

# Voices



FROM THE THIRD WORLD

Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians

## Eco-Crisis Theological Visions

Asociación Ecueménica de  
Teólogos del Tercer Mundo

Association Oecuménique des  
Théologiens du Tiers Monde

Special Volume

June 2009

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**VOICES FROM THE THIRD WORLD**

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## **Editorial**

**A**round fifty theologians from all parts of the world met at Belem in Brazil in January this year to ponder on the Eco-crisis and to engage on a theological search and response.

This issue of *Voices* is happy to place before you some of the papers presented by EATWOT members at this World Forum on Theology.

The rape of the earth takes various forms: pollution of water, dumping of nuclear and chemical wastes, low intensity conflicts ruthless exploitation of the earth's limited resources, destruction of flora and fauna. It also exists in the form of environmental racism and divisive power politics – Colonialism that led to the division and sharing of continents and countries among colonial powers, and transfer of peoples as labour from country of birth to other countries have led to tribal and ethnic conflicts in different parts of the developing world bringing about untold human suffering and devastation of the environment. The divisive power politics still persist in the world maintaining these conflicts at a low manageable level.

Imperialism, globalization (market) uncontrolled, haphazard industrialization and militarism are all processes that aggravate injustice, both ecological and social.

Unecological theology and mind-set need to be challenged and denounced profoundly as those concerned struggle to evolve a new eco-friendly ethos of life. Social justice calls for eco-

justice as well. Holistic diseases require holistic healing. At present the concern is more rooted in the fear of risk to human life. But the crisis challenges the human to a more radical questioning of philosophies and ways of life that alienate the human from nature.

Many committed people have sacrificed their energy and even their lives for the cause of justice peace and integrity of creation. May their lives be like the silver fish in the river of life inspiring many more to engage in dreaming dreams and announcing new visions of loving and harmonious relationships of peoples and nations with one another, mother earth, the cosmos and the living God immanent in nature.

***Sr. Marlene Perera***

## **The Fellowship of Christian Councils and the Quest for Peace in the African Great Lakes Region and the Horn of Africa**

Prof. Christopher Byaruhanga (Rev Dr)

### **Abstract**

**F**or quite long the region known as the Great Lakes and the Horn of Africa has continued to degenerate into a scene of conflicts and violence. Conflicts and violence in this region have become a legacy that reproduces itself in subsequent generations as the conditions that nurtured it in the previous generations are allowed to continue. The vision of the Fellowship of the Christian Councils in the Great Lakes region and the Horn of Africa (hereafter to be known as Fellowship) is the creation of communities founded on the Christian principles of freedom, justice and peace. In this paper the author argues that:

- i. Conflicts and violence are preventable.
- ii. The Fellowship should have both a special interest and a key role to play in conflict management in Africa.

## Introduction

I am profoundly grateful for the privilege extended to me to give a short address during the 3<sup>rd</sup> World Forum on Theology and Liberation, 2009 meeting. In the light of this year's theme **Water, Earth, and Theology – for another possible World**, it is my honor and joy to present a paper on a topic that greatly affects our being as Christians in the present day African Great Lakes region and the Horn of Africa namely, **The Fellowship of Christian Councils and the Quest for Peace in the African Great Lakes region and the Horn of Africa**

Since the beginning of the twentieth century the African Great Lakes region and the Horn of Africa have been involved in civil wars, inter-state conflicts and violence. Many people in the region have lost their lives as a result of conflicts and violence.<sup>1</sup>

The conflicts and violence in the African Great Lakes region and the Horn of Africa have to be understood against the background of ethnic/tribal conflicts and state formation that have proved to be life-threatening issues in this region. Other life-threatening issues such as globalization and ecological disaster have brought about a fast growing realization that the National Christian Councils in this region have relevance only to the extent that they can work together for the good of humanity. It is in response to such life-threatening issues that the Fellowship of the Christian Councils in the Great Lakes region and the Horn of Africa has gained growing support in the region.<sup>2</sup>

The vision of the Fellowship is to create communities that are founded on the Christian principles of justice, peace and freedom.

## The Position of the Great Lakes Region and the Horn of Africa

The Fellowship came into existence against the background of long-standing conflicts in the region. The story of these conflicts began in 1884 with the Berlin Conference when European powers decided to share Africa among themselves. In order to avoid clashes with one another, they created spheres of influence which are part of the Great Lakes region and the Horn of Africa's ecumenical story. This ecumenical story has revealed that this region is in a crisis stage. Many people in this part of Africa have lived under difficult circumstances for a very long time as a result of conflicts and violence. Conflicts in this region intensify year after year. For instance, in the recent past there have been wars in countries like Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Burundi and Uganda.<sup>3</sup>

The National Christian Councils in this region are faced with many challenges that are posed by conflicts and violence. It is the pressures of this century which have demanded that National Council of Churches in this region mobilize the resources of the church for peace through the Fellowship. The Fellowship's focus is on:

- i. Critically examining the root cause of the ongoing culture of conflict and violence in the region.
- ii. Critically analyzing the plight of this region that continues to degenerate into a scene of conflicts and violence.
- iii. Provoking its audience to think how to deter the prevalence of violent conflicts and how to resolve disagreements before they reach crisis stage.

The Fellowship argues that the resort to violence is not part of the African nature, but rather is a result of historical conditioning, a phenomenon that can be reverted by various National Council of Churches working together. The above mentioned agenda for the Fellowship is a sign of hope and peace, but there is more to be done in the Great Lakes and the Horn of Africa if this part of Africa is to be "another possible world".

### **The Way Forward for the Fellowship**

People, who are convinced about the positive role the Fellowship is playing, are tempted into presenting the Fellowship as offering solutions in spite of all the historical evidence that Christianity in this region is often seen as a significant cause of conflicts and violence. The way forward, therefore, is not as easy as many people would want to think.

The challenge is how can the task of dialogue make headway, so that the Fellowship can become the effective force for peace which so many people in the region proclaim it to be? The Fellowship needs to prepare herself thoroughly for the ministry of reconciliation in situations of conflicts and violence. This could be achieved by:

- i. Identifying itself with the cries and struggles of the ordinary people in concrete and tangible ways in their day-to-day concerns. In most cases priority is given to dealing with the immediate consequences of conflicts and violence by providing support to the victims of violence. While such a response is important and should be encouraged wherever possible, there needs to be much more than that.
- ii. Making people aware that conflicts and violence are predictable and preventable. In a region that yearns for meaningful change and progress, the Fellowship should not sit back

and be content with lively Sunday worship services. It must subject that reality to the demands of peace and reconciliation.

In order to be involved in meaningful reconciliation, the Fellowship must recognize two basic things:

- a. True reconciliation presupposes the establishment of conditions for justice. There cannot be peace in situations of conflicts unless the injustices that underlie the existing conflicts are resolved to the satisfaction of the actors.
- b. Reconciliation presupposes change of individuals and circumstances that foster and nurture conflicts. Unless change is experienced, fear, manipulation and conflicts become intensified.
- iii. Getting rid of centuries of negative baggage. A lot of people in this region have accumulated centuries of baggage where they tend to remember the bad times and use them as weapons against each other in times of conflicts.

### **Conclusion**

Is a new world possible for the Great Lakes region and the Horn of Africa? A meaningful answer depends on whether the Fellowship as a cause of reconciliation will take itself out of political relations and insert itself as a factor for reconciliation.

**Notes**

1. Of the countries in this region, it is only Tanzania that has avoided such a crisis.
2. The National Council of Churches' contribution to peace and stability in the Great Lakes region and the Horn of Africa is the formation of the Fellowship of Christian Councils.
3. The Fellowship of Christian Councils in the Great Lakes region and the Horn of Africa (FECCGLAHA) based in Nairobi, was set up by the Christian Council of Tanzania, the National Council of Churches of Burundi, the National Council of Churches of Kenya, the Protestant Council of Rwanda, the Sudan Council of Churches, the New Sudan Council of Churches, the Uganda Joint Christian Council, the Church of Christ in Congo, the Eritrea Orthodox Church and the Evangelical Church of Eritrea.

## **The Effects on Korea of UN-Ecological Theology**

Jong-Sun Noh

**T**here were two pretty  
 Fish that lived in a small pond  
 By the path deep in the mountain.  
 On a certain clear summer day.  
 The two pretty fish fought each other.  
 One fish floated on the water.  
 Her flesh decayed.  
 The water was polluted at the same time.  
 Now, in that little pond by the path  
 Deep in the mountain.  
 No life can survive.

– from Minkee Kim “Two Fishes”

### **Two Fishes: The Division of North and South Korea**

This poem is a song that the young, conscientized university students love to sing in Korea. When they sing the song, the small pond refers to the Korean peninsula, and the two fish refer to the divided north and south. As most of us know, North and South Korea have been divided for over forty-three years. Often, they have fought each other like two fish. Tragically, it is possible that, in the future, the pond as a whole

– the peninsula itself – will be polluted by conflict in such a way that no life will be possible.

To many young Christians who sing this song, the song has two distinctively theological meanings. First, it means that the Korean peninsula was once beautiful, that it was created by God for God's glory. The sun, the stars, the heavens, the earth and that particular part of earth called Korea were designed to praise the Lord. Second, it means that this peninsula may someday become a place that cannot support life. It may become a place in which the integrity of creation of which the World Council of Churches speaks and toward which Christians rightly exercise respect, may become a mere wasteland of disintegration.

What are we to make of this song? What can the song mean for us? Should it mean that the death of the Korean peninsula – its people and its non-human life as well – is imminent? Should it mean that the biosphere in Korea will be so totally devastated that the waters, the fish, and the human beings there will die? Perhaps, it can have an even broader meaning. Perhaps, the little pond of death in the song can refer to the planet earth as a whole and to the global biosphere. Perhaps the song is instructive to both Koreans and to the people of the world in pointing toward the destructiveness of a certain kind of unecological theology – what we in Korea call division theology – that legitimates an oppression of people, of other animals, and of the earth itself. In what follows I will explain what I mean by division thinking, showing its influence on Korea, the land I know best.

## **Korea**

In the pond by the name of Korea, the people of the north and the people of the south have fought and killed each other for over forty-four years. This conflict has been in fact a proxy war to benefit imperialist superpowers. Both North and South Korea have been the scapegoats for this neo-colonial proxy war, what amounts to a war of Imperialist beasts, the dragons of the

book of Revelation. Under the structure of this war, females and males of the human species have been and are currently dying, oppressed and exploited, even while they are unaware of the cause of their suffering or the cause of the division of Korea. Korean Christians have advocated and supported faiths, ideologies, and economics that legitimate division and are themselves divisive.

These division theologies (Bundan Shinhak) divide, violate, and destroy the integrity of God's creation. As Korean Christians we must confess our responsibility here, for we have sometimes accepted such theologies as our own. At the same time, however, the politico-economic elites within the military-industrial complexes of the super, imperialistic, and hegemonic powers must confess their sin of destroying the pond, the Korean peninsula, of destroying a beautiful and integral part of God's creation for their own political and economic ends. Let us review some of this history.

Although the Korean peninsula was once a unified community of nature and people, it has consistently been divided by outside forces. The sin of division and separation, breaking the one into two, was first plotted by Toyotomi Hideyosi, the Japanese general, and Weehahhoe, the Chinese general, in 1593, almost four hundred years ago. They proposed the division of Korea as a means of balancing power between the Japanese and Chinese hegemonies. They failed to respect that community which was the Korean people itself, along with the land they loved and the flora and fauna which dwelt among them. Division thinking begins by failing to respect existing communities of this sort.

The effects of such division thinking were exacerbated in the nineteenth century. In 1894, John W. Kimberly, the Minister of Foreign Affairs for Great Britain, the colonial power and chief oppressor of colonized people in the world at that time, again proposed the division of the Korean peninsula in order to make peace between Japan and China. This plan, designed from so-called first-world perspectives, essentially made

Koreans scapegoats. It is noteworthy that President Truman and General MacArthur did not divide Japan, the war criminal, in 1945; instead, they divided Korea, the victim of world war and of colonial powers. In dividing Korea these men committed the sin of dividing and destroying a part of the integral order of creation itself. An integral order is deeply ecological in the sense that it involves a people in communion with their land. It is a community in the sense noted above: an ecological community of people living in meaningful degrees of harmony with one another and with the earth.

A few in the West recognized the need to respect such a community. Averill Harriman, then the United States ambassador to Moscow, protested against MacArthur's plan to divide Korea because he knew that Korea had a history as one community with one race, and that no one should divide her. But the structures of MacArthur's consciousness – which was built over a long period of his life with guns and swords – were full of ruling ideologies, which wrongfully justified using the oppressed people as scapegoats for what he supposed to be justice, peace, and order. Though a so-called Christian working for justice, peace, and order in the created world. MacArthur did so from a consciousness informed by the hegemonic ideologies of the first world, ideologies that sought to divide existing communities. Thus Germany was divided after World War II; in Asia, by similar logic of division, Japan ought to have been similarly divided. But instead Korea was divided. This incident is not an accidental one.

The cause of this injustice can be traced back to 1905 when a secret agreement was made between President Taft (United States) and Prime Minister Katsura (Japan).<sup>1</sup> The secret agreement was made because Japan wanted Korea as a colony and the United States wanted the Philippines; each agreed to support the other in these respective aims. The Philippines and Korea were the “food” for a coalition of Japanese and American Imperialists. From 1910 to 1945 the leaders of the oppressed Korean people who tried to assert the self-reliance and Independence of a united Korea were put into

prisons, deported, exploited, tortured, politically assassinated, and martyred. The stories of their lives were not permitted to be put into print and were totally suppressed.

The people and their leaders who resisted the division of Korea could not enjoy the life spans given to them by God. Some, like Kim Koo, were killed by guns or stabbed to death by the hands of Cain, men who rebelled against the will of God. Some, like Reverend Chun Dukee, were tortured to death. The length of their lives was shortened arbitrarily by the forces of the imperialist superpowers.

The sin of rebelling against God through the violation of the integrity of creation, through the destruction of the beauty and harmony of the Korean peninsula, was ultimately committed by military-industrial elites in collaboration with these superpowers, with Western European and North American colonial powers, and with Japan in Asia. This is a continuing sin based on action that followed the division thinking of the Taft-Katsura mentality.

### **Division Theology, Imperialism, and the Violation of Life**

A kind of quasi-theology arose from the Taft-Katsura model. This quasi-theology is exemplified in the lives of men like the medical missionary Dr. William B. Scranton. Scranton was born in New Haven, Connecticut, graduated from Yale University, and received his M.D. degree from Columbia University in New York City. He was in certain respects a dedicated, loyal, and faithful servant of God, and he spent his life in Korea treating countless numbers of patients. He was one of the founders of the Sangdong Methodist Church, one of the first churches in Seoul City, and was at one time a district superintendent of the Methodist Church in Korea. In 1905, Imperial Japan forced Korea with guns and swords to sign a protectorate treaty and denied all the diplomatic rights of Korea. This was the first stage of the colonialization of Korea by Japan. The Young Adult Association in the Sangdong

Methodist Church began an active but nonviolent protest against Japanese Imperial colonialization. In response, Dr. Scranton, with the power of the district superintendent of the Methodist Church, disbanded the Young Adult Association of the church.

Dr. Scranton also took action against the pastor of the church, warning him not to make any political protests against the Japanese colonialization of Korea. This pastor, Chun Dukee, was very active in organizing the Shin Min Hwoe (New People Meeting), which had been working for the self-reliance, independence, and self-development of Korea, working in opposition to threats of colonialization by Japan. Numerous national leaders met with Chun Dukee, using the church as a secret gathering place. Among these were Yi Dongwhoo, who later organized the Korean Communist Party, the first Communist Party in Asia; Kin Koo, who was respected as one of the genuine leaders of the Korean people for an undivided Korean peninsula and who was later assassinated by ultra-right-wing terrorists; and Yi Choon, the patriot who killed himself for the peace and independence of Korea.

Scranton warning to Chun Dukee and his disbanding of the Young Adult Association indirectly and directly contributed to the processes of enslavement and destruction of life. Scranton faith was informed by the Taft-Katsura model; it was centered in the interests of the imperialists. This First-World orientation led him unwittingly to support the destruction of humans and other living beings in Korea. In the language of the World Council of Churches, his actions against the people and the natural communities in the Korean peninsula were actions against the integrity of creation.

The Japanese colonial government, that resulted from the colonization, suppressed Christianity. It prohibited Korean ministers from reading the story of Exodus, the story of another enslaved people which rose up against another imperialist force; and from reading the book of Revelation, the story of passive resistance against the Roman Empire. Indeed, Korean Christians were not allowed to sing "Onward Christian

Soldiers" because the Japanese government thought this hymn – and the biblical stories mentioned – would conscientize the people to fight against Japanese colonialism. These were the strategies of Japan to suppress the anti-Japanese independence movements among Korean Christians and to distort their faith.

What was the situation of human ecology in Korea under the Japanese colonial government? Young men in the Korean peninsula went to the proxy war and died there for the Japanese version of world peace and justice in Asia. Young women were forcefully "volunteered" to the Women Volunteer Corps and then misused as military prostitutes. Each woman was responsible for fifty to one hundred Japanese soldiers per day. They were systematically raped and subsequently died. There is no single memorial statue for the 200 thousand Korean women who died for the cause of the so-called justice and peace of the world.<sup>2</sup> It is fair and essential to remember that many Christians supported these historical sins of imperialism. These and other cruelties by which imperialistic colonialism systematically destroyed the created order of nature, men, and women in the Korean peninsula.

Unlike the Israel of prophecy in Ezekiel, Chapter 37, a Korea liberated from the Japanese in 1945 was still not a unified land. As noted above, the American general MacArthur divided Korea at this time. He and the United States divided Korea into two without any consent or even prior notice to any single Korean. This action was a clear violation of the rights of the Korean people. It further destroyed the life of the people and forcefully divided the members of countless families. Indeed, my own grandmother has been in North Korea since 1945, and my family has not heard anything of her for forty-three years. Division theologies fail to attend to those communities which are families, and which are among the most beautiful creations of God.

The United States decision to divide Korea clearly destroyed the integrity of many families. The south was placed under the Interim Military Government of the United States.

Those who advocated unification were arrested, imprisoned, killed, eliminated from society, and labeled pro-communists and leftists. Most of the Christians in the south, informed and guided by division faith, division ideology, and division theology, supported the “south-only election”, which assured permanent division of the north from the south.

Division theologies – by which families are separated, cultural traditions undermined, and natural communities destroyed – characterized even some of the most astute of Western theologians. For example, John C. Bennett, one of the greatest Christian political ethicists and former professor at Union Theological Seminary, supported the United States foreign policy as a sort of manifestation of the justice, peace, and will of God.<sup>3</sup> In actual fact, his support was the affirmation of the separation of families, husbands and wives, and the division of a whole people in the Korean peninsula. His theology was, as far as it concerned the Koreans, an Imperialistic division theology. Later, in his book *Radical Imperative: From Social Ethics to Theology*, Bennett confessed his mistakes, and came to see that his view of American foreign policy in the 1940s and 1950s as manifestations and realizations of the kingdom of God, was gravely in error.

Reinhold Niebuhr also made mistakes in understanding Korea. In 1950 he interpreted the Korean War as a war against Russian communist world expansionism. His perspective had been centered on the U.S. and Russia and did not do justice to the Koreans, the scapegoats in this proxy war between the superpowers (see Noh, 1983). In his *Intellectual-Autobiography* Niebuhr, like Bennett, confessed his misinterpretation and his lack of fair attention to the destiny of Koreans and Vietnamese, scapegoats under the situations of proxy war (Niebuhr). Division ideologies, division faiths, and division theologies of the Koreans were products in many ways of the theologians of the superpowers. Such ideologies would eventually lead to the destruction of both human ecology and the biosphere in the Korean peninsula.

## **The Human and Non-human Consequences**

What have been the practical consequences of these persistent efforts to divide Korea? Let us look. They include the sexual exploitation of women and the murder of protesters on Cheju Island, the development of a dependency upon nuclear powers: and an increasing dependence on polluting industry.

### **Cheju Island: Sexual Exploitation and Death**

There is a beautiful island called Cheju in the southernmost part of the Korean peninsula. There are many oranges produced on this island, and it is one of the most popular honeymoon sites. It is also a popular place for international tourists in general and Japanese men in particular. This island is known as an island with an abundance of three things: wind, rocks, and women!

How romantic to see that there are many women in the southernmost island of Korea! However, not many people realize that there is a reason why there are many women in that southernmost island with lots of oranges, tourists, and newly-weds. In fact, no one seems to ask the serious human-ecological question why there are so many women disproportionate to that of men. Historical data on this matter has been legally banned from being published in any form for the last forty years. On 1 March, 1947, at a memorial rally on the island for the independence movement of 1919, two people were killed by government forces. Incidents on 3 April, 1948, led to the killing of eighty thousand islanders – out of a total of 300 thousand who were labeled communist guerillas or pro-communists. Nearly one-third of the population on the island was killed with almost all the males eliminated. It will be the research task of engaged theological scholars to know how many non-combatant civilians were killed in that massacre. According to the secret documents of the Far East Command, the United States, later released to the public the slogans of the Cheju Islanders who were for the establishment of a self-reliant, unified Korean government which denied the division

of the Korean peninsula. Denying the south-only elections eventually divided Korea permanently (see Merrill).

In 1988, on this island where almost all the males were killed, there are many Geisha houses for non-Korean men only, each of which can entertain three hundred to five hundred Japanese men – men who do not need visas to come to the island for sex tourism. Is this a manifestation of the beautiful order of God's creation? The descendants of the women of the Japanese Women Volunteer Corps, who were forced into military prostitution have in the 1980s, dedicated themselves to the sex tourism of Japanese men. In a twisted way, their work has been praised as patriotic and nation-building because it brings foreign money into the country. In a sermon, the pastor of one of the largest Pentecostal churches on the island called the action of the Geishas patriotic and then declared that these women should give more to the church from their income. Researchers at the International Christian Seminar on Women and Sex Tourism held on 20 April 1988 at the YMCA on Cheju Island reported that the Geishas, chatting to one another, said, "We need to have more Japanese tourists, so that we can give more to the church." Is this not destruction of the human ecology, representative of the integrity of God's perfectly harmonized order of creation? This destruction involves the oppressed women of the most severely oppressed people in Korea. Such a violation of human ecology must be analyzed with regard to the domination of Korea by foreign powers and the divide-and-conquer strategies that continue to dehumanize the victimized people of the Third World. So, too, must the current problems of nuclear weapon dependency. So, too, must the destruction of the ecological biosphere.

### **Nuclear Dependency**

Currently, the Korean peninsula is not self-reliant but is rather absolutely dependent on the nuclear war strategies of the superpowers in general and those of the United States in particular. It has been reported by many sources that there

are more than enough nuclear bombs in South Korea to destroy the peninsula biologically forever. Reports indicate that there are from hundred and twenty to twelve hundred United States nuclear bombs in South Korea, and that there are approximately forty thousand United States ground troops stationed there. Russian nuclear weapons are targeted at South Korean military installations. American ground troops and civilians have efficient evacuation plans ready in case of an emergency nuclear war. But there have been no reports on evacuation plans for the forty million Koreans in the south (it is not fair to comment on the case of North Korea without clear evidence).

Recently, the Philippines has legislated a law declaring that those who bring nuclear weapons into the territory of the Philippines will be sentenced for an imprisonment of at least six years and up to a maximum of thirty, and that all airplanes or ships carrying nuclear bombs will be taken into custody.<sup>4</sup> There have been indications that the United States has explored plans to relocate the United States military from the Philippines to Taiwan. Such a relocation was strongly opposed by Taiwanese women delegates to the recent International Christian Seminar on Women and Sex Tourism, who insisted that it could result in making Taiwan a place of sex tourism for American soldiers. In the face of potential opposition, the United States has also examined the possible relocation of forces in the Philippines to Korea. Is it the case that the divided Korean peninsula will be the United States spare depot for nuclear bombs? Without prior notice to the NATO nations, United States troops are not allowed to use nuclear weapons in Europe. But in the case of the Korean peninsula, United States troops do have the power to start using nuclear weapons without any consent from the people, including the Korean commanders.

As was the case when Korea was divided in 1945, a decision-making structure that totally and intentionally ignores the opinions of any single Korean – including the current Korean Commander-in-Chief of the military forces in Korea – is applied now to nuclear-war strategies in Korea. From the

time of the Korean War in 1950, an American was until just recently the commander-in-Chief of all military forces, including the Korean forces in South Korea. The decision-making structure still is not only an obstruction of internal justice, but it is also a violation of international justice and of the sovereignty of Korea.

Korean life is threatened and the basic biological rights of Koreans are critically violated by the nuclear strategies of the United States. Neither can Russian responsibilities be ignored, since their nuclear weapons are ready to strike any part of the Korean peninsula. In the unfortunate case of nuclear war, Pyongyang City might be bombed by the nuclear warheads. What does this say of the survival of the people in Seoul City? If Wonsan City is bombed, could the people of Kangnung City, Sokcho City, or Woolsan City in the south expect to survive? And what of non-human life in both the north and the south? What of the biosphere of the peninsula itself? What of even the fish in the Imjeon River or in the seas west and east of Korea? Americans in Korea have efficient evacuation plans, but the Koreans and the other living beings on the peninsula do not have such an escape. The entire peninsula and all its inhabitants are threatened with absolute devastation.

Japan declared an anti-nuclear policy by her constitution. Legally, Japan is nuclear-weapon free. The Philippines also does not want to house nuclear weapons. Then why should Korea become the victim of the nuclear weapons of Russia and the United States?

But there are other problems.

### **Pollution-Dependent Industry**

Not long ago tens of thousands of people mourned the death of a fifteen-year-old boy who died of toxic poisoning as the result of working only six months in a mercury-producing factory. This is but a single example of how a once united land has become the scene of continued exploitation, and the

example must be understood set against a recent background of general violence, division, and exploitation of the Korean people and Korean land.

In April 1970, following a 1969 Nixon-Sato communique, the Mitsuya plan was proposed and subsequently implemented. The main points of the plan were as follows:

1. A unitary Japan-Republic of Korea (ROK): An economic cooperation zone should be created to operate in the 1970s so that the two countries can develop a sort of an Asian EEC (common market).
2. Japan will relocate to the South Korean Industrial Zone its steel, aluminum, oil refining, petrochemicals, shipbuilding, electronics, plastics, and other industries that cannot be maintained in Japan because of pollution.
3. In view of the shortage of labor in Japan, it will also shift its labor-intensive industries to the ROK.
4. The ROK government will strictly prohibit labor disputes at factories for these Japanese-ROK joint ventures.
5. Flexible domestic measures will be taken within the ROK to facilitate this mode of operation (see Noh 1983).

This plan, one which again commits crimes of the Taft-Katsura type and of division theologies, is clearly exploitative, as with the problem of nuclear weapons. It clearly conjoins exploitation of and threats against the well-being of human beings with the exploitation of and threats against all of nature. This plan has been realized in what is now a pollution-dependent Korea through the cooperation of Japan and the United States. Ultra-right-wing theologies in Korea have

interpreted the transfer of pollution-dependent industry to the ROK as a blessing, as a manifestation of God's miraculous assistance toward economic growth. But this transfer of technology and industry from – and the resulting reality of a dependency on – the United States and Japan threaten the entire biosphere, the entire Korean peninsula. The mass destruction of human life – as in the Bhopal incident in India or the Chernobyl nuclear incident in Russia – could happen at any moment in Korea. The annihilation of human and non-human life is increasingly possible.

The economic policies of this plan have resulted in the systematic destruction of the sphere of food production in Korea, which now imports fifty to sixty percent of its total needs, mostly from the United States. Korea is now a country dependent for its food on the United States, although Korea had been self-reliant in terms of food production for thousands of years.

Up until the 1960s, eighty percent of the total population was located in the farming countryside. Now only twenty-seven percent lives in the agricultural sectors of the land. As is happening in so many parts of the world where western models of development have prevailed, rural communities have been destroyed. Because of increasing food imports, there is no way for farmers to survive without giving up food production and that ecological sphere in which they once worked. Food is a weapon in neo-colonialistic capitalism. The food-dependent state cannot be politically self-reliant. In the Korea of today, Korean bachelors who remain to live as farmers in the countryside are unable to find brides. Their livelihood is threatened from all sides. Because of imports of beef from the United States, farmers have had to kill their own cows – and often themselves – because of debts they have incurred in the current economic situation. Farmers have consistently lost their lands to become mere tenants. These peasants – so connected as they have been to the earth – have been the heart of the Korean nation. In 1694, Korea experienced the literal fall of a nation when peasants were killed in the Peasants Revolutionary War (see Noh 1987 and Noh 1988).

### **Toward a Theology of Silver Fish in the Imjeon River**

To overcome the current critical situation, a theology of Jubilee must be declared in the land. Korean theologies have directly or indirectly supported the division of Korea, the violation of the integrity of creation, and the division-based psychosis and insecurities that have resulted from this violation and from the manipulation, intervention, and invasion of foreign superpowers. Korean theologies have been division theologies. They have led Korea toward an almost absolute submission to domination by the superpowers, a dehumanizing and degrading submission that has resulted in depressive frustration and neurotic inferiority complexes. As a consequence of this submission, Korean leaders and police have vented their frustrations by torturing their people, violating human rights, and raping subversive women students (as in the case of Deacon Moon Kiidong). These reactions are the symptoms of the collective division psychosis suffered by almost all the Korean people, a psychosis that has developed for over forty-four years. The only medication for such a sickness is the autonomy, self-reliance, and self-determination of the nation in an ecologically responsible way. A process for strengthening the people power and reunifying a land that has been systematically victimized by the superpowers calls for a theology of reunification and self-reliance. The Korean situation calls for a theology like the one embodied in the following story of fishes in a divided land, a theology of silver fish.

In January 1987, Park Chongchul, a Seoul National University student, was arrested by the police, who simply wanted to question him about another friend's whereabouts. After overnight torture with water, and as a result of this torture, Park died. The police cremated his body hurriedly and tried to eliminate the evidence by throwing the ashes into the streams of the Imjeon River, which runs between the divided north and south of Korea. The life of one student, who shouted out for the autonomy, self-reliance and reunification of a divided land and for the democratization of military dictatorships, was chemically reduced to a few grams of calcium,

nitrogen, and so on. After the cremation, these chemical elements – the ashes – were thrown into the river. I dreamed that they became the numerous silver-colored fish in the river. My hope is that these silver fish will live forever, or at least for as long and as far as the Imjeon River flows. They will swim in the demilitarized zone that divides Korea into two.

What we need is a theology of silver fish, a theology that moves beyond division thinking toward respect for the integrity of creation. A theology of silver fish will guide us into that beautiful unity of people in relation to one another and in relation to the earth, but it must do so by overcoming the division ideologies of foolish theologians and the division faiths of misguided Christians. If a theology of silver fish emerges, one that respects the integrity of the Korean people and their beautiful peninsula, division theologies based on the division psychosis will be transformed into theologies that respect living communities of people and land. Then the memory of Park Chongchul, and the many others like him who have suffered so much, can be redeemed. Then the silver fish of the Imjeon river can themselves enjoy the unpolluting peace of the living Christ.

### Notes

1. Ki-baik Lee writes. "Roosevelt felt, moreover, that it was necessary to acquiesce in Japanese domination of Korea as a quid pro quo for Japan recognition of U.S. hegemony over the Philippines. This deal between the U.S. and Japan is revealed in the secret Taft-Katsura Agreement of July 1905. England, too, in renegotiating the terms of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance in August 1905, acknowledged Japan right to take appropriate measures for the guidance, control, and protection? of Korea" (Lee, 309).
2. A monument related to this problem has been built recently in Chiban Prefecture, Japan. See Chung-Ok Yoon (a professor at Ewha University)
3. John C. Bennett writes: "I recognize in myself a too bland acceptance of national trends in the 1940 and 1950. The fact that there was considerable harmony between my ethical convictions and the policies of the United States Government during the Second World

War and during the early years of the cold war contributed to this" (Bennett. 9-10).

4. Chosun Dally News. 27 May 1988.

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## **Holistic Health & Healing: "Environmental Racism & Ecological Justice"**

Dwight N. Hopkins

The environmental movement in the U.S. is comprised of at least two major sectors. One is known to the public because of its emphasis on the preservation and conservation of mother earth; and Greenpeace is usually the face of this grouping. The second important dimension of environmental concerns is the struggle against environmental racism and for ecological justice. Here, poor and working class communities of African Americans, Latino-Hispanic Americans, and Native Americans have taken the lead against sickness in human bodies, social relations, and nature.

The Greenpeace wing of the movement has consistently fought for the healing of the planet. It teaches us that "... environmental degradation caused by massive pollution of air, water and land threatens the very life of the earth. Rapid depletion of non-renewable resources, indeed of species themselves, the thinning of the ozone layer, exposing all living creatures to the danger of radiation, the buildup of gases exacerbating the greenhouse effect, increasing erosion by the sea – all these are documented by scientific research".<sup>1</sup>

The primary foci of the earth-emphasis environmental wing have been historically "wilderness and wildlife preservation, wise resource management, pollution abatement, and

population control". Preservation examples include the spotted owl and the snail darter. The leaders and followers of this movement have mainly been middle and upper income whites with above average education and easy access to political, cultural, and economic resources.<sup>2</sup>

For instance in April 2007, roughly one thousand scientists from about seventy-four countries constituted the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. The final report discovered the dire impact of global warming on the earth's ecosystems. Increased populations and growing urbanization coupled with adverse climate changes will eventually result in hazardous flooding, drought, and slow extinction for up to twenty to thirty percent of plant and animal species.<sup>3</sup> More than ever, mother earth is sick with acid-rain pollution. The greenhouse effect is increasing; the fact that carbon dioxide traps the sun's heat in the atmosphere and consequently warms the earth. Industrial pollution is part of the problem. What many people don't know is that carbon dioxide remains in the atmosphere for about two hundred years. The increase in temperatures and sea levels will give rise to mass famine and damaging flooding. It is possible that in the year 2040, sea ice in the Arctic might disappear totally, preventing polar bears from hunting sea animals on which to live. For us humans, a radical climate change will drastically lower rainfall in the western United States and global storms will intensify.<sup>4</sup>

### **Environmental Racism & Ecological Justice**

Clearly, the conservation and preservation wing of the environment effort is most widely known in America. That is why many people are surprised to hear that African American communities have been struggling against environmental racism and for ecological justice long before the formal launching of the struggle in the 1980s. Among black folk, environmental racism symbolizes profound illness of both the earth and humans in people of color neighborhoods. Holistic disease requires ecological justice, i.e., holistic health and healing.

For example, Thomas Calhoun Walker was a black man and the Advisor and Consultant of Negro Affairs for the Virginia Emergency Relief Administration in Richmond, VA. During WWI, Walker was the architect of environmental initiatives for blacks, including providing black children with access to swimming pools and parks, eliminating rats on wharves, promoting gardening among blacks, and stressing hygienic homes.<sup>5</sup>

Likewise few realize that many of the urban rebellions in the 1960s derived from black folk's anger about lack of garbage collection and sanitation services. And the famous riot at predominantly Texas Southern University in Houston in 1967 erupted partially because community people protested an eight year old black girl's drowning at a city garbage dump. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated because he was helping black working class garbage workers in Memphis, Tennessee who went on strike for a holistic healthy environment. They sought increased wages, the same pay scale as white city workers, and a quality work environment.<sup>6</sup>

However, not all agree that the black community initiated the ecological justice dimension of the environmental movement. Some point to the United Farm Workers struggle against pesticide poisoning in the 1960s. And others mark the 15th century European occupation of Native American lands as the start of environmental justice struggles.

Yet general consensus cites the formal launching of the environmental racism and ecological justice movement in the year 1987. That year the United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice (UCC-CRJ) published the landmark study *Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States: A National Report on the Racial and Social-Economic Characteristics of Communities with Hazard Waste Sites*. Rev. Benjamin Chavis (a UCC black clergyman) headed the Commission whose report substantiated the reality of 'environmental racism'. Having created this new phrase "environmental racism", the report suggested:

"the existence of clear patterns which show that communities with greater minority percentages of the population are more likely to be the sites of commercial hazardous waste facilities. The possibility that these patterns resulted by chance is virtually impossible, strongly suggesting that some underlying factors, which are related to race, played a role in the location of commercial hazardous waste facilities. Therefore the Commission for Racial Justice concludes that, indeed, race has been a factor in the location of hazardous waste facilities in the United States."<sup>7</sup>

The UCC-CRJ (1994) updated study found that the situation had worsened. More Black and brown people were disproportionately living near hazardous waste areas. In seven years, there had been a six percent increase of people of color located near toxic disposal sites.<sup>8</sup>

After releasing their landmark 1987 report, the UCC assembled the historic First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit in Washington, D.C. in October 1991. The Summit assembled indigenous peoples, civil rights activists, labour organizers, anti-toxic veterans, and academics. A final conference report directly accented the role of race in environmental analysis:

"environmental inequities cannot be reduced solely to class - the economic ability of people to "vote with their feet" and escape polluted environments. Race interpenetrates class in the United States and is often a more potent predictor of which communities get dumped on and which ones are spared. There is clear evidence that institutional barriers severely limit access to clean environments. Despite the many attempts made by government to level the playing field, all communities are still not equal".

As the head of the UCC-CRJ, Ben Chavis understood the Summit as a key process for people of color to organize self-empowerment and self-determination focused squarely on environmental justice. U.S. minority populations were claiming their own voice and their own agency within the larger environmental effort.<sup>9</sup>

This Summit produced a major document called the "Principles of Environmental Justice". The seventeen principles are the plumb line for the environmental racism and ecological justice thrust.<sup>10</sup> With this statement, it becomes crystal clear that ecological justice combines nature with social justice. Both require healing. The ecological justice movement does not treat the problem of oppression and social exploitation as separable from the rape and exploitation of the natural world. Instead, it argues that human societies and the natural environment are intricately linked and that the health of one depends on the health of the other. It understands that if the human environment is poisoned, if there are no opportunities for economic survival or nutritional sustenance, or if there are no possibilities to be sheltered, then we have an inadequate environmental program.<sup>11</sup>

Environmental justice activists target the prevention of siting waste facilities in working class and people of color communities. They also broaden their organizing efforts to clean up the toxic impact on mother earth. For instance, local communities fight for their participation in decision-making on environmental health issues; oversee implementation of governmental and industry policy and guidelines; clean up poisonous industrial areas; and organize to end dangerous practices harming workers on the job. Moreover, the "movement for environmental justice is also about creating clean jobs, building a sustainable economy, guaranteeing safe and affordable housing, and achieving racial and social justice".<sup>12</sup>

### **Five Strands within Ecological Justice**

The current state of the ecological or environmental justice organizing results from five strands that have coalesced around environmental racism and for a healthy ecology.

The 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s civil rights struggle is probably the major foundation upon which the ecological justice movement is built. In fact, the black church and black community opposition to a PCP dump in Warren County, North Carolina in 1982 shows a direct tie between civil rights movements and environmental justice movements. It is this history of organizing, sacrificing, and strategizing that grass roots civil rights and church leaders (led by the UCC) bring directly into the ecological justice process. The Warren County protest was initiated by black church women.<sup>13</sup> Likewise, some of the Chicano student leaders of the 1960s Latino civil rights organizations are part of the historical foundation of environmental anti-racism efforts.

After the civil rights struggles of blacks and Latinos, grassroots anti-toxic activists have brought their wisdom and experience to the ecological justice process. These veterans gathered momentum in the late 1970s in opposition to the construction of incinerators, landfills, and waste facilities. A large representation of women exists here because women were often the ones who rallied to protect the health and lives of their children.

Both the civil rights and anti-toxic waste organizers came to understand that their local and specific efforts were linked to a larger systemic and structural problem, complicated by race and the wealthy class.

Thirdly, academics have joined the environmental justice struggle by contributing vital research and providing systemic and structural analyses, publications, lobbying, and networking. The United Church of Christ helped to organize academics into conferences to focus on environmental racism.

Fourth, Native American activists have perhaps the longest history of combating environmental racism and building ecological justice. This began 500 years ago with the arrival of European Christian colonialists. In fact the formation of the American Indian Movement (AIM) was influenced by environmental and land demands. A key contribution in the environmental racism/ecological justice philosophy is Native American's stress on self-determination; that is to say, oppressed communities must speak for themselves.

And, after American Indians, a fifth strand of the ecological justice organizing has been the labour movement. The United Farm Workers (headed by Cesar Chavez and comprised mainly of Latino farm labourers) built a national network emphasizing both the banning of pesticides and worker input in the decision making process on their jobs.<sup>14</sup>

### **Concrete Examples of Environmental Racism**

What these five different strands of ecological justice activists recognize is that environmental racism is a profound illness impacting the holistic body of creation. Such life threatening sickness disproportionately targets people of color and working class communities. To bring about the needed health and healing work, one has to have a deep appreciation for the depth of the attack on mother earth and social dying caused by unchecked individualistic human greed. Examples of environmental racism expose the broad scale nature of the suffering and sickness. Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr. argues that:

Millions of African Americans, Latinos, Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans are trapped in polluted environments because of their race and color. Inhabitants of these communities are exposed to greater health and environmental risks than is the general population. Clearly, all Americans do not have the same opportunities to breathe clean air, drink clean water, enjoy clean parks and playgrounds, or work in a clean, safe environment.

"Environmental racism is racial discrimination in environmental policymaking. It is racial discrimination in the enforcement of regulations and laws. It is racial discrimination in the deliberate targeting of communities of color for toxic waste disposal and the siting of polluting industries. It is racial discrimination in the official sanctioning of the life-threatening presence of poisons and pollutants in communities of color. And, it is racial discrimination in the history of excluding people of color from the mainstream environmental groups, decision-making boards, commissions, and regulatory bodies.<sup>15</sup>

In some cases, environmental racism and the resulting sickness it cause are intentional and deliberate policy practices on the part of global financial institutions. For example, Lawrence Summers, chief economist at the World Bank in 1991, released an internal memo that targeted Third World countries, or, in his words "Less Developed Countries". The memo indicates that the primary intent of the World Bank is to make profits for monopoly capitalist corporations at the expense of the health of working class people and poor countries in the world. Summers begins his memo with the phrase "dirty industries", indicating his awareness of how pollution causes sickness for the earth and for human beings. Because the memo gives an insider's view on the dire implications for health and death, we quote an extended excerpt:

"Dirty" Industries: Just between you and me, shouldn't the World Bank be encouraging MORE migration of the dirty industries to the LDCs [Less Developed Countries]? I can think of three reasons:

- 1) The measurement of the costs of health impairing pollution depends on the foregone earnings from increased morbidity and mortality. From this point of view a given amount of health impairing pollution should

be done in the country with the lowest cost, which will be the country with the lowest wages. I think the economic logic behind dumping a load of toxic waste in the lowest wage country is impeccable and we should face up to that.

- 2) The costs of pollution are likely to be non-linear as the initial increments of pollution probably have very low cost. I've always thought that under-polluted areas in Africa are vastly UNDER-polluted; their air quality is probably vastly inefficiently low compared to Los Angeles or Mexico City.
- 3) The demand for a clean environment for aesthetic and health reasons is likely to have very high income elasticity [i.e., meaning in the developed countries of the northern hemisphere] ....

The problem with the arguments against all of these proposals for more pollution in LDCs (intrinsic rights to certain goods, moral reasons, social concerns, lack of adequate markets, etc.) could be turned around and used more or less effectively against every [World] Bank proposal...<sup>16</sup>

Larry Summers and the World Bank are plainly considering causing illness and death in the poorer countries of the world in order to make more profits. He calmly offers proposals to dump toxics and pollution in the Third World because the developed countries have high incomes that would cause opposition. And he concludes by rationally calculating how arguments against his proposals for more pollution in Third World countries can be used against the World Bank.

Likewise, in 1975 the Trilateral Commission released its report titled *The Crisis of Democracy*. While the World Bank memo deals with poor people and countries of color inter-

nationally, the Trilateral Commission focuses on people of color and other former silent communities within the U.S. Yet, the same intentional calculations are at play. The report shares a definition of capitalist elite democracy.

The vulnerability of democratic government in the United States [thus] comes not primarily from external threats, though such threats are real, nor from internal subversion from the left or the right, although both possibilities could exist, but rather from the internal dynamics of democracy itself in a highly educated, mobilized, and participant society ... Previously passive or unorganized groups in the population – Blacks, Indians, Chicanos, white ethnic groups, students, and women – [have] now embarked on concerted efforts to establish their claims to opportunities, positions, rewards, and privileges, to which they had not considered themselves entitled before.<sup>17</sup>

External factors do not threaten American democracy. Rather, the people, the citizens of the United States are the threat. Clearly the monopoly capitalist representatives on the Trilateral Commission see democracy from their class perspective. That is why the report states that the “vulnerability of democratic government in the United States [thus] comes not primarily from external threats..., but rather from the internal dynamics of democracy itself”. These global capitalists lords are talking about how everyday Americans can threaten bourgeois democracy, the democracy of the monopoly capitalists themselves. Clearly in the eyes of the Trilateral Commission, democracy is not an objective, universal principle, but one deeply ensconced in class interests; that is to say, democracy in America is one of class struggle.

The World Bank represents monopoly capitalists' financial institutions. The Trilateral Commission represents major capitalist governments. But a similar approach is found among experts of environmental systems. For instance, Cerrell

Associates, a consulting firm for toxic waste companies, wrote a report suggesting toxic waste companies intentionally “target small, rural communities whose residents are low income, older people, or people with a high school education or less; communities with a high proportion of Catholic residents; and communities whose residents are engaged in resource extractive industries such as agriculture, mining, and forestry. Ideally, the report states, ‘officials and companies should look for lower socioeconomic neighborhoods that are also in a heavy industrial area with little, if any, commercial activity.’<sup>18</sup> Moreover other criteria for dumping toxic waste included being near highways, and far from schools, nursing homes, and hospitals, which communities of color lack; areas with cheap land values; commercial zoning; and unemployment. The overarching purpose of the report was to advise toxic companies how to bring about toxic sickness in communities that would not cause public opposition. These recommended guidelines for dumping poisonous wastes fit existing California hazardous sites largely populated by Latinos, and fit east coast urban sites, largely populated by blacks.

Given similar world views of the capital industry, governments, and private consultants, it should not surprise anyone that the “most polluted urban communities are those with crumbling infrastructure, ongoing economic disinvestment, deteriorating housing, inadequate schools, chronic unemployment, a high poverty rate, and an overloaded health-care system”.<sup>19</sup>

The expend ability of people of color ends not with capital, policy, and consultants, but also extends to the practice of the U.S. government’s own regulatory agencies. The *National Law Journal*, a leading legal publication, conducted a comprehensive analysis of every U.S. environmental lawsuit from the last seven years. Evidence shows that the U.S. government penalizes at a much higher rate pollution-law violators in white communities than in people of color communities. In fact, there is a 506 percent disparity between white and black communities. Similarly the *Journal* examined the 12 year history of the

federal government’s Superfund, an account that provides funds to clean up toxic sites throughout the U.S. The review of all residential toxic waste sites showed that “the government takes longer to address hazards in minority communities, and it accepts solutions less stringent than those recommended by the scientific community. This racial imbalance, the investigation found, often occurs whether the community is wealthy or poor”.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, sicknesses resulting from environmental racism is about race, as it cuts across class divides within the African American community.

Even studies by official regulatory offices document how African American and Latino communities in California experience closer proximity to toxic industries and the most workers in poisonous work environments, and endure an overall life of unhealthy factors yielding illness of the body and decreased quality of life.<sup>21</sup>

Robert D. Bullard, author of the groundbreaking text, *Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality* (1990), likewise discovered how race trumps class in environmental racism.

People of color are exposed to greater environmental hazards in their neighborhoods and on the job than are their white counterparts. Studies find elevated exposure levels by race, even when social class is held constant. For example, research indicates race to be independent of class in the distribution of air pollution, contaminated fish consumption, location of municipal landfill and incinerators, abandoned toxic-waste dumps, and lead poisoning in children.<sup>22</sup>

Lead poisoning, for instance, impacts children of color at all class levels regardless of their parents’ salary and educational status.

The Agency for Toxic Substances Disease Registry concluded “that, for families earning less than \$6,000,68 percent

of African American children had lead poisoning, compared with 36 percent for white children. In families with income exceeding \$15,000, more than 38 percent of African American children suffer from lead poisoning, compared with 12 percent of whites".<sup>23</sup> Regardless of household income, black children are two to three times more likely than white children to have sicknesses derived from lead poisoning.

What accounts for this across class illness? Disproportionately, white citizens can leave toxic areas that cause death and not healing. Working class and poor African Americans and even many black professionals and upper income households remain stuck in lethal situations due to residential segregation, bank redlining, and housing discrimination. When white families left, blacks moved into harmful situations of stockyards, warehouses, factory pollution, noise, dirt, and railroad tracks. Children grow up exposed to the stench of unhealthy land, water, and air and harmful noise levels.<sup>24</sup> Factually, "An African American who has an income of \$50,000 is as residentially segregated as an African American on welfare".<sup>25</sup>

Physical illnesses and death are closely linked to psychological and mental stress related diseases in areas of concentrated toxicity. Blacks are disproportionately situated in these conditions than whites and, therefore, experience higher levels of stress-related sickness and deaths. "For example, studies of both iron and steel foundry workers and laundry and dry-cleaning industry workers show an increase in the incidence of stress-related mortality and morbidity among blacks as compared to white workers."<sup>26</sup> Consequently, talk of healing from environmental racism has to be a holistic approach encompassing the physical, emotional, and spiritual levels of illnesses among blacks.

Native American and Latino-Hispanic communities are similar. Janet Phoenix (M.D., M.P.H., Ph.D. in children's health) has studied Navajo teenagers and discovered that they have organ cancer seventeen times the national average. She

concluded also that black children are fifty percent of the nation's youth who suffer from lead paint poison.<sup>27</sup> Dr. Phoenix sites the following symptoms of lead poisoning among children of color: behavior challenges, restricted vocabulary, low attention span, "fatigue..., loss of appetite, irritability, sleep disturbance, sudden behavioral change..., development regression... clumsiness, muscular irregularities, weakness, abdominal pain, persistent vomiting, constipation, and changes in consciousness. Lead exposure is particularly harmful to children. It damages their developing brains and nervous systems." which can give rise to emotional disturbances, learning disabilities, and attention disorders.<sup>28</sup> Environmental racism is a severe disease affecting minority children.

Native American nations (called reservations) are receiving increased attention by industrial toxic corporations. The latter view the former as spaces to avoid some of the tougher environmental regulations promulgated by state governments. The weaker federal policies have less bite when applied to Native Americans because of the particular status and nominal sovereignty of Indian nations.<sup>29</sup> Federal governmental office also are forging ahead to cause sickness and death for Native Americans. Winona LaDuke, co-chair of the Indigenous Women's Network claims that the "U.S. government recently solicited every Indian tribe within U.S. borders to host a possible nuclear waste storage facility. Officials entice tribes with 'no strings attached' grants of hundreds of thousands of dollars. The federal office of Nuclear Waste Negotiation states its mission as finding 'a state or Indian Tribe willing to host a repository or monitored retrievable storage facility for nuclear waste ...'"<sup>30</sup> Given the low wealth and financial base in Indian territories, federal bribery can be enticing. The federal government is persistent because, at least for one reason, two thirds of all U.S. uranium is under Indian territory. Yet the immediate financial rewards are overshadowed by the health risks. One of the elements that results from the uranium production process remains radioactive for a minimum of 16,000 years.<sup>31</sup>

Latino and Hispanic farm workers are intimately interwoven in the entire pesticide production and application. They mix, load, and apply health and life threatening pesticides. Brown people are also the flaggers in the fields, the labourers who guide and direct airplanes that spray pesticides over fruit and vegetable fields.

The highest exposure is from grapes, citrus fruit, peaches, apples, and other tree fruits that grow with a lot of leaves, or from crops that are sprayed often and close to harvest such as strawberries and tomatoes .... Farmworker children are also at high risk of pesticide exposure whether or not they work in the fields alongside their parents. Frequently, young children, including infants and toddlers, are taken to the fields by their parents because childcare is not available. The fetus is exposed as well when pregnant women work in the fields...<sup>32</sup>

Even children not brought to the fields are exposed to the clothing and footprints of their parents' shoes and work outfits. Pesticides cause skin diseases, cancer, male infertility, abortion, birth defects, and neurological disorders. In fact, some pesticides sprayed on fruit and vegetables contain a chemical similar to nerve gas. Though there are obvious immediate negative health outcomes, some of the long term deadly impacts of these pesticides become evident 10 to 20 years after exposure.

Over 95 percent of migrant farm workers are people of color, and 92 percent are Latinos and Hispanic labourers. Everyday thousands of Spanish speaking workers and their children are sprayed, infected, and poisoned by the pesticides that go on the fruit and vegetables we eat throughout America.<sup>33</sup>

Like other people of color, Latino health is subject to hazardous dump areas. "California has three Class I toxic waste dumps – the dumps that can take just about toxic substance known to science." One is in Kettleman which is 95 percent Latino, and the largest toxic waste dump west of Alabama. The

second one is in Buttonwillow with majority population being Latino. And the third is in Westmorland with a 72 percent Latino population.<sup>34</sup> Chemical Waste Management, the company that owns these California toxic waste dumps also owns the largest one in the country, found in Emelle, Alabama. Some suggest that this dump is the largest in the world. The population here is 95 percent black. Chemical Waste Management also owned a toxic incinerator on Chicago's southside, with a 55 percent black community and 24 percent Latino; and one in Sauget, Illinois with a 95 percent black population; and also one in Port Arthur, Texas, comprised of 80 percent Latino and black residents.

Charles Lee, a Chinese American and the lead author of the landmark UCC-CRJ report that coined the phrase "environmental racism", sums up the critical state of toxic health among communities of color:

Three out of every five African Americans and Hispanic Americans lived in communities with uncontrolled toxic waste sites .... African Americans were heavily overrepresented in the populations of metropolitan areas with the largest number of uncontrolled toxic waste sites. These areas include: Memphis, TN (173 sites); Cleveland, OH (106 sites); St. Louis, MO (160); Chicago, IL (103 sites); Houston, TX (152 sites); and Atlanta, GA (94 sites). Los Angeles, CA, has more Hispanics living in communities with uncontrolled toxic waste sites than any other metropolitan area in the United States. Approximately half of all Asians, Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans lived in communities with uncontrolled toxic waste sites.<sup>35</sup>

Devastation is an understatement when applied to people of color's holistic health; that is to say, environmental and social wellness. Environmental racism undergirds decisions on contaminated fish consumption, air pollution, hazardous toxic sites, urban incinerators and landfills, lead poisoning in

children, Native American land rights, the use of technologies in sustainable development, and farm workers' proximity to pesticides.<sup>36</sup>

### **Black Environmental Liberation Theology**

Framing environmental racism within the context of holistic environmental and social sickness suggests the important need of holistic healing, especially for communities of color. Perhaps one move in this direction is the creation of a Black Environmental Liberation Theology. James H. Cone hints at this direction when he laments the divide within the U.S. between the conservation/preservation and environmental racism/ecological justice wings of the environment movement. Cone writes: "Justice fighters for blacks and the defenders of the earth have tended to ignore each other in their public discourse and practice. Their separation from each other is unfortunate because they are fighting the same enemy - human beings' domination of one another and nature .... Connecting racism with the degradation of the earth is a much-needed work in the African-American community, especially in black liberation theology and the black churches".<sup>37</sup>

This challenge from James H. Cone, the father of black theology of liberation, to link racism and degradation of the earth with black liberation theology can be informed by the biblical witness to help tie together these concerns. Romans 8 19-23 reveals that the work of Christ includes the redemption of the entire universe, that creation might be freed from decay and share in sacred freedom. Ephesians 1: 1-10; and Col. 1: 15-20 point to Christ kneading together and unifying all that is in heaven and in earth and bringing the entire creation back to God's bosom. And we know Luke 4: 18 ff speaks to Jesus' mission with the oppressed and Mt. 25:31 ff has the only test to enter heaven. How we spend our earthly lives serving the lowly and healing earth is actually serving Christ. Therefore there "is a unity between the hope for the inward liberation of the children of God and the hope for the liberation of the entire physical creation from its bondage and oppression".<sup>38</sup>

Psalm 24: 1-2 reads: "The earth and everything on it belong to the Lord. The world and its people belong to the Lord. The Lord placed it all on the oceans and rivers". To have holistic healing of the environment and social ills, we must unveil the fallacy in the ideology and theology that say monopoly capitalists corporations, world financial institutions, and governments can own nature and the labour of working people. How is it possible for these mega-toxic and deforestation entities to own privately that which was created and still remains in God's hands? It is sin to monopolize the environmental wealth and resources from earth given to all of creation. So healing can begin on one domain at least - the theological level. Liberation theology can undergird ecological justice.

Indeed, Dianne D. Glave, an African American scholar and a leader in the environmental racism and ecological justice movement, is the first person to advance a Black Environmental Liberation Theology (BELT). In this manner, here is a direct response to the above-mentioned challenge of James H. Cone. Glave directly references Cone's quote that condemns the racism in the traditional environmental movement and the failure of black theology of liberation to take up environmental justice. Glave unites the environmental efforts with the ecological justice sectors. Hence she attempts to provide a working model for what she calls a "black environmental liberation theology (BELT), a strand of black liberation theology".<sup>39</sup>

Moreover, she claims the following in her constructive BELT:

Black liberation theology, which decries the oppression of African Americans based on biblical principles - is the foundation of BELT, a nascent theology based on environmental justice history and activism by African American Christians. Like black liberation theology, BELT is both a theology and an ideology that is actualized by shielding contemporary African Americans exposed to toxins and pollution

from landfills, garbage dumps, and auto mechanics' shops, and sewage plants.<sup>40</sup>

For Glave, BELT is built on three sources: the Bible, history, and grassroots organizing. Glave quotes Galatians 3: 28 as a biblical basis for her BELT. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus". She complements this texts with Psalm 82: 3-4 where it sides with the oppressed. "Defend the poor and fatherless; Do justice to the afflicted and needy. Deliver the poor and needy; Free them from the hand of the wicked". Yet her foundational biblical text is the Genesis story, where she finds that the earth belongs to God and Adam and Eve were only given stewardship and not dominion over God's earth.

Regarding the historical basis of BELT, Glave cites "the history of environmental justice by the African American church and Christian organizations. Church environmental justice activists, part of the long history of civil rights in the African American community and an underpinning of BELT, struggled to reverse twentieth-century environmental racism". A prime example was the Memphis black garbage workers' strike. Glave argues that King's April 3, 1968 "I've Been To The Mountain Top" speech serves as a "template for the justice of black liberation theology and BELT".<sup>41</sup> This address the night before his murder situated the garbage workers' struggles within an ecological lense and as environmental demands. King's words also expose various forms of white racial discrimination as attacks against nature.

Glave uncovers a history of black church involvement in environmental justice in Rev. Ben Chavis' talk at a national environment conference. Chavis' offered a theological interpretation of race and the environment: "The fact that we [African Americans] are disproportionately dumped on", says Chavis, "is just consistent with being in America .... And the demand that God puts on us is that we will face up to the contemporary responsibility that God has given us to not let

God's creation be destroyed by sin... Environmental injustice is sin before God".<sup>42</sup>

And regarding her third source for BELT, Glave pinpoints local grassroots activists as they fight against environmental racism. It is this material sector, writes Glave, that defines BELT. Here too she notes especially the role of everyday church folks struggling along side clergy and community leaders.

Glave acknowledges that BELT has its origin in black theology of liberation. To transform BELT into what she calls a theology incorporating twenty-first century action, she advances a twelve-point environmental justice agenda for action.<sup>43</sup> With her creation of BELT, Glave has advanced not only black theology of liberation. More specifically she provides one way to heal the holistic illnesses caused by environmental racism. Her BELT offers the balm to heal the body, mind, emotions, and feelings of those forging ecological justice on the ground. She acknowledges the component parts of progressive black church leadership, justice biblical warrants, public policy, people of color coalitions, tactical alliances with mainstream environmental groups, and the plumb line of grassroots efforts. "In response to African Americans being inequitably exposed to toxic chemicals and waste, the church is called to further expand grassroots and national reform looking at BELT – justice, grassroots activism, spirituality, and organization – all based on the Bible. Combined, the history and theology can be a 'spearhead for reform' for African Americans embattled by environmental racism in the future."<sup>44</sup> BELT is part of faith, health, and healing in African American life.

#### Notes

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8. Luke W. Cole and Sheila R. Foster, *From the Ground Up: Environmental Racism and the Rise of the Environmental Justice Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 55.
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17. Cynthia Hamilton, "Coping with Industrial Exploitation", in *Confronting Environmental Racism*, 73-74.
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21. Cynthia Hamilton, 70.
22. Robert D. Bullard, "Anatomy of Environmental Racism", *Toxic Struggles*, 26 and 27.
23. Ibid.
24. Cynthia Hamilton, 71.
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26. Beverly Hendrix Wright and Robert D. Bullard, "The Effects of Occupational Injury, Illness, and Disease on the Health Statu of Black Americans", *Toxic Struggles*, 156 and 159.

27. Cynthia Hamilton, 68.
28. Janet Phoenix, "Getting the Lead Out of the Community", in *Confronting Environmental Racism*, 77.
29. Robert D. Bullard, "Anatomy of Environmental Racism", *Toxic Struggles*, 32.
30. Winona LaDuke, "A Society Based on Conquest Cannot Be Sustained", in *Toxic Struggles*, 105.
31. Winona LaDuke, Ibid., 103. She also writes: "Over fifty million indigenous populations inhabit the world's remaining rain forests; over one million indigenous people will be relocated to allow for the development of hydroelectric dam projects in the next decade; The United States has detonated all its nuclear weapons in the lands of indigenous people... ; Two-thirds of all uranium resources within the borders of the United States lie under Native reservations... ; One third of all low-sulphur coal in the western United States is on Indian land, with four of the ten largest coal strip mines in these same areas; Fifteen of the current eighteen recipients of nuclear-waste research grants ... are Indian communities; and the largest hydroelectric project on the continent, the James Bay project, is on Cree and Inuit lands in northern Canada", p. 99.
32. Marion Moses, "Farmworkers and Pesticides," in *Confronting Environmental Racism*, 165, 166, and 167.
33. Marion Moses, Ibid., 162.
34. Luke W. Cole and Sheila R. Foster, *From the Ground Up*, 2 and 3.
35. Charles Lee, "Beyond Toxic Wastes and Race", in *Confronting Environmental Racism*, 49,
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41. Ibid., 193.
42. Ibid., 194.
43. Ibid., 197-198.
44. Ibid., 198-199.

fish and boatmen and also divers are constant figures in the spirituality of the people. Always the Lord is like a “fountain of living waters (cf. Jeremiah 17: 13) and the people are grateful when the “waves go over them” (cf. Psalm 42: 7) Water is a symbol and source of Joy.

So also the “fish” deep down, says Lalon in this song, is an image of the object one desires to find. So reminiscent of the Fish (“ichthus”) symbolism of the Church of the Catacombs. Jesus Christ is the Fish, and also the Eternal Fisherman, He who sat by the shore of Galilee’s Lake, and Who offered His disciples a cooked meal of fish (cf. John 21: 9-10). In an earlier paper<sup>2</sup> I have pointed to Rabindranath Tagore’s (1861-1941) image of the Eternal Boatman in his Golden Boat, coming down the swollen rivers after the Harvest.

In another paper<sup>3</sup> I have pointed out that for the MAIZBHANDAR Sufi saints of Bangladesh, the seeker is shown pleading with the “Great Helmsman” the grace to be ferried across the ocean of Life. One could also refer to that other great Sufi mystic of Bangladesh, HASAN RAJA. For him, God has<sup>4</sup> already come down and is sitting in union with the devotee in this Boat of Life! Yet to find the Lord, one must go even beyond Hasan Raja and the Sufi saints, even beyond what Peter attempted (cf. Matthew 14: 28-31) – to walk on the water; one has to dive into the water, and stay there till the Lord tells one to re-emerge.

Water also has a connotation of Destruction and Death, in the context of Bangladesh. In one of my TSUNAMI poems,<sup>5</sup> I have spoken of today’s NOAH, reflecting on the sea-side so terribly destroyed by Water ...

“And the dove  
Did not return this time (ref. Genesis 8:8)  
For the Water had now  
Come down to the tree-tops  
The trees that still stood  
And shed tears  
For the sins of mankind” ...

## Water, Earth, & Theology for Another World

Brother Jarlath D’Souza, CSC

### Water

“Only the diver knows  
how swirling is the movement of Love  
in the deep waters ...  
That river the un-initiated cannot see  
There the waves rise without wind.  
At the correct moment of the tide  
the river springs to life.  
In this river, untouched by Earth  
dwells a fish  
in solitary glory.  
The fish comes to the surface  
at the call of the Moon  
That is the time to catch it  
when Youth is a luminous spirit.  
Bathe in that river at the auspicious moment  
and your Heart will shed its fear.  
Says LALON — then the Summons will hold<sup>1</sup>  
no Fear for you.”

While reflecting on the theme of this Consultation, I find appropriate this song of the mystic poet of Bengal, Lalon Shah (1774-1890). In this land of more than 200 rivers, water and

Yet, even though Water can be a cause for Pain, Water is also a pointer to HOPE. In another of my poems, while reflecting on the 2003 Iraq War, I have lamented for the stricken people ...

“LIFE is done  
To a stand-still sand-bar  
Of the dying Euphrates  
The reddened Tigris  
And my bleeding Heart ...  
Yet, Phoenix-like, HOPE arise ...”<sup>6</sup>

Not only the Tigris and the Euphrates, but so many other rivers and waters of Asia and of my land have been washed by the blood of victims of oppression and injustices. And therefore, to wash away our sins and infidelities, there must also be the healing waters of SILLOAM (cf. John 9:6).

## Earth

Mother Earth is sad, is weeping, as a Korean theologian puts it, “Mother Earth is suffering under the Global Regimes of the Market/Empire”.<sup>7</sup> In the same vein, noted Sri Lankan thinker Tissa Balasuriya urges the leaders of all Religions to come together “to care for Nature”, and to resist all forms of ecological devastation and the economic exploitation and depletion of the natural resources of the Earth.<sup>8</sup>

Mother Earth is sad, is weeping silently. So Thomas Merton cries:

“O Earth! O Earth!  
When will we hear you sing,  
Arising from our grassy hills? ...  
How long we wait  
With minds as dim as ponds ...  
O Earth! When will we hear you sing?  
How long we listened to your silence  
in our vineyards ...  
Our minds are grey as rivers ...”<sup>9</sup>

One need not go to the full extent of Thomas Merton’s “bucolic wedding” to the solitude of the forest, nor to his embracing “green martyrdom”, as he puts it ... Yet theologians today must take into essentially serious account the wanton, and often planned, destruction of the forests and rivers, and of all God’s Creation.

The Genesis story puts it succinctly (cf. Genesis 1), “And God saw that it was good” ... Can we theologians say otherwise? And do we not have in all of our countries and regions stories and events that point to this Earth-based Theology and Spirituality? That is why I have prefaced one of my earlier writings by recounting the legend of BOGA LAKE, of a natural reservoir of water turned into salt water, as a result of humans debasing Nature.<sup>10</sup>

A relevant quotation can be found in the Holy Quran, in Sura Baqarah (2: 22), where Man has been termed as “Ashrafal Maqluqat”, the Caretaker of the Garden. Today’s CREATION SPIRITUALITY also speaks of this “Garden of the Lord” aspect of the Universe (cf. Ezekiel 36: 35, Genesis 13: 10, et al. The pointer is to return to the original ecological balance, almost like what today’s Buddhist revivalists speak of – the balance of all living beings: plants, fishes, insects, birds, humans, and all Creation. In this connection, at least one researcher<sup>11</sup> has pointed out to the Himalayan region of LADAKH in Kashmir, where this harmonious Buddhist way of life prevails, where humans are very close friends of Nature.

In the Asian and Bangladesh context, one must learn from persons of other faiths. For instance, one could also make reference to one of the traditional cults in Bengal, the SATYA-PIR (satya = true, pir = holy leader). The symbolic image for the Deity for these people is a little clay horse (toy-size); reminiscent of the horse symbol found in some primitive religions of the world, and one could also recall the story of the Trojan Horse of the Greek classical period. And high up in the Himalayas, in Tibet, the prayer flags are called “LUNG-TA” (wind horse), the horse said to be the bearer of pious thoughts flying up to the heavens.<sup>12</sup>

Nevertheless, there is also need for caution. The Islamic revival the world over and the concurrent Christian fundamentalist revival have tended to take the world towards a new iconoclasm, almost like that of the Middle Ages of Europe. Yet, icons will still be there. Look at the Television programmes that aim to satiate our sensibilities – not just movie icons, but also icons developed from items such as fast food brands, cosmetics, cars, and other such luxury items. Seeped in such ideologies, the Earth itself (GAIA herself) has tended to become a forgotten item of the agenda. Theologians of today must stand up to these new idols of Death, and must go forth and proclaim a message of Life and Hope – as Jesus taught.

The Prophet Habakkuk warns us, “let the Earth keep SILENCE” (Hab, 2: 20) in sadness and repentance for the crimes of Man against God’s Creation... “you have cut down the forests of Lebanon, you will be cut down; you killed the animals, now the animals will terrify you ... you are doomed because of your violence against the people of the world and its cities”. (Hab, 2: 15-17) ... Yet, the theologians of this post-TSUNAMI world and a post-SIDR country like Bangladesh<sup>13</sup> can NOT keep silent. One has to speak out and let his/her voice shriek in active protest!

One must also speak out for assisting the ethnic tribal minorities in the different countries of Asia, so that they can retain and preserve their COSMOTHEANDRIC vision of Reality.<sup>14</sup> The ethnic tribal people look at Reality as a whole; Nature, Divine and human, are understood as the constituents of Reality. Our annual Christian festivals of Christmas, Easter and Pentecost, do they not bring to mind this Cosmotheandric Image of the Deity? Does not the Rainbow in the Flood story (cf. Genesis 7) give us an inkling of Cosmotheandric presence in world events?...

### **Theology for Another World**

For the theologians in any Third World country, IDENTITY is a vital issue. One’s Identity has to be rooted in a Culture, nation-based or stemming from Religion. Theologians must

identify with a people, must speak for them, and to them, must project their essential ideology and way of life. And Culture today must include beliefs and action modes of any specific group of people.

And, as Thomas Berry so strongly avers, “we cannot discover ourselves without first discovering the Universe, the Earth, and the imperatives of our own Being”.<sup>15</sup> For this one has to read repeatedly and meditate on two basic Biblical texts side by side, Genesis I and John I; “In the beginning...” The “new world” that we hope for (cf. Rev. 21) can be attained and achieved only after one has made a deeper study of the Universe, and of the Earth in particular.

In one of my poems, I have asked similar questions...<sup>16</sup>

Shall we despair  
Or hope  
For wisdom, for love,  
For respect of History?  
Shall we speak  
Of Nothingness...?  
Or, of the coming Fullness of Time  
When Man shall build anew  
Amid the ruins  
In the cycle of Re-birth  
That the Buddha taught...?  
Or, like Shelley’s “Ozymandias”  
Shall we just accept defeat  
And despair?

Here, one has to quote Thomas Berry again.<sup>17</sup> “We should be clear about what happens when we destroy the living forms of this planet. The first consequence is that we destroy modes of the DIVINE PRESENCE.” ... That is exactly what our Earth is there for – to tell us about God. “All Creation sings of His glory and loving-kindness,<sup>2</sup> as the Psalmist confirms. (cf. Psalm 33, among others). The world of the Future must be one in which all living forms will be living in Harmony, and in which all Nature will speak to us strongly about God.

This futuristic picture has been termed by Markus Borg<sup>18</sup> as the Dream of God for Creation, beginning with the earthly Paradise depicted in the Book of Genesis to the concluding vision described in the Book of Revelation. It is this vision of SHALOM, this very rich Hebrew term, that our theological reflection must lead us to – through the Waters and Earth, and all created life. Closely allied to this concept is the postulate of at least one Islamic thinker,<sup>19</sup> who predicts that in the End Times a new Being will emerge, superior to the present humans, as part of a continuing Evolution of Creation under the plan of God! =

The image choices for the theologians painting pictures of this New World are manifold... For instance, walking the inter-faith path, as did GANDHI during the communal riots in Bangladesh in 1946-47; or, to sing of one's dream, as Martin Luther King did in the USA; or to identify with the dying in the streets of Calcutta, as did Mother Teresa; or to sing in search one's Beloved, while in a boat on the many rivers of Bangladesh, as did the itinerant Sufi mystic Hasan Raja; or, to weep and pray all night in the hills of Chittagong, as did the Christian hermit Brother Flavien ...<sup>20</sup> So many choices, or paths, yet the only viable "way" for us who identify with the millions of Asia, is that VIA CRUCIS of Our Lord Jesus Christ – to accept Suffering, and to help others overcome Pain and Loneliness, and to be ready even to die as He did, abandoned by friends, and clothed in the garments of Poverty and Penury! The theologian must build on this Reality of DUKKHA (Suffering) as the Buddha said, and project a Christian vision of Hope and Love.

One might be permitted to conclude with a Hindu prayer, popular in the Pashupatinath Temple in Kathmandu, Nepal.<sup>21</sup>

"Thou Lord of the Universe  
The Creator and Destroyer of the Universe  
Who hast all forms  
Whose Body is the Universe  
And Who is the support of the Powers (Gunas)  
of the Three Worlds

Who art worshipped by all  
The All-Merciful One  
The Friend of the Downtrodden  
O Thou Ruler of the Universe  
Protect me who am forlorn  
In the wilderness of the miseries of the World  
(Samsara)."

#### Notes & References

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1964, Dhaka, Bangladesh. cf. Song No. 34  
Lalon Shah lived 1774-1890
2. D'Souza, Jarlath – "KARNAFULI: Reflections in the Bangladesh Context" 2006, Dhaka, Bangladesh. cf. pp. 31-33  
The reference is to Tagore's famous poem "the Golden Boat".
3. D'Souza – *ibid.* cf. pp. 71-73  
MAIZBHANDAR is a "tariqa" (Sufi school) of Dancing Dervishes, followers of the Persian mystic Jalaluddin RUMI; they have a famous centre near Chittagong City in Bangladesh. The tariqa dates from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.
4. D'Souza – *ibid.* cf. p. 73  
HASAN RAJA (1852-1922) is a modern Sufi mystic, who spent the last years of his life in a boat in the rivers near Sylhet town of Bangladesh. Like the Poverello of Assisi (1182-1226) he gave up everything in search of God, whose image he found in the white heron of the river bank.
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16. D’Souza, Jarlath – “Phoenix-Like Hope Arises”, a book of poems  
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cf. pp. 585-488
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Martin Luther King – 1929-1968  
Mother Teresa – 1910-1997  
Hasan Raja – 1852-1922; vide supra note No. 4  
Brother Flavien – 1907-1981; Christian hermit of the Chittagong Hills, whose cause for beatification has been put up in Rome
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## **Democratisation of Africa from the Inter-religious Perspective**

Ramathate Dolamo

### **Introduction**

Africa went through three traumatic experiences. It was enslaved by the Arabs and later by the West and colonised by the West. Slavery was abolished and decolonisation began in the late 1950’s with Ghana having celebrated its 50 years of independence in 2007. South Africa was the last country to be freed from white rule in 1994. Post-colonial Africa was faced with a mammoth task to democratise itself (Arnold 2005: xiii). In my broadened definition of democracy, I would place elements such as multiparty/parliamentary democracy, the rule of law, accountability, good governance, transparency and constitutionalism, development, reconstruction and socio-economic justice.

### **Formation of Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and African Union (AU)**

When more and more African states were born as a result of decolonisation, they constituted themselves into the OAU. Thirty independent African states met in Addis Ababa in 1963 for this purpose (Arnold 2005: xiv). With fifty-three independent African states by 2000, the OAU was replaced by the

African Union. The AU has more power to an extent that it may intervene directly in independent states without the excuse by those affected states appealing to their sovereignty as it was the case under the mandate given to the OAU (Arnold, 2005: xix). The AU just like the OAU before it, has to address issues related to the legacies of slavery, post-colonialism as well as apartheid in South Africa. Neo-colonialism and globalisation through the Western institutions and governments, financial institutions such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organisation have been identified as culprits. And yet other problems are continent-grown such as corruption and despots (Mafeje 2002:72-80; Mkandawire 2002:112-114). To this list I would add the cold war between the former Soviet Union and the United States of America that started to thaw with the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989. What is of great importance is that in the AU and its organs and commissions unlike in the OAU, women representation is not left to chance. For example, the African Parliament's first president is a Tanzanian woman by the name of Angela Mongella. The African Peer Review Mechanism consists of some of the best women Africa has ever produced. Women should continue to claim more space in public life and use those teeth to bite. Time for token representivity is over!

### **The African Renaissance**

Analogous to the European renaissance, the African renaissance was born out of the social and spiritual history of slavery and colonialism (Mamdani 1999:125; Magubane 1999:11). Magubane (1999:10-13) believes that it was Nelson Mandela on 13 June 1994 who gave impetus to the project and this project was firmly put in Thabo Mbeki's hands to run with. It is important to mention that this renaissance included also the Africans in the diaspora. Indeed great leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Sekou Toure, Kenneth Kaunda and Leopold Sengho were forerunners of the project. As Malaka (2004:4) says, "Pan-Africanism rested on four pillars: (a) a sense of common historical experience (b) a sense

of common descent and destiny; (c) opposition to racial discrimination and colonialism; and (d) a determination to create a new Africa. In the main, as was evident with the formation of the OAU and particularly the AU, this renaissance aimed at instilling a sense of pride and dignity in Africa. Across the continent many organisations delved into Africa's past history to prove that African religion, philosophy and culture in general were far superior to any civilization in the world. Science and mathematics, education, governance, technology, etc were shown to have been started by Africans (Makgoba 1999). In South Africa, the Centre for African Renaissance Studies at Unisa, Kara Heritage Institute and Centre for Advance Studies in African Society at the University of Cape Town, have done a considerable amount of research into Africology and Egyptology. There are, of course, other such institutions in the country that are steeped in the revival of African religion and culture, such as Icamagu founded by Unisa academic Nokuzola Mndende. The South African Chapter of Renaissance would be more relevant to our unique situation in the country and stronger if our intellectuals were to factor in deliberately and consciously the contributions by the advocates of Black Consciousness. That, I contend, would be a particular contribution by South Africans to the African Renaissance discourse.

### **New Partnership for Africa's Development**

Inextricably linked to democratisation was what one might call the economic arm for Africa's recovery, the New Partnership for Africa's Development. The creation of NEPAD was to address challenges that the AU had identified, the most pressing and immediate ones being the eradication of poverty, ignorance and disease (Nyong'o 2002:3). The principles of NEPAD are as follows:

Good governance as a basic requirement for peace, security and sustainable development; African ownership and leadership. Anchoring the development of Africa on its resources and

resourcefulness of its people, ... acceleration of regional and continental integration; building the competitiveness of African countries and the continent; forging a new international partnership that changes the unequal relationship between Africa and the developed world ... (<http://www.nepad.org/2005/files/inbrief.php>, downloaded 2008/07/03).

One of the stated primary objectives of NEPAD is to accelerate the empowerment of vulnerable groups such as women and children (<http://www.nepad.org/2005>) and in the process poverty has been given a feminine face. And consequently Miss Rukato was appointed as the deputy chief executive of NEPAD. NEPAD has singled out agriculture as key to addressing poverty in the continent (Nyong'o 2002:17). This form of development will contribute greatly to the aims and objectives of the Kyoto Protocol that advocated responsible use of natural resources and the protection of the environment in the interest of creating sustainable development. The agrarian form of development is, therefore, more sustainable than others which deplete non-renewable sources of energy and other finite natural resources. One of the critical instruments devised was the creation of the African Peer Review Mechanism with prominent women serving on the committee. A number of countries have already been audited including Ghana, Botswana, Kenya and South Africa. As to the successes and failures of NEPAD, you are referred to the Codesria Conference papers published in 2006 and edited by Adesina, Graham and Olukoshi. One big success that can be mentioned is that Africa under the AU has awakened out of its slumber and is prepared to take its place in the world particularly at the United Nations. One important challenge that Africa is facing is the financing of NEPAD. The other partners are still the West and Brettonwood institutions that have failed Africa in the past sixty years by rendering our countries stateless.

### **Inter-religious Ethics**

Africa has over the centuries, in addition to the African Religion, become home to many religions such as Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Judaism and Hinduism. Africans are deeply religious with over 98% of the continent classified as religious. All these religions, in spite of their doctrines, work for an alternative society that is qualitatively different from the present one. That world is called by different names by various religions that populate the continent. These names include heaven, nirvana, paradise, new heaven and new earth, God's reign, reincarnation etc. Fighting poverty and human rights abuses and working for justice in general are values and principles embedded in all religions. Kung & Moltmann (1990: vii) are optimistically wondering when they say,

it would be of utmost importance for humanity if the great world religions could agree upon a basic ethic and ... upon basic rights of human beings.

Religions should, therefore, work together and not only side by side, to assist the African Union and NEPAD to achieve their aims and objectives. It is not a question of religions tolerating one another but of appreciating and celebrating one another's contribution to fighting poverty, ignorance and disease, and to working for justice and peace. It would be beneficial for religions to also theologise on the work done by secular organisations such as the World Social Forum as a platform for common witness and action. As Karl Barh (1963:297) aptly puts it,

we do not need to delete or retract anything from the admission that in His(sic) revelation God is present in the world of human religion

God's rule was inaugurated when Jesus was born and the Church that was born on Pentecost has been mandated to extend this reign to the uttermost parts of the globe (Matt 28:18-20). Through his teachings and life Jesus stood in the long line of great prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hezekiel and

Amos who were champions of the poor and the marginalised (Cone 2003:57-76). Jesus stood against the Roman empire and Judaism when the State and Sanhedrin connived against the poor (Gutierrez 1973: 226-227). His love for humanity was demonstrated by his compassion and solidarity with the victims of evil attitudes and structures (Isasi-Diaz 1996: 88-92, Boff & Boff 2005:1-9). I regard the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7) as Jesus' epitome on social ethics.

Biblical salvation/liberation history tells us that the first human pair God created was perfect in all respects and similar myths are found in other religions. Sin separated us from God but God never abandoned us. God's project of redemption and liberation from sin and its consequences reached its climax in Jesus the Christ. God's reign will be consummated with the return of Christ when everything will be transformed. John the Apostle was shown in a vision, a new earth and a new heaven (Rev 21: 1-4; cf. also 2 Pet 3: 13), a new order that prophets had spoken about (Is 65:17, Jer 31: 33). There would be a new covenant, a new morality and a new conscience. This new order according to Boff (1978:49-62) is neither a territory nor is it merely a spiritual one. Jesus has identified himself with humanity's deepest longings by becoming human.

## Conclusion

World's problems are here to stay, whether caused by nature or by humans or both. As co-creators with God, all humans regardless of religion, ideology, philosophy and gender have a responsibility to make planet earth a better, if not a perfect, planet to live in.

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## **Becoming One with the Whole of Creation**

Sr. Marlene Perera, FMM

**E**very part of this earth is sacred to my People. Every shining pine needle, every sandy shore, every mist in the dark woods, every meadow, every humming insect. All are holy in the memory and experience of my people.<sup>1</sup>

### **Introduction**

During the last five years, the Sri Lankan government had made at least three attempts to privatize the water resources of the country. However, the Bill was defeated each time it had been presented in parliament due to the mass opposition of the people who had been conscientized by MONLAR, Movement on National Land and Agricultural Reform.

The Lankans take pride in ownership of land. Yet, when the State-initiated plans to provide title-deeds for agricultural lands to individual farmers, by-passing the 'Paddy Lands Act of 1958', that aimed at preventing the fragmentation of these lands, it was also vehemently opposed by the people as they felt it would easily lead to the alienation of these lands to foreign multinational companies.

"If the elephants had been here today, they would have said the same thing with regard to humans." This statement

was made by a participant at a meeting recently, where land issues of the people were focussed on, in view of resolutions. One of the most pressing issues highlighted was the elephant-human conflict. The group that studied this issue had proposed that there was a need for greater control of the elephant population, as they were increasing rapidly and too many wild elephants were roaming through villages destroying crops and also causing immense hardships to villagers. Last year alone 85 elephants and 52 humans had been killed due to this. They felt that the present regulations of the country headed by the Wild Life Department were in favour of elephants rather than humans; this because a huge fine and a period of imprisonment had to be faced if one is caught injuring an elephant even to save one's own life. Since many at the meeting felt that these tragic incidents were due to vast deforestation for cultivation of alien crops, a more suitable solution, they agreed, would be to maintain forests with the natural vegetation where elephants would find food and water. This, in view of deforestation to make way for pine and turpentine cultivation, which drive out the elephants as they cannot be the habitats of these pachyderms. Of the 35% of forests, Sri Lanka has now only 19% remaining.

Under pressure from WB and IMF, most governments in developing countries are forced into such ventures mentioned above and action taken by the people conscious of the ill-effects of these endeavours could thwart such efforts.

### **The Global Concern for Water**

Two-thirds of the earth is covered with water of which 96.5% is ocean-based. 1.74 is retained as ice-caps, glaciers and permanent snow. Of all the water available in the world, it is said that only 3% is fresh. Less than 1% of this fresh water is available for human use. Fresh water is essential for the support and blossoming of all forms of life: plant, animal and human. Water is needed for food, manufacture of various goods and also to sustain health.

“Global consumption of water has arisen almost ten-fold since 1990 and many parts of the world are now realising the limits of their supply. World population is expected to increase by 45% in the next 30 years while fresh water runoff is expected to increase by 10%. UNESCO has predicted that by 2020 water shortage will be a serious world-wide problem.”<sup>2</sup> Wong Poh Poh, a professor at the National University of Singapore recently told a regional conference that “global warming was disrupting water flow patterns and increasing the severity of floods, droughts and storms - all of which reduce the availability of drinking water.” He said, “the UN Inter-governmental panel on Climate Change found that as many as 2 billion people would not have sufficient access to clean water by 2050. This figure is expected to rise to 3.2 billion by 2080.”<sup>3</sup> Hence, the world-wide concern for water and sustainable management of water resources.

### **Water is Life**

The importance of water to life cannot be assessed fully. All life is so dependent on water. It is urgent that humans reassess their relation with water and value water for what it is to life. This demands a new culture based on water consciousness that would automatically demand a change in the human's way of being. It is vital to note that our mother earth too is dependent on water. It is mother earth herself that nourishes the soil with water gushing forth from her bosom which in turn leads to the blossoming of flora and fauna and rain forests. There is a reciprocity and interdependence in all of nature which has her own way of regulating the water that the earth needs for its growth, if not hampered by external human forces. Nature existed in a dynamic and ever-changing balance with each other and has her own way of resourcing herself. The earth gives us the life-giving, cleansing water so freely. The human culture that is being built on human greed than on human need has taken water for granted with water being polluted and destroyed indiscriminately.

### **Earth is in Peril**

The world today is gripped by the problem of climate change, degradation of the biosphere, depletion of the ozone layer, rising sea levels, erosion of the top soil, desertification and other such threatening environmental phenomena. It is generally accepted that these could have devastating effects on all forms of life, leading to the extinction of much flora and fauna. Even human life is at risk. Yet, the world powers are unable to arrive at a consensus of how to meet this crisis caused by ruthless exploitation of the earth's limited resources, led not only by human need but above all by human greed.

It is largely held that never before had humans degraded the earth as now, making the earth less and less habitable. The current globalization thrust founded on the market, upholding global capital, creates artificial demands for more and more consumption. Since 'money' is upheld above all else, endless efforts are made to rapidly monetize natural resources found in developing countries, for greater profits to transnational corporations and for the benefit of the minority elite spread throughout the world, who are at the helm of this inhuman process. This process, besides being destructive towards the environment, continues to widen the gap between the industrialized, wealthy and powerful nations and the developing countries. Further, it makes the rich, richer and the poor, poorer, while holding the glittering golden calf of consumptive goods before them through media advertisements. This brings about much discontent among the dispossessed majority of the world, leading to social conflicts, especially in developing countries, where ethnic, tribal, religious and border conflicts are the order of the day, in a horizontal manifestation of violence. Rapid militarization of States is made to be imperative, leading to low intensity conflicts, maintained at a manageable level in various parts of the world. Hence the need for more and more arms, that feed the huge Military Industrial Complexes which build up the economy of powerful countries. All these armed conflicts add to the further devastation of the earth through

the emission of more and more green-house gases, leading to greater depletion of the ozone layer. Led by the desire for power and the power of desire, the human not only destroys the beauty of nature but also puts the existence of the earth in the balance; the human is in danger of losing his own life and his own humanity. "It is high time that we acknowledge that we are turning our home, this living planet into a wasteland, an unsuitable place for life. If environmental degradation continues, we would be killing not only ourselves but also the earth, the only life-sustaining system known to us."<sup>4</sup>

### **Why this Devastation?**

The major cause could be traced to the human's dualistic and dichotomized way of thought, objectifying the outside world, making the human the centre of all life and all else subservient to him. This anthropocentrism and this myopic self-preoccupation as individuals and nations have led us to ruthlessly exploit nature on a so-called development drive in view of consumption and acquisition through increased productivity. Our compartmentalized approach to knowledge, lack of a broad historical perspective, appreciation of space and comprehensive thinking together with the rapid development of technology had speeded up this reckless destruction of the natural world, heedless of the future, with no concern for all other life on this planet. Modernist European philosophy had emphasized the centrality of the human person who alone is acknowledged to be in the image of God, promoting horizontal transcendence: human to human for achieving fulfillment. This upheld human existence and experience to the detriment of the natural world. The human, has for long been the earth's biggest problem, human action being largely responsible for environmental devastation. In the midst of this crisis, our social, cultural, philosophical and religious outlook seem to fail us. The crisis is then not merely ecological but also cultural, religious and deeply spiritual.

### **A New Approach to Life Imperative**

We are living in an age where the rights of the non-human beings of the earth are being focussed on, in the context and the issue of the sufferings of the earth, forests, soil, waters and cosmos coming to the fore, with the rise of Ecological Movements. A new approach to life and relationships is the need of the hour to radically change our current self-centred mindset. "It is myopic to think that human welfare is possible without the well-being of the rest of the planetary community. Instead of this short-sighted narcissistic ethics we need a holistic ethics that broadens our vision and gives us a cosmic consciousness."<sup>5</sup>

Political will is needed at both local and international level to promote nature-friendly ethics and work out policies and strategies for the fostering of all forms of life on this planet. So far, the responses have been within the dominant technocratic mentality, operating within the same narrow framework and drawn on the same fixed premises as the thrust originally responsible for this crisis: through greater scientific ingenuity and more efficient technological management. Yet, what is needed is a fully committed and caring endeavour from the community of nations and the whole human family.

Among peoples of the world, solidarity is being built to find constructive responses to this crisis which is threefold: climate, food and financial. In January this year, at the World Social Forum in Belem, Brazil thousands from all over the world gathered together in a mass manifestation of the world's conscience against the atrocities committed against nature and humanity. The World Theology Forum, meeting at the same venue, brought together around fifty theologians from all parts of the world to ponder on, "Water, Earth, Theology for another Possible World". In their search for a new spirituality and world view to undergird a new way of being on this planet, they unanimously agreed that those assumptions are so specific to western industrial society:

- that human progress and happiness lies in the satisfaction of our material wants and sensual desires,
- the basic orientation of the human to nature is one of conflict and struggle aimed at subjugation
- the insistence of the absolute priority of the human over nature, to the exclusion of all other species and forms

had to be radically questioned in envisioning a new ethos of life.

### **In Communion with the Natural World**

We need to turn to the natural world from which we sprang, for inspiration and creativity that would propel us to a loving response. Profound contemplation of the natural world, would lead us to re-interpret our human existence and experience in loving and caring interaction and relationship with the world. "We know the sap which courses through the trees as we know the blood that courses through our veins. We are part of the earth and it is part of us. The perfumed flowers are our sisters. The bear, the deer, the great eagle, these are our brothers. The rocky crests, the juices in the meadow, the body heat of the pony, and man, all belong to the same family."<sup>6</sup>

A total, radical turn around from the present craze and hectic race in dominating the earth for satisfying human greed and the stabilisation of power and might of the powerful is urgently called for. Let us stand in humble wonderment before nature's diversity, beauty, complexity and mystery and concretely experience the deeper reality of life and touch the transcendent presence leading us to joyful imagination, inspiration and creativity: art, culture, song, dance, philosophy, spirituality. "Nature is the source of human origins and ongoing context of our evolution and spiritual development."<sup>7</sup> The human's new self-understanding has to emerge from this

inter-relatedness and inter-dependence on nature, self, one-another and on God, through this profound contemplation of the transcendent in nature.

### **Wisdom from Living Faiths**

The natural world is the primary symbol of the presence of the transcendent in all religious traditions. Yet, even religions have been co-opted in this wave of Modernity to the detriment of their original inspiration. The original life upholding and fostering initiative of religions have to be tapped to find the spiritual energy to bring about creative new visions of life in communion.. Islam holds that "all God's creatures are his family and he who doth good to God and his creatures is most beloved by God".<sup>8</sup> Tagore, in his mystical poetry and philosophical writings emphasizes the teachings of Hindu Scriptures in the following manner:

- that the universe in which we live is a manifestation of the Infinite Spirit;
- that there is no hard and fast line between nature and man or between man and God;
- that evil and suffering are not absolute realities but only the temporary expedients of the evolving Spirit;
- that the absolute Spirit is all ineffable joy and love;
- that true knowledge is that which perceives the unity of all things in God;
- that the emancipation of the human consists in his absolute self-surrender in service and love.

Tagore was able to view all the religions of the world as parts of one whole: **The Religion**. Buddhism on the other hand, has no formal acceptance of a divinity but promotes loving kindness to all living beings. "With deep philosophical insight into the inter-connectedness and the thoroughgoing inter-depen-

dence of all conditioned things, with its thesis that happiness is to be found through the restraint of desire in a life of contentment rather than through the proliferation of desire, with its goal of enlightenment through liberation from 'thanha', and contemplation and its ethic of non-injury and boundless loving kindness for all beings, Buddhism provides all the essential elements for a relationship to the natural world characterized by respect, care and compassion."<sup>9</sup> So too, with all other living faiths. We need to be grounded in their original inspiration for, they have much enlightenment to offer us in our spiritual quest.

### **Christian Perspective**

The gift of creation is also a call to be co-responsible servants of God to care for this dynamic gift, the earth, the Cosmos, in the process of building a world of justice and peace, which also implies eco-justice, in building loving and harmonious relationships with nature. As humans, possessing the capacity for conscious reflection and for informed decisions with moral awareness, humans are in a position to comprehend the impact of their options and change course. Misinterpretation of Scripture had led to certain mistaken concepts about nature. Initiating a re-reading of the Biblical tradition from the perspective of nature, the creation myth affirms the goodness and sacredness of God's creation that God continues to sustain. The Garden of Eden brings before us an image of Paradise where all beings including the human, lived in harmony, in communion with one another. Land played an important role in the history of Israel and God was present with them wherever they found themselves; sedentary, pilgrims in the desert, in exile etc. The prophets in Israel continually reminded them that land was a gift, not to be monopolized by a few and of their responsibility towards the have-nots, the widow, orphan, stranger. The jubilee tradition ensured that inequalities were rectified every fifty years by the re-distribution of land. According to Psalms. 19: 1-5, the heavens declare the glory of God and

the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Psalms 24 and 64 speak of God's solicitude for the earth

"But, even the Bible is clear on the fact that the *raison d'être* of creation is not found primarily in its ability to meet human needs. It has its own dignity, own rights and reason for being, quite apart from its role in sustaining humans."<sup>10</sup> Regrettably, down the years in our intellectual and ideological pursuits we have ignored the truth that Creation is the first symbol of divine manifestation and so the first Sacrament and source of revelation. (psalms 33, 90, 102). As Thomas Berry, puts it, "We cannot discover ourselves without first discovering the Universe, the Earth and the imperatives of our being."<sup>11</sup> "The apostle Paul spoke of the resurrection of the body rather than the immortality of the soul because he affirmed, first the body and the soul are an indivisible unity and, second that the reality of the resurrection is a liberating process located not just in human identity but in the whole creation. Through our bodies we are joined in solidarity with all of creation. The hope of the resurrection of the body understood biblically, is the hope that all the physical creation will be redeemed and transformed in the final triumph of divine love. It is the hope of a new creation fully established at the end of history when God will be "all in all". (1 Cor. 15--28). The struggles of the present in which the Spirit grows with us and through us for freedom (Rom. 8:23), already anticipate this New Creation".<sup>12</sup>

Jesus' vision of God's Reign is wholeness, 'shalom' to and communion among all God's creatures. "For those who follow Jesus, not self-interest but respect for all of God's creatures is what should hold sway."<sup>13</sup> The parables that Jesus related to bring home to people the message of God's Good News manifest clearly the intimacy that Jesus had with nature, his understanding of nature's way. Mathew in Ch. 8 places before us the scene of Jesus calming the storm. Does not this scenario show us, the intimate and loving relationship that Jesus had with the forces of nature, that they acceded to his request? The Gospels show that the attitude of Jesus to nature was that of

wonderment, appreciation and intimate communion. Jesus retired to the wilderness, the desert, the mountain top, the Garden of Olives whenever he wished to commune with God, his Father, usually before launching into his life's important tasks.

After his Baptism in the Jordan, Jesus retires to the desert for forty days to commune with his Father in solitude before starting his public life. (Mth. 4:1, Lk. 4:1). After he had fasted for forty days, the Gospels tell us, the devil attempted to tempt him in three crucial ways that we ourselves are tested in our worldly sojourn. The first one is to make use of his power to change the stone into bread and satisfy his human need, hunger: yes, the exploitation of material goods to satisfy human needs, leave alone greed; Jesus by his response, showed that it was far more important to live by God's Word than to satisfy one's needs. The second incident shows that Jesus was tempted on another human craving, that of prestige: to jump down from the highest point of the temple, so that people seeing God rescuing him from his plight would acclaim him as the chosen one of God. Jesus refuses with the words, "You shall not challenge the Lord your God". Words full of depth to ponder on! The third picture is of Jesus being taken to the top of a mountain, shown all the beauty and wealth in nature and all the nations of the world, with a desire to have power over all, by worshipping Satan. Jesus does not yield to this temptation with the words, 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only'. This incident shows us that humans could not attribute to themselves the power that belongs to God only. The human vocation is not to use God's creation to satisfy his needs and cravings to possess, have prestige and to exercise power over creation, other beings and humans. On the contrary, the human's sacred vocation is to discover God in God's creation, sing the glory of God with all of God's creation and serve God by being God's own caretaker of God's creation that God was directing towards fulfillment in God. The life of Jesus, as narrated in the Gospels empowers us humans, to move away with hope from this urge to lord it over and rape nature and all God's creatures in the

search for 'mammon'. Jesus' vision of Unconditional love includes wholeness for all creatures, even those we consider the least important, the non-human. He lived lightly, characterized by simplicity of life and warned us against getting enticed by all these cravings. (Mth. 6: 19-21)

In dialogue with the original inspiration of Christianity and of other living faiths, it is imperative that we Christians re-instate Nature as the primary revelation of the Divine. This demands a vision and a daring to go beyond our present mindset and boundaries to meet God who is awaiting to meet us just over there, with the indomitable faith of Abraham in the Bible. Within this perspective, theology in this ecological era would focus more on the divine transcendence we call God, as God immanent and revealing god-self in creation. Could we as Christians move from our fixed positions, beyond our boundaries to reach out humbly to other faiths in deep veneration to touch the divine present in them? In the profound encounter of all religions reaching out with genuine wonderment and awe to the divine revealed in each other's wisdom, true dialogue takes place, leading us to a more true understanding of the human's sacred trust as caretaker of nature as one among the rest of the species. Together they could engage in a praxis of caring for the earth as the Spirit's own servant, not lording over nature and over other humans. From this common endeavour would emerge a theology of Communion, of relationships and bonded-ness, as we give expression to our deepest experience of God in life rather than resort to verbal definitions. Christ would then naturally be experienced and given expression to within this cosmic history. Accordingly, a new ecclesiology will emerge with time, with the Bible being given its due place.

### **Movements Towards New, Life-Fostering Paradigms**

Among the many Peoples Movements engaged in the search and praxis for alternative, life-fostering cultures and ways of being, the Eco-Feminist Movement and the Indigenous

Peoples' Movements are significant. The Eco-feminists aspire to live together in solidarity in an inclusive culture that would respect, uphold and defend the rights of all humans, human groups, the diverse cultures and all of nature and the Cosmos as one human family. They aspire to be enriched by their diversities in harmonious interaction and mutual support as people, communities and nations. Their aim is to extend this same caring, harmonious and respectful relationship to nature, making use of available resources with reverence and with great responsibility for the well-being of all, preserving the integrity of Creation.

It cannot be denied that the world's Indigenous peoples have suffered much through Modernity and Colonial enterprise. Millions of such people and their lands have been denigrated for years. There is a growing mobilisation by these peoples to reclaim their lost heritage and reconstitute their communities to regain their original intimate relationships with nature, while also accepting change for a more comfortable life. They have always maintained that nature bespeaks of a sacred presence and it is this that gave meaning to their existence, coloured their lives and attitudes towards their surroundings leading to a spirituality that venerated all nature and beings as sacred, understanding all life as God's own life that God shares with all God's creation and humans. This gift of life was to them a dynamic call to a relationship of oneness and mutuality with all humans, plants, animals and all of nature and the entire Cosmos.

Sharing of a common cosmology calls for a united approach. Our ancestors had and today's indigenous people have a great reverence for the natural world which they hold as sacred. "How can you buy or sell the sky? The land? The idea is strange to us. If we do not own the freshness of the air and the sparkle of the water how can you buy them? If we sell you our land, you must remember that it is sacred ... One thing we know, our God is also your God. The earth is precious to him and to harm the earth is to heap contempt on its creator."<sup>14</sup>

The black Elk of North America express their relationship with the Cosmos thus: "We should understand well that all things are the works of the great Spirit. We should know that he is within all things: the trees, the grass, the rivers, the mountains and all the four-legged animals and winged people. And, even more important, we should understand that the Spirit is above all these things and all peoples".<sup>15</sup>

Wisdom gained from the interaction of all these endeavours and praxis would necessarily be the dynamics of a hermeneutics in evolving a caring and communion-oriented spirituality and theology.

### **Some Ecologically-oriented Theological Insights of the Day**

Sally Mcfague, a protestant feminist theologian, proposes a new theology of nature and of God which connects God with the human process. She holds that belief is not static as we continually discover the implications and consequences of religious mystery that is never exhausted. Theology is a creative and imaginative interpretation of reality rather than a discursive explanation of Bible and doctrine and is always metaphorical as it is an image of transcendental reality. One could have models in explaining the relationship with God but not definitions of God. Hence the need of today's theology to be open to contemporary mythic imagery symbols as they are interpretations that influence people. She puts forward four criteria for developing a theology of God's relationship to nature and humankind: 1) Such theology / cosmology has to be informed by science; 2) It should emphasize the inter-relatedness of humans with the whole of nature; 3) Be creation-centred rather than redemption-centred; 4) It must recognize the inter-connectedness of ecology, justice and peace. She finds focussing on the natural world as the Body of God would be adept in giving birth to a comprehensive theology along these four criteria "The universe is in God and is God's visible self-expression".<sup>16</sup> She elaborates, "In the metaphor of

the universe as the self expression of God – God’s incarnation – the notion of vulnerability, shared responsibility and risk are inevitable. This is markedly a different understanding of the God-world relationship than in the monarch-realm metaphor, for it emphasizes God’s willingness to suffer for and with the world; even to the point of personal risk. The world as God’s body, then may be seen as a way to re-mythologize the inclusive suffering love of the Cross of Jesus of Nazareth. In both instances God is at risk in human hands ... Just as once human beings killed their God in the body of a man, so we once again have the power .... We could kill our God in the body of the world.”<sup>17</sup>

## Conclusion

Thomas Berry, a creative catholic thinker of our times, feels that religion as also Christianity is far behind an interpretative pattern to make sense of our selves, our world and all that happens within the context of the rise of a new ecological vision of the universe. Spirituality grows with loving relationship with our world – the cosmos, for they stimulate and nourish our imagination, our inner world by which we relate to God. He stresses the need for a new creation myth. This demands a shift from sin-redemption myopia to a broader historical, ecological context. “The cosmos today is viewed as an on-going energy event rather than a sudden creation. It is a dynamic, self-explanatory process that is caught up in its own inner development. The challenge for theology is to move toward discovering God in the cosmic process rather than over and above it.”<sup>18</sup> He mentions further that all life being profoundly related genetically, the genes passing on the ever-increasing complexity of life; these genetic relationships constitute a profound oneness. Since our genetic coding define our humanity, individuality and constitute our relationship to the rest of reality, rediscovering our genetic coding would lead us back to our rooted-ness in the process of organic life. Human life is not separate and over against all other reality. It is a constituent part of it. “Our bonding with the larger dimen-

sions of the universe comes about primarily through our genetic coding. It is the determining factor. It provides constant guidance in the organic functions that takes place in all our sense functions; in our capacity for transforming food into energy, in our thought, imagination and emotional life. Our genetic coding enables us to experience joy and sorrow. It provides the ability to think, speak and create. It establishes the context of our relationship with the Divine.<sup>19</sup> Berry stresses the need for earth-centred language. “We are learning the mountain languages, the river language, tree language, the language of the birds and all the animals and insects as well as the stars of the heavens. The capacity for understanding and communicating through these languages, until now enjoyed only by our poets and mystics, is of immense significance since so much of life is lived in association with other beings of the universe.”<sup>20</sup> The ecological crisis definitely pushes us to new thinking, creativity, in finding new symbols and ways of being.

## Notes

1. Letter of Chief Seattle to US President in 1852 – Joseph Campbell with Bill Moyers, *The Power of Myth*, Bety Sue Flower-Editor, Doubleday, NY 10103, p. 34
2. Sisira Amarasekara; “Water is Life, Save Water, Save Life”, *The Island*, Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2008.
3. Experts: “Half faces Water Shortage by 2080”, in *The Island*, 20<sup>th</sup> November 2008
4. Joseph Peruma, CMF, *Motherly Earth*, p. viii
5. Joseph Peruma, CMF, *Motherly Earth*, p. vii
6. Joseph Campbell with Bill Moyers, *The Power of Myth*, Editor Betty Sue Flowers, Doubleday, NY 10103, p. 34
7. Paul Collins, *God’s Earth*, Harper Collins, 1995, p. 4
8. *Islam, an Introduction*, p. 91
9. *Buddhist Perspectives*, The Wheel Publication, No. 346/348, Foreword vii
10. Sean McDonagh, *Passion for the Earth*, p. 140
11. Thomas Berry, *Dream of the Earth*, p. 125
12. Marie Dennis, Joseph Nangle, OFM, Cynthis Moe-Lobeda, Stuart Taylor, *St. Francis and the Foolishness of God*, p. 113
13. *Consider Christ*, Elizabeth A. Johnson, p.140
14. Letter of Chief Seattle

15. Sr. Rosario Battung, RSG, *Becoming One Breath with Humanity and the Cosmos*, p. 9
16. Sallie McFague, *Imaging a Theology of Nature: The World as God's Body*, Birch et al in *Liberating Life*, p. 213
17. *Ibid*, p. 214
18. Thomas Berry, *The Dream of Earth*, San Francisco; Sierra Club Books, 1988, p. 196
19. *Ibid*, p. 196
20. Thomas Berry, "The Ecozoic Period" unpublished paper quoted by Paul Collins in *God's Earth*, p. 162

**Indigenous Peoples' Ecological Theology of  
Liberation**  
***Liberation for the Environment:  
An Inherent Ethical Responsibility***

Marcus Briggs-Cloud  
Mekkosuke of the Maskoke Nation

*Makvs Vholocet owis. Cvrket emvliketu  
hotvulkvet os momen cv poca tate emvliketu  
fusvulket owemuts. Cvrket em etulwvt mekkosuket os.  
K unfusken vtiyet os momen mekosvkv-cuko ariyet os.  
Ephofunkv envretv vketeciyet os. Vm etulwvt Tvlvhase  
Wvkokiye tusekiyvt owis. Momen tusekiyv-hocefkvt  
Kunfuske Yvholvt owes.*

For Indigenous Peoples who embrace holistic lifeways including philosophies that express our equal relationships to all living elements, particularly in the space where our respective societies are fixated or reside, we recognize the urgency of protecting a vital component to the efficacy of our Indigenous being. I am speaking of our natural reciprocity. The discourse formulated in the West, and furthermore filtered down to the colonized world through religious institutions, regarding the sanctity of life, has forever excluded the natural environment. We are all familiar with the classic precedents of this Eurocentric framework found in the biblical verses, such as:

“Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the face of all the earth.”<sup>1</sup>

Depending on one’s hermeneutical approach, the risk of cultural dilution for Indigenous Peoples is deeply at stake when reading these kinds of verses.

Moreover, while Liberation Theology, an agent which transcends these Euro-centric impositions, has sought to eradicate a wide range of oppressions from the world anywhere from political and economic social justice endeavors to seeking greater inculturation in the Church, it remains that the primary and popular ecological paradigm existing is one that emerges from the effects many outcomes of oppression, such as poverty, have had on the natural environment. In turn, this fails to acknowledge the inherently divine ethical responsibility Indigenous Peoples hold to serve as stewards of the earth, thus excluding them as intricate parts of the respective paradigm and discourse. Indigenous Peoples who seek a resurgence and/or at the least an affirmation of their autonomy and lifeways cannot settle for a paradigm which promotes their responsibility to the care for the earth simply as a response to oppressions that developed outside their own cultural context. Nor, accept impositions by groups who operate outside any given Indigenous societal space where people evolve uniquely and communally in accordance with the sacred. Rather, they must embrace a model that upholds and recognizes their unique and ancient spiritual responsibility to care for the earth. The former paradigm only leads to cultural dilution – in the sense of taking on new reasons to serve as stewards of the land that do not unfold or derive from a traditional and sacred philosophical framework rooted in spatiality. For example, those living on an Indian reservation where an abundance of trash or other forms of pollution fill the region, should continue attempting to care for the earth through renewal ceremonies, environmental protection efforts, daily rituals etc. They are all embedded in generational teachings, that is to say, they are operating off

spiritual traditions and not responses to colonial systemic impositions like poverty.

As I continue to ramble on here about cultural dilution, our relatives i.e. the earth and all natural elements of the earth, are independently crying out for a theology of liberation. In a theological discourse that upholds the sanctity of life, and moreover liberation of the oppressed, Indigenous Peoples should engage by not limiting ourselves to liberation for humanity alone by forgetting to include all living beings i.e. our equal relatives of the earth. At a recent board of directors meeting for the National Tekakwitha Conference, I was speaking to my fellow board members about various problems with bottled water, particularly about certain bottling companies who are oppressing peoples around the world. Furthermore, I challenged everyone in the room to remain conscious of the way in which we daily treat and utilize our water, since elders in my Indigenous Nation have instilled in our minds the sacredness of water. They teach that water is our first medicine! Ironically, it was an Indigenous priest sitting next to me who stated: “No! Human life is most sacred!” I replied, “Well, the brain is made up of nearly 85% water ... the liver nearly 95% ... muscles 70% etc.” I was told: “We are Catholic! That’s it, we are Catholic” and that I was “over-spiritualizing” the matter. As ambiguous as his reply may sound, the message was quite explicit. Even our traditional Indigenous perceptions of the environment are being severely compromised by those intellectuals and religious leaders who I thought operated effectively in both Indigenous and Western worlds yet find it increasingly difficult in 2008, according to the white man’s calendar, to resist the seductively acculturating institutions’ further impositions to which they must answer.

Whose ideological foundations are we operating from our personal and communal theological developments? Are we still letting our theologies be shaped predominately by Euro-centric thought or even by non-Indigenous responses to Euro-centric thought, or rather, are we allowing our Indigenous grass roots teachings to penetrate the conversations? I am also

reminded of a popular contemporary Christian band that has won over the ears of persons across the globe, including many Indigenous Peoples. This group, "Casting Crowns", produced a major hit, with a remarkably catchy tune in 2005 called "While You Were Sleeping", where one section of the song iterates the words:

"United States of America- Looks like another silent night, as we're sung to sleep by philosophies that save the trees and kill the children."

After discussing this song with some Indigenous persons, they found themselves feeling a need to dichotomize and thus prioritize their pro-life stances into first supporting anti-abortion campaigns before their own inherent Indigenous responsibility to care for the earth, as this seemed to be "true Christian teaching" since this particular Christian group (note: comprised of all Euro-American fundamentalist evangelical Christians) was promoting such a message. It did not take much to cease their pro-life agenda from extending across the board by quickly elevating humanity to a superior position over our other living relatives of the natural environment.

Additionally, Indigenous Peoples' traditional knowledge of the earth and their reasons to continuously reveal the importance of serving as stewards of the earth are quickly dissolving as Indigenous languages rapidly leaving us. It is often necessary that traditional knowledge of a particular space be transmitted in the language of a respective society. Thus, language holds the key to understanding what a society's theological and cosmological worldview encompasses, as it is shaped by the language to begin with. This also includes medicinal epistemological discourses within Indigenous communities to which the well-being of the people is contingent upon. It is evident that Indigenous language revitalization efforts are necessary for the perpetuation of maintaining traditional relationships between Indigenous Peoples and the earth. Therefore, that notion simply deems this paper bunk,

that is if you haven't thought so already, since I am ironically presenting my argument to you in a language of the colonizer.

While theologies of liberation are crucial at a time where oppressions continue to thrive in the world, we must not forget to lend our ears to hear the voices of our many, what have become invisible, relatives of the natural environment. They, as a result of modernity and raised environmental consciousness, are making their way to center stage but primarily for individualist motivations concerning personal security and stability, rather than maintaining reciprocal relationships with the earth as an inherent ethical responsibility. Indigenous People's have to draw on their own teachings and knowledge which require utilization of their respective languages, in order to advance a theology of liberation for all of our relatives of the earth.

#### **Notes**

1. Genesis 1: 28

## Missio Dei and Creation

Richard Twiss

The outworking of the life of the community of Christ-followers must never be restricted or determined by a singular theological imperative of “winning souls” to the neglect of the rest of creation. It must be seen as forever flowing from the “village of creation” of the Creator as the main current in the eternal stream of the creation story:

Trinitarian theology points to the radical communal nature of God. This communion overflows into an involvement with history that “aims at drawing humanity and creation in general into this communion with God’s very life. God’s very nature, therefore, is missionary. It is not primarily about the propagation or transmission of intellectual convictions, doctrines, moral commands, etc., but rather about the inclusion of all creation in God’s overflowing, superabundant life of communion. The church’s missionary nature derives from its participation in this overflowing Trinitarian life (Bevans & Schroeder 2004:288-289).

The Holy Spirit presided over the earth/creation while it lay void, waste and dark. As he hovered, like a chicken over its yet hatched eggs, the life of God began to touch all of the earth at a cosmic and molecular level, dispelling the darkness, bring-

ing divine order and filling the earth with the life of God. The earth was now “nine-months pregnant” with plants, animals and even human beings. When God wanted to create plants he delivered them out of the belly of the earth.

Then God said, “Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees on the earth bearing fruit after their kind with seed in them”; and it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed after their kind, and trees bearing fruit with seed in them, after their kind; and God saw that it was good (Gen 1 :11,12).

When he wanted to create animals, he delivered them out of the belly of the earth.

Then God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures after their kind: cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth after their kind”; and it was so. God made the beasts of the earth after their kind, and the cattle after their kind, and everything that creeps on the ground after its kind; and God saw that it was good (Gen 1: 24, 25).

When it came time to create human beings, he created Male-Man and Female-Man in his likeness and image and delivered them out of the dust of the earth.

Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them (Gen 1:26,27).

Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being (Gen 2:7).

The *missio Dei* as Trinitarian faith calls us to “recognize the interconnectedness of everything in the universe. Everything is related to everything else, and this means that an anthropology in the light of the Trinity can never be one that is anthropocentric.” Since everything is connected, humanity is part of the whole of creation (Bevans & Schroeder 2004:301). And everything that “never was,” has ever been, or ever shall be, came first, “existed,” within the community of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit before it proceeded out from them.

### **We are All Relatives in the *Missio Dei***

In Genesis, the human/creation story emerges from within the radical community of the Trinity and the oneness within the diversity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In Revelation, it “ends” with the radical community of the Trinity and the oneness within the diversity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, with human beings fully participating, have been restored to *imago Dei*.

After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb ... “ (Revelation 7:9).

What John saw in Revelation was birthed out of God’s self. The diversity in heaven is the reality of what God intended to be from the very beginning because only in the diversity of humanity could the indescribability of God be “mirrored.” With these as bookends, the *missio Dei* is a home for indigenous people in the story of Creation.

In the *missio Dei*, as “observable” in Revelation, heavenly worship reflects in its perfected state that which from the beginning of time always existed in the Trinity; here we see diversity perfected, cultures flourish, creation restored and the radical self-giving oneness of the community of the redeemed – the divine *tiyospaye* – “extended family” worshipping the Creator. Cultural diversity is not a deviation from God’s

“original plan”, the result of sin or judgment at Babel, but has always been God’s intention and design for human beings. This is good news for Indigenous people and affirms our “place” as Native/indigenous people within the context of God’s eternal triune community and purposes for creation.

Among the Lakota/Sioux, *Mitakuye Oyasin* is an expression that captures this heavenly reality. Translated, the words say, “All My Relatives or Relations”. However, what is communicated is a sense of one’s connectedness to the bigger world of creation. It says I am part of the people who have gone before me, with the people living today, and with those who will come after me. It says I am related to things above, things below and things all around. It says I am a small part of all that is, and ever has been, sacred. It militates against the sacred/secular dichotomy of the West and aligns us with a holistic and integrated worldview orientation of the *missio Dei*.

We love, because He first loved us. If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also. 110 4: 19-21

*Missio Dei* has a reconciliation dynamic that calls us to love others. Jesus says to love our enemies and to pray for those who deceitfully use us. *Mitakuye Oyasin*, according to Native theologian George Tinker (2004:92), includes as our relations, not only those of our immediate family but also, “fellow tribal members or even all Indian people.” But going even further, the *missio Dei* reminds us of “first things” and compels us to love all “two-leggeds”; even those who have hurt, wounded, unjustly treated, killed and oppressed our people.

**Missio Dei: A Message from the Margins**

The inherent ethnocentrism in neocolonial mission endeavors among Native North American people has effectively, socially, culturally and spiritually marginalized Native peoples. Across the world, in early missions' history, Stephen Neill (1990:384) acknowledges that missionaries were extraordinarily slow to recognize and trust the gifts of indigenous Christians. As indigenous leaders began reading and interpreting scripture for themselves, the foreignness of the church became a cause of distress and anxiety for them.

Our Native people today consistently reject the gospel story as the "white man's religion." The vast majority, however, do not reject the Christ and the Gospel, but they thoroughly reject the church.

Given the implicit and explicit participation of the churches' missionaries in the oppression and cultural genocide of American Indians, what relevance can Jesus have for Indian peoples? How can Native preachers proclaim Jesus to a community that has been constantly hurt by the proclamation of the gospel and those who have proclaimed it? The initial problem is not with Jesus but with Christianity and the church (Kidwell, Noley, and Tinker 2004:64).

The reason this is still so true is because the American church has so thoroughly culturally contextualized the gospel to its own context that it has, as Stephen Bevan's comments, "ceased to have anything to say and is no longer truly engaging the culture".

North American Christianity is in great measure *twisted* by culture. Too often, we have uncritically embraced many of the taken-for-granted presumptions and priorities that characterize the dominant worldview of Western civilization instead of

testing our culture's values and perspectives against biblical standards (Bevans 2004:128).

There is a call from the margins, challenging the church's consideration of the marginalized and as Philip Wickeri (2004: 192) notes, the need to "situate ourselves with those on the margins of empire, and there reconsider the meaning of the *missio Dei* for today. Mission from the margins is associated with peoples who have been marginalized in Christianity's expansion, and by the various colonial ideologies associated with it".

As First Nations theologians and leaders engage with the *missio Dei*, they will echo this call from the margins and, as Wickeri (2004: 187) sees it, call to a prophetic judgment the "triumphalism of the missionary movement" as we have experienced it in our lands and communities here in North America.

Over the past 400 hundred years the Gospel story was saturated in modernity, colonialism, strength, power, rule, prosperity, abundance, privilege, etc., resulting in our people receiving a culturally skewed gospel covered with foreign clothing. The story was so blended with the culture and worldview of the missionary that it was difficult to distinguish between the two. At this point in mission history, First Nations believers can offer an accurate critique to help the church, as Lesslie Newbigin notes (1986:9), "to become aware of the element of syncretism in their own Christianity, of the extent to which their culture has been allowed to determine the nature of the gospel they preach, instead of being brought under judgment by that gospel." This westernized Christianity has created syncretistic confusion for our Native people today, making it difficult to know the living Jesus.

**Missio Dei Relocates Our Histories**

As First Nations people, our place in creation history does not begin in 1492 when we were "discovered" by the lost Genoan mariner, Christopher Columbus. Our place in American his-

tory does not begin when we were granted the “privilege” of becoming citizens in the United States in 1924. We are not a chapter in the story-line of European colonial expansion and the American Revolution. Nor do our histories begin with the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ and the founding of Christianity. We began in God. We were known by God, already possessing a place of affection in His heart while we were still unformed in the depths of the earth. Then when it came time to come out; we were fearfully and wonderfully made in our mothers wombs, created in the likeness and image of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. (See Genesis 1:26, 2:7 & Psalm 139:14--16).

This is a profound reality for Native/indigenous peoples. When connected with the mutual openness of Father and Son, Son and Spirit, Spirit and Father as a model of relationship, “the constitutive nature of relationship for personal identity, the inclusion of diversity in community – all these vital truths and practices are rooted in trinitarian reality and existence” (Bevans & Schroeder: 2004:294). It is a way of thinking that will challenge the assumption of superiority that accompanied missions in the West and will help us understand the Trinity as a living communion of persons, always involved in the world, always inviting all of creation to share in the triune life of communion-in-mission. First Nations people are familiar with the idea of cosmological origins; adding to it the idea of God as Trinity as the basis of an Orthodox Christian theology of mission will sit well with our people. (Bevans & Schroeder: 2004: 294).

The emergence of Indigenous voices in the world of Christian theological conversation is now altering missiology in an irreversible way. One of the characteristics of most non-western theological method is their point of origin and departure. Typically western theological reflection begins with the study of scripture and tradition as an intellectual exercise to “correctly” orient them to the truth (Poitras 2004: 42). For Native peoples, theology will always begin the story with reflection of local contexts and experience, tracing our stories “back to the future” and our relationship to and with the land.

In this discussion, it is important for Native peoples not to make the same mistake as dominant culture people and shoehorn other people’s realities into our histories in an ethnocentrically determined category. We have a particular place in the historical stream of the *Mission Dei*. However, if we do not find our particular place in the bigger picture, and if we absolutize our own history, we lock ourselves into the ghetto of an ethnocentric “Native Christianity” that has no necessary relationship with other “churches” and “peoples” as part of the Body of Christ. This is not liberation, but perhaps a new kind of internalized neocolonialism.

As we seek the freedom of God promised by Christ, in light of five hundred years of having our histories written by others as if it were little more than the expansion of the Protestant churches of Europe and America, we may be tempted to insulate and isolate ourselves from potentially hurtful outside influences. Indigenous churches around the world have been pushed to perceive their histories as part of western Christianity and to submerge their relation to their unique histories in Africa, Asia, Latin America and beyond. The Western church has tended to see Western cultural history and Christianity history as one and the same, and it has consequently lost at times the ability to distinguish Christianity from non-Christian civil religion (Samuel & Sugden: 1999: 174-175).

### ***Missio Dei and Creation***

Native theologian George Tinker expands the concept of *Mitakuye Oyasín*, saying every Native who says this prayer knows his or her relatives necessarily include not only all people and animals, but “trees, rocks and mountains, fish and snakes”. He reflects on the reality of “All My Relatives” and its implicit consolidation of “living things” saying it can further help us “understand the extensive image and scope of the inter-relatedness and interdependence symbolized by the circle for one another”. He concludes saying:

The American Indian concern for starting theology with Creation is a need to acknowledge the goodness and inherent worth of all of that has been given life by the Great Mystery” (Tinker 2004:92).

Again, however, the *missio Dei* takes us behind the “curtain of the Creation” to the “thought” that was the “seed” of Creation that God spoke out of Himself into existence. We must begin our Theology story in the goodness of the Creator Himself in order then comprehend His goodness in His Creation. Since God created the heavens and earth by his word and the first human couple in his image, it was inevitable that from that time onward God would exercise a loving and providential care over his creation. Creation took place as the initial event in space-time history, the beginning of the self-disclosure of God. “He spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm” (Ps. 33:9) (Arthur Glasser 2003 :22). Costas sees God being present in every situation of life. The same God who created the world redeemed it. The same God who provides for the well-being of the earth judges those who exploit and destroy its resources. God is one, but one in community, a Trinity (Thomas 1995:119). Moses acknowledges Creation coming out of God when he speaks of God giving birth to the earth. “Before the mountains were born or You gave birth to the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.” (Psalm 90:2).

Of old You founded the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. Even they will perish, but You endure; and all of them will wear out like a garment; like clothing You will change them and they will be changed. But You are the same, and our years will not come to an end (Psa 102:25-27).

He stretches out the north over empty space and hangs the earth on nothing (Job 26:7).

Long before the first Europeans arrived, Native peoples understood that the (uncreated) Creator who creates is supreme

and unique and he constantly discloses himself as such. Our Creation story is the first element of the Christian gospel because it is “good news” to find personal identity in the fact that one has been created by God. Glasser points out that the apostles’ preaching to the Gentiles presupposes, “not the covenant with and the promises to the Fathers, but to the care of the Creator” (Glasser 2003:34). The apostle Paul affirms that the invisible nature of God – his eternal power and deity – is clearly perceived in the things he has made (Rom. 1: 19-20). The church in every age as Glasser emphatically states (Glasser 2003 :31) must proclaim earnestly the existence of God, the Maker of all things visible and invisible. The fact that Creation took place is an expression of the freedom of God: God’s sovereignty and grace, wisdom and power, and perfection. God’s subsequent activity in preserving Creation and in redeeming his people also reflects God’s gracious character.

## MASCULINITY: Market Forces, and Spiritual Potentials

Diego Irarrazaval

Each one of us may feel angry when bodies of women and of men become objects of marketing. Mostly the female image has been used in advertisement and in lustful commercials. The market also cleverly stereotypes masculinity. Contemporary society obtains material benefits from bodies of persons; it even sells spiritual devices and dreams. Anything and anyone is involved in marketing strategies. This happens in work, in education, in the media, in sports and festivals, and even in religious activities. *Machismo* and androcentric structures are widely established in Latin America's public and private spaces. Most regrettably spirituality is seen as a commodity. Even though most of us explicitly disagree with such manipulation, the fact is that our routine is full of violence and of symbols that cover it up.

That is part of our daily routine. Fortunately, there also is malaise, groaning, and a search for alternatives. Androcentric evils are becoming like tiny stones within our shoes; patriarchal traps are being avoided. Men experience frustration with the roles of being omnipotent and of enforcing discrimination. Not only that. We also resist; and discover ways of being happy. This happens not in competitions where one wins, but rather in interactions with others. Tolerance with those who are different from oneself has become a key learning

process. Today there are also more opportunities to share spirituality that leads to freedom. "When Christ freed us, he meant us to remain free" (Gal 5:1). This biblical truth has become part of one's longing for wholeness.

Fragile and strong voices of persons and institutions are in favor of males and females being fully human. This is experienced in intercontinental networks; for example dialogue, celebration, and strategizing that is taking place during this III Theology and Liberation World Forum, and in this World Social Forum.\* Throughout our continent there is a growing critique of hegemonic forms of maleness. The paradigm of being a *macho*, an autonomous and authoritarian image, harms most men. Fortunately, alternative ways of understanding masculinity are being discussed. Alternatives do exist: reason and emotions go hand in hand; there are more desires to connect with one's inner being and with others. Furthermore, in the religious arena there are interreligious activities and symbolic resources about "other" experiences of God. A loving and unconditional Presence may not be reduced to types of western Christendom and its imbedded patriarchy.

One of the major burdens that Christian education has placed on people's shoulders has been to segregate body from soul, as if they were two entities. During centuries it has been repeatedly said that bodies perish and souls are immortal. This dualism hinders an understanding of Christian incarnation and also hinders faith in the resurrection of the flesh. Some people have been traumatized by feeling their body as a "sinful instrument" and even as an obstacle to salvation. However, lay people's wisdom allows many of them to see their bodies as sacraments and to admire the divine Mystery becoming human. The *sensus fidelium* acknowledges signs of human-divine relationships.

Taking into account these circumstances, may I share with you insights and research on masculinity.<sup>1</sup> In my opinion, the deeper contemporary issue is how economic-cultural forces (that tend to transform everything into

commodity) distort expectations and experiences of men and women. Secular forms of Idolatry (and its violent dimension) tarnish the human heart. These forces shape the imagination and existence of the majority of people. It is important to register these explicit and subtle realities, and to discuss alternatives. In the midst of contemporary male idols, it is crucial to strengthen a masculine spirituality that allows us to be led by the Spirit of Life.

### 1) Ways of Understanding Gender

Often language becomes one-dimensional and attempts to describe an essence. Male and female identity is often dealt with as if each one were an essence, apart from history, and forgetting contexts and processes. For example, it is said that one's body reflects what happens in the soul; that the individual is a synonym for person; that human beings are segregated from the environment. Latin-Americans, in an uncritical way, tend to swallow information and knowledge that comes from the so-called developed societies. It has become difficult to look at our own types of knowledge about gender, understand who we are and what has happened in the course of history. It is important to be self-critical in any exercise of interpretation.<sup>2</sup>

As regards biological dimensions, the body usually is seen in terms of physical characteristics and of genital expertise. In the case of maleness, many understand it according to strength, external physical qualities, rationality. A common male genital behaviour is to presuppose ownership over other persons. In order to avoid these unhealthy interpretations of the human condition, it is necessary to reclaim Latin-American traditions about power within relationships, about sexuality as celebration of shared lives, about reciprocity and non-violence towards other persons, and about masculine-feminine interaction in a common project. It has also been important to have emotional links with what is different from oneself (without suppressing the other), and also to appreciate biological cycles with their potentials and limitations.

Our continent has many cultural colours and rhythms, and it has several kinds of *mestizajes* and of intercultural encounters. Interpretations about male and female factors are nourished by our traditional resources: persons with a European heritage, *mestizos*, Afro-Americans, autochthonous population, and other ways of seeing the world. Each group of persons reconstructs the meaning of life. For example, Andean people's perceptions of the world acknowledge relationships of men and women with the body of mother-earth, and also reinterpret economic and cultural Western patterns (when these are subordinated to the Andean holistic world view).

Therefore, masculinity is not a uniform and abstract essence. It has particular and plural expressions, within modern and post-modern scenarios. A common denominator is to give priority to material and technological progress and its symbolism. Pierre Bourdieu has written that in "the relationship of production and reproduction of symbols of capitalism", women are objects who have the role of increasing "symbolic capital held by men".<sup>3</sup> This happened not only in past ages; it continues to take place in new forms. Together with the vision that women are objects, men see ourselves as powerful and now also tolerant subjects. Constraint is placed on unacceptable forms of *machismo*. Some experts speak of Latin-American *neo-machismo*; since we develop clever strategies of manipulation over women and violence against other men (those seen as having less status).

As it is well known, masculinity has rich dimensions that influence each other: biological, sexual, political, economic, cultural, symbolic, spiritual dimensions. A growing concern is that we need interdisciplinary interpretations, and thus a more historical understanding of gender together with other dimensions of being human. One of our priorities is to read history from the point of view of the poor, of the young and of adults, as well as of discriminated women and men.<sup>4</sup> In Argentina, Gabriela Rotondi notes "unstable employment and working conditions, and lack of protection experienced by men belonging to marginal urban areas", and all of this implies poor social rela-

tionships and a lack of citizenship. In the case of middle class men, Norma Fuller emphasizes the identity split between domestic reciprocity, on one side, and language about masculine public roles, on the other side.

Throughout Latin America there are plenty of social scientific resources, and now also some creative events, pastoral workshops, and theological writings on gender and masculinity. The starting point has been women and a few men (in our continent and also in Spain) who developed insights in biblical studies and in systematics. Later significant work has been done by persons who dialogue with history, feminism, ecology, anthropology. The more outstanding inputs are those of Ivone Gebara, Elsa Tamez, Maria Clara Bingemer, Rubem Alves, Leonardo Boff, Marcio Fabri dos Anjos, Benedicto Ferraro, Wanda Deifelt, Andre Muszkopf, Adilson Schultz, Victor Hugo Lapenta, Dolores Aleixandre, Carmen Bernabe, Isabel Gomez Acedo, Juan Jose Tamayo, Andres Torres Q., Francisco Reyes Archila, Anibal Cañaverl.<sup>5</sup> A mono-cultural and mono-theological discourse about “the” masculine essence becomes irrelevant and without foundations. Nevertheless, one has to confess that essentialist and a-historical discourse predominates among many Christians. Hopefully, our evangelical tradition will continue to be re-examined, with a gender perspective, so that bodies and spiritualities may be understood with the eyes of the spirit of Christ.

This has been happening in people’s forms of religion and spirituality. Without falling into populism, one has to underline what happens among common people’s mystique and wisdom. Male and female discourse does not have to fall into an essentialist trap. Rather, we are challenged by fellowship and communion with the crucified and risen Lord. Instead of fatalistic tolerance of injustice and evil, common people demand a transformation of their crucified existence and celebrate life in their rituals and their ethical responsibilities. Evil is resisted. Well being is affirmed. Each one of these realities is seen with the eyes of God whose grace saves humanity. Suffering on one part, and happiness on another

part, do make sense in terms of Christ. His Incarnation (in Christmas and Epiphany rituals) and his Death and Resurrection (in Holy Week services) are where most people experience and understand the mystery of salvation. In these experiences God is acknowledged as vulnerable and compassionate, and not in terms of an omnipotent, sacred masculinity.

However, let us not forget that any religion (and also our Christian tradition) is deeply defiled by economic and cultural idols. Market forces have great impact on masculinity and also on feminine factors. A gender perspective deals not only with cultural values and behaviour; we also have in mind the biological, political, theological, psychological, economic aspects. It is thus necessary to have an interdisciplinary understanding of gender, since social and religious dimensions may not be explained using only one kind of knowledge. Persons doing theological research and teaching have to be engaged in dialogue with scientists and with interdisciplinary work.

In a few words; theological insights into the human condition include a gender perspective. This implies a study of ordinary people’s wisdom, economic and political analysis, spiritual and symbolic discernment. By a critical examination of masculinity, and by a shared enjoyment of life as men and as women, humanity may better develop its sensibility, rationality, and spiritual potentials.

## **2) Dichotomies and Reciprocity**

Commonsense is often corroded by dichotomies that make it very difficult to live faith in its wholeness. Here I am not speaking of differences nor of conflicts, where one needs to discern what is positive and what is negative. The key problem is rather a dualistic metaphysics, and its implications in daily behaviour. It implies non-acceptance of the other as other, and a naive and essentialist concept of good or bad, sacred or profane, material or spiritual, body or soul, object or subject, virtue or vice, rational or emotional, and so on.

Concerning maleness, it has been stereotyped as essentially opposed to anything labelled as feminine (and the latter is imagined in contradiction with the former). The masculine is carried out as one's duty to control lives of other persons, and to think and plan for the sake of others (since they do it inadequately). The male body is restricted to physical and rational superiority, and is seen as instrument of the spirit, and as object used by the mind. If these concepts are seen as obstacles to being human, then it is possible to develop a vision that differs from such dichotomies. If we have a holistic vision, events and persons are understood in terms of correlations. This does not lead to monism. Rather we are able to recognize necessary differences and to engage in interactions with other parts of reality.

Since its early phase, Latin American theology confronted dualism between human events and the history of salvation.<sup>6</sup> This does imply that we confuse different dimensions in reality. In terms of faith, the Source of being alive is not due to ourselves since we are recipients of grace. The Creator is not in the same level as his creatures. Rather, the Divine Spirit is present in every aspect of creation and in the mysterious interaction between different beings.

In human terms, dualism may be overcome when interactions are equitable, when reciprocity is symmetrical; thus they lead towards life.<sup>7</sup> This perspective includes a good understanding of masculinity (that is not in opposition to, nor superior to, the feminine). Thus we avoid the vicious superiority over other individuals or over the environment. Identity and behaviour are not a "unisexual" fantasy; nor do we erase the specific meaning of being sexually male and being masculine in gender.

Unfortunately, in the past and also today men have been trained to feel superior in rational, economic, and physical activities, and have been trained to control emotions and even to suppress them. Men are evaluated according to their ideas, work, autonomy, leadership on behalf of others. This has been

in opposition to women whose characteristics are: need to be protected, unpredictable behaviour, chaotic emotions. Moreover, an arbitrary division of tasks has been established: men are in charge of political institutions, science, legal systems, while women take care of children and home, are less capable of dealing with public realities, and have less intelligence. These patterns and prejudices have an impact on church responsibilities and symbols. For example, Christian doctrine is handed over through masculine guidelines (image of a law enforcing, omnipotent God, absolute truth, etc.) and spirituality is seen in terms of accomplishing goals, and of success in this world that implicitly has an androcentric content.

Are there alternatives? Yes. In many ways people throughout Latin-American history have built relationships of partnership (and not of unjust subordination). There are theoretical constructions – in terms of reciprocity and of genuine masculine inputs into human well being-. On another part there are day to day forms of gender collaboration, and of masculine identity that is life-giving. In moments of work and of family interactions there often is cooperation rather than an effort to win so that others lose. This occurs in many social and cultural activities. These experiences may be summarized in terms of reciprocity, of taking care of life, and not discriminating women nor men. Thus, we have a positive gender paradigm, meaningful for both males and females, which is a model within different cultural and religious contexts.

This discourse about alternatives is attractive. Nevertheless, one has to be faithful to facts and to processes. Is such an alternative paradigm present in day-to-day masculine identity and praxis? Moreover, does it really touch and transform faith experiences and theology? It is important to be honest about these issues. It is true that in some Christian communities and in theological discourse there are life-giving forms of masculinity. But the common denominator is not so positive.

So, any discourse about reciprocity has to have accountability. In the first place one feels deep inside, and also rationally, a conviction that dualism is dehumanizing, and that alternatives do exist. This implies a confrontation with androcentric and patriarchal patterns. These problems are due to internal and external forcés, and here one has in mind North Atlantic civilizations that influence many southern regions of our planet. Can such patterns be gradually replaced? It has so happened, and in many ways it continues to take place! Latin-American communities often do not discriminate nor exclude those who are different; migrant people are welcomed; masculine happiness is manifested. These positive characteristics have been developing along history. The paradigm of reciprocity allows men to relate well with other individuals and with the natural environment. One does not bow down before success nor before superiority at all costs.

It is convenient here to explain that the goal is not male self-emancipation; rather the goal is to strengthen masculine identities in order to take care of life as a gift, for the sake of ourselves and for happiness of other human beings who also respect the environment. This means that each person may be in harmony with energies inside the human condition, in the dynamics of the environment, and with humanizing forces in economics and in cultures. It is becoming more and more urgent, for the sake of human and cosmic survival, to take care of creation. We contribute to symbolic systems that are life-giving, and are not male-centered. Therefore, interaction and reciprocity are neither anthropocentric nor androcentric; rather they lead towards a recreation of existence in all its dimensions.

According to Paul's doctrine, creation and humanity "has been groaning in one great act of giving birth; not only creation but all of us who possess the first-fruits of the Spirit, we too groan inwardly as we wait for our bodies to be set free" (Rom 8:22-23). This may be translated into a language of cosmic rebirth and reciprocity, of communities that exist within the common house of mankind. In other words, different peoples

and cultures may be seen as eco-communities walking on the Earth. Another key teaching of Paul, the apostle of Gentiles, is that the body of Christ, God's body, includes Jews and Gentiles, men and women, different cultures and spiritualities. The body of Christ is one, and it has a plurality of services and of gifts, for the well-being of all its members (1 Corinthians, chapter 12).

Here it may be underlined that a faith-filled humanity is one that acknowledges gifts (charisms) and that gives priority to giving service to others. What about masculinity? Its responsibility is not control over nature, nor making other persons one's subordinates, nor omnipotence. Rather, genuine masculinity consists in sharing life as gift, and sharing reproductive responsibilities. These attitudes have a transcendental background. God is the source for being alive in reciprocity and in community.

If our starting point is Paul's message on the Body of Christ (1 Cor 12:12-30), then the paradigm of reciprocity is absolutely radical. "God has arranged the body so that more dignity is given to the parts which are without it, and so that there may not be disagreements inside the body, but that each part may be equally concerned for all the others. If one part is hurt, all parts are hurt with it. If one part is given special honour, all parts enjoy it" (12:25-26). According to Irene Foulkes the metaphor of one body and interconnected parts "transforms hierarchal relationships and claims to superiority by some members of the church".<sup>8</sup> In general terms, what is crucial is that God has established a radical human reciprocity, in which the weak are indispensable. What is most important is being body-community-of-God.

André Musskopf remarks that Corinthians praised the spiritual while scorning the body; under these circumstances, Paul develops the metaphor of body of the Lord. This biblical message has to be understood within the Latin-American context, since our societies "make of the body a product and a means of production, lacking any deeper meaning".<sup>9</sup> Economic-cultural

structures treat badly bodies of people and even more badly bodies of the poor and of women. For this reason, the biological value of bodies and their social and spiritual meanings have to be reaffirmed. This moves us to a radical critique of hedonistic market relationships and also a confrontation with the media (that destroy human dignity). Persons and other entities are reduced to being objects and their dignity is trampled on. A critique of hedonism emerges from Christian moral standards, and is due to being faithful to God's incarnation in the human condition.

It is most disgusting how things and persons are consumed and thrown away. A critique of commodification of existence does not mean a pessimistic attitude towards modernity. A good critique leads towards alternatives: we admire the beauty of each creature. The greatest challenge is to take care of the beauty of life, shared among people who are different and who discover the Creator's call to joyful reciprocity.

### **3) Masculine Spirituality**

Being faithful to the Spirit of Christ that sets us free is the foundation of our pilgrimage towards happiness. As I write this essay I plead the Spirit to lead all of us, listeners and speakers. "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will lead you ... " (In 16: 13). May she lead us to a spiritual vision and praxis of genuine masculinity.

What happens in our context? There are more and more accents on spirituality. That is certainly good; but, does it confront the systematic masculine appropriation of things and persons? This is not happening by chance, nor is it due to mistakes by few people. The basic problem lies within contemporary civilization; everything is seen as an object for individual consumption, and treated as merchandise. Moreover there is a masculine tendency to mystify objects, including one's body and others' as well. These and other factors make it most difficult for men to be authentically spiritual. As we all know,

spirituality is life-giving here and now, in an incarnated journey together with others.

When Christian institutions are examined, one common denominator is that males are the ones who give normative explanations about God, and who represent Him in a sacramental way. In my particular experience, for many years I wrote and taught theology, speaking as if I were a universal believer (without allowing my listeners and readers to discuss a masculine point of view handed over to them, nor did I acknowledge social and gender understandings of God). I now feel ashamed about that.

That is not the whole picture, thank God! I thank persons and communities who led me into the option for the poor (in the 1960s), and later into cultural and gender perspectives (from the 80s onwards) during a lengthy process of conversion (that continues onwards as I head towards being 67 years old!). It is a gift to be able to understand sacred realities and God's revelation without claiming ownership over it. It is also a gift to acknowledge positive masculine patterns, to interact with feminine wisdom and knowledge about God, and to see correlations between different interpretations of the human journey in history. That has happened in the midst of common people's ways of being Christian; many persons have been leading me in those directions.

Let us now go into the heart of the matter. That God be represented by particular images and persons are theological/sacramental claims that merit discernment. Any specific gender image of the transcendent may become an idol; or it may be a means of having faith. It may also lead to misunderstandings. Why? The mystery of God is neither a he nor a she. However, the divine Presence is not up in the sky, it is rather present in human history and in creation. In terms of relationships, love of neighbour and solidarity with the poor are the main criteria for our encounter with Christ.

In terms of ministry, being a male catholic priest leads some to see me as privileged intermediary and symbol of the

divine. When this happens I ask people to pay attention to the Gospel message about God and the poor. Conditions of marginalized people – and in a special way solidarity with whoever is hungry, unfree, sad, etc., is where the Son of God is encountered. “I was hungry and you fed me ...”, Mathew 25:35ss. The Gospel summons each of us to solidarity with the sick and hungry, with those who lack freedom, etc. This includes an evangelical demand that males interact with fragile realities, and that we affirm potentials of being alive. It is a matter of affirming our own vulnerability and mainly that of others; affirming also our own potentials and mostly that of others. Within each male there is vulnerability, and certainly there is also strength. Being vulnerable is a mediation to encounter God; acknowledging gifts of strength and potentials is also a major mediation.

A complex set of issues is that masculinity (including its spiritual characteristics) is interpreted as mainly a place of power, reason, autonomy, self-esteem, courage, certainty; while the feminine dimensions (including its spirituality) are interpreted as receptive, sacrificial, emotional, caring for others and not for oneself, fragile. As men we have to make special efforts to combine power and frailty, knowledge and sensibility, in order to develop a holistic spirituality. Women have their own difficulties and challenges.

One is thankful to other men who witness a combination of power and intimacy, courage and receptiveness, responsibility and gratuity. It seems to me that most of us need to rediscover – in relationships with other persons and with God – a better blending of compassion and power. Thus there is a flexible responsibility for oneself and for others, compassion and strong principles, pragmatism, solidarity, detachment. As we know such characteristics are found in men and in women, but we men are more challenged to blend them in order to develop an integrated spirituality.

Let me add some personal experiences. Years of sharing with Andean people (in Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador and elsewhere)

had a deep impact on my perceptions of masculinity. In these places, together with modern ceremonies, an important ritual of thanksgiving is addressed to Mother Earth. There are several kinds of signs of gratitude for the everyday gift of being alive. Outstanding symbolic moments are to share food, to welcome a stranger, and the *ayta, wajt'a, dulce Misa/Mesa* (sweet celebrations) that are like a banquet offered to *Pachamama*. Often I participate in a brief ritual called *ch'alla* (aspersion and offering to a sacred entity, made by a man and a woman using a beverage that can be wine, beer or soft drink) that has a meaning similar to a Christian blessing.

The indigenous and *mestizo* masculine experience is deeply spiritual, and it cannot be separated from the feminine experience. Both of them – together and each one having its specificity – are earthy, cosmic, transcendental. Moreover, they are characterized by the pleasure of celebration. As it is well known, magnificent Andean religious festivals that take place during the whole year have masculine and feminine leadership and symbols. These are different, but always related one to the other. Those who perform autochthonous dances and music carry out gender roles and qualities, as it also happens with people attending these ceremonies. As regards connections with the Other, thirty years ago native communities taught me to address God as *Taytacha* and *Tatitu* (= dear Father), which I do up till now.

During a workshop dealing with our spiritual-bodily condition, forty lay leaders of one Andean diocese have been most grateful to me for the chance to strengthen their encounter with God through human events and through interaction with nature. Each person chose a small plant or a tree, contemplating which they had a new spiritual insight. Being part of the body of Christ was reimagined by touching roots, trunks, and leaves (which on that autumn day were dancing with the breeze). Another spiritual exercise was a dialogue on body energies; these have become signs of God's power (that comes not from up high but from down below). Unfortunately, this type of mystique (during centuries of colonial control, and now due

to Christian rationalism) has been censured or devalued. Churchgoers are induced to adhere to “true” masculine religion, and to abandon one’s feminine roots in creation (labelled natural religion) and intercultural/interreligious spirituality (labelled as syncretism).

At times Catholic ceremonies include some native aspects; but usually autochthonous rituals are disqualified. The result is that many persons do not feel free to publicly practice rituals that are dear to them. For this reason, native Latin-Americans who during centuries have believed in the God of Life, during recent decades of church renewal have often suffered marginalization and misunderstanding. Some of them lower their heads and keep silent; others struggle for the acceptance of their own spiritual journey (so as not be driven into androcentric and monocultural patterns). When the spirit of the Gospel becomes the norm, then common people, with all their wisdom and fabulous celebrations, are free to live out their faith in Jesus Christ. Such faith is manifested through cultures and religions which benefit humankind.

The imagery of an earthly/spiritual body of Christ implies a radical renewal of human and of church structures, so that they allow and foster fraternity/sorority. This is one of the doctrinal heritage that Paul handed over to his listeners and through them to all of us. In communities in Rome and Corinth,<sup>10</sup> and later throughout the world, Paul moves men and women to a new life in Christ. What does this imply for us today, here? It mainly calls us to conversion to the crucified and risen Lord present today in humanity. It summons us to ways of human interaction, and faithfulness to the Spirit who makes all anew. It also means leaving behind patriarchal bondage (a major challenge to both men and women), a critique to a minor strand of feminism that opposes reciprocity, and a reconstruction of masculine and feminine spiritualities that encourage the journey of faith.

Throughout these years I am walking with urban and rural common people who – in spite of violence in all its forms,

including androcentrism – do carry out lives in terms of reciprocity. No one may own another person, nor control other’s future. I join their journey of giving birth to new forms of interaction where Jesus is experienced as the Lord of Life. We all have the feeling and conviction that humanity and creation are like the body of God. Reciprocity and of solidarity with the downtrodden (without superiority of one over the other) are signs of what is fundamental: participation in God’s history of salvation.

Allow me to underline this basic experience. Masculine and feminine spirituality grows because of day to day reciprocity and being rooted in the Spirit of Life. Since we are sons and daughters of a merciful Father, there is joyful responsibility among us. As a man, one abandons pseudo-masculine superiority, that looks down on anything seen as female. Such arrogance also damages men of a lower social status. We do strive to acknowledge oneself and others in terms of reciprocity, of spiritual brotherhood/sisterhood, being sons and daughters of a God who graciously transforms the human condition.

This conversation comes to an end. Masculinity is reconstructed in a Christian spiritual journey. This is not easy. Economic and cultural idols dehumanize us men, and turn us against other persons and against nature. So, one has to turn one’s back to androcentric marketing (which makes us obsessive consumers of power gadgets and of what is different from oneself). The radical option is for reciprocity and for enjoyable existence within God. As men we are empowered by relationships, by being not self-centered but rather vulnerable together with others, and by becoming stronger as we assume frailty and lose control over inequity.<sup>11</sup>

Masculinity achieves genuine strength when it embraces human frailty (and specially when it embraces the marginalized). Being vulnerable allows men – in our Latin American contexts – to nurture power. *Machismo* and androcentric patterns can be replaced by institutionalized reciprocity. This happens in everyday forms of solidarity when

persons are in need, in Latin-American festivals, in communities that share scarce goods but in a joyful manner, in social justice and peace initiatives, in silent contemplation of the body of God. Reconstruction of masculinity is one of several radical goals of a fascinating spiritual adventure.

### Notes

Input during a workshop on gender, III World Forum of Theology and Liberation, January 24, 2009, Belém do Para, Brasil. I apologize to English-speaking persons for my limited use of their language.

1. These concerns require scientific resources. See: Mara Viveros, José Olavarria Norma Fuller, *Hombres e identidades de genero. Investigaciones desde America Latina*, Bogota: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2001; Marina Castaneda, *El machismo invisible*, Mexico: Grijalbo, 2002; Rafael Montesinos, *Las rutas de la masculinidad*, Ensayos sobre el cambio cultural y el mundo moderno, Barcelona: Gedisa, 2002; Juan Carlos Callirgos, *Sobre heroes y batallas, Los caminos de la identidad masculina*, Lima: Escuela para el Desarrollo, 1998; Sonia Montecino, M.E. Acuna (comp.), *Dialogo sobre el genero masculino en Chile*, Santiago: Universidad de Chile, 1996; Maria Jose Moreno, "Masculinidades en la cultura de la globalizacion", in J. Olavarria (ed.), *Hombres, identidad/es y violencia*, Santiago: FLACSO, 2001, 37-54; Norma Fuller, "Reflexiones sobre el machismo en América Latina", en T. Valdes y J. Olavarria (eds.), *Masculinidades y equidad de genero en América Latina*, Santiago: FLACSO, 1998, 258-267; José Olavarria y Enrique Moletto, *Hombres: Identidad/es y Sexualidad/es*, Santiago: FLACSO, 2002; Jose Olavarria (ed.), *Hombres, identidad/es y violencia*, Santiago: FLACSO, 2001; José Olavarria, *Hombres a la deriva? Poder, trabajo, sexo*, Santiago: FLACSO, 2001. On gender see: Marlene Strey (org.), *Genero e cultura, quesotes contemporaneas*, Porto Alegre: EDIPUCRS, 2004; Dario Garcia, "Escenarios, imaginarios y construcciones de los cuerpos", en VV.AA., *Reflexiones en torno al feminismo y al genero*, Bogotá: Universidad Javeriana, 2004, 199-210; Humberto Maturana y Gerda Verden-Zoller, *Amor y Juego. Fundamentos olvidados de lo humano*, Santiago: Instituto de Terapia Cognitiva, 1997; John Moore, *Sexualidad y Espiritualidad*, Santiago: Cuatro Vientos, 1994; Arturo Rico Bovio, *Las fronteras del cuerpo. Critica a la corporeidad*, Mexico: J. Mortiz, 1990; Enrique Gomariz, Angela Meentzen (comp.), *Democracia de Genero*, San Jose: GESO, 2000; Nelly Richard, *Masculino/ Femenino, practicas de la diferencia y cultura democratica*, Santiago: Zegers, 1993. See also: Ursula King (ed.), *Religion and Gender*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1995; John Raines, *The Justice Men owe Women, Positive Resources from World Religions*, Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001; Max Oliva, *The Masculine Spirit*, Notre Dame: Ave Maria, 1997; James

Nelson, *The intimate connection, Male sexuality, masculine spirituality*, Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988; Martin Pable, *The Quest for the Male Soul*, Notre Dame: Ave Maria, 1996; Theodore Cohen, *Men and Masculinity*, Toronto: Thompson, 2000; Daniel Welzer-Lang, *Des homes et du masculin*, Lyon: Presses Univ., 1992; Pierre Bourdieu, *La domination masculin*, Paris: Seuil, 2002; E. Badinter, *XY De l'identité masculin*, Paris: Jacob, 1992; Y. Dalloire, *Homme et fier de retre*, Quebec: Option Santé, 2001.

2. In the past I focused on measuring one's existence as fulfilling duties, on one part, or as sharing genuine pleasure, on another part (see *Felicidad Masculina, una propuesta ética*, Chucuito, 2002, 17 -18, 26-27). These anthropological dimensions are linked to economic dynamics; several authors (and in a special way Vincent Miller, *Consuming Religion*, New York: Continuum, 2005) helped me to see the commodification of modern cultures/religions. Lately I am underlining economic-cultural conditions that wrap up masculine stereotypes, and also what challenges us to look for alternatives. The latter implies healthy relationships with other persons, and also contact with the Other who lovingly embraces us. In other words: an emphasis on the spiritual realm present in human kind, concern about the environment, and encounter (in the midst of darkness) with the living God.
3. Pierre Bourdieu and others, *La masculinidad, aspectos sociales y culturales*, Quito: Abya Yala, 1998, 78. Bourdieu also mentions the lack of symmetry in the symbolic interchange between individuals and objects, a problem that is sustained by a "mythical-ritual system".
4. Gabriela Rotondi, *Pobreza y masculinidad*, Buenos Aires: Espacio Editorial, 2000, 119. This issue is deeply examined by Norma Fuller, *Identidades masculinas, varones de clase media en el Peru*, Lima: PUC, 1997.
5. Masculinity is slowly becoming part of theological and pastoral reflections in Latin America. See SOTER (org.), *Genero e Teologia*, Paulinas/Loyola, 2003; Luiza Tomita, "A teologia feminista no contexto de novos paradigmas", *Teologia aberta ao futuro*, Sao Paulo: Loyola/SOTER, 1997, 143-154; Walter Boechat (org.), *O masculino em questao*, Petropolis: Voces, 1997; Nancy Cardoso, "Sagrados cuerpos", *Revista de Interpretacion Biblica Latinoamericana*, 38 (2001), 5-9; *Journal Alternativas*, 10/26 (2004); Leonardo Boff, "O masculino no horizonte do novo paradigma civilizacional", *A voz do Arco-iris*, Brasilia: Letra Viva, 2000, 97-116; Rose Marie Muraro, Leonardo Boff, *Femenino e masculino*, Rio de Janeiro: Sextante, 2002; Ivone Gebara, *Teologia Eco-feminista*, Sao Paulo: Olho d' Agua, 1997; Antonieta Potente, *Un tejido de mil colores. Diferencias de genero, de cultura, de religion*, Montevideo: Doble Clic, 2001; Marcio Fabri dos Anjos, "Relacoes do poder entre homens e mulheres na vida religiosa", in *Genero e poder na vida religiosa*, Sao Paulo: Loyola, 1999, 22-26; Victor H. Silvera

- Lamenta, *Masculino e femenino na vida religiosa*, Sao Paulo: Loyola, 2000; Dolores Alexandre, "Mujeres y hombres en la Iglesia: en busca de una nueva relacion", *Journal CLAR*, 34/1 (1996), 82-94; Andres Torres Q., "Teologia y genero en el cambio de paradigma", in C. Bernabe (dir.), *Cambio de paradigma, genero y eclesiologia*, Estella: Verbo Divino, 1998, 73-86; Juan Jose Tamayo, *Teologia, Pobreza y marginacion*, Madrid: PPC, 1999, 81-114, y "Horizonte feminista" in his *Nuevo Paradigma teologico*, Madrid: Trotta, 2003, 85-110; A. Musskopf y A. Schultz en VV.AA., *A flor da pele*, Sao Leopoldo: EST, 2004, 139-168, 169-193; Francisco Reyes, *Otra masculinidad posible. Un acercamiento biblico-teologico*, Bogota: Dimension Educativa, 2003; Several Authors, *Reimaginando las masculinidades, Revista de Interpretacion Biblica Latinoamericana*, Quito: RECU, 2007; Lucia Riba, "Cuerpos de mujeres y violencia, Una lectura desde la Biblia", in C. Schickendantz (ed.), *Religion, Genero y Sexualidad, Analisis Interdisciplinarios, Cordoba: EDUCC, 2005*, 155-174; Rosaura Barahona, "El varon visto desde los ojos de la mujer", *Cuadernos de espiritualidad*, 171 (2008), 36-40.
6. See Gustavo Gutierrez, *Teologia de /a Liberacion*, Lima: CEP, 1984, 90, 96: "acentuacion de la unidad tendiente a eliminar todo dualismo" because of "la vocacion unica a la salvacion que valoriza cristianamente - aunque de modo diferente al del pasado - toda la historia humana" (that is: theology today emphasizes unity that tends to eliminate all kinds of dualism, due to a common vocation to salvation that values human history).
  7. Concerning the paradigm of reciprocity, see Marshall Sahlins, *Cultura y razon practica*, Barcelona: Gedisa, 1987; Jorge Alberti y Enrique Mayer (comp.), *Reciprocidad e intercambio en los Andes Peruanos*, Lima: IEP, 1974; Emilia Ferraro, *Reciprocidad, don y deuda*, Quito: Abya Yala, 2004; Jose Estermann, "Relacionalidad del todo", *Filosofia Andina*, La paz: ISEAT, 2006, 123-150.
  8. Irene Foulkes, *Problemas pastorales en Corinto*, San Jose: DEI, 1999, 348. Jurgen Becker, *Pablo el apostol de los paganos*, Salamanca: Sigueme, 1996, 508: "la Iglesia es cuerpo de Cristo porque el Espiritu, cuyo ser polifacetico es visible en la comunidad, es el Espiritu de Cristo que mueve y transforma la comunidad". A latinamerican hermeneutics by Anibal Canaveral "Engendrar una nueva masculinidad: aproximacion desde Pablo", *Revista de Interpretacion biblica latinoamericana*, 56 (2007), 137-152; (he examines dominant male forms, and also an alternative masculinity, prompted by Pauline doctrine).
  10. See Rm 1:13, 7:1,4, 8:12,29, 9:3, 11:25, 12:1, 14:10,13,15,21, 15:14,30, 16:1,14,15,17,23; also 1 Cor 1:1,10-11,26, 2:1, 3:1, 4:6, 5:11, 6:5,6,8, 7:12,15,24,29, 8:11,13, 9:5, 10:1, 11:33, 12:1, 14:6,20,26,39, 15:1,6,31,50,58, 16:11,12,15,20.
  11. Adilson Schultz (*op. cit.*, 189) acknowledges that men learn not to speak about what is most important ... because to speak about oneself implies losing power.

## Liberation Theologies for the Twenty-first Century

### - A Mujerista<sup>1</sup> Prolegomenon -

Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz

There are several core elements of liberation theologies that must be clarified and sharpened for these ethical-theological enterprises to remain vital and relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These elements lie at the intersection of method and content. The way the III World Forum on Theology and Liberation outlines the "thematic keys" of the forthcoming gathering makes this amply clear. Liberation theologians have to come to terms with how we do theology, what method we employ to do theology. But we also have to taken into consideration what is the content of liberation theologies - what is the focus of liberation theologies. For example, liberation theologies claim to privilege the poor and the oppressed, hermeneutically and epistemologically. Yet, for the most part, the religious understandings and practices of the poor and the oppressed do not play much of a role in them. The option for the poor and the oppressed is supposed to be the hermeneutical lens of liberation theologians. That means that no theological statements can in any way support or promote oppression - no matter what kind of oppression it is. Yet liberation theologies continue to talk about God and explain what Christians believe about God in exclusively male terms and in hierarchical and authori-

tarian terms that emerge from and are used to rationalize the domination of males around the globe. The vast majority of liberation theologians do not take into consideration that as long as God is male, male is God.<sup>2</sup> As long as God is Lord, those who lord over others, those who control and dominate, will continue to believe they have the right to do so.

In this short article I schematically present three core elements of liberation theologies that need to be seriously considered if these ethical-theological enterprises are going to be worthwhile as we move ahead into the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **A. Of the People, not for the People; Solidarity, not Advocacy; Option for the Poor, not Preferential Option**

Three themes are interconnected in the first element. They must be considered together.

The first theme refers to the goal of the ethical-theological praxis of liberation. Liberation theologies clearly advocate for the poor and the oppressed. This is laudable and in no way do I want to criticize it or do I wish to deviate from this focus. Advocacy is good, laudable, right, and just. However, advocacy, unless done on behalf of oneself, is always tinged with a patronizing and lack of respect for the self-definition of those being advocated for.

Liberation theologies have to move beyond advocacy to in fact include the voices of the poor and the oppressed instead of using them mostly as points of reference or examples. The actual voices of the poor and the oppressed are very often absent from ethical-theological liberation enterprises. Instead what predominates are academic discussions that might be related to but are very distant from the actual people who struggle to survive every day. The actual religious beliefs and practices of poor and oppressed peoples are often disregarded or declared deficient or wrong. Liberation theologians have not

used methods that bring the people's religious beliefs and practices into the heat of liberation ethical-theological discourses.<sup>3</sup>

Some liberation theologies – *mujerista*, womanist, women-centered, feminist gay and lesbian, queer theologies (this is not an exhaustive list) – are done indeed from the perspective of the oppressed by the oppressed. In these theologies, however, where are the voices of the poor? Where is an analysis of the intersection of different forms of oppression that uphold structures of injustice – exploitation, marginalization, minoritization, powerlessness, and violence?

The actual voices of the poor and the oppressed must be central to liberation theologies if we are to claim that we *do* theology, that theology is a praxis. How are theologies of liberation a praxis for those for whom we advocate through this enterprise in which we are engaged? Most of the time it is a praxis for us academicians, for us who write, teach, and preach theologies of liberation. But how do theologies of liberation contribute to the liberation of the poor and the oppressed? To answer this question we need to remember that no one can liberate anyone else, that each one has to liberate herself or himself. From an ethical perspective one must always ask, how do theologies of liberation enable the moral agency of the poor and the oppressed? How are the ways the poor and the oppressed know reality privileged in liberation theologies? How is the way the poor and the oppressed understand reality and deal with reality part of liberation theologies? How much are theologies of liberation enabling the emergence of new knowledge coming from those who are marginalized, who have no way of contributing, of making their voices heard, their point of view valued and considered? How much are theologies of liberation a platform for the poor and the oppressed instead of explanations of church teaching and of what the Bible says?

The second theme is solidarity.<sup>4</sup> Theologies of liberation claim to be in solidarity with the poor and the oppressed. What is solidarity? Unfortunately the term solidarity has been co-opted, and it means not much beyond empathy with the poor

and the oppressed, being aware of them and their struggle, being sensitive to them, supporting them, walking with them? There is nothing wrong with empathy and there is nothing wrong with sympathy, compassion, mercy.<sup>5</sup> However, solidarity is about all of this and much more. Solidarity requires throwing one's lot with the poor and the oppressed, being profoundly bothered materially/financially by the poor and the oppressed, being bothered intellectually, being bothered spiritually.<sup>6</sup> We cannot claim to be in solidarity with others if we do not understand and accept how we are part of each other's "actional routes."<sup>7</sup> We are not in solidarity if we do not understand and accept the fact that our privileges and power – and readers of this article are most probably at least somewhat privileged – impinge on the poverty and oppression of those for whom we advocate. Solidarity is about using whatever privileges one has to undo systems of privileges, even if doing so will radically affect our way of life. Solidarity is about creating shared meanings and understandings, common purpose with the poor and the oppressed. It is about establishing mutuality with the poor and the oppressed. Solidarity is a theory and praxis of liberation: it impacts the goal – liberation – and it always has to be operative in the means, in the struggles for liberation.<sup>8</sup>

The third theme has to do with the option for the poor. Initially that is what was highlighted and required, an option for the poor. As complaints arose from those who are neither poor nor oppressed, theological considerations about the universality of God's love were brought to bear on this issue. It is important to bear in mind that modifying the option for the poor came from theologians.<sup>9</sup> The claim was shifted from "option" to "preferential option." Though undoubtedly God loves without preference or discrimination, to make the option for the poor a matter of preference corrupts the claim; softens it; dilutes it.

What the option for the poor claims is that God opts in a partial and exclusive way for justice. To say God is opting just

preferentially for justice, is to saying that God is partially opting for, or at least open to consider opting for, a little bit of injustice! To talk about a "preferential option" is to move grounding the option from God's justice to a matter of good will on the part of God. If it is a preference, it can stop being a preference. That is the nature of preferences. When "preferential" is added, the option becomes "optional, gratuitous, arbitrary, contingent, disconnected from justice, reduced to 'charity' and benevolence."<sup>10</sup> The option for the poor is not only a priority; it is a clear-cut option. That means that it excludes opting for the non-poor, for the non-oppressed, as non-poor and non-oppressed persons. God loves those who exploit and marginalize, those who do violence and discriminate, and those who dominate and control precisely by opting for the poor and the oppressors to repentance-to radical conversion. But as oppressors, no, God does not opt for them. This follows the centuries old Christian teaching that God loves the sinner but not the sin. And it follows the ethical-theological understanding that the option for the poor is not because they are:

subjectively better or more innocent or pure in their motivations .... it is the place in which they [the poor] find themselves that makes a difference. The perspective of the poor, ... pierced by suffering and attracted by hope allows them, in their struggles, to conceptualize another reality. Because the poor suffers the weight of alienation, they can conceive a hope-full project and provide a dynamism to a new way of organizing human life *for all*<sup>11</sup> (italics in the original text).<sup>11</sup>

The option for the poor needs to be clearly re-stated and its implications need to be carefully spelled out. In today's world more than ever, the option for the poor is a forced option; it has to be made, and not to make it is to make an option for the non-poor.<sup>12</sup> The option for the poor is the only way that the claim that a "new world is possible" can be validated.

## B. Ethical-Theological Liberation Discourses and the *Proyecto Histórico*

There is much criticism of liberation theologies because of their lack of articulation of a historical project. Latin American liberation theology is accused of having had socialism as its *proyecto histórico* and, therefore, since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, its detractors claim that it has lost relevance. *Minjung* theology is considered passé, claiming that the financial developments in Korea since the time of the Park and Chun dictatorships make the *minjung* irrelevant. *Mujerista* theology is accused of not having sufficient followers to have the right to exist as an ethical-theological discourse.

These criticisms, which are not the same as constructive critiques, are based on faulty premises. One of these faulty premises grounds the criticism that liberation theologies have failed to elaborate the specifics of a socio-political-economic plan.

Undoubtedly, a *proyecto histórico* needs a socio-political-economic plan; but that is not all it needs. The task of liberation theologies is not to elaborate social, political (in the sense of political parties and forms of governments) and economic programs and institutions. The task of liberation ethicists and theologians, grounded and involved in the historical reality of oppression, is to denounce injustice and to announce justice in a precise enough way to make moral choice possible, to work to come to shared meanings and understandings, to contribute to healing divisions and creating common purposes. Liberation theologies must clearly state that moral behavior – ways of being and acting – have to “shatter, either partially or wholly, the order of things prevailing ...,”<sup>13</sup> which is one of radical injustice. Likewise, theology follows ethics, liberation theologies cannot say anything about the divine and about human relationship with the divine – to which relationship among humans and between humans and other species and the biosphere is intrinsically connected – that does not promote moral conduct. The task of liberation theologies is

always an ethical-theological task, one that cannot be understood or pursued without understanding the connections that exist between religion and ideology.

Ideology here does not refer to Marx’s understanding of it as “something false, a distortion of the truth for the sake of social interest, a symbolic framework of the mind that legitimates the power and privileges of the dominant groups and sanctions the social evils inflicted on the people without access to power.”<sup>14</sup> Instead, ideology refers to “a system of goals and means that serves as the necessary backdrop for any human option or line of action.”<sup>15</sup> It is in this sense that one can talk of ideologies make religious beliefs operative for “without ideologies faith is as dead as a doornail, and for the same reason that James offers in his epistle: it is totally impracticable (James 2:17).”<sup>16</sup>

The task of liberation theology in relation to a *proyecto histórico*, is to contribute to develop and implement ways of being and acting that can enable and promote fullness of life: liberation. Theology is part of the noetic moment in liberative praxis. This noetic moment – reflection – is not apart from practice/action/engagement with historical reality. Reflection does not precede nor follow action. Praxis is precisely reflective action, a doing that emerges from and is followed by reflection, a reflection on action that contributes to further action. The task of liberation theologies is to relate Christian faith to today’s historical situations out of which they arise, always taking into consideration that liberation (salvation in religious/theological language) is “the only truth” in all liberation struggles.<sup>17</sup>

There are both differences and similarities between ideology and faith. Faith is a “metacosmic matter,” about a reality fully realizable not in historical times. However, faith “has to be anticipated here in this life not only through the spiritual achievements of individual persons but also through visible structures in human society.”<sup>18</sup> Faith/religion and ideology are not collapsible, that is, they are not the same thing. But, at the same time, “faith without ideologies is a dead faith.”<sup>19</sup>

Faith/religion and ideology are intrinsically connected, “faith ... has sense and meaning only insofar as it serves as the foundation stone for ideologies.”<sup>20</sup>

To conclude this argument, theologies of liberation need a *proyecto histórico* but that the task of liberation theologies is not an economic or political task. The task of liberation theologies has to do with historical reality, but its task cannot be confused with that of other disciplines and praxis.

### **C. Completing the Hermeneutical Circle: Another Task of Liberation Theologies**

Are liberation theologies being colonized by the academy and the church? There are many of us who believe that “slowly and methodically, liberation theologies are being sanitized and tamed by the lure of theological legitimization; they are being assimilated. And in this process of assimilation they have lost their edge and risk losing their relevance to the people. I will even be as bold as to claim that liberation theologies are no longer free, but captive to the academic enterprise of cold, objective, and impotent detachment.”<sup>21</sup>

How is this colonizing of liberation theologies happening? A concrete example referred to above has been the move to use “preferential” in front of option for the poor and the oppressed. This has resulted in taming one of the central tenets of liberation theologies. Another is the lack of serious attention to the religious beliefs and practices of the poor and the oppressed – hermeneutically and epistemologically privileging them.

A third way in which liberation theologies have been tamed lies in the failure to complete the hermeneutical circle of suspicion. Ethical-theological liberation discourses, listening to the cries of the poor and the oppressed, became and continue to be suspicious of the “ideological superstructure in general and ... [of] theology in particular.”<sup>22</sup> This suspicion must be applied to all of the superstructure, including religion

and theology. Liberation of theologies have failed to do this to a large extent. In ethical-theological liberation discourse there is much suspicion of the status quo, of the economic-political-social-religious reality. There is much written about this suspicion, about the analysis done by liberation theologians of the historical reality of injustice. However, there is little or at times no application of the suspicion to theology and religion itself.<sup>23</sup> This is why, as already mentioned, God continues to be referred to in exclusively male terms. This is why God is called Lord – which has the same meaning as “*patron*,” “*master*,” “*boss*.” This is why suffering continues to be given religious and theological values.<sup>24</sup> Most of the time ethical-theological liberation discourses use different words but say the same thing about God and about the relationship of human beings to the divine as has been said in the past.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of the of the III World Forum on Theology and Liberation (Belem, 2009) is to provide “a space for a theological reflection ..., looking for new paths of relationship and systematization, new methodologies and possible dialogues in order to contribute to the public debate about the future of the life on earth.” The “thematic keys” of the Forum further amplifies the focus making clear the need to continue to be committed to and think through the implications of the option for the poor, of solidarity. The Forum calls people together to contribute to a *proyecto histórico* that will make possible for life in the planet Earth to continue. Each and every one of the “thematic keys” calls for the participants not just to analyze unjust situations but to do theology. The Forum calls the participants to complete the hermeneutical circle and boldly bring the voices of the poor and the oppressed, including our exploited biosphere, to the theological enterprise. Only if this is done can one continue to talk about liberation theologies in the years ahead.

## Notes

1. *Mujerista* theology is a liberation theology enunciated from the justice struggles, the religious beliefs, and religious practices of Latinas living in the USA. See Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, *Hispanic Women: Prophetic Voice in the Church* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988; second edition Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992; revised third Scranton, Penn.: The University of Scranton Press, 2006); Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, *En La Lucha – In The Struggle: Elaborating a Mujerista Theology*, 2004 revised edition (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993, revised second edition, 2004).
2. Mary Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1968. Reprint; Boston: Beacon Press, 1985).
3. Of course there are exceptions, i.e., Ernesto cardinal, *The gospel of Solentiname* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1982).
4. Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, *Mujerista Theology – A Theology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996), Chapter 5. An earlier version of this chapter was published in *Lift Every Voic – Constructing Christian Theologies from the Underside*, eds. Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite and Mary Potter Engel (San Francisco: Haper And Row, 1990; revised second edition, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1998).
5. Though the title of the book and the opening essay highlight mercy, Jon Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy – Taking the Crucified People from the Cross* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1994), moves to the understanding of solidarity I proposed in 1989.
6. See John O'Brien, *Theology and the Option for the Poor* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992), Chapter 5.
7. Calvin Schrag, *Communicative Praxis and the Space of Subjectivity* (Bloomington, Ind.: University of Indiana Press, 1985 cited in Mark Kline Taylor, *Remembering Esperanza – A cultura-Political Theology for North American Praxis* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1990), 3.
8. See, Isasi-Diaz, *Mujerista Theology*, Chapter 5; also Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, *JUSTICIA: A Revolutionary Praxis of Care and Tenderness* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), Chapter 4.
9. See Tony Misfud, "La Cultura de la solidaridad como proyecto etico," *Cristianismo y Sociedad* 1997 Vol. XXXV/1, No. 131: footnote 18, 52-52. At Puebla, contrary to Medellin, the documents talk about "preferential love for the poor" (No. 382, for example).
10. José Maria Vigil, CFM, "The Option for the Poor is an Option for Justice, and Not Preferential – A New Theological-Systematic Framework for the Option for the Poor," in *Just Good Company – A Cyberjournal of Religion and Culture* (May 15, 2004); <http://www.westcoastcompanions.org/jgc/2.1/hometext.htm>; accessed June 30, 2004.
11. José Miguez Bonino, "Nuevas tendencias en teología" *Pasos Enero* 1987, No.9: 22.
12. See Roger L. Shinn, *Forced Option – Social Decisions for the Twenty-First Century* 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1991).

13. Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia* Eng. Trans (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, Harvest Book, 1936), 192 cited in Juan Luis Segundo, *A Liberation of Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1976), 100.
14. Gregory Baum, *Religion and Alienation* (NY: Paulist Press, 1975) 34.
15. Segundo, 102.
16. *Ibid.*, 121.
17. *Ibid.*, 118. Segundo is citing James Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1970), 17.
18. Aloysius Pieris, *An Asian Liberation Theology* (Maryknoll; Orbis Books, 1988), 25.
19. Segundo, pp. 106-110.
20. *Ibid.*, 109.
21. Luis G. Pedraja, "And the Truth Shall Set You Free: Liberation Theology, Praxis, and Colonization." *Apuntes Year 28, No.2* (Summer, 2008).
22. Segundo, 9.
23. A bright and brave exception is Ivone Gebara. See, for example, "The Face of Transcendence as a Challenge to the Reading of the Bible in Latin America," in *Searching the Scriptures – A Feminist Introduction*, ed. Elisabeth Schussler-Fiorenza (New York: Crossroads, 1993), 172-186.
24. For a radical critique of suffering and the cross as central to Christianity see, Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker, *Saving Paradise – How Christianity Traded Love of This World for Crucifixion and Empire* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2008).

## **Women's Prophetic Vocation Towards the Conservation of God's Creation**

Nunuk P. Murniti

### **Introduction**

Women and men were born from her/his mother. God has created the womb in a woman's body. What significance has this reality? Is it not that women are called in a special way to care for human and all life, using all their physical, mental, affective and spiritual potentials? Nevertheless women find it difficult to care for life all by themselves because of societal and environmental constraints. They need to be fit physically, psychologically and mentally and for this they need healthy food, clean water and vegetables etc. to sustain their reproductive capabilities. It is imperative that a woman keeps herself in good health for her offspring. Every new born child has first to be fed by her/his mother at least for a few months before she/he shifts to other food gradually. A mother could only feed her child if she is in good health and then later according to what she can afford and find. A good environment free of pollution is vital to preserve a woman's reproductive health. Chemical pesticide pollution of rice, corn, vegetables and fruits etc. has negative impact on women's bodies. This impact is drastically felt on the infant before birth and later when she suckles her baby. It is clear that a woman's health has much to do with the health of a baby born to her.

In my endeavours as a defender of women's rights, I experienced in 2000, this tragic human drama in Buyat Pante, North Sulawesi in Indonesia. There, a gold mining Company 'New Mont', used to discharge all the tailing into the Buyat Bay. The economy of the fisher-folk in Buyat Pante was mainly built around this Bay. As the waters of this Bay continued to be polluted by the arsenic chemicals, mercury, manganese, antimony etc. large numbers of fish were destroyed while others moved away from the Bay. Moreover, the chemicals from the tailing had contaminated the river close by as also the wells of the people that gave them drinking water. This gradually affected the health of the population, beginning with children who first developed a kind of itch which later became wide open sores all over their bodies. Women's menstrual cycle was affected as well, besides their falling prey to this itch. At menstruation women began to pass black clots of blood and those women who had been pregnant gave birth to unhealthy children with scaly skins most of whom died before they reached the age of five. This tragic situation made me understand the importance of clean water for the health of all people, especially that of women and their reproductive health

### **Threat to Human Health and Life by the Degradation of Land and Water**

The poet, Samuel Taylor Coleridge in his poem, 'The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner' wrote: "Water, water everywhere, but not a drop to drink!" It is of the utmost importance to preserve water efficiently as clean water continues to become scarce by the day. According to the United Nations Report on Water Development, by the middle of this century 60 countries around the world would suffer from lack of sufficient water. Around 98% of water on the earth is salty and is unfit for consumption. Only 1% of water on this earth is suitable, and much of it is saved as snow and ice in the Poles.<sup>1</sup> Today the world is becoming more and more aware of the consequences of ecological degradation: Tsunamis, earthquakes, floods, land slides are more frequent. Climate change could

have drastic effects on all life on the earth. The following factors need to be considered when one tries to grapple with the issue of water:

- underground water resources continue to decrease, even in bays, rivers and swamps.
- Water resources are not equally available in all parts of the world.
- Availability of water has led to wars breaking out in border areas of several countries.
- Developing countries are being pressurized to privatize their water resources by World Financial Institutions to receive foreign aid.<sup>2</sup>

It is important to note that much of human food depend on agricultural products. The global use of water for agrarian purposes is 80%, for industry is 20% and for households is 8%. More than half of the big rivers in this world have been polluted by industries, also Bays and sea shores. Illnesses related to unclean water like typhus, malaria and skin ailments lead to 5 million deaths every year, mostly among children.<sup>3</sup>

About 25% of bottled water is tap-water and according to Natural Resources Defence Council (NRDC) in US, it does not comply with the request for microbiological cleanliness.<sup>4</sup> The Mineral Water Industry gets a lot of profit from the sale of environmental resources. Perrier Group, operated by Nestle Firm is the second biggest water industry in the world. Nestle owns 30% of the market of mineral water. Danone has 15%, and Pepsi and Coca Cola are runners-up for the water industry. The value of this industry is 22 billion and would increase by 30% of its potential every year.<sup>5</sup>

During this century water would become the most valued commodity next to gold and oil. The World Trade Organization (WTO) and the General Agreement on Trade and Services (GATS)

manage water through laws and regulations which support Multi-National Corporations. The International Monetary Fund and World Bank exert the pressure for privatization of water as a requirement to obtain credits from them. Privatization of water is a tool used by Multi-National Corporations, for making water a commodity for accumulation of greater profit.

### **The Growing Feminist Consciousness**

In Asia, soil and water are considered as female symbols, while wind and fire are considered to be male symbols. Nature is the source of food and life. Ancient people lived on whatever they could find from nature. Men's and women's bodies are differently formed biologically and their food and water requirements vary accordingly. In the olden days, people lived near caves and forests to be able to find the water they needed for cleanliness and maintaining their health, specially for the reproductive health of women. Women protected the sources of water with great care as they realized the importance of water for cleanliness and health, especially during menstruation. Javanese women called menstruation by the term, 'nggarap banyu' which in English means 'to manage water,' because during this period they needed much water. The woman needs a lot of fresh vegetables, roots, fruits etc which could be easily found in forests. In the foetal stage, the infant swims in the foetal membrane water, the water of life for the unborn infant. At birth it is the foetal membrane water that precedes the birth of the child. This water makes child birth easier biologically.

That water is life is a universally accepted fact. Yet, this deepest meaning of water has been unfortunately lost by many people, including women during the years.

Around ten thousand years ago, a woman from a plant gathering tribe returned home after a long day of collecting seed in the wilderness. She stumbled and the basket with the seed fell on the ground. The woman collected all the seeds as best as she could, but inevitably some seeds remained buried

in the soil. The rains came, winter and spring passed and when the woman went out the following summer to collect the seeds, she happened to pass by the place where she had dropped the seeds the previous summer. Much to her surprise, she noticed grain growing in abundance on that spot, which she joyfully collected. Then she scattered more seeds on that particular spot and to her delight was able to make a good collection of seeds the following summer. This happened somewhere in the Middle-East's fertile crescent – the arc that extends from Palestine through Syria, southern Turkey, Iraq and western Iran. This is the first recorded incident of a woman involved in agriculture.<sup>6</sup> Women intuitively have the knowledge to plant food material, guided by their experience of meeting the food requirements of their children and community. Every human is nourished with what his/her mother provides even from the time of conception in the womb. Food then becomes a feminine concept.

The following story dating from the 1950s is from Yogyakarta, Indonesia. My grand-parents, who were peasants lived in the Merapi's valley, a fertile agricultural region. Here the people plant paddy, corn, cassava and vegetables. The women in this region could plant whatever they wished since the men accepted that the women were capable of managing the food requirements of the community. It was held that women knew better the quality of food and water needed for healthy living. My grandmother was a leader of this agricultural community with special responsibility for seed, fertilizer and also to care for the numerous water resources found as rivers, swamps and also as small waterways. In this village the people had different rituals for feeding the soil, animals like rats, tigers that come from Mount Mearapi. Banana 'raja', was considered to be good food for the soil as it was rich in glucose. My grandmother made green fertilizer mixed with ash from dry leaves. Before the planting period the soil is fed with this organic fertilizer. When the young paddy begins to appear, she used to feed the rats so as to prevent them from eating the young sweet sheaves that attract the rats. She was attentive to the needs

of the animals as well and showed her care for them. This is village women's way of caring for life, manifesting their concern for ecology. The women show great responsibility in caring for and in controlling the use of water and also in choosing good seeds, using good fertilizer and in controlling pests etc. The division of labour in these villages did not depend on sex but on the natural potential of women to perform these tasks, all agrarian societies acknowledging this natural potential of women.

These stories clearly show that formerly in ancient societies women were largely responsible for cultivation of crops, for food, water and the protection of the environment. Life is intimately related to ecology and fostering of life demands a loving care of the environment and women have fulfilled this task with great love for all. Unfortunately, structural transformation introduced through industrialization of agriculture has destroyed this feminist idiom and eliminated this responsibility from women. This led to the loss of this feminist principle and ideology of women being responsible for food production and the care of the environment. Unfortunately, today even many women are not aware of this.

### **Theological Reflection**

Water is a unique gift and of vital importance to all life systems, ecology as well as human life and symbolizes every step in the growth of human life. Ancient myth and modern science agree that water is the origin of life. The human being is conceived in the foetal membrane water. Water has its own cycle of movements, rains falling on all without discrimination. The sources and availability of water cannot be monopolized by any person or organization for one's own profit. When State policies tend to privatize water at the behest of international organizations to the detriment of its own citizens, then availability of water becomes a human rights issue. Scripture shows that God is the origin of all life. The biblical story opens with a vision of darkness, wind and water (Gen. 1:2) Out of the

Creator's Will the elements emerged. Formless matter takes form. The Creator fills the void with land and water (Gen.1: 6-10). The Creator inaugurates the Creation by his power, and there was light (Gen.1:3). Again and again, act by act, the Creator uttered his creative word and it happened as he wished. The Scriptures mention that God saw that his creation was good (Gen.1:12). Creation mirrored the goodness of the Creator in the responsive relationship of all species. Creation is God's gift to all beings, specially to humans because of God's great love. Therefore the Psalms praise the Creator as the one who sustains what we now call the eco-system, the web of life (Psalms 104:10-12; 16:18, 24).

The Prophetic tradition views pollution as a biblical term that conveys God's disgust at the moral degradation in human relationships and its impact on God's beloved Earth. In our day the word 'pollution' is used to refer to environmental degradation. The Prophets obviously lacked our scientific knowledge, but they were highly sensitive to the interaction that knit the human community to the natural environment and the divine purpose. The prophets saw that 'pollutant' entering the sensitive web of life at one point spreads quickly through the whole. Although concerned about the impact of pollution upon human welfare, they were equally concerned about God's honour and the well-being of the environment (Is.24: 4-6). They always spoke out when Kings abused their power to destroy the environment as the source of life. The prophets' mission to proclaim justice in the world also included justice towards nature and the eco-system. This new vision of justice culminated in the covenant between the Creator and the created. The land is removed from politics to the realm of ethical decision. Those in power, a small minority do not care any more for this covenant. Being materially oriented in life has put sustainability at risk. Power politics involved in economic development for the accumulation of wealth on a global and local level continue their destructive trends with no concern to ecological interests.

Jesus' Good News is an invitation to be embraced by the Reign of God that is being realized in the world. The Gospel of John begins with, "In the beginning was the Word..." (Jn. 1:1). This is an identification of Christ in the work of creation (Jn. 1: 1-5). Out of this creative process emerged the world. Jesus came to this world to renew the creation of God. The Kingdom that Jesus announced embraces all life in the Universe: nature, plant, animal and human. The parables that Jesus used in his teaching deals with nature, agriculture, food and life. He condemned the greed for power and wealth that brought about unnecessary poverty and inhuman oppression. Today, if Jesus were there he would definitely question various state policies and global trends that ignore the needs of majority of the humans and the rights of nature, led by big industries striving for maximum of wealth accumulation. These policies are imposed on developing nations by international organizations such as WB, IMF and WTO, for the benefit of the wealthy countries in the northern hemisphere. The suspicious relationships between northern and southern hemispheres due to this, is one of the world's biggest problems. This type of unjust situations existed in the time of Jesus as well, though not on a global scale. Jesus has taught us how to face these situations of injustice, specially that of unjust power. In Jesus' perspective, 'power' is not meant to have power over other humans, beings and nature to control them at will. Jesus speaks of the life-giving power of God. Jesus spoke to Nicodemus of a rebirth which Nicodemus failed to grasp fully. What Jesus meant was that one had to be born in water and the spirit (Jn.3: 7-15) and not from the flesh. In the Gospel of John the religious leaders are the symbol of power among the Jews. These leaders looked down on the people leading them like the blind leading the blind. Jesus in asking Nicodemus to be born of water and the spirit asked him to change this perspective on power to the power that comes from deep within the heart in love and compassion to serve the people and to foster all life in all its forms and integrity.

Within the Christian tradition, Franciscan spirituality has deep relationship with nature. Saint Francis of Assisi admired God's creation and his spirituality was born through his intimate communion with nature. He called water, 'sister water'. Ecology is our sibling who provides us with everything we need in life. Our responsibility is to care for nature with great solicitude. In the *Earth as Revelatory* a modern theologian, Thomas Berry rejoices over the earth's evolutionary history and its revelatory dimension. Through analysis he shows how people today, especially those in industrial countries have misinterpreted the Myth of Creation and the Vision of the Reign of God in the Bible to mean material progress through accumulation of wealth and power. To Berry, today, every day and every moment is a moment of revelation when we are made aware how the Divine operates in and through the Universe.

The feminist theologian, Sallie McFague, rejects the enlightenment perspective which separates God from his creation, the Cosmos, the World, all beings and the human. This view has led people to see themselves as separate from the rest of creation, and to objectify the world and use it at will with placing God at a distance. She proposes a need to rethink this view of God as this view affects how we see ourselves and the rest of creation. Humans today, hold in their hands the fate of millions of species in nature as well as their own. There is an urgent need to re-envision God in relation to creation and life. The view on God as King or as Father are only metaphors. New metaphors are needed to see God in relation to humans and the Cosmos in a loving embrace. She sees the earth as God's body and God's incarnation through Jesus manifests God's passionate love and bonding with God's creation. Seeing the earth as God's body will permit Christians to profoundly change their relationship with the world to one of caring and fostering life.<sup>7</sup>

### **Let us Join the Social Movement to Change the World**

Faith without good works is no faith at all. Our doing of theology has to be accompanied by concrete action. In the prophetic dimension we need to proclaim justice and peace to all of creation. We also need to build awareness in people on ecological issues and concerns. As women, we need to re-claim our original responsibility of caring for food, environment, water and life, taking over once again the care for the protection of soil, water, herbs, seeds and sovereignty of food production. The wisdom of women that emerges from this women's ideology should animate all families, social units and communities to inspire governments to take the correct course of action. Feminist potential in the villages should be made available to empower all women and harness all their survival wisdom and energy for the preservation of life and nature. Women power could them become a motor of social change by initiating Movements for the fostering of all life in inter-connectedness and inter-dependence.

#### **Notes**

1. UNEP, *Prediction of Global Ecology*
2. ROB Boden, *Water supply: Our Impact on the PLANET* (Hodder Wayland 2002).
3. WWW. Worldwater.org
4. Water for All Campaign, Public Citizen ([www.citizen.org/cmep/water](http://www.citizen.org/cmep/water))
5. Ibid
6. John Madeley, *Food for All, the Need for a New Agriculture*, ZED Books, 2002, p. 1
7. Nancy C. Wright & Donald Kill, *Ecological Healing, A Christian Vision*. Orbis Books, NY, 1993

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