

## INTERFACING FAITH TRADITIONS WITHIN A MINDANAWON ANTHROPOLOGY

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In his recent encyclical, *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis acknowledged that all religions, including indigenous belief systems, can contribute towards integral ecology as a way to counteract climate change and safeguard the earth. His call for people of faith to collaborate towards responding to the ecological crisis pinpointed the contribution of the indigenous peoples and their cultural riches from their “interior life and spirituality,” thus affirming the importance of churchpeople’s engagement in solidarity work with ‘indigenous peoples’ or IPs. The Pope’s exhortation is urgent and timely, considering a shift in the missionary landscape of the Catholic Church in the Philippines characterized by lessened presence among indigenous communities. In the 1970s-80s, and especially during the martial law era of the Marcos dictatorship, the pastoral reality was the reverse— there was little attention from the Vatican, but across Mindanao, a militant advocacy on behalf of the Lumad peoples involved an extensive network of Church people across Mindanao.

Various reasons account for this change. One is fewer ties between practicing anthropologists and church leaders, which led to the former’s diminishing influence on church programs on behalf of the Lumad. Second, Church leaders still lack an appreciation for the integrity, relevance and importance of the indigenous belief systems. This helps explain the persistence of a tendency towards proselytization (i.e. having them baptized in the Church) rather than toward engagement in Lumad struggles and defense of their rights. There is need to create spaces for anthropologists and theologians to have continuing exchanges on the realities of the Lumad in the current dispensation, and for more concrete actions towards greater collaboration both in terms of advancing scholarship and praxis at the level of communities.

*Keywords:* Ecological crisis, solidarity, ancestral domain, proselytization, Basic Ecclesial Community, indigenous belief system, Inculturation, dialogue, missiology, self-determination

At Puerto Maldonado, a city in Peru, on Friday, 19 January 2018, Pope Francis met with representatives of indigenous communities of the Amazon basin from Peru, Brazil and Bolivia in order to know more about the plight of their peoples. While facing a multitude of close to 100,000 people inside a crowded sports arena, the Pope “gave a stirring defense of the region’s indigenous people, whose lands and way of life are threatened by industry and government, leaving almost no institutions to protect them” as he deplored “the pressure being exerted by great business interests that want to lay hands on its petroleum, gas, lumber, gold and forms of agro-industrial monocultivation” and “threats from policies that ostensibly aim to conserve land without taking account its inhabitants” (Rochabrun 2018).

This was not the first time Pope Francis spoke passionately in defense of the world’s indigenous peoples. In his historic encyclical, *Laudato Si*, he “put himself on the side of Latin America’s original peoples in protecting the environment in their ancestral lands, in what will be a long struggle to counteract climate change and safeguard the earth,” positing that, “different religions, including the indigenous peoples’, can make rich contributions ... towards an integral ecology.” Interfacing the life and cultures of indigenous peoples and his strong ecological advocacy, he wrote: “Given the complexity of the ecological crisis and its multiple causes, we need to realize that the solutions will not emerge from just one way of interpreting and transforming reality. Respect must also be shown for the various cultural riches of different peoples ... their interior life and spirituality.” (Pope Francis 2015:No.63).

The words of Pope Francis, spoken in the context of Latin America, resonate with the realities of the indigenous peoples in the Philippines, especially in Mindanao, where both the State and corporate institutions are pushing political and economic interests at the expense of the Lumads. Countless documents indicate that their human rights, as well as rights to their ancestral domain, have been trampled upon. Their struggles for self-determination might as well be a story of great tragedy.

One would expect that the Pope’s strong statements, coming from a distinguished, popular and well-loved head of the global Roman Catholic Church, would be well disseminated by the leaders of the Church in Mindanao these days, especially the bishops and parish priests in dioceses with a considerable Lumad population. But if one were to check how many

church leaders have recently spoken passionately about the rights of indigenous peoples as well as the violence they are presently being subjected to, perpetuated by both State and corporate institutions, one could see the wide gap between the passionate plea of Pope Francis at the top and the silence of the leaders of the Local churches below.

But this has not always been so.

### **Looking back on pioneering years of Lumad engagement**

In the 1970s-80s, and especially during the martial law era of the Marcos dictatorship, the pastoral reality was the reverse— there was little attention from the Vatican, but across Mindanao, a militant advocacy on behalf of the Lumads involved an extensive network of Church people across Mindanao. They included Bishop Francisco Claver SJ, an indigenous person from the Cordilleras who was also an anthropologist, as well as the personnel of a number of religious congregations living and working among Lumads: Jesuits, Columbans and Maryknoll missionaries along with the OMI [Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate], PMEs [Foreign Mission Society of Quebec/PME Fathers], ONDs [Oblates of Notre Dame Sisters], RGSs [Religious of the Good Shepherd], MSMs [Missionary Sisters of Mary], FMAs [Daughters of Mary of the Assumption], and young diocesan priests who comprised the forefront of this nascent advocacy inspired by the spirit of *aggiornamento* arising out of the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II).<sup>1</sup>

True, the Mindanao-Sulu Pastoral Conference (MSPC) - the forum of ideas that facilitates the communion of the local churches of Mindanao and meets as a conference once in three years – continues to express concern for the Lumads. In the MSPC XVI held in Davao last October 2017, Church leaders from different parts of Mindanao gathered “to look into the plight of indigenous peoples (IPs) as well as the issues confronting the Basic Ecclesial Communities (BEC) in Mindanao” and focused their discussion on “the

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<sup>1</sup> *Aggiornamento* is the Italian word meaning ‘bringing up to date’ or the ‘modernization’ of the Roman Catholic Church, which was the thrust of Vatican II. The Council, which gathered all bishops from all over the world in Vatican, ended with the issuance of the Acts and Decrees of Vatican II (Second Vatican Council 1962-1965). [Cf. e.g. *Nostra Aetate*, The Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, proclaimed by Pope Paul VI, October 28, 1965.]

relationship between BECs and faith communities,... inter-religious dialogue, plight of the indigenous peoples, among others.” (MSPC 2017).

However, the walk does not follow the talk. Since the 1990s, oral declarations regarding the Church’s support of the Lumads’ rights and struggles have been scarce. A few statements, documents and press releases have been issued by church leaders but these have not been as consistently made as in the 70s-80s, the heyday of the MSPC. Steadily, through the years of the past three decades, there has been a diminution of actual concrete Lumad programs at the ground level, with personnel assigned to their communities dwindling, along with financial and moral support. In 2005, I observed that of a total of 2,038 men and women religious listed in the Catholic Directory in 2004 only a total of 105 religious – 5.2% of the total – were engaged in urgent pastoral ministries including work among the Lumads.

This data is quite disturbing considering that Mindanao is the region in the country that could still be considered as the missionary frontier and that many of the congregations who come here are from a missionary tradition. It does not speak well for the religious that the great majority of them are in traditional ministries. Given that once located and situated in Mindanao, it is easy enough for religious congregations to see and discern where the pastoral priorities lie, one can easily fall into depression to see that a meager 5.2% are engaged in urgent pastoral ministries. (Gaspar 2005:27)

What could be the reasons behind this?

I posit that with Pope John Paul II and later Pope Benedict XVI as head of the Church, the Vatican II spirit pushing for a progressive agenda within the Church dissipated, leading to reduced concern for social issues and people’s rights. This impacted the local Church in the Philippines, especially Mindanao, as pastoral priorities shifted (thus the lessening of personnel assigned to social apostolates) but was also aggravated by the red scare that arose in the tail-end of the Marcos dictatorship when the witch-hunt resulted in many bishops dissociating from church institutions they believed were infiltrated by elements of the NDF-CPP-NPA.<sup>2</sup>

Post-EDSA, non-governmental institutions became more dominant, thus shifting the landscape of civil society. During the martial law period, civil society was dominated by Church institutions and agencies (financially

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<sup>2</sup> [National Democratic Front-Communist Party of the Philippines-New People’s Army].

backed up by faith-based international funding institutions), as these were the agencies that could gain legal recognition during martial rule. Many of the leading church personnel who pioneered working among the Lumads (Bishop Claver, Fr. Vic Cullen, Fr. Rex Mansmann, Fr. Sean McDonagh, and others) disappeared from the scene for various reasons, and church bodies such as the Mindanao-based office of the Episcopal Commission of Tribal Filipinos (ECTF) as well as the Mindanao-Sulu Conference for Justice and Development (MSCJD) ceased to exist.

But I would add two more reasons:

One is that lessening of ties between practicing anthropologists and church leaders led to the former's diminishing influence on church programs on behalf of the Lumads.

And second, Church leaders still lack an appreciation of the integrity, relevance and importance of the Lumads' indigenous belief system. This helps explain the persistence of a tendency towards proselytization (i.e. having them baptized in the Church) rather than toward engagement in Lumad struggles and defense of their rights.

There is need to examine the interfacing of Anthropology with Theology in the Mindanao context. As Hispanized Christianity also served as an ideological tool for the conquest agenda of the Spanish empire since the dawn of the colonial era and the penetration of missionaries into the interior where Lumads are located has persisted until today, there has clearly been an intersect between Catholicism and the lives of the indigenous peoples. If we are to seriously study anthropology in a landscape such as the one in Mindanao, we need to interface its scholarship and praxis with a deeper understanding of the theological presuppositions of the Local Churches' presence among the Lumads.

At the same time, for the Church there is need for an inculturated re-reading of the Lumads' indigenous belief system. We need to be able to better understand what constitutes this belief system. And we must do our best to interface this cultural reality in such a manner that our Christian faith and practice are further enriched, thus making it meaningful for the people. This way, we do not repeat the same mistakes committed by missionaries of the past, who insisted on ignoring the cultural practices of the people in favor of imposing practices from the outside, specifically from Rome.

**Looking back to the beginnings of Indigenous' People's enslavement**

In his seminal book, *Worlds Apart*, Robin Hanbury-Tenison (1984) summarized the history of the Embera Choco Indians who lived in the forests that traversed between Panama and Colombia in Latin America:

(They) lived as far as they could from the coast, far up the little hidden tributaries, where no settlers penetrated, where they could hunt and fish and grow a few crops without having to be put upon by black or white outsiders. They are a gentle people...who have survived by never fighting back but instead choosing to melt into the jungle, friendly to them, unfriendly to those who do not understand it. Quite possibly the first mainland Indians seen by visitors from the old world, for Columbus sighted the Darien isthmus on his last voyage, they have resisted change for nearly 500 years.

First came the Conquistadores, carrying the gold looted from Peru from one coast to the other through the swamps and over the mountains. Then the pirates who preyed on them, ambushing and fighting on land in the bays and open seas around the coast. Later black slaves from Africa were brought to dig for gold in the hills and work plantations of sugarcane and coffee. When they escaped and in time were freed to settle the river estuaries, the Chocos moved back into the interior. Later still men came to dig the Panama Canal and great ships moved from ocean to ocean, cities grew and fishing fleets tapped the rich offshore shoals to feed them.

Through the centuries, while slavers hunted their bodies, missionaries their souls, the Choco retreated a little further, protected by the inhospitable jungle and the malarial swamps. No one acknowledged their right to any land and no reservations were created for them but at the same time, no one succeeded in settling them in towns or forcing any of other trappings of civilization on them, for they posed no threat and made useless slaves, dying when captured or running away to places where no sane man would go. (Hanbury-Tenison 1984:199-200).

Delete some of the details from this narrative, and what happened to the Embera Choco Indians is the same story for our Indigenous Peoples as the colonial era dawned in this part of Asia. Ironically, foreign and colonial-oriented Filipino historians declared 16 March 1521 as the historic day when the Philippines was “discovered” by the Spanish empire. From a post-colonial perspective, this day was, indeed, historic for it inaugurated the epoch when the indigenous Filipinos fell into the yoke of colonial oppression, which has persisted until today.

With this entry in his journal, Antonio Pigafetta – who accompanied Fernando Magellan - recorded what took place that fateful day when the Spaniards first sighted land in what is now within the territory of the Philippines, and met the ancestors of present-day Filipinos:

Saturday, the 16th of March, 1521, we arrived at daybreak in sight of a high island, three hundred leagues distant from the before-mentioned Thieves' Island. This isle is named Zamal. The next day the captain-general wished to land at another uninhabited island near the first, to be in greater security and to take water, also to repose there a few days. He set up there two tents on shore for the sick, and had a sow killed for them.

Monday, the 18th of March, after dinner, we saw a boat come towards us with nine men in it: upon which the captain-general ordered that no one should move or speak without his permission. When these people had come into this island towards us, immediately the principal one amongst them went towards the captain-general with demonstrations of being very joyous at our arrival.<sup>3</sup> (Pigafetta 1874:71)

Magellan’s exploration however ended tragically with his death in the hands of a local chief named Lapu-lapu. A few more attempts to colonize the islands after Magellan did not succeed until Miguel Lopez de Legazpi was able to establish Spain’s foothold in the islands four decades later. For more than three centuries, 1565 until 1898, *las Islas Filipinas* was Spain’s main colony in Asia.

Within this period, the Roman Catholic Church was not only established, but was entrenched across the country – except in areas that could not be penetrated by the Spanish forces, especially the hinterlands and Muslim

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<sup>3</sup>[[http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Page%3AFirst\\_Voyage\\_Round\\_the\\_World.djvu/151](http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Page%3AFirst_Voyage_Round_the_World.djvu/151)]

Mindanao. Today, the Philippines is the country with the highest percentage of Roman Catholics in Asia, with 86% of the total population indicating that they are Catholics by religious affiliation (Miller 2018).

But the Christianity that the Spanish friars brought with them to the islands in their ill-conceived efforts to please both the King of Spain and the Pope in Rome was a Christianity that radically veered away from the principles and values of the first disciples. It was a religion that integrated the residue of the influence of Greek thought (which privileged binary oppositions and the “world-beyond”), downplaying the core justice principle of the Bible, highlighting the non-essentials as opposed to more important aspects of Christianity (e.g. sacramentals rather than social justice).

During the medieval period in Spain, Roman Catholicism was dominated by political, economic and religious powers-that-be and had become a religion legitimizing monarchical rule and justifying a colonial agenda. It was a religion that gave more importance to external faith expressions as opposed to radical conversion to the Gospel values of justice, concern for the poor and the weak and solidarity for the oppressed— values that would constitute the core of the theology of liberation arising out of the Latin American landscape in the post-Vatican II period of the 1960s. There had even arisen the contention that Filipinos’ practice of being Catholics is one that nurtures “split-level Christianity”.<sup>4</sup>

The conversion process conducted by the Spanish friars was mainly proselytization, that is, it aimed to baptize as many natives to the Catholic faith as possible, even without the benefit of solid catechetical instruction. For how could such instruction be set up? Consider the limited personnel (there were so few friars to take on this role in the islands), communication difficulties, and geography (locations of the villages and the great difficulty of reaching out to these villages).

The labeling of the natives as “pagans” helped to perpetuate a false assumption that they had to be saved from their lack of faith, and that this could only be done through baptism in the Church. But in fact our ancestors had an indigenous belief system, a faith tradition which however was disparaged by the friars as “that of the devil” and therefore to be eradicated.

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<sup>4</sup> Split-level Christianity is the “co-existence within the same person of two or more thought-and-behavior systems which are inconsistent with each other,” leading to the practice of Christianity that is not in congruence with the values of the Gospel as taught by Jesus Christ (Bulatao 1966:120).



Unfortunately, this was the theological discourse propagated by Rome and popularized by the friars in that colonial epoch; it would radically shift with the rise of the theology of inculturation that arose in the Church almost four centuries later in the wake of Vatican II.<sup>5</sup>

If only the discourse on inculturation had already around in the 14<sup>th</sup> -15<sup>th</sup> century, the friars could have realized the following: how our ancestors' embraced a concept of the Deity and the spirit world, in which nature inter-relates with the divine constituting what is sacred, and in which the image of the Deity interfaced with worldview; the richness of creation myths; notions of good and evil and ways of transgressing the Deity; belief in the afterlife; a belief system embedded within ecological reality, where kinship is implicated; and a whole range of rituals with their symbols and meanings.

Our ancestors' belief system arose since time immemorial, and through centuries it helped to maintain the fabric of social life and cultures, which is to say that these provided the essential ingredients for survival even when life became very harsh. By contemporary standards, it is very possible to highlight positive values and features. It has to be assumed that these elements would have nurtured life rather than being destructive. Otherwise, how can we explain the communities flourishing across the islands when the dawn of colonization came around in the 1500s?

Given the circumstances of the conversion process during the colonial era, it was inevitable that Hispanic Catholicism would interface with the indigenous belief system resulting in time in a Filipino Catholic practice now

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<sup>5</sup> The Vatican Council (1962-1965) was convened by the late Pope John XXIII owing to the perceived need for the Church to deal with the realities of the modern world, and thus the need for renewal in terms of the Church teachings and practices. Radical changes had taken place in the world since the turn of the century, especially after World War II, and many bishops in the world began to feel restless that the Church was not able to have "a clear reading of the signs of the times" and have not been able to undergo the needed changes to be updated in terms of the realities of contemporary times. Pope John XXIII sensed this restlessness and convened the council, which produced some of the most important church encyclicals in the modern times. Various theologies arose from the decrees coming out of Vatican II, including the theology of religions and inter-faith dialogue, as well as theology of inculturation which encourages churchpeople to find a correlation between the people's indigenous cultures and the values of the Gospel. For readings on this theology, see: Acts and Decrees of the Plenary Council of the Philippines (1983), articles in various journals of the Philippine Catholic Theological Association (HAPAG), the *East Asian Pastoral Institute Journal* and the *Religious Life Journal* of the Claretian Publications.

referred to as popular or “folk Catholicism” or popular/folk religiosity within the Catholic tradition. There are many indicators to manifest that Filipinos embraced the synthesis of these two faith traditions, such as the importance of Catholic events in the nation’s calendar (Holy Week, All Soul’s Day, Christmas), and the way we celebrate fiestas as well as festivals that attract millions of devotees (*Nazareno* in Quiapo, *Sto. Niño* in Cebu, Our Lady of Manaoag in Pangasinan, *Ina de Peñafrancia* in Bicol, the Mother of Perpetual Help in Baclaran, and others).

All throughout the country’s historical process, a “chauvinist Christianity” asserted itself, helping to destroy the fabric of a belief system that for centuries had held the people’s lives in a symbolic manner and made living a most humane, just and compassionate way of life possible. Thus, it is appropriate to critique the kind of Christianity that has persisted in the Philippines since Spanish colonization.

With the introduction and expansion of Islam (since 1280-1310) and Roman Catholicism (since 1521) across the islands, more and more practices of pre-conquest indigenous religion unless were abandoned, unless, because of resistance or by being located in the hinterlands, proselytization campaigns did not make inroads. Thus, Islam and Roman Catholicism did not reach most of the Cordillera region, parts of southern Luzon including Mindoro and Palawan and the greater part of Mindanao. It was only from the American occupation (since 1898) to the rise of the Republic when the relatively remote communities could be reached, and this then led to proselytization campaigns by both Protestant and Catholic missionaries in Lumad territories. In spite of the decline in numbers of those who continued to worship the pre-conquest Deity and spirits, there are pockets of indigenous peoples today who have not totally abandoned such a belief system as indicated by studies conducted in Mt. Banahaw and other sites (e.g. Gorospe 1992). Among lowland Filipino communities, elements of the indigenous belief system are preserved in healing and worship practices, as well as the use of amulets as empowering elements (e.g. McAndrew 2001, 1982-1983). This only goes to prove the resilience of the indigenous belief system.

### **A missiological shift**

To seriously pursue Pope Francis’ call for the Church to be in solidarity with the peoples in a location such as Mindanao, it is imperative for the Church to find ways to introduce a radical shift in her missiological-pastoral approaches, especially in her presence among indigenous communities. The

reality is that there are major differences between the elements constituting the Roman Catholic belief system, and those of our indigenous ancestors. Moreover, the latter are in fact far more attuned to present-day progressive theological/missiological discourses.

In dealing with the concept of total human liberation (salvation), the Roman Catholic belief system in the country still generally manifests a residue of Medieval Theology, with a dualistic view of a dichotomy in terms of relating body and soul, heaven and earth, etc., leading to privatized, spiritual-oriented practice of faith. Salvation only involves cleansing the soul of sin so it gets to heaven. On the other hand, indigenous belief systems have an integral view of how the Deity and the spirit world make the people conscious of the reality of life surrounding them, one that connects the material and spiritual in a wholistic manner. Salvation is seen in terms of how believers practice their faith in an integral manner.

When dealing with Integrity of Creation, the Roman Catholic belief system has no regard for the sacredness of the whole of Creation (despite Pope Francis' *Laudato Si*), as it views the material world as existing mainly for the benefit of human beings who can decide how to deal with the whole of the environment. But for the indigenous, everything in the planet is holy and sacred and thus, needs to be respected. Human beings are as sacred as all the creatures of the entire ecological, cosmic reality.

In terms of dealing with the everyday, the Catholic faith's framework is mainly emphasizing individual efforts done privately and expressed in devotional/sacramental ways. On the other hand, for the indigenous, faith is to be practiced both in terms of deepening people's spirituality, but also inspire them to be engaged in dealing with the needs of society. In terms of people's participation (in liturgical and sacramental life), only the clergy hold dominant roles within the Catholic Church perspective. But for the indigenous, all have a role to play, not only the shamans. Whereas male clerical domination is the reality of Roman Catholic Church structure, among the indigenous, the women play equal roles; in fact, for indigenous communities, the officiants at rituals may be women (*babaylan*). Consequently, the Church's hierarchy is male-dominated, which is not true among indigenous communities.

In terms of rituals, the Church's Eucharistic celebrations, sacraments and sacramentals incorporate Latin/Roman "culture" with little effort at genuine inculturation. For the indigenous, ritual performances are far more connected to people's everyday lives and elements of their cultural fabric rich in

meanings. Finally, when it comes to establishing a sense of community defined by a spirit of collaboration and solidarity, the faithful who come to church to worship hardly have concrete relations of solidarity with each other, embodying a sense of being sisters/brothers. For the indigenous on the other hand, kinship and clan-based relations make tribal relations cohesive and greater compassionate solidarity is encouraged. Thus, to set up Basic Ecclesial Communities is redundant as indigenous communities are already acting as one body in response to their communal needs.

If Christianity is to remain relevant to the lives of believers in countries such as the Philippines, there is a need to tap into indigenous wellsprings and to come up with pastoral-missiological responses that would empower vulnerable people to resist violent domination and oppression. This means redeeming a Christianity that brings together the roots of the indigenous belief system and the values of the Christianity of the first Christian communities in the post-Resurrection epoch of Jesus Christ. Where does one begin the process? We all know that we cannot return to the pre-conquest era. History has unfolded and we are where we are today in our culture, including what we believe in. There exists no possibility of restoring our indigenous belief system to us even though there might still be isolated indigenous communities who continue to worship the Deity and the spirits of old.

With these communities, there is need to pursue an inter-faith dialogue in the same manner that Christians dialogue with Muslims. We must retrieve the more important constitutive elements of that belief system of yore and find ways so these could be appropriated by way of a genuine inculturation vis-à-vis the manner we Catholics today practice our religion. This necessarily involves highlighting the liberating elements of both and diminishing the shadows especially of a Roman Catholicism that is contrary to the essence of Christianity as practiced by the early Christian communities.

### **A way forward**

However, until there arises political will on the part of those who could make a difference so the Local Church will be truly able to live up to the challenges of Pope Francis, all these are mere ideas that will remain on paper. Some of these ideas were actually discussed early on during the pioneering years of the Lumad ministry in Mindanao in the 1970s-80s and some steps were taken to pursue them. Unfortunately, the drive to push this agenda forward lost momentum in the ensuing decades. How may the rise of

this political will be brought about? A number of initiatives and efforts will need to take place to achieve a number of goals, including:

***Creating spaces for anthropologists and theologians*** to update one another about current Lumad realities. Key Lumad leaders should be invited as resource persons, and discussions guided by relevant theories and discourses on how to respond to these realities, and concrete actions towards greater collaboration both in terms of advancing scholarship as well as praxis at the level of communities will need to consider the following questions:

- What are the priority concerns and issues to concentrate on?
- How may those who are also concerned with Lumads engage with government agencies e.g. the National Commission for Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), the Department of Education, the Local Government Units and the military; civil society groups e.g non-government organizations, local Lumad organizations and Church institutions)?
- What resources are at their disposal so they can get involved with Lumad communities?
- What are the necessary security precautions needed for dealing with communities that are prone to eruptions of violence among various armed groups?

The process could start in small circles, e.g. among theologians and anthropologists within Catholic educational institutions, including the following: Ateneo de Davao University, Ateneo de Zamboanga, Xavier University-Ateneo de Cagayan, Notre Dame University, Father Saturnino Urios University; and tapping from local seminaries like St. John Vianney Theological Seminary in Cagayan de Oro, Regional Major Seminary, and St. Alphonsus Theological and Mission Institute run by the Redemptorists in Davao. When resources can be mobilized, they could expand into a network. It should not be difficult to get the Presidents of Catholic universities to support this initiative if they take seriously Pope Francis' exhortation in *Evangelii Gaudium*.

I call on theologians to carry out this service as part of the Church's saving mission. In doing so, however, they must always remember that the Church and theology exist to evangelize, and not be content with a desk-bound theology. Universities are outstanding environments for articulating

and developing this evangelizing commitment in an interdisciplinary and integrated way (Pope Francis 2013:134).

Anthropologists who are connected with state colleges and universities (such as the Mindanao State University network, the University of the Philippines-Mindanao, the Western Mindanao State University, and others) as well as those connected with civil society organizations could also be invited to join these study-discussion circles. Anthropologists who are also church workers could be encouraged to serve as animators-facilitators and to take the lead in getting this process started.

***Strong collaboration between the Church and anthropologists.*** Once the first steps are taken, a group of theologians and anthropologists serious about pursuing this agenda could then connect with the Mindanao-based Board members of the Association of Major Religious Superiors (AMRSP) and the Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines (CEAP) along with the bishops involved with the Mindanao-based Episcopal Commission on Indigenous Peoples (ECIP), with hope that they can be encouraged to join in the discussions. Through these efforts, the 1970s-80s are revisited— a time when there was strong collaboration between the Church and anthropologists (e.g. with UGAT). This will help assure that Lumad programs can be strengthened or initiated and possible personnel and financial resources could be mobilized. This could also serve as a venue to encourage bishops and religious superiors to send more of their personnel to study Anthropology so that they can better serve the interests of the Lumad in the long-term.

## **Conclusion**

My ideas may sound quite idealistic and not doable, given our tendency to get too caught up with too many concerns – sometimes we feel we do not have the energy to do more than what we can accomplish these days. However, there are situations in Mindanao today that do demand urgent militant action. One of these is the plight of the Lumads. We need to collectively respond to this in far more collaborative ways than what we have been able to muster so far.

In the face of the difficulties that lie ahead, we need to take seriously the words of Pope Francis:

What we need, then, is to give priority to actions which generate new processes in society and engage other persons and groups who can develop them to the point where they bear fruit

in significant historical events. Without anxiety, but with clear convictions and tenacity (Pope Francis 2015: No.223).

Sometimes I wonder if there are people in today's world who are really concerned about generating processes of people-building, as opposed to obtaining immediate results which yield easy, quick short-term political gains, but do not enhance human fullness. History will perhaps judge the latter with the criterion set forth by Romano Guardini: "The only measure for properly evaluating an age is to ask to what extent it fosters the development and attainment of a full and authentically meaningful human existence, in accordance with the peculiar character and the capacities of that age" (Pope Francis 2015: No.224).

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