

IS DIALOGUE POSSIBLE?

Muslims and Christians in Mindanao*

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The question for this missiological conference is: “Is Dialogue Possible?” There are many possible ways to approach this question and this topic. Our approach will be in line with Catholic missiology. The deeper question is: Why is this a missiological question? The first topic I will present will be the theology of this question.

“Muslim-Christian” Conflict?

What usually comes to mind with the question of dialogue and Muslims and Christians in Mindanao is the violence that has become the overarching image for Mindanao and is generally referred to as a

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Muslim-Christian conflict because this is the traditional historical language used to refer to this violence. It should be kept in mind that reference to a Muslim-Christian conflict is the accepted and normal way of speaking. This is the ready made—but also limited—category that might hide the truth as much as reveal it.

In this context of armed conflict, dialogue is often understood as a means to negotiate for peace between armed groups. Since 1970, about 125,000 people have been killed in Mindanao-Sulu. Dialogue between Muslims and Christians in Mindanao might be considered a matter of life and death. The present situation in Mindanao calls for an end to violence, and for reconciliation and peace through dialogue and understanding. In particular, dialogue implies negotiations, political compromises or economic bargaining.

Missiological Foundation of Interreligious Dialogue

In what way is this issue a missiological topic? In July 2000, the Philippine bishops issued a statement on mission, “‘Missions’ and the Church in the Philippines,” that specifically mentioned interreligious dialogue as one of the “new things” of mission.¹ The bishops asserted that interreligious dialogue would demand a deeper understanding especially of the Islamic religious community, their religiosity and theology. The letter strongly urged that future formation programs for Filipino Catholics include the Church’s teaching on the relation of Jesus Christ and the Church to other religions. The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) sees interreligious dialogue as part of the mission of the Church in the Philippines. At the beginning of the third millennium they called this a new thing, something new. As the Philippine church gathered for the first ever National Mission Congress from September 27 to October 1 of the

¹Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines, “‘Missions’ and the Church in the Philippines,” *Landas* 14 (2000) 249.

same year, interreligious dialogue was taken up as a missiological topic.

While the present tragically painful situation seems to provide an impetus for a negotiation or compromise type of dialogue, the foundation of interreligious dialogue is not in the passing contemporary scene. If the passing scene were the foundation, then at each changing moment, a new concept of interreligious dialogue would be needed.

The theological roots of dialogue are founded on the missionary nature of the Church as the icon of the Trinity, since it is the triune God who has begun his dialogue of salvation with all humanity. We begin by looking at a missionary Church, a Church of the Trinity-in-mission and of a dialogical Church, a Church of the Trinity-in-dialogue.

As was clearly indicated at the Second Vatican Council in *Ad Gentes* (AG), mission is the very nature of the Church. The missionary nature of the Church has its origin in the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit in accordance with the decree of God the Father (see AG 2). The Church does not pre-exist mission and neither does it have a mission. The Church belongs to mission, the Church originates in and from mission, and the Church's deepest identity is mission. This link between mission and the Church implies that any study of missiology requires ecclesiology and any study of ecclesiology demands missiology.² In *Redemptoris Missio* (RM), Pope John Paul II reaffirmed this interconnection of mission and Church by saying that, since the time of Vatican II, the insertion of missiology into ecclesiology has given a new impetus to missionary activity and

²“The problem of the criteria for mission did not at all seem to belong properly to a particular heading of ecclesiology, but rather to be at the center of the whole of ecclesiology. If the notion of mission depends on the conception one has of the Church, it is also true that the conception of the Church depends on the way one understands its mission.” Severino Dianich, “The Current State of Ecclesiology,” *Concilium* 146 (1981) 95.

has moved missionary activity to the center of the Church's life (RM 32). This is key: missionary activity is at the center of the Church's life.

Paul VI, in his first encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam* (ES), stated that the origin and initiator of all dialogue is God. The history of salvation is God's continuous dialogue with all humankind. God's dialogue is the dialogue of salvation. The Church is to participate in and extend that dialogue. Since God's dialogue with all humanity is continuous, the Church must continuously participate in this dialogue. Since the Church has its origins in what the Trinity does and who the Trinity is, the Church must also extend that dialogue in which it persistently and graciously participates.

We need to keep ever present this ineffable, yet real relationship of the dialogue, which God the Father, through Christ in the Holy Spirit, has offered to us and established with us, if we are to understand the relationship which we, that is, the Church, should strive to establish and to foster with the human race (ES 71).³

The way for us to understand the Church's dialogue with all humankind is to first realize that the Church's dialogue is determined by God's dialogue in the Incarnation and the outpouring of the Spirit, the mission of the Son and the mission of the Spirit.

Dialogue is explained in ES as the "internal drive of charity, which tends to become the external gift of charity" (ES 64). Dialogue wells up from within the Church, from the gift of God's love lavishly poured out, which the Church has received, in which it participates; this wonderful gift God has communicated to and established in the Church. The Church is described in *Ecclesia in Asia* (EA) as the privileged place chosen by God "in which God chooses to reveal the mystery of his inner life and carry out his plan of salvation for the

³O'Carroll holds that this is the most important section of the encyclical. He maintains that this is the first time that the parallel between God's dialogue in the Incarnation and outpouring of the Spirit and the Church's dialogue and relation with the world is explicitly stated. Michael O'Carroll, "Pope Paul's First Encyclical," *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* 103 (1965) 10.

world” (EA 24). This overflows and becomes the same gift that the Church is called to share with and extend to the world. This sheds light on the theological foundation of dialogue.

The missionary nature of the Church that has its origin from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit in accordance with the decree of God the Father (see AG 2) has the same trinitarian foundation as the dialogue both offered and established with the Church by God the Father through Christ in the Spirit (see ES 71). The missionary nature of the Church finds its origin in the Trinity; the dialogue of salvation finds its origin in the Trinity.

Interreligious dialogue is an integral dimension of the mission of the Church; it is not the totality of mission, but an essential dimension of it (*Dialogue and Mission* 13; RM 55). Our topic deals with interreligious dialogue, so I want to emphasize that interreligious dialogue is not the totality of mission but one essential dimension of it. Since the totality of missionary activity is at the very center of the Church’s life and not just an option at the periphery, interreligious dialogue as a fundamental element of the Church’s mission must be an essential part of the way of being Church. Interreligious dialogue is not a concern for a few individual Christians, nor is it some kind of movement or popular fad; it is much more than that. Interreligious dialogue is one of the dimensions at the heart of the Church, since the totality of missionary activity in all its dimensions is to be at the center of its life.

The very existence of the Church is due to the missions of the Trinity. *Lumen Gentium* (LG), the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, uses a phrase from St. Cyprian that portrays the Church in terms of its distinctively trinitarian nature. “The Church has been seen as ‘a people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit’” (LG 4). The Church has its origin in the missions of the Trinity and it is called to be made one with the unity and communion of the Trinity.

This unity and communion is not limited to the Church itself. The unity and communion of the Trinity is imprinted on all of cre-

ation. Creation bears the image of the Trinity, therefore, the Trinity is the goal toward which all creation tends.

All men form but one community. This is so because all stem from the one stock which God created to people the entire earth (cf. Acts 17:26) and also because all share a common destiny, namely God (*Nostra Aetate* 1).

The Church sees her role as one of fostering this unity of humanity, its cultures and religions, because this unity ultimately comes from God who wills that unity.

God the Father is the beginning and end of all things, we are all called to be brothers; we ought to work together without violence and without deceit to build up the world in a spirit of genuine peace (*Gaudium et Spes* 92).

In 1986, after the first interreligious gathering in Assisi, Pope John Paul II explained that the Second Vatican Council linked the unity of the human race with the identity and mission of the Church when it called the Church a sign and instrument of union with God and unity of all humanity. Unity is seen as radical, fundamental, and decisive, which makes all differences appear as merely secondary. God's plan of unity dominates all creation; even religious differences must be overcome as God's plan is realized. In this plan, no one is outside the divine plan of salvation, just as no one is excluded from the work of redemption in Jesus Christ. It must be held that contact with the paschal mystery is accessible to all humanity through the activity of the Holy Spirit (see GS 22). This radical unity is universal and it has its origin and end in God. From faith, we emphasize the fundamental unity of the human race. The Church must be aware of—and be a sign and instrument of—the mystery of unity and reconciliation that it has received from Jesus who offered his life for all.⁴

⁴See John Paul II, "To the Roman Curia," Rome, 22 Dec 1986, in Francesco Gioia, ed., *Interreligious Dialogue: The Official Teaching of the Catholic Church (1963-1995)* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1997) par. nos. 562-73.

The bond of communion at the heart of the mystery of the Church flows from the missions and communion of the Trinity.

The Church's first purpose then is to be the sacrament of the inner union of the human person with God, and, because people's communion with one another is rooted in that union with God, the Church is also the sacrament of the unity of the human race (EA 24).

Mission and communion are radically linked; one implies the other. It is the trinitarian mission that calls all humankind to share in the trinitarian communion. God's dialogue of salvation flows toward that communion. Mission is primary so that both communion and dialogue are aspects of mission. Mission itself comes from and must be directed to the Trinity.

Communion and dialogue are two essential aspects of the Church's mission, which have their infinitely transcendent exemplar in the mystery of the Trinity, from whom all mission comes and to whom it must be directed (EA 31).

In other words, the Church comes from the Trinity, is fashioned in the image of the Trinity and journeys towards a trinitarian fulfillment of history. That image of the Trinity is one of mission, dialogue and communion. The distinctively trinitarian nature of the Church makes it a Church of mission, dialogue and communion.

Local Church: Where Mission and Dialogue Become Reality

This Church of mission, dialogue and communion becomes a reality in each local Church. The question "Is Dialogue Possible?" can be expressed from a missiological perspective as: How does the local Church of Mindanao-Sulu (and, in the same way, the Church in the Philippines, since many Muslims have moved over the past 15 or 20 years to all parts of the archipelago) integrate interreligious dialogue, as an integral dimension of the mission of the Church, into its

way of being Church in its own context? Does the way of being Church—of the local Churches of Mindanao-Sulu or the local Church of the Philippines—affirm that dialogue with Muslims is possible? Do these local Churches witness to the dialogue of salvation that the Trinity is continuously engaged in with all humanity by participating in it and extending it, particularly to our Muslim neighbors? The answer to the question: “Is Dialogue Possible with Muslims and Christians in Mindanao?” is being answered in the affirmative by the local Churches who are striving to live for this dialogue, and often in very difficult situations.

We must say more about the local Church. Where does the local Church get its understanding, perceptions and attitudes toward dialogue? The Church’s self-understanding, a missionary self-understanding according to its specific nature, emerges from the interplay of the lived experience of the human condition [the context], and the data of revelation: the Sacred Scriptures, and the living tradition of the Church [the text of faith] (see *Dei Verbum* 10).⁵ The interplay is between experience and theological reflection. Theological reflection does not take place in a vacuum, but in the actual socio-economic, historical, cultural, political, and religious context. The experiential dimension does not take place in a vacuum either. The local Church has already been formed and is constantly being renewed by Sacred Scripture, the Church’s tradition and the Church’s magisterium. The local community is the place where the dynamic interplay or interaction between the faith tradition and the context takes place. This interaction can be illustrated or pictured in the form of a triangle made up of three corners: the local Church, the text of faith and the context. The local Church plays a crucial role in interpreting both the text of the faith in light of [the local Church’s] understanding of

⁵This section follows the presentation of a triangular method in Jacques Dupuis, *Who Do You Say I Am? Introduction to Christology* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1994) 5-9; and *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997) 13-19.

its context, and its context in the light of its understanding of the text of the faith.

This local community is both conditioned by its historical reality and the accumulation of the Christian memory or the biblical revelation, tradition, and the Church's magisterium. These are not two different moments, as if one came before the other, but these two aspects are constantly brought together in the local Church. The text of faith asks questions and raises issues through the interpreter, the local Church, of its situation and its understanding of the situation. The context also asks questions and raises issues through that same interpreter of its understanding of the datum of faith. This is a continuous reciprocal movement of the fundamental and vital exchange of ideas, between the given of the faith and the living historical reality, which takes place in the "person" of the local Church.⁶

While the historical, political, and economic factors influence all persons involved in dialogue, I would like to emphasize that the primary reason for involvement in interreligious dialogue is not the political or social situation, but the theological understanding of God's plan of salvation and the mission of the Son and the mission of the Spirit. The importance of the historical and political aspects does not imply their priority over theological reasons for interreligious dialogue; nor should one conclude that dialogue is merely a reaction to the present historical situation. It is the theological starting point and eschatological goal that are the foundation for the Church's involvement in dialogue, but this involvement is shaped by the present situation. The local Church is so important in this because it is the local Church, by its way of being Church in its own context, that puts a recognizable face on dialogue because the local Church is involved in and shaped by its context. This involvement touches all aspects of the political and social as part of human life, but the Church

⁶ "[T]he interaction between the text and context, or between memory and culture, takes place in the interpreter, that is, the local Church." Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology*, 16.

does not approach these aspects as an organization with an ideology nor as a political party with a specific agenda.

In EA, Pope John Paul II says that each local Church, specifically in areas of conflict (like we have in Mindanao), must be about the work of

building unity, working for reconciliation, forging bonds of solidarity, promoting dialogue among religions and cultures, eradicating prejudices and engendering trust among peoples.... All this demands of the Catholic community a sincere examination of conscience, the courage to seek reconciliation and a renewed commitment to dialogue (EA 24).

Dialogue has as one of its goals the resolution of tensions, divisions and conflict caused by ethnic, social, cultural, linguistic, economic and religious differences. It is important to note that, according to most commentators, what is labeled as religious tensions and conflicts are generally not the result of religious differences. On the contrary, religious differences are used to aggravate some other source for the tension such as ethnic, social, cultural, linguistic and economic reasons.

However, dialogue is not just a way to resolve conflict and tensions. Dialogue is a response to what God has initiated and it follows the way of the Incarnation. The starting point for dialogue is the Father's initiation of the dialogue of salvation through the Son and the Spirit.

The desire for dialogue, however, is not simply a strategy for peaceful coexistence among peoples; it is an essential part of the Church's mission because it has its origin in the Father's loving dialogue of salvation with humanity through the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Church can accomplish her mission only in a way that corresponds to the way in which God acted in Jesus Christ: he became man, shared our human life and spoke in a human language to communicate his saving message. The dialogue which the Church proposes is grounded in the logic of the Incarnation. Therefore, nothing but fervent and unselfish solidarity prompts the Church's

dialogue with the men and women of Asia who seek the truth in love (EA 29).

Interreligious Dialogue

I will now present a few thoughts from Church teaching specifically about interreligious dialogue. The 1991 document *Dialogue and Proclamation* (DP) from the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue defines dialogue as

‘all positive and constructive interreligious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths which are directed at mutual understanding and enrichment’ (DM 3), in obedience to truth and respect for freedom. It includes both witness and the exploration of respective religious convictions (DP 9).

In this definition, it is good to note that while dialogue is directed to mutual understanding, mutual understanding is not the final goal of dialogue. Dialogue must reach a deeper level. Mutual enrichment is thereby given greater emphasis. This enrichment is found at the deeper level of belief and religious conviction where each one witnesses to his/her faith. In this mutual witness, witnesses meet other witnesses to engage each other with their religious convictions in order to deepen their response to the promptings of the Spirit.⁷

There are six types of dialogue, all interconnected with each other, presented in DP:

⁷“Interreligious dialogue does not merely aim at mutual understanding and friendly relations. It reaches a much deeper level, that of the spirit, where exchange and sharing consist in a mutual witness to one’s beliefs and a common exploration of one’s respective religious convictions. In dialogue Christians and others are invited to deepen their religious commitment, to respond with increasing sincerity to God’s personal call and gracious self-gift which, as our faith tells us, always passes through the mediation of Jesus Christ and the work of his Spirit” (DP 40).

1) The dialogue of life, where people strive to live in an open and neighborly spirit, sharing their joys and sorrows, their human problems and preoccupations (DP 42).

2) The dialogue of action, in which Christians and non-Christians collaborate for the integral development and liberation of people (DP 42).

3) The dialogue of theological exchange, where specialists seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritages, and to appreciate each other's spiritual values (DP 42).

4) The dialogue of religious experience, where persons, rooted in their own religious traditions, share their spiritual riches, for instance with regard to prayer and contemplation, faith and ways of searching for God or the Absolute (DP 42).

5) The dialogue of collaboration for human rights regardless of religious affiliation and cooperation which tries to "solve the great problems facing society and the world, as well as in education for justice and peace" (DP 44).

6) The dialogue with culture involves religions because the two are always joined together, although culture remains broader than religion.

The question is complex, for several religious traditions may coexist within one and the same cultural framework while, conversely, the same religion may find expression in different cultural contexts. Again, religious differences may lead to distinct cultures in the same region.... [I]nterreligious dialogue at the level of culture takes on considerable importance. Its aim is to eliminate tensions and conflicts, and potential confrontations by a better understanding among various religious cultures of any given region (DP 45-46).

Particularly applicable to the Mindanao and Philippine situation is the dialogue of life, the dialogue of action, the dialogue of collaboration for human rights and the dialogue with culture. How are these actually taking shape in Mindanao? I have no intention of making a complete report of all activities in Mindanao, but will just focus

on Basic Ecclesial Communities which indicate that the local Churches of Mindanao-Sulu include dialogue in their way of being Church.

Basic Ecclesial Communities and Dialogue

To quote a parish priest in the Archdiocese of Cotabato: "It is the local Church through the Basic Ecclesial Communities that must be at the forefront in the dialogue mission of the Church." I believe that he has a tremendous insight. He is working with others to integrate interreligious dialogue into the way of being Church at the BEC level. This idea makes great sense theologically and it makes great sense practically. I want to give emphasis to it, not because it gets the most press or is so widespread but because it touches all of the important levels of dialogue. It offers to the grassroots level the lived experience of Church as a Church of mission, dialogue and communion.

All believers are called to be committed to dialogue as a necessary and integral element of the evangelizing mission of the Church. This is for all as individuals. However, all believers are to practice dialogue as a community and not merely as individuals. "Each member of the faithful and all Christian communities are called to practice dialogue, although not always to the same degree or in the same way" (RM 57). The diocese can have programs for dialogue, so can the parish, but if we are going to speak of the dialogue of life, it must be present at the most human level. As mentioned earlier, dialogue must take on a human face, a recognizable face. It is at the level of the BEC that dialogue must be present, must take on a face and have a name. The "person" of the local Church is known in these basic communities.

Dialogue must be communitarian or ecclesial and not individual. Theologically, this is based on the triune God. In reality, it is based on everyday human experience. Each individual is identified with a community; what that person does can be interpreted in the name of

the community. Isn't part of the problem with the relations between Muslims and Christians just that? In the eyes of many Christians, if one Muslim does something bad, that is what all Muslims do; in the eyes of many Muslims, if one Christian does something bad, that is what all Christians do. We seem caught in an endless circle of hopelessness.

As an example, in 1999, the Archdiocese of Cotabato had a diocesan meeting and decided to initiate a program for interreligious dialogue. The thrust of this program focuses on the BEC level, making the education and formation of BECs integral to the interreligious dialogue ministry. This is a grassroots based program where people at each local level talk to, come to understand, and respect one another. This facilitates the process of peace. The emphasis is on the sharing of experiences and living as neighbors. This was envisioned as involving at least a two-year process for each community.⁸ The process was understood as needing the formation/education/preparation of these Christian communities.

One important aspect of this process is the formation that is necessary to develop a BEC which understands dialogue as part of being Christian. This formation is an education for peace. Education is needed for a culture of peace. In the process, people remember that before the 1970s they lived in peace with very good relations. The effort is to gradually have the idea of dialogue and a culture of peace grow on the people. They discuss ways of conflict resolution at their own level. The BEC will become a leaven to form basic human communities of Muslims and Christians.

In 1998, the "Culture of Peace" manual was published. This is a manual for a seminar that was developed in Mindanao in response to the local situation and it fosters unity in diversity through dialogue and mutual acceptance. The seminar is a step in the process of transforming attitudes, behavior, and values to encourage all to become

⁸If there were a timetable, it has been rendered irrelevant by the "all out war" policy and the evacuations.

peace builders. The seminar is divided into three parts. The first part traces the common roots of the tri-people of Mindanao through a historical journey. This section encourages the participants to identify and face their biases and prejudices rooted in historical experience. The second part presents conflict situations and challenges the discovery of peaceful approaches to resolve them. The identified peaceful approaches are also opportunities for transformation, development, and unity in the midst of diversity. The third part develops an understanding of a culture of peace and the further transmission of this understanding to more people.

At the BEC level, through the on-going formation of these communities and the "Culture of Peace" seminars, people are rethinking their relations, their history and their identities. History, the pain of the violence, and the attitudes that go with it weigh heavily on the shoulders of all.

History Revisited

Let us take an aside into one part of the problem with attitudes and prejudice and biases. History continues to be an important factor and influence in the contemporary reality of Muslim-Christian relations in Mindanao.⁹ What is perceived to be true becomes more important than what is actual fact.¹⁰ One of the ordinary recommendations of the experience of interreligious dialogue is that history needs to be rewritten to include the histories and participation of all ethnic groups in the struggle for independence and freedom.¹¹ The

⁹"The ordinary Muslim sees the past as more real than the present." Alunan Glang, *Muslim Secession or Integration?* (Quezon City: by the author, 1969) 2.

¹⁰"As ever in the Philippines, it is what is perceived to be that is important, not necessarily what is fact." Michael Diamond, "Editor's Page," *Dansalan Quarterly* 5:4 (1984) 195-96.

¹¹This has also been affirmed in the Philippines. Rosalita Tolibas-Nuñez,

issue involves human dignity, respect, acknowledgement and self-consciousness of the different ethnic groups. Perceptions from history color the perceptions used today for each group to see the other.

For example, an Interreligious Assembly, organized by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, was held at the Vatican from 25-28 October 1999.¹² The Final Report stated:

Particular attention needs to be paid to respecting the others' self-definition of their own religious identity. It is also important to be sensitive to the particular social, cultural, and religious contexts in which interreligious relations take place.¹³

The promotion of interreligious harmony and respect for people of different traditions depends on education. Education is not mere knowledge, but a real appreciation that promotes true listening and genuine esteem. Interreligious and intercultural dialogue need education that includes thanksgiving for diversities and forgiving for the wrongs of the past committed by all parties. This education must reach the grassroots and the young so that future generations can

Roots of Conflict: Muslims, Christians and the Mindanao Struggle, ed. Emil Bolongaita (Makati City: Asian Institute of Management, 1997) 89. Glang quotes from a speech made by Domocao Alonto in 1955. "Our textbooks need revision; they are ineffective in the knowledge and wisdom they impart to the Muslim Filipinos. Our history books, for instance, tell only of the heroism and patriotism of the northern Filipinos. No mention is made whatsoever of the patriotic exploits and heroic deeds of the Filipinos of the South. Why, is patriotism a monopoly of the Christian Filipinos? Have not the Moros fought—and successfully—the Spaniards... the Americans and the Japanese?" Glang, 81.

¹²The Central Committee for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, following the recommendation of John Paul II in *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* for such a gathering, entrusted the organization of this Assembly to the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. The Assembly went to Assisi on 27 Oct 1999, the anniversary of the 1986 World Day of Prayer for Peace, to renew the spirit of Assisi.

¹³"Interreligious Assembly: Final Report," *Pro Dialogo Pontificium Consilium pro Dialogo inter Religiones* 103 (2000) 13.

avoid the errors of the past while seeking truth, justice, peace, and reconciliation. A practical suggestion offered by this assembly is a mutual review of textbooks “not only of religion, but also—and perhaps especially—of history.”¹⁴ In order that education be a means for promoting mutual understanding, it is necessary that “textbooks on history and religions give an objective presentation of religious traditions so that individuals belonging to these traditions can recognize themselves in that presentation.”¹⁵ Education for peace and justice is a very important task. The young generation needs to be properly informed of their mutual history. The young generation must be given the opportunity to look to the future, avoiding the errors of the past. They need to have the opportunity for education that promotes real listening and true mutual esteem. They need textbooks that present history which is honest and unsentimental. This must reach the grassroots through the BEC.

Many scholars are engaged in reexamining the history of Muslims and Christians in the Philippines and these include studies of Mindanao history and even local histories in the different places of Mindanao. The Mindanao-Sulu church should encourage and support these initiatives. The positive relations that are part of the history of Muslim-Christian relations and the positive experiences of dialogue or working for a common project for mutual development need to be included in written history and memories. It appears that these are often forgotten or overshadowed by negative remembrances. The pain and wounds of past events need to be healed and this will take time. As Bishop Benny Tuddud said, we need new events, “a series of happy events that will be remembered during the years to come in contradistinction to the four hundred years of unhappy events” that are now remembered.¹⁶ For the Church to offer a recon-

¹⁴Ibid., 14.

¹⁵“Message from the Participants of the Interreligious Assembly,” *Pro Dialogo Pontificium Consilium pro Dialogo inter Religiones* 103 (2000) 11.

¹⁶Bienvenido Tuddud, *Dialogue of Life and Faith: Selected Writings of Bishop*

ciling presence, it will have to work at creating these events and new memories. It is precisely at the level of the BEC where these new memories can be created. The Church should also treasure and encourage the recording of these experiences.

In revisiting history, the complexities of history should not be submerged in an ideological presentation of history; nor should a dominant ideology denigrate the diversity of ethnicities, cultures, and languages. Both of these approaches to history do damage to the truth of the past, and that past casts a dark shadow on much of the present-day relations of Muslims and Christians in Mindanao-Sulu.

When the complexities of history are submerged in an ideology, a presentation of Muslim-Christian relations that depicts two adversarial groups of people—defined as radically different from each other and, from time immemorial, in conflict with each other—is a great disservice to history and to present-day relations. This type of history implies that there is no other option to conflict and that the present violence is inevitable. This type of history creates its own self-fulfilling attitudes and perpetuates conflict.

When a dominant ideology denigrates the diversity of ethnicities, cultures, and languages of others, this depreciation leads to a deprivation of personal and communal importance and acceptance. This is interpreted as a deprivation of personal and communal dignity and worth. This type of historical presentation also leads to a contentious understanding among different groups and to conflict.

For example, some perceptions from history need to be questioned in their simpler and more easily propagated forms. Because these are simple and easily propagated, they are often repeated but they are also at the base of emotions, attitudes and prejudices. The idea that the Spanish had a blind animosity for all Muslims needs to be balanced with events in which the Spanish cooperated with Muslims, not only in one certain period but at different times in history.

The idea that before the arrival of Spain there was one Muslim people who consistently were opposed to all attempts at colonization by Spain needs to be qualified with the complexities of the relations among the different ethnic groups who are Muslim and their varying responses to the Spanish. The combination of American business interests and the call for Mindanao to remain as an American colony or an independent Mindanao need to be further studied and the complexities not ignored. The contradictory statements of that period need to be seen together. The use of the term Moro Province referred to a limited area that included about two-thirds of Mindanao from 1903 to 1914.¹⁷ Additionally, the Moro Province was a temporary entity superseded by another temporary institution (1914-1920)—the Department of Mindanao-Sulu—which also did not encompass all of Mindanao either, as it did not include Misamis and Surigao.¹⁸ The migration during the 1900s changed the relationships of the different ethnic groups in Mindanao and brought about change in the minority and majority relationships. The complexity of these relationships and the different reactions to these should be explored.

¹⁷The precedents to the Moro Province date back to the Spanish divisions of Mindanao. In 1860, the Spanish established a politico-military government over areas in Mindanao as well as Basilan. There were six districts; five were in Mindanao, while the sixth district was that of Basilan. In 1900, the Department of Mindanao and Jolo was divided into two sub-districts. The first was the predominantly Christian population of northern and northeastern Mindanao with its headquarters in Cagayan. The second had its headquarters in Zamboanga. It had Basilan Island and all of western and southern Mindanao as far as Davao. In 1901, the civil provinces of Misamis and Surigao were created. Agusan was a special province under the Secretary of the Interior. The rest of Mindanao was divided into the five districts of Sulu, Cotabato, Zamboanga, Lanao, and Davao. In 1903, these districts were called the Moro Province but did not include all of Mindanao; Misamis, Surigao and Agusan were never part of the Moro Province.

¹⁸The Department of Mindanao and Sulu of 1914 included Sulu, Cotabato, Zamboanga, Lanao, and Davao (the old Moro Province) with the addition of Agusan and Bukidnon, but not Misamis and Surigao.

Here is a practical example of how we speak and how this possibly betrays our attitudes based on history. One complaint is that there is a perceived disregard of Mindanao in Philippine history, because Philippine history is written from a Manila point of view¹⁹ and events

¹⁹A noted writer on Muslims in the Philippines, Peter Gowing, has commented that local writing of Philippine history has largely been written by Tagalogs and others from the perspective of the scholarly world in Manila. There "is the need to liberate Philippine historiography and instruction from a certain Tagalog-Pampango parochialism... which gives the impression that Philippine national history is really the history of the Tagalogs and Pampangos in the neighborhood of Manila." Peter Gowing, "Teaching Muslim Filipino History," *Dansalan Quarterly* 4/1 (1982) 7. T.J.S. George also points out that when Philippine Independence was declared on 12 Jun 1898, the flag symbolically contained three stars representing Luzon, the Visayas and Mindanao. This illustrated a broad all-encompassing national political vision. This was a revolt in the pursuit of a separate nation. However, the eight rays of the flag are said to represent the eight provinces of Luzon that were in revolt. "Certainly the eight provinces, all of them in Luzon, were not the first to be in a state of war against colonialism.... Their very claim to represent the whole archipelago should have helped to avoid the canonization of Luzon which in reality began resisting colonialism three centuries after Mindanao blazed the trail." T.J.S. George, *Revolt in Mindanao: The Rise of Islam in Philippine Politics* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1980) 74. Gowing contends that there are two major sources of Philippine history. One source is the Hispanized and Christianized peoples of Luzon and the Visayas and the second is the Islamized peoples of Mindanao-Sulu. He maintains that these two distinct histories have to be seen together. The approach of Gowing offers a critique of a split history, one for Luzon and the Visayas, and another for Mindanao, while at the same time labeling one Hispanized and Christianized and the other Islamized. This approach does not seem to take into account the histories of the many indigenous groups and the native Christian peoples of Mindanao. Yet he sees the need for historical balance as a joining of the two histories. George agrees that there is a theory of two histories. He says that the so-called "Philippine History" is seen as separate from the history of Mindanao. George, 75. A famous Muslim writer, Cesar Majul, concurs with Gowing. "To refuse to take the history of the latter [Muslims] as an integral part of the history of the national community is in effect to assert that the proper history of the national community is only of a conquered people, while the history of the uncon-

that are distant from Manila are given much less importance.²⁰ Is this perhaps evident in the way people speak of Cebu? To find Cebu on a map of the Philippines, one will look to the middle of the map. Yet in spite of geography, Cebu is called the Queen City of the South. If you are in Mindanao, you might ask: "South of what?" Does this supposedly honorific designation of Cebu also seem to indicate that what is south of Cebu does not matter or is of no importance, or even worse, is not really considered as part of the country? How we speak helps to reveal our attitudes. Yet often we speak in the categories given by society in a non-reflective way. Does this sense of geography come from having learned a certain type of history?

Another example of the way we speak in a non-reflective way, as an indicator of our understanding, is in the use or definition of the word "Filipino." There exists a common connotation that is attached by some to the word Filipino. This connotation indirectly expresses that the only true Filipinos are those who acculturated in the Span-

quered people is to be dismissed." Cesar Adib Majul, "The Role of Islam in the History of the Filipino People," *Asian Studies* 4/2 (1966) 306. Majul too reacts against what Gowing calls a *Tagalog-Pampanga centrist history*. "If the Philippine Revolution is to be regarded as not only a movement of some Christian natives against Spanish rule, but of the Filipino people in their attempts at freedom, then there is no reason why the more than three hundred years of struggle of the Moslems of the South against Spain and resistance against pressure from other Western powers cannot, in the same light, also be considered as part of the Filipino struggle for freedom." Majul, 304.

²⁰"The idea of an exemplary center survives in modern concepts of statehood—that the culture of the state center (i.e. Manila, Jakarta, etc.) is the cultural ideal, and that everything outside of it is degraded and less civilized to the degree that it is geographically and politically distant from the center. . . . In the Philippines, the language of the political center, Tagalog, has been successfully advanced as the official language, while other languages, though they might be quite unrelated in grammar and vocabulary (except for links within the Austronesian language family) are referred to, sometimes derogatorily, as mere 'dialects.'" Oona Thommes Paredes, "Studying Mindanao Through Southeast Asian Ethnographic Themes," *Kinaadman* 22 (2000) 65-66.

ish colony, or who participated in the Philippine Revolution of 1898.²¹ This signification would exclude people of the archipelago such as the native tribes and the Muslims. Also, it is common to classify art, for example, as Filipino art, Muslim art, or indigenous art, thereby not acknowledging Muslim and indigenous art as Filipino art. Related to the connotation of Hispanization and the 1898 revolution, there is another connotation of the term “Filipino,” namely, that of being Christian.

An example of this is in the final letter of the bishops in 1986. This was a letter on the National Eucharistic Year entitled “One Bread, One Body, One People.” Since 1986 was such a tumultuous year in the life of the entire Philippines, the bishops proposed a Eucharistic Year “to signify the aspirations for unity and communion based on just relationships and just social order.”²² However, the theme of the letter caused the Church to be seen and understood as triumphalistic and insensitive to people of other religious traditions.²³ The letter also contained numerous uses of the phrase “our people.” It referred, at the same time, to all the people of the country and the Catholic people with the same phrase. This was seen as insensitive to those who did not see themselves as “our people.” Admittedly, there was ambiguity, but most times the context clarified the meaning. However, the negative reaction to the title for the year and the letter are worth noting. But the lesson was not learned. In June of 2000, during the war between government forces and the MILF, the CBCP National Secretariat of Social Action, Justice and Peace called

²¹Jainal Rasul, “Muslim-Christian Relations at the Grassroots Level,” *Dansalan Quarterly* 5/3 (1984) 141.

²²Orlando Quevedo, “Social Teachings and Social Transformation in CBCP Thought (1945-1995)” in *Anamnesis*, ed. Francisco Claver and Pedro Quitorio (Manila: CBCP, 1996) 80.

²³Samuel Tan, *A History of the Philippines* (Quezon City: by the author, Manila Studies Association, Philippine National Historical Society, 1997) 110; Quevedo, 80.

for nationwide masses on June 25, the Feast of Corpus Christi.²⁴ These masses with the tolling of church bells were to call national attention to the war in Mindanao and to call for an end to the hostilities. Unfortunately, it was called the “National Synchronized Sunday Mass for Peace: One Body, One Nation.” Again, the link between the eucharist and the one body of Christ, the one body of the Church and the idea of one nation can be understood as the forming of a specifically Christian nation and revive the charge of triumphalism and insensitivity.

Also, the Conciliar Document of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP II CD) begins by saying that “the faith was implanted deeply, making us one people, one nation, though riven, even as we still are, by geography, cultural traditions, languages, ethnic origins” (PCP II CD 10). This statement claims that the implanting of the faith made the Philippines one people and nation, “a Christian nation” (PCP II CD 9). While acknowledging a plurality of ethnic groups, languages, and cultures, the document does not initially admit a plurality of religions and defines the nation in terms of the Catholic faith.

Catechism for Filipino Catholics begins by stating:

‘For us Filipinos, the first century of the coming millennium will mark the 500th year since we as a people accepted the faith’ (PCP II 3). It makes us the only Christian nation among our Asian brethren. There are deep affinities between Christ’s message and the Filipinos’ inmost ways of thinking and acting (CFC 28).

This use of language seems to reflect an attitude that those who are not Christian are not Filipino in the true sense of the word. Is this unreflective speaking that comes from a previous time or does it convey what is really meant? Does this reflect attitudes from an un-

²⁴Norman Bordadora and Edwin Fernandez, “Bishops Urge Tolling of Bells for Peace,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 20 Jun 2000, 1. “Synchronized Mass for Peace June 25,” *CBCP Monitor* 4:13 (2 Jul 2000) 3.

derstanding of history? Is it not just as easy to refer to the Philippines as the only *predominantly* Christian country in Asia and thereby allowing for a plurality of religions in the Philippines? Why is this use of language that can be offensive so easily perpetuated?

The challenge to live as a Church of mission, dialogue and communion will have to continue. Much has happened in the past and much still needs to be done.

Closing

Interreligious dialogue is called the “new challenge of the third millennium” and the time to begin is now. As Bishop Tutud said, the Church as a reconciling presence will have to work at creating new events and new memories. With hope in the triune God, the source and end of dialogue, the Mindanao-Sulu church can look to the ever new beginning of the journey to dialogue and peace. Let me close with this quote from Bishop Valles of Kidapawan.

Gradually, if it is the Holy Spirit that is prompting us to speak of peace, we may be led to explore and discover new ways of reaching out to our Muslim brothers, many of whom like ourselves, are longing for, and seeking, peace. Then we will be moved to do the works of peace. To understand. To dialogue. To forgive and be forgiven. And to reconcile. But we have to begin now. We cannot wait and allow events to overtake us or overwhelm us. We must be courageous and allow the Spirit to lead us to new and untried ways of peace. We may be ignored. We may be opposed. Or worse, we may be persecuted. But persist we must. For in the end, true peace is a gift, undeserved and unmerited, which is for God to give to us in His own ripe time.²⁵

²⁵Romulo Valles, “A Reflection of the Armed Conflict in Mindanao, Diocese of Kidapawan Experience,” address at the Jubilee Year Alumni Homecoming in the Regional Major Seminary, Davao City, 7-9 Aug 2000.