

THEOLOGICAL REACTION

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Several themes stand out in Fr. Demetrio's paper in "Ecology and Creation According to the Bukidnon of Central Mindanao."

The first theme is the harmony between nature and life, a harmony between all created beings, a harmony that is to be respected; a true community of life.

Before the primitive people became aware of the biological process of impregnation and birth, they saw the elements of the earth to have something to do with the child being put into the mother's womb. Thus, there is a bond between humanity and nature. The child is sired by some element in the surrounding environment: the fruit, the water, or the whirlwind. People, plants, and animals work together for the increase or preservation of life.

Secondly, this harmony of all the elements is especially true in fostering and achieving peace. To achieve peace, there must be harmony. The elements of nature are essential elements in the peace process. The rattan or *balagun ha lintukan* played a special role. The rattan was split, and from its split skin, a knot, or *kedao*, was tied. The knot was sent to the different tribes: the Maranao, the Maguindanao, and the Manobo. When the four knots were tied, the peace ceremony took place. The place of the peace treaty takes on a special significance and sacredness. In the peace pact the environment participates in bringing about peace. Water, plants, animals were actively involved in the building up of peace and therefore also in the increase and preservation of human life.

If harmony is not present, there is no longer peace. The lack of well defined territorial boundaries brought about conflict. Thus, there was a need to resolve the difficulty and bring about harmony. This was achieved by clearly defined, well guarded borders. Thus, peace, or harmony among people, is linked with harmony and order in all of creation.

Part of this harmony is the special role given to women and their respect within the community. Notice the special place given to Bai Kamayugan and Bai Mayebag.

The legend gathered in 1972 in Tikalaan, Bukidnon, relates the peace pact gone through by the leader of five tribes dwelling in Central Mindanao. What is significant in this legend is the mutual loyalty of five tribe leaders: one Christian, two Muslims and two animists. The peace pact included harmony with many elements: the Qur'an, the Bible, the durian, the white chicken and the green *balagun*, with all the elements being mixed together in a hole dug in the earth.

The harmony with nature of those involved in the peace pact allows them to go beyond their tribal and religious differences. They have a union at a deeper level. Today, a durian tree stands in Tikalaan which all people of Central Mindanao look upon as a tree of friendship. The use of the *balagun*, the blood of the white chicken, and the durian antedate both Islam and Christianity. The earth itself, in the wide, pervasive support of all forms of existence, is participant to the peace pact.

I find similarities between this peace pact and Abram's Covenant experience in the Old Testament. While there is no encounter with Yahweh in the Bukidnon legend, there is an encounter among the five leaders of the people with the earth being an essential part of the peace pact. In God's covenant with Abram (Genesis 10:1-19), there is also a harmony with nature, a sacrifice of animals, and a sense of importance given to the elements of the earth.

Third, the poetry of the Bukidnon reflects their harmony with nature, and their sharing of deep emotions with nature. SALA AI reminds me very much of Psalm 103:13-16.

Our life is hard. We are like pilgrims in the wide world. Like the plant, we have our times willed by Diwata. When we have fulfilled our time, the plant of life withers away in the soil of Kana-an (Paradise) where it was planted.

Men would cling to life. But we cannot refuse the order of God who wills everything."

Psalm 103:13-16

As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear him. For he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust.

The day of man are like grass; he blooms like a flower in the field:

But the wind passes, and he is gone, never to be seen again.

In conclusion, the harmony between nature and life, especially in fostering peace and even the sharing of deep emotion with nature, reveals the Bukidnon's focus on immanence not transcendence. However, the peace pact presents a special challenge. Since the unity of the five participants in the peace pact rested upon a deep level of bondedness with the earth, a question arises for the Christian. What is the meaning of the Incarnation? May a Christian allow his deepest union with others to lie in a harmony with nature or in a harmony with faith in a mysterious God who has revealed Himself fully through Jesus Christ? Does the Incarnation challenge the source of bondedness for all people? Is all of reality transformed by the Incarnation, natural reality as well as human reality? May Christians find a deep level of union, not only explicitly in faith in Jesus Christ but also implicitly by sharing a union with peoples of different religions and cultures, bonded by their harmony with nature, a nature transformed by the Incarnation?