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Community leaders attend our PAR dialogue in Tabuk, Kalinga.

PEACE, CONFLICT, AND CULTURE: A REFLECTION ON OUR TRIP TO KALINGA

by AJ Block

On November 3rd, 2014, a team from the Peacebuilder's Davao office set off for the mountainous Kalinga province in Luzon. Once there, we met our PAR community leader in the area, Twinkle, to be our guide for the duration of the field trip. Our express intent was to lead some PAR, coffee, and livelihood workshops; we were also there to listen to the community, begin to understand its culture, interact with some of its leaders, and also get a feel for the socio-political situation on the ground. All of this we did in partnership with PBCI missionary Twinkle Alngag Bautista and her family, from whom we received a warm welcome. It was clear after the trip was over that there is much to learn and much that can be done in Kalinga, and also that there are people of peace in the province, where God is certainly at work.

Of primary interest to me was the PAR training we

held. The atmosphere and content of the dialogue, namely the insights it brought forth about peace, conflict, and culture, were at times challenging, but vitalizing. I think it is important to note that despite (or perhaps because of) the sometimes heavy material discussed in the dialogue, its most indicative result was seen in how it opened up doors for relationship not only between us and some community leaders of Kalinga, but also among these leaders themselves. During the workshops, discussion ranged from interpretations of peace, violence and conflict; biblical shalom and its potential conduciveness to culture; institutions specific to Kalinga culture that dictate conflict resolution; the forces of positive and negative energy, and much else. Seeing the depth of participation through both the guardedness and the vulnerability, the defensiveness and the open-mindedness, what stood out most was the collective

For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ. - 1 Cor. 3:11

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Visiting a coffee farm owned by our new Kalinga partners

embrace that came at the end, when all were able to see each other (and themselves) with newer eyes. It was inspiring to see the undercurrents of humanity that unite us across culture, and especially how the constituents of shalom find expression no matter the cultural context.

Peace is a universal concept, but finds its expression subject to cultural environments around the world. For example, in the PAR workshop we were asked to describe our personal vision of peace first privately, then in small groups, then as a consensus of all the small groups' discussions. My personal idea of peace as a Canadian, a 21 year-old, a Western, Caucasian male, and all the components of identity that make me, *me*, differed in priority and language compared to the Kalinga women and the other North American intern, Jonathan, I was discussing with. When looked at more in depth, though, we found that our individual conceptions of peace fit together nicely to make a fuller, more holistic shalom: my prioritized desire for interpersonal understanding and having a noticeable voice was conducive, indeed, even completed by, Ate Malou's (Twinkle's aunt) need for harmony in the family, Jonathan's call for justice, and others' desire for unity, co-existence, identity, safety, etc. It seems to be that what we need as human beings are in certain ways influenced by our cultural identity, both private and corporate. Can we, then, prioritize one constituent value of peace over another? Yes, but it is clear that individuals-in-community have both shared and personal needs, so a level of subjectivity arises in one's personal experiential vision of shalom. In other words, when it comes to understanding and envisioning God's shalom, different aspects of it will stand out from person to person. In the end, what

is important and comforting to know is that God cares about our needs, and His vision of wholeness for us addresses those needs regardless of the worldly context. Truly, who else would know our needs better than He who created us?

So what about when our human nature compels us the other way, toward a selfish imposition of our will over others? Conflict is inherent to humanity, but is not inherently bad. Indeed, it can even be life giving as two or more parties find a venue to express themselves interpersonally towards a new, mutually beneficial reality. Unfortunately, violence and greed also come naturally to people around the world. It follows, then, that these desires will not only create conflict, but perpetuate it, creating a much more complicated and painful problem. Again, these anti-Kingdom values are pervasive throughout humanity, and thus have seen different cultural-historical products throughout time: whether it is the disaster capitalism seen today, the great wars of the twentieth century, the conquests of biblical times, or even the early Mennonite debacle at Munster, violence and greed always find a cultural milieu in which to parasitically thrive.

Peace and conflict are natural products of human interaction, mediated through culture. So why does it seem like we excel at conflict and lack a consistent dedication to peace? So often our socio-cultural institutions lend themselves to an inadequate approach to conflict. Although God still dignifies our imperfect laws, it is clear they need careful evaluation to not miscarry the justice they claim to impart. Too often in the West, for example, does a troubled teen end up



PBCI Executive Vice President Joji Pantoja receives a warm welcome from our Kalinga partners



The Chico River, beloved by the tribes of Kalinga.

in juvenile detention when what they really need is loving guidance and psychological healing. Or on the geopolitical stage, an air campaign on a wily dictator or an unruly militant group may end up perpetuating the violent unrest it aims to solve. In Kalinga, cycles of reactionary curses and vigilante acts of revenge upset the spiritual and social balance of tribal relationships. For all of humanity's efforts at enacting justice, two things become clear: that we have an inherent understanding of peace and justice and strive for it; and that, without exception, it is inadequate and prone to corruption and so needs God's corrective touch.

As I learned from the Kalinga people in the workshops, we can and should understand these things spiritually. For all of their positive intent, human institutions are still susceptible to evil. It will not overpower God's ability to dignify our poor attempts at justice, but it is still evil, and so can taint our human efforts in spiritually harmful ways. Furthermore, the entrenchment of violent conflict in our globalised society gives rise to deceptions such as just war and redemptive violence, which are justifications employed throughout the world that mask the inevitability of war, tragically, as a necessity. The greatest lies are those closest to the truth.

This is why the truth of the Gospel of peace needs to be practiced and shared. With Christ a culture of peace can be sought without erasing what makes people unique. This requires consideration of everybody as equals, an acknowledgment of cultural identity, and addressing of historical injustice. An effort toward establishing shared spaces, common values, and mutual dreams is needed, but without compromising differences by ignoring them or squandering the opportunity they create to learn from one another. This is a tall order, and it takes time, faith, and a profound hope against the endurance of violence, as well as an understanding that history belongs to God. Fueled by our hope in the transformative Gospel, then, we can work toward a collective liberation of our worldviews, so that different people groups in the Philippines and the wider world can show solidarity in values without being reduced to uniformity. This is the dynamism of the culture of peace. It is a trust in Christ to help us shed the dysfunction of this world and a striving towards the wholeness of shalom. It can happen in Kalinga. It can happen in the Philippines. Surely, it will happen the world over. May God help us all to seek that reality. 🙏



A *pochon* mediator signs the community's final agreement

A PROCESS OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN KALINGA

by Salome Haldemann

In Northern Luzon, in the beautiful province of Kalinga, made of mountains and waterfalls, lives a tribe of the same name. The Indigenous People of Kalinga have found balance between progress and tradition, and live a semi-urban lifestyle while respecting the tribal law.

I have been living with them for a few weeks, and have been blessed with the opportunity to discover the *pochon*. Loosely, the *pochon* means "peace pact agreement" between two subtribes of Kalinga. Included in the *pochon* is the indigenous way of settling a dispute: when a conflict arises between two subtribes, members from both subtribes meet to try and find a solution that will suit both parties, even if it takes days of discussion. The Kalingas only use the Philippines' justice system as a very last resort.

Today, the *pochon* is called to solve what would be a very private conflict in the western world. Jericho* has been married to Mary* for 8 years. Recently, he discovered that his wife had been having an affair with Daniel*, one of her colleagues, and that she was now pregnant with his child. Daniel is also married, and comes from another subtribe. Elders and eminent members of both tribes have come to Jericho's house to try and find an acceptable solution. Mary and Daniel are not allowed to assist, but they will accept whatever the council will decide.

When the meeting starts, the tension is palpable. One of his sisters stays inside the house with Jericho to make sure he stays calm. He is hurt, angry, and does not really want to take part in the discussions. He is set on divorcing his wife.


The discussions go on for many hours. Even though many people participate, everybody is silent as one after the other stands to speak: "We want Daniel to pay a penalty, he is the one who fathered the baby."

"We understand the need for penalty, but please keep in mind that the situation could be the other way around, and don't be too hard on us."

"Let me tell you of a similar story and of its outcome." A young woman takes the minutes, for archive.

On the other side of the house, the garden and the kitchen are buzzing with activity. The children play and run around the squealing pig being butchered for lunch: meals are a crucial part of Kalinga culture, and offering a four-legged animal to your guests is a sign of respect, especially in a context of conflict. When lunch is ready, both parties have reached an agreement. Jericho and Mary will divorce, but Jericho will not sue Mary, thus allowing her to keep her job with the government (infidelity is a penal offense in the Philippines). Jericho will keep the house, and Mary will move back to her mother's house with their two daughters, aged 4 and 8 years old. Daniel will not divorce his wife because she just gave birth to their fifth child, but he will be paying a penalty for moral damage. In reality, the fees and the penalty will be the responsibility of the whole tribe: Daniel would not be able to pay, and this way he will be reminded that his actions have an impact on everyone. The agreement is put to paper, and signed by all the participants.

The afternoon is used to discuss details of the agreement, and smaller matters. At the end of the day, Jericho is much calmer. Is he happy with the process? "Yes," he says, "I know they are wiser than me and have a better understanding of the situation. Without them I would already have done something that I would have regretted."

The whole process took one day, cost one pig, and the outcome considered each party's best interest. The community has avoided a years-long, humiliating and pricey trial, and it looks like Kalinga has a lot to teach us. 

*The names have been changed to protect the privacy of the people involved