

Community, Solidarity, and Subsistence
A reflection on the ecumenical movement in
the Philippines

社區、團結、存活

菲律賓基督徒合一運動的反思

Lizette Pearl TAPIA-RAQUEL

[ABSTRACT] In the Philippine context, reports and reflections on the ecumenical movement are about stories on the lives and struggles of the common people. From experience, there are three elements to listening to and telling stories: trust, truth, time. When people share their stories of suffering and pain, triumphs and trials, life and death, they entrust us with their very lives. And this trust must be held sacred. In encountering and engaging them where they are, we see, smell, taste, hear and touch the truth ourselves. These are truths that are undeniable because we experience them ourselves when we dare to go where the people are crying out for life. And these truths are from the perspectives of the most vulnerable. Finally, they must be timely. The ecumenical movement must move with the times, immerse itself in current struggles, seek to be relevant and responsive to issues of life and death today. This article seeks to reflect on the commitment of those in the ecumenical journey in the

Philippines to listen to and share the stories of the suffering Filipino people. It also presents theological perspectives on what it means to be a participant in the ecumenical movement which is about being committed to communities, practicing radical solidarity and living in subsistence.

[摘要] 在菲律賓的背景下，基督徒合一運動的思考是關於普通人的生活 and 掙扎的故事。根據經驗，聽取和講述故事有三個要素：信任、真理、及時。當人分享他們的痛苦、勝利和考驗，生與死的故事時，他們將生命託付給我們，這種信任必須保持神聖。在與他們相遇到時，我們自己看到、聞到、品嚐、聽到和觸摸到真相，這是無可否認的真理，因為我們膽敢前去人們為生命而叫喊的地方，我們親身體驗到這些真理，而這些真理是來自最弱勢群體的觀點。最後，他們必須來得及時。基督徒合一運動必須與時俱進，沉浸在當前的掙扎中，尋找與今天生死攸關的事並做出回應。本文是一班在菲律賓基督教合一旅程中承諾傾聽和分享當地受苦人民故事的人的反思。文章從神學觀點指出，成為基督徒合一運動的一份子，就要致力於社區，實踐激進的團結和基本的存活。

From Culture to Community

In November 2013, Typhoon Haiyan or Yolanda made a landfall in the Philippines. It is the strongest landfalling cyclone on record with maximum sustained winds of 285 km/hr. equivalent of Category 5, with storm surges up to 17 feet.¹ It destroyed life and property especially in Samar and Leyte, leaving over 6,000 dead. Unofficial reports say that there were over 15,000 dead but the

¹ "Typhoon Haiyan." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 5 May 2018, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Typhoon_Haiyan.

government had stopped counting after the body bags ran out.² The cost of damage was estimated to be over USD 2 billion. It left 1.9 million homeless and over 6 million displaced. Tacloban, one of the most devastated areas, was described as a ‘war zone.’³ Over three years after the disaster, the survivors of Typhoon Haiyan continue to demand for rehabilitation and support. The Aquino Government was criticized strongly for their response and the United Nations itself described the efforts as ‘inadequate.’ Benigno “Noynoy” Aquino, then president, never visited Tacloban until the end of his term and the people continue to express anger and disgust for his government’s apathy. In January 2015, Pope Francis held a mass in Tacloban in an act of solidarity with the survivors of Typhoon Haiyan. Over 200,000 people were present.⁴

Tacloban received help from the governments of other countries as well as international agencies but these were still insufficient. However, there were more communities which were equally in need but did not receive anything from the government or from any agency. It was to such a community that we were asked to do ‘mission.’ In March 2014, over a year after Typhoon Haiyan, my husband Norman, and I visited Maalan, Maayon, in the Province of Capiz. It was a three-hour flight from Manila, half-a-day of travel on land in a car, and about an hour of an uphill climb on a motorcycle. There were some steep areas on the unpaved roads and we walked on foot until we could ride the motorcycle again. Before we visited

² Suerte Felipe, Cecile. “Yolanda Death Toll as High as 15,000, Priest Says.” *Philstar.com*, The Philippine Star, 5 Jan. 2015, www.philstar.com/headlines/2015/01/05/1409522/yolanda-death-toll-high-15000-priest-says.

³ Times, The Manila. “Super Typhoon ‘Yolanda’ Defines Aquino Presidency.” *The Manila Times Online*, The Manila Times, 15 Nov. 2013, www.manilatimes.net/super-typhoon-yolanda-defines-aquino-presidency/53296/.

⁴ AFP. “Pope Flees Philippine Storm, Cuts Short Typhoon Mercy Trip.” *Daily Mail Online*, Associated Newspapers, 17 Jan. 2015. www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/afp/article-2913974/Pope-set-emotional-day-Philippine-typhoon-survivors.html.

Maalan, we imagined that hunger would be evident and the land would be barren. We thought we brought with us the wisdom of rebuilding their homes. We imagined that people would sound desperate and be consumed with hopelessness. Instead, the community in Maalan, Maayon, had fields planted with rice and corn. Though they were heavily in debt for the seeds and fertilizers which were necessary for farming, they had planted despite the challenges and would soon reap the fruits from the land. We learned from the people that concrete and steel structures were broken down like crackers and wire during the typhoon as we saw the wasted remnants of these, while bamboo slats for walls and floors withstood the winds and the heavy rains even of Typhoon Yolanda. They had rebuilt their homes and lives with the limited resources they had. Still, we were welcomed by a community which lamented their cruel fate, understood the injustice and oppression they continued to experience, but celebrated how they have survived and continue to live on despite these. I felt their sense of community but the poverty was still evident. Many of their makeshift houses were built with scrap tarpaulin and wood. These were like ovens in the middle of the day and can not give shelter when it rains. The children, too, were sick and malnourished. The farmers were heavily in debt and they paid a ten percent monthly interest on their loans. The women and men are strong but there is very little they can do without support and opportunities. Most of them were caught up in a cycle of debt and slavery. This meant they no longer enjoy the fruits of their labor. Whatever they earn for their work or from the crops were not to be given them and were to be paid immediately to their debts. It was heartbreaking!

One would think all these sufferings would make a selfish and bitter people, but they sent us home with squash and gourd from their gardens. One of the men carried them on his back and accompanied

us on the dusty and rugged road back. The entire community watched us as we walked away and repeated again and again, "Come back!", "Please don't forget us." As we walked down, I thought this must have been how people responded to Jesus in Galilee. Like the people of Maalan, Maayon, the communities where Jesus preached, healed and forgave, felt deep gratitude for the compassion and presence of the Christ. I remembered one of the first things they said to us, "You are the first ones to come and show concern for us. We thought nobody would ever come."

In many of my journeys, whenever I return home, I feel I can never truly go back. There is always a part of me that remains where I have been: with the families who welcomed us into their homes and fed us, with the women who told their stories in languages foreign to us but whose laughter and tears conveyed what words could not, in the quiet acceptance of the men who quickly prepared chicken soup for us to express their hospitality and in the eyes of children who remind us that they are no different from our own. That was our experience at Maalan, Maayon. In one day, I felt differently about who I am, the people I encountered, and what matters in this journey called life.

For me, this is what the ecumenical movement is all about. It is about going where people are crying out for life.

This journey to and with the people of Maalan, Maayon, began when we were asked by our friends in the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP),⁵ the most concrete and powerful

⁵ The National Council of Churches in the Philippines is an ecumenical fellowship of non-Roman Catholic denominations in the Philippines working for unity in faith and order. Since its establishment in 1963, it has sought to bring together the churches towards opportunities for common prophetic witness and service by responding to the relevant issues affecting people's lives. It takes the side of the suffering and the most vulnerable as has been modelled by Jesus Christ. It has ten member churches: Apostolic Catholic Church, Convention of Philippine Baptist

embodiment of the ecumenical spirit in my country, to visit the remote community. My husband was serving then as the lead person in the Outreach Ministry of our church, Central United Methodist Church, which had designated a fund for responding to people affected by disasters. So, we used our own money for the air and land travel and saw the devastation in their community with our own eyes. NCCP has always sought to bring the churches closer to the people, especially those who were suffering, and at that moment, we represented an ecumenical effort to reach out to the community. We had wanted to send them money so some of them could rebuild their homes immediately. We knew that we would not be able to help everyone but at least could help some. However, we were told by the people at NCCP that we were not just constructing stronger houses but are committed to sustaining the community. It was explained to us that if we only chose some recipients and ignored the needs of others, we would actually be destroying the community. That is, their community spirit.

People Surge,⁶ the alliance of organizations of people who have survived Typhoon Haiyan in Eastern-Visayas, Philippines, and ACT Alliance,⁷ a coalition of more than 140 churches and church-related

Churches, Episcopal Church in the Philippines, Iglesia Evangelica Metodista En Las Islas Filipinas, Iglesia Filipina Independiente, Iglesia Unida Ecumenical, Lutheran Church in the Philippines, the Salvation Army, the United Church of Christ in the Philippines, and the United Methodist Church.

⁶ People Surge was created to campaign and advocate for accountability, human rights, climate and social justice from the Philippine Government and big businesses. The people who are part of it, most of whom are survivors of climate disasters, who have concluded that there is an interconnection between disaster, environment, climate, politics and society.

⁷ ACT Alliance is a coalition of more than 140 churches and church-related organisations working together in over 100 countries to create positive and sustainable change in the lives of poor and marginalised people regardless of their religion, politics, gender, sexual orientation, race or nationality in keeping with the highest international codes and standards. ACT Alliance is supported by 25,000 staff from member organisations and mobilises about \$1.5 billion for its work each year in three targeted areas: humanitarian aid, development, and advocacy.

organizations, whose members are associated with the World Council of Churches and the Lutheran World Federation, along with the NCCP, entered into a partnership to genuinely respond to the communities devastated by Typhoon Haiyan. In many parts of the world, big businesses and governments have made the survivors of climate disasters even more vulnerable in their desire for profit and political gain. Act Alliance and the NCCP, which are ecumenical endeavors, have sought to genuinely uplift the life and dignity of the suffering people.

Today, the ecumenical movement must move towards and journey with people crying out for life. But churches' and missionaries' perspectives and rhetoric alongside colonialists on 'manifest destiny,' 'white man's burden' and 'benevolent assimilation' have not been about the poor but about the white man's 'destiny,' 'burden,' and 'benevolence.' Local churches which continue to be colonized in practice and perspectives are not any different. They are just as dominating, oppressive, and destructive to local communities.

Going back to the community of Maalan, Maayon, I had introduced myself as a pastor and a teacher. I shared that I taught about women in the Bible and female, pre-colonial native priestesses called *babaylans* to empower women and to promote gender justice. Then I asked them, "Is there a *babaylan* here?" Several women pointed to a woman not older than me. She was affirmed by her community as a spiritual leader of the community and she herself proclaimed, "I am a *babaylan*." In conservative church circles, the *babaylan* is a pagan priestess. For more critical learners of history, the *babaylan* embodied indigenous spirituality and was a community leader who was also a healer, the offerer of rituals to connect the community with the divine and the facilitator of peace and growth among the people. However, I learned that she was not only a

babaylan, but was a devout Roman Catholic and a teacher of catechism in the local parish as well. For her and her community, there was no separation or conflict between the old spirituality and the acquired religion. At another time, I was giving a lecture entitled, *Babaylan and Feminisms*, to a group of Baptist pastors at Filamer Christian University in Roxas City, Philippines. After my lecture, which validated the contributions of *babaylans* in history and their life-affirming practices, several pastors expressed appreciation for this new understanding. Even if they have been pastors for decades, they continued to go to the *babaylans* in their communities for their sicknesses but had often felt guilty of unfaithfulness to God and to Jesus Christ. The lecture I had given them was liberating.

Our native spirituality which nurtured communities before the colonizers came has been demonized and rejected in a nation that is more than 86 percent Roman Catholic, about 2 percent Protestant, and with 6 percent attending national cults today. While some communities practice some kind of dual religion, a mixture of old beliefs and a devotion to the Christian God, the missionary agenda and the conversion of the natives was not a 'holy conversion' but a 'holy confrontation,' as described by Carolyn Brewer.⁸ My unpublished Master of Divinity thesis entitled, "The Church's Violence Against Women Under Spanish Colonial History and its Continuing Impact Today," is a study of how the Spanish mission to the Philippine Islands destroyed the spirit, identity, and community of the natives, particularly the females. Before the missionaries came, the goddesses in Philippine myths, female warriors in war epics, roles in family and society, the *babaylan*, sexuality and law, and the language exhibited women's value and equality with the men,

⁸ Carolyn Brewer. *Holy Confrontation: Religion, Gender and Sexuality in the Philippines, 1521-1685* (Manila: Institute of Women's Studies, St. Scholastica's College), 2001.

whether as siblings or as spouses. The Spanish priest's perspectives, symbols, rituals, and theologies re-shaped the natives' consciousness, relationships and culture. In the Spanish chronicles, the native's religious and sexual practices were demonized and perceived as abuses. They were forced to denounce their native spirituality, their cultural, economic and political systems, and their identity as a people. Today, centuries after the first Spanish missionary expedition to the Philippines, we are a subjugated people with women being labeled as either virgins or whores, idealized as mothers, sacrificed in the name of God and religion in churches where male supremacy is a primary ideology.⁹ The Spaniards came with the sword and the cross. The Americans came with the Bible and the gun. The acceptance of these Christian symbols were not without a cost. The new religion eliminated our native alphabet, the *alibata* or *baybayin*; buried our myths and stories; demonized our cultural leaders and bastardized our cultures. In fact, the very name of our nation exhibits our colonization as a people. The Philippines or Filipinas¹⁰ was given to the islands of Leyte and Samar in honor of King Philip II of Spain. Later, *Las Islas Filipinas* or the Philippine Islands applied to the entire archipelago. In the changing of our nation's name, our cultural identity was likewise diminished and destroyed.

George Tinker defines 'cultural genocide,' as "the effective destruction of a people by systematically destroying, eroding, or undermining the integrity of the culture and system of values that defines a people and gives them life."¹¹ Jose Rizal's novels: *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo*, first published in 1886 and 1891, respectively, exposed the abuses, hypocrisy, violence and cultural

⁹ Lizette Pearl G. Tapia-Raquel, "The Church's Violence Against Women in Spanish Colonial History and its Continuing Impact Today" (M. Div. thesis, Union Theological Seminary, Philippines, 2005).

¹⁰ The name was given by Spanish explorer Ruy Lopez de Villalobos.

¹¹ George E. Tinker, *Missionary Conquest* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press) 6.

genocide of the Spanish missionaries against the natives of the Philippine Islands. Rizal belonged to the Propaganda Movement which was seeking to find representation to the Spanish Cortes, the legislative body composed of Congress and Senate in Spain. The movement was not for the separation of the Philippines from Spain. Nevertheless, Rizal was executed for rebellion on December 30, 1896.

Tinker lists four vehicles through which cultural genocide is accomplished: political, economic, religious and social aspects.¹² Politically, the Spanish government replaced the leadership of the tribal elders and issued the 'cedula,'¹³ a residence tax certificate and an identification card which the Filipino native had to possess at all times or the non-bearer could be arrested and incarcerated by the Spanish Guardia Civil. They also created Spanish settlements which segregated the Westerners from the natives and further divided the natives into social classes. Economically, the Spanish settlements also forced the natives to leave their lands and for farming and fishing communities whose livelihood was connected to the land, the natives became impoverished and utterly dependent on the economic system of the Spaniards. Religiously, the native religion and the priestesses were demonized, placing the Filipino women at the bottom of the hierarchy, branding those who did not want to convert as pagans or whores if they were women, and institutionalized gender violence through their all-male hierarchy and patriarchal ideology. Socially, the *babaylan*, as cultural leader, the *datu*, as political leader and the *panday*, as the economic leader were all disempowered as the Spanish hierarchy established its absolute power and authority over the islands. The cultural genocide was

¹² Tinker, *Missionary Conquest*, 6-8.

¹³ The Katipunan, the revolutionary movement against Spain which was launched in August 1896, had for its first symbolic act of resistance the tearing of the *cedulas*.

thorough and potent, not just under Spain but also under the United States. Until 1985 when I was in the University, we were required to take 12 units or four courses on the Spanish Language. Throughout the decade, whether in universities, elementary schools or seminaries, the ongoing debate on the medium of language for teaching had been bitter. Then it was Spanish. For about a century now, we have been measured by our grasp of the English language. Over 400 years later since the first missionaries and colonizers came, the Filipino people continues to be enslaved and subjected to cultural genocide. This time by Filipinos themselves who no longer value Philippine culture.

Reflecting on the future of theology for my context, I must consider the following questions:

First, how can a church be responsive and relevant in a context where Christianity is already the dominant religion? Second, for whom will the church construct and live out this proposed theological and ecumenical task?

The process of constructing local theologies demands a conscious *listening to culture*. It is committed to breaking the domination of local cultures by outsiders and to creating a theology of incarnation with the belief that Christ is already present in the local context even as Christ is being proclaimed there. Schreiter summarized the challenges and possibilities of listening to culture. First, in listening to the Christ in a culture, one must look at the concepts of 'creation,' 'redemption,' and 'community' in the local context. Second, a foreigner must allow himself or herself to be informed by the culture without measuring and analyzing it according to his or her own foreign culture. Third, the native members of a community must take the lead in the process and must be willing to critically describe their culture while allowing outsiders

to share their insights about their native culture. Fourth, a semantic analysis must progress to pragmatics in pursuit of constructing a local theology.¹⁴

I think doing theology in the Philippines must go beyond culture and cultural identity. In a society that is characterized by foreign domination, the rule of the elite, and mass poverty, there is a need to take seriously the issues of social class, power dynamics, justice and common good. Thus, I would adopt Schreiter's *listening to culture*, but instead of using 'culture' I would use 'community' and in place of the 'foreigner' I will use 'church.' Then the inquiry would be: First, how does a community look at the concepts of 'creation,' 'redemption,' 'salvation,' and 'peace?' Second, what must be the attitude and perspective of the church or someone who is not from the community to be informed and listen to the voices and cries of the people in the community? Third, are the members of the community able to analyze their social, political and economic situation to critically engage in conversation with those outside of their community like the church? Fourth, are the leaders or articulators in the community able to arouse, organize, and mobilize the members of the community and the church through their narratives, challenges and calls? A fifth question would be, is the church able to articulate and respond to the experiences and struggles of the community? Constructing a local theology in the Philippine context today demands 'listening to community,' and by community, I mean the most vulnerable communities: the urban poor, the laborers working in the country and those forced to migrate, the displaced farmers and fisherfolk, the indigenous peoples whose leaders are being killed for resisting mining and mono-crop plantations. It is

¹⁴ Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, (New York: Orbis Books, 1985) 40-42.

with the Filipino communities in mind that I submit what I think about the future of theology and the ecumenical movement.

Not Development But Solidarity

In Mindanao today, over 500,000 hectares of land are covered by mining concessions. Over 700,000 hectares are covered by banana, pineapple, oil palm, rubber and other plantations. These lands are ancestral lands of the Lumads which are now militarized. Over fifty percent of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) are now deployed to Mindanao to secure the interests of investors. Furthermore, over 20 indigenous paramilitary groups called *Alamara*, *Magahat*, *Bagani Force*, among others, have been unleashed by the AFP and are sowing terror and division in Lumad communities. The Lumads claim that they are the targets because of their resistance to the plunder of their lands. Over 40,000 of them have already been forced to flee their own ancestral lands due to militarization. Their livelihood has been disrupted and their communities, schools, clinics and farms have been destroyed. Out of the 71 indigenous leaders killed under the former president, Benigno Simeon Aquino, 56 are Lumads. The primary agenda undergirding the disruption and destruction of communities and lives was and still is – development.

Descartes, the father of Enlightenment, introduced the principle of radical doubt where all knowledge must be based on rational thought. But after the two World Wars, it was conceded that reason does not secure progress and peace. On the contrary, it resulted in reductionism which stunted human development; reduced the earth and human beings into objects causing the enslavement of peoples, the degradation of the environment and plunder of the earth; and widened the gap between the rich and the poor because of greed. The problem was not about backwardness and underdevelopment.

Peoples and countries are poor because of the West's abuse of power causing dependency and not liberation.¹⁵ The mission agenda and the missionaries, intentionally or unintentionally, are complicit in this as a critical study of history will reveal.

If development has not and cannot fulfill the reign of God or peace for all of Creation and humanity, what can? The 1982 Mission and Evangelism document of the World Council of Churches reads, "There is no evangelism without solidarity; there is no Christian solidarity that does not involve sharing the knowledge of the kingdom which is God's promise to the poor of the earth. There is here a double credibility test: A proclamation that does not hold forth the promises of the justice of the kingdom to the poor of the earth is a caricature of the Gospel; but Christian participation in the struggles for justice which does not point towards the promises of the kingdom also makes a caricature of a Christian understanding of justice."¹⁶

What does solidarity mean? The Old Testament's most profound exhibition of solidarity is in the Exodus Narrative:

⁷ Then the LORD said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings,⁸ and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.⁹ The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them."¹⁰ So

¹⁵ David Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (New York: Orbis Books) 300-311.

¹⁶ Mission and Evangelism Document of the World Council of Churches, paragraph 34.

come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.”¹¹ But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?”¹² He said, “I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain.”¹⁷

God’s solidarity with the Hebrew people is five-fold: First, “I have observed...,” means that God turns towards the oppressed. Despite the goodness in the world, God sets God’s sights on the suffering and sees them. For the church today, ‘to observe’ means to take an interest in the suffering peoples of the world. It may not be readily evident as the world is wide, but it is a commitment to know what is happening in the world because it is in the world that the Kingdom of God will come. Second, “I have heard their cry...” means God does not only speak but listens, especially to the cries of the suffering. For the church today, to listen means to hear without having absolute answers and wanting to prescribe solutions but to genuinely and critically understand what is being said and what is not being said, understanding why it is being said and not being said. Third, “I know their sufferings...” is revealing of God’s understanding of the pain, humiliation and brokenness of the people. It is not merely about knowledge of a situation but an empathic connection. For the church, this means we must allow ourselves to share in their suffering to be able to cry, hope and struggle with them. Four, “I have come down...” reveals the selflessness of God. God does not have to remain on a throne, be transcendent and omniscient. In coming down, God abandons the place of power to be truly present where the suffering people are. For the church, it means

¹⁷ Ex. 3: 7-12, New Revised Standard Version.

divesting ourselves of power, authority and primacy, and allowing ourselves to be immersed in situations where people are experiencing injustice and oppression. It is about being vulnerable with the vulnerable, knowing suffering with the suffering. Fifth, God says, "I will be with you..." and I think this means that God journeys with the people in pursuit of liberation. More than that, it is about taking sides because to journey with the oppressed means to journey against the oppressor. God's solidarity with the Hebrews defines the very nature of God. God is not neutral. God chooses to be in solidarity with the slaves, those who need God the most.

Jesus himself chose to be in solidarity with the poor and suffering. In the incarnation of the Son, the Trinity throws itself open, in solidarity where the Father of the Son becomes the Father to all of humanity. Through the brotherhood of the Son, humanity enters into a covenant with the Trinity where they are invited to live 'in God' and 'God in them.' I think a theological understanding that places Jesus as a 'brother' makes Jesus present in our families, communities and struggles for justice and peace. Jesus leads the way and we are invited to follow to respond to the political realities of our time. To follow Christ is not to be in glory, but to participate in his mission and fate, even unto death.¹⁸ In Moltmann's *Theology of Mystical Experience*, he defines the process by which we experience God. First, by meditation as knowing, then with contemplation as self-awareness, then mysticism which is coming into fellowship with God towards a public discipleship, and finally, until martyrdom where in our experience with God, we experience persecution and self-sacrifice. Thus, to follow 'the only begotten son' and 'the first-born of many brethren' is to be in covenant not just with the Trinity but to be in solidarity with the suffering humanity or those

¹⁸ Jurgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ* (London: SCM Press, 1990).

who Moltmann described as ‘crucified people.’ Nevertheless, our brotherhood with Christ is also to share in the liberation of humanity and the whole of creation.

But Jesus’s solidarity is not just covenantal. It is political. In the incarnation of the Son, God enters that chaotic space of “the Other.” But not just any ‘other,’ but the suffering, oppressed and political other. Jesus was born in a family of refugees, amongst a people who were a colony, and in “the Kingdom of Rome.” From the Song of Mary in Luke 1, his birth was a moment when there were hungry people who needed to be filled with good things, and where the mighty must be pulled down from their thrones. He preached on “the Kingdom of God” as a counter discourse to the Kingdom of Rome, was called ‘the Son of God’ at a time when the emperor was believed to be ‘the son of God.’ He was later killed by the empire by crucifixion which was a punishment meted to those who were believed to be enemies of the empire. He could have been born amongst the Romans and could have transformed the world from a more privileged position, but he was not. Jesus as the ‘icon,’ ‘image,’ and ‘reflection of God,’ was placed in a political context that required a political response. Thus, to follow ‘the only begotten son’ and ‘the first-born of many brethren’ is to engage in the political realities of our time.

Thus, Jesus’s solidarity with the suffering communities and peoples is two-fold: covenantal and political. Jesus solidarity is not just individual but corporate, not just contemplative but active, not just communal but cosmological, not just divine but human in its expressions. But another characteristic must be added to the first two and that is ‘radical’ and by this I mean ‘counter-history.’ In a world where power and authority are given respect and honor, Jesus says, “But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the

Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."¹⁹ In communities where families demand loyalty and primacy, Jesus says, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple."²⁰ Finally, human beings are constructed to have a desire to be accepted, to belong and to be loved. But Jesus says, "Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man!"²¹ Jesus's radical demand to serve others and not ourselves, to serve others and not our families, to seek to serve the 'Son of Man' even when we are hated, rejected and demonized, is imperative towards liberation and genuine peace. It is only through radicality can one begin to challenge and change long held beliefs, practices, and relationships. To begin with, God becoming human is the most radical of all. It is the most radical expression of solidarity.

The Ecumenical Bishops Forum (EBF)/Philippine Ecumenical Peace Platform (PEPP) is the largest ecumenical peace movement of Church leaders in the Philippines. It is composed of Church leaders from five-member federations: the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, the National Council of Churches in the Philippines, the Philippine Council of Evangelical Churches, the Ecumenical Bishops Forum and the Association of Major Religious Superiors Men and Women in the Philippines. Through the years, they have expressed solidarity with the poor and oppressed as their most sacred task, seeking to become true prophets in these critical times by providing pastoral guidance, statements and analysis on issues affecting the lives of the people, particularly on issues of human

¹⁹ Matthew 20: 26-28.

²⁰ Luke 14: 26.

²¹ Luke 6: 22.

rights, and peace and justice issues. The EBF and the PEPP has been the most radical in their solidarity work: joining protest rallies of peoples' movements, conducting investigations and interviews in remote areas where people have been harassed and killed due to the abuse of state forces, accompanying and advocating for persons and peoples whose family members or community members have been killed due to the 'War on Drugs' of the government and those held as political prisoners. As such, they themselves become targets. One example is the case of Bishop Carlos Morales of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente who was falsely accused of possessing illegal firearms and a grenade after taking in as passenger in his vehicle one of the National Democratic Front of the Philippine's consultants, Rommel Salinas. The NDFP is the revolutionary united front organization of the Filipino people seeking national liberation and pursuing the democratic rights of the people. Bishop Morales was illegally arrested in May 2017. He was released only recently. Another example is the killing of Fr. Marcelino Paez, a 72 year-old Roman Catholic priest, who was shot by motorcycle-riding men just a few hours after he helped facilitate the release of a political prisoner by the name of Rommel Tucay, a peasant organizer who had been charged of illegal possession of firearms after being abducted and tortured by a joint military and police team in Nueva Ecija. There are prophets among us and they are not just in the Church but amongst the people.

The ecumenical movement in the Philippines has rejected the development agenda of the government as that which will transform the society and economy of the Philippines. Development has only perpetuated the marginalization of the masses: laborers, farmers, indigenous people and others. Thus, the ecumenical movement in the Philippines, like the EBF/PEPP, has chosen radical solidarity with the poorest and the most oppressed. They have become a threat to

those who have power and might but are a source of hope to those who need God the most.

Not Prosperity but Subsistence

The Lumad Peoples have been branded communist and rebels and it is under the guise of the development that the military and the state impose laws, empower the state forces and turn a deaf ear to their cries for justice and human rights. In 2011, Father Fausto Tentorio an Italian priest and a member of the Pontificio Instituto Missioni Estere (PIME or Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions), was killed in North Cotabato in the island of Mindanao. He is the third priest to be murdered in Mindanao. A staunch anti-mining advocate, he has been in solidarity with Lumad and Muslim communities for a long time. He had built and sustained Day-Care Centers and alternative schools for the Lumads for years. It has been said that if it were not for him and his companions in the advocacy, the Lumad People would have been displaced permanently and robbed of their land. It is the priests solidarity work in the church, alongside the international community and the organized peoples that has given hope, courage and joy to the Lumad peoples. The other two priests, Father Tullio Favali and Father Salvatore Carzedda, did similar work. Today, Father Peter Geremia from the same mission continues the solidarity work in North Cotabato. It is a continuation of God's work with the slaves in Exodus and Jesus's commitment to the poor in his time. Their solidarity work, when measured by the world standards for development which is characterized by infrastructure and physical facilities, will not satisfy those who have power, knowledge and authority. But for the people of North Cotabato and Mindanao, their solidarity has enabled them to defend

their land, preserve their culture, educate the next generation and pursue their goals as a community independently.

The Lumad communities do not measure life according to prosperity but according to peace. They have one principle for life, and it is not dependent on development or oriented towards prosperity. It is 'subsistence' and its pursuit is peace or shalom. Fisherfolk, farmers and many indigenous peoples' communities have always lived at the subsistence level. They harvest, gather and obtain only what is necessary for living for themselves and for their communities. The idea of hoarding is alien to them. The concept of 'profit' is opposed to their communal living which shares resources, whether it is water from the river, a harvest of grain or fruits, the meat of a captured monitor lizard or boar. The idea of being richer or poorer than anyone is unthinkable. Even the hiring of laborers is something they do not practice. Everything is shared, especially labor. In their vulnerability, there is a need for community. And because resources are not unlimited, they must live at the subsistence level, so that the generations that come after them can still share in the fruits of the earth.

There is a popular story about missionaries doing mission in communities. It is said that while they were coming down from a community, they came upon a guava tree which had so much fruit. They each took a piece to taste. Finding it delicious and sweet, they opened their bags and took as much fruit that they can carry. A member of the community came by and took one and ate it. As he was about to leave, one missionary said, "Take more! It's good. Maybe you can even sell some of it to the people in town." He replied, "We only take what we need, Father. Somebody among us might come by and might be feeling hungry. If we take more than we need, someone will go hungry and we do not want that to be

experienced by anyone." The priest suddenly felt the heaviness of his bag which he had filled with the fruit.

In Mark 10, a rich, young man asks Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. The text reads, "Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions."²² After all the rich, young man had done to inherit eternal life, he was still found lacking. Jesus's command to sell what he owned and give to the poor as essential for him to truly follow Christ was a shock to the rich, young man. His lack was to be filled and made abundant in his dispossession and subsistence. Jesus demanded radical generosity. More importantly, Jesus demanded radical solidarity.

Today, in the Philippines, there are 5.5 million child laborers, aged 5-17, working in hazardous environments. One out of five children are working to put food on the table. 43 percent of jobs in the economy or 16.2 million out of 37.8 million workers, are contractual employees which means that they are paid low, have no job security and have no benefits. For example, 9 out of 10 workers at SM Malls are contractual. Six thousand hectares of sugar land or what is known to be Hacienda Luisita remains with the Cojuangcos, the family of the president, even after the Supreme Court has decided in favor of the peasant farmers. Perhaps we must call it 'radical generosity.' Rev. Dr. Everett Mendoza says, a Filipino theologian says, "Nothing less than a radical transfer of wealth and power can change the situation. The Christian faith claims that God though rich became poor in Christ that the poor might become rich. The world's richest must become poor so that the poor of the world may live."

²² Mk. 10: 21-22, New Revised Standard Version.

Finally, I wish to deconstruct a popular Old Testament narrative which, to me, validates greed. Genesis 41: 55 reads, “When all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread. Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, “Go to Joseph....Joseph opened all the storehouses, and sold to the Egyptians ...all the world came to Joseph in Egypt to buy grain, because the famine became severe in all the world.” In the text, it is evident that Joseph has control and monopoly over the supply of grain. When the Egyptians cried in their hunger, Joseph sold rice to them. He SOLD rice to them. How many could afford to buy Joseph’s grain and how many died of hunger because they could not afford Joseph’s grain? But what is also explicit in the text is that Joseph was selling to both the Egyptians and the non-Egyptians. There was no mercy even for the people of Egypt. Joseph and the Pharaoh were making a profit even as communities and peoples were dying of hunger. Genesis 41: 49 reads, “Joseph had stored grain in such abundance, like the sand of the sea - that he stopped measuring it: it was beyond measure.” He and Pharaoh had the power and resources to feed peoples and nations and yet they chose not to. Fueled by greed and profit, the powerful men sacrificed peoples and nations. Is it not incredible that more than half of the world’s population experiences hunger on a daily basis and communities engage in wars over basic resources such as water, food and land even as producers harvest bumper crops and oil companies earn billions of dollars? Is it not incredible that the Philippines has a great number of some of the grandest and most expensive malls in Asia while hundreds of thousands of families live in houses made of trash or are forced to live in the streets? Is it not incredible that there is so much evidence of affluence and profit as much as there is evidence of human suffering and deprivation? This is how our economic system works today. Narratives in the Bible and our histories exhibit humanity and even the church’s capacity and propensity to do both good and evil. Solidarity and subsistence are

theological and missiological imperatives today that the Church must take on.

A Litany of Resistance against Greed

For every student who is educated in a premier university where he or she is made to believe that financial success is more important than the common good, there are hundreds of un-schooled children who labor as early as five years old just to put food on the table.

For every corporation that earns billions in profit in a global community, there are villages and homes where men, women and children toil day and night, in fear and in inhumane working conditions for slave wages.

For every government that exhibits power to ensure the interests of capitalists and foreign investors, there is a mother searching for an abducted daughter or son, children whose father or mother is murdered to be silenced and to instill fear, and an entire community that flees to escape militarization.

For every mining company that extracts minerals and wealth from the earth to sustain our wasteful consumption, there are indigenous peoples and farming communities who lose their homes, their clean water, their land to till, and witness how their paradise becomes a wasteland.

For every woman who indulges in luxuries and vanities to fulfill the image the powerful have created, there are a hundred women who struggle with blood, sweat and tears to birth a new world where women are truly whole.

For every human being who remains silent in the suffering of their fellow human beings, a woman will die in childbirth, a child

will stop going to school even before he learns to read, and a father will feel helpless in the face of his children's hunger.

Thus, subsistence as a theological principle is not just for poor communities seeking survival. It is more so for those who have much, and especially for those whose lives has been driven by the need to possess and have more. We cannot serve both God and mammon. Until we are able to divest ourselves of our wealth, of our need to have more than others have, of our desire to have more and more, we cannot live out the ecumenical spirit. Ultimately, the ecumenical spirit is not just intended for church unity, but unity in service to those who need God the most.