

# SACRAMENTAL RELATIONALITY: ECO-THEOLOGICAL POSSIBILITIES

**Randy J. C. Odchigue**

*In this paper the author explores resonances between the Manobo indigenous spirit-worldview and the Christian discourse of ὁ λόγος ἐν κόσμῳ in order to put forward a framework of resistance against the violation of the integrity of creation. The proposal critically examines the dualistic anthropocentric outlook and provides an alternative perspective that sees the human within the web of eco-theological interrelationality. This paper contends that with the encounter of the Manobo indigenous system of knowledge and beliefs, a Christian sacramental-relational discourse can re-imagine itself to become a contextually relevant articulation of a contemplative praxis where resistance against ecological destruction becomes simultaneously a faith-response and a faith-action.*

## INTRODUCTION

**T**he name “Timber Queen of the South” has been predicated to Butuan not without good reason. Through its waterways and highways, Butuan serves as the funneling junction for the logs from the forests of Agusan. And it has been a veritable and verifiable fact that logging industry which once dominated the economy of Agusan remains an important source of income in the area to this day. The practice of logging and mining has adverse effects not only in the environment but also in political and socio-cultural discourse of Agusan and Butuan.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Confer, Randy J.C. Odchigue, “Bibo, Ergo Sum: Theo-Social Reflections of the Taguibo Watershed Advocacy,” in *Hapag: A Journal of Interdisciplinary Theological Research* 7 § 1 (2010): 79-91.

This paper aims to look first at the experience of the Manobo (the dominant indigenous ethnic group in Agusan)<sup>2</sup> in order to put forward a framework of environmental engagement inspired by the resources within the Manobo discourse itself. Secondly, since I come from the hermeneutic tradition of Christianity, I want to look into the Christian discourse and see what frameworks it can offer in relation to the question of preserving God's creation. Thirdly, we hope to identify lines of resonances between the Manobo narrative and the Christian discourse to show that indeed our local discourses can form tactical alliances with other discourses. We hope that the resonances we identify and the alliances we form can help us re-imagine a Christian narrative that rouses support for ecological praxis.

## **The Manobo Culture**

In this part of the paper, I will focus on the practices and belief systems of the Manobo indigenous peoples who are among those directly affected in the ecological degradation in Agusan. There are other tribes (such as Mamanuas, Higaonons and Banwaons) in Agusan but I limit myself to the practice of the Manobos as they also have broad affinities in practice and belief systems vis-à-vis the other communities.

A cursory glance at the material culture of the Manobos would reveal that their lives are intimately connected with environment.<sup>3</sup> Their means of subsistence, their industrial activities and even the general sociological culture manifest the fact that they have forged

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2. "The Manobo are several people groups who inhabit the island of Mindanao in the Philippines. They speak one of the languages belonging to the Manobo language family. The Manobo cluster includes eight groups: the Cotabato Manobo, Agusan Manobo, Dibabawon Manobo, Matig Salug Manobo, Sarangani Manobo, Manobo of Western Bukidnon, Obo Manobo, and Tagabawa Manobo. The groups are often connected by name with either political divisions or landforms. The Agusans, who live near the Agusan River Valley, are named according to their location." [http://www.joshuaproject.net/people\\_profile.php?peo3=10186&rog3=RP](http://www.joshuaproject.net/people_profile.php?peo3=10186&rog3=RP). (accessed 20 February 2011). We will focus our overview on the experience of the Agusan Manobo.

3. John Garvan, *The Manobos of Mindanao* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1941), 17.

their lives through an intimate connection with nature. Religious belief is an essential part of the Manobo's relationship with the ecosystem. Garvan observes that religious observance is embedded in the lifeworld of the Manobo.<sup>4</sup> In a separate study with a Manobo community in Manguicao in the Adgawan river area, Agusan del Sur, Gatmaytan writes, "it is striking how important rituals and meeting religious or spiritual obligations are to the people of Manguicao. Much of these permeate many activities that I, for example, would consider a secular activity. Thus, when discussing kaingin farming, informants uniformly include the omens, rituals, and *pamalibi* to be observed."<sup>5</sup>

In a research by Fr. Saturnino Urios University (FSUU) to the Manobo communities in Esperanza and San Luis, Agusan del Sur,<sup>6</sup> the respondents were unanimous in articulating that the value of the land for the Manobos and for the Banwaon is sacred. It is identified, attached and connected to their lives. It is likened to the market because it provides everything they need for survival and as a church because it is where the creations of Magbabaya are found.<sup>7</sup> A variable considered in the theoretical framework of the research are the groups of respondents according to their social location. For the Datus, Baylans, Bais and the Elders, land is identified with life. "Losing their land is losing life itself."<sup>8</sup> The parents and the para-teachers have a slightly different answer. The land is, according to them: "sumpay sa kinabuhì."<sup>9</sup> Their very lives are connected to the land. From the

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4. Ibid., 28.

5. Augusto Gatmaytan, "Conflicts in Construction: Manobo Land and Resource Praxis and State Legislation on Tenure," Unpublished MA Thesis, Ateneo de Manila University Graduate School, 1999, 55. *Pamalibi* is a ritual observed by the Manobos as they engage their day to day interaction with each other and with the environment. An example would be the ritual asking permission from the spirits when one needs to take something from the forest.

6. The study covered the two municipalities of Esperanza and San Luis, Agusan del Sur with 110 participants. See, Alma Eleazar, et al, "Cultural Practices and the Realm of Meanings of the Lumad in Agusan on Gender, Reproductive Health and Sexuality," Unpublished Research, Fr. Saturnino Urios University, March 2009.

7. Executive Summary, 2.

8. Eleazar, et al, "Cultural Practices", 20.

9. Ibid.

perspective of the youth, the land is not only the source of their livelihood but is something that they inherited and can be passed on to the succeeding generations.<sup>10</sup> What is notable here is the fact that in the answers of the respondents there is a discernible movement away from their relationship of the land that seemed to be directly proportional to generation gap of the respondents. However, despite the differences, the common thread lies in the evident importance of the land in relation to their identity and existence. Moreover, the highly spiritual culture of the Manobo regard it as a repository of memory where their ancestors are laid to rest: “The very ground is hallowed by spirits of the ancestors after their death. Life and death makes the land sacred.”<sup>11</sup>

From the social-cultural and religious perspective, it is quite clear that the Manobo regards created realm as connected to life and as such sacred. Such framework is intrinsic in the interplay in the life-world of the material and spiritual. One can argue from the facts that for the Manobo, the created realm is the symbolic space of relational encounter with the sacred. I argue that the notion of symbolic relational encounter between the sacred and the profane has some points of contact with the Christian framework of *Yéôôáóéò* as recuperated by the theologian John Zizioulas.

## **Yéôôáóéò AS CHRISTIAN FRAMEWORK OF RELATIONALITY AND SACREDNESS OF CREATION**

### **Theological Recuperation of Yéôôáóéò**

Regarded by Yves Congar as one of the “most original and most profound theologians of our age”<sup>12</sup>, Zizioulas (while coming from the liturgical tradition of the East) is at the forefront of the struggle to promote ecological ethos and asceticism. His route

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10. “Kining yutang kabilin para sa among mga kabatan-onan, kini among ampingan kay bililhon man kini gikan sa among katigulangan...” Eleazar, et al, “Cultural Practices”, 20.

11. Eleazar, et al, “Cultural Practices”, 20.

12. Yves Congar, “Bulletin d’ecclésiologie,” in *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 66 (1982), 88.

towards the resistance against environmental destruction came from his recovery of the notion of ὁ ἄλλος θεὸς featured in the apophatic frameworks of Maximus the Confessor. Zizioulas notes that ὁ ἄλλος θεὸς signifies that “God is love, and as such He creates an immanent relationship of love *outside Himself*.”<sup>13</sup> The phrase “outside Himself” must be emphasized because it underlines the fact that “love as ὁ ἄλλος θεὸς gives rise not to an emanation in the neo-Platonic sense, but to an otherness of being which is seen as responding and returning to its original cause.”<sup>14</sup>

In the mind of Zizioulas, it was Maximus who successfully developed a “Christological synthesis within which history and creation become organically interrelated... Christ is the ἑῖς αἰὼς of creation and one must find in him all the ὅλα of created beings.”<sup>15</sup> Four affirmations support this synthesis: a) incarnation is the result of the loving will of God freeing God from the necessity of the ὅλα of creation; b) Incarnated in history, Christ is the bond between God and creation; c) truth in Christ (understood from the perspective of soteriology) is eschatological; d) the eschatological truth comes into history but cannot be reduced to or be identified with it.<sup>16</sup> The synthesis of Maximus was an important step because he enabled the ἑῖς αἰὼς concept to “pass from cosmology into incarnation by means of the dynamical ideas of will and love.”<sup>17</sup> The important point here for Zizioulas is that the truth of the ἑῖς αἰὼς of things is understood in terms of the loving will of God. What is at stake of course is that Maximus, in Zizioulas reading, has secured the freedom of God from the necessity of ὅλα of things. This departure from the Greek concept of ἑῖς αἰὼς (truth) is accomplished Christologically. Herein lies the role of incarnation: “The incarnate Christ is so identical to the ultimate will of God’s love, that the meaning of created being

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13. John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985), 86.

14. Ibid.

15. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 96. See also, I.H. Dalmás, “La théorie des logoi des creatures chez S. Maxime le Confesseur,” in *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* (1952): 244-249.

16. Robert D. Turner, “Foundations for John Zizioulas’ Approach to Ecclesial Communion,” in *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 78 (2002): 438-467; here, 451.

17. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 97.

and the purpose of history are simply the incarnate Christ. All things were made with Christ in mind, or rather at heart, and for this reason irrespective of the fall of man, the incarnation would have occurred.”<sup>18</sup> Christ is the *ἁλήθεια*. He is the truth because he incarnates “the ultimate, unceasing will of the ecstatic love of God, who intends to lead the created being into communion with His own life, to know Him and itself within this communion-event.”<sup>19</sup> In Zizioulas’ interpretation, through the concept of *ὑπόστασις*, Maximus is able to liberate truth from the Platonic unchanging sameness. The significance of this for Zizioulas lies not only in the breaking away from Greek monism but also in removing the question of truth, knowledge and the relationship of God and the world from the sphere of Greek ontological categories and in situating them in the domain of love and communion.<sup>20</sup>

## **Philosophical Implication**

The epistemological ramification is clear: what is proposed by Zizioulas is a kind of a hermeneutics of communion that goes beyond an *adaequatio* and implies a *relatio* between the knower and the known. Zizioulas follows the Greek Fathers in their approach to truth by identifying it with communion.<sup>21</sup> Knowledge is “the outcome of an event of communion.”<sup>22</sup> It is not the result of a cognitive act from a self-enclosed individual. Cognitive act as mediation involves “a process of gathering information about the other being, i.e., by subjecting it to my observation which will lead to a description (establishing characteristics) and evaluation (establishing qualities and value) of this being.”<sup>23</sup> This not only implies an ontology of being (where the being of things acquires an ontological status), it also involves a mode of objectification to recognize the ontological status of things before one can relate to them. “The truth of these ‘objects’

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18. Ibid.

19. Ibid., 98.

20. Ibid., 92.

21. Ibid., 101.

22. Zizioulas, “Human Capacity and Incapacity,” in *Scottish Journal of Theology* 28 (1975), 401-48, 427.

23. Ibid., 426.

becomes therefore a provocation for the knower; the known and the knower exist as two partners; the *res* and the *intellectus* must somehow reach an *adaequatio*; the subject and the object constitute a pair whose presence determines epistemology.”<sup>24</sup> The problem with this schema is that it presupposes the existence of the individual as the center of truth. Once truth becomes so grounded on the ontology of the individual, any other truth can readily become a provocation of one’s own freedom because the individual is asked to or forced to acknowledge the truth that comes from the outside.<sup>25</sup> In this hyper-individualized existence one can only love after one has knowledge of the “object” of his or her love. The logical outcome of this, in Zizioulas’ intuition, is the separation between thought and action – the dissociation between *theoria* and *praxis*. And because “the possibility of knowledge appears to precede the act of communion (love) and to be independent of it, it becomes possible for man to dissociate his thought from his action and thus to falsify truth.”<sup>26</sup> The biblical idea of “doing truth” becomes quite impossible because truth and *praxis* only coincide up to certain isolated moments. Turner appears to be correct in his interpretation of Zizioulas that the atomized experience of the individual does not teach us that communion is indispensable in knowing.”<sup>27</sup>

The modern caesura between the *res cogitans* and *res extensa* posits a world of fragmented existence and self-enclosed narratives. Openness is not an integral part of this epistemological layout because the individual first “is” and then he or she can choose to be or not to be “in relation”. When an individual makes himself or herself the referent of all existence without regard for the other, all his or her relationships can easily lead to death and his actions into destruction.<sup>28</sup>

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24. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 102-103.

25. Ibid. Zizioulas argues that epistemology as rooted in the individual provokes the freedom of the individual “for he is asked to submit to, i.e. compulsorily to acknowledge, that truth of being of whatever is other than himself, whether fellowman or thing” 103.

26. Ibid., 104.

27. Robert Turner, “Eschatology and Truth,” in *The Theology of John Zizioulas: Personhood and the Church*, ed., Douglas Knight (London: Ashgate, 2007), 15-34, 29.

28. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 105.

When a narrative or a race or a framework claims itself to be the reference point of all above all others, its pretensions can annihilate lives, can decimate cultural and ecological spaces.

For Zizioulas the salvation of epistemology lies in identifying truth with communion. Or to use contemporary language, it lies in an hermeneutics of communion. In Turner's reading this means living in truth which is "movement of communion."<sup>29</sup> This can be attained through the concept of the person where ὁ Θεός αὐτός coincides with ὁ ἄνθρωπος αὐτός. In the person being and the relating coincide.<sup>30</sup> ὁ Θεός αὐτός signifies that a person is a disclosure of truth by the fact that his or her being is communion. For Zizioulas therefore, the vocation of the human is to be ὁ Θεός αὐτός: to be in communion with fellow human beings and the whole of creation. Displaced as the central referent in theological discourse, the *anthropos* is now defined within the web of interrelated and interconnected relationality.

### **Sacramental ὁ Θεός αὐτός: The Eucharist as Ritual of Sacredness**

For Zizioulas, the eucharist as icon of the eschaton is a constituting event of ek-static communion. Its ritual celebration projects the inclusivity of God's kingdom.<sup>31</sup> This means that the privileged occasion where ἐκείνη ἡ βασιλεία is fully realized in the Church is in her sacramental life expressed in the Eucharist. "Full communion means in the first place eucharistic communion, since the Eucharist is the recapitulation of the entire economy of salvation, in which past, present and future are united and in which communion with the Holy Trinity and with the rest of the Churches as well as with creation takes place."<sup>32</sup> The Eucharist is not just the mere repetition of the

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29. Turner, "Eschatology and Truth," 31.

30. John Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, ed. Paul McPartlan (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 112.

31. John Zizioulas, *Lectures in Christian Dogmatics*, ed. Douglas Knight (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 139.

32. Zizioulas, "Church as Communion," 14-15. For a discussion on the unity of the past, present and future in the Eucharist and its connection to symbolism, see, John Zizioulas, "Symbolism and Realism in Orthodox Worship," in Sourozh 79 (2000), 3-17.



sacrifice on Golgotha rather, Zizioulas asserts that the Eucharist or the divine liturgy is an image of the kingdom of God, an image of the last times that “begins with the invocation of the kingdom, continues with the representation of it and ends with our participation in the Supper of the kingdom, our union and communion with the life of God in Trinity.”<sup>33</sup> Thus, it is not accidental that in many languages, including Modern Greek, the term for partaking the Eucharist is called “*Theia koinonia* or Holy Communion.”<sup>34</sup> This means that the Eucharist is the moment in history where the eschatological communion is glimpsed. For Zizioulas, it is an iconic re-presentation of this communion whereby eschatology irrupts into history – whereby the intimate connection between the natural and supernatural is affirmed. There is no longer a dualism which separates the secular and the sacred because creation and her gifts, in and through the liturgy, are offered to God as Eucharist and thanksgiving symbolizing the cosmic communion with humanity and creation.

Zizioulas’ position converges with some Western sacramental theologians. Notable among them is David Power who affirms that the central meaning of the Eucharist is “the communion of the diverse members of the church in the elements of bread and wine, around a common table, sharing in the things of earth.”<sup>35</sup>

### **Possible Anthropological, Philosophical-Theological Frameworks of Relationality at the service of Ecology**

From the foregoing points raised we may elucidate some cultural-philosophical-theological possibilities in which we can base our engagement. While the Manobo cultural practices and belief system

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33. John Zizioulas, “The Eucharist and the Kingdom of God,” in *Sourozh* 38 (1994): 1-12; here, 1-2.

34. Zizioulas, “Church as Communion,” in *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 38 (1994), 7-19, 15. In relation to this, Zizioulas points out that ‘inter-communion’ should be replaced by ‘communion’ in order to do justice to an ecclesiology of communion. With regards to other sacraments, they are given in view of the Eucharist. Zizioulas describes communion in other sacraments as anticipatory – calling for their fulfillment in the Eucharist. See, 14-15.

35. David Power, “Eucharistic Justice,” in *Theological Studies* 67 (2006): 856-79; here, 860.

is too complex to be reducible to one totalizing perspective, I argue we can still discern and make broad perspectival alliances between Christian concepts and theirs without forgetting/glossing over heterogeneity. In reading both perspectives we can posit that the most important resonance that we can discern is the fact that relationality is what defines being: in the Manobo, it is the contemplative intimacy between creation and the spirit-world; in the framework of *Yêôôâôéô*, it is the predication of relationality with essence and existence. Put simply, in both frameworks the human could not but be defined from the perspective of interconnectedness not only with fellow human persons but also with creation.

## **Hermeneutics of Relationality and Ecology**

Seen from a philosophical perspective, the hermeneutics of *Yêôôâôéô* overcomes the epistemological dichotomies that resulted from the Cartesian division between the *res cogitans* and *res extensa*. The hierarchical dualism that influenced a modernistic outlook against environment and ecology is interrogated on the basis of the epistemology of communion. In a parallel vein, hierarchical dualism is foreign in the life-world of the Manobo where they see land as being identified with life itself.<sup>36</sup>

The implication is very clear. In this dichotomy of hierarchical dualism, the individual is presupposed to be the center of truth and interpretation. This leads to an insulated ego that looks at *res extensa* from an exploitative vantage point fueled by the industrial and technocratic tide. We have seen already that this self-enclosed narrative resulted to unspeakable destruction of the environment that is well documented in media and in scientific studies. Steeped in the world-view of social, spiritual and cosmic boundaries, the Manobos would not be familiar with the concept of limitless and wanton consumption of the reified creation. The Manobo idea of consuming has something to do with relating and being a part of a community.<sup>37</sup> This means

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36. Eleazar, et al, "Cultural Practices", 20.

37. The concept of *salugan* (roughly means watershed that defines and is defined by a major river) while geographic in meaning, the term has both social and ritualistic implication. "Only the Manobo from a *salugan* can eat deer, hornbill,

that the person is not the sole referent but is seen as part of the geographic, social and cosmic web of relationships. The same trajectory is proposed by the hermeneutics of *Yêôôááóéè* whereby the human person is regarded as part of a complex web of interrelation and interpretation.

This displacement of the human person as the sole referent of truth gives space for a much more modest approach in positing discourses and interpretations. In relation to environment, an hermeneutics of communion opens up the possibility of an orientation of what Zizioulas calls an ecological asceticism – one does not have to have quantity in order to have quality. The hermeneutics of communion and the idea of *salugan* can indeed open doors for a discussion on an ethical-ecological discourse of *sapat*: reflecting on what is enough as an exercise of ethical praxis in relation with the other and with creation.

### **The Sacredness of Creation: Resonances between *Yêôôááóéè* and Manobo Existential Intimacy with the Land**

The effort to discern links between frameworks always involves some degree of risk that one might be making too facile and naive connections between them. On the other hand, one should not dismiss as trivial and insignificant, traces and faint echoes of resemblances that are found in them. As we have mentioned before, when we look at the framework of *Yêôôááóéè* in relation to the cultural practice and belief systems of the Manobo, we realize that relationality is a framework that can be seen at work at different levels and intensities in local narratives and practice. In the researches of Garvan, Gatmaytan and FSUU, we have seen that the Manobo culture and identity are mediated through their connection of the land. Life is intimately linked with land. This can also be seen in the intergenerational narrative of how and what does their ancestral land

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python, gibang or monitor lizard and tabon bird caught in that salugan. People from other salugan can do so only at the risk of falling sick, unless they marry into the community or have stayed there for a great number of years.” Gatmaytan, *Conflicts in Construction*, 39.

mean to them. In my conversations with Sr. Eupy Bandigan, RGS, head of the Lumad (indigenous peoples) School in San Luis, Agusan del Sur, she mentions the complexity of her work to conscientize the younger generation of Lumads because according to her some leaders of the community serve as conduits of logging and mining companies. She however mentions that the older Datus have retained a consciousness that their culture and their land are their lives. The research of FSUU highlights the insights that the land is something that is passed on from generation to generation and that the Lumads' lives and culture are connected to the land.<sup>38</sup>

From these insights, the Lumad can argue that the destruction of their ancestral land through logging and especially open-pit mining is an act of ethnocide. By destroying that to which their lives and culture are hinged is equivalent to an eradication of ethnic identity and culture. Even if they continue to exist, without land, without culture, without identity, they perish as a people. Thus, it is not only imperative to defend the integrity of creation because they are related to creation in an extrinsic way but as the Manobo would say the human has existential intimacy with the land: because it is “sumpay sa kinabuhì” (connected with life) and that it is life itself. One can say that the concept of *Yêôôáóéò* and communion is deeply embedded in the psyche of the Manobo.

Furthermore, the intimacy and interconnectedness with the environment is not limited simply to existential and social relations but is something that has spiritual significance. The land stores the memory of the ancestors and enables the living to commune with cosmos by communing with the spirits. The tangible space where this communion happens is the land. The land is sacred because of what it is and because of what it symbolizes. For the Manobo, creation – the land is the space of encounter with the spirits. The land is something that is intrinsically spiritual. “The forests remain sacred to the Manobos and their belief that it is the dwelling place

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38. The findings of FSUU regarding the inter-generational meanings of land for the Manobo correspond with Sr. Eupy Bandigan's reflections. The latter's position is that there is a need for the younger generations to get in touch and rediscover the contemplative intimacy that the older generation holds in relation to nature and ecology.

of the *abians* or the spirits. The resting place of the dead is believed to be sacred and its location in the forests enhances the sanctity of the place.”<sup>39</sup>

The same perspective of the sacredness of creation exists in the framework of eucharistic Ὑἑὸδᾶόἑδ. In this work *La vision eucharistique du monde et l'homme contemporain*, Zizioulas points out how a liturgical vision of the world shows the intimate connection between the natural and supernatural. Here, there is not anymore a dualism which separates the secular and the sacred because creation and her gifts, in and through the liturgy, are offered to God as Eucharist and thanksgiving symbolizing the cosmic communion with humanity and creation.<sup>40</sup> Zizioulas believes that Christianity can contribute to the pursuit of ecological well-being by first, “stressing and promoting the idea of the sacredness of creation in all its aspects, spiritual as well as material.”<sup>41</sup> Since there is no longer a duality between the spiritual and the natural the duality between the subject and the object put to an end: “the observer and the observed form an unbreakable unity, the one influencing the other.”<sup>42</sup> The human person is not isolated from the rest of the universe.

What we see at work here is that in both experiences the sacredness of creation challenges the human to approach nature and environment with respect. The Manobo cultural religious perspective invites the human person to remember the sacredness of the land by attaining a contemplative awareness of the significance of the land or environment in relation to life, to their ancestors and to the cosmic spirits at work in creation. The framework of eucharistic Ὑἑὸδᾶόἑδ looks to creation as a space sanctified by the ἔἱᾱἱδ. It is a space where humanity encounters and is challenged to respond to the unceasing invitation of God to participate in God's being. Through the agency of the ἔἱᾱἱδ who is the incarnation of the ecstatic love of God, creation is being led back into communion with God's

39. Eleazar, et al, “Cultural Practices”, 21.

40. See John Zizioulas, “La vision eucharistique du monde et l'homme contemporain,” in *Contacts* 19 (1967): 86.

41. John Zizioulas, “Ecological Asceticism: A Cultural Revolution,” in *Sourozh* 67 (1997) 22-25; here, 23.

42. John Zizioulas, “Preserving God's Creation. Three Lectures on Theology and Ecology I,” in *King's Theological Review* 12 (1989) 1-10; here, 8-9.

own life. In the Christ and through the Spirit, creation is incessantly being offered back to God as it is being incessantly sanctified in every celebration of the Eucharist.

It is from this perspective, Zizioulas argues, that in relation to ecology we need to be conscious of the sacredness of creation. With this, he proposes that all human persons are “priests” of creation lifting it up in offering particular beings to a relatedness of all that is and to the Kingdom of God. He draws from the liturgical tradition of the Church and seeks a more primordial motivation in the idea of humanity’s role as a priest of creation.<sup>43</sup> Zizioulas believes that a human person is a priest of creation as he or she freely cultivates it to become the locus of communion with God and fellow human persons. This means therefore that the material world or creation is not created by God to be exploited for the pursuit of individual happiness and fulfillment. It is there as a sacred gift which is meant to foster communion with God and with others.<sup>44</sup> The priesthood of humanity is identified by Zizioulas with the Orthodox idea of the *anaphora* or offering. This offering does not mean offering a sacrifice in the sense of deprivation or substitution but in the sense of allowing everything that exists in a limited or finite way to enter into the limitless and infinite life of God.<sup>45</sup> Priesthood in this sense is, therefore, freed of its pejorative meanings and its ministry of “offering” could be seen in the sense of “opening up particular beings to a transcending relatedness with the ‘other’ – an idea more or less corresponding to that of love in its deepest sense.”<sup>46</sup>

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43. Zizioulas, “Preserving God’s Creation,” 8-9. In the same article, Zizioulas asserts that in facing the ecological crisis we are in need of “a new culture in which the liturgical dimension would occupy the central place, and perhaps determine the ethical principle.”, 3. In relation to this point, he also places importance in the role of the person as a priest of creation. He says: “Ancient liturgies seem to be centered not so much on the consecration of the elements, even less so on a psychological anamnesis of the Cross of Christ, as on the lifting up of the gifts of bread and wine to the Creator Father, what is called in all the ancient Greek liturgies the *Anaphora* (literally, ‘the lifting up’).” 9-10.

44. See, Zizioulas, “Ecological Asceticism: A Cultural Revolution,” 23.

45. See Zizioulas, “The Eucharistic Prayer and Life,” in *Emmanuel* 85 (1979) 181-196; here, 194-195.

46. Zizioulas, “Preserving God’s Creation,” 3. For Zizioulas this opening of the person to the other is the fundamental attitude that we need today for a positive relationship with nature and with one another. “I feel that our culture

For Zizioulas this opening of the person to the other is the fundamental attitude that we need today for a positive relationship with nature and with one another. “I feel that our culture stands in the need of a revival of the consciousness that the superiority of the human being as compared with the rest of creation consists not in the reason it possesses but in its ability to relate in such a way as to create events of communion whereby individual beings are liberated from their self-centeredness and this from their limitations, and are referred to something greater than themselves, to a ‘beyond’ – to God, if one wishes to use this traditional terminology. This man can do not as an individual but as a person...” For Zizioulas, such liturgical and priestly attitude towards nature leads to forms of culture which are deeply respectful of the material world.

Zizioulas suggests that in dealing with the issue of ecology, we need a spirit of asceticism. This asceticism does not begin with the platonic dualism which is often characterized as a devaluation and contempt for the bodily and the material world. Rather, the ecological asceticism that Zizioulas suggests is an asceticism which actually begins with a deep respect for the body and the material creation and an acute awareness that we are not the masters or possessors of this creation but are “called to turn it into a vehicle of communion, always taking into account and respecting its possibilities as well as its limitations.”<sup>47</sup> The point is that natural resources are not unlimited.

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stands in the need of a revival of the consciousness that the superiority of the human being as compared with the rest of creation consists not in the reason it possesses but in its ability to relate in such a way as to create events of communion whereby individual beings are liberated from their self-centeredness and this from their limitations, and are referred to something greater than themselves, to a ‘beyond’ – to God, if one wishes to use this traditional terminology. This man can do not as an individual but as a person...” 3. A possible problem here lies on the fact that Zizioulas uses the term priest. While he tries to move away from its pejorative meaning, the use of the term priest does not sit well with those who explicitly repudiate presumptuous androcentric terminology.

47. Zizioulas, “Preserving God’s Creation,” 3. Zizioulas believes that human persons play a key role as priests of creation because they possess the capacity to “relate in such a way as to create events of communion whereby individual beings are liberated from their self-centeredness and thus from their limitations.” John Zizioulas, “Ordination – A Sacrament? An Orthodox Reply,” in *Plurality of Religions* (Concilium 74), New York, 1972, 35. Zizioulas is aware that the term ‘priesthood’

The prevailing consumerist mentality seems to ignore this fact because it encourages consumption by making many things necessary which previous generations could easily live without. Zizioulas believes that there is a need to reshape the way we look at life: “Quality does not need quantity in order to exist... Qualitative growth must replace the prevailing conception of economic development which is dominated by quantitative statistics. Asceticism must cease to be a notion referring to a class of religious eccentrics and become synonymous with qualitative – instead of quantitative – progress in human societies.”<sup>48</sup> If the Manobo experience insists on a contemplative intimacy with creation; the framework of Ὑπερβασις invites a contemplative offering of creation through the priesthood of Christ. Different in emphasis but they both plea for what Zizioulas calls an ethos of ecological asceticism.<sup>49</sup>

## **Symbol and Sacrament**

The third possible resonance between the two perspectives is more sacramental and symbolic in nature. Zizioulas’ framework posits for a Eucharistic view of creation where the eschatological irrupts into the historical. The Holy Eucharist mediates this irruption. In a series of lectures on the Eucharist and the Kingdom of God, Zizioulas points out that the “the Divine Liturgy (*Theia Eucharistia* – Holy Eucharist) is an image (*eikona* – icon) of the Kingdom of God, an image (*eikona*) of the last times (*ton eschaton* - eschaton).”<sup>50</sup> Zizioulas’ understanding of icon derives from the Patristic idea of participation of the prototype. Built into an icon, like any art, is the signifier and the signified. In an icon, however, the symbolic identification of what it signifies eliminates the distance between the viewer and the

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carries with it pejorative meanings that is why he hastens to clarify that being a priest of creation means “carrying with it the characteristic ‘offering,’ in the sense of opening up particular beings to a transcending relatedness with the ‘other’ – an idea more or less corresponding to that of love in the deepest sense.” Zizioulas, “Preserving God’s Creation,” 2.

48. Zizioulas, “Ecological Asceticism: A Cultural Revolution,” 23-24.

49. Ibid.

50. Zizioulas, “Eucharist and the Kingdom of God (I),” 1.



signified enabling the viewer to participate in what is being represented in the icon.<sup>51</sup>

Applied to the Eucharist, Zizioulas believes that liturgy is icon to the divine liturgy. The function of this Eucharist is to serve as the ‘window’ of this ultimate affirmation of being over non-being. This means that through the agency of the icon, eschatology bursts through and penetrates history. Through the Eucharist, the eschatological Christ through the agency of the Holy Spirit sanctifies creation. In this Eucharistic ek-static framework, creation is viewed from a sacramental perspective where the presence of God is discerned therein. Through the relational sacrament called the Eucharist, eschaton penetrates and transforms the created realm. In the constant ritual celebration of the Eucharist, creation becomes sanctified and becomes a space of encounter where humanity connects with God. Through the Eucharistic ritual, the sacramental relationality between the spiritual and material, between the Creator and creation is affirmed, strengthened and manifested.

The perspective of regarding creation as a symbolic-sacramental space of encounter between the material and the spiritual is very much embedded in the Manobo psyche. The land is a repository of memories and relationships between the living and the dead, between human person and the cosmic powers. There might not be a doctrinal convergence between the Manobo and the Christian tradition but the framework of looking at creation as a space of encounter for relations to be forged between the material and spiritual remains significant for both frameworks. More importantly, the resonance of sacramental relationality from both perspectives clearly invites the human to realize that if creation is a space for an encounter with the sacred, exploitation and wanton destruction have no place in the manner we relate with the environment. That is why for the Manobo, praying to the guardians of the forest before entering or taking anything from the land is imperative. They believe that “absence of the prayer or offering may bring bad luck of those entering the forest...The person must offer something first before getting something in return from the forest.”<sup>52</sup>

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51. Aristotle Papanikolaou, *Being with God: Trinity, Apophaticism, and Divine-Human Communion* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2006), 39.

52. Eleazar, et al, “Cultural Practices”, 21.

And I believe that some excursus is in order here about the complexity of the Manobo experience about their belief on the sacredness of the land and the function of ritual vis-à-vis economic activity. In his research, Gatmaytan affirms that belief in the spirit and the practice of rituals are part of the Manobos' daily lives. "Indigenous beliefs are not an esoteric knowledge held only by a group of elders, or something to parade on important occasions only; one can have intelligent, informed conversations about spirits with children."<sup>53</sup> Gatmaytan refers to one of the letters of Fr. Urios (dated May 20, 1883) mentioning the steadfastness the Manobo held on to their indigenous belief system.<sup>54</sup> It must be noted however that in his findings, Gatmaytan posited that the notion of the land as sacred is not equated to it being taboo or untouchable. This is evidenced in the fact that in his research area, there was no resistance coming from the Manobo against logging. In fact, there was even a "logging ritual" that grew out of the existing rituals for felling trees for agriculture.<sup>55</sup>

Gatmaytan argues that his data seems to call into question the tendency "to ascribe to indigenous culture of religion a character that is supposedly incompatible with capitalism and the exploitative view of nature it embodies."<sup>56</sup> With this data in mind, Gatmaytan argues that indigenous religion does not function as a prohibitive tool in order to control or prevent logging operation. The fact that something is regarded as sacred "does not in itself remove it from the sphere of human economic activities."<sup>57</sup>

The findings of Gatmaytan show the complexity of the culture of the Manobo. On the first glance it seems to put into question the assumption that indigenous belief system is against the use of natural resource. To this however, I believe several observations can be made. First, the findings of Gatmaytan enable us to examine our own bias and warn us of obfuscating our conclusions because we

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53. Gatmaytan, *Conflicts in Construction*, 58.

54. See, P Saturnino Urios, "Carta del P. Saturnino Urios al P. Superior de la Mision, 20 May 1883," in *Cartas de los Pp. de la Mision de Filipinas*, 10 vols. (Manila, 1977-1895); Gatmaytan, *Conflicts in Construction*, 58.

55. Gatmaytan, *Conflicts in Construction*, 90.

56. *Ibid.*, 92.

57. *Ibid.*, 93.

ignore heterogeneity, division and contestation in the Manobo discourse vis-à-vis our own presuppositions.<sup>58</sup> It tells us any facile reductionism cannot be made here. Having said that, I would like to argue that to use the findings of Gatmaytan to swing into the other side of the pendulum, that is, of making the mistake that since the Manobo belief system of “sacredness” is not prohibitive, it does not mean it is ethical to exploit this loophole to the lowlanders’ gain. There is a vast difference between what is considered valuable between the lowlanders and the Manobos. The economic vulnerability of the indigenous peoples cannot and should not be manipulated by the lowlanders to advance the latter’s agenda. It is here that the proposal of Zizioulas for ecological asceticism comes to play. We have to be ascetic with our needs in relation to the resource that we share with other peoples. Even if admittedly there is no prohibitive stipulation in the belief system of Manobo against logging, Gatmaytan himself recognized that the use of resources (even individual resource) is explicitly linked to the cultural practice of sharing.<sup>59</sup> Gatmaytan frames this point in the following words: “one could say that to own is to have obligation to share.”<sup>60</sup>

On this point, I diverge a little bit from Gatmaytan’s reading. When he points out that there is nothing in the Manobo belief system of “sacredness” that interrogates the capitalistic exploitative framework, I propose that this belief system be understood in connection to the cultural practice of sharing. It is no surprise that Gatmaytan found the cultural trait of sharing paradoxical because it seems that he is not able to make the connection between faith and culture (on this particular point). If sharing is thoroughly embedded in the cultural consciousness and practice of the Manobo, then that in itself is an interrogative discourse against logging that seeks to take advantage of the non-commodificatory framework among many of the Manobo. Perhaps there was no resistance because the Elders and the leaders of the community are not aware of the

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58. See the position of Tania Murray Li, “Images of Community: Discourse and Strategy in Property Relations,” in *Development and Change* 27 (1996): 501-527; here, 505.

59. Gatmaytan, *Conflicts in Construction*, 140-41.

60. *Ibid.*, 141.

incommensurability of the amount given to them and the real profit of the logs when sold in the saw mills in Butuan and Cagayan de Oro.<sup>61</sup> The point is clear. When there is really a cultural consciousness of respect, relationality and sharing then exploitation is out of place: taking advantage is immoral. The practice of logging (at least in the experience of Agusan) can never be justified because the Manobo are not only financially and economically exploited, they also lose their social and cultural heritage.

## **Conclusion**

What we propose is to re-imagine a Christian narrative that overcomes Cartesian epistemological distinction between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*. The Manobo experience provided us with the necessary experiential lens in order to look at the relevance of our reflections in our context. The framework that we propose is that of sacramental ek-static relationality. This perspective is rooted in the co-incidence of ἕνθεός and ὁ θεός in the notion of the person. This has implications in theology and philosophy. Theologically, this means that reflections on the trinity, ecclesiology and soteriology are essentially relational. The trinitarian persons are persons-in-communion. The ministries are at the service of building up the body of the “corporate Christ.”

The Eucharist is an event where eschatology interrupts history breaking it open for the grace of God to renew and sanctify human institutions. The Eucharist is the beating heart of the pilgrim church where the supernatural becomes the existential – where creation gets in touch with redemption. In the ritualization of the Eucharist, creation becomes a sacred space of relationality. Philosophically, the co-incidence of ἕνθεός and ὁ θεός redeems epistemology by exposing the limits of the *res cogitans* as the referent of all existence. Hermeneutically, this framework displaces any totalitarian narrative/interpretation and relativizes its pretensions as a regulating discourse in relation to other.

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61. We who have spent some time doing immersions and pastoral work with the Lumad (indigenous peoples) are familiar with the joke that they would trade in two native chickens for a small can of Young's Town sardines.

As we have demonstrated, the anthropological, cultural and religious discourse of the indigenous peoples resonates with the relational framework we are proposing. Relationality is deeply embedded in the indigenous cultural practice and belief system. The relational practice happens not only in the community of persons but extends to creation as a gift that is intimately connected to life and faith. Indeed, the indigenous peoples do have a contemplative intimacy with the whole of creation.

We have painstakingly drawn out the resonances between the Christian tradition, epistemology and the indigenous knowledge, systems and practices in order to articulate parallel and convergent frameworks of resistance against ecological destruction. This proposal utilizes some cognitive re-appropriation of Western concepts in theology and philosophy. In the meeting of concepts with the practice of the local and indigenous peoples, the framework acquires an element of faith and contemplation. This relational framework cannot remain as mainly a cognitive discourse. With its encounter of the Manobo experience, the sacramental relational discourse becomes a contemplative praxis. Ontology becomes doxology becoming praxis. Resistance to mining and logging that leads to ethnocide is not simply an act of ideology. It is an act to affirm life and culture. It is an act of faith.

**Randy J.C. Odchigue**  
**Father Saturnino Urios University**  
**San Francisco St., Butuan City**  
**email address: [odchi@yahoo.com](mailto:odchi@yahoo.com)**