



Creation Theology in the Context of Mindanao Today

ABSTRACT

In this paper, I revisit the classic biblical texts pertaining to the doctrine of creation. Foremost are the two creation narratives in the books of Genesis and the Psalms. I then present the contemporary theological debate about the impending ecological crisis citing the reflections of selected theologians on ecological issues. After this, I share the emerging ecumenical consensus globally and locally among Catholics and Protestants. Then I highlight the UCCP statements on how we could cope with the "ecological nightmare." Finally, I cite some peoples' initiatives in Mindanao to protect the environment.

THE CLASSIC BIBLICAL TEXT ON THE DOCTRINE OF CREATION

The Two Creation Stories in Genesis

Let us examine the two creation stories in Genesis. The first account (Gen. 1:1-2:3) is known as the Priestly,



while the other account (Gen. 2:4b-25) is known as the Yahwist.

There are five basic differences between them.¹ First, the priestly account (P) is believed to be written by a group of priests in Jerusalem after the Babylonian exile (586-538 BCE); while the Yahwist account (J), have been written 500 years earlier during the heyday of the United Kingdom under David and Solomon (1000-922 BCE). This account consistently used the name Yahweh (or Jahveh) for God. Second, the two accounts differ in their description of the scope of creation. In the P account, the scope of creation includes the whole sweep of the universe; it's cosmic in scope covering the sun, moon and stars in the firmament, the primordial bodies of water, the earth with its hills, mountains and plains, all kinds of plants and animals. The creation of human beings, male and female, is the climax of this creation account. Human beings were mandated to have overall control over the plants and animals. In the J account, however, the scope of creation is much more limited and confined only to a particular spot on earth: the garden of Eden. God created (formed) man (male only) from the dust of the ground just like the animals and the birds, and lastly, the creation of woman as a climax. Third, they differ in the way they portray God. The P account portrays a very lofty and well-developed concept of God; God is very powerful in that creation was done through his speech. He would say: "Let there be light" and light appeared. On the other hand, the J account portrays an anthropo-morphic God. God is portrayed in the form of human person with obvious limitations, doing things with

¹ See Melanio L. Aonanan, *God's Liberating Acts* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1988), 30ff.

trial and error, working with his own hands such as when he formed man and the animals and birds from dust of the ground. Furthermore, after God realized that man was so lonely in the midst of the garden, God decided to make animals and birds, and then presented them to the man. But man was not happy still, that's why God created woman!

Fourth, the two accounts differ in their description of the order or sequence of creation. In the P account, the human person (both male and female) was created last of all after the heavenly bodies, earth, rivers, oceans, animals, birds, etc. This means that humankind is the climax of God's creation. It is also important to note the daily sequence of creation up to the seventh day. On the other hand, in the J account, man (male only) is the first to be formed to be followed by plants in the garden then the animals and fishes, and finally, the woman who was made from the man's rib. Finally, the two accounts differ in their conclusions. The P account ends with the observance of the Sabbath Day. To the Priest-writers, this is the most important requirement of their religion. The J account, however, concludes with a happy note, the joining of man and woman in the institution of holy matrimony. "That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united with his wife, and they become one" (Gen. 2:24).

Let me summarize the significance of both accounts. The P account obviously is noted for its "majesty in style and sublimity in thought" bearing the marks of intense theological reflection over many generations before it was finally written down during and after the Babylonian exile. The purpose of the P account is to declare that everything is dependent for its existence and meaning upon the Sovereign God. The most important theological assertion

of the P account, I believe, is the statement that humans (male and female) are created in the image of God. This means that humans (both male and female) are “living representations of God’s kingly rule on earth.” Likewise, the J account has much theological significance. It was not concerned primarily with the creation of heaven and earth, or with human’s relation with the cosmic scene, but rather with the earthly environment. It portrays a profound understanding of human existence: that the human was made from the dust of the ground. Therefore, “the good earth is the stage of his life. He is a tiller of the ground and to the ground he must return at death.” But a person’s life depends on the life-giving breath of God. Therefore, our existence depends on our relationship with God and, as the creation of the woman shows, our relationship with other selves.

Other Classic Creation Text: Psalms 8

Psalm 8 has the distinction of being the first biblical text to reach the moon, according to J. Clinton McCann, because the Apollo 11 mission in 1969 left a silicon disc containing messages from seventy-three nations with the text of this psalm. Psalm 8, writes McCann, “provides an eloquent proclamation of the cosmic sovereignty of God and a remarkable affirmation of the exalted status and vocation of the human creature.”²

Verse 1-2, enthusiastically proclaim the majesty of God’s “name in all the earth!” “Thou whose glory above the heavens is chanted/ by the mouth of babes and infants”.

² See J. Clinton McCann, *The Book of Psalms: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections. The New Inter-preters’ Bible, Vol 3* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press. 2000).

This conveys the idea that even babies recognize God's cosmic sovereignty. The Psalmist asserts that God can use even the speech of vulnerable, helpless infants, as a power to oppose God's foes (the chaotic forces) that God conquered and ordered in the sovereign act of creation. Understood this way, v. 2 anticipates the assertion of vv. 3-8 that God uses the weak and vulnerable human creature as a partner in caring for a creation that is constantly threatened by destructive forces of chaos.

The identity of both God and humans is addressed explicitly in verses 5-8. God rules the world, and that humanity has royal status, being "a little lower than God". The sovereign God has bestowed sovereignty upon the human creature to have "dominion" over "all things" (v. 6-8). This suggests that God and humanity are partners in the care of creation. Since the human is created in the "image of God," God has made the risky choice to share God's power! The majesty of God's name, which is known "in all the earth," includes the dominion of humanity, for God has given them dominion over God's "works" by putting "all things under their feet" (v. 6). Therefore, God's "name" is bound up with the human performance of dominion, and human dominion is a responsibility that is to be bounded by God's rule. The identity and destiny of God, of humanity, and of the creation are inextricably linked.

Walter Brueggemann suggests that the crucial interpretation is to hold the central importance of humanity in God's plan for creation. To abdicate the God-given responsibility to be partners with God in caring for creation is dangerous. Apart from the limits of God's sovereign will, the exercise of dominion is in danger of becoming simply human autonomy, or self-rule. Thus, the

frightening signs of ecological disaster are all around us, from eroding soil to polluted streams to the possible depletion of the ozone layer. Psalm 8 is thus a reminder “that the God-praising and the earth-caring activity are one.”³

CONTEMPORARY DEBATE ABOUT THE ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

On April 20–21, 2012, there was a conference held at Claremont Graduate University in California where outstanding theologians addressed the question: “What is the most compelling theological issue today?” One of the eight major papers was presented by Mark I. Wallace, a well-known ecological theologian.⁴ I found Prof. Wallace paper very erudite, coherent, compelling and relevant to the issue of ecology, global warming and climate change. And I would like to share with you a summary of his insights of creation theology.

Prof. Wallace says that “the ecological crisis induced by our indiscriminate exploitation of nature constitutes a *status confessionis*, a situation so grievously contradictory to the gospel as to require a collective declaration and prophetic witness by the whole church...” He continues: “Today, when global warming is destroying the very ecosystem that makes life possible and rendering meaningless the Christian hope for a new heaven and a

³ Walter Brueggemann, *A Social Reading of the Old Testament: Prophetic Approaches to Israel's Communal Life* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 66.

⁴ See Mark I. Wallace, “The Song of the Thrush: Christian Animism and the Global Crisis Today,” in *The Task of Theology: Leading Theologians on the Most Compelling Questions for Today*, Edited by Anselm K. Min. Maryknoll (New York: Orbis Books, 2014). I'm grateful to a dear friend, Ms. Emma Ruth Deguzman of New York City, who sent me this book as a gift.

new earth, we are faced with another *status confessionis*. It rings hallow to speak of the wonders of God (*mirabilia dei*) or the goodness and beauty of creation in a world where death, degradation and disasters reign, where the Spirit can no longer renew the face of the earth because the earth can no longer bear the weight of human sin. The ecological crisis is a profoundly spiritual crisis, and saving the planet is the most compelling theological issue, an imperative that which there is none greater. What is at stake is the fate of creation itself.”⁵

Wallace offers the vision of Christian animism as the theological and moral foundation for a radical new way of envisioning the world as God’s creation. For him, Christian animism is founded in the “doctrine of the incarnation of God in Jesus and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in all things that exist. God continually incarnates Godself through the embodied reality of life on earth. It is a thoroughly biblical doctrine that human beings are obligated to care for creation because all creation is the bearer of the Holy Spirit. Nature is a living web of gifted relationship, a self-organizing field of living, dynamic relationships among a marvelous variety of creatures, all of them made alive and moving by the energizing presence of the Holy Spirit.”⁶

Wallace retrieves “the biblical heritage of the work of the Holy Spirit as the “green” face of God in the world, highlighting the ministry of the Spirit as the celebration of the good creation God has made for the joy and sustenance of all things. He asserts that the Holy Spirit is identified with the four elements of the universe: earth, air, water and

⁵ Wallace, *The Task of Theology*, xxiii.

⁶ *Ibid.*, xxiv.

fire, and bring their full ecological power and meaning. As earth, the Spirit is the fleshy avian form of life (dove) which is God's nurturing, inspiring and birthing presence in creation, hovering all creation at its genesis and present at Jesus' baptism to signal god's approval of his public ministry. As air, (*ruach*), the Spirit is the animating breath for all living things and the wind of prophecy. We inhale God at the moment of our birth and exhale God with our last breath when we die. As water, the Spirit brings life, healing and refreshment to all creatures, infusing all liquids with sacred energy, the water of baptism, the wine of the Eucharist, the vital fluids of blood, tears, sweat, urine, rain, rivers and waterfalls. As fire, the spirit is the blaze of God that both condemns human arrogance for its injustice and exploitation and ignites and unifies the multilingual and interracial community of the early church.⁷

To be true to the biblical legacy is to recognize the continuing presence of the divine Spirit not only in Jesus but also in the very elements that constitute existence in nature. The Spirit is the "soul" of the earth empowering all life forms to enter into a dynamic relationship with the greater whole, while the earth is the "flesh" of the Spirit making God palpable and vicious in all the changes of nature. The Spirit is the hidden, inner life of the world, while the earth is the outward manifestation of the Spirit's sustaining energy. In this view, God is a living being that subsists in and through the natural world.⁸

Back to the original question: "What is the most compelling theological issue today?" Wallace argues: "God

⁷ Wallace, *The Task of Theology*, 222-223.

⁸ Mark I. Wallace, *Fragments of the Spirit: Nature, Violence, and the Renewal of Creation* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 133-168.

is a living, suffering co-participant in the pain of the world. God suffers all the afflictions and degradations we inflict on nature. God is at risk in the world today. The threat of ecocide brings in its wake the specter of deicide.”⁹

The doctrine of creation, according to Jurgen Moltmann, has become the focus of debate in recent years. There are two factors contributing to this renewed interest. First, the ecological crisis has encouraged study of the theology of the natural environment and its impact on human life. Second, biblical scholars have found how pervasive is the theme of creation and its relation to salvation history in its cosmic context. Recent exegesis has pointed out that the climax of the story is not the creation of human beings on the sixth day, but the day of rest that follows. ‘The goal of every Jewish and every Christian doctrine of creation must be the doctrine of the sabbath.’ On the sabbath, the world and its maker rejoice in the harmony of the good creation. Stressing the cosmic dimension of the day of rest, recent theology has sought to offset the anthropocentrism that has sometimes characterized earlier theologies of creation. The purpose of life is not only for human welfare/benefit but ultimately for the glory of God...(Amen!). The life of the planet and its manifold species belong to God's good creation; these have a divinely appointed purpose.¹⁰

⁹ Wallace, *The Task of Theology*, xxv.

¹⁰ Jurgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1985), 276.

EMERGING ECUMENICAL CONSENSUS AND PROPOSALS

On June 16-19, 2019, a conference in Wuppertal, Germany with the theme “Together towards ecologies, ethics of sustainability and eco-friendly churches”. The conference was planned and organized together by Protestant Association of Churches and Mission (EMW), Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD), United Evangelical Mission (UEM), Bread for the World, World Council of Churches. In that gathering, the participants “heard the cries of the earth, the cries of people vulnerable to the effects of climate change, especially children and the elderly, the cries of youth demanding intergenerational justice and the concerns of experts over current trends” and they “express the courage to hope and are compelled to call the global ecumenical movement towards a comprehensive ecological transformation of society.”¹¹

Let me summarize the salient points of their report and recommendations. They affirm that the ecumenical movement have “committed itself to a pilgrimage towards justice, peace and the integrity of creation.” They recognize the “urgency of the crisis” and discern “the signs of the time, to hear God’s call, to follow the way of Christ, to discern the movement of the Spirit and, in response, to recognize the positive initiatives of churches all around the world.” The crisis is manifested in: Contaminated or polluted water; Land is degraded through unsustainable agriculture and unhealthy eating habits; Global carbon emissions are still increasing; greenhouse gases are

¹¹ See The Official Report, *Kairos for Creation – Confessing Hope for the Earth: The Wuppertal Call* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2020).

accumulating in the atmosphere and climates are disrupted (air). As Christians we come together to confess our complicity and bondage to sin: “we have transgressed planetary boundaries. The earth seems no longer able to heal itself. Creatures are groaning in travail (Rom. 8:22). We have been unable to hold together ecumenical concerns over justice amid poverty, unemployment and inequality, over a participatory society amid various forms of violent conflict and over sustainability amid ecological destruction.” They acknowledge the theological [failure] of the churches such as “theologies of dominion in the name of differences of race, gender, class and species, the theological legitimation of patriarchal domination; dualist and reductionist ways of relating heaven and earth, soul and body, spirit and matter; the denial and ridicule of scientific expertise and insights in order to maintain the current order, the prolonging of myths of unlimited progress, putting trust only in technological solutions to ecological problems instead of realizing their cultural, moral and spiritual nature; the pseudo-gospel of emphasizing the accumulation of wealth and prosperity, self-serving ways of always blaming problems on others; and escapist ways of addressing the victims of ecological injustice.”

Finally, they issued an urgent call to the churches to heed the “need for ecological conversion (*metanoia*), a change of heart, mind, attitudes, daily habits and forms of praxis (Rom. 12:1-2).” This must be put into practice in “all aspects of Christian life: congregational fellowship and practices, prayer, fasting, spirituality, doctrine, ethos, education, art, music, ministries and missions.” Also, they issued a ten-point challenge to the global ecumenical

movement, Christian world communions and all other churches to plan for a *decade of ecological learning, and comprehensive action to re-orient the priorities of churches*. They recommend to the WCC, in its 11th Assembly in Germany this August 2022 to declare a “Decade for the Healing of Creation”.

They conclude: “The task ahead is immense and will require decades of dedication. The urgency of the situation implies that a comprehensive response cannot be delayed. The next decade will be decisive to allow the Earth a time of rest. The biblical motifs of Sabbath and Jubilee provide a unique source of hope and inspiration, an interruption in the cycle of exploitation and violence, expressed in the vision that there shall be “a year of complete rest for the land” (Lev. 25:5).”

THE UCCP AND CREATION THEOLOGY

How does the UCCP in Mindanao respond to the “ecological nightmare” that is engulfing us?¹² Let me review with you the work and witness of the UCCP. Environmental concern has been an important part of the UCCP’s witness beginning the decade of the 1990s. For instance, the 1990 4th Quadrennial Assembly took the importance of ecology as an issue as its theme: “Called to be Stewards of God’s Creation.” This theme projects the whole program of the church making ecology as a critical issue among the UCCP concerns. This was brought about by two factors: internal and external. The internal factor is

¹² Melanio L. Aoanan, *Ecumenical and Prophetic: The Witness of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1998), 99-101; 113; 126-127. This book is now revised and expanded in time for the UCCP Diamond Jubilee on May 25, 2023. It was published by Merryland Publishing Corporation in 2023.

the worsening situation in our environment. This alarming situation is described as an “ecological nightmare.” Because of the widespread destruction, our environment is no longer able to sustain life. The truth of this claim has been shown by experts in the natural and social sciences, as well as by artists and poets. The external factor is due to the influence of ecumenical organizations of which the UCCP is an integral part: WCC and WARC. These global organizations encourage all their member churches to be involved in the conciliar process of advocating justice, peace and integrity of creation.

The “JPIC process” is a continuing study and deepening of the meaning of creation and its fulfillment. This continuing process of study has come up with the theology of nature or creation. Thus, in our 1990 GA, we formulated a resolution on “Environmental Concerns” which was an outcome of systematic study on the destruction of the environment. The resolution points out that the destruction of our environment is causing “untold sufferings” to our people and destroying the bases of their livelihood. The dramatic population increase has led to the depletion of our natural resources which, if unattended, will result to greater national disaster. This is a result of “the absence of a development policy which (a) puts prime value to human life and social values over materialistic approaches; (b) exercises a choice of technologies which ensure sustainable productivity of natural resources and (c) makes Filipinos as the direct beneficiaries of products and services from the motherland.”¹³

Because of this situation, ‘we are called upon to be vigilant to defend God’s creation” and encourage the whole

¹³ UCCP Statements, cited in Aoanan, *Ecumenical and Prophetic*, 206.

UCCP constituency to: (1) educate our people on the root causes of ecological destruction; (2) help formulate development policies which “give due consideration to rational land use, genuine land reform,” and support for “total logging ban for the next 25 years; and (3) formulate action programs which protect the environment, undertake massive tree planting, speed up the “land-titling process for landless farmers,” and promote programs which are environ-mentally sound and sustaining.”¹⁴

The other statement concerns the “Preservation of the Integrity of God’s Creation”.¹⁵ The biblical bases underscore the “goodness and order of God’s creation” which God entrusted to the care of human beings to “recognize God as the Lord of their lives and of history.” But because of “lust to possess and to amass for themselves the wealth and bounty of the earth,” coupled with the total neglect for the welfare of creation, “human beings failed miserably as stewards.”¹⁶ Therefore, the GA calls everyone to work for the restoration of the “beauty and order creation,” through the following: (1) Encourage every farmer to use organic fertilizer and pesticides [and] take seriously his/her being steward of God’s creation and combat all forces that desecrate God’s earth; (2) Local churches to support the policy of total logging ban for twenty-five years....and undertake tree-planting program; (3) Local and national government to give immediate attention to the problem of pollution, forest destruction....and restore the denuded eroded mountains and hills”.¹⁷

¹⁴ UCCP Statements, cited in Aoanan, *Ecumenical and Prophetic*, 207.

¹⁵ *UCCP 1990 GA Minutes*, cited in Aoanan, *Ecumenical and Prophetic*, 200.

¹⁶ UCCP Statements, cited in Aoanan, *Ecumenical and Prophetic*, 209.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 210.

Furthermore, the UCCP Statement of Faith gives primary importance to creation theology when it affirms that the one Creator God is the source of all energy and order in the universe. This affirmation ensures that our life has meaning and purpose because this is part of God's liberating purpose and will. Thus, basic to a person's life is complete, total trust and surrender to God which is inherent in our relationship with God. Furthermore, the Statement of Faith affirms that God is a dynamic and liberating presence in history. God offers guidance, encouragement and strength to those who are God's chosen people." Part of God's dynamic being is God becoming a human person in Jesus Christ. Jesus lived, died and lives again and continues to reign as Lord of life and history. Through the Holy Spirit, God acts in the world and strengthens believers so that they can live out their faith"¹⁸

The UCCP Constitution gives importance to our being "steward of God's creation" and declares that we "shall protect, promote and enhance the ecological balance and the integrity of creation" (Art. 2, Sec. 12). The UCCP has "demonstrated through its official statements and pioneering action programs how the environment has to be protected. This conviction was expressed by Dean Dioscoro Umali, a member of the UPLB community in a commencement speech. With his characteristic humility, he recognized that greed and indifference "has brought about the widespread destruction of our environment." He emphasized the truth that: "a person's life does not consist in the abundance of his possession; that sharing and equity constitute the first seeds of your survival.... But realism

¹⁸ Aoanan, *Ecumenical and Prophetic*, 113.

compels me to say: ‘Be heroes we never were—or perish... Go, then, and rebuild our scarred land. Go and be heroes we never quite managed to become—and live.’¹⁹

As pastor of the Church Among the Palms in UPLB, I have personally observed how some UPLB students practiced ecological ethics when our group went up to Mount Banahaw. They showed their concern for the cleanliness of the environment. They meticulously picked up all plastics, candy wrappers, and other thrash along the way up to the mountain. And as we came back to the plain, they buried them underground. This kind of ecological ethic and spirituality shown by these young people is indeed very contagious. I wish that in the UCCP institutions we could achieve this level of spirituality beginning with our youth, women and men. This way, we can make our local churches, college campuses as truly sacred spaces.

As Filipinos, we need to learn and practice a “creation-centered spirituality” as popularized by the Japanese theologian Kosuke Koyama. This understanding of spirituality has been an important corrective to the western culture and emphasis on exploitation and plunder of nature in the name of profit. It is this challenge, says Koyama, where we can locate the future of Asian Christian spirituality which is creation-centered spirituality.²⁰

In May 1995, I had the chance to travel from Lebak to Cotabato City through a Four-seater Beechcraft plane. Few months earlier, I traveled from Davao to Cagayan de Oro via Buda through Bukidnon. In both trips, I saw the

¹⁹ Cf. Dioscoro L. Umali, “Be Heroes We Never Were and Live!” in *Riding the Third Wave into the Third Millennium*. Ed. Richard Schwenk (Manila: SEED Center, 1991).

²⁰ Kosuke Koyama, “Asian Spirituality,” in *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*. Ed. Gordon S. Wakefield (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1989), 32.

unabated destruction of the mountains in Mindanao. According to Fr, Sean McDonagh, a Columban Missionary who used to work at the Santa Cruz Mission in South Cotabato, the destruction of our environment as well as “human life and other forms of life in Planet Earth have reached a critical point.” The first thing that we need to do “is to recognize the damage that our profit-oriented approach to the world has already caused,” and we must begin “to care actively for the dynamic stability and regenerative powers of the earth.” We have a responsibility to promote a “sustainable development and put an end to exploitative relationship and recapture much of the respect and reverence for the natural world.” Continues Fr. McDonagh: “*We see the beauty and diversity of the myriad of life-forms a wonderful closely related community which is fruitful if cared for but proves fragile when abused. It is a world that evokes reverence, awe, gratitude and prudent use... [This] is the primary revelation of God to all men and women. Like tribal people round the world, we must once again commune with God in nature*”.²¹

PEOPLES’ INITIATIVES IN MINDANAO TO PROTECT THE ENVIRONMENT

Let me mention the historic Dayandi [*Sandugo*] of 21 Datus in Mindanao under the *Alyansa sa mga Lumad sa Habagatang Mindanao Alang sa Demokrasya* (ALUHAMAD). Here is their Declaration in Cebuano:

²¹ Sean McDonagh, *To Care For The Earth: A Call To A New Theology* (London: Chapman, 1986), 10.

“Ang yuta maoy sinugdan ug katapusan sa among kinabuhi ug kaliwatan ... Ang maong kaliwatan naga-atubang sa dakung kagubot, dakong kagutom ug makalilisang nga paghilak sa umaabot nga mga adlaw.... Ang among mga sagradong dapit yutang kabilin dugay ng gisugdan sa pagpugos ug pagpalugwa sa iyang duga ug gatas pinaagi sa mga bag-ong galamitong makinarya, ilang giilog kini pinaagi sa papel nga ilang gipakita kanamo nga dili masabtan sa among katawhan.”²²

Tungod sa ilang pagka-matngon sa hiwing sistema, ilang gika-usahan ug gipanumpaan pinaagi sa Dayandi: “... alang sa pagbarug ug pagpa-nalipod sa kinabuhi sa Yutang Kabilin ug sa kaugmaon sa among kaliwatan, labaw sa tanan, barugan ug panalipdan ang mga Sagra-dong Yutang Kabilin sa among mga katigulangan. Tungod kay ang Yuta, kinabuhi, gasa gikan kang Magbabaya; amo kining panalipdan ug pakamatyan hagtud sa katapusang tulo sa among dugo, hangtud sa mga katuigan nga moabot ug ngadto sa tanan namong kaliwatan”²³

The *Dayandi* is an ultimate expression of *status confessionis*, i.e., the desire to protect and uphold their ancestral domain which is *Apo Sandawa* [Mt. Apo]. It sealed their unity using the symbol of blood and wine signifying might and sacredness of the *Dayandi*. Together with and

²² Sandugo, *NCCP Magazine* (1989), 21. See also Albert E. Alejo, SJ, *Generating Energies in Mt. Apo: Cultural Politics in a Contested Environment* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press), 2000.

²³ Sandugo, *NCCP Magazine* (1989), 21.

through their elders, they swore to *Magbabaya* “to protect and defend *Apo Sandawa*... even to the last drop of their blood.” They call on fellow Filipinos “to recognize, uphold, and respect the victory of Apo Sandawa.” They reiterated their willingness to collectively improve their condition and “to defend our right to survive as a people of the Earth”.

Other examples of initiatives for the fight for ecological justice are the work of three Roman Catholic friends (two Diocesan priests, Fr. Randy Jasper C. Odchigue of Butuan City and Fr. Reynaldo D. Raluto of Cagayan de Oro City, and a Jesuit Fr. Joel E. Tabora. They are academic theologians like myself, but are deeply immersed in ecological advocacy. They have written significant pieces about peoples struggle to protect our fragile environment, and how years of plunder and exploitation in the Caraga, Bukidnon and Davao-Cotabato regions caused massive misery and impoverishment, on the one hand, and critical peoples’ action, on the other. Fr. Odchigue points out that decades of timber and mining activities in Caraga have induced deep economic inequality and the emergence of conflict lines around the issues of criminality, insurgency, and resource-based conflicts. These problems have exposed the indigenous peoples in Caraga region to conditions of vulnerability as they find themselves caught in conflict lines with limited economic opportunities.²⁴

In the Bukidnon area, Fr. Raluto discusses how decades of corporate-led timber extraction operations have stripped away forest resources that leave the indigenous

²⁴ Jose Jowel Canuday & Joselito Sescon, eds. *Transfiguring Mindanao: A Mindanao Reader* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2022), 496-521.

population extremely impoverished. Decades of plunder caused the rise of clergy militancy to end forest resource extraction in both Caraga and Bukidnon. This also inspired the emergence of a broad based multi-sectoral movement on socio-ecological issues that confront resource extractive industries. The Bukidnon clergy established multi-sectoral formation that oppose the exploitation in the region. The whole Malaybalay Diocese (lay and clergy) was mobilized in barricading the highway until the then DENR Secretary Fulgencio Factoran Jr issued an Administrative Order dated April 30, 1990 imposing a Logging Moratorium in the whole province of Bukidnon. Tragically, it led to the brutal ambush of Fr. Nerylito Satur on October 14, 1991.²⁵

Close to home, my mentor and friend, Fr. Joel Tabora, SJ, who just finished his term as President of Ateneo de Davao University, has been consistent in his advocacies. First, for the protection of the environment especially in the light of President Duterte's EO 130 s. 2021 which re-opens mining in the country under the problematic provisions of the Ph Mining Act of 1998 (RA 7942). This is especially critical for the Mindanao environment due to the EO supports the environmentally disastrous SMI mines in Tampakan, South Cotabato and endangers our river systems and food security. Second, he supports the peace process in Mindanao where in the face of great religious and cultural diversity on the island including Muslim, Christian and Lumad communities the culture of dialogue is very important. He believes the culture of dialogue is the path and collaboration is the code of conduct, and mutual understanding the method and standard. Third, as an academician like myself, he is

²⁵ See Canuday & Sescon, eds., *Transfiguring Mindanao*, 523-541.

concerned for the education of our people for the 21st century, how to make quality education accessible to all through a system where public and private educational institutions fulfill complementary roles in educating the people. Part of this concern is to foster complementarity between the educational system legislated by the BARMM through its recently passed Education Code and the educational system in the rest of the Philippines.

CONCLUSION

To recapitulate, let me point out six insights. First, we discussed and analyzed fundamental biblical insights and theological affirmations on creation theology. Second, we have pointed out emerging ecumenical consensus and proposals on how the churches could engage in the advocacy for justice, peace and integrity of creation. Third, we have reviewed significant statements and affirmations of our church (UCCP) as a leading advocate on ecological issues. Fourth, we have cited local initiatives of people in Mindanao to defend the welfare and integrity God's creation. Fifth, we have stressed that concern for genuine spirituality is necessarily connected with the issue of justice, peace, and ecological integrity. As Christians, we must recognize that we can learn significant insights on spirituality, social justice, and care for the environment from the Lumad people in our country. Sixth, in our openness to the Lumad people we may discover the praxis of pristine religiosity that shows reverence for the whole of created beings, devout prayerfulness, and shared poverty. It is with these insights that we are drawn closer to the unity which we find in God. Our intimate closeness and

conversation with God we may learn to establish the bond of peace and solidarity which is much needed in establishing a landscape of shalom, harmony and prosperity in our beloved Mother Land! To God be the Glory! Amen!

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