

The Relevance of *Laudato Si'* in the Cordilleran's Search for Autonomy

Joefrey M. Almazan*

Saint Louis University, Baguio City, Philippines

Abstract: *Laudato Si'* claims a necessity to show particular concern 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. 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. For over two decades, Cordillera's indigenous peoples continue to assert their historical right of self-determination through regional autonomy. Pursuant to the constitutional mandate, two attempts had been waged to achieve the status of regional autonomy in Cordillera; however, the two organic acts had been rejected and failed to be ratified. The study was designed to answer the main research problem: "what alternative framework does *Laudato Si'* offer to support a new scheme for Cordillera Autonomous Region? This research study employed a methodology which is qualitative. Using the three R's (reality, reflection, response) of analysis, the researcher is able to come into grasp with the actual situation that the indigenous peoples of the Cordillera have been facing most especially in their search for regional autonomy and see the different factors affecting visions of autonomy. Finally, through the challenges of *Laudato Si'*, a reconstruction of the framework for the next organic act of Cordillera Autonomous Region was made.

Keywords: *Autonomy, Cordillera, Laudato Si', indigenous peoples, organic act, land*

*Joefrey M. Almazan can be contacted at joef_almazan@yahoo.com.

*Our dominion over the universe should be understood more properly
in the sense of responsible stewardship (Laudato Si', #116)*

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 people, land is intimately connected to almost all parts of their lives – their livelihood, culture, home, and their identity.¹ Losing it means taking most of what they have. It is no secret however that the lands of the indigenous people are very rich in natural resources and it has great potential for hydro-electric development project.² Developing these rich lands would eventually lead the government into butting heads with the indigenous people. Thus, a conflict leading to sacrifices was unavoidable.

The Cordillera region has long been struggling for the claim of regional autonomy accorded in the notion of self-determination as home of ethnic minorities in the north. Their clamour for self-rule is rooted on the ancestral lands, domains and resources, national oppression, indigenous cultural preservation and socio-economic integration within the region.

Several attempts at legalizing autonomy in the Cordillera region have failed in two separate plebiscites. An affirmative vote for the law on regional autonomy is a precondition by the 1987 Philippine Constitution to give the region autonomy in self-governance much like the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao in southern Philippines. The first law *Republic Act No. 6766*, took effect on October 23, 1989 but failed to muster a majority vote in the plebiscite on January 30, 1990. The second law, *Republic Act No. 8438* passed by Congress of the Philippines on December 22, 1997, also failed to pass the approval of the Cordillera peoples in a region-wide referendum on March 7, 1998.

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 play a crucial role in the conservation of the environment.³ Since then, the literature is replete with studies exploring various aspects of environmental development including the ethical and spiritual dimensions of land management. However, even as a few pioneering social

¹ Christopher Skene, "The Global Economy and the Erosion of Civil Rights: The Case of the Philippines," *Philippine Political Science Journal*, vol. 27, no. 50 (2006), 61.

² *Ibid.*, 66.

³ *Ibid.*, 70.

scientists have laid a finger squarely on the subject of resource management as an area of spiritual and theological discourse, no study in this area has been conducted in the Cordillera region.

Laudato si' claims a necessity to show a particular concern 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. 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. For over two decades, Cordillera's indigenous peoples continue to assert their historical right of self-determination through regional autonomy. Pursuant to the constitutional mandate, two attempts had been waged to achieve the status of regional autonomy in Cordillera; however, the two organic acts had been rejected and failed to be ratified. The study was designed to answer the following research problems: what are the underlying reasons why the 1998 plebiscite failed vis-à-vis provisions of the Republic Act 8438? what alternative framework *Laudato Si'* offer to support a new scheme for Cordillera Autonomous Region?

Dams, Land and the Right to Autonomy of the Cordillerans

Nevertheless, in various parts of the world, pressure is being put on them to abandon their homelands to make room for agricultural or mining projects which are undertaken without regard for the natural and cultural degradation. (*Laudato Si'*, #149)

In the name of development, the government facilitated the entry of large scale mining operations that insidiously violates indigenous peoples rights, disintegrates cultural communities, and inflicts irreparable environmental damage.⁴ This observation was boldly supported by Molintas, Carino, and Balao, "Using the power of legislation and the might of modern technology, the Philippine government has ravaged the remaining frontiers occupied by indigenous peoples."⁵ Bulldozing ancestral domains in search of natural resources, it has pushed indigenous peoples deeper and higher into the hinterlands and into the quagmire of marginalization. For instance, in the barangays of *Tawangan* and *Ballay* in Kabayan, Benguet, at least one

⁴ "The Writing on the Wall," *Northern Forum on Church and Society*, vol. 11, no. 2 (October 2002), 1.

⁵ A. Allad-iw, Retrieved from Bulatlat News: <http://www.Bulatlat.com/2007/08> (accessed August 12, 2007)

hundred hectares of mossy forest had disappeared in these two barangays since 1987 according to PNP Superintendent with some twenty hectares bulldozed shortly before the May 2007 elections, allegedly by the orders of a barangay official.⁶

Indigenous peoples (*Igorots*) have suffered and will continue to suffer immense danger to their lands and environment due to the long-term impact of dams. The dam has caused the loss of ancestral lands due to siltation. Siltation of rivers is a serious problem in Benguet resulting from mining operations and dam construction. The *Ambuklao* and *Binga* dams are stark examples of the detrimental impacts of siltation and mega dams on rivers. The steadily rising level of silt in the dam reservoirs and along the Agno River upstream of the dams is covering a wider and wider area around the dams and continues to destroy more and more rice fields. In the case of the *Ambuklao* dam, the communities of *Bangao* and *Balacbac* were located far above the predicted water level of the dam and 17 kilometers away from the predicted edge of the reservoir. These two communities are now inundated because of the rising water level and accumulation of silt upstream along the Agno River. Government authorities dismiss the increasing siltation as a natural phenomenon. However, the *Ibaloi* people know that the dams are the real culprit. The farmlands and communities were never affected by silt before the dams were built despite storms and earthquakes. The dams blocked the free flow of water and silt down to the lowlands.

During the construction of the dams, many families lost their lands and were displaced. Along with their lands were their livelihoods. In the highlands however, the lands are not just simply a means for livelihood. It can be said that the relationship of the land and the people is more intimate than most. That is why when the people lost their lands during the construction of dam, they lost their culture and identity as well. For these reason, the dam projects did not contribute to sustainable development in the socio-cultural aspect. The violation of the collective rights of the indigenous people in terms of their concerted rights to self-determination and cultural preservation which is the basis of their continued existence and identity were curtailed.

In the environmental area, we can surmise that the dam projects contributed to sustainable development. In an environmental friendly way, the country is able to harness electric power by using the dams made in *Tinongdan*. The dams are able to last for a long time and stay productive in generating electricity. During the construction of the dam however, the environment was greatly altered. The land was flooded with water and many trees were cut down.

⁶ *Ibid.*

In December 2000, the Supreme Court of the Philippines dismissed a petition that questioned the constitutional legality of the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA), an act which came into existence in 1997 giving the peoples of the Cordillera decisive influence over the establishment of foreign mining companies. In this act, ownership over the lands was regarded as communal, rather than individual and thus coincided more with the view on ownership of the Igorot. The IPRA was totally different in tone from the Philippine Mining Act of 1995.⁷

Without consulting the Cordillera people, this code gave companies the freedom to devastate tribal lands, allowed 100% foreign ownership, and gave companies the right to displace and resettle people within their concessionary areas. Some influential people filed a lawsuit with the Supreme Court against the IPRA, because it contradicted with the Mining Code and would therefore be unlawful. The fact that the Supreme Court had to dismiss the petition, because the vote had been 7-7, could be understood as another victory of the CPA.

Through lengthy discussions, the state convinced the indigenous people that the development programs will not only provide an abundant progress for the country but it will also help the local residents at the same time. Thus, an exchange was made for this purpose. The locals bitterly left their lands with the promise that they will be properly compensated for it, that the community must not be deprived of government assistance, and with hopes that these projects will be for the betterment of the whole country. As they say, some element of force or coercion and a goodly amount of consent are necessary for governance.⁸ Keep in mind however, the word 'compensated'. The taking of private properties of individuals is not condemned in a modern society if the individual is sufficiently and justly compensated. But what if they were not compensated properly? To this day, some are still resurfacing and making their protest heard in order to claim the just compensation that is way long overdue. That's what they claim. If it's baseless or not, it will be for another occasion for people to scrutinize and uncover these.

The prosperity of the majority is the new dogma of a modern sovereign state. Through the virtue of the Social Contract, a private property of an individual can be taken by the state if it's deemed beneficial for the whole populace.⁹ The welfare of the majority shall override the needs and wants of the few – such is the new brand of modern oppression: 'Tyranny of the Majority.' But can it really be called an optimistic development when few were left behind? When the minority are exploited for the

⁷ Cordillera Peoples' Alliance, *The Cordillera Peoples' Continuing Struggle for Self Determination* (Baguio City. 1999).

⁸ Emerenciana Arcellana, "A Theory of Philippine Politics and its Implications for National Development," *Philippine Political Science Journal*, vol. 3, no. 3 (1976), 61.

⁹ Michael Curtis, *The Great Political Theories*, vol. 2 (Harper Collins, 2008), 2.

benefits of the many? When means employed are only just a means for an end? Time will tell if the sacrifice was worth it.

Causes of the Failure for Cordilleran Autonomy

Richards, to begin with, merely focuses on the functionalities of natural resources for indigenous peoples, laying down a sociological framework for the analysis of the relationship between nature and indigenous religions. He argues that culture – particularly religious rituals and traditions tied to nature – results as the objectified manifestations of this relationship as it indirectly binds and solidifies personal and community ties through such rituals as those revolving around resource-utilization activities.¹⁰

Indeed, the struggle of the indigenous peoples of the Cordillera for land echoes that of indigenous peoples around the world. It has been the IP's dream for ages to regain the land from which, in their belief, springs human life – land that has shaped the culture, tradition and worldview of a whole community with an uninterrupted history of communal life and productive relationship with nature.¹¹ Indigenous peoples have been, in the name of modernization and in the process of globalization, ejected from their lands and culture. Their survival as indigenous has, thus, been threatened. Colonialism has dispossessed them of their lands and today they occupy a mere fraction of their ancestors' once vast domains, virtual strangers in the land that has belonged to them since time immemorial.¹²

The failure of the first organic act was purported by inadequate information of the people regarding the autonomy law and the contradicting concept of genuine autonomy for people of Cordillera and the national government. For people of Cordillera, genuine regional autonomy means self-rule on the basis of broad grassroots democracy, through which indigenous peoples can exercise the full range of their rights, pursue their collective interests, and define their own path of development while on national government's perspective aims merely to establish a regional autonomous government to comply with a constitutional provision and structural in nature.

Moreover, the failure of first organic act was affected by the internal problems within the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) regarding campaign funds

¹⁰ M. Richards, "Common Property Resource Institutions and Forest Management in Latin America, *Development and Change*, vol. 28, no. 1 (1997), 99.

¹¹ W. Claver, "Our Struggle Endures, The Land of our Ancestors Shall Yet Be Ours", in R. Manaligod, *Struggle Against Development Aggression* (Quezon City: SBA Printers, 1990), 5.

¹² L.L. Wiersma, "Indigenous Lands as Cultural Property: A New Approach to Indigenous Land Claims", *Duke Law Journal* (2005), 1061.

allocation, information dissemination as concentrated on the urban centers rather than on grassroots level, and lack of will and sincerity among the duly appointed agencies to launch a corollary campaign apart from the information drive on autonomy law. On the other hand, other factors that paved way for the failure of the RA 6766 are the unpreparedness of Cordillera people for self-rule manifested on assertiveness of different organizations regarding constitutionality of EO 220, presence of militants, factions and conventional organizations and system of landlordism and tenancy within the Cordillera. The campaign of 'no' vote by the CPA on the RA 6766 as a bogus autonomy law influenced the minds of Cordillera people that contributed to the failure of the ratification of the first organic act.

Analyzing the provisions of the first autonomy law, there are vague provisions stipulated therein regarding source, conditions and manner of acquiring financial assistance for drive of development within the area, overlapping powers of the regional governor, compensation of public officials, and manner of acquisition of ancestral domains as well as the exploitation of resources within the region.

The second attempt for regional autonomy in 1998 also failed as people voted 'no' for the ratification of the RA 8438. The failure of the second plebiscite was triggered by limited campaign period of the COMELEC causing insufficiency of information and persistent misinformation among Cordillerans, problems on allotted campaign funds, ban on political advertisement in relation to the second plebiscite, campaign of 'no' vote waged by mass democratic and militant groups such as CPA, CPLA, CPDF and CPRAG, and widespread protest against power-hungry and traditional politicians who campaigned hardly for regional autonomy. Looking into provisions of the RA 8438, the organic act has no clear elaborations on the matter of the ancestral lands and customary laws. Regarding the mode of exploitation of the natural resources of the region, the RA 84838 contained lot of provisions which were not complementary but contradictory to each other. Moreover, provisions on the RA 8438 vaguely stated the qualifications for the high ranking positions within the regional government such as belongingness of an official to the native cultural group of the region as envisioned on the concept of genuine autonomy.

Igorots have varying conceptions regarding autonomy such as independence and self-government, however, they were unable to explain further its implications. They tend to associate the word autonomy with the events happening on the ARMM and often described it in the pattern how government dealt with separatist movements. Their concept of autonomy could be derived from readings on books, class discussions, and available media like newspapers, televisions, radio and social networking sites. Moreover, visions of autonomy by the Igorots is moulded by their experiences of political, economic, socio-cultural situations within the Cordillera

Administrative Region wherein such experiences could reflect their readiness to assail the self-rule.

At present, a third organic act of the Cordillera is in the offing supported by the Cordillera Regional Development Council.

The Sanctity of the land: The basis of the Cordillera's notion of autonomy

This section evaluates different factors affecting visions of autonomy by the indigenous peoples of the Cordilleras (Igorots) and at the same time challenge these different factors through treatises on the land as envisioned by *Laudato si'* (reflection).

Indigenous Theology of the Land

Indigenous peoples (IP) believe that land was granted to them by Kabunian and entrusted to them to harness, to cultivate and develop, to take care, 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 defined the people's role as stewards or guardians of the land. Since time immemorial, the indigenous peoples (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 their permanent settlements, constructed their rice terraces, identified their territories from boundary to boundary, and were living peacefully. They have developed a culture that defined their actions, their behaviors, in order to survive.¹³

As human beings, our relationship with the natural world is, by definition, a social one. The ways we see and use nature are products of how society is organized and how we, as members of that society, see nature's value. In other words, our relationship with nature is socially constructed and socially 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 dynamic relations between local people and the state presuppose the interplay of culture and religion, power, history, and human agency. Given this

¹³ NCIP, Benguet. n.d. <http://www.benguet.gov.ph/index.php?Itemid=301> (accessed April 2015).

perspective, the study of ancestral land struggles is seen to have a primary subtext in a theological discourse that does not examine merely objects and events that occur in the natural world but also meaningful actions and expressions of utterance, symbols, artifacts, texts of various kinds and subjects that express themselves as well as others who interpret the expressions they produce and receive.

The struggle for ancestral land as a discourse, however, 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 could deviate from the actual scene, resulting in a gap between “what should be” and “what actually happened.” This gap is also a venue for negotiation of power and meaning among the parties involved.

The engagement of what could be referred to then as an indigenous land theology consisting of the system of interrelated indigenous knowledge, beliefs, attitudes and practices about land and ecology on the one hand and the Judaeo-Christian environmental theology on the other could be approached as a dialogue of two spiritualities that could enrich each other in inspiring and illuminating the indigenous peoples' struggle for their ancestral lands in a kind of communicative theological action that is both empowering and liberative.¹⁴

Notion of Land as Common Home

*At heart, this document, addressed to “every person on the planet”
is a call for a new way of looking at things,
a “bold cultural revolution.” (Laudato Si', No. 3, 114).*

The world faces more daunting environmental challenges. Global warming has caused climate changes disrupting the natural cycles and weather patterns. While hurricanes are getting stronger, droughts are becoming longer and more intense. Mountain glaciers around the world have receded, increasing sea levels which could bury low-lying islands underwater.¹⁵ Global warming is partly caused by greenhouse gases released by natural phenomena. Large quantities of these gases come from anthropogenic activities like the burning of fossil fuels.¹⁶ Changing pattern of rainfall leads to local shortage of food and health problems and even armed disputes.¹⁷ Many water sources are threatened by faulty waste disposal, industrial pollutants, fertilizer

¹⁴ Leonardo Boff, *Ecology and Liberation* (New York: Orbis Books, 1996), 10.

¹⁵ A. Gore, “Making Changes for Our Children,” *Vital Speeches for the Day*, vol. 73., no.5 (2007), 182.

¹⁶ R. S., Guzman, *Environmental Education for Sustainable Development* (Quezon City: 2000), 2.

¹⁷ J. Broome, “The Ethics of Climate Change,” *Scientific American*, vol. 298, no. 6 (2008), 68.

un-off, and saltwater intrusion into underground aquifer leading to unsafe drinking water and depletion of ground water.¹⁸ Soil has been contaminated by excess of salts and hazardous chemicals. Erosion and exhaustion of nutrients and trace elements have degraded the quality of soil resulting in poor crop harvests. Deforestation and mining are among human activities which have adversely affected biodiversity.¹⁹

On the local level, experts note that the Philippines have a “low adaptive capacity of human systems while also bedeviled by high vulnerability to climate change.” The country ranks fourth in the global climate risk index and 15 out of its 16 regions are vulnerable to sea level rise.²⁰ In response to ecological crisis, Pope Francis wrote his encyclical letter ‘*Laudato Si*’ issued on June 18, 2015. Saint Francis of Assisi was Pope’s inspiration and guide in writing his encyclical. He reminds us that our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a mother who opens her arms to embrace us. She sustains and governs us. This sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her and the irresponsible use and abuse of the goods he bestowed on us. The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life.

This is why the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; the “new poor” she “groans in travail” (Rom 8:22). We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth;²¹ our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters. Nothing in this world is indifferent to us.²² The message of Pope’s Francis encyclical ‘*Laudato Si*’ focuses on the environmental responsibility arising in humans due to ethical effects after the catholic teachings, practices to respect humanity and natural world.²³

Hence, *Laudato Si*’ summarizes Pope Francis’ challenge to seek sustainable and integral development in order to protect our common home. A new dialogue on the future of the planet is needed. While he acknowledges the work of people to address environmental degradation and social injustice, he also recognizes that this work must be shared by more people, for indeed these concerns affect us all. Hence, five themes come to the fore:

¹⁸ P. Rogers, “Facing the Fresh Water Crisis,” *Scientific American*, vol. 299, no. 2 (2008), 28.

¹⁹ Guzman, *Ibid*.

²⁰ P. Tubeza, “Business Acts on Global Warming,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (2009), 14.

²¹ cf. Gen 2:7. New American Bible.

²² Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter of the Holy Father Francis on the Care for our Common Home: *Laudato Si*’ (24 May 2015).

²³ M. Holine, *Finding the Message of Pope’s Encyclical*, vol. 57 (2015).

1. *Gospel of Creation*, which outlines the contribution of religious beliefs and faith traditions to an integral ecology and human development. Acknowledging the role of science and philosophy, *Laudato Si* also seeks to show how faith convictions can offer a foundation of care for the environment and care for the poor and most vulnerable sectors of society. As Christians, we are reminded of our responsibility for creation and are called to reaffirm our commitment to care for the environment.

2. *The Problem of Technocratic Paradigm and Anthropocentrism*, which Pope Francis tries to ascertain the deepest causes of the ecological crisis, which include the technology, globalization, and modern anthropocentrism. He believes that technology gives those who possess knowledge on such technologies and have the economic resources to use them an impressive dominance over the whole of humanity and the entire world.

3. *Not just Ecosystem but Integral Ecology*, which highlights that nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves, or just simply a mere setting in which we live. Pope Francis believes that we are not facing two separate crises, but rather one complex crisis that is both social and environmental.

4. *Need for Dialogue and Action*, which spotlights the need for a change of direction and other courses of action and outlines the major paths of dialogue which can help us escape the spiral of self-destruction that currently engulfs us. Pope Francis advocates dialogue on the environment in the international community, dialogue for new national and local policies, the politics and economy in dialogue for human fulfilment, and the religions in dialogue with science.

5. *Ecological Education and Spirituality*, which calls for a kind of change in terms of our lifestyles and particularly in our consumption. We, as consumers, have the power to influence political, social and economic systems, simply by our attitude towards consumption. A new education is needed to understand humanity's covenant with the environment. Environmental education, this has been mostly about informing, rather than in instilling new habits, attitudes and values. A more practical environmental education is needed that will encourage responsibility and action.

Proposed Framework for a New Organic Act

*We can awaken our hearts and move towards an "ecological conversion"
in which we see the intimate connection between God and all beings,
and more readily listen to the "cry of the earth and the cry of the poor."
(Laudato Si' # 49).*

Through the challenges of *Laudato Si*, this section attempts to reconstruct the framework for the next organic act of Cordillera Autonomous Region (response). Based on the failures of the two (2) organic acts and the conceptions of autonomy by the indigenous peoples considering the present condition of CAR, the following themes of *Laudato Si* are therefore recommended to be included as considerations for the next organic act of CAR.

First, an emphasis on the *Gospel of Creation* must be inculcated in Igorot's consciousness. Pope Francis shares this world view that land is sacred. In his encyclical *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis developed the spirituality of cultural ecology based on cultural values as against consumerist's culture.

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. Then 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," and the water which had come together he named "Sea."²⁴ 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.²⁵

Land is life! Land is sacred! That is the undeniable creed of the indigenous peoples. Land is life and land is sacred is a worldview that threads their spiritual rituals and worships and their worldviews. The ethnicity of the indigenous peoples is the most significant aspect of their claim to the 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 land where they were born and have defined their humanity. Their land of origin is not only the source of their sustenance, it is 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.

Land is a central issue to indigenous peoples because it defines their very existence. Since time immemorial, Philippine ancestors believed in a cosmology

²⁴ 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.

²⁵ Aurea G. Miclat-Teves, "Land is Life: Reclaiming the Ancestral Domain of the Aetas for Food Security", *Promoting Indigenous Knowledge for Food Security*, A Source Book (2009), 79.

where the Creator (known by various names such as Bathala, Kabunian, Magbabaya, Apo Sandawa) was linked with other deities and spirits. In Philippine origin myths, the land and everything connected to it were created by this deity. Because land was of divine origin, it was sacred. Being sacred, it was not subject to ownership, sale, purchase, or lease. Among indigenous peoples in the Philippines, there was a widespread belief that land was held usufruct; it could not be removed from the community's use.

The interaction of the ancestors with the land varied according to how they produced what they needed for food. The indigenous peoples do not believe in private ownership of land. Rather, they subscribe to communal owner through the concept of ancestral lands and ancestral domains. Ancestral domains is defined under R.A. 8371 or the IPRA Law as: "all areas generally belonging to ICCs/IPs comprising lands, inland waters, coastal areas, and natural resources therein, held under a claim of ownership, occupied or possessed by ICCs/IPs, by themselves or through their ancestors, communally or individually since time immemorial, continuously to the present except when interrupted by war, *force majeure* or displacement by force, deceit, stealth or as a consequence of government projects or any other voluntary dealings entered into by government and private individuals/corporations, and which are necessary to ensure their economic, social and cultural welfare.

It shall include ancestral lands, forests, pasture, residential, agricultural, and other lands individually owned whether alienable and disposable or otherwise, hunting grounds, burial grounds, worship areas, bodies of water, mineral and other natural resources, and lands which may no longer be exclusively occupied by ICCs/IPs but from which they traditionally had access to for their subsistence and traditional activities, particularly the home ranges of ICCs/IPs who are still nomadic and/or shifting cultivators.²⁶

Ancestral lands on the other hand is defined by the same law as: "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."²⁷

²⁶ See Republic Act 8371 (IPRA Law).

²⁷ *Ibid.*

Hence, for the indigenous peoples, in the words of Rev. Rex Reyes, secretary general of the NCCP, 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 that is upon it and not to be exploited to satisfy the greed of the few. Such indigenous people’s perspective resonates with the Christian understanding of responsible stewardship. Responsible stewardship and indigenous spirituality uphold the reverence of life, the good interrelationship that should be the dynamic of a community and sensitive to the well-being of future generations. These practical knowledge and foresight explain why indigenous people 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 Makiling 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.”²⁸

Second, *integral ecology* must be the thrust of the Cordilleran autonomy. Our world at present is experiencing a fundamental crisis: “A crisis in global economy, global ecology, and global politics. The lack of a grand vision, the tangle of unresolved problems, political paralysis, mediocre political leadership with little insight or foresight, and in general too little sense for the commonwealth are seen everywhere.”²⁹ Javier shares his views on our present-day experience of global crisis when he said that:

Humans have become deaf and blind and insensitive to the physical, ethical and religious degradation and desecration of the Earth that the *anthropocentrism* or more specifically, the *androcentrism* of contemporary cultures and religions have created. Likewise, human have been re-cast into *techno-sapiens* that favor much of the technological advances at the expense

²⁸ <http://nccphilippines.org/2016/09/mga-katutubokristyanong-pamayanan-kinakalinga-ang-buhaykalikasan-kabundukan/>.

²⁹ Hans Küng, *A Global Ethic. The Declaration of the Parliament of the World’s Religions* (London: SCM Press, 1993), 2.

of the *homo sapiens* and the natural world. The Earth is no longer a source of calm and peace, no longer a pure promise of goodness and happiness.³⁰

Hans Kung claims that “the agony is so pervasive and urgent that we are compelled to name its manifestations so that the depth of this pain may be made clear. Peace eludes us – the planet is being destroyed – neighbors live in fear – women and men are estranged from each other – children die!”³¹ This is a situation that pushes people to the margins. In this context, the task of a missionary is to a *home-builder*. Javier stresses that “the missionary invites the religious-other to create with him a larger family where a welcoming atmosphere and warm hospitality and friendship are real.”³²

This environmental crisis should bring us back to our sense. If this is done, there is a chance that our sense of the holy can be saved. We need a new worldview, a worldview that emphasizes the integrity of creation. By this we mean, as Javier claims in his article, “*The Earth is Sacred*,” the value of all creatures in and for themselves, for one another, and for God, and their interconnectedness in a diverse whole that has unique value for God, together constitute the integrity of creation.³³

Pope Francis recognizes the role of the indigenous cultural communities in practicing a sound cultural ecology based on the notion that land is of divine origin, and therefore, sacred. “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.”³⁴

Hence, ecological justice must be promoted. It is not enough to defend human rights. Parallel to this endeavor is the defense of the rights of the Earth, or

³⁰ Edgar Javier, “The Earth is Sacred,” *Religious Life Asia*, vol. XII, no. 4 (October-December 2010), 3.

³¹ Hans Küng, *Global Responsibility: In Search of a New World Ethic* (London: SCM Press, 1991), 1.

³² Edgar Javier, “The Missionary amidst Different Cultures and Religious Traditions: Re-imaging the Missionary Identity in Contemporary Times,” *Religious Life Asia*, vol. XIII, no. 3 (July-September 2011), 49.

³³ Javier, “The Earth is Sacred,” 6.

³⁴ *Laudato Si'*, #146.

the integrity of creation. To achieve this goal, confidence in the power of science and technology or human power should be replaced, if not tempered, by confidence in the God of Biblical tradition. The human vocation to be God's co-creator must be relaunched in order for a habitable world to emerge.

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. Javier quoting Dianne Bergant argues "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."³⁵

Third, *ecological spirituality* must develop among the Igorots of the Cordilleras. In the daily life of the indigenous peoples, this belief in the Great Spirit and other spirits is translated into respect and care for Mother Nature, which is the foundation of ecological spirituality. Indigenous peoples look at themselves as integral part of nature, and hence, one has to live in productive harmony with nature. Unlike the prevailing worldviews of the capitalists and socialists, the indigenous peoples view of nature is not something to be dominated. They lived with the land. The land is viewed not as a resource to be exploited for profit but the source of their group's being. The thought that one is a mere part of Nature, when understood seriously, is a very humbling experience.

This worldview of considering oneself as mere part of nature is very much contrary to the belief that man is created to dominate other creatures (The Dominion Theory). It may be true that the Book of Genesis states that: 'And now we will make human beings; they will be like us and resemble us. They will have power over the fish, the birds, and all animals, domestic and wild, large and small.' So God created human beings, making them to be like himself."

For the indigenous peoples, the emphasis is not on the power of man over the fishes, the birds and animals in the sense of destroying them for his own sake, but on the image and likeness of God. This simply means that God has created human beings as stewards of his creation: "I am putting you in charge of the fish, the birds, and all the wild animals." Fr. Diarmuid O'Murchu laments this reality when he said: "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,

³⁵ Javier, "The Earth is Sacred," 5.

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.”³⁶

This kind of spirituality, which is the belief in the Great Spirit is akin to Christianity's Pneumatology. This was explained by O'Murchu by quoting and expounding the idea of a German theologian Jurgen Moltmann: “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 together and keeping them in life. The inner secret of creation is this indwelling of God.” For Moltmann, the Spirit uniquely represents God's indwelling of the whole creation... The indwelling of God in creation is facilitated primarily by the Spirit, described by Moltmann as the principle of evolution... the Spirit of the universe, its total cohesion, its structures, its formation, its energy. “God the Holy Spirit has the exclusive quality of saturating creation, and it is God as Spirit through whom creation experiences this special immanence and indwelling of God... Through the energies and potentialities of the Spirit, the Creator is himself present in his creation. The Holy Spirit is nonetheless also the Spirit of Christ and requires the redemption wrought in Christ to act effectively in the world.”³⁷

That Kabunyan is himself present in his creation is not only a concept or an idea for the indigenous peoples but a way of life they practice every day. For the indigenous peoples, spirituality is a lived experience, not institutionalized. It is a kind of an incarnational spirituality. By incarnational spirituality, we mean the life of our human spirit that is situated and rooted in the human flesh. By this orientation, we are shifting our understanding of spirituality from institutionalized spirituality to incarnational spirituality, from spirituality that is associated with an institutional way of the living to a spirituality that is rooted in our common humanity.³⁸

Conclusion

The failure of the first organic act was purported by inadequate information of the people regarding the autonomy law and the contradicting concept of genuine autonomy for people of Cordillera and the national government. For people of

³⁶ Diarmuid O'Murchu, *God in the Midst of Change: Wisdom for Confusing Times* (New York: Orbis Books, 2013), 71.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 139.

³⁸ Julio Xavier Labayen, “Human Rights and Spirituality,” *Not to Hurt the Womb That Gave Birth; Dynamics of Neglect and Dynamics of Spirituality* (Asian Human Rights Commission, 1998): 133.

Cordillera, genuine regional autonomy means self-rule on the basis of broad *Igorots'* democracy, through which indigenous peoples can exercise the full range of their rights, pursue their collective interests, and define their own path of development while on national government's perspective aims merely to establish a regional autonomous government to comply with a Constitutional provision and structural in nature.

Moreover, the second attempt for regional autonomy in 1998 also failed as people voted 'no' for the ratification of the RA 8438. The failure of the second plebiscite was triggered by limited campaign period of the Comelec causing insufficiency of information and persistent misinformation among Cordillerans, problems on allotted campaign funds, ban on political advertisement in relation to the second plebiscite, campaign of 'no' vote waged by mass democratic and militant groups such as CPA, CPLA, CPDF and CPRAG, and widespread protest against power-hungry and traditional politicians who campaigned hardly for regional autonomy.

Considering the failures of the first two (2) organic acts and as the Cordillerans conceptualize anew the proposal for the next organic act for the Cordilleran autonomy, a workable framework must be made. Authentic autonomy for the *Igorots* cannot happen unless a serious dialogue is made. Failure in this regard results in estrangement whereby *Igorots* go about dreaming for self-governance whose elements are considered alien, and therefore create less impact. It was in this principle in mind that an attempt of reappropriating the themes of *Laudato Si* on the gospel of creation, integral ecology and ecological spirituality, to create alternative frameworks for the next organic act of the Cordilleran autonomy was made. The application of these themes will help the indigenous peoples of the Cordilleras discover some possibilities of a meaningful and relevant autonomy. For the *Igorots*, an authentic autonomy must start with their culture (land) and should give particular attention to their issues of cultural identity and liberation.^{PS}

References

Books

- Boff, L. *Ecology and Liberation*. New York: Orbis Books, 1996.
- Curtis, M. *The Great Political Theories, Volume 2*. Harper Collins, 2008.
- Guzman, R. S. *Environmental Education for Sustainable Development*. Quezon City, 2000.
- Küng, Hans. *A Global Ethic: The Declaration of the Parliament of the World's Religions*. London: SCM Press, 1993.

_____. *Global Responsibility: In Search of a New World Ethic*. London: SCM Press, 1991.

Manaligod, R. *Struggle against Development Aggression*. Quezon City: SBA Printers, 1990.

Palmer, J. *Environmental Education in the 21st Century: Theory, Practice, Progress and Promise*. New York: Routledge, 1998.

Encyclical

Pope Francis. "Encyclical Letter of the Holy Father Francis on the Care for our Common Home." *Laudato Si'* (24 May 2015).

Journal and Articles

Arcellana, E. "A Theory of Philippine Politics and its Implications for National Development." *Philippine Political Science Journal* Vol. 3 Iss. 3 (1976): 61 - 69.

Broome, J. "The Ethics of Climate Change." *Scientific American*. 298 no.6 (2008): 68-73.

Carino, J. "Ancestral Land in the Cordillera." *Pantatavalan* (1998): 1-15.

Gore, A. "Making Changes for Our Children." *Vital Speeches for the Day* 73. No.5 (2007): 182.

Javier, Edgar. "The Missionary amidst Different Cultures and Religious Traditions: Re-imagining the Missionary Identity in Contemporary Times." *Religious Life Asia* Vol. XIII No. 3 (July-September 2011): 49-50.

_____. "The Earth is Sacred." *Religious Life Asia* Vol. XII no. 4 (October-December 2010): 1-9.

Labayen, Julio Xavier. "Human Rights and Spirituality." *Not to Hurt the Womb That Gave Birth; Dynamics of Neglect and Dynamics of Spirituality*. (Asian Human Rights Commission, 1998): 133-149.

Miclat-Teves, Aurea G. "Land is Life: Reclaiming the Ancestral Domain of the Aetas for Food Security." *Promoting Indigenous Knowledge for Food Security, A Source Book* (2009:79-94.

Molintas, J.M. "The Philippine Indigenous Peoples' Struggle for Land and Life: Challenging Legal Texts." *Arizona Journal of International & Comparative Law* (2004): 269-306.

Richards, M. "Common Property Resource Institutions and Forest management in Latin America." *Development and Change* 28 (1) (1997): 95-117.

Rogers, P. "Facing the Fresh Water Crisis." *Scientific American* 299 no.2 (2008): 28-37.

Skene, C. "The Global Economy and the Erosion of Civil Rights: The Case of the Philippines." *Philippine Political Science Journal* Vol. 27 Issue 50 (2006): 61 - 88.

Wiersma, L.L. "Indigenous Lands as Cultural Property: A New Approach to Indigenous Land Claims." *Duke Law Journal* (2005): 1061-1088.

Magazines, Pamphlets and Newspapers

Balao, J. The Land Problem of the Cordillera National Minorities. *First Multisectoral Land Congress*. (March 11-14, 1983).

Holine, M. Finding the Message of Pope's Encyclical Vol. 57 (2015).

Northern Forum on Church and Society. *The Writing on the Wall* 11 (2) (2002, October): 1.

Tubeza, P. Business Acts on Global Warming. *Philippine Daily Inquirer*. 14 (2009).

E-Sources

"A World Resources Institute": project.wri.org/sd-pams-database/philippines/electric-power-industry-reform-act (accessed March 29, 2015).

International Finance Corporation: [http://ifcext.ifc.org/ifcext/spiwebsite1.nsf/ProjectDisplay/SPI_DP26996\(2008\)](http://ifcext.ifc.org/ifcext/spiwebsite1.nsf/ProjectDisplay/SPI_DP26996(2008)) (accessed March 29, 2015).

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

CPA. www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/workshop_IPPE_cpp.doc (accessed March 2015).

Merriam-Webster. *Dictionary*. m-w.com: <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/development> (accessed December 2014).

Merriam-Webster. m-w.com: <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/development>.

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

Shah, A. *Global Issues.org*. Global Issues: <http://www.globalissues.org/article/425/poverty-and-the-environment> (2003, April 20) (accessed December 10, 2014).

"Energy for Economic Growth." *World Economic Forum*: [http://reports.weforum.org/energy-for-economic-growth-energy-vision-update-2012/#\(2012\)](http://reports.weforum.org/energy-for-economic-growth-energy-vision-update-2012/#(2012)).

