opportunities. This is where his concept of an event begins to gain significance.

Badiou asserts that "events, initiated by disruptions in existing structures, create space for new truths to emerge" (Agra 2017, 163). Badiou's notion of an event elucidates the importance of contradictory multiplicities in uncovering concealed truths and opportunities for

development. Human subjects dedicated to uncovering truths across various domains transcend conventional reasoning and societal norms. A human subject, whether operating independently or collaboratively, genuinely believes in their situations and endeavors to enhance them, in contrast to a subject that remains inert in a situation that “does not engage with its demands” (Heyer 2009, 442). Imbong examining Badiou’s perspective on romantic relationships, posits that “confronting challenges collectively enhances comprehension and facilitates the attainment of previously deemed unattainable objectives” (2015, 39). Their drive originates not only from their affection for each other, but also from love itself, motivating them to rise above selfishness and work together toward lasting love and a more meaningful life. Here, Badiou enables individuals to construct a more equitable world by integrating theory with practice.

Badiou’s inquiry into the sole concept of existence parallels the way totalitarian regimes impose authoritarian language. Existence, for Badiou, is a being within a world regulated by relational logics—a framework that delineates the manner in which a being exists. Badiou (2009, 116) elucidates logic as the framework that structures the relationships between beings in reference to other beings. This profound transformation questions conventional perceptions of experience and reality, whereby the interactions, connections, and manifestations of a being’s elements delineate its existence. We shall now officially elucidate Badiou’s terms of “infinite,” “existential resource,” and “appearance” to enhance our analysis of his philosophy of existence.

According to Badiou, a “world” is akin to a limited representation of existence, defined as any situation or location composed of multiple entities that coexist and are regarded as elements of a cohesive whole, analogous to the way apples in a fruit basket constitute a world (Kejriwal 2021, 68). “Worlds or situations function as frameworks that dictate the arrangement of multiple possibilities, as they are the places in which an individual’s identity is formed” (Badiou 2009, 113). A being’s existence is inherently situated within a particular situation, as we cannot ascertain the feasibility of its existence without reference to the precise situation it inhabits. However, comprehending “being” designated for a specific situation necessitates acknowledging that situations serve as frameworks devoid of a singular, central point of reference.

The absence of a singular reference point that delineates a situation results in Being engaging in several situations, which we refer to as the

“infinite” (Badiou 2002, 68). No situation is confined to a singular, immutable state of existence (Badiou 2009, 308). Conversely, each situation possesses an “actual infinity” as the notion of a singular truth is dismissed (Kahvecioglu 2015). For example, take a political leader in a certain province of the Philippines who fulfills the functions of both a mayor and a governor. Assuming the roles of “mayor and governor” can be interpreted as exemplifying Badiou’s notion of the infinite situation pertinent to a political leader, signifying their existence as a servant leader inside a province. A being situated in a particular situation may be deemed to exist due to the myriad possibilities for its existence that the situation provides. This indicates that “the infinite” encompasses multiple interpretations. Multiple situations allow various beings to articulate themselves, each contributing to their holistic development.

However, being aware of the importance of actively participating in a situation one is a part of means recognizing the responsibilities that come with that specific situation. For Badiou, the term for this concept is “existential resource,”—representing the conscious participation in a situation a being is part of. The obligation of a being in a situation arises from the notion that a being is inherently destined to appear in a particular world or situation (Badiou 2009), for such a being is closely tied to a presented localization, whose space acts as the infinite situation in which it resides (Badiou 2002). In the context of a province-based political leader, the responsibilities associated with these situations present limitless opportunities, including, but not restricted to, a mayor devising strategies for environmental preservation and a governor supervising the agencies tasked with executing these strategies. Badiou’s existential resource is a being existing in different local situations at a given point in time, hence, “does not revolve around a singular overarching world, but instead encompasses multiple situations where beings exist, resulting in a decision to portray only one being instead of the entirety of Being” (Badiou 2009, 161).

Moreover, Badiou raises the question of how we can determine the emergence of a pure multiplicity, or a being, within a situation characterized by a very complex network of differences, identities, intensities, and similar elements (2011). In short, what we need to validate according to Badiou is the existence of a being in the infinite local situations from which it emerges. This is where the idea of a single, fixed reality is challenged, and embracing the diversity of ways “being” can manifest is revealed.

To confirm the existence of a being, it is important to see its active engagement in a situation. Badiou posits that the ‘situation of a being’ refers to the situation in which a being delineates a unique procedure for establishing its identity through interactions with other beings (2009, 114). A being may display differing levels of difference, identity, or proximity to other beings depending on the many situations in which it exists (Badiou 2002). Hence, in a specific situation, it is possible for multiple beings to exist concurrently, and the observation of their coexistence indicates the recognition of the particular localized situation within the larger situation of the involved beings. A competent political leader in a province simultaneously occupies both the offices of mayor and governor within that area. The functions of a mayor and a governor appear quite analogous, as both are tasked with responsibilities pertaining to environmental conservation and embody the qualities of credible political leadership, reflecting similarities in the province they serve. In here, Badiou brings our attention to the complex levels of existence manifested through the act of appearance.

Appearance has the function of drawing attention to the spatial dimension of existence, highlighting the “there” in the diverse manifestations of being as observed in their ontological state (Badiou 2009, 162). The differentiation or identification of beings depends on their appearance, as it is through their appearance and interrelations that one can comprehend existence. Badiou employed logical relations to discern the emergence of two or more beings within a situation, prompting us to consider their interrelations, whether they differ or possess certain commonalities in the situation they belong to. According to Badiou, this reasoning relates to the concept of appearance, which refers to the extent to which the appearance of a being aligns with or diverges from that of another recognized being in a situation.

Badiou’s novel approach to understanding Being contrasts with spiritual explanations by emphasizing the physical components of the material world, devoid of metaphysics, hence challenging societal conventions, beliefs, and religious interpretations within existing institutions. Badiou refers to this as the transcendental, which is “the system in place that enables us to understand the varying degrees of identities and distinctions in a particular world or situation” (2009, 118). Badiou asserts that the scale serves as a multifaceted tool for assessing the efficacy of a particular situation. According to Badiou, a measurement system is

essential to evaluate the similarity among various beings in a specific situation and ascertain their level of identity. Hence, a being appearing in a situation is determined by the “degree of indexing of its appearance based on either the transcendental aspect or the logic of the situation” (Sahin 2012, 111).

A multiple is inherently connected to a being’s existence as being-there. Based on this information, multiple situations exist in which a being may appear, each characterized by distinct elements, as evidenced by the simultaneous existence of two or more beings within the realm of a particular being. Badiou (2011) asserts that a measure of identity is associated with this precise point, representing the extent of identity or distinction between two beings within a given situation. In assessing the degree of identity between two beings in a situation, a scale that pinpoints the pivotal aspect of the situation, which facilitates the analysis of both identity and differences within the confines of the particular situation to which a being belongs (Badiou 2009, 119) must be laid out. To elucidate the scale, it can be defined as the measurement of the extent of identity of the act of appearing or the function of appearance, represented by the equation $Id(\varepsilon, \varepsilon)$. Every transcendental possesses a minimum (μ) and a maximum (M) value. If $Id(\varepsilon, \varepsilon) = \mu$, then ε does not exist in the world m ; its existence in m is null (Badiou 2009). This denotes the least level at which two multiples lack similar relations in a situation. If $Id(\varepsilon, \varepsilon) = M$ (indicating the maximal self-identity of ε ’s appearance), then ε exists absolutely in the world m (Badiou 2009, 269). When two multiples react in a manner that impeccably corresponds with a situation, it exemplifies Being actively existing within that situation they are in. Consequently, a multiple that is included in a situation where it successfully fulfills its function and is validated as advantageous to that situation, its existence is maximal (Badiou 2009). Given this, maximal existence entails direct engagement with the outcome of an event, fully adopting a new set of truths to transcend mere existence and initiate a new existence within those truths (Prozorov 2014).

Ultimately, Badiou’s philosophical framework offers a unique perspective on understanding the idea of existence. According to him, the existence of a being in a world/situation is determined by how much it is identified as being, along with other beings, the same within the world/situation in which it participates (Badiou 2009, 269).

4. The Role of the Philippine Church in Youth Development

Although individuals frequently link the Catholic Church with grand architecture, spirituality, and history, its significance on both global and local levels extends far beyond these surface perceptions. The Catholic Church, unlike other organizations, significantly influences health, education, and poverty alleviation, demonstrating a profound commitment to addressing many societal needs in the pursuit of Truth (Volonte 2020). The Catholic Church is characterized as a “religious organization capable of engaging in substantive dialogues with the secular realm to promote the dignity of all individuals, alongside justice, peace, and sustainable development” (Alva 2021, 222). In his article “The Distinct Role of the Catholic Church in Development and Humanitarian Response,” Gordon (2021, 13) underscores that the Church’s impact on human development is founded on three fundamental principles of Catholic Social Teaching: seeing, judging, and acting. These basic concepts serve as a framework for decision-making, providing practical guidance that, when integrated, focus on essential aspects of human transformative development.

The Church should observe social indices and heed the voices of the marginalized, oppressed, silent, underrepresented, and mistreated by unjust authorities. The Church asserts that “every individual is both sacred and social, warranting the opportunity to attain their full potential through engagement in family, community, and relationships within spiritual, social, and cultural frameworks” (Himchak 2005, 4). The Church is tasked with serving all of society, regardless of race or creed, by protecting human dignity, fostering solidarity and the common good, assisting the impoverished, and nurturing creation. Pope Paul VI asserted that growth must encompass more than only economic progress. For authenticity to exist, it must be complete: inclusive, indicating that it should foster the welfare of every individual and the entirety of a person” (*Populorum Progressio*, 1967; as cited in Gordon 2021, 15). The Church adheres to several mission concepts, including spirituality and social justice awareness. The significance of spirituality and social justice awareness in the development of Filipino youth underlines the sociocultural identity of the Catholic Church.

Accordingly, these two mission principles embody the Badiouan level of maximal existence, representing the Church’s role as fundamental resources for Filipino youth development. Analyzing how the two mission

principles embody Badiouan existential sense is essential for a Filipino youth development framework.

Badiou posits that a being lives solely inside a situation, implying that beings detached from a situation lack a feeling of existence. Badiou's concept of infinity delineates an existence wherein the elements of the situation to which being is assigned either lack totalizing attributes or have been divested of substance (Mambrol, 2018). A being's existence is not contingent upon a singular circumstance, as there are countless contexts to which a being may pertain. This multiplicity guarantees that the essence of a being, engaged with infinite situations, remains unclouded by the essential aspects that characterize its existence. Badiou (2009, 114) asserts that "the process of 'worlding/situating' a formal being, which encompasses its existence or manifestation, is fundamentally a logical procedure that establishes a secure foundation for its identity."

Concerning the identity of the Catholic Church, despite facing various challenges that assess its significance, their dedication to fostering the growth of Filipino youth embodies Badiou's concept of the infinite, as illustrated by the Church's mission principles of spirituality and social justice. According to Badiou (2009, 114), the Church is perceived as a "pure multiplicity capable of manifesting in infinite situations," exemplified by the context of Filipino youth development. The fundamental ideas of spirituality and social justice consciousness serve as the basis for potentially transforming interactions with Filipino youth. In contemporary society, it can be contended that these mission principles, regarded as fundamental components, direct the Church in "confronting diverse challenges at both global and local scales, by motivating its organizations and members, including the youth, to maintain relevance in an evolving world" (Vincett and Obinna, 2014: 1, cited in Cornelio 2016, 12). This suggests that the mission principles, viewed through Badiou's perspective, act as fundamental elements in the context of Filipino youth development, acting as existential resources that reflect the social identity of the Catholic Church.

Badiou defines "existential resource" as the conscious engagement in a situation to which a being belongs. Conscious participation in a situation denotes the obligation of a being within that situation, stemming from the conviction that Being is necessarily destined to manifest in a local situation (Badiou 2002, 69). The way a being exists is not random; it is influenced by the particularly local situation, dictated by the circumstances that

emerge within that situation. Badiou's concept of "existential resource" emphasizes the need of adeptly navigating the situation one faces. The Catholic Church's influence on spirituality and social justice guides its role in shaping authentic relationships, significance in young Filipinos' lives, and fostering transformative existence for a more equitable society. For example, when examining individuals who perceive spirituality as a conduit for connecting with themselves, others, nature, or the universe, alongside those who concentrate solely on the Divine Reality, it is clear that the Catholic Church significantly contributes to the arrays of Filipino youth development, irrespective of its procedures. In the Catholic Church's endorsement of Filipino youth through a focus on social justice, it demonstrates its recognition of them as essential members of God's family and its commitment to offering equitable opportunities irrespective of their social standing.

Upholding the dignity of Filipino youth embodies Badiou's existential resource along with the spirituality and social justice awareness of the Church, symbolizing the Church's obligation rather than a privilege towards them. Nonetheless, Badiou's notion of existential resource implies that a being's existence is contingent upon the structural and relational dynamics of its situation; thus, our primary concern is how to ascertain the existence of a being within a situation marked by a highly intricate network of differences and identities. This emphasis brings our attention to Badiou's notion of appearance.

From Badiou's viewpoint, these mission principles represent the specific situation of a being, with each ideal functioning as the foundational framework that informs the Catholic Church's mission efforts in the development of Filipino youth. Badiou's transcendental scale allows for the visibility of the connections and assurances of unity among these elements in a particular world/situation, presenting their appearance in an organized manner. The relations among these Church mission elements are always taken into account "when observing differences in their existence, with their identity formation being dependent on the differences between them" (Paquette 2018, 1074). Assessing the level of identity determines whether multiple beings can be considered identical or similar to one another in the situation they are in.

The measurement of the degree of identity in appearances is represented by the equation $Id(\varepsilon, \varepsilon)$ in the transcendental scale. When two multiples do not have the same relations in a particular situation, their

transcendental scale is $Id(\varepsilon, \varepsilon) = \mu$, indicating that ε is not present in the world m , making its existence non-existent in the situation m . On the other hand, when two multiples react in a manner that affirmingly matches the situation, the measure of the level of identity between these two multiples in a situation is $Id(\varepsilon, \varepsilon) = M$, demonstrating the maximal level of existence of a being and is absolutely identical in the particular situation it is in. It has been noted that the Catholic Church's mission principles of spirituality and social justice awareness highly contribute to the development of Filipino youth, which leads to effective strategies and practical solutions, a symbolism of a Badiouan level of maximal existence. To comprehend this better, let us analyze an example where the Church's key frameworks on Filipino youth development can be seen as a representation of Badiou's maximal existence. As previously mentioned, Badiou's maximal existence is defined by the transcendental operation that suggests when a being is equally related to another being, the being's existence is at its maximal level and is exactly identical to the situation it is in.

Considering spirituality can involve analyzing its relationship with religion. Individuals may self-identify as "spiritual and religious" or "spiritual but not religious" (Mansukhani and Resurrecion 2009, 272). In the relations between spiritual and religious, attending church or joining prayer meetings is seen as a way for individuals to communicate with the divine, providing inner fortitude for a purposeful life and defense against unjust forces, both personal and societal, that may come their way undesirably. In his report, Sadjje (2020, 20) explained that the "800,000 Filipino Catholics who joined the Feast of the Black Nazarene seemed to be greatly touched by the powerful portrayal of Christ's unwavering love and perseverance during challenging times". Lazar (2015, 3) emphasizes the idea that a "profound spiritual bond that mirrors St. Paul's message in Romans about how we are transformed through Jesus Christ's death and resurrection". In Macairan's (2021) news article "Papal Nuncio tells youth: Develop habit of prayer," Archbishop Charles Brown re-echoes this by emphasizing the importance of young Filipinos forming a habit of praying. The Papal Nuncio underscores the importance of regular prayer to Filipino youth, aiming to persuade them of its significance, inspire hope for salvation, and develop virtues for navigating life's challenges.

Spirituality, not necessarily tied to religion, encompasses feelings of fullness, interconnectedness, and relationships with oneself, others, nature, or the world. Young Filipinos seek authentic purpose and togetherness in

life without fearing challenges. This means that beyond traditional religious practices, young Filipinos are embracing personalized and experiential ways of practicing their beliefs, shifting towards personal encounters with God rather than strict devotion to Catholic beliefs (Cornelio 2016). This change emphasizes ethical values over rigid beliefs, signifying a new way to define religious identity (Cornelio 2016).

Students learn art and sports in school to grow spiritually and physically, turning loss into motivation. This engenders a feeling of belonging, regardless of religious affiliation, where curiosity and active involvement foster mutual respect, trust, and friendliness (Instrumentum Laboris, “Educating Today and Tomorrow: A Renewing Passion” 2014). This brings us to the significance of interfaith dialogue for young people, indicating that it encourages relationships and involvement in communities outside of theological debates (Cornelio and Salera 2012). A non-clergy speaker who talked about the significance of self-value among young Filipinos in the modern era, considering the high regard for social media personas, stresses that embracing oneself as a precious identity not only enhances one’s own life but also brings beauty and enrichment to others (CBCPNews 2017).

Prayer, acknowledged for its positive impact on mental health and well-being, has shown high levels of one’s sense of self and their connection to others and the world they belong to. For instance, Filipino Catholic youths view private prayer as a way to reach out to God for forgiveness, guidance, and protection during difficult times, seeing it as a helpful religious coping mechanism (Del Castillo et al. 2023). In other words, the Church offers spiritual growth and encourages self-improvement through lifelong learning. Participating in spiritual activities can lead to a stronger connection with one’s faith, impacting decision-making processes of Filipino youth, such as values-formation and approaches towards challenges, including environmental awareness (Griffith 2009, 2).

Badiou’s transcendental scale in the realm of spirituality, as manifested in its appearances, is symbolized by the Catholic Church’s role in Filipino youth development. These appearances include spiritual or non-religious experiences, a profound spiritual connection signifying new beginnings after embracing the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, drawing nearer to the Triune God, establishing connections beyond conventional religious beliefs, and engaging in spiritual practices as a way of life. These

manifestations of spirituality represent a key element of the Catholic Church's identity in Filipino youth development. Denoting this as: $\text{Id}(\varepsilon, \varepsilon) = M$, the Church's role in promoting Filipino youth development through these spiritual appearances reaches its maximal level of existence.

Young individuals involved in community participation are encouraged to cultivate creativity and recognize the beauty of the world. This fosters self-awareness, environmental responsibility, and an appreciation for the Creator's greatness, ultimately demonstrating the importance of education for personal development and community advancement (Instrumentum Laboris, "Educating Today and Tomorrow: A Renewing Passion" 2014).

Empowerment, focusing on collaborative and respectful societal engagement, examines unjust influences in various areas like economy, politics, society, gender, environment, and culture. Empowering young people through youth programs, it facilitates introspection and self-discovery nurturing their sense of self-worth and dignity, which assists them in developing their moral, social, emotional, and spiritual selves as well as in forming their values (Trabajo 2016, 46). For instance, the Muslim-Christian Youth for Peace and Development, affiliated with the Peacemakers' Circle, an innovative organization under the United Religions Initiative in the Philippines, emphasizes the participation of the local community (Cornelio and Salera 2012). In an interview regarding the importance of interfaith for MCYPD teenagers, it was found that personal ties and community engagement had a greater influence than religious affiliation on their interactions with each other (Cornelio and Salera 2012).

Pope Francis emphasized in his document "Global Compact on Education" the importance of embracing new ideas to tackle current issues, promoting risk-taking, and fostering a desire for a meaningful life (2020). This is how the Church addresses the challenges of youth rebellion by relying on the teachings of Jesus and Mary, along with strong Catholic doctrine (Sison 1957). This is not a deficiency in the Church's moral leadership, but an opportunity to collaborate with the state to convey its enduring wisdom to the contemporary world.

In addition, according to the Union of Catholic Asian News (UCA 2019), a significant number of Filipino adolescents pledged to participate in a global initiative focused on fostering environmental awareness during the campaign's launch in the Philippines in 2022. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines accurately designates the youth as "agents of

change” (Molino, 2022), highlighting their crucial role in fostering a stable and secure future. Playing their part as caretakers of the environment goes beyond just big gestures; it starts with incorporating simplicity into daily routines, a practice that echoes the familiar classroom mantra: “Separate biodegradable waste from non-biodegradable waste.” This embodies the concept of intentional stewardship, covering God’s diverse creation.

Moreover, social media exerts a considerable influence: the Church advocates for young individuals to use it for disseminating the gospel, as Fr. Stephen Cuyos, MSC asserts that “there exists substantive potential in both social networking and social media” (CBCPNews 2012). The “Pastoral Guidelines on the Use of Social Media,” published by Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, offer young Filipinos organized counsel regarding the utilization of online platforms, along with a definitive enumeration of behaviors for mindful and Christ-centered engagement in the digital realm (Villegas 2017). In accordance with Cardinal Tagle’s counsel, the youth can utilize digital channels to responsibly enhance the dissemination of the Gospel message (Patinio 2023). Countering falsehoods with easily obtainable facts and knowledge helps them to avert the harmful spread of “deception and untruths.” This proactive method involves identifying individuals spreading incorrect information, assisting others in recognizing credible sources, and avoiding potentially misleading media sites (CBCPNews 2017b).

Badiou’s transcendental framework regarding social justice awareness encompasses the recognition of individuals as divine social beings, the advocacy for empowerment to actualize the teachings of Jesus Christ, and the promotion of harmony, equity, and sustainability within society through transformative initiatives, collaborative efforts, and the respect for each person’s intrinsic value. With this, the manifestations of social justice awareness signify its role as a fundamental aspect of the Catholic Church’s identity in the development of Filipino youth. This can be expressed as: $\text{Id}(\varepsilon, \varepsilon) = M$, signifying that the Church’s contribution to Filipino youth development manifests through representations of social justice awareness, expressing a maximal mode of existence.

The Church’s mission principles lead to creative spiritual growth and pastoral care, enabling young Filipinos to excel in a quickly evolving world by genuinely serving themselves and others, subsequently enhancing their abilities, talents, and intellect to improve the society they live in.

5. Conclusion

The study examines the role of the Catholic Church in the Philippines in promoting the development of Filipino young people. It specifically investigates the relationships between Catholic social teachings of spirituality and social justice awareness and Badiou's existential philosophy. We have understood that spirituality and social justice awareness align with Badiou's notion of maximal existence such that their respective manifestations contribute to the development of Filipino youth. In Badiou's philosophy of existence, when two beings are identified together in a situation, their existence is at its maximal level. To put it simply, if multiple beings exist together and play an active role in the situation they are in, they are seen as expressing what it means to exist on a maximal level.

The Catholic Church's mission for Filipino youth aims to empower, unite, and sustain them in their communities through spirituality and social justice awareness. This is because the Church's role in youth development is shown as engaging and cooperative, both inside and outside its community. Moreso, the Church's social teachings of spirituality and social justice awareness exemplifies Badiou's notion of maximal existence, representing the ability of Filipino youth to lead purposeful lives through civic engagement, living truthfully and serving the Philippine community and the global world.

In conclusion, the Church has demonstrated its societal role by providing essential values-support systems to help Filipino youth navigate the challenges in their development and attain their desired quality of life in the contemporary world. They advance a fair and all-encompassing society by focusing on the welfare of young Filipinos and offering them necessary resources to enhance the communities they are part of, particularly in the Philippines. Analyzing the development of Filipino youth can be done through examining youth leadership, fostering creative thinking in youth development, or finding new methods to enhance positive youth development, among other aspects.

REFERENCES

- Agra, Kelly Louise Rexzy. "How to Change the World: An Introduction to Alain Badiou's Subtractive Ontology, Militant Subjectivity, and Ethic of Truths" *Kritike* 11, no. 2 (2017): 160-197.
https://www.kritike.org/journal/issue_21/agra_december2017.pdf
- Alibudbud, Rowalt Carpo. "Climate Change and Mental Health in the Philippines." *BJPsych International* 20, no. 2 (2023): 44-46. DOI:10.1192/bjp.2022.31
- Alva, Reginald. "The Catholic Church's perspective of human dignity as the basis of dialogue with the secular world." *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 3, no. 2 (2017): 221-241.
 DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17570/stj.2017.v3n2.a10>
- Angwaomaodoko, Ejuchegahi Anthony. "The Impact of Social Media on Youth Education and Well-being". *Path of Science* 10, no. 4 (2024): 1010-1017. DOI: 10.22178/pos.103-8.
- Azuike, Maureen Amaka. "Challenges and Negative Effects of Social Media on the Education of Children and Young Adults in the 21st Century." *Journal of Arts and Contemporary Society* 9, no. 2 (2017): 46-56.
<https://www.cenresinjournal.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Page-46-56-0971.pdf>
- Badiou, Alain. "Existence and Death." *Discourse* 24, no. 1 (2002): 63-73. DOI:10.1353/dis.2003.0003
 _____. *Logics of Worlds (Being and Event, 2)*. Translated by Alberto Toscano. Continuum, 2009.
https://www.academia.edu/88634805/Logics_of_Worlds.
- _____. "Towards a New Concept of Existence." *The Symptom* 12, 2011.
<https://www.lacan.com/symptom12/towards-a.html>
- Bai, Niyang. "Educational Challenges in the Philippines." *Broken Chalk*, August 4, 2023.
<https://brokenchalk.org/educational-challenges-in-the-philippines/>
- Broad, Robin, and John Cavanagh. *Plundering Paradise: The Struggle for the Environment in the Philippines*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.

Cabanes, Jason Vincent A., and Fernando A. Santiago. "Consuming Digital Disinformation:

How Filipinos Engage with Racist and Historically Distorted Online Political Content." Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2023.

CBCP News. "Fight Fake News, Bishops Urge Catholics." *CBCPNews*, June 21, 2017.

<https://cbcpnews.net/cbcpnews/fightfakenews/>.

_____. "The Filipino Youth and the question of identity."

CBCPNews, 2017.

<https://cbcpnews.net/cbcpnews/the-filipino-youth-and-the-question-of-identity/>

_____. "Use of Social Media as a Wholesome Tool for Communication, Youth Told."

CBCPNews, 2012. <https://cbcpnews.net/podcast/use-social-media-as-wholesome-tool-for-communication-youth-told/>

Cornelio, Jayeel. *Being Catholic in the Contemporary Philippines: (Young People Reinterpreting*

Religion). London: Routledge, 2016.

Cornelio, Jayeel, and Timothy Andrew Salera. "Youth in Interfaith Dialogue: Intercultural

Understanding and its Implications on Education in the Philippines."

Development Studies Faculty Publications 12, no. 60 (2012): 41-62.

ISSN: 1665-2673

Del Castillo, Fides, Clarence Del Castillo, and Harold George Koenig.

"Associations between

Prayer and Mental Health among Christian youth in the Philippines."

Religions 14, no. 806 (2023): 1-14.

<https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14060806>

De Sagun, Rejien Renee N, et al. "Fake News among the Youth in the Philippines: The Case of

the National Capital Region (NCR)." *Policy Brief* 2, no. 21 (2023): 1-10.

file:///C:/Users/hp/Downloads/Vol.2_Issue+21+(Fake+News+Among+Youth)+Sagun.pdf

Dy, Angel Belle C., Alane Blythe C. Dy, and Samantha Katrina Santos.

"Measuring Effects of

Screen Time on the Development of Children in the Philippines: A Cross-Sectional Study." *BMC Public Health* 23, no. 1261 (2023): 1-13,

<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-023-16188-4>

- Fajardo, Margarita Felipe. "Filipino Students' Competency in Evaluating Digital Media Content Credibility: 'Beginning' to 'Emerging' Levels." *The Journal of Media Literacy Education* 15, no. 2 (2023): 58–70. <https://doi.org/10.23860/jmle-2023-15-2-5>.
- Francis. "Educating Today and Tomorrow: A Renewing Passion (Instrumentum Laboris)." Congregation for Catholic Education, 2014. https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_20140407_educare-oggi-e-domani_en.html.
- Francis. "Video Message of His Holiness Pope Francis on the Occasion of the Meeting Organized by the Congregation for Catholic Education: 'Global Compact on Education. Together to Look Beyond.'" October 15, 2020. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20201015_videomessaggio-global-compact.html.
- Griffith, Coleen. "Catholic Spirituality in Practice." C21 Resources: 21st Century Center at Boston College, February 2009. https://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/top/church21/pdf/Spring_2009.pdf
- Gordon, Graham. "The Distinctive Role of the Catholic Church in development and humanitarian response." ResearchGate, February 2021. DOI:10.13140/RG.2.2.21569.07529
- Heyer, Kent Den. "Education as an Affirmative Invention: Alain Badiou and the Purpose of Teaching and Curriculum." *Educational Theory* 59, no. 4 (2009): 441-463. https://www.academia.edu/101993724/Education_as_an_Affirmative_Invention_Alain_Badiou_and_the_Purpose_of_Teaching_and_Curriculum?email_work_card=view-paper
- Himchak, Maureen. "Social Justice and Social Services Within the Catholic Church." North American Association of Christians in Social Work (NACSW), 2005: 1-12. <https://www.nacsw.org/Publications/Proceedings2005/HimchakMSocialJustice.pdf>

- Ibrahim, Mon. "The Environmental Impact of Digitalization." *Manila Bulletin*, August 1, 2023. https://mb.com.ph/2023/7/31/the-environmental-impact-of-digitalization#google_vignette
- IBON Foundation. "Government Priorities Enrich a Few and Destroy the Environment."
- IBON, November 25, 2020. <https://www.ibon.org/govt-priorities-enrich-a-few-and-destroy-the-environment-ibon/>
- Imbong, Regletto Aldrich. "Badiouian Philosophy, Critical Pedagogy, and the K12: Suturing the Educational with the Political." *Phavisminda* 14 (2015): 35-48. <https://philarchive.org/rec/IMBBPC>.
- Joshi, Mani. "Issues and Challenges of Adolescents in the 21st Century: An Introspection." *Research Journal of Philosophy & Social Sciences* 48, no. 2 (2022): 143–154. <https://doi.org/10.31995/rjps.2022v48i01.18>.
- Kahvecioglu, Seref Anil. "Alain Badiou's Ontology and Utopian Thought." M.S. - Master of Science, *Middle East Technical University*, September 2015. 1-177. <https://etd.lib.metu.edu.tr/upload/12619090/index.pdf>
- Kejriwal, Pritha. "On Being, Subject and Truth in the Works of Pablo Neruda and Alain Badiou." *Birkbeck Institutional Research Online*, 2021. 1-163. <https://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/id/eprint/47369/1/FINAL%20PHD%20THESIS%20%28PRITHA%20KEJRIWAL%29.pdf>
- Lanuza, Gerry. "The Theoretical State of Philippine Youth Studies." *Sage Publications* 12, no. 4 (2004): 357-376. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/epdf/10.1177/1103308804046719>
- Lazar, Roy. "Christian Spirituality - Roman Catholic Perspective." *Unom*, November 5, 2015.
- Macairan, Evelyn. "Papal Nuncio tells the youth: Develop a habit of prayer." *PhilStar Global*, September 6, 2021. <https://www.philstar.com/nation/2021/09/06/2125136/papal-nuncio-tells-youth-develop-habit-prayer>
- Magistra, Aristri Rahma, et al. "The Impact of Modernization in Education, Economics, Social and Cultural Sectors on the Existence of Democracy." In *Proceedings of the International Conference for Democracy and National Resilience 2022*

- (ICDNR 2022), 122–128, 2023. https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-494069-75-6_18.
- Mambrol, Nasrullah. “Key Theories of Alain Badiou.” *Literary Theory and Criticism*, March 6, 2018. <https://literariness.org/2018/03/06/key-theories-of-alain-badiou/>.
- Mansukhani, Roseann, and Ron Resurreccion. “Spirituality and the Development of Positive Character among Filipino Adolescents.” *Philippine Journal of Psychology* 42, no. 2 (2009): 271-290. https://pssc.org.ph/wp-content/pssc-archives/Philippine%20Journal%20of%20Psychology/2009/Num%2002/09_Spirituality%20and%20the%20Development%20of%20Positive%20Character%20Among%20Filipino%20Adolescents.pdf
- Mendoza, Gabrielle Ann, et al. “Misinformed or Overconfident? Fake News and Youth Voting Likelihood in the Philippines.” *ResearchGate* (2022): 3-29. DOI:10.2139/ssrn.4064584
- Mesa, Eirene P. “Measuring Education Inequality in the Philippines.” *The Philippine Review of Economics* 44, no. 2 (2007): 33-70. <https://pre.econ.upd.edu.ph/index.php/pre/article/view/227/630>
- Molino, Jeramie Nunag. *KaLikhasang Balaan: A Critical Analysis of Filipino Youth Environmental Awareness and Attitudes Towards an Eco-theological Reflective Process*. Animo Repository, 2022. https://animorepository.dlsu.edu.ph/etdd_tred/3/.
- Nuncio, Rhoderick. “The State of Youth Internet Studies in the Philippines: Implications for Future Research and Policy Studies.” *ResearchGate* (March 25, 2019). 1-29. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/334849078_The_State_of_Youth_Internet_Studies_in_the_Philippines_Implications_for_Future_Research_and_Policy_Studies.
- Okafor, Jennifer. “Negative Impact of Technology on the Environment.” TRVST, January 18, 2024. <https://www.trvst.world/environment/negative-impact-of-technology-on-the-environment/>.
- Olaganathan, Rajee and Kathleen Quigley. “Technological Modernization and Its Impact on

Agriculture, Fisheries and Fossil Fuel Utilization in the Asia Pacific Countries with Emphasis on Sustainability Perspective.” *International Journal of Advanced Biotechnology and Research (IJBR)* 8, no. 2 (2017): 422-441.

<https://commons.erau.edu/publication/839>.

Panahi, Soheila. “Impact of Modernization on Development of Adolescents the Media, Culture and Technology.” *Unique Journal of Pharmaceutical and Biological Sciences* 3, no. 2 (2015): 15-22

<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/308892205>.

Paquette, Elizabeth. “Humanism at Its Limits: A Conversation between Alain Badiou and Sylvia

Wynter.” *Philosophy Today* 62, no. 4 (2018): 1069-1088.

DOI:10.5840/philtoday2019226246

Patinio, Ferdinand. “Tagle Urges Youth to Be Influencers of Jesus on Social Media.” *Philippine*

News Agency, August 5, 2023, <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1207202>.

Prozorov, Sergei. “Badiou’s Biopolitics: The Human Animal and the Body of Truth.”

Environment and Planning D: Society and Space 32, no. 6 (2014): 951-967.

<https://doi.org/10.1068/d14089p>

Punzalan, Christopher Habunatalia. “Evaluating the Environmental Awareness and Practices of

Senior High School Students: Basis for Environmental Education Program.” *Aquademia* 4, no. 1 (2020): 1-7.

<https://doi.org/10.29333/aquademia/8219>

Sadje, Hadje Cresencio. “Karl Gaspar’s Transformative Spirituality: Rediscovering Precolonial

Philippine Spirituality and Its Challenges to Contemporary Filipino Pentecostal Spiritualities.” *Scientia* 9, no. 2 (2020): 1-12.

https://www.academia.edu/44194821/KARL_GASPARS_TRANSFORMATIVE_SPIRITUALITY_Rediscovering_Precolonial_Philippine_Spirituality_and_its_Challenges_to_Contemporary_Filipino_Pentecostal_Spiritualities.

Sandhya, V.P., “The Doctrine of Event: A Study in Alain Badiou.” *IOSR Journal of Humanities*

And Social Science 25, no. 3 (2020): 22-24.

<https://www.iosrjournals.org/iosr-jhss/papers/Vol.%2025%20Issue3/Series-3/D2503032224.pdf>

Sahin, Eylem Yenisoy. "A Critical Reading of Alain Badiou: Relativism in Badiou's Theory of

Truth." Dissertation – Doctoral Program, Middle East Technical University, June 2012. <https://hdl.handle.net/11511/21699>.

Sison, Juan. "Juvenile Delinquency". *CBCP Online*, 1957.

https://cbcponline.net/statement-of-the-philippine-hierarchy-on-juvenile-delinquency/?fbclid=IwAR0LGK8t4a_wZRIYiagcGbX-fXGQbwf6sm8CgaLJ2jVnQzFYo_bXWAVvGX8.

Sultana, Munazza, and Syed Abdul Ghaffar Bukhari. "Factors of Ethical Decline and Religious

Measures to Overcome." *Journal of Islamic & Religious Studies* 5, no. 1 (2020): 85-98. DOI: 10.36476/JIRS.5:1.06.2020.17

Trabajo, Frances Mae. "Effects of Involvement in Religious Organization on Youth Development." *Academe* 8, no. 1 (2016): 45–51.

<https://doi.org/10.15631/aubgsp.v8i1.88>.

Union of Catholic Asian News. "Young Filipinos Join Global Effort to Fight Nature's Woes."

Ucanews.Com, September 2, 2019.

<https://www.ucanews.com/news/young-filipinos-join-global-effort-to-fight-natures-woes/85486>.

Villegas, Socrates. "Pastoral Guidelines on the Use of Social Media." *CBCP Online*, January 30,

2017. <https://cbcponline.net/pastoral-guidelines-on-the-use-of-social-media/>.

Volonte, Luca. "The Catholic Church Makes the World a Better Place." *Daily Compass*, September 3, 2020.

<https://newdailycompass.com/en/the-catholic-church-makes-the-world-a-world>

<abetterplace?fbclid=IwAR39gBvZ6tNLxkaCPHV6u3my7ShUW4hWT8n9E25R0xeIkJ2e9J7jxXROV8>

Wolpert, Stuart. "Is Technology Producing a Decline in Critical Thinking and Analysis?" *UCLA*, May 9, 2019.

<https://newsroom.ucla.edu/releases/is-technology-producing-a-decline-79127>.

Submitted: Jun. 1, 2024; Accepted: Oct. 24, 2024; Published: Jan. 10, 2025
DOI: 10.62461/EPB102424

Edith Stein's Phenomenology of Empathy in Parish Ministry

*Elvis P. Ballacay Jr.*¹

ABSTRACT

This paper aims to apply Edith Stein's phenomenology of empathy to offer a paradigm for understanding the human person, which can help to enhance relationships in Catholic parish ministry. People in parish ministry are known for their various functions as ministers called in by the Church to serve the pastoral needs of other people in the parish community. However, the value of individuals and relationships in parish ministry seems to be compromised by certain issues of abuse that occur in the Church, which are detrimental to the growth of the parish community. To help alleviate these issues, this paper demonstrates that empathy can be a way to value the human person and relationships in the parish community. Using phenomenological hermeneutics, accounts of empathy are applied to navigate the interpersonal character of this paper, inviting and suggesting rather than imposing interpretations in the people's experiences in parish ministry. Stein's accounts of empathy as the essential experience of the other and the foundation of intersubjectivity offer a holistic understanding of the human person at the psycho-physical and spiritual levels. Thus, the relevance of empathy is integral in many aspects of service in the parish ministry, especially in helping to better enhance relationships among people in the Church and in

¹ **Elvis P. Ballacay Jr.** is a graduate student taking MA Philosophy program at Saint Louis University, Baguio City. He finished his AB Philosophy with units in Education at San Pablo Seminary, Baguio City, in 2019.

fostering values in every activity of the parish community, including interpersonal and pastoral communications.

Keywords: *pastor-priest, lay ministers, parish community, human person, interpersonal relationships*

1. Introduction

Empathy is usually described as putting oneself in another's shoes. We practice empathy, for example, when we try to feel ourselves in the situation of other people who experience joy or pain. In Edith Stein's phenomenology, she offered a more arduous yet profound understanding of this phenomenon. For her, "empathy is the experience of foreign consciousness in general, irrespective of the kind of the experiencing subject or of the subject whose consciousness is experienced" (Stein 1916, 11). This notion of empathy for Stein paves the way for the experience of intersubjectivity to foster values in human relationships. In the essay "Empathy as Intersubjectivity: Edith Stein's Approach to Peaceful Interpersonal and Community Experience," Solomon Oballa (2015, 23) mentions, "Empathy, when embraced as a model for community living will necessarily lead to the avoidance or peaceful resolution of many unwanted conflicts among friends, family members, neighbors, and colleagues." These are possibilities in which empathy gives to the community. However, the question now comes of how empathy is experienced in a community where human relationships are formed by individuals with diverse backgrounds who share common values of serving in the ministry, such as the parish community.

In parish ministry, the experience of empathy is necessary to develop people's interpersonal relationships. It has been acknowledged that "the ability to empathize with the emotions of another person is an extremely helpful trait for building interpersonal and social relationships," (Pierzchala 2022, 301). Given that the parish priest and lay ministers encounter different personalities, minds, and emotions from the people they serve in the Church, empathy plays a role in the daily interactions of these individuals as they serve in their parish community, especially in their pastoral communications and interpersonal relationships. Empathy also

plays a significant role in the pastoral activity of the Church, which should include a great deal of “openness” and “readiness” to listen to people’s needs and messages (Pierzchala 2022, 302).

Thus, Edith Stein’s phenomenological accounts of empathy as the essential experience of foreign consciousness and the foundation of intersubjectivity help enhance the awareness of interpersonal relationships in the parish community and better appreciate the value of the human person in parish ministry.

2. Edith Stein’s Phenomenology of Empathy

Edith Stein’s works are thriving in various academic research and practice fields. Her works are increasingly introduced by practitioners and scholars in psychology, philosophy, and theology, particularly in Jewish and Catholic studies. Yet despite the growing interest in Stein’s works, she remains little known as a philosopher (Kukar 2016, 5). In the book *Contemplating Edith Stein*, Joyce Avrech Berkman remarks, “[at] the outset of the twenty-first century, Stein the brilliant philosopher is not widely recognized. Rather, Stein, the nun Sister Benedicta a Cruce, murdered at Auschwitz on August 9, 1942, and canonized by Pope John Paul II on October 11, 1998, stirs popular interest and debate,” (2006, 2).

Her uniqueness as a philosopher is remarkably seen in her doctoral dissertation, *On the Problem of Empathy* (1916), under the supervision of Edmund Husserl at the University of Freiburg-im-Breisgau (Germany). In this work, she tried to arrive at her investigation of the problem of empathy by analyzing Theodore Lipps’s works and transforming her historical interpretations into the systematic analysis of methodical questions using Husserlian phenomenology (Jani 2015, 20). In her autobiography, *Life in a Jewish Family*, Stein mentions that Husserl emphasized that the world’s reality is constituted intersubjectively “through a plurality of perceiving individuals who relate in a mutual exchange of information. Accordingly, the experience of other individuals is a prerequisite. To this experience, an application of the work of Theodore Lipps, Husserl gave the name *Einfühlung* (Empathy)” (1986, 269). Thus, Stein profoundly discussed her phenomenological accounts of empathy in her dissertation with such precise and careful investigations that led her to arrive at a clarified experience of empathy.

Stein begins to discuss her phenomenological accounts of empathy by providing an example to illustrate the nature of the act of empathy. She says, “A friend tells me that he has lost his brother and I become aware of his pain. What kind of awareness is this?” (1916, 6). Here, Stein is not concerned with the external countenance of inferring the pain nor how we become aware of the person’s pain. She is more interested in knowing what “this awareness is in itself” (Stein 1916, 6), and this awareness can only be investigated from within.

The words above connote that empathy is not “outer perception.” This term refers to acts in which physical expressions, bodily gestures, material movements, and other concrete beings or events that belong to space and time come to us in embodied givenness. The pain we infer in the person based on one’s sad facial expression and sorrowful words is not an act of empathy but rather an experience of outer perception. Here, empathy occurs when we can feel and understand the pain of the other; that is when we become the subject of the experience in the original subject’s place (Stein 1916, 10). It’s because, in principle, we can never get an “orientation” where the pain is primordially given (Stein 1916, 7). In contrast, empathic perception takes a step back and is thus reflective and non-primordial (Pughe 2019). However, this does not mean that empathy has no primordially. Empathy is “an act that is primordial as present experience though not primordial in content” (Stein 1916, 10). Since, for Stein, all our present experiences are primordial (1916, 7), empathy is primordial in experience because it deals with grasping what is here and now.

Stein places the distinction between the “act of experiencing” (primordial) and the content experienced (non-primordial) at the center of her dissertation on empathy (Borden 2003, 28). The primordial experience of empathy is an original encounter of the person empathizing with the other. It is primordial in the sense that the self immediately experiences the person’s act of understanding. At the same time, the non-primordial experience of empathy is an original experience of the other. The given content of the other’s experience is non-primordial to the person who empathizes because that content is immediately experienced by the other, not the person who empathizes. For example, John understands that Peter is joyful because he successfully defended his thesis. John’s act of understanding is primordial to him, but Peter’s joy is non-primordial because that experience of joy comes from him, not John. So, the act of

empathizing is primordial, while the content of empathy is non-primordial. This makes empathy unique in contrast to other acts of comprehension like memory, expectation, and fantasy because its experience is primordially given to the self. Still, the content of empathy is non-primordially given by the other.

The acts of remembering, anticipating, and imagining do not have their object bodily present or what Stein calls “givenness.” They do not have the embodied object given now of the experience of memory, expectation, and fantasy. For example, the memory of pain is primordial since the act of remembering the pain is given in the present experience. Yet, the pain itself, which is the object of memory, is remembered as a past and not a present experience, so the content of memory is non-primordially given. So, in the act of memory, there are two I’s involved: the I of the present and the I of the past. The I of the present is the subject doing the act of remembering, while the I of the past is the object being remembered. In the case of fantasy, however, Stein sees no distance in time between the two involving I’s. The fantasizing I and the fantasized I is filled with continuous experiences that stretch throughout the present time granted that I am not fantasizing about memory or expectation. Yet, Stein recognized that there is also a distinction of I’s in fantasy. The I dealing with fantasy is primordial, while the I being imagined is non-primordial.

Anna Janni claims that parallel to these mental acts, “the act of empathy has a temporal dimension both as an acting process and its experience” (2015, 22). This connotes the primordial element of empathy because the acting process is carried out in the present experience of the I who empathize. However, the difference between empathy and memory, expectation, and fantasy is that its content comes from another I, not the same I who empathizes. The “other” is the foreign I that is being empathized and carries the non-primordial content of empathy. Thus, two individual I’s are involved in empathy: the empathizing I and the empathized I. There are two individual I’s in its experience. The self-I primordially experiences empathy, while the other-I experiences empathy’s non-primordially. So, by its very nature, Stein claims that “empathy is a kind of act of perceiving *sui generis*” (1916, 11), a one-of-a-kind phenomenon.

Opposed to this idea is sympathy, which we can see as happening when a person feels sadness as a response to a similar feeling in another (Escaño 2022, 2). Emerita Quito carefully distinguishes these phenomena based on

Stein's accounts. She says, "Empathy is not sympathy, which is from the Greek *sym* (with) and *pathe* (suffer, feel) whereas empathy is from the Greek *im* (in) and *pathe* (suffer, feel), so, to feel with and to feel in are not the same" (2001, 55). Quito also posits that it is easy to sympathize or to feel the joy or sorrow of the other person, but to empathize is a difficult task, for it means assuming the I of another to experience their joy or sorrow. For instance, acknowledging that the other is feeling down and supporting them by giving inspirational words or comforting gestures renders an act of sympathy. At the same time, understanding the pain that the other experiences by realizing a similar experience or putting oneself in the other's shoes is an act of empathy. Here, empathy is much deeper than sympathy because the feeling of the other is given to us, and we are placed in a position to understand the other as the original subject of empathy. The content of sympathy is primordial since it is from the self. In contrast, empathy is non-primordial in content because it comes from the other.

Although empathy is not a homogenous phenomenon, with no absolute definition, we can still see that for Stein, empathy is "dynamic and multidimensional" (Kukar 2016, 6). Here, Stein identifies three levels of accomplishment of empathy to help us understand its process "the emergence of the experience, the fulfilling explication, and the comprehensive objectification of the explained experience" (1916, 10). With these, Stein places the other or foreign person as central to the experience of empathy. In the last two chapters of her dissertation, *The Constitution of the Psycho-Physical Individual* and *Empathy as the Understanding of Spiritual Person*, she places the individuality of the other as the focal point of her investigation of empathy.

2.1. Psycho-physical Level of Empathy

At the psycho-physical level, we come to know ourselves and other people as distinct and unique individuals. We distinguish the selfness of our I and the otherness of the foreign I because each of us has our own "peculiar experiential content" that shifts over the stream of consciousness (Stein 1916, 11). This experiential content is any occurrence that contextualizes our experience as individuals. Now, the unity of each stream of consciousness that people experience individually as belonging to their "I" and not to another "I" is the soul [*Seele*]. For Stein, this substantial unity is "my" soul when the experiences in which it is apparent are "my" experiences or acts wherein my pure "I" lives (1916, 40). The soul grants

us the reason to say that these or those experiences are “mine” and not from other people who also have “their” own peculiar experiences. The soul causes the unity of the stream of experience and gives life to the physical body, making it “alive” to constitute it as a “living body” [Leib] (Stein 1916, 41). Thus, the soul, together with the living body, forms the “psycho-physical individual” (Stein 1916, 50).

As we empathize with the psycho-physical individual, the knowledge we grasp from the other is given in terms of sensation and feelings (Stein 1916, 44-50). By our experience of sensation and feelings, we become “present” to ourselves as the center or “zero point” of all psycho-physical activities (Stein 1916, 43). In empathy, the zero point orientation of the person who empathizes begins with themselves and gradually transitions to the foreign consciousness’s own zero point. (Macariola 2022, 47). The “I” have its zero point as the other also experiences their own zero point orientation. This orientation, therefore, is the other’s relative viewpoint from which the individual perceives the world (Macariola 2022, 47). So, as we empathize with others, we have access to their sensations and feelings from their zero point of orientation. Hence, we gain knowledge of them as foreign psycho-physical individuals. These, however, are not the only knowledge we learn in empathy. Stein believes that empathy can still bring us to another level of understanding of the human person, and that is the spiritual level wherein we comprehend ourselves and others as spiritual persons through feelings and values.

Understanding others as spiritual persons in empathy differs from understanding people as religious, divine, or holy. On this level, the knowledge we acquire from the spiritual person through empathy is no longer grasping natural causality but grasping meaning context or “motivations.” Here, Stein sees motivation in the lawfulness of spiritual life and claims that the experiential context of spiritual subjects is an experienced “totality of meaning and intelligible as such” (1916, 96). The experiences of others are comprehensible to us in empathy because they are motivated by the laws of reason. As such, “consciousness as a correlate of the object world is not nature, but spirit” (Stein 1916, 91). On this account, Stein argues that the basis for the “realm of the spirit” is constituted through feeling contrary to the physical realm, which is made known through perceptual acts. In empathy, such an experience of feeling is already an act of knowing.

2.2. Spiritual Level of Empathy

Stein says that in every literal act of empathy, which, for example, in every comprehension of an act of feeling, we have already penetrated the realm of the spirit; for as physical nature is constituted in perceptual acts, so a new object realm is constituted in feeling which is the “world of values” (Stein 1916, 92). On this level of spirit, grasping other people’s motivation becomes possible. Since, for Stein, motivation is the “meaning-content” of an experience, every motivation that comes from the person’s feeling is understood only on the level of the spirit and not on the level of physical nature. Here, “motivation is what an individual understands in other persons, who, as persons, are essentially constituted as spiritual” (Escaño 2022, 4). In this sense, empathy gives us a deeper knowledge of the other because grasping motivation is, at the same time, a feeling into the other person’s values (Hernandez 2012, 97).

Empathy, therefore, grants us a more holistic understanding of the other as an individual and person at the psycho-physical and spiritual levels. Recognizing the other through empathy means seeing the foreign living body as a person having sensations, feelings, soul, and values. This is the knowledge we grasp from our experience of the people through empathy. Now, empathy may become a catalyzing force in understanding the human person in a community of diverse individuals such as the parish community.

3. On Parish Ministry

In the context of the Catholic Church, the “parish” is described as a local community of faith that exists in a diocese where people meet their spiritual and temporal needs. The 1983 Code of Canon Law (Canon 515) describes the parish as: “a specific community of the Christian faithful established, in a particular Church (diocese) whose pastoral care, under the authority of the bishop, is entrusted to a priest-pastor, who is its proper shepherd” (Catechism of the Catholic Church - CCC 1994, 2179, 585). Pope Francis also describes the parish as “a community of communities... center of missionary outreach, environments of living communion and participation” (*Evangelii Gaudium* 2013, No. 28). However, the territorial concept of the parish is no longer a geographical space only but also the context wherein people express their lives in terms of relationships, service, and traditions (Congregation for the Clergy - CC 2020 No. 16).

The people form relationships in the parish, where they gather to worship and serve as one in the “parish community.” The Church describes that “the parish community is the human context wherein the evangelizing work of the Church is carried out, where Sacraments are celebrated and where charity is exercised” (CC 2020, No. 19). Given that the parish community lives in the Church, “the subject of the missionary and evangelizing action of the Church is always the People of God as a whole” (CC 2020, No. 27). For this reason, the individuals living in communion with the parish are also subjects of the Church’s life and mission in parish ministry.

In this paper, “parish ministry” is defined in terms of various leadership functions carried out as a form of service in the Church at the parish level, both by the pastor and the layperson. Parish ministry is derivative from the word “parish” as the community of the Christian faithful and “ministry” as the authorized service of individuals in the Church. In the *Modern Catholic Dictionary* (2000), ministry is defined as the “authorized service of God in the service of others, according to specified norms revealed by Christ and determined by the Church.” In this sense, the parish community consists of specific individuals authorized by the Church to serve the parish’s pastoral needs. Thus, following Christ, the ultimate source of ministry in the Church (CCC 1994, 874, 254), every individual in parish ministry plays an integral role in sharing the mission of Christ through their acts of service in the Church.

The center of every service in the parish is neither the priest, lay ministers, nor the community, but Christ, himself the source of ministry in the Church. For this reason, the priest, lay ministers, and the community partake in Christ’s ministry in the Church. In realizing their various roles in parish ministry, they are configured to show exemplary leadership and service to the community as ministers of Christ. However, despite the noble mission of the Church to form the people according to her norms and values, the parish is still susceptible to human fallibilities.

Here, Stein sees the danger that may threaten us if we take the self as standard “we lock ourselves into the prison of our individuality; others become riddles for us, or still worse, we remodel them into our image and so falsify historical truth” (1916, 116). It happens in many forms of abuse in society, such as misuse or overuse of one’s power and privilege. It covers various damaging acts that affect the value of human persons and interpersonal relationships in the parish community, allowing potential

issues to emerge, such as distrust, misunderstanding, and fear. In turn, it shows its harmful effect on the emotional or mental life of individuals since abuse also influences the emotional connection of the people being served aside from the misuse or overuse of the Church's temporal goods (Abellanosa 2020, 363). From the experiences of people in the parish nowadays, the lack of empathy among parish leaders perpetuates such abuses in the parish community.

The lack of empathy is one of the many reasons people experience abuse that demeans the value of human persons in parish ministry. Consequently, subjects are turned into objects, as people are reduced by autonomy when a leader fails to practice empathy. An example is the verbal abuse that young ministers experience from their parish priest or lay leaders, who take pleasure in scolding and embarrassing them, especially when they commit mistakes at the holy mass or any parish activities. Here, the verbal abuse that these young ministers experience towards them may cause emotional damage. Hence, the presence of others is reduced to the mere experience of subject manipulation, such as "creeping emotional blackmail" (Abellanosa 2020, 365). It implies that "in all religions or religious groups, abuse is a reality," and it is not peculiar to the Church precisely because "where power and privilege go together, there is abuse" (Abellanosa 2020, 370).

In parish ministry, the abuse of power is usually seen among the pastors and lay leaders who misuse or overuse their authority to the people they serve in the parish community. However, the abuse of power is not only prompted by the leaders of the Church. Instead, abuse is a possibility that happens to anyone who does not recognize the value of others' presence. It results in the experience of indifference, apathy, exclusion, and the like growing among the parish community members. Now, let us see how the Church describes these people as opposed to any forms of abuse in their ministry. It is to help us understand that the experience of abuse is still not amenable to the service of the Church, especially to the relationships of the priest and lay faithful in the parish community.

4. Contemporary Issues in Parish Ministry

The significance of parish ministry in the Church's life is seen and understood in the organic communion between the priest and the lay faithful. They form relationships with respect for their rights and roles as

members of the Church and mutual recognition of their respective capabilities and responsibilities as individuals. It is why the pastor who is in close communion with his Bishop and the community should avoid introducing into his priestly ministry in the parish any forms of “authoritarianism” and “democratic administration” that go contrary to the profound reality of the ministry (CC 2002, No. 18, Para. 3). However, such authoritarianism occurs when the priest imposes his authority on the parish as the absolute maker of decisions without taking the time to listen to the opinions of the parish community. Besides, the presence of the priest as the parish community’s spiritual leader is diminished when he only focuses on asserting his managerial role as the administrative leader of the parish. In this case, the priest perceives the people as subjects of his authority rather than subjects of Christ’s ministry.

In truth, the Church relies trustingly on the priest’s presence in the parish community through his daily fidelity to care for the people without succumbing to authoritarian and self-governing ways. The problem, however, is when the daily tasks of the priest in parish ministry are confronted with secular affairs that are alien to the profound meaning of his priestly ministry. Although it is natural to feel tired at work, what disappointments, it must be stated, are experienced when the winds of secularism often choke the seeds sown with such noble daily effort (CC 2002, No. 29, Para. 6). For this reason, the Church recognizes that “priests can be overwhelmed by structures which overpower them and are not always necessary, or which induce negative psycho-physical consequences detrimental for the spiritual life and for the very ministry itself” (CC 2002, No. 29). Here, given the internal dangers that a priest experiences in his ministry in the parish, his presence as a psycho-physical individual may be affected by negative values that could harm his spiritual life. However, these potential issues in the priestly ministry of the pastors are implied to them and to the lay ministers, who can be susceptible to the dangers of structural prejudices in society.

An issue in the Church common to the clergy is the experience of clericalism that creeps in the lay leaders and parish members. Pope Francis recognizes that people have often given in to the temptation of thinking that committed lay people only work with the priest. However, this unknowingly generated a lay elite, believing that committed lay people are only those who work in the matters of priests, and we need to remember and look at the believers who strive to live the faith (Francis 2016, Para. 11).

He added, “These are the situations that clericalism fails to notice because it is more concerned with dominating spaces than generating initiatives” (Francis 2016, Para. 11). It alerts us to the danger that the laity clericalizes themselves by insisting that they only truly fulfill their calling to serve by involving themselves in ecclesiastical ministries (Fitzgibbon 2020, 16). Certain lay groups or individuals in the parish fall into this experience of elitism when they think having positions in the parish or working with the priest poses a high-standing status to their image as ministers.

Although the problem of clericalism is seen in various people’s experiences, it is still essential for us to ponder whether clericalism may be caused by the lay members’ lack of understanding of their roles as non-ordained ministers in parish ministry. The distinction of their roles and duties should be oriented appropriately to avoid misinterpretation or lessen the misconduct of people concerning their clericalist mindset. Nevertheless, due to the long history of this issue in the hierarchical structures of the Church seen both by the clergy and the lay faithful, the experience of clericalism is perpetuated. Abellanosa claims that “although clericalism has been identified as a common factor that contributes to abuse however, it is here argued that it is just a symptom of a more serious pathology of the Church, and that is elitism” (2020, 362).

Lay ministers, together with the parish priest, seen in cohorts of influential politicians, well-known business individuals, and rich people, also practice elitism when they tend to place themselves as the privileged ones in the parish community, favoring only their interests. Given the structural bias of the hierarchical system in the Church, the experience of elitism by the ordained leaders also influences the lay leaders. It perpetuates this problem in the parish, making it more difficult to overcome this issue nowadays. “Precisely, why clericalism as the concrete face of elitism within the Roman Catholic Church is also a difficult reality to deconstruct because even the lay faithful are themselves oriented to such a clericalist culture” (Abellanosa 2020, 369). In the *Evangelii Gaudium*, the Church recognizes that “if part of our baptized people lacks a sense of belonging to the Church, it is due to certain structures and the occasionally unwelcoming atmosphere of some parishes and communities, or to a bureaucratic way of dealing with problems...in the lives of our people” (2013, No. 63). In consequence, several members opt to stop serving in the parish because of certain abuses that make them feel unwelcome and overwhelmed to be part of the ministry.

Thus, the challenge we seek to consider not only for the parish leaders to realize but also for every Christian member is to make their presence be felt and known through their leadership and service that is more inclusive, appreciative, and communal. In this way, we can make our experience of relationships in the parish community open and welcoming, like the life of the early Christians who serve as living examples for the parish community today. Now, let us profoundly understand the phenomenological implications of empathy in parish ministry. Through this, we can reflect on what it means for leaders and ministers to be servant-leaders of Christ.

5. Phenomenological Implications of Empathy in Parish Ministry

5.1. Empathy as a Spiritual Attitude: An Awareness of Presence

We based our consideration of empathy as a spiritual attitude on Stein's claim that consciousness is not nature but spirit; in every literal act of empathy, in every comprehension of an act of feeling, we have penetrated the realm of spirit (1916, 91). As we penetrate the people's spiritual realm, we also enter their realm of values. Empathy as a spiritual attitude is an approach that leads us to become aware of one's presence in our spiritual state, which involves the experience of feelings and values. This empathy approach helps us understand the presence of the human person, especially in our personal and communal relationships with people.

Empathy as a spiritual attitude is experienced by showing openness and readiness to listen to the needs and messages of the people. Our ability to listen is a spiritual act in which we grasp the experiences of others using comprehension. Practicing empathy as a spiritual attitude helps parish leaders focus their pastoral consciousness on experiencing the emotions and values of the people they serve. By making empathy the way to encounter the inner feelings of the people in need, parish leaders profoundly experience the presence of these people as subjects of their ministry. Since Stein places the presence of the "other" as the center of empathy, putting other people in service makes the ministry of parish leaders "other-centered" rather than self-centered. In this way, the experience of authoritarianism that prompts the abuse of power can be reduced or overcome when parish leaders relate with the people as subjects of their ministry and not as subjects of their authority.

Thus, by understanding the needs and messages of the people through empathy, parish leaders open themselves to be ready to take action to help the people they serve. Empathy as a spiritual attitude becomes a way to allow the presence of others to be seen and felt consciously by making them the center of leadership and service in parish ministry.

5.2. Primordial and Non-primordial Experiences in Parish Ministry

In the context of parish ministry, we relate the primordial and non-primordial experiences of empathy to the experiences of serving individuals in the Church. Since all our present experiences are primordial (Stein 1916, 7), every role and function of ministers in parish ministry are primordial to them. The experiences of the pastor who is bestowed with duties of “teaching, sanctifying, and governing” the people in the parish are primordial to his priestly ministry as an ordained individual (CC 2002, No. 19). In contrast, the experiences of the lay ministers who “assist” and “collaborate” with the pastor in caring for the people are primordial to their lay ministry as non-ordained individuals. Given the various roles and experiences of the priest and the lay ministers in parish ministry, their presence is also primordial to their constitution as individuals.

As we have seen, empathy is primordial in experience but non-primordial in content; these elements of empathy can lead individuals to realize their roles and experiences in parish ministry. By empathy, the parish leaders may recognize that they have their primordial roles to live as individual ministers, which are non-primordially given to the people they serve. These primordial and non-primordial experiences of the priest and lay ministers are realized when empathy becomes the basis of interaction. In this way, empathy may hinder any sense of power subjugation and abuse of privilege in the ministry when people can understand each other’s role as primordial to them through their various callings to serve in the Church as centered in Christ and not to themselves alone.

5.3. Empathy as *Sui Generis*: A Unique Experience of Christ and the Other’s Presence

Based on Stein’s assertion that empathy is an act of perceiving as *sui generis*, empathy can be a way for us to experience the unique presence of other people in parish ministry. In empathy, the other becomes the focus of our service in parish ministry. By making empathy the basis of service, the

presence of the other in need is perceived and felt. Even though the other's mental state is non-primordially given, the experience of becoming aware of it, focusing on it, and then comprehending it is primordial; thus, it is in this tension between which can and cannot be directly experienced that makes empathy unique (Kukar 2016, 6-7).

The instances of awareness, focusing, and comprehension of the other's needs are drawn from the process of empathic experience in which we approach the other by the acts of our mental and emotional states, allowing the feeling of care to emerge in our knowledge of the other. Although empathy is a means to understand the other from within and not necessarily to respond to the needs of the other, empathy may serve as the motivation to inspire acts to help people in need. However, empathy is the process of understanding the inner life of another, but in no way the response to that inner life (Kukar 2016, 7). So, our experience of others in parish ministry begins by understanding their mental and emotional states. Since empathy is a unique type of perception, our knowledge of empathy can also make us aware of God's presence in the Church through the presence of the people we serve in the ministry. Thus, through empathy as the basis of service in parish ministry, we experience Christ's presence when our service is centered in Him in the presence of others.

5.4. Empathic and Sympathetic Service

We consider the terms "empathic service" and "sympathetic service" to emphasize the relevance of these phenomena to our experience of people in the parish ministry. Since these two structures help direct human emotions toward the "other" (Nweke and Okeke 2021, 63), both are similar but perform different functions regarding how we relate with others. Empathic service is experienced when the content comes from other people's experience. It asks how we can understand the needs of others based on their perspective as the subjects of our service. On the other hand, sympathetic service is experienced when the content of the service begins from the perspective of the self toward the other. It asks how we can communicate ourselves as the subject of service to other people.

In parish ministry, empathy is paramount in helping to understand people's problems, especially when confronted with emotional conflicts. Since sympathy points to a specific affective response in the manner of compassion or pity, empathy thoroughly encompasses effects in general (Nweke and Okeke, 2021, 64), either positive or negative ones, such as

fear, love, resentment, or gratitude. Here, it implies that empathy is not always but often experienced as a neutral phenomenon. Empathy, as a neutral experience, does not inherently dictate a moral judgment or approval of someone's actions. Understanding another person's perspective allows us to choose our own response, positive or negative. Empathy does not remove our ability to decide whether our actions will be helpful; its primary focus is on deeply understanding the inner lives and experiences of others. While empathy involves comprehending feelings, thoughts, and experiences, it does not dictate how we should respond to them. Here, we hold on to Stein's words that "we are only dealing with the general essence of empathy and not with its effect" (1916, 18). Thus, these two-sided service experiences are necessary for developing parish ministers' pastoral consciousness. By having empathy and sympathy in service, parish ministers can direct their consciousness to focus attentively on the needs of others.

Parish ministers can practice empathic service to understand the feelings and experiences of the people they serve. In parish activities such as outreach programs, spiritual counseling, and visiting the sick, parish ministers apply empathic service when they understand the needs of the people based on their experiences or stories in life and not from their own experiences. Parish ministers can practice sympathetic service by acknowledging the feelings and experiences of the people they serve based on their responses to others' experiences. Parish ministers apply sympathetic service when they recognize and respond to their needs by showing the same feelings or taking action to help the people. Here, empathy and sympathy differ in experience but have similar goals of making other people the focus of service. However, it is only through empathy that we first understand other people's feelings and experiences before responding to their needs with love, mercy, and compassion, which comes through sympathy.

5.5. Empathy and Unity: On the "We" Phenomenon in the Parish Community

In the parish community, the experience of unity is made possible with a mutual understanding of their similarities and differences. As an organic community, members in the parish can experience the feeling of oneness or unity when their similarities and differences are appreciated and recognized through empathy. It implies the recognition of their presence as

individuals that, despite their diverse feelings, thoughts, and experiences, they form a community where everyone can attain a “we” experience. It comes to life in our feelings, and from the “I” and “you” arises the “we” as a subject of a higher level of experience in empathy (Stein 1916, 17). In the “we” experience, people do not disassemble their individualities to form an association of people. Instead, the “we” experience grants their individuality to transcend through empathy as they encounter each other’s presence in the community.

Here, individualism can be overcome when people realize the value of their presence as individuals from their experience of the “we” in the community. However, without empathy, there could be no “we,” only competing “I’s” (Burns 2017, 127-142). The experience of unity in the parish community is hardly possible without empathy. This is because it is not through the feeling of oneness but through empathizing that we experience others; the feeling of oneness and the enrichment of our own experience become possible through empathy (Stein 1916, 18). The “we” experience in the parish community is integral to forming the people of God. The parish priest and lay ministers experience the “we” phenomenon when they recognize each other as collaborators and partakers of Christ’s ministry in the Church.

By recognizing their commonalities and differences, the priest and lay ministers share a mutual understanding that bridges their individualities to form a community that prioritizes the needs of the “we” rather than the “I”. It is essential in helping to avoid or resolve damaged relationships of individuals in the parish community, particularly among priests and lay ministers who have interpersonal conflicts due to personality clashes and misunderstandings. Empathy can serve as a bridge, inspiring mutual appreciation by recognizing that everyone has their own limitations and unique experiences. Empathy is not merely a tool for understanding; it is a way of acknowledging that not all experiences can be fully comprehended by others (Kukar 2016, 7).

Thus, through empathy, people in the parish community can have similar experiences amid diversity, regardless of their roles and experiences as individuals. With this realization, a more fruitful interaction can be experienced in the parish community when empathy becomes a way to experience unity in parish ministry.

6. On the Limits and Further Considerations of Empathy in Parish Ministry

Empathy is relevant to the parish community's continuing development of human relations. However, empathy is not the only key to preventing abuse and interpersonal issues in the parish community. It is because empathy, in essence, is a means to perceive the foreign consciousness or others' experiences and not to make an end to moral issues that people experience. Empathy extends beyond merely understanding positive or negative emotions; it does not necessarily require action to address a specific problem or situation. In other words, pro-social behavior (helping others) is not a prerequisite for empathy (Nweke and Okeke 2021, 64). It does not oblige the person to act and experience the same experiences as others, either positive or negative.

Moreover, people experience the limit of empathy when parish leaders over-rationalize the experiences of others, which is detrimental to their cognitive level as psycho-physical individuals. It happens when they ignore the feelings of the people they are helping. For example, a priest who is always too academic in approaching the people and dealing with their problems can cause confusion and resentment from the people, especially in remote areas of the Church like barrios and *gimongs* (Basic Ecclesial Communities). Likewise, parish leaders who are too emotional with their relationships with others, especially when confronting interpersonal issues, can cause exhaustion and burnout to their affective level as spiritual persons. It happens when they decide to help others out of emotional impulse without proper deliberation. For instance, a social action minister who always gives donations out of pity without taking time to evaluate the situation can be abused by individuals who take advantage of the Church. Here, empathy reaches its limit when there is no holistic understanding of the other in the cognitive and affective levels of the human person.

As ministers of the Church, parish leaders need empathy to balance their intellectual and emotional capacities because empathy is neither about emotions nor reason alone. Instead, the fusion of reason and emotion is at work in empathy. This is why parish leaders are encouraged to hone their intellectual and emotional capacities to understand the experiences of others. It can be done through active listening to the people's concerns and messages that foster healthy interpersonal relationships and pastoral communications. Empathy enhances pastoral communication and

interpersonal relationships of people through sincere dialogue and participation in the regular activities of the parish community that involve social interactions. In this way, pastoral communication becomes a key for the interpersonal relationships of people to experience healthy dialogue and interaction in parish community. To give a few examples, parish pastoral meetings, liturgical and formation seminars, visiting the sick, outreach programs for people experiencing poverty and victims of calamities, catechisms for children, and barangay or *gimong* masses, are parish activities wherein ministers can develop their intellectual and emotional capacities. Given these activities of people in parish ministry, the experience of empathy can dynamically create a more holistic framework for parish leaders by incorporating other approaches, such as care ethics and servant leadership, that foster healthy interpersonal relationships and community building.

Empathy is conducive to applying care ethics to serve the needs of people in the parish community. A central feature of care ethics is its emphasis on discerning and meeting others' needs, those others with whom one is in relation (Bennett 2023, 627). So, care ethics can be accompanied by the practice of empathy since it helps to guide the moral decisions of parish leaders as they serve the needs of the people. The implication of empathy towards ethics of care can be seen from the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), who decided to help a wounded stranger. This example shows the significance of empathy towards ethics of care, which parish leaders are encouraged to practice as they serve various people regardless of their racial and social boundaries. Here, practicing the ethics of care through empathy can help parish leaders deepen their understanding of pastoral care in terms of the *care of souls*, the *care of persons*, and the *care of people as communities* (Claver 2009, 6). If care in parish ministry is motivated by empathy, servant leadership is carried out genuinely in the parish community.

Empathy also inspires servant leadership to be practiced in parish ministry. Servant leadership emphasizes increased service to others, a holistic approach to work, promoting a sense of community, and sharing power in decision-making (Sirisooksilp et al. 2017, 12). Empathy is necessary for the values parish ministers learn, such as humility, receptivity, and accountability, to be improved. The application of servant leadership is empowered by empathy through sharing ideas and experiences in decision-making, especially during parish council meetings, the

preparation of liturgical celebrations, and the planning of pastoral programs. Here, the practice of empathy in servant leadership molds the consciousness of parish ministers to lead in the parish community as servants who prioritize the needs of others rather than their personal needs. In this way, parish ministers become Christ-and-other-centered leaders instead of being self-centered individuals.

Edith Stein's phenomenology of empathy can be applied to parish leaders' pastoral communication and formation, especially for future priests and lay ministers whose ministries are focused on matters of social interactions. Integrating empathy into these individuals' pastoral training and education may help deepen their understanding of the human person and relationships in the community as they are prepared to lead and serve in the Church. Consistent communication in service, regular prayer meetings, Bible sharing and reflections, leadership programs and development, training of lay ministers, spiritual counseling, and others are parish activities that can help to cultivate the experience of empathy both by the clergy and lay faithful. Since these activities involve pastoral communications, empathy is a primary way to nourish their cognitive and affective understanding as they interact with others. In this way, people foster a culture of empathy wherein relationships are experienced in terms of the pastoral activities of the parish community.

A culture of empathy can be integrated into the parish's goals and objectives, guiding the development of pastoral activities aligned with the community's vision and mission. Examples of such activities include youth empowerment programs, liturgical seminars and training, prison apostolates, Sunday school programs, outreach initiatives, and visits to the elderly and sick. Pastoral activities in the parish are not meant to be imposed as agendas but are callings to serve others. Here, empathy can be a fundamental value for the parish community to apply when the goals and objectives of every pastoral activity are meant to serve Christ and others in the ministry.

7. Concluding Remarks

This paper has demonstrated, analyzed, and interpreted how the phenomenology of empathy, developed by Edith Stein, offers a paradigm to understand human consciousness, feelings, and experiences with other people, especially in a Catholic parish. Here, empathy can be a way to

enhance the experience of human relationships in parish ministry. This comes first from our comprehension of the essence of empathy as a phenomenon by its primordial and non-primordial experiences contrary to other acts of comprehension, the knowledge we grasp of the human person at the psycho-physical and spiritual levels, and the understanding of the roles and experiences of people in the Church. Through these ways, we arrived at our final consideration that empathy helps us to improve our interpersonal relationships in parish ministry by learning to understand, appreciate, and care for the people.

Empathy plays a crucial role in various aspects of leadership and service within parish ministry. It helps to strengthen relationships among Church members and fosters the development of values in all parish activities involving interpersonal and pastoral communications. However, given the prevailing issues that continue to challenge the value of the presence and relationships of people in the Church, what are other possible ways to help alleviate these issues through empathy? How can we ensure that our experience of empathy grants us valid knowledge of the people considering the experience of certain abuses that not only demean the value of human presence but also deceive people's consciousness in parish ministry? Is empathy adequate to enhance our knowledge and relationships with people in the Church?

This paper, therefore, encourages that since the experience of empathy appears in various ways of understanding, people in the parish community may consider adopting and integrating the given interpretations of empathy from this study into their personal and communal relationships as they serve and participate in parish activities of the Church. Thus, further research on empathy could deepen our understanding of the human person and the nature of relationships within parish ministry, ultimately contributing to the promotion of healthy and meaningful synodality.

REFERENCES

- Abellanosa, Rhoderick John. "Abuse, Elitism and Accountability: Challenges to the Philippine Church." *Asian Horizons* 14, no. 2 (2020): 361-380.
- Bennett, Pip Seton. "Care Ethics, Needs-recognition, and Teaching Encounters." *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 57, no. 3 (2023): 626–642. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jopedu/qhad040>.
- Borden, Sarah. "Phenomenology and the Person." In *Edith Stein: Outstanding Christian Thinkers*, edited by Brian Davies, 20-45. New York: Continuum, 2003.
- Burns, Timothy. "From I to You to We: Empathy and Community in Edith Stein's Phenomenology." In *Empathy, Sociality, and Personhood: Essays on Edith Stein's Phenomenological Investigations*, edited by Dermot Moran and Elisa Magrì, 127-142. Cham: Springer Verlag, 2017. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-319-71096-9_7
- Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church: Definitive Edition, Based on the Latin "Editio Typica" by Pope John Paul II*. Manila: Words and Life Publications, 1994.
- Claver, Francisco. *The Making of a Local Church*. Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2009.
- Congregation for the Clergy. "Instruction 'The pastoral conversion of the Parish community in the service of the evangelizing mission of the Church,' of the Congregation for the Clergy." July 2020. <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2020/07/20/200720a.html>.
- Congregation for the Clergy. "Instruction: 'The Priest, Pastor and Leader of the Parish Community,' Offices of the Congregation for the Clergy," August 4, 2002. https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccclergy/document/s/rc_con_ccclergy_doc_20020804_istruzione-presbitero_en.html
- Escaño, Francis Paul, "Edith Stein, a Philosopher, and a Saint: A Journey from God as a Being in the Consciousness to the God as a Real Being." *ARADMAN: Multidisciplinary Research Journal*, 2 (2022): 1-13. <https://journal.evsu.edu.ph/index.php/amrj/article/view/338>
- Fitzgibbon, Eamonn. "Clericalization of the Laity: A Prescient Warning of Pope Francis for the Catholic Church in Ireland." *Irish Theological Quarterly* 85, no. 1 (2020): 16-34. DOI: 10.1177/0021140019889208

- Francis. “*Evangelii Gaudium*. Apostolic Exhortation of Francis to the Bishops, Clergy, Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today’s World.” November 24, 2013. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html.
- Francis. “Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis to His Cardinal Marc Armand Ouellet President of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America.” March 19, 2016. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2016/documents/papa-francesco_20160319_pont-comm-america-latina.html.
- Hernandez, Michael Roland. “Empathy and Transcendence: Edith Stein’s Phenomenology and the Deconstruction of Intersubjectivity.” *Siribayat Journal of Philosophy* 1 (2012): 91-107.
- Jani, Anna. “*Individuality and Community. Construction of Sociality in Edith Stein’s Early Phenomenology*.” *Philobiblon: Transylvanian Journal of Multidisciplinary Research in Humanities* 20, no. 1 (2015): 19-32. <https://www.philobiblon.ro/en/magazine/2015/1/volume-xx-2015-no-1>.
- John Paul II. “*Christifideles Laici*. The Post-Synodal Exhortation of John Paul II on the Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World.” December 30, 1988. http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_30121988_christifideles-laici.html.
- John Paul II. “Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* to the Bishops, Clergy and Faithful on the Formation of Priests in the Circumstances of the Present Day.” March 15, 1992. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_25031992_pastores-dabo-vobis.html.
- Kukar, Polina. “The Very Unrecognizability of the Other: Edith Stein, Judith Butler, and the Pedagogical Challenge of Empathy.” *Philosophical Inquiry in Education: The Journal of the Canadian Philosophy of Education Society* 24, no. 1 (2016): 1-14. <https://journals.sfu.ca/pie/index.php/pie/article/view/905>.
- Macariola, Edward, L. “Edith Stein on Individual and Community: Critical Insights on a Philosophy of Inclusion.” *ARADMAN*:

- Multidisciplinary Research Journal*, 2 (2022): 43-59.
<https://journal.evsu.edu.ph/index.php/amrj/article/view/341/155>.
- Nweke, Charles Chukwuemeka and Okeke, Stephen Chibuike. "The Im/possibility of Empathy." *Philosophia: International Journal of Philosophy* 22, no. 1 (2021): 62-73. doi.org/10.46992/pijp.22.1.a.5
- Pierzchała, Michal. "The Role of Empathy in the Church's Fraternal Dialog with the World in the Teaching of Pope Francis." *Perspectives on Culture* 39, no. 4 (2022): 299–312.
<https://doi.org/10.35765/pk.2022.3904.20>.
- Pughe, D.L. "The Empathy of Edith Stein." *The Dream of Knowledge*, February 1, 2019. <https://thedreamofknowledge.com/2019/02/01/the-empathy-of-edith-stein-by-d-l-pughe/>
- Quito, Emerita. "Edith Stein's Phenomenological Empathy." In *Phenomenology: Edmund Husserl and Edith Stein*, 54-71. De La Salle University Press, Inc. 2001.
- Sirisooksilp, Saowanee, Wallapha Ariratana, and Keow Ngang Tang. "The Effect of Administrators' Servant Leadership on the Excellence of Catholic School." *Contemporary Educational Researches Journal* 7, no. 1 (2017): 11-19. <https://doi.org/10.18844/cerj.v7i1.487>.
- Stein, Edith. *Life in a Jewish Family: An Autobiography 1891-1916*. Translated by Josephine Koepfel. Volume 1. Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1986.
- Stein, Edith. *The Collected Works of Edith Stein: On the Problem of Empathy*. 3rd Revised, Translated by Waltraut Stein. Vol. 3. Washington D.C.: ICS Publications, 1989.

BOOK REVIEWS

DOI: 10.62461/PAS230125

Andrew Hemingway. *Can We Zoom into God?* Eugene, OR: Resource Publications, 2022. Pp. xx, 286. ISBN 9781666744309 (cloth); 9781666744293 (paperback); 9781666744316 (eBook).

Written shortly after the pandemic lockdown in the UK, Andrew Hemingway's *cri de coeur* responds negatively to the title question. Perhaps no surprise there, but his reasoning raises important considerations for religious communication.

Hemingway writes in a kind of conversational style, with topics and thoughts suggesting themselves from their context. The book does not so much present a logical step-by-step argument but a series of reflections on religious practice, theological understanding, and media affordances. His thinking draws on (Evangelical) theology and media ecology and weaves writers as diverse as William Barclay, Karl Barth, Martin Buber, John Bunyan, John Calvin, Nicholas Carr, Jacques Ellul, Abraham Kuyper, Jaron Lanier, Alistair McFadyen, Marshall McLuhan, Lewis Mumford, Neil Postman, A. W. Tozer, R. Chenevix Trench, and Kevin Vanhoozer into an ongoing conversation. The book thus has a solid grounding in a wide range of sources, but the conversational style sometimes makes it difficult to keep track of them all.

In that same sense of conversation, then, this review will briefly review Hemingway's theological and media positions, then converse with them from a different theological stance and from a wider media ecology analysis.

Firmly rooted in the Reformation's Evangelical tradition and Calvinist theology, Hemingway rebukes his own church for its quick acceptance of streaming video as a means to enable worship. Theologically, he identifies several reservations. First, the use of these screen technologies creates "a new idolatry." For a religious tradition that firmly rejected images in churches, the screens differ little from images and, like images, draw the worshipers away from the Word. As an artist, Hemingway does not oppose art and image in principle, but he does object to its growing role in the churches as something that beguiles and bedazzles. Second, the technology as a medium by its very nature takes on a mediating role, which stands

between the worshiper and the Word, an interpellation strongly rejected during the Reformation—though at that time a mediation by people (priests) rather than by technology. Mediation, he holds, remains a continuing temptation for Christianity. Third, citing Arthur C. Clarke’s comment, “Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic” (p. 69), Hemingway warns against magical thinking in religion and the addictive nature of technology. The temptation, of course, substitutes the work of human hands for God. Fourth, the overall role of image and mediation calls to mind Catholic theology, and Hemingway repeats many of the Reformation objections to the Church of Rome. Well read in Evangelical theology, he rejects the cult of the “Queen of heaven,” the papacy, and anything that lets Roman theology into the worship of the church and Zoom (his synecdoche for streaming services) has hints of Roman about it.

His objections come not only from theology. Hemingway takes the work of Neil Postman and others in the media ecology tradition to heart. Screen technology bears too strong a resemblance to television to escape television’s temptations, so well described by Postman in *Amusing Ourselves to Death*.¹ As an entertainment medium, television leads us to view everything it mediates to us—news, politics, business, and even religion—as just so much more entertainment. The affordance of that medium is too strong to resist. Rehearsing the history of religious programming in the UK, Hemingway asks, “Are the people tuning into ‘Songs of Praise,’ or ‘Stars on Sunday’ actually worshiping God? Are they worshiping in Spirit and in truth? If not, in the light of this question, we must ask what are the people ‘actually’ doing?” (p. 85). In his chapter, “Seeing is not Believing,” he points out that the television lens creates a world insofar as its lens is not that of the Scriptures” “The problem is that this ‘make-believe’ world is like a matrix, and as such the truth becomes blurred, so much so that people cannot distinguish between what is real or false anymore” (p. 92). Following Susan Greenfield,² he notes that the digital technologies impact “not just the generic brain, but the individual mind, beliefs, and states of consciousness” (qtd., p. 92).

¹ Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Penguin, 1985).

² Susan Greenfield, *Mind Change: How Digital Technologies Are Leaving Their Mark on our Brains* (New York: Random House, 2015).

Some Christian traditions do not share Hemingway's worry, at least in the same ways. The U.S. evangelical tradition, with its televangelists and mega-churches have created a fairly successful blend of worship and entertainment (though Postman aimed his critique at them in *Amusing Ourselves to Death*). Hemingway does not accept their understanding of worship or evangelicalism, criticizing, among others, the Rev. Billy Graham for his public preaching campaigns based on the U.S. revival tradition, which itself may well draw on early Methodist outdoor preaching.

Other Christian traditions could frame their own critiques of streaming religious services. Catholics—following John of Damascus in the iconoclastic debates and, like him, building an argument from Colossians 1:15—accept the role of images, but could well object to streaming worship on several other grounds. First, the various streaming practices shift worship to spectatorship. In his third “law of the media,” Marshall McLuhan³ points out that new media forms retrieve past practices. During the medieval period, Christian Eucharistic devotion turned worshipping congregations into spectators, with church architecture placing congregations at a distance from the altar and with church practice encouraging benediction (the adoration of the sacrament) rather than the partaking in communion. Streaming services have revived that sense of looking at the Eucharist, with some Catholic churches even offering “virtual benediction.” An indirect consequence follows, with the religious imagination shaped not by icons, religious art, or church environments, but by the impermanent flicker of a screen.

Second, streaming worship makes the Eucharistic presider or pastor into the dominant figure. The need for the camera to focus on an individual implies that some individual person matters more than the rest of the worshipping community. To borrow another of McLuhan's laws, streaming worship reverses into clericalism, tempting both priest and congregation to exaggerate the role and power of the presider. The temptation ignores the teaching of the Second Vatican Council in its *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* (#7) that “Christ is present in the liturgy in four unique ways. These ways are: especially, in the Eucharist broken and shared; in the person of

³ Marshall McLuhan and Eric McLuhan, *Laws of Media: The New Science* (University of Toronto Press, 1988).

the minister; in the Word of God; and in the assembled people of God.”⁴ The ranging of the camera over the faces of the congregation does not really solve this problem; Hemingway objects to that as well, as it fragments the worship, distracting from the movement of prayer.

Third, as the theologian Karl Rahner, arguing against televising the Mass many years ago,⁵ stated, because one can do something does not mean that one should. Such a publicizing of the sacred mysteries “leads straight to a complete denial in principle of any *disciplina arcani* whatsoever; for having the Mass on television can only mean admitting absolutely anyone and everyone to the innermost mystery of religion. Yet up till now there has always been, in every religion, some form of this ‘discipline of the secret’” (p. 211). Rahner makes the same point here that Joshua Meyrowitz later made when he pointed out the consequences for social behavior of making everything public via television.⁶ Meyrowitz notes the harms resulting from the merging of public spheres and the blurring of public and private behaviors. Where privacy ceases to exist, people’s sense of themselves and their identities break down. Rahner recognizes this in the religious distinction between believer and unbeliever. For support, Rahner draws on a theological tradition that extends back to St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Ambrose. Televising has consequences “if we consider this event from the point of view of those celebrating the Mass. It is permissible for them to perform the objective sacramental mystery of the Mass only if they bring to it a quite definite personal participation in faith and love. A merely objective setting-up of the external cult-action without personal cooperation in it would be a sin and sacrilege” (p. 210). Even believers viewing at a distance lose something.

Fourth, the Catholic tradition could object to streaming religious services on another theological ground, what Rahner might consider a metaphysical one: the understanding of sacramental actions. The Catholic Church does not recognize sacramental action at a distance. Those

⁴ Office of Worship, Archdiocese of Santa Fe, 2003, Liturgical Catechesis - #4. Retrieved July 1, 2024 from <https://archdiosf.org/documents/2017/11/04TheFour-foldPresence.pdf>

⁵ Karl Rahner, “The Mass and Television,” in *The Christian Commitment: Essays in Pastoral Theology* (Trans., Cecily Hastings) (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1963), 205–218.

⁶ Joshua Meyrowitz, *No Sense of Place: The Impace of Electronic Media on Social Behavior* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), Chapters 5–7.

celebrating the sacraments must be physically present to one another. While no one has argued that during a streaming Mass the presider does or could consecrate bread or wine at a viewer's home, the streaming situation does run the risk of confusing just what the participants are doing. Not surprisingly, the situation has led to people's revisiting the debates about sacramental action through technology, whether of the Eucharist⁷ or the Sacrament of Reconciliation.⁸ Is what viewers or auditors do what happens in the church building? In each situation, the answer is negative in regards to sacramental action at a distance.

Hemingway also draws on the media ecology tradition—primarily that articulated by Neil Postman—in his critique. That approach could well add more material for the consideration of consequences of streaming for worship. In a 1974 essay, McLuhan wondered about the impact of the microphone in liturgical activities.⁹ He recognized that the role of sound implied an oral culture and the vernacular. The microphone amplifies both and brings their characteristics with it. It fosters a “switch from visual to acoustic bias in daily experience. Likewise, the disturbances within the Church and the liturgy are, in a large part, to be understood in relationship to this vast reversal of form and content which occurs when a whole people is suddenly flipped from visual to auditory experience. In terms of the use of the microphone in the liturgy, it may be observed that acoustic amplification overloads our auditory sensory channel, diminishing the attention span of the visual and private experience of the liturgy, as well of the architectural space, isolating the individual in a kind of ‘sound bubble’” (p. 113). Streaming makes this process more intense and perhaps more confusing in worship. It illustrates what McLuhan elsewhere argues: that each new medium brings with it a changing ground of experience. The streaming of worship removes distance, that is, extends the place of worship—the church structure—(one can be anywhere in the world and still be part of that church) but introduces a different kind of distance. It introduces, as Hemingway points out, a new mediation. The worshiper

⁷ Judith Hahn, “Communion in an Online Mass? Sacramental Questions in Light of The Covid Crisis” *Studia canonica* 54 (2020): 457–474.

⁸ Denziger-Schoenmetzter 1088 (or DS 1994), in this case regarding the technology of writing.

⁹ Marshall McLuhan, “Liturgy and the Microphone,” in *The Medium and the Light: Reflections on Religion*, ed., E. McLuhan and J. Szklarek (Toronto: Stoddart, 1999), 107–116. Originally published in *The Critic* 33, no. 1 (1974): 12–17.

remains both physically distant and divided from the place of worship, while experiencing the illusion of connection..

The camera has its affordances, bringing with it its own way of seeing (to borrow from John Berger's title and analysis¹⁰). While we could debate, with Rahner, the propriety of a camera in a holy place, we would have to admit the long association of technology with worship: the technologies of art, of music, of architecture, for example. Each of them creates their own religious aura and people use each of them to engage in theological reflection on what they believe and upon what worship means. Is the camera all that different? What does the camera bring? It brings a perspective that differs from unaided human sight; it brings a framing of what it presents; it brings an interpretation of what it shows; it brings the added features of sound and perhaps commentary; it brings reproducibility—streaming worship implies recording worship, with its own questions of the validity of that fossilized experience—it brings a value chain created by and for the entertainment industry; it brings a new environment to the worship service, taking place not in a purpose-built church building or even room, but taking place in one's home or office, complete with their non-religious trappings. The camera transforms the worship experience. As Berger, following Walter Benjamin, points out with art, the camera's ability to reproduce what it beholds transforms the experience into something else.

Such separation of sound and image from the worship environment has consequences for community. Worship typically takes place face-to-face, in person. Even if participants do not usually look at one another except at specific ritual moments, they know each other's presence. The conversations and interactions before and after worship create a deeper sense of belonging and shared purpose. Introducing the screen shifts the worship experience to a kind of parasocial interaction where people must imagine their unseen community beyond the screen. Each of these moments can add to the worship experience but, at the same time, each transforms it. As noted long ago, parasocial interactions, while real in one sense, are false in another—people engage with characters or actors as though they knew them, even though they do not. Streaming worship

¹⁰ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin, 1972). (Based on a BBC series https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0pDE4VX_9Kk&list=PLn6KyJ4PmZsPhigNqPIWGEoCgBHHjhib3&index=1)

encourages us to interact as though we were there, but only with those people whom we see or hear. Similarly, imagined communities are real but not immediate. The media ecology analysis highlights how the introduction of any new elements (here, cameras, network streams, etc.) transforms the original space and experience.

Finally, implied in all of this, comes the loss of the physical. Worship, at least in the Catholic tradition, consists of physical properties: bread, wine, water, touching, seeing physical objects. The proclamation of God's word might still exist even if disembodied, but nothing else in the Mass is. Streaming worship disallows the physical. Much like the theological objection to sacramental action at a distance, a media ecology objection also highlights what the media take away. Disembodied ritual engagement differs from the ritual engagement it represents, even as it may create its own ritual—times of viewing, family gathering, place in the home, use of worship aids, and so on. But without the physical, there is no sacrament. The media ecology analysis recognizes the loss as well as the substitution of one ritual or another.

Hemingway begins by asking about the church experience of online worship during the pandemic. He poses important objections and he will no doubt not be the last to do so. His two categories of theology and media ecology provide important grounds for this ongoing reflection on a widely shared experience among the churches, but they may not go far enough. Each of us who experienced streaming worship should reflect on their experience from as many perspectives as possible.

Paul A. Soukup, S.J.

Santa Clara University, USA

Mary Frohlich. *The Heart at the Heart of the World: Re-visioning the Sacred Heart for the Ecozoic Era*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2024, 256 pp. ISBN: 9781626985629 (paperback)

What does the Catholic devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus have to do with ecology? In *The Heart at the Heart of the World: Revisioning the Sacred Heart for the Ecozoic Era*, Mary Frohlich emphasizes the significance of our relationship with the environment and the relevance of this traditional devotion to the pressing contemporary ecological and environmental crisis. The Catholic devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, a symbol of God's boundless love for humanity with roots in scripture and theological reflection, gained widespread popularity in France in the 17th century. Some of the tenets of this devotion involve consecrating oneself to the Sacred Heart, embracing God's merciful love, returning love with gratitude, and making amends or reparation for offenses against God. This devotion has waned, as Frohlich acknowledges. However, she sees in this spirituality a fresh perspective, offering much to inspire us to foster mindfulness about our dynamic web of mutually beneficial and interconnected relationships with the natural world and our call to safeguard and collaborate with God's creation to survive and thrive.

But why the Sacred Heart? Before exploring the meaning and theology of the Sacred Heart more deeply, Frohlich discusses the human heart as an expression of a person's depth, wholeness, love, emotion, and interior life. In her discussion of the heart's vulnerability, Frohlich emphasizes our interpersonal and social relationships with others and our susceptibility to grief and woundedness. She also discusses the four functions of the heart in human life: interiority, bonding, belonging, and meaning. Interiority refers to a safe space where we retreat for reflection and rest. Bonding is the place of the heart in offering and receiving love and tenderness. Belonging is the desire to connect and care for ourselves and others through committed participation. Meaning is the investment into making the world a better place.

Devotion to the Sacred Heart can be traced back to the early times of the Church. Readers will find Frohlich's historical survey of references and devotion to the Heart of Jesus within the Christian tradition from the first five centuries to the medieval period in Europe to seventeenth-century France and the twenty-first century. Frohlich highlights stories about the Heart of Christ in each historical period as expressed and theologized by influential spiritual figures, e.g., Origen (185-253), Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), Gertrude of Helfta (1256-1302), Jean Eudes (1601-1680), Marguerite Marie Alacoque (1647-1690), and Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955). Teilhard de Chardin, for example, identified the Sacred Heart as an "Omega Point" or "the heart of matter and of the physical cosmos" (p.

37). It is “an attractive force of infinite divine love that is constantly at work in the created world to lure it towards its ‘pleroma’ or fullness of life” (p. 36).

As revealed in the Sacred Heart, God’s boundless and passionate love invites us to respond to love with love, not only for human beings but also for all of God’s creation. A challenge found in modern life is our disconnection with the Earth, which Frohlich calls the “Earth-separated life.” In the controlled environment of our home, we are shielded from direct interaction with the natural cycles of air, soil, water, and diverse living organisms. Our food is purchased or delivered in containers and bags (p. 46). Frohlich describes the effects of our consumerist and Earth-separated lives on our spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being. She highlights efforts we can take to reclaim and rediscover our relationship with the Earth and within the community of Earth creatures. One such effort is a new way of recognizing and understanding the kingdom of God. Frohlich asserts that Jesus’s core preaching about the *kingdom* of God can be expressed today as the *kindom* of God, in which all life is our kin and is interconnected and interdependent. Our vocation is to “live faithfully the life of kinship” within this web of created beings (p. 177).

God’s kindom is not like a “well-ordered nursery,” as we imagine, but rather “wild” and “queer.” By wild, she means the diverse web of creatures, and every one of them is an object of God’s tender love. She writes, “[The] fact that wild creatures, from viruses to rats to sharks, may at times be inconvenient or even life-threatening for human beings does not detract from their being equally members of the kindom that God has created and longs to accompany into the fullness of life” (p. 97). Queer, on the other hand, refers to a way of rejecting all culturally imposed binaries, e.g., male/female, for humans and animals. She emphasizes that God and the created world do not adhere to binary, heteronormative expectations. God’s radical love breaks all boundaries.

God’s radical love exists eternally. The Sacred Heart does not begin at Christ’s incarnation but has been at the heart of the world since the beginning of creation, from the emergence of the universe to the emergence of the galaxies and solar system to the emergence of all life forms. Jesus was incarnated “to reconcile all things to God” and “to complete the manifestation of God’s Living Heart on Earth” (p. 88). Jesus’s death on the cross is the ultimate complete giving of himself to others so that they may have life.

The pierced side of Christ, or “Pierced Heart” as traditionally understood, expresses divine compassion for our brokenness or “sacred wound” that is cosmic in nature. God’s love and tenderness for humanity and creation heal this cosmic, sacred wound. Being wounded is unavoidable but can lead us to wholeness and holiness (p. 189). It can goad us into reparation, a traditional Sacred Heart practice of “penitential suffering to make up for the dishonor suffered by God” (p. 213). However, in our context, according to Frohlich, reparation can be done through forming people of good and moral character, participating in ecological

restoration, ritualizing our acts of building community with the more-than-human world, and opening the eyes of our hearts to recognize the beauty and wholeness of the Earth.

Given the current global reality of catastrophic, ecological degradation and Pope Francis' recently issued encyclical on the Sacred Heart, *Dilexit Nos* ("He loved us"), the book is a timely contribution to the discussion and reflection on the environmental crisis, self-giving love, and our deep relationality with the Earth. Through the lens of Sacred Heart devotion, Frohlich writes to incite an eco-spiritual awakening experience that can inspire a shift of assumptions from anthropocentrism toward naturecentrism, in which human beings are a humble species that is part of a larger fabric of coexistence and ecosystem. The universe and planet Earth have existed for billions of years, and we humans are latecomers. Yet, in a short time, we have contributed much to the destruction of the Earth. Thus, Frohlich offers "an evocative and inspiring vision," inviting readers to experience God's love in and through nature and challenging them to live "heartfully" as kin within the interdependent community of living beings and delve deeper into understanding the rootedness of human affairs in the planet's geological and biological systems.

Frohlich claims in the introduction that this is not an academic book. What she writes comes from her heart. Throughout the book, she interacts with modern scholarship on ecology and theology and shares her experiences connected to the points/themes discussed, making her writing engaging and relatable. For example, in her explanation of creation and God's involvement, she acknowledges our need to respect science but emphasizes that God cannot be reduced only to its findings (p. 76). She rejects the notion of an interventionist God who intervenes in the created world to accomplish things apart from natural processes. Instead, she embraces the concept that divine intentionality directs the evolution and emergence processes (p. 77). She interprets the "Big Bang" theory as the "exploding forth of the vast fountain of divine love from the Heart of God" (p. 80).

The book is written in an accessible and intriguing style for a diverse readership. Readers will appreciate Frohlich's meticulous attention to Christian (Catholic) terminologies, providing necessary details to help unfamiliar readers. Each chapter concludes with statements and questions for reflection to help readers contemplate the sacred and our spiritual relationship with God and with the Earth. Furthermore, the suggested readings listed at the end of each chapter invite readers to delve deeper into the subject matter. *The Heart at the Heart of the World: Revisioning the Sacred Heart for the Ecozoic Era* offers a heartfelt, thought-provoking, and stimulating reading experience.

Vien V. Nguyen, SCJ

Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology, USA

Vu Anh Ta. *Communication Theology in the Context of Intercultural Communion*. Bangkok: ARC, 2024. 182 pp. ISBN 9789744871664 (paperback).

Ta Anh Vu's book *Communication Theology in the Context of Intercultural Communication* presents a pioneering exploration of the intricate relationship between theology, communication, and culture. The book offers a comprehensive framework for understanding how these elements intersect within the context of the Church's missionary endeavors. By delving into the complexities of intercultural communication, Ta provides invaluable insights for theologians, missionaries, and anyone seeking to foster effective dialogue across cultural boundaries.

The initial chapters establish a foundational understanding of culture and communication, providing essential context for subsequent discussions. Ta's exploration of the historical and theoretical underpinnings of these concepts offers a rich tapestry for comprehending the complexities of intercultural interaction. This groundwork is crucial for establishing a shared vocabulary and conceptual framework for the reader.

A distinctive feature of the book is its integration of theology and communication. By examining the divine self-communication within the Trinity and its manifestation through Revelation, Ta offers a profound theological lens through which to view human communication. This approach is particularly insightful, as it highlights the sacred nature of communication as a fundamental aspect of human existence. The author's ability to seamlessly weave together biblical narratives and theological concepts demonstrates a deep understanding of both disciplines and their interconnectedness. Ta highlights different philosophers like Lonergan and Rahner on anchoring the discussion of the book in God's Self-Communication. Stemming from the belief that the heart of the Christian Faith is the Trinity, he articulated how God is in Himself *communio* and communication in order to communicate with humans as a threefold interaction of love. The plurality of God in Rahner's emphasis stresses the Father sending his Son and His Holy Spirit. This was further explained by Ta in the biblical narratives with the emphasis on the creation stories, to the incarnation, and redemption. The author's ability to seamlessly intertwine biblical narratives, theological concepts, and communication theories

demonstrates a deep understanding of the interconnections between these disciplines, offering a fresh perspective on the nature of human interaction.

One of the book's most significant contributions lies as well in its emphasis on the practical application of communication theology. Bridging the gap between theory and practice, Ta moves beyond theoretical discussions by offering concrete models and approaches for the Church to engage in intercultural dialogue. While the book provides a vigorous theoretical framework, it also offers practical guidance for those engaged in intercultural ministry. This balance is essential for ensuring that the book's insights are relevant and applicable to real-world challenges. As such, the emanating principle of communication theology etched in its considerations to intercultural communication, the Trinitarian communication where the Trinity of God is participating, and thus in the culture of the Israelites, God's revelation and incarnation are grounds for His communion and communication. The exploration of concepts such as accommodation, contextualization, and inculturation provides readers with practical tools for navigating the complexities of cross-cultural interactions. Where accommodation offers an approach on sensitivity towards diversified encounter of cultures; Contextualization highlights how Christians are the important agents of modelling their local culture and are able to contribute for the common good; this leads to the deeper sense of approaching where the message of Jesus birth as the highest form of inculturation is incarnated in the hearts and mind of people in their own culture. By grounding these approaches in theological principles, the author offers a compelling vision for how the Church can effectively communicate the Gospel in diverse cultural contexts.

The book's strength is directed in its ability to bridge the gap between theory and practice. While it provides a robust theoretical framework, it also offers practical guidance for those engaged in intercultural ministry. This balance is essential for ensuring that the book's insights are relevant and applicable to real-world challenges.

While the book offers a comprehensive overview of communication theology and intercultural communication, there is potential for further exploration in certain areas. For instance, incorporating contemporary case studies of intercultural challenges faced by the Church could enhance the book's relevance to current issues. Additionally, delving deeper into the ethical dimensions of intercultural communication would provide valuable

guidance for practitioners seeking to navigate sensitive and complex situations.

Furthermore, exploring the role of technology and media in intercultural communication could be a fruitful area of inquiry. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, understanding how digital platforms shape intercultural interactions is crucial for effective communication. The book could benefit from a more in-depth analysis of how digital technologies can both facilitate and hinder intercultural understanding amidst the threat of relativistic principles.

Another potential area for further exploration is the intersection of intercultural communication and power dynamics on culture and family. While the book touches on some aspects of power imbalances between cultures, a more in-depth analysis of how power structures influence intercultural communication could provide additional insights. This would include examining how marginalized groups and minority cultures are represented and positioned within dominant cultural narratives. Particularly, Political acculturation which involves the process of adopting a new political culture in terms of values, participating in political processes, and understanding new political systems that resulted from migration, colonization, or regime change.

Despite these areas for potential expansion, *Communication Theology in the Context of Intercultural Communication* is a significant contribution to the field. The book's comprehensive approach, coupled with its practical orientation, makes it a valuable resource for theologians, missionaries, and anyone interested in fostering intercultural understanding. By offering a theological framework for intercultural communication, Ta provides a compelling vision for how the Church can effectively engage with diverse cultures while remaining faithful to its core message.

In conclusion, Ta's book is a thought-provoking and insightful exploration of the complex relationship between theology, communication, and culture. By offering a comprehensive framework and practical guidance, the book empowers readers to navigate the challenges and opportunities presented by intercultural interactions. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, the insights offered in this book are essential for building bridges of understanding and fostering a more harmonious global community.

Solomon A. Patnaan

Siena College Inc., Quezon City, Philippines

Sam T. Rajkumar. *Resounding Faith: Embracing Modern Music in Children's Ministry*. Bangalore, India: Omega Book World, 2023, 130 pp. ISBN: 9789389069815 (paperback).

The book *Resounding Faith: Embracing Modern Music in Children's Ministry*, offers a transformative look at the role of contemporary music in promoting spiritual growth among children. The author, with his extensive experience in theology and music education, argues that modern music can be effectively integrated into children's ministry. Though "Resounding Faith" has seven chapters apart from the introduction and conclusion, fascinatingly, it can be structured into three main sections: theological foundations, practical applications, and case studies, based on the contents, flow of thought, in-depth analysis of the subject matter, style, and arrangements of ideas. Each section is meticulously crafted to build upon the previous one, providing readers with a comprehensive understanding of the theological basis, practical implementation, and real-world impact of modern music in children's ministry.

In the primary section, Rajkumar's argument for using music in worship is based on biblical and doctrinal foundations, emphasizing music as a form of expression and communication with God. He addresses common misconceptions about contemporary music in the church and asserts that all forms of music can glorify God and enhance worship when used appropriately. Rajkumar begins his theological exploration by examining the role of music in the Old Testament, citing examples like the songs of Miriam and Moses in Exodus, the Psalms, and King David's instrumental worship. He also highlights the use of music in early Christian worship in the New Testament, citing hymns by Jesus and his disciples, Paul's encouragement to sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, and the worship practices in the Book of Revelation. Rajkumar counters criticisms about contemporary music in worship, arguing that the essence of worship is not tied to a specific style but to the heart and intention behind it. He asserts that contemporary music, when used thoughtfully and with theological integrity, can enhance worship and make it more accessible and meaningful to children.

The subsequent section of the book offers practical advice on incorporating modern music into children's ministry, including selecting

songs, planning worship sessions, and engaging children in musical activities. It emphasizes the importance of choosing age-appropriate songs that resonate with children's experiences and interests. The author suggests a mixture of contemporary worship songs, traditional hymns, and children's worship music and provides tips for creating a balanced worship set list. The book also provides guidance on creating engaging worship sessions, emphasizing the need for a welcoming, inclusive, and interactive environment. Multimedia elements, movement, dance, and creative arts are suggested to encourage children to express their faith in diverse ways.

One of the outstanding features of this section is that Rajkumar emphasizes the significance of incorporating music into children's ministry, such as Sunday school and children's church, to teach biblical stories, reinforce themes, and promote spiritual growth. He suggests that leaders should involve children in music-making, providing opportunities for singing, playing instruments, and participating in worship teams. This fosters a deeper connection to faith and responsibility in their spiritual journey. Rajkumar also emphasizes the importance of inclusivity and diversity, encouraging leaders to incorporate music from diverse cultures and traditions to reflect the diverse backgrounds of the children they serve. This approach enhances the worship experience and fosters a sense of belonging and acceptance among children.

Rajkumar provides advice on incorporating multicultural music into children's ministry, including selecting songs in different languages, exploring diverse musical styles, and inviting guest musicians. He suggests that ministry leaders educate children about the cultural and historical context of music, helping them appreciate and respect God's creation. Also, he addresses the logistical challenges of integrating modern music, offering solutions like building a music team, training volunteers, and sourcing affordable instruments. Likewise, he proposes gaining church leadership and congregational support through workshops, presentations, and demonstrations, and encourages leaders to communicate the theological and practical reasons for incorporating contemporary music, enhancing worship, and engaging the younger generation.

The latter section of the book presents case studies from churches and ministries that successfully incorporate modern music into their children's programs, highlighting its positive impact on spiritual growth and community engagement. The case studies cover rural churches, urban congregations, and multicultural communities, accompanied by interviews

with ministry leaders, parents, and children. The author discusses the implementation of modern music in various ministries, highlighting its benefits in enhancing children's spiritual growth, faith connection, worship participation, and understanding of biblical teachings. The book also discusses the challenges faced by some ministries, including resistance from traditionalists, limited resources, and initial scepticism from parents and leaders. Despite these obstacles, the book highlights the perseverance and creativity of ministry leaders who found innovative solutions, ultimately transforming their worship practices.

“Resounding Faith” explores the role of music in children's ministry. It balances theory and practice, highlighting the importance of music in worship and its implementation in ministries. The book emphasizes inclusivity and diversity, incorporating music from diverse cultures and traditions. Rajkumar calls for this approach to reflect the multicultural nature of congregations, enrich worship, and teach children about acceptance and unity. The book offers practical advice on selecting songs, planning worship sessions, and engaging children in musical activities. It also provides suggestions for overcoming logistical challenges and gaining support from church leadership and the congregation.

Readers seeking a scholarly and theologically informed exploration of *Embracing Modern Music in Children's Ministry* will find “Resounding Faith” to be a valuable resource. However, the book's depth and academic focus may be a bit challenging for those without a background in music. While the book's depth of research is commendable, it could be more accessible to general readers. Nevertheless, “Resounding Faith” will plausibly serve as a vital resource for pastors, worship leaders, educators, and those involved in children's spiritual formation, aiming to enhance the dynamic and relevant worship experience.

Santhosh G

United Theological College, Bangalo

Daniella Zsupan-Jerome. *Speak Lord, Your Servant Is Listening: Reflections on Faithful Communication in a Digital Age*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2024, 135 pp., eISBN: 9780814689110, E8911

Delving into the Scripture and reflecting deeply upon it is foundational for Catholic social communicators' mission to authentically share the Good News in a complex and rapidly changing world. These practices serve both spiritual and professional dimensions, ensuring that their communication aligns with the Church's teachings and effectively reaches the hearts of the faithful.

Daniella Zsupan-Jerome's latest work, *Speak Lord, Your Servant Is Listening: Reflections on Faithful Communication in a Digital Age*, is an effective spiritual guide focused on the intersection of the Catholic faith and digital communication. A devotional resource for Catholic communicators, the book is a *lectio divina*-based guide that provides insights and reflective practices for navigating digital culture through the lens of faith, emphasizing listening, intentionality, and a theology of communication rooted in communion with God and others.

Zsupan-Jerome is a distinguished pastoral theologian whose scholarly work explores the dynamic interplay of theology, communication, and digital culture. She is currently an assistant professor of pastoral theology and the director of the Sustained Encuentro Program at Saint John's University School of Theology and Seminary in Collegeville, Minnesota. Since May 2024, she has been on the editorial board of *Religion and Social Communication*.

Zsupan-Jerome's body of work and scholarship emphasizes the transformative role of digital media in ministry and faith formation. Her notable book, *Connected Toward Communion: The Church and Social Communication in the Digital Age*, delves into the Catholic Church's approach to digital communication, highlighting its potential for fostering spiritual growth and connection. In addition to her academic work, she has contributed to

pastoral and devotional resources, offering insights that bridge theology with contemporary media practices.

In the introduction of *Speak Lord, Your Servant Is Listening: Reflections on Faithful Communication in a Digital Age*, the author explores the profound role of communication of faith in our daily lives. Communication, she asserts, is a divine gift, rooted in God's creative Word, and a means of fostering relationships and building communion. She emphasizes that all believers are called to communicate their faith, not just through professional ministry or public platforms but in their everyday interactions.

In an age dominated by digital communication, the introduction highlights the challenges and opportunities of engaging authentically in this space. It calls readers to view communication not merely as a tool for content exchange but as a holy practice rooted in listening, intentionality, and the fruits of the Spirit. This sets the tone for a contemplative journey through Scripture, where readers are invited to reflect on how faith shapes their communication in the modern world.

Communication, a gift meant to bring people into communion with one another and God, is emphasized in the book's various chapters. This theme is evident in stories like Pentecost, where the Spirit enables diverse peoples to understand one another (Chapter 18), and in Adam's joyous declaration upon meeting Eve (Chapter 2). True communication reflects the relational nature of God, who is a Trinity of love and unity. When communication prioritizes self-giving, mutuality, and connection, it mirrors divine communion. Conversely, miscommunication, such as at the Tower of Babel, distorts this purpose, leading to division and alienation (Chapter 4). The reflections urge the readers to reclaim communication as a sacred act that fosters unity, understanding, and shared purpose.

The reflections also explore how words can build up or tear down, citing examples like the serpent's deceitful twisting of God's words to lead Adam and Eve astray (Chapter 3). They encourage readers to use their words intentionally to create, heal, and inspire rather than to harm or divide. Faithful communication also calls for accountability, especially in the digital age, where anonymity and rapid dissemination often lead to thoughtless or

harmful exchanges. As such, we are invited to practice mindful speech rooted in truth and compassion, to counter the noise and hostility prevalent in contemporary discourse.

Listening also emerged as a vital theme of this *lectio divina*, both as a posture toward God and as a foundation for authentic human relationships. Stories like those of Samuel's call (Chapter 8) and Elijah's encounter with God in a gentle whisper (Chapter 9) illustrate the transformative power of listening with the "ear of the heart" (p.16). Amid the distractions of modern life, particularly with the overwhelming noise of digital spaces, the readers are counselled to practice contemplative listening. To listen well is to honor others' dignity and to be fully present. This attentiveness enriches personal relationships and deepens one's relationship with God, who speaks in silence and stillness.

Silence as a sacred space is also a theme evident in the various reflections in this book. Silence is portrayed not as an absence but as a profound presence, a space where divine communication unfolds. In Revelation, the silence in heaven before God's judgment reflects awe and reverence (Chapter 20). Similarly, the readers are advised to incorporate silence into modern communication practices, allowing space for reflection and discernment. In a culture that values speed and immediacy, individuals are urged to practice silence—to pause and engage with depth and intentionality.

Finally, the Holy Spirit is portrayed as the animating force behind faithful communication (Chapters 10, 18, 19). This theme calls on the readers to discern the Spirit's guidance in their words and actions, ensuring that their communication aligns with God's will and reflects divine love. As such, we are to approach digital communication with a person-centered mindset, emphasizing the humanity behind the screens. By embodying the fruits of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, and kindness—believers can transform digital spaces into avenues for authentic connection and evangelization.

The Epilogue reflects on Mary, the Mother of God, as a model for faithful communication. Mary's "yes" to God marks her as the first influencer, embracing the Divine Word with humility and openness. Through her example, she teaches the theology and

practice of communication by receiving, nurturing, and sharing the Word. Her Magnificat and silent attentiveness illustrate a balance of conviction and humility, guiding believers to prioritize their relationship with God over self-promotion.

Mary's role extends into the digital age, where her traits of listening and service provide a blueprint for engaging faithfully in communication. Her relationship with the Word and Spirit inspires believers to say "yes" to God in their own lives, fostering encounters and connections that mirror divine love. The epilogue calls for prayerful reflection, asking Mary to intercede for us as we strive to become faithful communicators in both word and action.

Social communicators serve as bridges between the Church and society. Regular Bible reading, reflections, and *lectio divina* such as those in this book will help anchor their work in the truths of the faith, fostering a deeper personal relationship with God. This spiritual grounding will, in turn, help them approach their mission with authenticity and integrity, ensuring their message reflects Gospel values rather than personal agendas or secular pressures.

Bible reading and reflection are indispensable practices for Catholic social communicators. They serve as a compass, guiding their ethical, creative, and spiritual efforts while ensuring their work remains rooted in the Gospel. By immersing themselves in Scripture, communicators not only enrich their own faith but also uphold the dignity of their audience and ensure their content aligns with the Church's mission of communion.

Roderick Evans Bartolome, Dcomm

Far Eastern University, Philippines

Call for Papers

***Religion and Social Communication*, Vol. 23, No. 2, 2025**

Theme: “The Media and Religion & Spirituality in Asia”

The ARC Journal *Religion and Social Communication* invites submissions for its upcoming issue (Vol. 23, No. 2, 2025), focusing on the theme “The Media and Religion & Spirituality in Asia.” This issue seeks to explore the dynamic intersection of media, religion, and spirituality within the diverse contexts of Asia. As media continues to shape societal narratives, its influence on religious practices, spiritual beliefs, and interfaith dialogues is increasingly significant. We welcome scholarly contributions that investigate how media impacts religion and spirituality in Asia, as well as how religious and spiritual messages are communicated through various media platforms.

Scope and Topics:

We invite papers from a variety of disciplines, including but not limited to religious studies, media studies, sociology, anthropology, theology, communication studies, and cultural studies. Topics may include, but are not limited to:

Media Representation of Religious Practices and Beliefs

- How are religious practices, rituals, and beliefs portrayed in Asian media?
- What role does digital media play in shaping perceptions of religious communities?
- Comparative studies of how traditional and digital media represent various religious traditions.

Religion, Spirituality, and Social Media

- How are religious groups using social media to engage followers and promote spiritual practices?
- The influence of social media influencers on religious discourse.
- The role of social media in spreading religious movements, fostering spiritual communities, and promoting interfaith dialogue.

Media as a Tool for Religious and Spiritual Mobilization

- How has media mobilized religious groups for social, political, or environmental causes?
- Media's role in advancing religious activism, spirituality, and social justice.
- Coverage of religious conflicts and collaborations, including interfaith peacebuilding initiatives.

Religious and Spiritual Narratives in Popular Culture

- The representation of religious and spiritual themes in Asian film, television, literature, and music.
- How has media transformed traditional religious storytelling, mythology, and symbolism in popular culture?
- The relationship between popular culture and religious traditions in constructing spiritual identities.

Media, Religion, and Government Relations

- How do state-controlled media regulate religious discourse in various Asian countries?
- The impact of government policies on religious expression in the media.
- Censorship and the mediation of religion in politically restrictive environments.

Religion, Spirituality, and Media in Diaspora Communities

- How are diaspora communities using media to maintain their religious and spiritual traditions?
- Media's role in facilitating transnational religious networks and practices.
- The influence of media on religious identities in migrant and refugee communities.

Media, Technology, and the Future of Religious Practice

- The impact of emerging technologies (e.g., AI, virtual reality, augmented reality) on religious practices and spiritual experiences.
- How are religious communities adapting to new technological opportunities and challenges?
- Digital media's role in shaping future trends in religion and spirituality across Asia.

Media and Interfaith Dialogue

- How does media foster interfaith dialogue across religious traditions in Asia?
- Media's role in promoting peace, tolerance, and understanding among diverse faith communities.
- Case studies of media-facilitated interfaith initiatives and their outcomes.

Ethics and Challenges in Media's Engagement with Religion and Spirituality

- Ethical issues in representing religious minorities and spiritual movements in the media.
- The commodification of spirituality and its impact on authentic religious practices.
- Addressing bias, misrepresentation, and sensationalism in media coverage of religion.

Submission Guidelines:

We invite both theoretical and empirical papers that offer fresh insights into the relationship between media, religion, and spirituality in Asia. Submissions may include case studies, comparative analyses, or critical reflections. All papers will undergo an initial editorial review followed by a double-blind peer review process.

Manuscripts should adhere to standard academic formatting and citation styles. For journal policies and author guidelines, visit: [ARC Journal Policies](#).

Authors of accepted papers are also invited to present their research at the 15th ARC International Roundtable, to be held in Bangkok, Thailand, in November 2025.

Submission Deadline: February 28, 2025

Publication Date: June 30, 2025

Send inquiries and manuscripts to: arcstjohns.bkk@gmail.com

We look forward to your contributions and to advancing scholarship on this important theme!

Religion and Social Communication
Vol. 23 No. 1, Jan. - Jun. 2025

Religion and Social Communication is the semiannual scholarly journal of the Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication (ARC), founded in 1999. ARC is an independent research center housed at St. John's University, Bangkok, Thailand. The ARC aims to:

- Facilitate, support and publish research on subjects related to Religion and Social Communication in Asia;
- Promote related publications in the field;
- Develop a network of interested researchers and institutions;
- Foster interreligious dialogue and cooperation in the field.

Religion and Social Communication invites papers, book reviews and abstracts that provide scholarly insights into the fields of Religion and Social Communication in Asia. The journal welcomes contributions from professional researchers as well as M.A. and Ph.D. students who are interested in publishing their academic work within the themes of Religion and Social Communication. All papers go through peer review and editorial process. The ARC reserves the right to accept or decline submitted contributions in order to meet the standards of the publication. We gratefully acknowledge all contributions.

For further information, including submissions, subscription and inquiries, please contact: arcstjohns.bkk@gmail.com.

To subscribe to the journal Religion and Social Communication or order other ARC publications, please contact: arcstjohns.bkk@gmail.com for rates and method of payment.