Method and Themes for a Philippine Theology of Development

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Abstract: A theology of development for the Philippines should emerge from the Philippines. In this article, I articulate a method and starting points for a Philippine theology of development, focusing on communities often marginalized: the poorest, indigenous, Muslims, women, and LGBTQ. Building on local concepts, such as *kapwa*, I argue that this theology of development should emerge from walking alongside the marginalized communities, listening to them, and empowering their voices, as they call for development as the holistic wellbeing of the earth and its peoples. Emerging themes include the sacredness of the earth, communion, all human beings as created in God's image, and Jesus' life and actions. The emerging praxis articulates the need to 1. care for the environment; 2. remove economic growth from the definition of sustainable development; and 3. provide a holistic education and safety for each human being.

Keywords: Theology • Development • *Kapwa* • Philippines • Marginalized • Wellbeing

Introduction

In the global North, the Philippines is considered a developing country. Historically, in the theory and practice of development, the global North has both defined development and the policies needed to achieve it. This is also true for the theology and ethics supporting particular development policies and practices. Theology has tended to emerge from the top down, for example, from the Vatican. However, a theology of development, as well as development itself, its policies, and practices, should emerge from those experiencing the effects of this development. Rather than being the object of development, the Philippines should be the author of its own development and theology, in particular, those most marginalized in the Philippines.

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Why does a theology of development from and for the Philippines matter? First, there has been little attention to a theology of development in the context of the Philippines, although there are vibrant liberation theologies. Second, the Philippines should determine its own process of development based on its own value systems. Finally, it should enact development practices based on its shared vision. This article offers a method to understand Philippine perspectives on development and theology, providing some key concepts emerging from the literature in the Philippines. The purpose of this article is to offer a starting point by which each person can be empowered, able to life in all its fullness.

In this article, in order to think about a theology of development, I begin with the people in the Philippines most excluded from the decision-making processes of development and theology. The people who have been harmed by or excluded from the previous practices of theology and development should be enabled to create theologies and development practices that will include and support them. So, the first step is to determine who the marginalized communities are in the Philippines; the second step is to be with these marginalized people; and the third step is to listen to and prioritize the perspectives of the marginalized.

Next, I consider the theological themes emerging from these marginalized communities, including the sacredness of the earth, the importance of communion, and within Christian communities, the notion of all created in God's image and the focus on Jesus' life and actions. From these theological themes emerge calls for praxis to care for the environment, including sustaining the forests and water and using the land for the common good; to remove economic growth from the concept of sustainable development and focusing on meeting the basic needs of each human being, ensuring a moral wage,

reducing inequality; and more broadly, to provide a holistic education and safety.

Finally, I address the need to enact this praxis, centering the marginalized voices at a regional and national level and supporting and working toward the understanding of development that the marginalized communities articulate.

Methodology and the Literature

My method comes from liberation theology, commonly called the hermeneutical circle.[1] It is a spiral of action and reflection in community. The first step is to find the community; here, I prioritize communities marginalized from decision-making processes of theology and development. The second step is to see the reality in the community, which requires being with and listening to these communities. The third step is a dialogue between life and faith in the community. The "final" step is action based on this dialogue. "Final" is in quotations because this method is a spiral, whereby after action, the "seeing of reality" begins again. No theology or development practice will be the "final form", as it is a continual process of action and reflection; in addition, there is no a priori theology or development practice.

In terms of defining theology and development,

[1] In liberation theology, the hermeneutical circle is a prominent method of action and reflection. Drawing on Paul Ricoeur, among others, liberation theologians articulate a spiral in which the biblical texts, life experiences, and academic analysis all inform each other; each is set side by side, and we read life and the text and analyze them in the light of each other. See for example, Juan Luis Segundo, *The Liberation of Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1976)*;* Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1987)*,* and; Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Paul Ricoeur and the Methodology of the Theology of Liberation* (Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of St. Andrews, 1993), among others.

theology is often defined as faith seeking understanding. However, it is also the understanding of reality seeking faith, as Fides del Castillo stated.[2] Our experiences influence our thinking, actions, and understanding of God, just as much as our understanding of God influences our thinking, actions, and experiences. Hence, theology is not limited to thinking about God; it includes our actions; in this case, the theology of development includes our practices of development. We "do" theology in our daily lives through our actions. This understanding of theology does not come from an elite group who introduces it to others; rather, it emerges from the communities themselves. The definition of development emerges throughout the article, since I focus on marginalized understandings. As a starting point, we can consider development as aiming to achieve the wellbeing of humans and the earth.

In a recent book addressing a theology of international development, I argued that there were three key aspects to begin a discussion of theology and development, an understanding of empowerment, a clear definition of justice, and the need to be with the marginalized, those experiencing the effects of development.[3] Up to now, much development practice has been faith-based but without a clearly articulated theology driving the practices. During the past 50 years, there have been attempts at a theology of development from the global North; however, what emerged instead are theologies of liberation, arguing against the harmful effects of development from the global South (struggle in

[2] Fides del Castillo, "Laylayan Theology: Listening to the Voices from the Margins," *Religions* 13, no. 5 (April 24, 2022): 391, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13050391.

[3] Thia Cooper, *A Theology of International Development*, Routledge Research in Religion and Development (London: Routledge, 2020).

the context of the Philippines).[4] As this article argues, an effective theology of development needs to emerge from those experiencing the effects of development. This theology should be local, contextual, and it will likely not be systematic as there are varying forms of marginalization requiring varying practices. One might prefer to use the term "theologies"; however, the goal is to find the commonalities in terms of methods and themes whereby humans can be helped rather than harm. So too, the development practices will be local and contextual, articulating a notion of development through the commonalities, striving to work together toward a shared vision.

As someone who does not live in the Philippines with marginalized groups, it is not my place to define a theology of development for the Philippines. This would be another top-down approach. However, I can provide a method to work toward such a theology and highlight the themes that appear to be emerging from the marginalized groups, as noted in the recent literature in the Philippines. For this article, then, I reviewed the past five years of articles from the Philippines discussing areas of theology and its intersections with marginalized groups. The majority of the literature discussed economically poor Christians, for example, in the context of the BECs, as well as the indigenous communities. Three further groups in the Philippine context less often referred to in the literature were the LGBTQ community, women, and Muslims. Where some articles articulated indigenous perspectives, only a few articles considered Philippine Muslim, female, and LGBTQ conceptions of theology and of development.

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[4] Thia Cooper, *Controversies in Political Theology: Development or Liberation?* (London: SCM Press, 2007).

1. A Method for a Theology of Development

A. Which communities are marginalized in the Philippines?

In the context of the Philippines, whose voices are centered and whose voices are marginalized? There are two ways in which communities can be marginalized. One is to be deliberately excluded from decision making, and the other is simply not to be considered in decision-making processes. Examples from across the globe include people in prison, the homeless, children, the elderly, LGBTQ, and a variety of minoritized groups, whether minoritized due to race, religion, ethnicity, class, or sex. From the recent literature, I discerned five groups understood as excluded in some way from decision-making processes, although there are certainly more, since marginalization encompasses a broad range of groups, as noted above. These five groups were Muslims, LGBTQ, women, the indigenous, and the economically poor.

i. Muslims: As the Philippines is often seen as a Christian (mainly Catholic nation), people from other religious traditions can be marginalized. In particular, Muslim communities were highlighted; see for example, Alizaman Gamon and Marian Tagoranao's article on zakat.[5]
ii. LGBTQ: As in many other countries, the LGBTQ community remains marginalized. Governments and many religious traditions, including Christian denominations, fail to fully include this community. Here, see, for example, del Castillo's study of LGBTQ

[5] Alizaman Gamon and Marian Saidona Tagoranao, "Zakat and Poverty Alleviation in a Secular State: The Case of Muslim Minorities in the Philippines," *Studia Islamika, Indonesian Journal for Islamic Studies* 25, no. 1 (2018): 97–134.

youth,[6] as well as Joseph Goh's article on the need to trans/form church.[7]

iii. Women: Again, as in many countries, there are a variety of contexts where women's decision-making status is unequal to men's, particularly in religious communities. See, for example, the work of Rae Sanchez[8], Agnes Brazal[9], and Alfonso Suico[10].

iv. Indigenous: Again, as in many countries, the Philippines has a diverse indigenous population, often excluded from the national conversation. See for example, del Castillo's study of the beliefs of indigenous Christian youth[11] and Jerry Imbong's interviews with indigenous people in Mindanao,[12] as well as several others cited throughout this article.

v. The Economically Poor: Finally, people who are marginalized due to low wages or entirely excluded from the economy due to unemployment, also lack a

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[6] Fides del Castillo et al., "Centrality of Religiosity among Select LGBTQs in the Philippines," *Religions* 12, no. 2 (January 28, 2021): 83, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12020083.

[7] Joseph Goh, "Trans/Forming Church in the Asia Pacific Region: Narratives of Hospitable Ecclesiology by Philippine and Tongan Transgender Women," *QUEST: Studies on Religion & Culture in Asia* 4 (2020 2019).

[8] Rae Sanchez, "Disrupting Disruptions: Charting and Challenging Notions of Gender in Philippine Feminist Theologizing," *Feminist Theology* 30, no. 3 (May 2022): 332–52, https://doi.org/10.1177/09667350221085162.

[9] Agnes Brazal, "Ethics of Care in Laudato Si': A Postcolonial Ecofeminist Critique," *Feminist Theology* 29, no. 3 (May 2021): 220–33, https://doi.org/10.1177/09667350211000614.

[10] Alfonso Suico, "In Search of the Babayi: A Quest for a Distinct Filipina Theoethics," *Journal of Asian Orientation in Theology* 1, no. 2 (August 2019): 199–218.

[11] Fides del Castillo, "Re-Imagining the Religious Beliefs and Cultural Practices of Indigenous Christian Youth," *Religions* 13, no. 6 (June 13, 2022): 539, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13060539.

[12] Jerry D. Imbong, "'Bungkalan' and the Manobo-Pulangihon Tribe's Resistance to Corporate Land-Grab in Bukidnon, Mindanao," *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples* 17, no. 1 (March 2021): 23–31, https://doi.org/10.1177/1177180120967724.

> voice in decision making. This group was the main focus of the articles in the context of theology and development.

The task of those working in theology and development is to be with these marginalized groups and also to work to understand which other groups are being excluded.

B. Being With Marginalized Communities

The second task then of articulating a theology of development is to be in community with the marginalized. Hence, we need to be in community with Muslims, LGBTQ, women, the indigenous, and the poor, if we are not already. Lisa Asedillo, discussing a theology of struggle, stated "The intent is to produce theology that begins with the daily lives of Filipino people."[13]. A theology of development also begins in daily life, being with the marginalized communities, enabling them to define both theology and development, as Stephanie Puen remarked with particular reference to indigenous groups.[14]

The Base Ecclesial Communities (BECs), still active in the Philippines, are one example, associated with the Catholic tradition.[15] These small communities work to enact change, based on their shared lives, beliefs, and

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[13] Lisa Asedillo, "The Theology of Struggle: Critiques of Church and Society in the Philippines (1970s-1990s)," *Indonesian Journal of Theology* 9, no. 1 (August 12, 2021): 62–92, https://doi.org/10.46567/ijt.v9i1.187.

[14] Stephanie Ann Puen, "Contributions of Catholic Social Thought to Doughnut Economics to Achieve a Vision of Flourishing of Creation," *Journal of Dharma* 46, no. 3 (2021): 295–312.

[15] Ferdinand Dagmang, "Culture as Enabler for SDGs: Learning from Jesus of Nazareth's Vision/Mission," *Journal of Dharma* 46, no. 3 (2021): 345–62.

actions. David Lim noted the importance of "disciple-making in small groups… through participative life-sharing".[16] To hear the theology emerging from these communities, we need to share life with them. However, we should not simply rely on our church-related communities alone. For example, del Castillo mentioned that while the BECs continue to thrive, the younger generation participates less.[17] When sitting with the marginalized, listening to young people and the elderly is crucial, as people under the age of 18 or over the age of 60 are often excluded from the economy and decision-making processes. Further, many of the marginalized communities are not connected to churches.

To be with the marginalized means to immerse ourselves in the marginalized communities, wherever and whoever they are. Dave Capucao linked the concept of immersion to *babad*.[18] For Capucao, immersion includes becoming aware of a community and participating in the life of the community, which means taking a risk, as we may be entering an unknown that will change us. We do not enter a community to share our knowledge, e.g., to impart a theology of development. We enter a community to learn, experience, and listen. Immersion brings knowledge, as we listen and act with others. Importantly, immersion is a process, rather than a moment; in this process, a theology of development can emerge. Immersion commits to being with the marginalized in community, without an end point.

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[16] David Lim, "A Missiology of Philippine Roman Catholicism on Overcoming Nominal Christianity," East-West Center, July 1, 2018, http://ewcenter.org/?p=1883.

[17] Fides del Castillo, "Gifted to Give: Perspectives on Faith and the Catholic Church in the Philippines," *Dossier Philippinen*, 2021, 159–70.

[18] Dave Capucao, "Exploring the Spirituality of Babad," *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue*, no. 1 (2021): 49–67, https://doi.org/10.2143/SID.31.1.3289543.

Immersion in a community is a form of solidarity. Leo-Martin Ocampo explained the importance of the translation of the word solidarity in *Laudato Si'*[19], as *pagdadamayan*, the helping of others because one is a part of others; one suffers with others.[20] In addition, *damay*, mutual assistance, includes "*damay* as the concrete assistance that is given, *damay* as a sense of personal involvement in an event, and *damay* as active participation."[21] This is a sharing of oneself, one's life, and one's possessions. We need to know our shared selves, *kapwa,* which only happens by living with each other and listening to each other. In particular, we start with the normally sidelined communities. For Fritz Melodi, we need to be willing "to suffer in the practice of solidarity in behalf of others."[22] Becoming part of marginalized communities is to share in the suffering, as we work together to end it. This is critical, as for the body to be healthy, all its parts need to be healthy. Ocampo quoted the local proverb, "the pain of the pinky is felt by the whole body."[23] Each individual is part of the whole human community and should be fully included.

In this solidarity in community, we also participate in interreligious and intercultural dialogue, as both Capucao and Jojo Fung detailed. This interreligious dialogue accompanies and experiences others' religious

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[19] *Laudato Si'* is a papal encyclical written by Pope Francis in 2015.

[20] Leo-Martin Angelo R. Ocampo, "Solidarity as Pagdadamayan in the Filipino Version of Laudato Si': An Experiment in Inculturated Translation," *Landas* 32, no. 1 (2018): 43–64.

[21] Ocampo.

[22] Fritz Gerald M. Melodi, "Virgilio Enriquez and Dietrich Bonhoeffer in Dialogue: Discerning a Theology of Solidarity in Philippine Kapwa-Culture," *ERT* 45, no. 3 (2021): 268–78.

[23] Ocampo, "Solidarity as Pagdadamayan in the Filipino Version of Laudato Si': An Experiment in Inculturated Translation."

experiences, rather than prioritizing one's own.[24] Jonathan Canete and del Castillo also articulated the importance of fellowship (*pakikipagkapwa*) for interreligious dialogue.[25] Based on the shared self, one commits to the other, to experiencing life with another in all its facets.

C. Listening to Marginalized Communities

The third task is to listen to Muslims, LGBTQ, women, the indigenous, and the economically poor about their experiences, how they articulate what development should look like, and the theology of this development, as we participate with them in their communities. Two examples from the literature in particular highlight this listening. First, Delfo Canceran introduced a method to do theology with the indigenous, for example, which reflects many aspects important to a theology of development, including listening to the indigenous, prioritizing their methods and ways of knowing, and becoming part of a dialogue that refuses to prioritize western concepts or answers[26]. He described a triad between indigenous peoples, activists, and theologians, as "a discursive community combining knowledge and praxis together. The indigenous peoples remain the privileged source of knowledge."[27] Both theology and development practice have failed to privilege the

[24] Jojo M. Fung, "The Mystique of Dialogue: Pathway to Spirit Power for Liberative Struggle," *Landas* 32, no. 2 (2018): 109–25.

[25] Jonathan James Canete and Fides A. del Castillo, "Pakikipagkapwa (Fellowship): Towards an Interfaith Dialogue with the Religious Others," *Religions* 13, no. 5 (May 19, 2022): 459, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13050459.

[26] Delfo Canceran, "Indigenist Method: Doing Theological Research with the Indigenous Peoples," *Journal of Dharma* 46, no. 1 (2021): 61–86.

[27] Canceran.

understandings of the marginalized. While we may occasionally listen to the marginalized and sometimes even include marginalized perspectives, we do not prioritize these perspectives. A second example of listening in the Philippine context is *laylayan* theology described by del Castillo, [28] referring to the term meaning the "lower end of the garment", used to describe the marginalized. This theology emerges from the indigenous, BECs, and women leaders, along with other marginalized groups.

D. Participating with Marginalized Communities

So, if we immerse ourselves in marginalized communities, and listen to the marginalized, then, we can also participate in community with the marginalized. In participating, we can share our own experiences, as a partner. For example, sometimes people newer to a community notice things that are or taken for granted by people who have been part of the community for a long time, based on their different experiences. Puen highlighted aspects of change management, in this context.[29] Change management echoes themes in participatory development, articulated by Robert Chambers[30] among others, of carefully attending to the power dynamics in communities, hearing what the key needs, wants, and expectations are, identifying what is helping or hindering change, and working toward that change. Many new themes and issues arise in this way.

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[28] del Castillo, "Laylayan Theology."

[29] Stephanie Ann Puen, "Operationalizing the Vision of Catholic Social Thought Using Change Management," *Religions* 13, no. 6 (May 26, 2022): 483, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13060483.

[30] Robert Chambers is a practitioner, researcher, and author in the field of development studies, who has focused on participatory development.

The following two sections discuss some of the theological themes and development issues, emerging from the marginalized communities, as starting points for the continued dialogue and participation in community.

Finally, for those of us whose voices are often centered, it is important to amplify the marginalized perspectives and support the communities. In this, the marginalized take center stage, changing us. "As we enter into the world of the other, we are transformed in the sacred revelation of the other."[31] Their understanding of development and theology blends with ours, shifting our perspectives. As part of this shift, "we need also to unlearn and abandon many of our baggage that only hinders our fruitful engagement."[32] A theology of development unlearns the theories and theologies introduced from the top down and learns from the experiences of the marginalized. Being fully in community changes each of us. The final section of this article discusses this in terms of future action. One key is that we do not enter and immerse ourselves in a community to learn and then leave. We remain part of the communities.

2. A theology of development emerging from marginalized communities

A. Theological themes

Here, I articulate an emerging issue-based theology rather than a systematic theology of development, drawing on the theological themes that are inspiring action in the marginalized communities. These theological themes included Jesus' life and actions,

[31] Canceran, "Indigenist Method: Doing Theological Research with the Indigenous Peoples."

[32] Canceran.

humans created in God's image, communion, and the sacredness of the earth.

i. Jesus' life and actions

For those communities within the Christian tradition, the marginalized often focused on Jesus' life and actions. This Christology centers on Jesus rather than the Christ, though aspects of Christ emerged as well.[33] God becoming human as Jesus is seen as a model for fellowship in community, since God, rather than remaining aloof, became part of the human community. Further, Jesus chose to be with marginalized groups of people during his lifetime.[34] As Willard Macaraan wrote, in the context of the BECs, "The basic attitude of Jesus' compassion was solidarity with humankind that took precedence over every other kind of love and solidarity."[35] Jesus identified with those people who others avoided, inviting all to participate with him. In his work, the communities see how Jesus empowered the marginalized.

Jesus' and his family's life and experiences as poor are key for the marginalized groups too. "Struggling for survival bring[s] about an articulation of Christology for the lowly, because this lowliness Christ himself took on."[36] Jesus was not born into or part of a wealthy and privileged community. For Michael Asis, the Philippine traditions of the Santo Niño and the Suffering Black

[33] Lim, "A Missiology of Philippine Roman Catholicism on Overcoming Nominal Christianity."

[34] Michael Demetrius H. Asis, "Toward A Filipino Christology," *Budhi: A Journal of Ideas and Culture* XXII, no. 2 (2018): 1–41.

[35] Willard Enrique R. Macaraan, "An Economic Alternative from the Base: The Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) in the Diocese of Boac, Philippines," *Religions* 13, no. 7 (June 27, 2022): 595, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13070595.

[36] Asedillo, "The Theology of Struggle."

Nazarene both highlight the humanity of Jesus; these are experiences of the kingdom that provide "wellsprings of life and strength".[37] Jesus was a baby, a toddler, a teenager, an adult, and he suffered as humans do.

The marginalized groups draw strength from Jesus' life and actions, as well as Jesus' willingness to die for his beliefs. Jesus was a *bayani*, one who "completely gives his or her life, and gives it up should the opportune time come, for the bayan."[38] Jesus died, but his community lives on; Jesus died so that we might live. From here, further community action emerges. "The hero martyred in the name of freedom and liberation, inspires a collective response that will continue to champion the cause."[39] The BECs are one of these communities, as are many other marginalized groups, carrying on the work that Jesus began, empowered by Jesus.[40] Further, the emphasis here is on action. To follow Jesus is to focus on taking good actions, struggling toward justice, rather than simply "thinking" about how we should behave.

ii. All humans created in God's image

Also within the Christian tradition, the marginalized communities emphasized that all human beings are created God's image, the *imago Dei*. This means every human, whatever age, class, race, religion, sex, sexuality, nationality, and so forth. Hence, we should celebrate and include all of God's varying creations, as the entire human community together forms the image of God. Allan Basas described how this focus also emerged from the second Plenary Council of the Philippines, with the

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[37] Asis, "Toward A Filipino Christology."

[38] Asis.

[39] Asis.

[40] Dagmang, "Culture as Enabler for SDGs: Learning from Jesus of Nazareth's Vision/Mission."

imago Dei underpinning the understanding of the body of Christ.[41] Here, if one person suffers, all suffer alongside, as noted in the section on being with marginalized communities.

The Christian concepts of humans created in God's image and the body of Christ echo the Philippine concept of *kapwa*, "the perceived state of shared identity and interdependent relationships."[42] I am not fully separate from others. I come to understand myself in relation to others. There is a "'unity' of the self and others."[43] Drawing on the work of Virgilio Enriquez, Melodi described the "collectivist, relational, and intuitive" aspects of Philippine society. Within the Christian tradition, solidarity and a sense of community is described in terms of the body of Christ. However, we must be careful not to limit our shared selves to our friends, family, or other Christians, as all humans are made in God's image,[44] and every human is part of our shared selves. This implies that no human being should be excluded.

Kapwa, the *imago Dei,* and related concepts are also important for the LGBTQ community. Goh argued the need to transform church for transpeople,[45] which the Christian churches have often failed to do. Sanchez highlighted the *babaylan*, the traditional woman

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[41] Allan Basas, "Refiguring the Ecclesiology of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines for Filipino Catholics," *Philippiniana Sacra* 54, no. 161 (2019): 3–22, https://doi.org/10.55997/ps1001liv161a1.

[42] Basas.

[43] Melodi, "Virgilio Enriquez and Dietrich Bonhoeffer in Dialogue: Discerning a Theology of Solidarity in Philippine Kapwa-Culture."

[44] Vivencio Ballano, "Catholic Social Teaching, Theology, and Sociology: Exploring the Common Ground," *Religions* 10, no. 10 (September 27, 2019): 557, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel10100557.

[45] Kumar Aryal, "The Evangelical Christian Response to Poverty and Its Impact on Holistic Development of the Poor in the Philippines: A Case Study," *Journal of Asian Mission* 21, no. 1 (2020): 5–33.

mystics, who also included male to female crossdressers.[46] Colonial notions of a strict separation of male and female interrupted what was a more fluid indigenous understanding. Rebuilding these understandings of the diversity of the human beings created in God's image and the diversity of the body of Christ underpins the call for treating each human being as fully human.

Further, the understandings of *kapwa* and humans created in God's image challenge notions of hierarchy, which have enabled the marginalization of many groups, including women. Brazal proposed moving from a hierarchical understanding of God–male–female to a mutual relational understanding of God and humans.[47] Suico further suggested the terminology of *babayi* rather than Filipina, drawing on indigenous conceptions.[48] Diverse indigenous understandings of gender and sex, the LGBTQ communities[49], *kapwa,* and the *imago Dei*, all challenge us to think of ourselves in mutual relationships, rather than hierarchical ones. Every human being should be able to live life in all its fullness.

iii. Communion with each other and God

Hence, communion is a third theological theme emerging from marginalized communities. Understood in a sacramental way in the Christian tradition, this concept of sharing in community is also important in other religious and cultural traditions. Here, rituals help to build community and relationships with each other,

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[46] Sanchez, "Disrupting Disruptions."

[47] Brazal, "Ethics of Care in Laudato Si'."

[48] Suico, Alfonso, "In Search of the Babayi: A Quest for a Distinct Filipina Theoethics."

[49] del Castillo et al., "Centrality of Religiosity among Select LGBTQs in the Philippines."

God, and the earth. This communion builds an understanding of the need to work toward the good of the entire community. For Basas, the practice of communion as in the early Christian communities can build "the identifiable bonds that foster unity among all the members, and the evangelical charity that inspires the actions of the members".[50] This characteristic of communion, sharing life with each other, builds on the understandings of the shared self, already prominent in Philippine society. Basas described the Philippine community in the context of 'sociality' and emphasized *malasakit*, "a high form of self-sacrifice or an offering of self to others."[51] In sharing ourselves with others, we are willing to suffer for others, noted in the concept of solidarity above.

There are a variety of rituals and practices that build the notion of communion with each other and with the divine. Within the Catholic tradition, Bento Tamang advocated for the regular practice of the rituals of baptism, catechism, and confirmation, in addition to communion, to be celebrated in community.[52] Further, catechism could offer the possibility for a deepening of the theology from the marginalized, through participation, dialogue, and transformation. Each of these rituals helps to build the community. The importance of ritual celebrations that recognize the sacred and its integration with the daily life of the community is also key in indigenous communities and other religious traditions. The celebration and participation in these opportunities

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[50] Basas, "Refiguring the Ecclesiology of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines for Filipino Catholics."

[51] Basas.

[52] Bento F. Tamang, "The Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults: Its Potential of Revitalizing the Basic Ecclesial Communities of Bontoc-Lagawe" (Santa Clara University Jesuit School of Theology, 2019), https://scholarcommons.scu.edu/jst_dissertations/48.

for communion can also engage those from outside the communities, as noted in the section on being with the marginalized.

iv. The sacredness of the earth

The sacredness of the earth is the final theological theme, emerging predominantly from indigenous communities, alongside understandings of humans as created by the divine and the importance of communion and rituals. Here, God, humans, and the earth are in mutual relationship with each other, a type of Trinity, Brazal suggested.[53] Aurelio Agcaoili described Ilocano notions of the ethical coexistence with and care for the environment. Humans are in a mutual relationship with the earth; both are equally important.[54] The Ilocano have a practice of "healing the earth", which can help us to unlearn "the undue regard for the place of human beings in this earth".[55] Where the Christian tradition centers the human being, indigenous traditions can help broaden our understanding beyond our self-centeredness, which has led to the destruction of the environment and other creatures. All of creation is of equal value.

Interacting with the various indigenous peoples who have survived colonialism is an important part of a theology of development. Highlighting indigenous traditions, Fung asserted the importance of suffusing life "with God's sacred presence and power so that humankind relates to God's creation with reverence and

[53] Brazal, "Ethics of Care in Laudato Si'."

[54] Aurelio S. Agcaoili, "Nakaparsuaan, Kadagaan, and Panaglunit Ti Daga: Climate Justice and Environmental Ethics in Ilokano Life," *Budhi: A Journal of Ideas and Culture* XXII, no. 3 (2018): 1–26.

[55] Agcaoili.

sensitivity."[56] Where the Christian tradition has tended to separate the spiritual and the material, often treating the environment as simply material, many indigenous communities reject this separation. Fung also notes the emphasis on the sacredness of the cosmos through rituals, linking to our previous theme of communion. Again, using Christian theological language, we could think in terms of a sabbath or jubilee for the land and the water[57], recognizing the importance of caring for all of God's creation; the community and the common good include the earth and its peoples.

As a final note, while some of the literature attended to theological themes emerging from the indigenous communities in the Philippines, little attention was paid to theological themes emerging from other religious communities in the Philippines, in particular, the Muslim communities. As noted below in the section on emerging issues, zakat is one of the five pillars of Islam, which can help to reduce inequality through giving away part of one's surplus. Zakat and other practices within Islam emerge from the importance of and the responsibility for taking care of others, working toward justice. Communities in Mindanao, along with other regions, show the need for a multireligious and multicultural theology of development.

B. Themes for Development Praxis

Several areas for praxis are emerging from the marginalized communities in the context of the theological themes: care for the environment, an economy

[56] Fung, "The Mystique of Dialogue: Pathway to Spirit Power for Liberative Struggle."

[57] Jeane Peracullo, "The Virgin of the Vulnerable Lake: Catholic Engagement with Climate Change in the Philippines," *Religions* 11, no. 4 (April 18, 2020): 203, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11040203.

for the people, and the need for a holistic education and safety. Each of these areas of praxis may suggest further theological understandings in addition to those I've separated out above. In addition, as both intersect and continue to build on each other more theological and development concepts will emerge. However, here, I note the starting points from the recent literature.

i. Care for the environment: forests, water, and land for the common good

One focus, emerging particularly from the indigenous communities, is the need to care for the earth and all its inhabitants building on the sacredness of the earth and the relations between humans, the earth, and God. Hence, indigenous groups define development differently to mainstream development theories and practices, by including the wellbeing of the earth and its inhabitants. Hazel Biana and Virgilio Rivas argued that we should work from an "indigenous peoples-inspired planetary ethics."[58] For example, in the Philippines, 85% of the key biodiversity areas are on indigenous lands. This biodiversity shows the ability of the indigenous to protect the earth and the need to center indigenous voices in the conversation of protecting the environment. Indigenous communities, despite the intense devastation of their lands and practices through colonization, industrialization, and traditional development practices, have managed to maintain some harmony with the environment. We should first learn from those who live with the land (rather than on the land), based on the sacredness of all creation.

Three areas of focus emerge in this call to care for the

[58] Hazel T. Biana and Virgilio A. Rivas, "ENVIRONMENTALISM: Toward an Indigenous Peoples-Inspired Planetary Ethics," *Journal of Dharma* 46, no. 2 (2021): 183–98.

earth: the forests, the water, and holding land in common. Colonialism and development processes have both destroyed the majority of the forests in the Philippines[59]. As an island nation, forest cover maintains the health of the soil, retains the soil, and reduces the effects of climate change. From covering more than 80% of the islands in precolonial times, today, the forests cover less than 25% of the land, with only about 3% still primary forest. Karl Gaspar described the context of the complete devastation of Mindanao's forests, which has caused landslides and other major types of destruction.[60] The indigenous and others who resist this harm suffer death from direct killing and from eviction from their homes, land, and access to their natural resources. Retaining the remaining forests and reforestation are key aspects of this focus in order to protect the land and its inhabitants.

Protecting the water is a second area of focus for indigenous and other marginalized communities, though less referred to in the recent literature. While water is central to life for every creature, in addition, the Philippines is a nation of islands. The waterways in the Philippines are as important as the land, and clean water has to be a shared responsibility; water cannot easily be divided into discrete portions, as we often attempt to do with land. Melanio Leal presented the results of a survey in a community along an urban river, where themes emerged of "the problem of garbage" and the "importance of the river", among others. [61] In this case, as only one

[59] Kathleen Nadeau and Jojo M. Fung, "Indigenous Liberation Theology Looking to the Past for Answers in the Present," *Budhi: A Journal of Ideas and Culture* XXII, no. 3 (2018): 27–56.

[60] Karl M. Gaspar, "The Contemporary Philippine Church's Engagement in Ecological Advocacy (1988-2019)," *MST Review* 22, no. 2 (2020): 43–78.

[61] Melanio L. Leal, "Contextualizing Laudato Si in the Philippines: Environmental Problem in Purok 1A, Hapay Na Mangga,

group along the river, they need broader support. Jeanne Peracullo also highlighted the case of the Pansipit River, where an image of the Virgin Mary was discovered[62]. Although the area is revered, this reverence has not extended to caring for the water or the surrounding land.

The third area of focus is the call for land to be held in common by communities. Catholic and indigenous notions of land and water for the common good complement each other here. Agcaoili discussed the importance of *banata*, still part of Ilocano practices, where "some lands, some forests, or some parts of the communal spaces are collectively agreed as something no one owns, … reserved for all members of the community."[63] Corporations and the government have ignored indigenous concepts of communal land, considering it to be unused. In the name of development and economic growth, they have claimed land to remove and sell its natural resources.

Hence, protecting communal lands also entails reclaiming the illegally taken land. Imbong discusses Bukidnon, Mindanao, in terms of the indigenous resistance to land taken illegally by corporations, both for plantations and for mining.[64] The indigenous groups are reclaiming some of this land, through the process of *bungkalan*. This process is similar to the work of the Landless Movement (MST) in Brazil[65], started by the landless and the Catholic Church, where groups of families move adjacent to an unused piece of land, farm it, and then apply for communal ownership in the

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Barangay Dolores, Taytay, Rizal," *Bedan Research Journal* 4 (2019): 176–90.

[62] Peracullo, "The Virgin of the Vulnerable Lake."

[63] Agcaoili, "Nakaparsuaan, Kadagaan, and Panaglunit Ti Daga: Climate Justice and Environmental Ethics in Ilokano Life," 20.

[64] Imbong, "'Bungkalan' and the Manobo-Pulangihon Tribe's Resistance to Corporate Land-Grab in Bukidnon, Mindanao."

[65] See www.mstbrazil.org for further details of this movement.

Brazilian courts.

In sum, development, here, refers to the wellbeing of the earth, not just for humanity's sake but for the earth's sake.

ii. An economy for the people and the environment: meeting basic needs, providing fair wages, and reducing inequality

Related to the call to care for the earth is a critique of sustainable development, which currently includes the foci of economic growth, social equality, and environmental protection. For some of the marginalized communities, economic growth conflicts with the other two. Abundio Babor stated that the focus on growth reduces "human persons and the environment as a means to an end, to accumulate profit," which "is a serious moral issue". [66] Where the concept of sustainable development says we will aim for economic growth and protect the environment, holistic development says we will aim for each person to live life in all its fullness in harmony with the earth. From economically marginalized communities comes a call to remove the focus on economic growth and profit and focus the economy on the wellbeing of humans and the environment.

Development, here, emphasizes that the economy exists for humans and the environment; humans and the environment do not exist for the economy. People marginalized or excluded from the global economy argue for a system other than capitalism. Brazal articulated, as do many indigenous and other groups, that human

[66] Abundio R. Babor, "A Critique of the Notion of Sustainable Development as a Paradigm for Environmental Sustainability," *Landas* 33, no. 2 (2019): 57–90.

flourishing does not require economic growth.[67] From the marginalized communities, we hear that economies and societies can be built around fair and communal use and protection of the land and water, equitable access to food and water, safe housing, fair and safe labor, health care, holistic education, and safety for each human being. Alternative economic systems exist locally and within the discipline of economics that can be strengthened by the voices of the excluded[68].

There were several examples of economic alternatives in marginalized communities, focusing on meeting the needs of humans and the environment. For example, Benigno Beltran articulated the Laudato Si' Covenant, based on the principles of *Laudato Si'*.[69] Focusing on care for the earth and the poor, it aims to plant one million bamboo plants in degraded areas of the country to prevent erosion and flooding. It also aims to connect one million organic farmers through ecommerce, using sustainable technology, as well as sustainable agriculture principles, building cooperatives. Another example was a compassion-based alternative economics emerging from some BECs, with community stores that focused on the economy as 'provisioning".[70] In addition, Alma Espartinez highlighted an example of economic solidarity during the COVID-19 pandemic with the

[67] Agnes Brazal, "Does Capitalism Kill? Post-Vatican II Papal Perspectives on Development," *Louvain Studies* 41 (2019): 65–85, https://doi.org/10.2143/LS.42.1.3286080.

[68] Puen, "Contributions of Catholic Social Thought to Doughnut Economics to Achieve a Vision of Flourishing of Creation."

[69] Fr. Benigno P. Beltran, "Earth Stewardship, Economic Justice, and World Mission: The Teachings of Laudato Si'," *Missiology: An International Review* 48, no. 1 (January 2020): 39–56, https://doi.org/10.1177/0091829619897432.

[70] Macaraan, "An Economic Alternative from the Base."

emergence of community pantries.[71] Ana Patricia Non, in her neighborhood in Quezon City, set up a cart with a note: "Take what you need. Give what you can."[72] As the story spread, so did the carts, forming a network of community help.

The economically marginalized communities also called for a fair wage for workers. The minimum wage, set by the government, considers the minimum a person needs to survive, focused on minimizing the "cost" to increase a company's profits. Minimum-wage workers argue that this wage fails to meet the basic needs of a family; in contrast, they call for a fair wage. For Vivencio Ballano, according to Catholic Social Teaching, a moral wage is "a wage that can enable the workers to live a decent life that is appropriate to their dignity as created in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1: 26-27)."[73] Rather than a business prioritizing profit, it can prioritize its workers. For example, cooperatives and worker-owned business more equally share the earnings and the decision making in a business setting.

Another aspect of the call for a changed economy is to reduce inequality. In part, this critique relates to wages. However, people need access to water, food, shelter, health care, education, and so forth, regardless of their ability to work. [74] Improving societal structures to provide

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[71] Alma Espartinez, "Emerging Community Pantries in the Philippines during the Pandemic: Hunger, Healing, and Hope," *Religions* 12, no. 11 (October 25, 2021): 926, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12110926.

[72] Espartinez.

[73] Vivencio Ballano, "Law, Morality, and Catholic Social Teaching on Family Living Wage: Analyzing the Adequacy and Morality of the Minimum Wage in the Philippines," *Cogent Social Sciences* 8, no. 1 (December 31, 2022): 2023253, https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2021.2023253.

[74] Ruben C. Mendoza, "WHAT IF: COVID-19 in the Philippines in the Light of the Catholic Social Tradition," *Journal of Dharma* 45, no. 2 (2020): 201–22.

what people need outside of the economic system can help to mitigate inequality. One further example in Muslim communities, cited by Gamon and Tagoranao, is that of Islamic financial practices, such as *zakat*, the obligation to give away 2.5% of your surplus, which can help to reduce inequality.[75] *Zakat* highlights an important aspect of a theology of development, which is that in order to have a fair economy based on meeting the needs of humans and the environment, not only do the marginalized need a better standard of living, but people who have excess need to give up some of what they have.

In sum, here again, development refers to ensuring the wellbeing of humans and the environment.

iii. Holistic education

Marginalized groups also cited the importance of access to education and to an appropriate and holistic education. An educational system should include indigenous, Muslim, and other contexts and knowledge systems. Biana and Rivas argued in the context of indigenous communities that "addressing their plight requires decolonizing practices instituted through educational parity, especially in the national curriculum, to represent their historical and cultural struggles." [76] First, the educational curriculum should include indigenous history and knowledge, and in particular, indigenous understandings of how to protect the environment. Second, local indigenous knowledge should be integrated into local education, as Agcaoili noted with

[75] Gamon and Tagoranao, "Zakat and Poverty Alleviation in a Secular State: The Case of Muslim Minorities in the Philippines."

[76] Biana and Rivas, "ENVIRONMENTALISM: Toward an Indigenous Peoples-Inspired Planetary Ethics."

regard to the Ilocano.[77] The current formal educational system lacks attention to the intertwining of ourselves, others, and the earth, to our responsibility to each other and the earth, and to the importance of justice in community.

In addition, the key concepts and perspectives of the various religious and cultural traditions in the Philippines need to be taught. In the case of Catholic schools, Macaraan suggested centered pluralism,[78] around the concept of *kapwa*. Here, multiple religious understandings can be articulated even within one particular tradition's educational system. In the context of the Philippines, people who are not Catholic should learn about the Catholic tradition and its theologies, as that has been predominant. Oppositely, it is important for Catholics and others to learn about the diversity of traditions within the Philippines.

In addition to the need for holistic content in the educational system, people need equal access to education. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, online education continued; however, this education required internet access, unavailable to many. In addition, assigning homework assumes a person has the space, time, and light in which to work, and simply attending school can be inaccessible for children who cannot afford the necessary related items.

A comprehensive and holistic education enables each person to participate fully in the community. One's culture and traditions are acknowledged and celebrated,

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[77] Aurelio S. Agcaoili, "Saan a Maymaysat' Aldaw: Education in Democracy, Social Justice, and Inclusion in Ilokano Life," *Budhi: A Journal of Ideas and Culture* XXIII, no. 3 (2019): 65–94.

[78] Willard Enrique R. Macaraan, "A Kapwa-infused Paradigm in Teaching Catholic Theology/Catechesis in a Multireligious Classroom in the Philippines," *Teaching Theology & Religion* 22, no. 2 (April 2019): 102–13, https://doi.org/10.1111/teth.12477.

and one gain an understanding of the broader society. Tejedo cites "civic engagement" as key, which he defines as "a citizen's right to participate in decision making around the economic, social, cultural, religious and political processes that affect their lives."[79] To be civically engaged, people needs to be empowered by an education that provides the skills and knowledge relevant to their situations.

iv. Safety

Finally, the marginalized communities articulated the importance of safety for each human being, an aspect emerging from the understanding that all humans are created in God's image. The current lack of safety was discussed in the context of the "war on drugs", as well as in LGBTQ and indigenous communities. The "war on drugs" has been described as a "war on urban poor men".[80] Fung detailed the contract killings and hit teams hired outside the official structures in this "war". In one survey to determine perspectives on this government policy, 53% of the participants stated, "rich drug pushers are not killed; only the poor ones are killed."[81] In addition, the sellers and users are targeted, rather than the producers and suppliers. The "war on drugs" has reduced safety, rather than increasing it. Resistance against this harmful policy has emerged, for example, from the

[79] Joel A. Tejedo, "Doing Pentecostal Civic Engagement in the Squatter Area of Lower Rock Quarry, Baguio City, Philippines: Doing Pentecostal Civic Engagement," *International Review of Mission* 107, no. 1 (July 2018): 159–78, https://doi.org/10.1111/irom.12215.

[80] Jayeel Cornelio and Gideon Lasco, "Morality Politics: Drug Use and the Catholic Church in the Philippines," *Open Theology* 6, no. 1 (June 24, 2020): 327–41, https://doi.org/10.1515/opth-2020-0112.

[81] Jojo M. Fung, "An Emerging Theology of Human Security: The Philippine Context," *Concilium*, Human Security, no. 2 (2018): 67–74.

BECs.[82] Broader church hierarchies should reflect the voices of the poorest to resist the devaluing of certain groups of people that leads to a lack of safety and to harm and death. In order to "live life in all its fullness", one needs to be safe from harm.

3. Act: Next steps together.

As the above theological themes and development issues are only a starting point, it is important to continue the conversation in marginalized communities, as the section on "A Method for a Theology of Development" detailed. Continuing to discern which communities are marginalized and being with these communities to understand their perspectives is an ongoing process. In addition, two further areas of praxis are key, centering the marginalized voices at a regional and national level and supporting and working toward the understanding of development that the marginalized communities are articulating.

A. Centering the marginalized communities

In order for understandings of theology and development to emerge from the marginalized, their voices need to be centered. This means changing ways of policymaking and changing structures. As Ferdinand Dagmang notes, "the involvement of the poor must be multi-dimensional… empowerment must be pursued so that all members are able to participate in the life of the

[82] Christopher Ryan Maboloc, "An Analysis of the Philippine Catholic Church's Approach to President Duterte's Drug War," *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 46, no. 3 (July 2022): 352–59, https://doi.org/10.1177/23969393221087062.

whole community."[83] For true empowerment of the marginalized communities, we need to change the structures to hear their voices and include them in decision-making processes. Empowerment comes when one has the ability to enact change. "Power should be inclusive, that is, the decision-making processes should include the poor, especially programs that directly affect their life."[84] For those of us working in religious, educational, business, and government institutions, we need to shift our institutions' ways of working to center marginalized perspectives.

B. Enacting the changes the marginalized communities articulate.

Second, in our fields, we also need to support and work toward the understanding of development that the marginalized communities articulate. As Fung notes, "Any violation of the person dignity of the wo/men, youth and children calls for mounting political actions by the civil society and the church to oppose such hideous brutality with the insurrection power of the cross and the Risen Lord."[85] The job of theologians, churches, synagogues, temples, mosques, NGOs, businesses, and so forth is to work alongside the marginalized toward the change the affected groups desire.

For those of us not already part of the marginalized communities, this requires us to take on the risks that come with being marginalized. Imbong, for

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[83] Dagmang, "Culture as Enabler for SDGs: Learning from Jesus of Nazareth's Vision/Mission."

[84] Jerry D. Imbong, "The Political and Economic Vision of Pope Francis: Implications for Philippine Church Mission," *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 45, no. 3 (July 2021): 212–20, https://doi.org/10.1177/2396939320926491.

[85] Fung, "An Emerging Theology of Human Security: The Philippine Context."

example, reminds us of the missionaries "who fought alongside the peasants and indigenous people (the Lumad in Mindanao) for rural development were martyred by elements of the state, mostly military and paramilitary."[86] In Christian terms, are we willing to follow Jesus' path and be ridiculed and killed so that others might live? Are we willing to become a full participant in community?

Conclusion

In sum, a theology of development from and for the Philippines matters so that each person can live life in all its fullness in harmony with the environment. This article offered a method to understand perspectives on development and theology that focused on being with and listening to marginalized communities. Then, it articulated some key concepts emerging from these marginalized communities. In terms of the theological concepts, the communities emphasized Jesus' life and actions, every human being as created in God's image, communion, and the sacredness of the earth. In terms of the issues related to development, they called for protection of the earth, including the forests and water, and a focus on using the land and water for the common good; they argued the economy should be arranged for the people, rather than people serving the economy, including removing the focus on economic growth, instead meeting people's basic needs, ensuring a fair wage, and reducing inequality; finally, they called for ensuring access to a holistic education and safety for each human being. From here, we can continue the conversation about development as the wellbeing of

[86] Imbong, "The Political and Economic Vision of Pope Francis."

humans and the planet, prioritizing the voices of the marginalized.

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