

**PEACE-BUILDING AND TRANSFORMATION:
BEING A GOSPEL WITNESS IN THE MIDST OF UNJUST GLOBAL REALITIES**

***A Biblical-Theological Framework
for a Peace and Reconciliation Ministry***

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PeaceBuilders Community, Inc. (PBCI) exists to be a Gospel witness in the face of unjust global realities. We seek to live the Gospel through peace-building and transformation ministries.

At PBCI, we understand the New Testament term *gospel* (euaggelion) as good news or good message—denoting the good tidings of the kingdom of God¹ and the proclamation of God's saving activity which is demonstrated in the life and work of Jesus of Nazareth.

Being a witness of the Gospel is about telling the truth—the Truth we experienced in Christ. Our witness ought to be authenticated with our lives. It means loving our neighbors as we love ourselves. It means loving our enemies, reconciling with them, and respecting them as friends. It involves living in their midst in justice and in peace. It involves being transformed in all aspects of our lives in accordance with the character of Jesus—the Prince of Peace. Being a Gospel witness is submitting our whole life, our whole being, to the Almighty God. It is acknowledging God's sovereignty over our most valued priorities. When we acknowledge the God of the Bible, such acknowledgment "requires the reordering of everything else."²

In 2004, I lived in the Municipality of Sultan Kudarat, Province of Maguindanao, Mindanao Island, for six months. The neighborhood where I lived was just a few kilometers away from Camp Darapanan, the Central Headquarters of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)—a non-state armed force fighting for their right to self-determination.

I stayed in a neighborhood called Nuling, the traditional residence of a respected clan who are the descendants of Sultan Kudarat—a national hero among Muslims in the Philippines. I introduced myself just as I am—a Christian who wants to build peaceful relationship among the Maguindanao Muslims. I told them that I was a pastor and a student of Theology and that I was

¹ W.E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, Merrill F. Unger and William White, Eds. (New York: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985), pp. 275-276.

² Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), p. 747.

preparing to be a peace-building worker among the tri-people of Mindanao—the Lumad (Indigenous Peoples), the Bangsamoros³ (mostly Muslims), and the Migrants (mostly Christians). They learned about my family, my religious background, my political background, and my dual citizenship as a Filipino and as a Canadian. Though I was scared at first, I determined to be completely transparent with them.

Today, my family had been embraced by a respected *datu* (a traditional community leader) and his extended family. My wife is like a sister to a *bai* (a lady belonging to the datu clan). My 23-year old son who was raised in Canada is so at home with his Bangsamoro Muslim friends in Sultan Kudarat. During the wedding of a prominent young datu, my son was chosen to be the young datu's best man. In that wedding, my wife and I served as the only Christian sponsors among the business and political leaders in Muslim Mindanao. I love my adopted Muslim family!

Our small peacebuilding community is also working in partnership with Muslim organizations like the Bangsamoro Development Agency (BDA). We work together with BDA in the area of Values Enhancement Program among Muslims and Christians around the Ligawasan marsh.

As a community, we are completely transparent with all the people of Mindanao as witnesses for Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace.

Peace-building starts with Salam-Shalom. The Arabic word *salam*, and the Hebrew word *shalom* basically means "completeness, soundness, welfare, and peace." *Completeness* has the idea of being whole—that is, all the parts are connected with each other. *Soundness* can be understood also as safety of the body and clarity of mind. *Welfare* can be viewed as wellness—that is, holistic health and prosperity. *Peace* can be read as tranquility, contentment, and healthy relationships with God and other human beings, and thus, the absence of any

³ The term *Bangsamoro* (lit. Nation of Moros) refers to the thirteen ethno-linguistic groups—namely, Maranao, Maguindanao, Tausug, Samal, Yakan, Sangil, Badjao, Kalibogon, Jama Mapun, Iranun, Palawanon, Kalagan, and Molbog—who embraced Islam. They are mainly found in Western and southern Mindanao Island, the Sulu Archipelago, and the coastal areas of southern Palawan. The Moros were once considered to be the most developed communities in the entire Philippines Archipelago. They reached the level of a centrally organized society. They had their own form of government antedating several hundreds of years the creation of the Philippine Republic. I interchange the terms *Bangsamoros* and *Moros*.

hostility or war. Salam-Shalom can be summarized as the quality of life characterized by harmonious relationship with God, with the Other, with our Being, and with the Creation. Salam-Shalom is a vision of life where spirituality, community, identity, and economy-ecology are harmoniously connected with each other.

I'm using the term *peace-building* here as "a comprehensive concept that encompasses, generates, and sustains the full array of processes, approaches, and stages needed to transform conflict toward more sustainable, peaceful relationships."⁴ Peace-building, as a strategy, has many components. Among them are: conflict transformation, military intervention and conversion, governance and policymaking, restorative and transitional justice, environmental protection, human rights, civilian and military peacekeeping, peace education, activism and advocacy, trauma healing, and social-economic development.

Peace-building is a practical form of being a martyr-witness. This idea is from a New Testament term, *martyría* (marturiía). This is not about having a messianic complex. This is not about mere adventurism in a conflict zone. This is not a search for an extreme missionary experience.

Being martyr-witnesses, first of all, means that we will love all people unconditionally and we will practice selfless love to the point of offering our lives to the people with whom we are called to live and to serve. This is exemplified in the humble life of Jesus of Nazareth whom we follow in response to His sacrificial love. Secondly, it means that, by God's grace, we will not lie. As witnesses to the truth we have experienced in Jesus Christ, we will initiate transparent and honest interaction with all the people concerned as we relate with them and as we formulate and implement our policies. Thirdly, being martyr-witnesses affirm that justice is an attribute of God. Therefore, our tasks will be implemented in accordance with what is just and equitable among all people concerned. Fourthly, it means practicing genuine forgiveness. Using the

⁴ John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (USIP, Wash., DC, 1997, p. 20)

energies available to us through the power of the Holy Spirit, we will absorb the violence committed against us so that our lives may be used as servants to stop the cycle of violence within us and around us. Finally, it means incarnating God's peace in our lives. We will seek harmony and reconciliation with the Creator, with our Being, with Others, and with the Creation. We believe in solving problems through non-violence. By God's grace and mercy, we will not use weapons to hurt or to kill people as a means to accomplish our dreams, mission, and objectives.

When we rediscover what it means to be a martyr-witness, we are ready to do the work of peace-building and transformation.

Shalom-Reality Versus the Construct of Globalism

The vision of shalom, as may be regarded by some, is a religious idea that may not be so *realistic* compared to the *realities* of globalization. It is therefore necessary at this point to understand what the term *realistic* means, and how this is understood in the context of globalization.

The term *reality* is understood here as a social construct.⁵ *Shalom*—a vision of the good life characterized by harmony between God, our Being, the Other, and the Creation—is a construct of reality based on a biblical vision of what the good life means. *Globalism*⁶—the ideology operative in the perceived reality of globality and in the process of globalization—is also a construct of reality based on the neo-classical vision of what the good life means. Hence, this paper is comparing two constructs of reality based on two diametrically opposed visions of what the good life means.

⁵ This is based on Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckman, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Garden City, N.Y.: Double Day, 1966).

⁶ This paper understands *globality* as the perception of the reality of a world community, and *globalization* as the processes through which sovereign national states are criss-crossed and undermined by transnational actors. Both *globality* and *globalization*, with the negative and positive aspects inherent in them, are irreversible. *Globalism*—the ideology operative in the perceived reality of globality and in the process of globalization—is the focus of critique in this paper.

The construct of globalism is the predominant view of reality. Globalism is best understood as the vision of the good life in neo-classical theory of political-economy.⁷ It is a worldview—a *weltanschauung*. This worldview is a *construct of reality* that started in the 18th century with Adam Smith's concept of market capitalism. According to this political-economic view of the world, *the individual* is understood as an agent of choice. Given the many alternatives presented to the individual, her or his actions would be based on *self-interest*. Human individuals are assumed "to seek the highest level of satisfaction of our wants," and this *satisfaction of wants*, as long as they are available, determines human happiness.⁸ In order to attain the highest satisfaction of wants, the individual must make a *rational decision*—on what to buy, on how to spend time, on whom to marry, on what course to study, on what career to take, and so on. The rational choice of the individual seeks a single end—that is, the "subjective satisfaction, utility, or happiness through alternative means."⁹ This rational choice presupposes *scarcity*—a state "when the naturally available means are inadequate to satisfy desires fully."¹⁰ Scarcity depends both on desire and on the availability of resources. The best way to allocate scarce resources is through the means of *market decentralization*—that is, "allowing the market to reshuffle resources and commodities so as to achieve their most desirable use."¹¹ When basic satisfaction is attained through these processes, the next stage would be the *maximization of individual satisfaction*. If an interconnected system of individuals experience satisfaction, then maximization is deemed to be happening. This is also regarded as "group welfare."

The individual, in the process of maximizing self-satisfaction, will have to increase his or her utilitarian experience in a linear fashion. In this sense, the individual is considered to be a

⁷ For an in-depth discussion of this political-economic worldview, see James Caporaso and David Levine, *Theories of Political Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 79-99.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 79-80.

⁹ Ibid., p. 81.

¹⁰ Ibid.,

¹¹ Ibid., p. 85.

consumer. In the process of the individual's consumption, he or she can affect others either negatively or positively. The effect is positive when "an individual's act of consumption yields an unintended benefit to someone else"; and negative when "the individual's well-being is enhanced by an experience that harms others."¹² These positive and negative effects of one's individual act of consumption are described as *externalities*. Externalities are social consequences of private want satisfaction.

The neo-classical economic worldview is not a value-free discipline, as most economists would claim. Its metaphysics and ideology is globalism. As a political scientist, Ulrich Beck identifies this "metaphysics of the world market"—a monocausal and one-dimensional reduction of the complex reality of globality and globalization—as the number one error of globalism.¹³ In this perspective, many aspects of reality and human life are left outside the lenses of economics. From his economist's analytic lenses, de Swardt-Kraus said that in this construct of reality goods, land, labor, even cultural, religious, and aesthetic artifacts are commodified, which in turn results to political disempowerment and socio-cultural dislocation of many people around the world.¹⁴ John Cobb, a theologian, made this same point in his book *Sustaining the Common Good*.¹⁵ He identifies the neo-liberal ideology as economism, a vision that perceives life and reality solely in terms of growth in Gross Domestic Product in a linear way. He said that when professional economists become the major controlling power in the service of global economic growth, we then become worshippers of a god called *growth*,¹⁶ with a religion called *economism*¹⁷.

¹² Ibid., p. 82.

¹³ Beck, p. 118.

¹⁴ This is one of the theses of Cobus de Swardt-Kraus, *Globalization for Sale: An Analysis of the Interdynamics of Globalisation, Valorisation and Marginalisation* (London: Kegan Paul International, 2000).

¹⁵ See John B. Cobb, *Sustaining the Common Good: A Christian Perspective on the Global Economy* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1994).

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 47.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 28.

If globalism, as mentioned earlier, is a *weltanschauung*—one's apprehension of reality and how one views her or his relationship with such reality, then *weltanschauung* can also be understood as religion; that is, if *religion*, as John Milbank defines it, is understood as "the basic organizing category for an entire culture: the images, word-forms, and practices which specify 'what there is' for a particular society."¹⁸ Can globalism, then, be understood and evaluated as a religion? From a theological-ethical perspective, I do believe so. There are implicit "theology" and "ethic" operative in globalism.

From a biblical perspective, globalism as a religion replaced the worship of God with the worship of a god called Mammon. *Mammon* (÷/mm;) is an Aramaic word which means "wealth" or "property," and is personified as a god of wealth, property, or money (Mt. 6:24; Lk. 16:13). Mammon is worshipped in the sense of being served (Heb. db'[]; Gk. douleuvw) as the highest category in a person's or a culture's value system. Mammon is the most important power energizing globalism. Stackhouse's insight about the powers and spheres behind human cultures and organizations is relevant here:

While it is properly impossible for many to believe in non-substantial persons in the form of angels or demons, spirits or devils—flitting around and making things happen in life—it is equally impossible to deny that moral and spiritual forces influence life for better or for worse. The reality of such "spiritual energies" is no less true for contemporary humanity than it was for peoples living in ancient "animistic," "polytheist," or "mystical" cultures, although the ways in which we think about these energies, perhaps even encounter them, have surely changed.¹⁹

The identification and naming of Mammon as god of globalism is a valid analysis of "psycho-spiritual and socio-moral potentialities that claim people's loyalties and respect in various societies."²⁰

¹⁸ See John Milbank, "The End of Dialogue," *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, Gavin D'Costa, ed. (New York: Orbis Books, 1990), p. 177.

¹⁹ Max L. Stackhouse with Peter J. Paris, *God and Globalization, Volume 1: Religion and the Powers of the Common Life* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press, 2000), p. 31.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

Globalism also assumes a basic anthropology. In the neo-classical worldview, the person is an *individual-in-marketplace*. This basic anthropology is well articulated by Sallie McFague:

The worldview or basic assumption of neo-classical economics is surprisingly simple and straightforward: the crucial assumption is that human beings are self-interested individuals who, acting on this basis, will create a syndicate or machine, even a global one, capable of benefiting all eventually. Hence, as long as the economy grows, all individuals in a society will sooner or later participate in prosperity.²¹

Globalism reduces human beings to mere *homo economicus*. The Self becomes an isolated individual who exists to satisfy his or her wants; a self-interested consumer in a mechanistic world. When an isolated individual's identity is reduced to being a self-interested consumer, the tendency is to create a universe where the center is the Self. The interest and satisfaction of the Self becomes the highest goal. When other people and other creature enter this self-centered universe, they feel used as objects of utility or abused as instruments for individualistic satisfaction. The Others feel alienated. The Self, in return, is alienated. The Self, then, is isolated and becomes alone in her or his own universe or self-defined reality. The psycho-spiritual and socio-moral implications of the alienated Self is frightening, as evidenced in many sad events in many homes, offices, and schools today.

In globalism, the Other is merely treated and reduced as a *competitor*. There is a positive side to this. Competition motivates individuals and societies to be efficient in terms of cost-benefit analysis and management of resources. Because the individual is assumed to live and progress in life as a self-interested consumer in an economic arena defined by scarcity, each individual-in-marketplace has to compete against each other.²² This self-interested competitor

²¹ McFague, p. 77.

²² In fairness to the business and economic sector, it must be pointed out that there are business ethicists who recognize the limitations of competition in developing one's career in the midst of market capitalism. For example, Robert K. Greenleaf, who died in 1990, has been a powerful voice to reshape management and leadership policy. He is respected as a business ethicist at Harvard Business School and MIT; see Robert K. Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership* (New York: Paulist Press, 1983). The limits of competition and the potential for co-operation is also being debated in the national and international level of discussions in political-economic ethics; see for example Russell Keats, "The Moral Boundaries of the Market," *The Political Quarterly: Ethics and the Markets*, eds. Colin Crouch and David Marquand (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 1993), pp. 6-20.

tends to maximize the production and distribution of scarce goods and services. When competition is regulated through the standards of justice and fairness, it can be ethically viable.

But there is also some negative aspects of the Other as a competitor. Competition isolates each individual from other individuals. They can only interact with each other through an interconnected system of individuals who are trying to satisfy their wants. In globalism, the Other can only be experienced as part of an impersonal economic concept called *externalities*—the social consequences of private want satisfaction. The operative term in these externalities is *rational decision-making*. Relationships, at its best, have to be determined by a rational decision to attain the highest satisfaction of wants. The key evaluative standard for interpersonal relationships, wittingly or unwittingly, is the question: "What's in it for me?" In neo-classical economic worldview, relationships are commodified, if not totally devalued. For example, spending time with a person from a rationalistic approach has to be viewed as *an investment of time* with a person from whom a return of investment can be expected. Such relational investments may return when the Other becomes a client, a political supporter, a donor, and perhaps a part of career development network. At best, investment for the Other may return as a source of emotional support, financial help, business credibility reference network, etc. When the Other is treated like a commodity, we reduce their humanity based on exchange value or extrinsic value. When we devalue human beings, we insult her or his Creator who declared that human beings have intrinsic value—that the human person is "very good" (Gen. 1:31).

Finally, globalism views Creation as a *machine*. In both neo-classical and Marxian²³ economic theories, Creation is regarded as mere pool of resources to be consumed and exploited because the Earth is seen as a mechanistic resource base, not as a living organism.

²³ See Caporaso and Levine, pp. 55-78. The difference between neo-classical and Marxian approach is that, the former do not believe in centralized economic-ecological planning while the latter insists on centralized planning. Historically, it seems that the neo-classical approach (market capitalism) have won over the Marxian approach (planned socialism).

There is an on-going debate among Christian theological-ethicists²⁴ on how we should regard the Creation. Should we regard the creation as the resource base to be managed technically to satisfy the needs and wants of human beings? Thomas Sieger Derr believes so.²⁵ This is called the *anthropocentric view* of the world. Or, should we regard the creation as a holistic ecosystem to be cared for lovingly for the sake of both human beings and other life forms? James A. Nash believes so.²⁶ This is called the *biocentric view* of the world. I, being raised up in the context of Asian worldview, see a harmony between the anthropocentric and biocentric world. It is not an *either-or* conflict. It is a *both-and* harmonization. *Both* anthropocentric *and* biocentric views of the world, from the perspective of shalom, are complementaries, not contradictories. The harmonized perspective of anthropocentrism-biocentrism affirms an organic-relational view of creation and resists a mechanistic-utilitarian view.

For millions of people in Asia, Africa, Latin America, as well as the first nations of North America and Australia an organic-relational view of the world makes more sense than a mechanistic-utilitarian worldview. From the perspective of many people outside the affluent societies of Western Europe and North America, there is a direct relationship between the cry of the oppressed people and the cry of the planet earth.²⁷ When the Creation is simply regarded as a mechanistic resource base, then the benefits of the earth will be more available to those with more powerful ways and means—legal means, political apparatus, military arms, cultural influence—to enforce and implement their claims. Human history shows that this view of the world, complemented by the above-mentioned ways and means, necessarily results to imperialism²⁸ and injustice²⁹.

²⁴ See Thomas Sieger Derr with James A. Nash and Richard John Neuhaus, *Environmental Ethics and Christian Humanism* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 17-103.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 105-124.

²⁷ This is eloquently and passionately expressed in Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, trans. Phillip Berryman (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997).

²⁸ See Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict From 1500 to 2000* (New York: Random House, 1987).

The vision of salam-shalom is a better alternative view of reality. The vision of globalism as a construct of reality and as a "religion" is diametrically opposed to shalom as a religious vision of the good life characterized by harmony between God, our Being, the Other, and the Creation.

Salam-Shalom is harmony with the Creator. This is *spiritual transformation*. True peace starts with the Creator. Christians believe this. Muslims believe this. Most Indigenous Peoples believe this. Christians and Muslims definitely have to delineate and have dialogue with each other on *how* peace with God can be experienced. For us Christians, it's through faith in Jesus Christ. For our Muslim friends, it's through following the Five Pillars of Islam.³⁰

During those six months living in Sultan Kudarat, I was given various opportunities to engage in a heart-to-heart interaction with Bangsamoro Muslims. Every time they ask me what I was doing in their neighborhood, my usual reply was something like this:

I am here as a follower of Jesus Christ. We are commanded to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. I do not believe that Christians should use violence for whatever reason. I condemn the Crusades where the name of Jesus Christ was misused. Muslims are my neighbors. Would you give me a chance to love you in the name of Jesus Christ? Can we honestly engage in transparent dialogue without resorting to violence? Can we be both faithful with our respective faiths while learning to live together in peace? Can we be both honest as we testify and witness to what we know is truth?

Those who were more educated in Islam—the *imams* (prayer leaders), *ustadzes* (Islamic teachers), and *ulamas* (Islamic scholars)—engaged me in theological discussions that enriched me as a person. They guided me as I read the English translation of the Qur'an during those months. They asked me about the doctrine of the Trinity, of Christ as *the Son of God* (though all of them did not even mention or allowed me to mention this term as they consider it as

²⁹ For a good case study, see Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer, *War Against the Poor: Low-Intensity Conflict and Christian Faith* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1989).

³⁰ (a) Iman—faith or belief in the Oneness of God and the finality of the prophethood of Muhammad; (b) Salah—establishment of the daily prayers; (c) Zakah—concern for and almsgiving to the needy; (d) Sawm—self-purification through fasting; and, (e) Hajj—the pilgrimage to Makkah for those who are able.

blasphemy), of the Final Judgment, of the Second Coming of Jesus. They felt free to critique those Christian doctrines in an atmosphere of friendship and intellectual enhancement. I felt they listened to me as much I listened to them. Despite our doctrinal differences, we respected each other's journey as we seek to be in-harmony with the God of Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, and Jacob.

The ordinary people shared their struggles and victories as they seek to follow the Five Pillars of Islam. Every time I listened to them, they gave me equal time, if not more, to share my own struggles and victories as a follower of Jesus Christ.

Those six months in Sultan Kudarat were one of the most meaningful and happiest times in my life. Despite some of my cross-cultural mistakes, my Bangsamoro friends have patiently embraced me as one of their family members. There were times when they even risked their lives for me. I was so vulnerable and yet I felt so safe and secure with them.

By walking with my Maguindanaoan friends in their spiritual journey, I was spiritually transformed as a witness for Jesus Christ among Muslims!

Christians are called to worship *God alone*, not to worship *God & Mammon*. In the biblical narrative, the proper name of God, YHWH (hwhy) means *I am who I am* or *I will be who I will be*. In the Jewish tradition, the proper name of God must not be uttered; instead, they substitute the term *The LORD* (ynda) to refer to YHWH (hwhy). This is important because it emphasizes the reality that the Creator-God is eternally present but cannot be grasped totally by any human being. God is with us, immanent; but God is also transcendent and cannot be manipulated based on human wants and needs. To worship God means to acknowledge God to be at the highest position in our value system; thus, *worth-ship*. A community who worships YHWH recognizes that no persons or objects can be acknowledged to be at the highest position in the community's value system and the community's understanding of reality. For YHWH-worshippers, God is the Ultimate Reality. No attachments to persons and things, no other gods, no idolatry. Even our conception of God, including my notion of God as Ultimate Reality, even

our most sophisticated theology, cannot be an object of attachment. The worship of God allows people to relate with God with freedom and liberation from any attachments.

The worship of Mammon necessarily puts money, wealth, and property as the highest position in the value system of a person or a community. Mammon-worship is necessarily expressed through an explicit and intentional attachment to things that, in the process, Mammonism actually reduces people to things by seeing their value merely as extrinsic—that is, based on exchange value. For example, in Mammon's value system, human beings are seen as mere human resources measurable by their dollar amount per time of work. Thus, the worshippers of Mammon tend to *thingify* people. When this is the case, people are sacrificed to the altar of money, wealth, and property. It becomes easy to oppress and exploit people when they are seen as *things*.

Harmony with God is acknowledging God as the Ultimate Reality. The other aspects of our life's reality are subordinated to God. The statement of Jesus in Matthew 6:24 is a call to reorder the lives of his followers based on the awareness that God is Ultimate Reality. In globalism, Mammon—wealth and property—is considered as the ultimate reality and the highest category in its value system. When a commitment to God is made, such commitment necessarily requires the reordering of wealth and property as subordinate to God-Reality. It means renouncing Mammon as god. In the same token, when a commitment to Mammon is made, then Mammon becomes the highest category in one's value system and God is reordered as subordinate to wealth and power. Commitment to both is not possible. There can only be one Ultimate Reality. God-Reality does not allow other claims of ultimate reality; hence, other claimants are false claims. Commitment to false claims of reality is idolatry.

But even those who claim that they are committed to God-Reality and that wealth and power is subordinated to God-Reality, the temptation to equalize God and Mammon in our hearts is a day-to-day struggle. When we are lulled into this compromise, the tendency is idolatry. The value system of the church—its attitude towards wealth and property—must be evaluated in the

light of God-Reality. The church's value system, especially those who are in the affluent communities and societies, must go through this *Reality check*.

Salam-Shalom is harmony with our Being. This is *psycho-social transformation*. This is about our identity and security as a person. In salam-shalom perspective, the harmonious Being or Self—the wholeness of soul, life, personality, desire, appetite, emotion, and passion that characterize us as living beings—leads a person to live an Abundant Life. *Abundant Life* is a term used in the Gospel of John (10:10), which means living life in its fullness—spiritually, physically, socially, economically, and culturally—as exemplified by the life of Jesus. Abundant Life is not defined by *what I have* but by *who I am*, in the context of relationships.

This reminds me of my lunch with a Maguindanaoan man I call *bapa* (uncle). He was a retired History teacher in a local high school. His dream is to see the self-determination of the Bangsamoro people in a geographical context—in a juridical entity.

“Dann, I’m so glad I am a Muslim and not a Christian,” he told me while I was sharing his family’s lunch. My rice-filled right hand hanged between my plate and my mouth as I waited for his next sentence. “You see,” he continued, “you Christians from the North have lost your identity. You call yourselves Filipinos—those who have been defeated by the conquerors and were given as a gift to their ruler, King Philip of Spain. This is the reason why you Filipinos will never conquer us, Bangsamoros, even with your American-supplied weapons. We have our cultural identity and dignity intact under the Almighty Allah, while you have trampled yours with the name of a dead foreign king.”

“But that’s just...” I tried to rebut to defend my tribal pride.

“A name? A historical past? A part of your present historical reality?” he asked, with a mixture of compassion and anger showing on his face. “Whenever you say you are a Filipino, you are telling your historical defeat! You merely look at your historical identity after 1521. The Malay culture is way earlier and far richer than your limited historical memory. Perhaps you should consider re-discovering who you are, culturally and spiritually, while you’re here with us. Come home. Come back home to being a Malay. Return to Islam.”

I listened to my *bapa*. I rediscovered and embraced my Malay heritage through my immersion into the Maguindanaoan culture. I also experienced that, as a follower of Jesus, I can appreciate my cultural heritage in a redemptive way—that is, enjoying the God-glorifying and humanizing aspects of my newly rediscovered Malay culture, while submitting to the Creator those dehumanizing aspects of culture that need purification.

In Maguindanao, I have been transformed. In Maguindanao, I rediscovered the Malay part of me that my Western upbringing has forgotten. In Maguindanao, God redeemed a part of my cultural identity and opened my eyes to a new understanding of our ultimate future—when the redeemed cultures and dignity of all ethnic groups will be brought before the holy presence of God (Rev. 21:26). And in Mindanao, I can start enjoying this ultimate future... right now!

Today, my *bapa* refers to me as “an adopted Maguindanaoan who follows Isa (Jesus).”

That prompted me to reflect on my identity using biblical texts as lenses and mirrors. I learned that identity means being a *person-in-community*, not a *consumer-in-marketplace*. The biblical understanding of the Self (Heb. *vp,n<*) is so rich, far richer than the reductionist understanding of the neo-classical economic view of the self. On one hand, self can be understood as *soul, living being, life, and person*. On the other hand, self can also be understood as *desire, appetite, emotion, and passion*. The former refers to the relational-spiritual aspects of our self that we share with other human beings and with God. The latter refers to basic instincts of the self that we share with animals. When the self is merely regarded as *consumer-in-marketplace*, we limit our “self-ness” to the basic animal instincts of our humanity. We are then reduced to only one side of our “self-ness.” Hence, we are alienated from our own self and we do not experience the shalom or wholeness of our *being*. This alienated self is the easy target of commercial advertisements that lull and manipulate human beings to become mere *consumer-in-marketplace*. Such advertisements usually appeal to the desire, appetite, emotion, and passion.

In shalom perspective, the harmonious Being—the wholeness of soul, life, personality, desire, appetite, emotion, and passion that characterize us as living beings—leads a person to live an Abundant Life. *Abundant Life* is a term used in the Gospel of John (Jn. 10:10), which means living life in its fullness—spiritually, physically, socially, economically, and culturally—in the context of the community. Abundant Life is not defined by *what I have* but by *who I am* in the context of relationships. A person experiencing an abundant life regards her or his identity as a *person-in-community* and not as mere *consumer-in-marketplace*.

In contrast, globalism sees the Self as an isolated individual consumer who is addicted to commodity. The meaning of one's self is determined by how much goods and services one is able to consume in order to satisfy one's needs and wants. Relationships are mere means to satisfy one's needs and wants.

Many churches today, especially those who are focused on church-growth-at-all-cost, are offering programs that would satisfy the needs and wants of church members and adherents who behave more like religious consumers rather than God worshippers. Many church programs and activities are more focused on meeting the desire to experience a sort of "spiritual high." This is not the calling of the church.

The church is the *shalom*-community that is called to demonstrate that it is possible to live a life of wholeness. The reduction of the self into a *consumer-in-marketplace* is not acceptable to the church. The church is the pilot community called by God to show and tell that the biblical understanding of the whole self, as a *person-in-community*, is possible. This possibility is experienced through the discipleship of the whole self into the cruciform life of Christ. In Christ, a person can discover what it is to be a whole human being—a person who is nurtured intellectually, physically, socially, and spiritually (Lk. 2:52).

Salam-Shalom is harmony with Others. This is *social-political transformation*. In an unjust and oppressive system, human beings are seen as mere human resources or *projects*. The tendency is to *thingify* people. When this is the case, human beings who are created in the image of God are sacrificed to the altar of wealth and power. It becomes easy to oppress and

exploit people when they are seen as *things*. Many times, well-meaning organizations and institutions—like governments, corporations, schools, military, churches, and even families—wittingly or unwittingly practice this, including institutions that claim to be Christian.

The more I interact with the Bangsamoros, the more I become aware where Christians ought to sharpen our listening skills. We should listen to their stories of historical injustices committed against the Moros by the Filipinos³¹ who are usually labeled as ‘Christians.’ We should listen to their stories on how a series of land-grabbing laws³² in the past 100 years impoverished and displaced thousands of families. We should learn more about militarization³³ and how the presence of thousands of government troops affects most Bangsamoro communities. We should hear their cry against the dehumanization of the Bangsamoro people.

In Sultan Kudarat, my protector *ama* (father), who is a retired civil servant and a community leader, emphasized to me that the conflict in Mindanao is not about religion. “Christianity and Islam,” he said, “are not the problem in Muslim Mindanao. The Bangsamoro people are not against Jesus. We actually respect Jesus whom we refer to as Nabi Isa. The Bangsamoros resist, instead, Western colonial powers that identify themselves as Christians, and brought with them dehumanizing acts of war and oppression against our people. We see the Government of the Republic of the Philippines perpetuating such actions.”

In April 2005, a team of Mennonite pastors and peace-builders travelled across Mindanao. They met with *ulamas* (Islamic scholars), *ustadzes* (Islamic teachers), *datus*, graduate students, professors, NGO executives, and other leaders in Muslim Mindanao. The intention was to establish a transparent dialogue between Muslims and Christians and to build bridges of trust and understanding. Dr. David Shenk, a Mennonite scholar who has been in dialogue with religious leaders in Iran and other Islamic leaders in the Middle East, was leading the team.

³¹ For a more formal ethnographic study on this issue, see: Thomas M. McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels: Everyday Politics and Armed Separation in Southern Philippines* (Manila: Anvil Publishing, 2002), pp. 269-289.

³² For a legal Moro perspective on these Acts, see: Salah Jubair, *Bangsamoro: A Nation Under Endless Tyranny* (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: IQ Marin SDN BHD, 1999), pp. 95-97.

³³ See, Mathews George Chunakara, *The Militarization of Politics and Society: Southeast Asian Experiences* (Hongkong: DAGA Press, 1994).

I invited them to visit my neighborhood in Sultan Kudarat. They were received by a respected datu, his son, and other young Bangsamoro professionals. The Sultan Kudarat hosts gave us a brief on the Bangsamoro perspective of Philippine History.

Afterwards, we had a dialogue. Polite questions were answered politely.

Then a young Bangsamoro youth leader whispered to me: "*Kuya* (Elder Brother) Dann, I really need to ask a question that I've been wanting to ask a Western Christian, but I'm afraid I might offend them."

"Ask them... just be honest with your question... it's okay... go for it," I whispered back, trying to push him beyond his hesitation.

Finally, he asked Dr. Shenk: "You know, every time I see white people in Mindanao, I immediately think of Christian religious imperialism and Western military expansionism. It has been our historical experience. Tell me, are you here to eventually convert us through your peace and development activities?"

"We do our peace and development activities sincerely in the name of Jesus Christ," David Shenk answered. "We do not come with the Bible on one hand and a sword on the other hand. We come in humility as Jesus is humble. We come with the Cross, not as a symbol of violence—as in the Crusades—but as a symbol of suffering and peace. We will be faithful in expressing unconditional love and service with honesty and transparency. But when one of you would approach us to know more about this peace in Jesus, we would not say 'No, go away!' That would be religious imperialism."

Luke Shrockhurst, one of the Mennonite pastors, affirmed Dr. Shenk and added: "As Americans who carry US passports, we ask for forgiveness for the violence our nation has brought to Mindanao. We apologize for the injustices our government has committed against your people... We are the kind of followers of Jesus who do not believe in war... We do not agree when our nation is regarded as a god, for that is idolatry."

"Thank you for your honest and straight-forward answers," the young Bangsamoro leader told us. "I sense that you really respect us. You are welcome anytime here in our neighborhood."

Now, this young Bangsamoro youth leader and his family help the work of *Peacebuilders Community* in his area. He travels with us throughout Mindanao as we advocate for peace-building and transformation among the tri-people of this beautiful land.

In January 2006, almost a year after that dialogue, my wife and I came back as full time peace-building missionaries with Mennonite Church Canada. In July 2008, PeaceBuilders Community arranged a dialogue between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Philippine Council of Evangelical Churches (PCEC) right within the MILF's General Headquarters in Camp Darapanan, Barangay Simuay, Sultan Kudarat, Maguindao. Bishop Efraim Tendero, National Director of PCEC prayed for the MILF Peace Panel *en banc* and asked God's blessings to the Bangsamoros, declaring them as neighbors and not as enemies.

We are called to love others as *neighbors* and not to treat others as *competitors*. In salam-shalom perspective, people are called to live a communal lifestyle. This communal view of life is emphasized by Sallie McFague:³⁴

As members of the household called Earth, we are relational beings, defined by our needs that make us dependent on others by our joys that make us desire one another. We are not just self-interested individuals; in fact, according to the ecological-economic picture of reality, we are basically and primarily communal beings who become unique individuals through help and response to others.

In the communal lifestyle, the Other is treated as a neighbor to be loved as one's self. The poor is embraced justly as an integral part of the community.

In contrast, globalism treats the Other as a competitor. In this perspective, one's relationship is usually determined by the question, "How can I get ahead?" It is a competitive lifestyle. One's relational environment becomes a *rat race*. Progress and growth is pictured as being in the *fast lane*. The successful ones are described as *those who have arrived*. The one's

³⁴ McFague, p. 110.

who are left behind—economically, politically, socially—are considered *losers*. The competitive lifestyle is considered amoral because it is seen as a necessary, rationalistic approach to relationships in the context of market capitalism.

Rationalistic approaches to relationships even crept in many religious circles. People would have to find out what kinds of people go to a certain church with a conscious or subconscious evaluative factor: "What's in it for me?" Rationalistic decision-making that is aimed to satisfy one's religious wants is a fact in many Christian congregations in many of our cities and municipalities. When relationships are viewed based on exchange value (extrinsic value), the Other's God-given value as one created as "very good," fallen, and yet loved (intrinsic value), is reduced to being a *competitor*, if not merely as a *commodity*. When this happens, the church may be contributing, wittingly or unwittingly, to the devaluation of human beings— from that of *a person created in God's image* to that of *a thing born to be used*.

For the Jewish listeners of Jesus Christ, the Samaritan was the person who loved his neighbor. Neighborly love can come from Others whom we do not usually consider to be neighbors (Lk. 10: 25-37). For the followers of Jesus Christ in an era of globalization, the neighbor is the Muslim, the Jew, the Buddhist, the religious Other.³⁵ We can give love to them. We can receive love from them.

Salam-Shalom is harmony with Creation. This is *economic-ecological transformation*. Creation, from salam-shalom perspective, is seen as an *organic-relational* world, not merely as a *mechanical-utilitarian* world. In a mechanical-utilitarian view of the world, the emphasis is exploitation. If one of the parts of the machine-world is not functioning, the tendency is to replace it. Hence, in an unjust system, the natural resources can be exploited for the present, and then later, it can be substituted with synthetic products and artificial solutions.

In an organic-relational world, the emphasis is stewardship and loving care of creation. The biblical story of Creation tells us that "the Lord God formed the mortal (*adam*) from the dust of the ground (*adamah*) and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and the mortal became a

³⁵ Jensen, pp. 187-200.

living being" (Gen. 2:7). These are the dynamic imageries used to give us a grasp of the beginning of the human race. We all came from the ground. We were named after the ground. We are one with Creation. We are one humanity! We are all carbon-based material. We are all breathed with the same breath of God. That is the story of our *Being Alive*! When the Creator-God commanded us to subdue the Earth (Gen. 1:28), it has the idea of *l'shamrah*—to care for, to keep, to watch, and to preserve it (Gen. 2:15). Earth-destruction is listed by the Prophet John as a sin (Rev. 11:18). We are all called by the Creator-God to be stewards of Planet Earth! Christians must apply the salam-shalom lifestyle in the stewardship of their resources.

The heart of the conflict in Mindanao is about Ancestral Domain.³⁶ The complex debate surrounding the Ancestral Domain claims of the Lumads (Indigenous Peoples) and the Bangsamoros is a theological-ethical challenge as far as the Bible is concerned. For many Christians in the Philippines, this economic-ecological issue seems to be a stumbling block in their relationship with Muslims in Mindanao, mainly because it challenges our national loyalty and integrity. But we have to look at this issue beyond the lenses of nationalism.

Consider the voice of a young intellectual Bangsamoro from the Mindanao State University in Marawi City:

We were a thriving state under the Sultanate of Maguindanao, especially under Sultan Kudarat—who was our political leader sometime between 1500 and 1600 CE. The Spaniards were able to conquer Luzon and Visayas; but they did not succeed in colonizing the Muslims in Mindanao. Then the Spanish Empire became weak. They lost to the Americans in Mexico and in the Philippines. To make a graceful exit, they sold the Philippines to the United States and they included Mindanao. We resisted American colonialism and hundreds of thousands of lives were lost... In the past 100 years, both governments of the United States and the Philippines sent millions of Christians to Mindanao. Many of our lands were taken by force or through unjust means. True, our datus sold many of our lands to you Christians. We see that as hospitality and generosity, for the absolute owner of the land is the Almighty Allah and our datus are entrusted owners. You saw the inexpensive sale of our lands to you as gullibility on our part. But the Almighty Allah knows our hearts. Now, all we seek is to keep the remaining parts of Mindanao where the majority of the Bangsamoros live. We want to manage the natural resources entrusted to us by the Almighty Allah. In these remaining lands, our people will practice and enjoy our

³⁶ For an in-depth understanding of the conflict in Mindanao, see Patricio P. Diaz, *Understanding Mindanao Conflict*, MindaNews Publications, 2003; Salamat Hashim, *The Bangsamoro People's Struggle Against Oppression and Colonialism*, Mindanaw, Bangsamoro Darul Jihad, October 2001 / Rajab 1422H.

rights to self-determination. Where Christians are the majority, you can keep the land for yourselves. Where Christians and Muslims live together, we need to negotiate peacefully based on truth and justice. That's my understanding of what we're fighting for. That's my personal view of what ancestral domain is all about.

How do we, followers of Jesus Christ, deal with the issue of the Bangsamoro's claim of Ancestral Domain? How do we apply the values of the Kingdom of God—such as justice and peace—as we think of *the people* and *the land*? What other biblical-theological lenses through which we can see the conflict in Mindanao and other land-based conflicts in our country?

Our answer to these questions depends on how we look at Creation as part of our ministry. God cares for the whole creation, including the human species. The creation is the *world* that "God so loved..." (Jn. 3:16). This *world* (kovsmo") can mean *the sum total of everything here and now, all of humanity*, or *world-systems*. This is also the creation that will ultimately be reconciled with Christ (Col. 1:15-20). All living things are important to God. God relates with the Creation. That is why it is important for the church to see Creation as an *organic-relational* world. We were created as part of the whole creation. Our shalom—our experience of wholeness—necessarily includes the whole of creation.

The issue of Ancestral Domain for the Lumads and the Bangsamoros of Mindanao is a ministry-issue in the Church. Our presence as servants of the Prince of Peace must affirm the policies of our governments about creation-stewardship when they are consistent with biblical justice and peace. When the governments' policies are against the biblical values of justice and peace, we must critique them as part of our prophetic ministry.

Creation, from shalom perspective, is seen as an *organic-relational* world, not merely as a *mechanical-utilitarian* world. In a mechanical-utilitarian view of the world, the emphasis is exploitation. If one of the parts of the machine-world is not functioning, the tendency is to replace it. Hence, in globalism, the natural resources can be exploited for the present, and then later, it can be substituted with technological products and solutions.

Conclusion

As I conclude, let me reiterate that we are called to be martyr-witnesses (*martyría*) of the Good News (*euaggélion*) of Jesus Christ. This is how each one of us can be an *evangelical witness* in a conflicted land and in the face of unjust global realities.

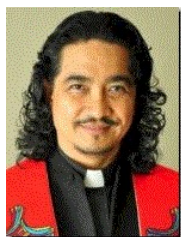
Some of you might say, "I'm not called to go to a peace-building work between Christians and Muslims. Perhaps that's your calling. Not all Christians have the same calling."

True. Not all Christians are called to be peace-builders between Muslims and Christians; the *Muslim-Christian-factor* here is the *variable*, the specific context. The *constant*, or the general principle, in this challenge is *being a martyr-witness of the Evangel—the Good News*. All of us are called to be martyr-witnesses of the Good News of the Prince of Peace! No exception.

Being a peace-builder does not only apply to armed-conflicts. There are many conflicts happening in our own individual lives, in our families, in our churches, in our communities, in our cities, in our provinces, in our nation, and in our world. The root is the spiritual conflict between the Creator-God and humanity. This root conflict spills over to our relationships; hence, we are faced with various relational conflicts between family members, friends, church members, political parties, ethnic groups, etc. I cannot think of a place where human beings interact without conflict.

We are all called to be agents of peace and transformation in each of our particular contexts of conflict. We are called to exemplify harmony with God, with our Being, with Others, and with God's Creation.

May our lives as martyr-witnesses of Jesus Christ build peace and bring transformation in this conflicted world of the 21st Century.



DANN

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In-between chatting with his adult children over the Internet, watching his grandchildren over the Skype, and connecting with his global community through Facebook, Dann Pantoja serves as a peacebuilding worker, trekking through the armed-conflict areas in the Philippines. He works closely with Joji, his lifetime sweetheart. He's privileged to have a competent team at PeaceBuilders Community, Inc., a peace and reconciliation resource organization based in Davao City, Mindanao Island, Republic of the Philippines.

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