

# *Voices*



FROM THE THIRD WORLD

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Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians

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## THEOLOGY FOR ANOTHER POSSIBLE WORLD

Asociacion Ecumenica de  
Teologos del Tercer Mundo

Association Oecumenique des  
Theologiens du Tiers Monde

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**VOICES FROM THE THIRD WORLD**

is a bi-annual publication of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT)

**Annual Subscription Rates**

*For Asia and African Countries*

Air Mail                      US\$ 15  
Sea Mail                      US\$ 10

*All Other Countries*

Air Mail                      US\$ 18  
Sea Mail                      US\$ 12

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Please pay subscription by Bank Draft payable to the "Voices, C.S.S. Bookshop" and forward the same to

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Telephone: 0469-2630389, Telefax: 0469-2634936  
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This periodical is indexed in *Religion One: Periodicals*, the *Index to Book Reviews in Religion*, *Religion Indexes: Ten Year Subset on CD-ROM*, and the ATLA Religion Database on CD-ROM, published by the American Theological Library Association, 820 Church Street, Evanston, IL60201-5613. E-mail: [atla@atla.com](mailto:atla@atla.com)  
Website: [www:http://atla.library.vanderbilt.edu/atla/home.html](http://atla.library.vanderbilt.edu/atla/home.html)

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Vol. XXVIII, No.1

June 2005

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## Editorial

### A THEOLOGY FOR ANOTHER POSSIBLE WORLD

The *World Social Forum* (WSCF) has become an annual event, bringing together thousands and thousands of social action groups or NGOs around the world. This year it was held again in Porto Allegre, Brazil in January 2005. Numerous groups that represent a variety of specific concerns of people's struggles congregating together to envision a "possible another world" is significant to all who are committed to building a just world. A celebrative event, it is too early to know the course of action the groups together envisage and strategize for the evolution of a different world. However, the message is loud and clear; The present world that is being shaped by empire builders, multinationals, and global financial institutions is inimical to the life of people at large, and endangers all life on earth.

A new dimension was added to this year's efforts. It was the get together of a Forum of theologians prior to the meetings of the WSCF. About two hundred theologians who are committed to the liberation paradigm participated in this event. They were from all continents, not only from the 'third world' as it normally happens. The Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) played an important part as one of the sponsors. Thanks to the network of theologians from Latin America, especially in Brazil, and their untiring efforts.

It provided yet another refreshing and stimulating time of sharing about and imagining together a “possible another world”, and the place of theology in it.

Some of the papers presented at the Forum are included in this issue of the *Voices*. We regret that we could not publish some excellent contributions presented in the Spanish, French and Portuguese, as translations of them into English are not yet available in print.

It is impossible to give a summary of the discussions. But two trends are discernible. One, the analysis of the present world and its mechanism of oppression has deepened to include not only economic and social factors, but also the cultural and ecological dimensions. In fact one of the key-note presentations reminded us of the tyranny of “monoculture” that is dominant in our world of knowledge, and in the economic and social systems, curtailing the space for, or even an imagination of, another world. We are not free even to dream of a different world. This remains a cultural and spiritual catastrophe. Perhaps this deep crisis should be the starting point of our theological reflection and response.

Two, we need to enlarge the scope of liberation as a theological category, especially to include an ecological narrative. Ecology is here understood in a broader perspective to include a new world view and value system. To build an alternate world we need alliances across the board-of environmentalists, multiculturalists, spiritualities, and the groups committed to gender justice and other collectives in our common struggle. The issues also assume a wide range of topics, from sexuality to political culture. Theology plays a critical role in the interface of all these realities, interrogating with them, and providing broad strokes of God’s purpose for all God’s creation.

Peace,

*K. C. Abraham*

## **GOD OF ALL THE NAMES AND INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE**

*Michael Amaladoss, S.J.*

Another world is possible. But it is only possible through a transformation of this one. Such a transformation involves the integral liberation of the humans and of the world, and it cannot happen without transformation in the fields of cultures and religions. The transformation of religions is, however, complex. Religions tend to be both legitimating and prophetic. In their attempt to become relevant to a particular situation religions get socially and politically contextualized. They justify existing economic and socio-political structures. The caste system in India, slavery and Apartheid as well as socio-economic inequalities have been justified in this way. At the same time, in the name of the deeper values or of the Transcendent they witness to, the religions also challenge people and their living situations and structures to change. Every religion, in this sense, has both oppressive and liberative

characteristics. They may be represented by different groups within it. Institutions tend to be conservative while charismatic persons or movements tend to be prophetic. The prophetic and the liberative dimensions of religions seek to remake the world. They are animated by hope. Not only do they affirm that a new world is possible; they claim to offer ways of attaining it. Hinduism quests for freedom from the burden of the cycle of births in this world by promoting righteous action without attachment. Buddhism seeks to transcend a life of suffering by rooting out desire or clinging. Christianity searches for liberation from sin and its oppressive structures by love and selfless service of the others. Islam aims at promoting universal justice and community by obedience to God's law.

One would have thought that these religions can collaborate in freeing the people of their sufferings in this world and usher in a new one. But a look around the world shows us that religions, as a matter of fact, seem to be part of the problem. Flashpoints like Iraq, Palestine, Bosnia, Northern Ireland, Sudan, Kashmir, the Philippines, Indonesia and even Thailand point to underlying inter-religious tensions all over the world, and it has created an atmosphere of self-defensive fear. Religious pluralism, therefore, is not merely a fact, but also a problem. For the metacosmic religions it is not merely a social and political problem; it is also a religious one, if they think of themselves as the only true religion. Among Christians, however, there has been in recent times an increasingly positive appreciation of other religions and a desire to dialogue and collaborate with them in building a new world. This new theological outlook has not yet gained wide acceptance, at least in official circles, and needs still to be explained and defended. But it is crucial for any effort at building another world. I would suggest that all religions need to develop such a positive outlook towards other religions. Before I outline this new outlook in theology, let us look a little more closely at the situation that has given rise to it. All theology is, after all, contextual.

## Religions in Conflict

The fact of religious pluralism in the world needs no demonstration. That today their mutual relationships are in a conflictual mode, more or less hostile, if not violent, is also obvious.<sup>1</sup> A glance at history will show that inter-religious conflict has always been there. When we are the victims we call them persecutions which produce martyrs. Why should religions be in conflict? I think that there are two inter-related reasons.

The first reason is that *religion is used as a political tool*.<sup>2</sup> Politics has a social base: a group, a nation, an empire. The source of unity of such a group can be *external*, like political or military domination or simply territory or *internal* like language, ethnicity, culture or religion. When empires collapse and nation-states emerge such principles of identity and unity are particularly in demand. Ancient Egypt and Rome had state religions where the king was divinized. People who did not pay homage to the king were considered strangers, even enemies. When the Roman emperors became Christian, they used Christianity as a unifying force, even calling ecumenical councils to ensure this. Islam does not make a distinction between religion and politics. Even today, where Muslims are a majority, Islam is the religion of the state. Christianity enjoys a quasi-official role in Europe and America, in spite of the recent European Constitution. Nepal is a Hindu kingdom. Sri Lanka, Thailand and Burma are Buddhist states. Japan is Shinto. In most countries minority religious groups are tolerated. The impact of a certain brand of Christianity on the recent elections in the USA is too well known to need comment. Religion is therefore used as a source of identity and community building, besides justifying the existing situation. Rooted in ultimate, even transcendent, dimensions of life it is perhaps the strongest force for social cohesion. Politicians consciously use religion as an easy means of bringing and knitting people together into a group. Such a unity would embrace and transcend even economic and socio-political inequalities. People who

belong to the same religion are made to feel that they share the same economic and political interests. Even where individual rights are affirmed, social relations are governed by group identities. In a majoritarian democracy the religion of the majority is privileged. Recent stories centring round crucifixes in the class room, both in Germany and Italy are illustrative. In India, which has a secular constitutional framework, a Hindu party has been seeking, unsuccessfully, political domination by a simplistic identification of culture, religion and nationality. The Islamic community or *umma* seeks to transcend national boundaries. In such situations, though the real causes for inter-religious conflict are political, supported by economic interests, religious symbols are used to motivate the masses. It may even be that the leaders of such movements are not themselves believers in the religion that they make use of as a political tool. But they certainly play with the simple faith of the masses.

Another reason for inter-religious conflict is that metacosmic religions, claiming to be based on a special revelation of God or on the privileged experience of a founder, consider themselves to be the unique or the better way to achieve the goal of human life, however it may be described.<sup>3</sup> Christianity claims that Jesus is the only saviour and that every one who is saved is related, in some way, to the Church. Islam thinks that every one is born a Muslim, because it is the natural religion. Buddhism stresses that the only way to nirvana is the path that has been shown by the Buddha. The Hindus believe that whatever practices various religions may follow, their goal is experiential, non-dual oneness with the Absolute. The religions are open to others, but on their own conditions. Even such limited openness disappears when they become political tools. They further radicalize the socio-political division. The religious conflict is interpreted in the context of an ongoing cosmic conflict between good and evil. One identifies oneself with God, while the other, the enemy, is identified with the devil. The others are then demonized and violence against them is deemed a virtue. Religions with a sacrificial tradition can also justify most violence as having a

sacrificial significance. So we have the crusades, the jihads and the holy wars. At that stage, people no longer feel guilty for killing the religious other; they may even consider it a sacred duty. One is even ready to sacrifice one's own life in fulfilling it.

Any theology developed in this context will have a double role. On the one hand, it has to help in the purification and transformation of religion itself into a truly liberative force. On the other hand, it has to make religion into a collaborative force rather than a cause for conflict and violence. In this essay, taking the first necessary step for granted, I shall focus on the second dimension of inter-religious relationships.

### **Search for a Method**

There are two ways of approaching the phenomenon of religious pluralism. The first looks at them as it were from the outside. One may claim it to be an 'objective', 'scientific' or 'philosophical' approach. The other looks at them from within one's own religious tradition in which one believes and to which one is committed. I think that the latter is the proper theological approach. Let me illustrate.

Some look at religion in an abstract manner as an effort to apprehend and reach out to the 'Real' or as a way to human liberation.<sup>4</sup> Religions are obviously many. This pluralism is then approached with a readymade framework: exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism. A religion is said to be exclusive if it claims to be the only way. It is inclusive, if it tolerates other religions, but on its own conditions. It is pluralistic if it accepts many ways. Inter-religious conflict can be avoided only if a pluralistic position is adopted. At first sight, such a framework looks like a useful tool to classify theologies of religion. If we look at Christian theology, for example, some claim that the Church is the only way to salvation. These are the exclusivists. Others accept a certain role for other religions but suggest that Christianity is the best way or has the fullness of the means of salvation. They are the inclusivists. The pluralists affirm that Christianity is one true way to

salvation; but there can be other equally true or effective ways. If all religions are not the same, at least they play the same role in human society. Some philosophers may even suggest cynically that the really “Real”, if it exists, is after all beyond all these human efforts to understand and express it. This framework of “exclusivism, inclusivism, pluralism” has been dominating the field of reflection on religious pluralism in recent years. Theologians of religion seem to feel obliged to take a stand in relation to it. Even theologians who refuse to adopt the scheme are forced into it. The problem is that this is a ‘liberal’ view. Few believers in any religion will feel comfortable with such a scheme. I do not think that this framework is a useful tool for theological reflection. We cannot have a universal theology of religions.<sup>5</sup>

Liberation theologians, more than others, are aware that the starting point of theological reflection is faith commitment. This has two elements. One is the experience of life with its sufferings, problems and questions. The other is a faith vision which helps one to confront and live this life. Theological reflection is a correlation between these inter-linking elements. Such a correlation can lead to mutual transformation. We seek to transform life in the light of our faith commitment. On the other hand, our understanding and expression of faith may also change in the light of our experience and struggles. Today we experience religious pluralism not only as a fact but also as a problem. If we wish to adopt a positive, dialogical approach to other religions, then we must find a space for other religions within our theological world. Every religion must make a similar effort to make space for other religions within its own theological framework.<sup>6</sup> Only then can they dialogue at the level of faith. I think that it is at this level that one can speak of real inter-religious dialogue. Only that kind of inter-religious encounter will qualify as inter-religious dialogue. Let me explain.

### **Collaboration and Dialogue**

In a society where there are many religious groups, people have to live together. This can be done in various ways. A first model is

that of a religion-free public social order.<sup>7</sup> It refuses to give religion any kind of public, social role. Religion is privatized, so to speak. This happens in countries like China and France. People are free to practice any religion of their choice. This freedom is a human right. So long as the exercise of this right does not interfere with the right of others to practice their own religion and does not upset public order the State must respect and protect it. Collaboration between religious groups at the secular level is possible and necessary. But religions do not enter the scene. The Decree on Religious Freedom of the Second Vatican Council, for example, did not go beyond this level. It demanded freedom for religions in civil society. But civil society itself should be free of any religious elements. Communist states seek to impose such a religion-free social and political order. Secular states like France also try to do the same as can be seen in the recent case of Muslim girls wearing the head scarf in state schools.

This model, however, encounters two problems. First of all, the multi-religious community must agree on economic and socio-political values that it wants to pursue. If religions are to be kept out of the picture on what principles can these values be based? The French would advocate reason. The Chinese would advocate ideology. The question is whether every one would agree on reason and/or ideology as adequate sources for a social vision and values. Many would feel that only religion, in so far as they speak of ultimate questions in life, can be the root of such vision and values. They would say that in this case reason and ideology are functioning as quasi-religions. The second problem is that no true religious believer would agree that his/her religious faith should control only his/her private life and should have nothing to say about his/her social and public life.<sup>8</sup> I am sure that liberation theologians would be particularly sensitive to the attempt to reduce religion to the purely private sphere.

The alternate model would be that each religious group seeks to develop its own vision and values for social life. In a multi-religious

situation, different religious groups seek, through dialogue, to arrive at an 'overlapping' consensus regarding visions and values that they wish to pursue together in collaboration.<sup>9</sup> The religions therefore are allowed a certain public presence and role in civil society. Religious groups enter into discussion, mutual persuasion and consensus formation in the public, civil space in discussion groups, in the written and spoken media, in the universities, etc. Accepting other interlocutors and working towards consensus supposes equality between religions at a formal level, irrespective of numerical strength and political power. Theological questions start right here. A particular religion may have difficulty in recognizing other religions as equals. It may privilege its own ethical perspectives as better or even non-negotiable. Such disagreements can happen even within religious groups as, for example, in the USA with regard to contraception and homosexuality. It can very well happen between religious groups. The status of women, for instance, seems to be a sore point between different religious groups. Religious groups therefore have to dialogue with each other already at this level. Such dialogue may lead to a change in perspectives within each religious community. Hinduism, for instance, had a period of reform and renaissance under the impact of Christianity and British culture at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Beyond this dialogue at the socio-political level, religions can also encounter each other at the strictly religious sphere. Inter-religious dialogue in this sense supposes that the other religion is recognized, respected and accepted as a valuable partner in dialogue. This means that one hopes not only to give, but also to receive. One feels ready to be challenged to change at the religious level. Dialogue becomes mutual prophecy. It is here that inter-religious dialogue becomes a theological problem. The theological question then is what space do we make for other religions within our own religious vision and how does this affect other aspects of this vision. In Christian terms this would mean: what is our theology of religions and how does it affect our ecclesiology,

Christology and eschatology. This is where a new theology, which favours inter-religious dialogue emerges.

### A New Theology of Religions

Christian theology had always recognized that people belonging to other religions could be saved by God if they are sincere to their conscience. What is new is that today we believe that God is reaching out to the people, not in spite of their religions, but in and through their religions.<sup>10</sup> The roots of this change of perspective are found in the Second Vatican Council, though it did not affirm this positively. In its constitution *The Church in the Modern World* the Council made a strong assertion of the universal salvific will of God (No.22). The document on *Other Religions* accepted God as the 'common origin and goal of all peoples and found 'good and holy elements' in other religions (Nos. 1-2). The decree on mission rooted the mission of Jesus Christ in the mission of God that embraces the whole universe and the whole of human and cosmic history (No.2). The Council however did not say anything positive about other religions as such. Theologians like Karl Rahner affirmed that, if God reaches out to other believers, given their human and social nature, it must be through the beliefs, symbols and rituals of their religions through which they are trying to reach out to God.<sup>11</sup> Asian Bishops and theologians also developed a similar perspective.<sup>12</sup> Such a positive appreciation of other religions received a symbolic confirmation when John Paul II invited the leaders of other religions to come together at Assisi to pray for world peace. As authoritative commentators pointed out at that time, this gesture of the John Paul II recognized the other religions as legitimate, since the other believers can pray – that is, be in touch with God – through their rituals and, secondly, their prayers will be heard by God. A more formal confirmation of the presence and action of the Spirit of God in other religions came in his encyclical *The Mission of the Redeemer* (No.28-29).

Such a positive appreciation of the other religions in God's economy of salvation is integrated into Christian theological tradition in two different ways. A group of Indian theologians have described this as a paradigm shift.<sup>13</sup> The first paradigm is a linear one. History starts with various religions. Even if the Spirit of God is present in them, it is only in a limited manner. Then God reveals Godself to Abraham and Moses. Jesus Christ is the final and ultimate Word. All other manifestations of God find fulfillment in him. The Church has the fullness of the means of salvation. The second paradigm is more complex. God has a plan: to share God's life with every one. God also wishes to gather all things in harmony. God sends the Word and the Spirit into the world and reveals Godself to various peoples in various ways. God's self-revelation provokes a human response of faith. This divine-human dialogue is always salvific. Part of God's plan is to become personally involved in the process. God chooses the Jews to prepare God's coming and the Word of God becomes flesh in Jesus. Jesus and the Church are the symbols and servants – sacraments – of God's plan. God chooses to do this in a humble, kenotic, dialogical way. The different manifestations of the Word are not opposed to each other, even if the Word incarnate has a special role and mission. But this role is to bring all things together. Fulfillment itself is eschatological. We do not know how this would happen. We are but humble servants who are called to dialogue with all people of good will. The Spirit who is present everywhere is the animator of this process of reconciliation and communion.

### **The Church and the Reign of God**

How does one relate the other religions to the Church? Starting with the affirmation that the Church is necessary for salvation, some affirm that all the people who are saved are related to the Church in some mysterious way. I think that it is better to set the other religions in the context of the Reign of God. Jesus proclaims and inaugurates the Reign of God. Jesus sends the Church into the world as the symbol

and servant or the sacrament of the Reign of God. There are, however, two ways of looking at the Reign of God. Some, while accepting that the Church is the beginnings of the Reign and is not identical with it, will see the Reign of God as the future of the Church. The Church will grow into the Reign. Others will however see the Reign of God as wider than the Church and present wherever God's grace is operative. The Reign of God may also be operative in and through other religions. The Church therefore relates to other religions as collaborators in the project of realizing God's Reign in this universe. In the ongoing struggle between God on the one side and Satan as the personal power of evil and Mammon as the social power of evil on the other, the religions are on the side of God and of the Church. They are allies rather than enemies. The Church's own role is not one of domination, but of service to the Reign of God, wherever and however it is being realized.

The Reign of God is an eschatological reality. It is not purely other-worldly waiting to be realized at the end of history. It is not going to be fully realized in this world either. God has not promised us that. But the Reign is constantly being realized as human communities of freedom, fellowship and justice are being built up. The people may be economically poor and politically powerless. Yet they are slowly realizing the Reign of God in their lives and their communities, praying "Your Kingdom come" and hoping for its full realization at the end of times. It is this hope that keeps people struggling, finding joy and peace in the midst of their struggle. It is in this context that another – a very different - world seems possible and is being realized by people of good will, of whatever religion or ideology, working together and energized and empowered by the Spirit of God.<sup>14</sup>

### **Jesus, the Liberator**

What is the role of Jesus Christ in the process? Most Christians confess that Jesus is the only Saviour. So they seek to relate every one who is saved to him, if not through explicit faith, then by implicit faith. Implicit faith refers to a system that is operative without the

conscious awareness of the people who are its beneficiaries. Some, however, think that Jesus is one among the saviours. The people of other religions are saved in other ways. In technical terms they say that the role of Jesus in the salvation of others is 'representative', not 'constitutive'.<sup>15</sup> Of course, it is difficult to see what Jesus represents to people who do not recognize or acknowledge him. The problem, once again, is that the argument is abstract, *a priori*.

Perhaps a closer look at the New Testament will throw some light. The disciples encounter Jesus, listen to his proclamation of the Reign of God and witness to his initiation of its realization. His violent death at the hands of the Jewish and Roman authorities shatter their dreams. But his resurrection makes them realize that Jesus was no ordinary human being and that the reign of God he inaugurated was eschatological – already present and yet reaching out to fulfillment beyond history. First, they say that God has raised him up. Then they slowly realize that this ascent follows a descent. Deeper reflection on this mystery leads them to assert the pre-existence of Jesus in their early hymns. Paul sees God creating everything in Christ and also gathering up all things in him. (Eph 1:3-10) John sees Jesus as the incarnation of the Word, who was with God in the beginning, in whom everything was created and who is enlightening everyone coming into the world. (Jon 1:1-14). What happens here is that what God does in the humanity of Jesus is related to what is happening in eternity. What Jesus does therefore should not be isolated. Nor should it be reduced simply to a historical manifestation or symbol of an eternal mystery. Eternity is being played out in cosmic history and what happens in history is relevant to eternity. The descending and ascending of Christ is not simply play acting. The divine involves itself in history and transforms it. But the principal actor here is God: Father, Word and Spirit. The Word that became human in Jesus has been active in various ways all through history. The different religions may be seen as expressions of the different manifestations of the Word through the Spirit. What God does through the Word cannot be reduced to

what God does through Jesus, though they are obviously interrelated. Jesus is a special manifestation in so far he is the incarnate Word. But he comes as a self-emptying servant, not to assert his superiority, dominate or control. So when we confess Jesus as the only Saviour we are using the principle of the 'communication of the idioms'. God - Father, Word and Spirit – is the only Saviour. God is working in the world in various ways. The Word becoming flesh is God's work. But it does not monopolize God's work, but is at its service. Jesus as the Word of God is the only saviour. The Word made flesh is the sacrament – or symbol and servant – of this mystery. Its service consists precisely in entering into history and in collaborating with the many ways in which God is active in it.<sup>16</sup>

To confess therefore that Jesus is the only Saviour is to acknowledge that the mystery we name Jesus is present and active every where, not to claim any kind of superiority to Jesus. This very mystery calls us to collaboration between the various ways it is manifested in history. The incarnate manifestation of the Word is not its only manifestation, though it is a special one. But its speciality is humble service. Its role is one of being at the service of the mystery and its many manifestations. The service that it envisages and demands is one of dialogue.

### **A Call to Dialogue**

This dialogue however is not simple because every divine manifestation involves a human response. Both God's self manifestation and the human response are free. While God's manifestations are interrelated, God is not obliged to repeat Godself. The human response is also conditioned by history and culture as well as by the sinfulness of the humans. This is true also of the Church. It is because of this pluralism of God's manifestations and human responses that the dialogue can be mutually prophetic, purificatory, and enriching.

While God and God's Reign are points of convergence, pluralism of religions is not only a value, but inevitable, given the diversity of

divine manifestations, of history and cultures and of the human groups themselves. The Biblical vision of history is one of bringing together, of gathering, not of making one, so that "God may be all in all." (1 Cor 15:28). It is harmony and communion rather than unity, certainly not uniformity. This supposes freedom and equality, justice and solidarity. Thus a theology of dialogue can be supported by a theology of pluralism and harmony.<sup>17</sup> The Muslim *umma* (universal community), the Buddhist inter-being and the Hindu dharma confirm this vision of harmony.

Openness to the other is not against the affirmation of one's own identity. Dialogue becomes a problem only when the different identity of the other is denied or downgraded. The theology through which one seeks to justify to oneself the possibility of dialogue is itself not the object of dialogue.

### **Intra-personal Dialogue**

Inter-religious dialogue may start as collaboration in the pursuit of agreed upon human and spiritual values at the economic, social and political level. At some stage religions encounter each other as religions. Faith encounters faith. At a basic level there is an effort to know and understand the other religion. Ignorance and prejudice will have to be overcome. The attempt to understand leads to comparative study, because one's point of reference is one's own religion. Understanding may lead to appreciation. We believe that God has spoken to them and that they have devised ways of experiencing God or the Ultimate. God may have spoken to them in a way different from the way in which God has spoken to us. Still, in so far as it is God who has spoken, we feel that what God has manifested to them is not totally irrelevant to us. It may be even complementary. Some people then read and are nourished by the scriptures of other religions. Others may seek to experience God or the Ultimate following the *sadhana* or spiritual practices of another religion. We know Hindus who have sought to be disciples of Jesus and follow his teachings. There are Christians who practice Hindu yoga or Buddhist systems of meditation

like Zen or Vipassana. They have been spiritually enriched. Some seem to succeed in integrating such methods and experiences with their Christian context and identity. There are others who do not succeed in such integration. They seem to feel that they are different, but equally valid experiences of the Absolute. These people may offer experiential support to the experience of religious pluralism. The fact that God is the common origin and goal of all the religions and that it is the same Spirit of God who is present and active in all religions does not mean that all religions are the same and have the same religious or spiritual experience. People who are open to the spiritual experience of other religions are often accused of syncretism. Syncretism is an indiscriminate mixing of religious meaning systems. People who are engaged in inter-religious dialogue at the level of spiritual experience are not to be considered being syncretistic. It is an intra-personal process. They are rooted in their own faith, while being open to other faith experiences. When no integration is possible, there is the possibility of a dialectic. It is mutually challenging and creative. I am not indulging here in hypothetical considerations, but trying to make sense of reported experiences.<sup>18</sup>

### **Dialogue as Reconciliation**

Where there has been inter-religious conflict no true dialogue is possible without conflict resolution and reconciliation. So we also need a theology of reconciliation. The starting point for reconciliation is of course the recognition that some thing unjust has been done and people have been hurt. There is an acknowledgement of guilt or at least of responsibility, either at individual or collective level or both. People want to rebuild community based on justice. The justice they look for is not retributive, based on revenge, but restorative, based on forgiveness. Revenge can often lead to a spiral of violence. Forgiveness promotes reconciliation and community. Forgiving need not mean forgetting. As a matter of fact memory may remain a useful warning signpost for the future. But memories too have to be healed.

Restorative justice involves an attempt to restore to people what they have lost during the violence. People, of course, cannot be brought back to life. But means of livelihood can be provided. The sense of human dignity that one loses when treated as an object can be regained when the stories of one's sufferings are listened to. The *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* that the South African Government established after the end of the Apartheid regime was a pioneering effort in this area.<sup>19</sup> Such efforts could be imitated elsewhere.

The theological bases for reconciliation are found in the life and death of Jesus. Jesus witnessed to the forgiving love of the Father, healing people by forgiving them. His new commandment of love goes hand in hand with the demand that they forgive each other. Both God and Jesus are held up as models of forgiveness. The prayer "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us" sums up the attitude. Asking pardon can be as hard as forgiving. The Church itself had the courage to ask pardon for its misdeeds, not without some quibbling, only in recent years.

### **Dialogue and Conflict**

While pluralism by itself need not lead to conflict, struggle may be inevitable when pluralism leads to division, domination and injustice. Unjust structures do not change by themselves. Is a spirit of dialogue opposed to conflict in such circumstances? The horizon of all our actions and struggles is the community of the Reign of God. Any struggle must be set in that context. This would mean that the necessary struggle would be non-violent and lead to negotiation and progressive change. Violent revolution may occasionally succeed in throwing out a dictator. But it hardly ever brings peace and justice. Jesus himself is the model of non-violent struggle. Following his example, leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Dom Helder Camara and Nelson Mandela have shown its contemporary relevance.<sup>20</sup> Where struggles and violence are frequent, structures to promote conflict resolution may have to be set up.

Dialogue, conflict resolution and reconciliation can be analyzed in terms of social psychology. Theology however is involved when we are exploring inter-religious conflicts. Religion also gives a depth to the process of repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation. Religions that do not speak much about sin may not also talk about forgiveness. But all understand the need for reconciliation and peace.

### **Prophetic Dialogue**

I have suggested that each religion has to develop its own theological perspectives with regard to its relation with other religions. It is not meaningful to speak of a universal theology. We tend easily to accuse others of being fundamentalistic, unforgiving, etc. Christianity has been fundamentalistic till recently. Our openness to dialogue is still half-hearted and often has a hidden agenda. Even today Asians with their living experience of other believers seem more open to dialogue than Euro-Americans. We began asking forgiveness for our past misdeeds only a few years ago. Hindus have shown themselves more open to dialogue than Christians in India. Therefore we need not rush to judge others. Theological dialogue with other believers may provoke others to reflect and develop their own theological traditions and to become more open to dialogue. We have seen this happening among Asian theologians of liberation of all religions.<sup>21</sup> Every religious tradition is trying to make space for other religious traditions within its own religious context and is open to dialogue and collaboration not only in the socio-political sphere but also in the religious one.

### **Dialogue with Ideologies**

We have been talking so far about inter-religious dialogue. Much of what we have said will also apply to our interaction and collaboration with people who are not particularly religious but follow an ideology. They may be non-believers, agnostics or marginal believers. But they may believe strongly in an ideology and follow it with commitment. If our aim is to achieve harmony among human beings we cannot ignore

ideologies. We have to collaborate with their followers too. They too can be fundamentalist and violent, having a blind faith in their ideologies. They may not believe in God. But we believe that God is working also through them. When Jesus evoked the picture of the final judgment he conferred blessedness, not on people who were faithful practitioners of religious ritual, but on people who were close to the poor and the suffering, who were compassionate and helped those who were in need. It is significant that the World Council of Churches has a sub-unit for dialogue with faiths and ideologies. Ideologies are quasi-religions. Their followers attribute a certain absoluteness to them. They shape their vision and values.

### Conclusion

A new world then is possible. All people have to build it together. Even if some struggle is inevitable, it can be non-violent leading to justice through negotiation and reconciliation. Religions and ideologies need not be obstacles to such collaboration. All religions can make space for such inter-religious collaboration, based on their experience of pluralism and their belief in one God. This is true today also of Christians. A new theology of religions and of mission and a new practice of dialogue are emerging among them. This new awareness brings new challenges and new possibilities for faith-praxis.

This is perhaps the moment to rethink the title of my presentation. The phrase "God of all the names" may make it appear that the different religions are only different names for one and the same God. This image does not take seriously the identity and difference of the various religions. Every religion is an interplay of divine and human freedom.<sup>22</sup> They are different experiences and expressions of divine-human encounter. God is neither a common denominator nor the great Unknown. God is the source of richness and diversity. God manifests Godself in various ways to various peoples at various times in various cultures under various historical circumstances. God is the inexhaustible source of this diversity. Pluralism therefore has to be acknowledged, accepted and respected. But this pluralism is not chaotic. There is

one God and this God has a plan for the universe which is working itself out in history. We believe that this plan includes also an incarnate manifestation of the Word of God, besides the universal presence and action of the Word and the Spirit. But it is meant to be sacramental. God's goal is to create a new world:

See, the home of God is among the mortals.  
 He will dwell with them as their God;  
 They will be his peoples,  
 and God himself will be with them;  
 he will wipe every tear from their eyes.  
 Death will be no more;  
 mourning and crying and pain will be no more;  
 for the first things have passed away.  
 And the one who was seated on the throne said,  
 "See, I am making all things new" (Rev. 21:3-5).

It is our task to discern God's action in history and through peoples and to collaborate with God and with others in realizing the new world. This collaboration will have to take place at all levels: economic and political, personal and social, cultural and religious. Inter-religious dialogue is only one element of this collaboration. But it is a crucial one since it provides meaning, motivation and inspiration in an ultimate context. That is why dialogue between religions is interesting and necessary. Such dialogue will lead to cosmic harmony where "God will be all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28).

### Notes

- 1 See Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. London: Touchstone Books, 1996; Sudhir Kakar, *The Colours of Violence*. Delhi: Viking, 1995; Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God. The Global Rise of Religious Violence*. New Delhi: Oxford, 2000; R. Scott Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000; Veena Das (ed), *Mirrors of Violence*. Delhi: Oxford, 1995.
- 2 Cf. Bipin Chandra, *Communalism in Modern India*. New Delhi, 1984; S. Arokiasamy (ed), *Responding to Communalism*. Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1991; Achin Vanaik, *Communalism Contested. Religion, Modernity and*

- Secularization*. New Delhi: Vishtaar, 1997; Peter van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism. Hindus and Muslims in India*. Delhi: Oxford, 2002.
3. Cf. Karen Armstrong, *The Battle for God. Fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*. London: Harper Collins, 2000; Lionel Caplan, *Studies in Religious Fundamentalism*. London: Macmillan, 1987; Leo D. Lefebure, *Revelation, the Religions and Violence*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 1988.
  4. Cf. Paul F. Knitter, *No Other Name? A critical Survey of Christian Attitudes to World Religions*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1985; *One Earth, Many Religions: Multifaith Dialogue and Global Responsibility*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1995.
  5. Cf. W.C. Smith, *Towards a World Theology*. London: Macmillan, 1981; Leonard Swidler (ed), *Towards a Universal Theology of Religion*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1987.
  6. For example: Michael Amaladoss, *Making Harmony. Living in a Pluralist World*. Delhi: IDCR, 2003, pp.123-134.
  7. Cf. Rajeev Bhargava (ed), *Secularism and Its Critics*. Delhi: Oxford, 1998; Neera Chandhoke, *State and Civil Society. Explorations in Political Theory*. New Delhi: Sage, 1995; Keith J. Pavlischek, *John Courtney Murray and the Dilemma of Religious Tradition*. Kirksville: Thomas Jefferson University Press, 1994.
  8. Cf. Neera Chandhoke, *Beyond Secularism. The Rights of Religious Minorities*. Delhi: Oxford, 1999; T.N.Madan, *Modern Myths and Locked Minds. Secularism and Fundamentalism in India*. Delhi: Oxford, 1996.
  9. Cf. John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.
  10. Cf. Jacques Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999. This book has a large bibliography.
  11. Cf. Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations V* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1969), p.128.
  12. See "Theses on Interreligious Dialogue" by the Theology Advisory Committee of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences in John Gnanapiragasam and Felix Wilfred (eds), *Being Church in Asia*. Manila: Claretian, 1994.
  13. For this paradigm shift see Thomas Malipurathu and L. Stanislaus (eds), *A Vision of mission in the New Millennium* Mumbai: St.Paul's. 2001.
  14. See John Fuellenbach, *The Kingdom of God. The Message of Jesus Today*. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002),
  15. Cf. Paul F. Knitter, "Comitment to One – Openness to Others", *Horizons* 28 (2001) 255-270.
  16. Cf. M.Amaladoss, "Jesus Christ as the only Saviour and Mission", *The Japan Mission Journal* 55 (2001) 219-226
  17. See "Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony" in Franz-Josef Eilers (ed), *For All the Peoples of Asia*, Vol. 2 (Manila: Claretian, 1997), pp. 229-298.
  18. Cf. Dennis Gira and Jacques Scheuer (eds), *Vivre de plusieurs religions. Promesse ou illusion?* Paris: L' Atelier, 2000.
  19. Cf. Desmond Mpilo Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness*. New York: Doubleday, 1999.
  20. Cf. George Pattery, *Gandhi, the Believer*. Delhi: ISPCK, 1996.
  21. Cf. M. Amaladoss, *Life in Freedom. Liberation Theologies from Asia*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997.
  22. See John Paul II, *The Mission of the Redeemer*, 28-29.

## THEOLOGIES IN THE U.S.A.

Dwight N. Hopkins

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we can point to, at least, four theological models in the United States of North America: neo-conservative theology, liberal theology, the religion of U.S. monopoly capitalism, and prophetic theology.

### Neo- Conservative Theology

Neo-conservative theology is the main form of theology in the U.S.A. today. Its basic theological anthropology is the following: the purpose of an American citizen is to fight for the global supremacy of U.S.A.'s dominance. The god of neo-conservative theology is the *open face of aggressive U.S. empire*. Or to put it in different words: God has called the U.S. to make the rest of the world into the image of the United States. The rise of neo-conservative theological anthropology has been aided by the fact that the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

no longer exists. Neo-conservatives believe that the United States represents God and the USSR represents Satan. Because the USSR no longer exists, it means that Satan has been defeated by God's kingdom, which is the "American way of life". Neo-conservatives believe that it was their Cold War policy against the USSR that caused its decline. And since their policy was correct, it is their right now to spread their type of theological anthropology globally. This is what is taking place throughout the world. Without the USSR and without cohesive networks of resistance in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> worlds, or domestically within the U.S. itself, neo-conservatives argue that just as God made the U.S. in God's image, the U.S. is going to make the rest of the world in its own image.

Domestically within the United States, the neo-conservative theological anthropology has two major human values. First is the value which states that the U.S. as a country is *number one in the world*. It is number one because neo-conservatives claim that no other country can rival the sheer power and strength of the U.S. This feeling of "number one" reveals itself in the military occupation of countries in the Third World. It is also shown in the religious fever displayed at international sports events like the Olympic competitions. To be number one is to have a feeling of absolute supremacy. If any country or non-Americans challenge or disagree with this neo-conservative theology, then they will be totally destroyed.

A second value in the theological anthropology of the neo-conservatives is their belief that not only is the U.S. number one, but also is it the *best country in the world*. If it is the best country globally, then the rest of the world is both secondary and inferior. These two values combine to produce a unique American arrogance in American spirituality. These spiritual values assume that the U.S. is always right; that the U.S. never has to admit a mistake; that when an American wants something done, it should be done immediately; and that the only real rules and ethics are those defined by the U.S. Neo-

conservatives; and that they also can be generous and show concern for the poor. But if the poor want to determine their own humanity or if another country has a disagreement with the U.S., then the neo-conservative spiritual generosity is withdrawn or it is turned into a spirituality of vengeance.

Finally, neo-conservative theological anthropology argues that each U.S. citizen should make it on their own, without help from the government. They also state that those who have wealth are the best examples of how to work hard and make it on their own. These images of a human being have two implications. The government is moving away from providing safety nets for the majority of its citizens. Instead, the government is calling for more and more privatization of social services. Second, neo-conservatives are carrying out a major restructuring of the U.S. economy and social policies where wealth is being radically redistributed upward. Workers are losing benefits. The taxes of ordinary people are being used to give to corporations. The class divide between working people and the wealthy is increasing. Again, the ideal theological anthropology is the small group of wealthy in the U.S. who should be granted increased wealth. Because they are the ideal of what a person should be, their success somehow will trickle down to the majority of U.S. citizens.

Not only is this a reshifting of the U.S. society just on the economic level. It is, in addition, a restructuring at the social level. The gains of people of color (or minority communities), women's rights, lesbian and gay citizens, unions, the environment, regulations against corporate monopolies, freedom of speech (and other bourgeois rights), and more, are all under attack in an open and an aggressive manner.

Neo-conservative theology is the justification for a form of Christianity that does not allow for any type of public discussion that disagrees with it. In this example, Christianity is one of official party line. The party line becomes public through the neo-conservatives who control various aspects of government and the media. In fact,

when someone does disagree with them, neo-conservatives attack the dissenters as being Christian “heretics”, or for falsely subordinating Christianity to “secularism”, or not being “patriotic” because to disagree with neo-conservatism is to disagree with the definition of what it means to be an American citizen. Thus, it is to disagree with the special calling that God has given to the U.S.

### Liberal Theology

The second major theology in the U.S.A. is liberalism. It too has a theological anthropology linked to a conception of god. Its god consists of a return to the foundations of the bourgeois revolution of North America in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In a word, its god is *bourgeois rights*. Here the purpose of an American citizen (that is, the meaning of being called by the god of bourgeois rights) is to fight against those attacks on individual freedoms: such as individual free speech, assembly, separation of church and state, freedom to worship (as long as it does not affect the public realm), freedom to debate different ideas in the public, the right to work, women’s rights, the rights of minority citizens of different colors, the right to vote, the right to privately own wealth and property, responsibility of the wealthy to those who are suffering, the importance of using reason when there are differences of opinion, and the view that government should represent all the people. We can restate a liberal theological anthropology in the following way: the god of bourgeois rights has called all human beings to come together around a common table and be fair to one another. And part of being fair is to be sensitive to those who are at the bottom of society.

Like the neo-conservative theology, liberal theological anthropology believes that the image of U.S. citizens should be the global model for how people should relate to one another. Liberal theology, furthermore, agrees that the Cold War was necessary and the decline of the U.S.S.R. is evidence that the global model for human beings is the U.S.A. because it is the only super power throughout the world. The difference between neo-conservative theology and liberal theology is

around the nature of god and what this god has called human beings to do. What liberal theology wants to spread around the world are bourgeois rights as defined by the United States: individual rights, freedom of religion, the importance of public debates based on who can use reason to persuade others, the right to vote for two bourgeois parties, free trade, U.S. culture, the right to private ownership of wealth and property, etc. The decline of the U.S.S.R. and the rise of one super power has not meant that liberal theology now calls for the U.S. to pull back from the global scene. Nor does liberal theology support different countries in their efforts to pursue their own way forward. Liberal theology is for advancing the god of bourgeois rights, best revealed in the U.S. way of life. This god is the U.S. style of democracy.

Domestically within the United States, liberal theology has a theological anthropology that is inherently a contradiction. On the one hand, humans are called by a higher goal to pursue bourgeois rights, which means maintaining individual freedoms for all Americans regardless of their class, racial, or gender status. This aspect emphasizes the “rights” part of bourgeois rights. Here we find liberal theology arguing for racial and ethnic minorities, women, labor unions, the environment, etc. On the other hand, humans are called to affirm the right to private ownership and accumulation, and monopolization of wealth and property. Here we find the emphasis on the “bourgeois” part. The ideal theological anthropology for liberal theology is a person who can balance this contradiction so that everyone enjoys a fair and just way of life. Despite the best intentions of liberal theology, it fails to see that the god of bourgeois rights includes an antagonistic contradiction. Bourgeois rights, first of all, maintains a preferential option for the bourgeois – those who own the most property and capital in the U.S. Because the majority of people cannot attain the ideal status of becoming a bourgeois person (which means enjoying the full rights of liberal theology’s god), liberal theology never questions the god of bourgeois rights itself, but only supports reforms for the marginalized.

A major spiritual value of liberal theology is that every American (regardless of whether one is an oppressor or oppressed) has the *right to their own views*. But the god of bourgeois right has already sided with the bourgeois sectors of U.S. society. It is not level playing field for all U.S. citizens when it comes to who has the resources to make their views known in the public realm.

A second spiritual value is *fairness*. But again we see the contradiction between “bourgeois” and “rights” comes to the surface. At first, it sounds good that all U.S. citizens are called by the god of bourgeois rights to be fair. Yet, all citizens can enjoy the fairness of their rights as long as these citizens do not threaten bourgeois privileges and the government that supports those privileges. The values of free expression and fairness are not objective; they are ultimately in favor of bourgeois sectors and society.

Because a liberal theological anthropology contains a deep contradiction internal to what it means to be a human, liberal theology cannot take a firm stand on fundamental rights. Because it too often takes different positions on the same issue and because of the strong, unified force of neo-conservative theology, liberal theology cannot mount a successful attack of neo-conservative theology’s drive to restructure the entire economy and social arrangements in the U.S.

### **The Religion of U.S. Monopoly Capitalism**

Both neo-conservative and liberal theologies operate within a larger religious context that liberals and neo-conservatives both support. Specifically, I argue that U.S. monopoly capitalism itself is a religion. The god of this religion is the *concentration of monopoly finance capitalist wealth*. God, in this sense, is not merely a belief in the accumulation of capital for private possession by owners operating inside of one country; that stage is a lower one in the development of capitalism. On the other hand, the god of monopoly finance capitalist wealth embodies the Ultimate Concern where there is a fierce belief in the intense concentration, in a few hands, of finance capitalism on

the world stage. It is an extreme expression of the private ownership and control of capital in various forms of wealth spurred on by the rapid movement of finance and capital on a global scale. Monopoly wealth is a power on its own right that makes its adherents bow down to it and pursue any means necessary to obtain it. All who believe in it are possessed by it; it is the final goal above all else.

Like all religions, the religion of U.S. monopoly capitalism advances a theological anthropology. (Theological anthropology defines and regulates what it means to be a human being in a religious system). What does a god require of human beings in order for them to be human? Such a human being is one who has the most concentrated financial wealth accumulation on a global scale. Ideally, since religions have an inclination for utopia, a small group would control the world’s capital. Here capital includes both the majority of the human population – real people – and the ecology, the earth’s natural and human-made resources. In the future utopia on earth, all social relations among human beings will be defined by the god of concentrated wealth. In other words, to be a human being is to fit on an unequal scale of wealth ownership. Wealth redistribution goes upward into the possession of a small group of citizens.

In contrast, theological anthropology for the majority of the world suggests another reality of what it means to be human in the religion of U.S. monopoly capitalism. Prior to the arrival of this religion, especially in Third World indigenous communities, human beings were valued for who they were as members of the human race created by some divine power. Now this global religion re-baptizes them into a new man and woman, where the measure of worth becomes what one consumes. The U.S. global religion forges new tastes and sensibilities throughout the world while it attempts to manufacture one transcendent culture, the culture of market consumption. A true human being becomes one who actually possesses commodities or one whose goal in life is to do so. Despite the fact that the vast majority

of Third World peoples live in poverty, the religion of U.S. monopoly capitalism attempts to transform them into adherents of the faith by inducing in them a desire to perceive themselves as owning the products from the developed capitalist world. This fact touches the core issue of the new religion, which wants people not only to purchase products but to reconceive of themselves as consumers. To change into something new, various groups must, besides redirecting their purchasing habits, re-feel who they are in the present, and re-envision their possibilities for the future. Communities are baptized into a lifestyle to fulfill the desire for commodities and to follow further the commodification of desires.

Globalization pursues relentlessly this refashioning of the new man and woman throughout the globe. It seeks a homogenized monoculture of the market to bring about the transformation of people who are valued in themselves to people who are determined by their dependency on commodities. A world culture producing one definition of what it means to be a human being is predicated on serving the market.

The spreading of different values is closely linked to the theological anthropology. As one redefines oneself, by accepting the new religion's re-creation of the human person, one internalizes values appropriate to the new man or woman. The point of the religion of U.S. monopoly capitalism is to craft new values to accompany the new person. First is the value of individualism. If monopoly finance capitalist wealth is to succeed as the new god throughout the earth, it has to erase the idea, particularly in Third World indigenous cultures, that the individual is linked to, defined by, accountable to, and responsible for his or her family and extended family. A sense of communalism and sacrifice of individual gain for the sake of a larger community stands in stark contradiction to the new religion of U.S. monopoly capitalism. Once an individual converts to the new religion and reorients his or her self-worth and feeling of worthiness to a mode of individual gain, regardless of the well-being of those around him and her, this person has

successfully undergone the rite of confirmation into the new religion and has accepted faith in the new god as a personal lord and savior. The value of individualism (e.g., individual gain by any means necessary) is central to the god of monopoly finance capitalism.

Individualism opens up the additional value of accumulation of things for the individual's primary benefit. In other words, gaining and amassing personal possession as a means of acquiring more personal possessions flows from a focus on the self for the self. This acquisitive desire manifests itself in diverse ways. It downplays sharing. It weakens the art of negotiation and compromise. It blinds a vision of mutuality. And it fosters a utilitarian way of being in the world where people, places, and things become tools for and stepping-stones toward increased personal profit.

### **Prophetic Theology**

The final model of theologies in the U.S. is prophetic theology. As sustained, massive movements on the part of ordinary people, prophetic theology is hard to observe. Yet there are pockets of prophetic theology on the local level. Prophetic theology conceives of God as liberation toward the practice of freedom. Therefore, theological anthropology understands itself to be called by God to work in liberation struggles in order to produce freedom, especially for the poor, working people, the brokenhearted, and the marginalized. Prophetic theology works for a holistic liberation and freedom, where the wounded spiritually of the individual is transformed at the same time so that demonic social structures are radically altered.

And prophetic theology organizes on several levels simultaneously and not sequentially. It is concerned about the liberation of and practice of freedom of working people, races and ethnic groups, women, lesbians and gays, and the ecology. Because the eventual practice of freedom means each individual person having a healed spirit while participating in new social structures defined as a common wealth, then prophetic theology struggles for spiritual and material freedom.

In the academic arena, we see prophetic theology being taught by U.S. minorities of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT), white feminists, and a very small group of professors developing a white theology of liberation.

On the church level, a small progressive group of churches are practicing in a prophetic theological anthropology; they preach an holistic gospel of individual spiritual change and structural change. Prophetic theology, as a larger movement, is manifested in the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference. This conference is a national network of the most progressive wing of the African American churches. Each year it brings together pastors, lay leaders, seminary students, and professors, men and women, to discuss the theology and practice of justice, freedom, ethics, and politics relative to personal liberation and domestic and international issues. It defines personal salvation as a process linked to the well being of community. Furthermore, these black religious gatherings are very concerned about the survival and self-determination of Third World countries. In fact, the Proctor Conference was initiated and sustained by the leadership of prophetic African American pastors across the U.S. Various congregations within this national network have ministries dealing with working people, the poor, racial and ethnic communities, the ecology, and women. Some have ventured out to heal the brokenhearted among black gay and lesbian Christians. Moreover, they are actively making connections with liberation theologians worldwide. Though small, it is with prophetic theology, especially where it continues to root itself among working people, where a better world is possible.

Although the one world super power has advanced its demonic dimensions of globalization, empire is both most dangerous and most vulnerable when it allows no dissent. When the dragon wipes out even the pretense of bourgeois rights and international cooperation, it is approaching the end of its rule. For, if it could rule its own people and the rest of the globe with a smile, then it would be at its strongest

point. Only when it is wounded and losing its grip on exploited peoples and oppressed nations will it resort to open, brute intimidation both abroad and at home. But human history and God's role in human history have shown that ultimately it is the people's struggles that yield a new social configuration where the human person becomes the defining criterion of healthy social relations and a spirituality of compassion and global friendship. Now is the opportune time to intensify the work toward justice and build even stronger international bonds among prophetic theologies of all kinds. Even in the midst of storm clouds in the midnight hour, we know that joy will come in the morning. The Lord will make a way out of no way.

## THEOLOGY AND LIBERATION: THE AFRICAN AGENDA

*Emmanuel Martey\**

### Introduction

By the close of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the first publication on the modern African theology movement was over forty years. It began with the nationalist reflection on Christianity in the mid-1950s by black Roman Catholic priests studying in Europe who, with the spirit of African Nationalism, began addressing and questioning the African condition under colonial oppression.<sup>1</sup> This reflection also led the discussion on *Africanization* as a theological justification of the African Revolution and the liberation struggles on the continent. Although the theme of liberation was actively present in African politics, it was completely absent in theological discussions at the time. The liberation language of theology, Mercy Oduyoye has pointed out, “scandalized many”;

and it was seen not just as a political word, but it was also “a protest word, even a violent word” associated with “upsetting existing political order which brings with it chaos and insecurity”; and African Christians, having been educated against all that might bring with it confrontation’ quickly shied away from it.<sup>2</sup>

From the very onset, Africans did not restrict the hermeneutic endeavour to just the biblical text but included the human condition as well as the African worldview which were also perceived as *texts*, thus, allowing a comparative study of the many forms of engagement of the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the human situation—a human situation which had been drained of its very essence by slavery, colonialism and racism.

Theological discussions of the Africanization paradigm in these early years had contributed immensely in defining the major theological paradigms in contemporary Africa, including *Liberation* and *Inculturation*. By the close of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, three other paradigms had become serious partners in theological dialogue; albeit, they are still in their infant stages. These include; *Reconstruction* theology which calls for a paradigm shift from liberation to social transformation and reconstruction; *Pentecostal-Charismatic* theology; and *African Initiated Church* theology both of which emphasize on spiritual liberation.<sup>3</sup>

### THE LIBERATION HERMENEUTICAL PARADIGM

Liberation as a theological paradigm in Africa is a hermeneutic procedure that seeks to understand the African reality and to interpret this reality in the light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to bring transformation of the oppressive status quo. Since the 1970s, liberation has become Africa’s acquisition of a new theological self-understanding and has challenged Africans to discover themselves as human beings with *Imago Dei*. But it has also given Africans the determination to participate in God’s redemptive act in history. Liberation has therefore

become the African theological choice for anthropological dignity over against anthropological poverty. It is a quest for true humanity.

Liberation theology on the continent of Africa has emerged primarily as a response to white racist oppression and western capitalist imperialism that have impoverished the African. But again, liberation is also a response to oppression of Africans by Africans as well as of African women by the men. All these different forms of oppression have contributed in depriving and denying human dignity of the African.

There are different approaches to liberation in Africa that have given rise to different theological expressions and movements having different histories, emphases and functions. These varieties of liberation address issues of *race, gender, poverty, culture* and *spirituality* which serve also as the points of departure for their respective theological systems. While the issue of race finds expression in *Black theology* in its South African manifestation; that of gender finds expression in *African Women's theology*. Poverty also finds expression in the narrowly defined *African Liberation theology*, and, culture in *Inculturation theology*. Recently, with the training of theologians from the newer *Pentecostal* and the *Charismatic* churches, emphasis is being placed on spiritual liberation in their theological writings.

### **Black Theology**

Black theology was the first liberation oriented theology to appear on the African scene in the early 1970s. It drew most of its initial insight from North American Black theology. The keynote of this theology before black majority rule was liberation with special reference to racism as manifested in the vicious circle of Apartheid. Therefore, the actual situation that gave rise to liberation in South Africa was Apartheid and the need to demolish it as a socio-political system. Black theology took seriously the experience of black people which was grounded in a history of racial oppression and economic exploitation.

Before Apartheid ended officially in 1994, the development of Black theology had already seen two different phases. The first phase

began in the early 1970s as a theological expression of Black Consciousness Movement and therefore initially took over the exclusively Race Analyst approach into its reflection. At this time, its task was to conscientize black people to the situation in which they were and the situation in which they ought to be—arousing them to become the vehicles of their own liberation.

The second phase began in the 1980s with conferences organized by the Black Theology Task Force of the Institute for Contextual Theology (ICT). Whereas the publication of the book entitled: *Essays on Black Theology (1972)*<sup>4</sup> formally inaugurated the first phase; the second phase was ushered in by the publication of *The Unquestionable Right to be Free: Black Theology from South Africa (1986)*.<sup>5</sup>

Unlike the first phase, the second began to take Marxist analysis of South African society very seriously which brought a sharp (albeit, false) division between the advocates of Race-Analyst and Class-Analyst approaches. Besides, there were others who wanted to hold the two in creative tension as the best way to understand the South African situation. Another important factor present in the second phase was the inclusion of feminist perspective in black theological reflection.

Since the relevance of Black theology is largely determined by the nature of South African reality, with the change of the political environment, there is bound to be a shift into a new phase. Veritably, the new post-Apartheid phase ushered in by nonracial democracy is challenging black theologians to consider themes such as reconciliation and black empowerment in theological hermeneutics. There are other themes in which younger generation of black theologians are very interested; these include human rights, political economy, civil society, democracy, secularism, religious freedom and the engagement of culture in all these themes.<sup>6</sup>

### **African Women's Theology**

African Women's theology is the theological articulation of women's own experiences of sexism and gender inequity in both church

and society. It is *de facto* a theology of process born out of experience of pain and of women's vision. As such, it is contextual and analyzes religion, culture, socio-economic and political realities of Africa.

African women theologians also focus on their own specific challenges and join other women in the analysis, deconstruction, reconstruction and advocacy that foster the healing of human brokenness and transformation of society. Consequently, women theologians are raising uncomfortable questions that confront the androcentric bias that, for a long time, has informed the predominantly patriarchal religious traditions of the Christian faith.

Forming part of women's theological challenge include: the image of God in African womanhood; who Jesus Christ is for the African woman; the true image of the Church; and the rereading of the Bible. Others are, African cultural history, religion, and the sources of spirituality; elements in the fear of sexuality that result in the repudiation of matriarchy; the violence against women; and traditional ritualistic processes and practices which are oppressive to women such as widowhood rites, polygyny, clitoridectomy, bride-wealth/price, purdah and child-marriage.

African Women's theology is unleashing a new dynamic that should vitalize African theological hermeneutics. This is made possible mainly by The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (The Circle) which is, perhaps, the most active theological group in Africa today. In this movement even women theologians "who would not use the language of revolution are also writing with emphasis on 'psychic liberation' and 'internal transformation.'" Oduyoye explains the rationale behind this approach:

Liberation on the mentality that keeps women coping with marginalization and repression rather than resisting it has become an area of much reflection. Several have turned to the study of African Traditional Religion and Culture as a source of both empowerment and dehumanization of women. Studying this undergirding factor of life in Africa, is required, if the liberating

aspects are to be fully appropriated and the oppressive ones exposed and disposed of.<sup>7</sup>

### **Inculturation as Strategy for Liberation**

In one way or other, we have all participated in the fruitless inculturation-liberation debate within the context of Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT). Within the Asian context, for example, I recall the debate between theologians from the Philippines with Carlos Abesamis as their spokesperson and the Sri Lankan theologian Aloysius Pieris at EATWOT's Asian Theological Conference in Wennapuwa in 1979.<sup>8</sup> Again, the tension between African theologians and Latin Americans on the one hand and, on the other hand, between African and Black theologians on both sides of the Atlantic are well documented.<sup>9</sup>

In Africa, as a result of this tension, culture was not seen in its comprehensive way. An artificial gap was created separating culture from politics and socio-economic relations. Inculturation and liberation became two different and opposing theological paradigms. The former was seen as a mutual interaction or dialogue between culture and the gospel emphasizing the traditional way of life; and the latter between the gospel and socio-political realities addressing the influence of modernity and Western way of life.

What most competitors in this debate failed to recognize was that the problems being addressed by both inculturation and liberation were all *African problem* with each approaching it from a different perspective. But the path each chose ended up providing only one-sided solution to this problem. What was lacking at this initial stage was a fruitful dialogue between the two that would foster mutual appreciation of what each was and could offer in service to Africa. Furthermore, both were unable to find a common ground from where to agree and proceed to act in harmony to undermine and dismantle the structures of death and decay.

In Africa, therefore, inculturation is not to be seen as one thing and liberation another. That is why today, many Christians in Africa, especially, new generation theologians (even from South Africa) have come to appreciate culture “for the purposes of conducting a dialogue with Christianity.”<sup>10</sup> The same young theologians are those on whom the influence of liberation has been so great.

The cultural strength of African people cannot be ignored or underestimated. The mistake the early missionaries and colonial administrators made in their contact with Africans was to attempt to obliterate the African cultural identity. The foundation of a people’s liberation, according to Amilcar Cabral, is in their inalienable rights to have their own history whose continuity lies in culture. That is why in Africa, liberation is necessarily an act of culture; and, the liberation movement in Africa has been seen by theorists and analysts as “the organized political expression of the struggling people’s culture.”<sup>11</sup>

Africans take both culture and the gospel as active forces of liberation. It is this dual fact of theological understanding in the dialogical process of inculturation that culture and the gospel of Jesus Christ increase the African passion for liberation. Inculturation then becomes empowerment and a strategy for liberation.

Inculturation is liberative in that in the process of dialogue, it recognizes the oppressive and anti-life components in both culture and the Bible which are then challenged, critiqued and transformed. With such an understanding and a new look of inculturation and liberation, the long debate and division between the two is made inefficacious. With the formulation of inculturation as a strategy for liberation by the new generation of theologians, we have the problem addressed in a non-evasive and creative manner.<sup>12</sup>

In Africa, dialogue between culture and the Christian faith has exposed and is undermining all negative and oppressive elements in culture, especially those that dehumanize women. Besides, it has also led to an inculturated-liberative reading of Scripture that brings to light

not just its patriarchal orientation but also its ideological and racist outlook. Such rereading of the Bible, as has been demonstrated by theologians like Teresa Okure, has disclosed the sinful human and socio-cultural conditions that have often distorted the constitutive voice of God.<sup>13</sup>

### **Reconstruction as an Act of Liberation**

Reconstruction as a theological paradigm began gaining currency in the late 1980s and especially, the early 1990s. At its Fifth General Assembly in Lome (1987), the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) favoured theology of Reconstruction as a way forward and began advocating for it especially, when it became clear that Apartheid was coming to an end and therefore a new theological paradigm apart from liberation might be necessary.

The African theologian with whom the theology of Reconstruction is largely associated is Jesse Mugambi who in his address to the Executive Committee of AACC in Nairobi proposed a paradigm shift from the post-Exodus to post-Exile imagery for Africa. He saw *Reconstruction* as the resultant theological axiom, thus shifting the emphasis from Liberation as indicated in the title of his book: *From Liberation to Reconstruction* (1995).<sup>14</sup> Mugambi is convinced that; “the 21<sup>st</sup> century should be a century of reconstruction in Africa, building on old foundations which, though strong, may have to be renovated.”<sup>15</sup> He compared the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century secular and ecclesial contexts of Europe with their respective awakenings of the Renaissance and the Reformation and declares:

The 1990s are the beginning of Africa’s Renaissance and Reformation. They will commence the process of Africa’s reconstruction.<sup>16</sup>

In this shift, the post-exilic text that becomes the centre for “the new theological paradigm in African Christian theology as a logical development from the Exodus motif” is the book of Nehemiah. Mugambi sees Nehemiah as “the director of reconstruction project”

after the Babylonian exile. In this new paradigm, Jesus' mission is seen to be "reconstructive rather than destructive" and the Sermon on the Mount regarded as "the most basic of all reconstructive theological texts in the Synoptic Gospels."<sup>17</sup>

Mugambi identifies three levels of reconstruction covering all areas of societal life. First, there is the *personal* which deals with the reconstruction of individual motives and intentions. The second is *ecclesial* reconstruction dealing with all areas of the church's life including; "management structures, financial policies, pastoral care, human resource development, research, family education, service and witness." He then sees theology as "the means by which the church rationalizes its process of ecclesial reconstruction."<sup>18</sup> The third is *cultural* reconstruction which has five components of (i) *politics* dealing with the management of social influence; (ii) *economics* dealing in matters of managing resources; (iii) *ethics* dealing with the reconstruction of the system of values; (iv) *aesthetics* dealing with the sense of proportion and symmetry in all aspects of life; and, (v) *religion* which provides the world-view synthesizing "everything that is cherished by individuals as corporate members of the community."<sup>19</sup> Reconstruction in Africa therefore refers to actions taken in all the different dimensions of societal life and not just in one particular sector of human existence. It is thus a praxis embracing many practices within the social realm.<sup>20</sup>

In the discussion of reconstruction as a theological paradigm on the continent, two important events have taken place within the theological community of the African Church which should be worth mentioning. The first was the 2000 Theological Conference held in Mbagathi, Nairobi, Kenya, where for the first time representatives from the Conference of African Theological Institutions (CATI); the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC); the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT); The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (THE CIRCLE); and the

Organization of African Instituted Churches (OAIC) met to clarify their role in the service of the Church and the wider community.

At Mbagathi, the tension between liberation and reconstruction became obvious when black theologians from South Africa including Takatso Mofokeng and Tinyiko Maluleke expressed dissatisfaction with Mugambi's attempt to down play and underestimate the importance of liberation for Africa's social transformation and development. Reconstruction, it is argued, must begin with liberation and all Africans are not yet liberated. For EATWOT members at the meeting, the movement from liberation to reconstruction was not from EATWOT. According to the EATWOT women present, if there was any movement, it was "from liberation to spirituality" because women's power to bring about change comes from the Holy Spirit. On the theology of Reconstruction, one female participant said: "I am still reading and I cannot relate to it." On the other hand, there were other participants who also argued that the end of Apartheid should oblige theologians to think of a new paradigm; theology, they contended "is above liberation and God is above all."

The Final Communique of this conference brought out the division among members of the African theological community. It declared:

We note that the paradigm of reconstruction has gained wide currency as a model of theological thinking in our contemporary situation, but for many of us it needs further elaboration and reflection, particularly on the relationship between liberation and reconstruction.<sup>21</sup>

The importance of the Mbagathi meeting was that it put the accent on *both* liberation and reconstruction. Africa needs both emphases for meaningful social transformation and development. Reconstruction is about human development and as such cannot be separated from liberation; for, reconstruction in itself, it was concluded, "is an act of liberation."

The second important event regarding Africa's discussion of reconstruction as a theological paradigm took place in 2002 in South Africa during the Conference on Theological Education and Ecumenical Formation which was part of the interactive process to embark on the Journey of Hope in Africa to make a difference on the continent in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>22</sup> Unlike the Mbagathi meeting where there was apparent division between liberation and reconstruction, this conference saw both as complementary and envisioned a journey of hope "for Africa's *liberative reconstruction* and sustainable development."<sup>23</sup>

### **Liberative-Reconstruction and Africa's Development Initiatives**

Africa is trapped in poverty. Her poverty stands in stark contrast to the affluence of the developed world. Tears shed by the Church in South Africa five years ago are still the tears being shed by the whole ecclesial community on the continent: one-third of the world's poorest people lived in Africa and although the continent comprised of ten per cent of the world's population, seventy-five per cent of all people living with HIV/AIDS were in sub-Saharan Africa. It continued,

One in thirteen African women dies during pregnancy or childbirth, representing nearly half of such deaths worldwide. Nineteen thousand children die in Africa each day as a result of preventable diseases and malnutrition . . . [and] most African nations are ill-equipped to overcome these problems.<sup>24</sup>

It is such situations prevailing on the continent that compel both ecclesial and theological communities in Africa to share the common vision and pledge of new generation of African political leaders to combat and eradicate poverty and the culture of death and decay as envisioned in the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) plan.<sup>25</sup>

NEPAD is the vision and initiative of African political leaders who have pledged to eradicate poverty; place the continent on path of sustainable growth and development; participate in global economy

and body politic; and liberate Africa from "the malaise of underdevelopment and exclusion in a globalizing world."<sup>26</sup>

Presenting itself as a visionary and dynamic initiative seeking to reconstruct and develop the continent, NEPAD condemns the logic of credit and aid binomial that has underlined African development efforts. This is an abnormal situation and there is the need for its reversal. It cautions against the continued marginalization of Africa from the globalizing process; and says, this constitutes a serious threat to global stability. NEPAD therefore calls for a new relationship of partnership between Africa and the international community, especially the highly industrialized countries, to overcome the development chasm that has widened over centuries of unequal relations.<sup>27</sup>

Furthermore, NEPAD declares that Africans "will no longer allow themselves to be conditioned by circumstances. We will determine our own destiny and call on the rest of the world to complement our efforts."<sup>28</sup>

The importance of NEPAD is contained in the fact that it is the only comprehensive, long-range plan for Africa's development that has received support from both African political leaders and developed countries. Besides, it is the only continental development plan that, despite its weaknesses, has been hailed by both the ecclesial and theological communities in Africa. Others, like the Lagos Plan of Action and the Lome Conventions did enjoy such ecclesial and theological support. For instance, questions as to how NEPAD could help fulfill Christ's promise of meaningful and abundant life for all African people; or, what kind of theological principles should be emphasized in assessing NEPAD's development initiatives and others have been asked and discussed.

The commitment of the theological community of the African Church was demonstrably established when at the 2002 Conference in South Africa, Bishops, Patriarchs and other Church leaders committed themselves and pledged to disseminate the NEPAD vision

and information to the grassroots. The “Plan of Action” of this Conference declared:

It is the Christian church’s mission in fulfilling Christ’s promise of meaningful and abundant life for all of Africa’s people that compels us to engage critically with NEPAD in a spirit of mutual responsibility and commitment to Africa’s reconstruction and development.<sup>29</sup>

Although, the NEPAD document itself hardly uses the term “reconstruction,” theological responses from both ecclesial and theological communities in Africa emphasize liberative-reconstruction as a theological principle in assessing the initiative. For example, according to the South African churches, “NEPAD contains several important elements that could be further developed into effective mechanisms for Africa’s reconstruction and development.”<sup>30</sup>

For all its promises and capabilities to transform Africa into a continent of peace and prosperity, NEPAD has not escaped criticisms. The most systematic and constructive criticism has come from the South African Council of Churches which accused NEPAD of having “a blurred vision” when it focused on globalization, privatization and its failure to engage the people of Africa to solve Africa’s problems.<sup>31</sup> The Council further explained,

. . . NEPAD’s vision is blurred when it attempts to identify new resources for Africa’s reconstruction. It fails to see beyond the self-serving economic prescriptions proffered by an industrialized world that has grown rich off the plunder of Africa . . . The political will generated by NEPAD must be focused into a truly participatory transformation of Africa through direct, immediate, and decisive action to overcome the causes of Africa’s deepening impoverishment.<sup>32</sup>

By fixing its eyes on increased global integration, NEPAD indeed has a blurred vision and must be helped to restore its vision. For those of us coming from the underside of history, Globalization has become a notorious term. It is a concept that has come to be associated with paternalism and domination. To some it is only a smokescreen and a

cover up for a dominant culture to absorb and dominate the rest of the world. To others, it is the latest stage of capitalist imperialism. NEPAD cannot also pretend to be unaware of the severe negative impact that privatization of basic and social services has on poor people in Africa. Again, failure to focus “on Africa’s people first . . . can result in an increasingly divided Africa at the continental and national levels.”<sup>33</sup>

The way NEPAD has presented itself as a visionary and dynamic initiative seeking to reconstruct and develop the continent challenges all African theological communities. We also must try to find the strengths and weaknesses of this plan and help un-blur its vision to promote authentic liberative-reconstruction that will bring meaningful social transformation and development of Africa.

### Conclusion

In Africa, as Oduyoye has observed, we have come to see paradigms of liberation and transformation, “not only in the experiences of God recorded in the Bible but also in our African history, religion and struggle to be whole.” Africa’s participation in the “the liberation of theology, the theology of liberation and in liberative theology, liberates and empowers us.”<sup>34</sup> And it is this liberation and empowerment coming from the Trinitarian God of love, grace and hope that has given us the spirit of resilience not only to survive all kinds of dehumanizing and death dealing forces but also to join all those who seek to transform all forces of death and decay to bring humankind life in its fullness.

### Notes

1. See A. Abble et. al. *Des Pretres noirs s’interrogent* (Paris, 1956). It was the publication of this book that was considered the starting point of modern African theology.
2. Mercy Oduyoye, “Liberation and the Development of Theology in Africa” in *The Ecumenical Movement Tomorrow*, edited by Marc Reuver, Friedhelm Solma, Gerrit Huizer, (Kampen/Geneva, Kok Publishing House/WCC, 1993) p. 203. For the presence of the theme of liberation in African political thought and action from the colonial times in the 19th century, see J. Ayo Langlely (ed.), *Ideologies of Liberation in Black Africa, 1856-1970: Documents on Modern African Political Thought from Colonial Times to the Present* (London, Rex Collins, 1979)

3. For theological articulation of the Reconstruction paradigm, see: J.N.K. Mugambi, *From Liberation to Reconstruction: African Christian Theology After the Cold War* (Nairobi, East African Educational Publishers, 1995); for Pentecostal-Charismatic theology and African Initiated Church theology, see Simon Maimela and Andrio Konig (eds) *Initiation into Theology: The Rich Variety of Theology and Hermeneutics* (Pretoria, JL van Schaik, 1998) chapters 10, 11, 12, 24 and 25. The African *Initiated Churches* (AICs) have been described variously also as African *Instituted Churches*; African *Independent Churches* and African *Indigenous Churches*.
4. Mokgethi Motlhabi (ed.), *Essays on Black Theology* (Johannesburg, University Christian Movement, 1972). The South African government soon banned this edition. The British edition, Basil Moore (ed.), *Black Theology: The South African Voice* (London, Hurst, 1973); and the American edition, Basil Moore (ed.), *The Challenge of Black Theology in South Africa* (Atlanta, John Knox Press, 1974) were published.
5. Itumeleng J. Mosala and Buti Tlhagale (eds.), *The Unquestionable Right to be Free: Black Theology from South Africa* (New York, Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1986).
6. See Tinyiko Maluleke's "Epilogue" to Xolile Keteyi's *Inculturation As a Strategy for Liberation* (Pietermaritzburg, Cluster Publications, 1998), page 65.
7. Mercy Oduyoye, "Liberation and Development of Theology in Africa," p. 209.
8. For details, see Virginia Fabella (ed.), *Asia's Struggle for Full Humanity* (Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books, 1980)
9. For details of all these debates, see Kofi Appiah Kubi and Sergio Torres (eds) *African Theology En Route* (Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books, 1979); Sergio Torres and John Eagleson (eds.), *The Challenge of Basic Christian Communities* (Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books, 1982); Virginia Fabella and Sergio Torres (eds.) *Irruption of the Third World: Challenge to Theology* (Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books, 1983); Emmanuel Martey, "African Theology and Latin American Liberation Theology: Initial Differences Within the Context of EATWOT," *Trinity Journal of Church and Theology*, vol. V, Nos. 1 & 2, July 1995, pages 45-63, also his "An African Examines Trends in Asian Christian Theology," *Trinity Journal of Church and Theology*, vol. VI, No. 1, January 1996, pages 24-36.
10. Keteyi, *Inculturation as a Strategy for Liberation*, p. 51
11. Amilcar Cabral, *Unity and Struggle: Speeches and Writings* (New York, Monthly Review Press, 1979), page 143.
12. The two young theologians from South Africa, Xolile Keteyi and Tinyiko Maluleke are among those who have stressed this point; see Keteyi, *Inculturation as a Strategy for Liberation*, pp. 50-56, 62.
13. See Teresa Okure, "Bible: Africa" in *Dictionary of Third World Theologies* edited by Virginia Fabella and R. S. Sugirtharajah, (Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books, 2000) page 16; also her "Women in the Bible" in *With Passion and Compassion: Third World Women Doing Theology* (Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books 1988). See also Itumeleng J. Mosals, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Eerdmans, 1989; and his "The Use of the Bible in Black Theology" in *The Unquestionable Right to be Free*, pp. 175-199.

14. J.N.K. Mugambi, *From Liberation to Reconstruction: African Christian Theology After the Cold War* (Nairobi, East African Educational Publishers, 1995)
15. Ibid. p. 5, cf. p. 40.
16. Ibid. p. 5, cf. p. 41.
17. Ibid. p. 13.
18. Ibid. 17.
19. Ibid. pp. 16-17.
20. See Joao B. Libanio, "Praxis/Orthopraxis" in Virginia Fabella and R.S. Sugirtharajah (eds), *Dictionary of Third World Theologies* (Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books, 2000), p. 172.
21. See the "Final Communique" of the CATI/AACC/EATWOT/CIRCLE/OAIC Conference held at Mbagathi, Nairobi, Kenya from 14th-17th August 2000.
22. This Conference which was organized by the World Council of Churches Education and Ecumenical Formation Team (WCC-EEFT) took place from 17-22 September 2002 at Kempton Park, Lutheran Conference Centre, Gauteng Province, South Africa.
23. WCC, "Plan of Action" for the Conference on Theological Education and Ecumenical Formation entitled "THE JOURNEY OF HOPE IN AFRICA" held from 17-22 September 2002 in South Africa, page 3.
24. South African Churches, *Un-blurring the Vision: An Assessment of the New Partnership for Africa's Development*, (Johannesburg, SACC/SABCBC, 2000) p. 9. See also the Final Declaration of Committee on HIV/AIDS of the 26th United Nations General Assembly Special Session, 27 June 2001; *Africa Recovery*, vol. 16 No. 1, April 2002; see also www.un.org for the United Nations Development Programmes etc.
25. For a comprehensive African Church's response to the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) initiative, see the *Un-blurring the Vision : An Assessment of NEPAD*; and for the whole African theological community's response, see the "Plan of Action" for the Conference on Theological Education and Ecumenical Formation on THE JOURNEY OF HOPE IN AFRICA., 2002.
26. Department of Foreign Affairs—Republic of South Africa, *Part 1: Constitutive Act of the African Union (AU), Part 2: New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD)*, p. 17 from henceforth referred to as the NEPAD Document.
27. NEPAD Document, paragraph 8, p.8.
28. Ibid. par. 7, p. 8.
29. WCC, "Plan of Action," p. 3.
30. *Un-blurring the Vision*, p. 25, cf. pp. 7, 10, 26, 27, 29.
31. Ibid. pp. 7f.
32. Ibid. p. 10.
33. Ibid. p. 8
34. Oduyoye, "Liberation and the Development of Theology in Africa," p. 209

*Report*

## REFLECTIONS ON THE WORLD FORUM ON LIBERATION AND THEOLOGY

PORTO ALEGRE, JANUARY 21-25, 2005

*Deenabandhu Manchala*

This event has to be seen as a major milestone alongside Medellín (1968) that inspired the emergence of liberation theology, Detroit (1975) that proposed socialist option, and Dar-es-Salaam (1976) that brought the EATWOT into being. Over 150 theologians from many parts of the world participated in this event that was sponsored by a collective of theological associations in Latin America, North America and Europe. The overall theme: *Theology for another possible world* was intended to resonate with the theme of the World Social Forum – *Another world is possible*. The WSF is a global event of thousands of people's movements from all over the world that meets parallel to the World Economic Forum where the wealthy and the powerful meet to fine tune their own visions of the world.

The 33 presentations\* from a variety of contextual and experiential perspectives were considered under five major sub themes: *Another world is possible*; *God for another possible world*; *Religion for another possible world*; and finally, *Theology for another possible world*. It was, of course, difficult to articulate the same, not even the features of it, given the preliminary nature of this global initiative and the programme that was meant to be primarily a fair of theological reflections committed to the liberation paradigm. It was indeed a bold and creative initiative that has the potential to inspire new ways of doing theology in partnership. At the end, it was decided to meet again when the next WSF meets in Africa in 2007, and possibly to make it an ongoing activity. I would like to reflect on some features of the conference which I think have relevance to the work we do in the WCC and to highlight the reasons for future accompaniment and involvement.

### 1. Theology as an ally of those who believe they can make a difference in the world:

The forum, even though it could not enter into dialogue with the ideological orientations of the social movements that were to congregate in the same city the following week, was meant to explore the possibility of envisioning theology as an active ally of those who are not only resisting the visions of the world according to the powerful but also seeking and proposing alternatives. It was an attempt to dream of God's *oikoumene* together with those who dream of another world, one that is radically different from the way the hegemonic powers as well as the escapists do. Its aim echoes with the call given by the Harare Assembly: "How do we live out our faith in a globalised world?" In spite of the contextual specificities of these theologies, there was an honest attempt to identify points of similarities in order to evolve common strategies and shared visions. As such it was not an attempt towards a universal liberation theology, but one on liberation and theology; an attempt to view and explore these together for mutual accompaniment and accomplishment.

## **2. Issues of life and people as subject matter of theology:**

The issues that featured prominently in these reflections were: economic globalisation, the politics of the powerful, the predicament of international structures of accountability, militarisation, violation of human rights, environmental degradation, the abuse and misuse of power, gender injustice, religious conflicts, violence and wars, etc. What was distinct about these reflections were the analyses of these issues and their interconnectedness and the articulation of theology from the perspective of those who are most affected by these realities. These reflections pointed towards further work on political ethics, theology of religious pluralism, nurturing multiculturalism, transformation of all structures of human relationships, and an examination all aspects of life that are touched by the values of economic globalisation. These in a way point towards the need of a public theology for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Incidentally, these are the issues that we too have been working on in the Council. Discussion on these issues echoed with some of the theoretical questions in our ongoing discussion on the reconfiguration of the ecumenical movement. We may draw on this resource as well as challenge the same on the basis of our engagement with churches in many parts of the world.

## **3. Role of religion in creating monocultures in a pluralistic world:**

In response to the spirit of the social movements gathering at the WSF which reject all attempts towards monocultures and false universalisms, the forum examined the interconnection between religion and culture afresh. Since religions and theologies have, to a great extent, created and nurtured monocultures and thus served the unifying strategies of the empires and the powers-that-be, in the present climate of the empire and the overwhelming nature of its value orientations, it was said that theological task needs to promote a spirit of appreciation of diversity and work towards the creation of a civil society with a safe distance from the market, religion and politics. The affirmation

of the basic pluralistic character of life and of God's creation and seeking unity of all peoples for justice and life, these are the new tasks of theological vocation. Reflection on the contours and content of ecumenism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, perhaps, needs to be conscious of this critique of western universalistic monocultures coming from those who are most affected by them.

## **4. The reality of religious pluralism:**

It is in the same spirit, the forum also viewed the global reality of religious pluralism and identified the need to search for new methods for appropriate theological responses. In an increasingly pluralistic world, theology has a much reduced space in the public realm; so is the effectiveness of Christian response to global problems. Theological activity involves negotiation for new spaces, partnerships and opportunities. This inevitable reality also has profound significance to the way we understand and pursue ecumenism. How do we view the other? How do we understand ecclesiology, Christology and eschatology in the context of this new global reality? Shall we be apologetic in our response? Or shall we tread this path cautiously because we don't want to rush into syncretistic responses? Or shall we view it as a coming together of pro-life forces and as trans-religious responses in faith to the God of life?

## **5. Spirituality of life:**

The theologians present there came from various confessional and cultural backgrounds but that diversity was hardly an impediment for them to find a common ground in a bio-centric approach. So were the social movements that gathered the following week from around 100 countries. A passion for life, if I may interpret, a spirituality of life seems to be the energy that brings and binds these forces together and this, perhaps, needs to be viewed as the new site of God's mission in praxis.

I would also like to point towards three areas where I found the forum disappointing:

### A. Who cares for these theologies anyway?

The forum did not seem conscious of the fact that many Christian communities in the world today live out their Christian faith with NO or narrow or outdated theologies. The forum seemed to have operated on the assumptions of a predominantly Christian Latin American context where theology still has a respectable public space. As an Indian / Asian Christian belonging to a fragmented minority in a predominantly multi-religious context where the negotiating space for my theological reflection is very narrow, I felt frustrated when I heard what theology can and must do. Furthermore, there was hardly any attempt to take stock of the state of the churches, no mention of confessional theologies and the need to challenge the same in the light of the challenges of today's world. It is one thing to dream of another world and a theology for the same but it is completely another thing to make it a reality. Dreams remain unrealistic when we don't allow them to challenge and change the reality. If the prime addressee of theology is not the church, theology can turn out to be a mere intellectual exercise or the preoccupation of some intellectuals while the churches, through which theology needs to find expression, remain as they are.

### B. Women only for gender issues?

There were some outstanding women theologians who made their presence felt through their interventions. However, what disappointed me was when some of these women were asked to make presentations on gender issues. Of course, there were a couple of them who spoke on other issues but most of the presentations were made by men. It was as though women theologians only can and should speak on gender issues. In fact this aberration was also pointed out in the group discussions. Theological reflection towards the goal of a transformed world, must also transform our ways of doing theology, our ways of understanding and exercising power.

### C. Big names, papers and presentations:

Many radical things were said and a searing analysis of the world realities was done by some of the finest theologians. Be that as it may, the faces and names of the disinherited and the disempowered from whose vantage point these theologies are done were invisible, except for some input from Dalit and indigenous peoples' perspectives. Alienation from their life-world has often drifted theology away from God's world and people. While a bio-centric approach does provide a common ground for a wider theological discourse, neglect of the option for the poor poses for these theological reflections, the danger of losing the distinct honour of being theologies from below.

#### *Notes*

- \* These presentations can be found (date-wise) at: [www.pucrs.br/pastoral/fmtl](http://www.pucrs.br/pastoral/fmtl)

## THE CASTE SYSTEM, EMERGING CASTE CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE OPPRESSION OF DALIT CHRISTIANS

*Yesudas Choondassery*

### Introduction

After the legal abolition of “Untouchability,” the caste system has evolved into a new level of existence in the Indian society. Today, caste<sup>1</sup> is a consciousness. It is a collective consciousness of the Indian culture developed into an entity without a formal structure, deeply affecting and influencing the Indian mind perpetuating new forms of caste oppression. It creates a new consciousness of caste identity that pervades the entire culture. The influence and impact of caste consciousness control the daily interactions of the political, social, economic, and religious fabrics of the Indian society. The farsighted Dalit guru, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar (1891-1956) foresaw the evolution of this monster (the caste system) and declared that India could not be

free until this monster is killed. Now, the struggle is not primarily against it as a system, but against an idea – a consciousness of caste – and, therefore, it is a struggle against an ideology that has taken the form of an abstract entity.

Under a postmodern ideal in contemporary India, Dalits’ subjective experience of oppression has been left in evasiveness as if it was something of the past, and the Indian society shows an “apathetic stance” toward the subjective reality of caste oppression of the Dalits, as if everyone is in a marginal space. Sandoval clearly explains this situation:

Once it was possible to know exactly who you were and where you stood; a time when it was possible to map your position in social space and to consider from what Archimedean point you could court the possibility of action. This positioning is necessary for comprehending the place in the social order from which one is expected to speak... it was possible to apprehend clearly who were the rulers and who the ruled and to look clearly into the face of one’s enemy...such clarity is traded...a disorientation that permeates everybody, regardless of social caste.<sup>2</sup>

Sociologically, therefore, it becomes far more difficult than what it has been a struggle against a system with prescribed norms, structures, and practices. This is not to affirm that caste as a system has been abolished. On the contrary, the rudiments of caste as a system are still in practice in India because of the caste consciousness. Recent developments of caste ideology and caste politics among the different castes, vying for political power and caste superiority make the struggle all the more difficult and challenging. My attempt is to reconsider the reality of Dalit oppression in contemporary India, which has been obscured by newer forms of caste consciousness and ideology.

This study is divided into three parts. The first analyses different levels of caste consciousness from the perspective of the psychological insights of consciousness developed by Sommerhoff and Baruss. Their understanding of consciousness sheds light on the systematic

metempsychosis of the caste system into caste consciousness. The second part examines oppression as caste consciousness manifested in the Indian society in different representations of consciousness, arguing that caste consciousness produces Dalit oppression. The final section will specifically analyze Dalit Christian oppression produced by caste consciousness, based on the insights drawn from Sommerhoff and Young. The study concludes with some clear insights of the nature of the present Dalit Christian oppression in the contemporary Indian society.

### **The Importance of the Issue**

Over the years, innumerable studies have been done by social scientists analyzing the caste system, formulating different theories, and proposing several solutions to the evils of the Indian Caste System. In spite of all these caste has not changed. It assumed a different form. As Gupta notes “caste cannot change intrinsically as long as it is fundamentally founded on identities that draw their sustenance from a rhetoric of natural differences that are imbued with notions of purity and impurity...caste identities will find novel ways of expressing themselves, now in politics, now in economics, now in capricious expressions of hierarchy, justice, and even equality.”<sup>3</sup>

Caste has drifted away from a structural system centered on the binary opposites of purity/impurity. Although, the boundary (the slash) between purity and impurity has not been erased, nevertheless, it has been reduced showing that the values and hierarchical order implied in the opposites are not so rigid, but are still valid. Therefore, my task in this study is not to analyze caste as a social system, but to examine the post-structuralist evolution of the caste system as caste consciousness in the Indian mind today analyzing its repercussions in the social life of India, and its expressions of oppression experienced by the ex-Untouchables<sup>4</sup> or today's Dalits. Such an analysis of caste from the perspective of today's caste consciousness aims at re-examining Dalit oppression from a present-day experience of Dalit

oppression as a starting point of a study of Dalit Christian ethics. Thus, this essay will study the issues of oppression produced by the caste system from a caste consciousness matrix. Although, I will use Marion Young's model to analyze oppression, my analysis is not limited to this model alone. It will incorporate the analysis of oppression found in the Dalit theologians and Dalit social reformers. This study will ask three basic questions; what is caste consciousness in contemporary India? How does it produce oppression? And how can we start from the common Dalit experience of oppression produced by caste consciousness to formulate a Dalit Christian ethic of Justice?

### **A Discreet Consciousness of Caste in the Indian Society**

An Indian is born into a caste. A caste is by ascription and birth alone determines one's status in the Indian society founded on a caste hierarchy.<sup>5</sup> Indians are very discreet about their caste consciousness, especially the Dalits. Talking about it publicly is illegal and discriminatory causing an embarrassment for the lower caste people; therefore people tend to preserve this consciousness discreetly. When I say it is discreet, I specifically mean, from the part of the Dalits, it is a careful dynamic used, as it causes embarrassment or attracts too much attention, especially by revealing something secret, and from the part of the non-Dalits, showing a certain amount of judgment in conduct and speech or capable of preserving a prudent silence.

Caste consciousness is a new outcome of the evolution of the traditional Indian caste system. Like the abolition of slavery lead to the development of a discreet race consciousness in the United States, evolving into an abstract social entity like classism or racism, the evolution of the caste system begins from the constitutional abolition of Untouchability.<sup>6</sup> During the colonialist era, the colonialists distributed benefits and services based on a caste rank considering the caste systems as an unavoidable social structure of the Indian society perpetuating the caste system. Therefore, in the post colonialist times, India struggled with the issues of caste and caste related violence.

The Indian social reformers worked toward a radical change in the Indian consciousness expecting a gradual transformation of caste consciousness into a national identity rooted in citizenship and Indian nationalism.<sup>7</sup> Contrary to the hopes of the reformers, caste consciousness evolved into caste identity politics among the Dalits as well as the non-Dalits rooted in caste ideology begetting a deep sense of one's own caste identity.<sup>8</sup>

Identity politics, whether caste or politics oriented, is an alienating principle for the Dalits. By using an assimilationist ideal,<sup>9</sup> the propaganda of identity politics for a unified India, tried to find a political unity not depending on religious unity but on political, historical, and cultural factors. Identity politics poses an alarming threat to the Dalits and the marginalized that they often have to cover their religious, ethnic, and cultural identity to assimilate into the system. In contemporary India, it is reported that the Dalit professionals in the IT industry, who moved into the metropolitan areas of India from the villages, have to conceal their Dalit identity from their peers and co-workers who consider that the Dalits have no ability to learn the computers.<sup>10</sup> The inherent prejudice of caste consciousness is still an internal dynamism of the non-Dalits and explains the futility of identity politics in India.

### Consciousness and Caste

To begin analyzing caste consciousness, I want to start from a simple question, what is consciousness? As there are several interpretations to the meaning of consciousness, it is difficult to conceptualize and define. Consciousness can be approached from four perspectives: physiological, cognitive, experiential, and social.<sup>11</sup> For this study, I want to employ Sommerhoff's scientific study of consciousness to analyze caste consciousness from a social perspective. Although, the social perspective of consciousness, as shared knowledge, is not a primary focus of psychologists today, Sommerhoff includes a similar notion of "shared attitudes" as in class consciousness or national consciousness in his approach. His approach

to consciousness is biological. He argues that we humans are a product of continuous biological development and the faculty of consciousness is a part of this development. Therefore, he concludes that "the roots and rationale of consciousness in needs arising out of an organism's interactions with the external world"<sup>12</sup> and its functions have to be studied as a biological property implemented by the human brain. How it is implemented by the human brain *objectively* as a part of the faculty of the brain, is a part of the physiological study of consciousness. Why it evolved and how it operates *subjectively* as particular qualities of experience, particularly as caste consciousness is the object of my study.

Sommerhoff integrated three different aspects of the consciousness of an organism (individual or society) in his biological approach to consciousness: (1) an awareness of the surrounding world, (2) an awareness of the self as an entity and (3) an awareness of one's thoughts and feelings, and developed an "Integrated Global Representation" (IGR) model for an understanding of primary consciousness. He defined IGR as "an extensive internal representation of the current state of the organism which includes the total situation facing the organism in both the external and the internal world."<sup>13</sup> This model suggests consciousness as an extensive internal structural and functional representation of an individual or a society (organism), its current state of being, with a total knowledge of the present situation of the individual or society in both the inner and outer world. Applied this definition to caste consciousness, it includes: (1) the organism, (2) its internal representation, (3) which are structural and functional, (4) a total knowledge of the present situation, and (5) the elements inner and outer world.

The elements of the inner world of the organism contain, psychological and motivational stimuli, current mental events, such as memories of the recent and distant past as well as the thoughts of the future, mostly subjective experience. Whereas the elements of the

outer world are the properties of the present surrounding world, from which the senses infer knowledge, based on experience and previous knowledge. A representation might mean different things like the name of the author on a book represents who wrote the book or a national flag represents a particular country. In this context a representation is understood in two different senses: structural and functional.

Understood within the IGR model, we can consider caste consciousness as an extensive internal structural and functional representation of the individual or society, developed out of the elements of the inner and outer world of the caste system. Over the years, it has evolved into extensive internal and external representations of the individual and society responding to the present situation from the stimuli received either from the structural or functional images of caste. Thus caste consciousness contains various structural and functional internal and external images within the individual or society. Hence, a caste consciousness is a highly complex structural and functional representation of the organism and it becomes instantly functional when the organism decides to act or react on selected stimuli either from the inner or the outer world. It can aptly be said that caste consciousness is internalized through a process of social construction.

### **The Generative Causes of Caste Consciousness**

Caste consciousness is interwoven with the caste ideology of purity and pollution. The cultural, social, political, economic, and religious structures of India are founded on the ideology of purity and pollution. It manifests and operates through different representations of casteism. Therefore, this section will first analyze the structural and functional representations of caste consciousness as properties to understand the nature of caste ideology retained in the society even after the disintegration of caste as a system. Then, I will look into caste ideology from the purview of caste consciousness matrix to understand clearly the generative causes of caste domination and thus get a clear perspective on how to address the issues of oppression produced by caste consciousness.

The representations of caste consciousness are divided into two levels: Structural and Functional. The structural representations produce abstract and concrete internal images of the caste system. The abstract images of caste are produced from a hierarchical consciousness, a residue of the caste system, and a cultural consciousness ascribing specific cultural traits to the Dalits and non-Dalits in the caste hierarchy. The concrete images of caste are produced from a biological consciousness in which a caste is associated with biological categories of colour, shape, and appearance. On the functional level, caste consciousness functions in three different facets of the society: political, social, and economic. When the organism (individual or society) acts consciously, unconsciously or behaviourally on stimuli from the abstract or concrete images of caste consciousness in the structural level or functional level the action of the organism produces oppression in both structural and functional levels of caste consciousness. For example, unconscious assumptions, prejudiced judgments, derogatory remarks or stereotypical comments are produced either from the abstract or concrete images of caste consciousness within the individual's mind or from the idea that a person's caste could be determined from someone's appearance, cultural traits, or biological representation.

### **A. The Structural Level**

#### **The Abstract Structures of Caste Consciousness**

##### **1. A Hierarchical Consciousness**

Despite all the criticisms and pitfalls, still, Louis Dumont's *Homo Hierarchicus* plays a pivotal role in analyzing the Indian caste system for its systematic, scientific, and theoretical synthesis of the caste system in the principle of a hierarchical thesis based on the ideology of purity and pollution. Dumont's hierarchical thesis has to be understood in the light of the "*varnashramadharmā*" (*dharma* (ethic) based on the *varna* (colour). The four "*varnas*"<sup>14</sup> describe the four groups in a descending hierarchy according to the order of status. Dalits were

not listed in the four *varnas* and they were beyond the pale of caste without a caste identity in the *varnashramadharmā*. Gradually, the system of caste hierarchy led to the formation of sub-castes on the grounds of the occupations and assimilated the oppressive caste hierarchy by way of a replication of the dominant social order within their communities accepting the dominant caste ideology based on purity and pollution.<sup>15</sup> Dalits thus entered into a hierarchical gradation of the sub-castes according to their occupation in the society within the purity-pollution poles. Hence, the emergence of the sub-castes led to further divisions in the society, each caste claiming its superiority over the other:

As castes always value themselves highly, they must, as a consequence, hierarchise others, however idiosyncratic such formulations may appear to be. Also, while some ex-untouchable castes may not accept their lowly status, they might, however, continue to believe that there are other castes out there that are polluting. This is the true phenomenology of caste.<sup>16</sup>

Therefore, in the modern India, caste identity plays a crucial role, often, surpassing the system itself.

We have gone a long way since Dumont's hierarchical thesis based on the ideology of purity and pollution proposal. And generally speaking, there can be hardly any empirical support of evident practice of Untouchability based on the ideology of purity and pollution<sup>17</sup> in contemporary India. Although the concrete structural set up of the caste system has collapsed in the democratic process, still, the structural abstract images of caste hierarchy is imbued in caste consciousness and produce structural oppression and inequality based on ranks and status.

## 2. A Cultural Consciousness

Each caste, either Dalit or non-Dalit shares particular cultural traits. The cultural forms also acquired a hierarchical gradation as the dominant Brahminic world view devalued the Dalit cultural and religious

forms and images as polluted, savage, inferior, and *anemic*. The phenomenon of Dalit cultural devaluation is a product of the history of Brahminic conquest, domination, and the degradation of Dalit cultures and civilization. Degraded cultural caste consciousness of the Dalit cultures produce abstract structural images of a devalued and inferior Dalit culture. The Dalit cultural symbols of music, musical instruments, deities, and forms of worship<sup>18</sup> were all considered expressions of an inferior culture and therefore they produce inferior images of Dalit culture. In contrast, the non-Dalit cultures gained a superior status. Clarke points out two tendencies of the dominant culture when it interacts with the cultural symbols of Dalits: demonizing and trivializing of Dalit cultural symbols.<sup>19</sup> Today, caste as a cultural consciousness establishes a hierarchy from superior to inferior portraying a gradation in cultural identity.

### The Concrete Structure of Caste Consciousness

## 3. A Biological Consciousness

Within the belief of essentialism, "that human behavior is "natural," predetermined by genetic, biological, or physiological mechanisms and thus not subject of change"<sup>20</sup> rests a biological consciousness of caste. Gupta and Sahay argue that the lower and upper castes justify the practice of endogamy on commonly assumed biological differences.<sup>21</sup> So far, caste theories in sociology and anthropology have not taken seriously the biological factors of caste consciousness due to their over-rated emphasis on hierarchy in the caste system.

The biological features of color, shape, accents (accents found in the same dialect or language are often considered as a trait of caste identity), appearance etc, are perceived as distinctive biological hereditary traits of a particular caste and push the Dalits to the fringes of caste hierarchy. The biological consciousness of caste produces stereotypical images of Dalits and non-Dalits in literature and media, which impart these stereotypical images into the Indian as well as non-Indian minds. These images of the Dalits produced by the biological

characteristics become a part of the education system, family, and society perpetuating oppression as a biological category of domination.

## **B. The Functional Level**

### ***1. A Political Consciousness***

Caste politics is germane to the acquisition of power in the democratic India, which is mostly controlled by caste and religious politics and often leading to caste rivalries and violence. In the political arena of contemporary India, caste consciousness has emerged into a required consciousness for a caste to obtain cohesion and political power, so that, the economic, religious, and other factors can be altered and controlled according to the vested interests of the caste that holds political power. Recent empirical study of Michelutti among the Yadavs, a traditionally low to middle ranking peasant caste in Uttar Pradesh and certain other northern states, who have become a significant political power through a caste oriented political consciousness, amplifies my argument that caste consciousness in politics transformed the caste dynamics of India.<sup>22</sup> Gupta observes, “untouchable castes that were once considered supine and docile are now militant, aggressive, and fully conscious of their power and right in the democratic polity.”<sup>23</sup> In recent years, caste mobilization became a primary political agenda of Dalit social and political activists seeking political power as a pre-requisite for Dalit liberation.

### ***2. A Social Consciousness***

Being the member of a higher caste is a symbol of social status in India. If you ask the Dalits if they want to be reborn in the caste system, where they want to be? The common unequivocal consensus would be the upper level of the hierarchy.<sup>24</sup> Indian social mind absorbed caste into its social consciousness so tactfully that it is difficult to isolate caste consciousness from the “unconscious assumptions and reactions of well-meaning people in ordinary interactions, media, and cultural stereotypes.”<sup>25</sup> Therefore, eliminating Brahmanism and caste

hierarchy or making laws alone will not eradicate caste consciousness structurally entrenched in the society.

As a result, Dalits develop a “double-consciousness” in their social interactions. Du Bois identified it as a peculiar sensation “in the sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of the world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.”<sup>26</sup> Young argues that double consciousness arises when the oppressed groups, who are searching for recognition in the society, refuse to agree to the “devalued,” “objectified,” “stereotyped” notions of the society receive in turn the judgment that they are “different,” “marked,” and “inferior.”<sup>27</sup> An awareness of this exclusion generates conflict in their being since they are defined by two cultures and two social worlds producing a double consciousness. Because of this developed double consciousness, the Dalits often deny their own caste identity and involuntarily accommodate themselves to the value system of the upper caste. Caste consciousness has become a part of the social consciousness of India and unarguably, it has developed into a practice of social ostracism of the Dalits from the social life of India.

### ***3. An Economic Consciousness***

An economic consciousness of caste is found in the two contrasting poles of poverty and wealth. Economically, empirical studies<sup>28</sup> show that the Dalits are deprived of material wealth, property, and live in abject poverty. Material poverty, as Gutierrez says, “is certainly a social and economic issue, but it has much more than a social and economic dimension. In the final analysis, poverty means death: unjust death; early death; death due to illness, hunger, repression; physical death; and cultural death.”<sup>29</sup> Mostly, it is the Dalits fall victim to the economic exploitation of the upper castes who hold the means of production. *The Economist* magazine reported quoting a local district magistrate from a predominantly Dalit village in India, that “real empowerment will only come when they have assets,” (Dalits) the report continues, “that remains impossible, because there would be an

uncontrollable backlash as soon as the “core interests” of the dominant local castes were threatened.”<sup>30</sup> The report underlines my argument of the pervasiveness of oppression present today due to caste consciousness.

### Caste Ideology and Oppression

The structural and functional generative causes of caste consciousness are the foundations of my analysis of the oppression of Dalit Christians. To this, I want to add Young’s analysis of oppression to identify clearly the multi-faceted nature of Dalit Christians’ oppression produced by caste consciousness.

Marx left us in an ambivalent situation with his critique of ideology as a misguided and confused account of experience. Thus, the ambiguity in Marx’s conception of ideology opens two different facets of ideology: positive and negative. In this study, I am inclined to follow Ricoeur’s view of ideology to analyze caste ideology. Ricoeur’s view shows a more closeness to the nature of caste ideology than that of the Marxist-Leninist view. There have been failed attempts to analyze caste in terms of a class analysis of Marxism.<sup>31</sup> As Ricoeur claims “the analysis in terms of social classes” seals oneself to the “polemic for or against Marxism,” therefore, “what we need today is a thought which is free from any process of intimidation, a thought which would have the audacity and the capacity to *cross* (italics original) Marx, without either following or fighting him.”<sup>32</sup> He claims his way of “crossing” Marxism by arriving at the concept of ideology, rather than starting from an analysis in terms of social classes.

Ricoeur argues from the Weberian premises of social action and social relation, where the latter adds “stability and predictability of a system of meanings” to the former and gives it a level of meaningful mutually oriented and socially integrated character of action. Ideology “is linked to the necessity for a social group to give itself an image of itself, to represent and to realize itself” and to retain social and political power in a society. It gives a social group a collective identity from its

primitive “founding act,” which can never be repeated, therefore, ideology plays the role of keeping this “social memory” alive and “perpetuate the initial energy beyond the period of effervescence.”<sup>33</sup> Caste ideology, in contemporary India, plays somewhat a similar role as Ricoeur’s conception of ideology by repeating or exhuming the origin of a caste, romanticizing and idealizing it to retain social cohesion and political power.

Ricoeur thinks that in the modern society ideology plays an analogous role, similar to that of the foundation myth and origin stories of ancient societies. The contemporary society romanticizes and idealizes their glorious past to retain and maintain the present cohesion of a particular group. This is exactly what happens in the new caste identity developed among Dalits and non-Dalits by exhuming their origins and stories of glorious past to keep the group together. Political affiliation, national identity, religious affinity or cultural commonality, cannot bind people together. The ingeniousness of a caste ideology is that as caste consciousness develops caste ideology becomes more and more powerful and the groups become more cohered.

In this sense, caste consciousness functions an ideological role that coheres a caste being founded on the theories of their origin or founding act to show their superiority over other castes.<sup>34</sup> These old stories can never be repeated, therefore, the role of caste ideology is to keep alive symbolically the theories of their founding act and perpetuate them in various ways. Although, caste consciousness has a positive role here, keeping the members of a caste together on the ideological grounds of their founding stories or theories of origin, we cannot overlook the fact that ideology can also show its negative aspect in caste consciousness. Caste ideology is “both interpretation of the real and obturation of the possible.” Ricoeur calls our attention to this negative characteristic of ideology, which has an “operative” function.

It consists in the fact that the interpretative code of an ideology is something *in which* men (*sic*) live and think, rather than a

conception that they pose. In other words, an ideology is operative and not thematic. It operates behind our backs, rather than appearing as a theme before our eyes. We think from it rather than about it.<sup>35</sup>

To interpret an ideology, Ricoeur thinks we have to do it from within that ideology. We have no neural ground. Ideology is “the grid of ideas through which we come to know the world... we feed of the ideology of our time.”<sup>36</sup> Ideology is thus pervasive, inseparable, and inescapable, as Ricoeur claims “we think from it rather than about it,” in an “ideological closure” or “ideological blindness.” This is the nature of caste consciousness and caste ideology in India. The Indian mind thinks from and within the compass of caste ideology. The danger inherent in caste ideology is that it instigates caste pride leading to exclusivism and the danger of ethnocentrism, the practice of judging another group on the assumption that one’s own group is superior to other groups. Caste ideology and its generative caste consciousness, in the negative sense, move toward the pathological with its particular functions of “dissimulation,” “domination,” and oppression with a hierarchical consciousness of the caste system.

### **Defining Forms of Dalit Christians’ Oppression**

Using a systematic frame to analyze caste oppression postulates a redefinition of the generic understanding of caste oppression in terms of prejudice or discrimination. These concepts do not completely encapsulate the structural levels of caste oppression. Therefore, having explained the generative cause of oppression produced by caste consciousness, my next task is to analyze oppression, inequality, and injustice as an institutionalized structural concept.

Dalits are a large group of oppressed people in India. Majority of them are still under Hinduism despite centuries of domination and oppression. Several Dalit groups made an exodus from Hinduism joined other religions in search of freedom and liberation. Now, they belong

to different religious traditions in India, each group with its own unique characteristics of oppression. Caste based discrimination and oppression are not just a product of the Hindu society and the Caste System. They persist among the non-Hindu religions, such as, Christianity in India. This study will focus on the Dalit Christians, who are Christian converts from the Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST)<sup>37</sup> during the 19<sup>th</sup> century missionary endeavours of the Western missions. This study will have a direct reference to the Dalit Christians in the State of Kerala, India, from where I infer my subjective experience. This study also aims at as Isasi-Diaz says, “denounce and deconstruct only to rescue what is mine, recognizing that to do so I have to embrace the life-long process of freeing myself of the internalized oppressors. To denounce and deconstruct is a way of actively remembering what I do not want the future to be like.”<sup>38</sup>

Among these oppressed Dalit groups, I single out the Dalit Christians as a targeted group for my analysis and study. Dalit Christians make about 70% of the Christians in India. However, the negligence of the Indian church on Dalit issues reflected in the words of Archbishop George Zur, Apostolic Pro-Nuncio of India, when addressing the Catholic Bishop’s Conference General Body in 1991:

Though Catholics of the lower caste and tribes form 60 per cent of Church membership they have no place in decision-making. Scheduled caste converts are treated as lower caste not only by high caste Hindus but by high caste Christians too. In rural areas they cannot own or rent houses, however well-placed they may be. Separate places are marked out for them in the parish churches and burial ground. Inter-caste marriages are frowned upon and caste tags are still appended to the Christian names of high caste people. Casteism is rampant among the clergy and the religious. Though Dalit Christians make 65 per cent’ of the 10 million Christians in the South, less than 4 per cent of the parishes are entrusted to Dalit priests. There are no Dalits among 13 Catholic Bishops of Tamilnadu or among Vicars-general and rectors of seminaries and directors of social assistance centers.<sup>39</sup>

What do the Dalits who are divided into several castes and religions have in common? Is it “Untouchability” or “Oppression”? There are scholars who argue that Untouchability is the common ideology that binds the Dalits together.<sup>40</sup> Untouchability is a stigma perpetuated under the category of an abstract caste consciousness of purity and pollution in the caste hierarchy. It is only one category of Dalit oppression and besides, it is an abstract category. Untouchability is only one form of oppression the Dalits suffer over the years under a caste-dominated society. It alone cannot find cohesion of Dalit communities as it is a stigma that the Dalits want to erase from their memory as well as the memory of their oppressors.

“Oppression” is a common experience of any oppressed or marginalized group. According to Frye, oppression involves “a system of interrelated barriers and forces which reduce, immobilize and mould people who belong to a certain group, and effect their subordination to another group.”<sup>41</sup> Accordingly, an analysis of Dalit Christians’ oppression provides us a crucial direction toward understanding every aspect of Dalit oppression as a stance, a perspective, a horizon, and a starting point from which we perceive the entire reality of the Dalit Christians as an oppressed group. Therefore, a Dalit Christian ethic of justice needs a scientific analysis of the oppression of Dalit Christians, a deep sense of Dalit Christian identity (versus caste identity), an emergent Dalit consciousness, a solid Dalit theology, and a methodology of resistance developed from an oppositional consciousness to withstand the structural and functional representations of oppression produced by caste consciousness. This study will concentrate on Dalit Christians’ oppression as a starting point of Dalit Christian ethics.

My project is to analyze Dalit Christian oppression from caste consciousness matrix. Caste consciousness among the Indian Christians generates and perpetuates oppression. I have already analyzed the multi-faceted oppressive structures of caste in contemporary India perpetuated and imbued in caste consciousness.

“Oppressions differ,” writes Lebacqz. She continues, “but each is a possible window to injustice and therefore to justice.”<sup>42</sup> Consequently, I open my discussion quoting the poignant words of a Dalit Christian theologian Arvind P. Nirmal, which resonate the painful memories of caste oppression:

My dalit ancestors did not enjoy the nomadic freedom of the wandering Aramean. As outcastes, they were also cast out of their villages. The dalit bashes (localities) were always and are always on the outskirts of the Indian village. When my dalit ancestor walked the dusty roads of his village, the *Sa Varnas* tied a branch of a tree around his waist so that he would not leave any unclean footprints and pollute the roads. The *Sa Varnas* also tied an earthen pot around my dalit ancestor’s neck to serve as spittle. If my dalit ancestor tried to learn Sanskrit or some other sophisticated language, the oppressors gagged him permanently by pouring molten lead down his throat. My dalit mother and sister were forbidden to wear any blouses, and the *Sa Varnas* feasted their eyes on their bare bosoms. The *Sa Varnas* denied my dalit ancestor any access to public wells and reservoirs. They denied him entry to their temples and places of worship.<sup>43</sup>

This Dalit Christian experience of oppression within the matrix of caste consciousness opens a new perspective toward the reality of oppression that caste is the dominant generative cause of oppression the Dalit Christians suffer. Caste consciousness maintains the systems of oppression and privilege. Therefore, I want to analyze the forms of Dalit Christian oppression from the purview of the structural and functional representations of caste consciousness.

### **Caste Consciousness as *Homo Hierarchicus*: Exploitation**

Exploitation, a normally ascribed term to a Marxist analysis of oppression, is a misunderstood concept in social analysis. My intention is not to enter into the Marxist polemic of a hallucinogenic intensity of economics, but rather, identify the conception of exploitation from the “ideologies of natural superiority and inferiority,”<sup>44</sup> which is implied in an exploitive and essentialist oppressive caste consciousness of

hierarchy that defines ranks and status to exploit and oppress the Dalit Christians. Indian Christianity has to be viewed as a system of exploitation of the poor low-ranking Dalit Christians by more prosperous high-ranking Christians. The caste ideology of purity and pollution, structurally implanted in the sub-consciousness of Indian Christians hierarchically gradate Christians in a hierarchy. The non-Dalit Christians despise and look down on the Dalit Christians who are in the lower level of the hierarchy as inferior. Exploitation, thus excludes the Dalit Christians from leadership roles, force them to menial labor, and eventually to poverty.

Empirical studies conducted by Kurian in 1995 and 1998 in two of the Indian Catholic dioceses with a high density of Dalit Christians, the diocese of Vijayapuram and the diocese of Palai, point to the question of leadership. Kurian concludes, "though the Christian Dalits constitute the majority in all parishes in the Vijayapuram diocese, their participation in the church administration is pitifully low. Similarly, in the composition of the clergy the presence of dalit minister is almost negligible." While in the diocese of Palai, which is a Syro-Malabar upper caste Catholic diocese, no Dalit Christian has yet become an ordained clergy, showing the politics of recruitment to vocations to ordained clergy.<sup>45</sup> Wilfred adequately sums up the nature of this exploitation as the "perplexity on the part of the Church-leaders when they have to appoint a dalit priest to a community or a parish of middle or upper caste people. Some Church leaders are embarrassed about their dalit priests, and they do not seem to know what to do with these priests!"<sup>46</sup> Caste consciousness permeates the social with an ideology of the intrinsic worth of the person and anthropologically dehumanizes and exploits the Dalit Christians, who become a victim of caste oriented exploitation.

Dalit Christians are constantly forced to exploitive menial labour. It is a means to exploit the Dalit Christians economically by forced low paying jobs. Menial labour, writes Young, "usually refers not only

to service, however, but also to any servile, unskilled, low-paying work lacking in autonomy, in which a person is subject to taking orders from many people."<sup>47</sup> Kurian's studies show that even today, Dalit Christians educational qualifications have not changed and they are confined to menial works like, farming, sewage cleaning, digging graves, plantation workers etc., which hardly any of the non-Dalit of their status would be forced to do. They are estranged and alienated from their own personhood in a society that considers the dignity of a person based on caste identity.

### **Caste Consciousness in Culture: Cultural Imperialism**

Caste and culture are reckoned synonymous and therefore, cultural superiority is identified and ratified by caste superiority. Indian culture produces images of cultural superiority of the upper castes and they are not easy to change especially when they are religiously legitimized and have the weight of a sacred tradition. The roots of cultural oppression are ethnic prejudice and Casteism. "Cultural imperialism involves the universalization of a dominant group's experience and culture, and its establishment as the norm."<sup>48</sup> The culture, manners, and traditions of a dominant group are taken as the standard and the marginalized group becomes invisible under the power of the dominant group. The culture, manners and even world view of Dalit Christians have become invisible under the dominant upper caste Hindu and Christian world view. The culture of the Dalit Christians is considered as inferior and deviant as if their culture is something polluted that needs purification.

Since the Dalits' "Dravidian" culture, which was the culture of the indigenous people, have been devalued by centuries after centuries of oppression at the hands of the upper caste Hindus, dominant Brahminic ideology, and upper caste Christians, the customs and traditions of Dalits in general and Dalit Christians in particular have been deemed irrational and inferior. The Christian missionaries also perpetrated this attitude of the Hindu upper caste during their missionary

activities finding ways to purify this defiled polluted group. Thus, most of the traditions, customs and practices of the Dalit Christians were abolished during their conversion process to Christianity. We can trace a sense of “uprootedness” and “alienation” from their own culture, clans, and traditions among the early Dalit Christian converts.

The cultural oppression of the dominant culture leads to internalization of the dominant culture. Slowly, Dalit Christians, often unknowingly, internalize and assimilate the culture, manners, and traditions of the dominant group as the standard of life and change their own culture. Isasi-Diaz explains this phenomenon:

Little by little we internalize the way the dominant culture sees us - when it sees us - for we are always obliged to act according to the image society has of us. Little by little our own culture and our own self-understanding become as invisible to ourselves as they are to the dominant culture. And that invisibility finds expression in a rejection of our cultural customs and values, in a rejection of ourselves.<sup>49</sup>

Moffatt calls this phenomenon a cultural “replication” where the “entire set of institutions and of ranked relations from which they have been excluded by the higher castes by the reason of their extreme lowness,” have been evolved into a “deeper and often unarticulated construction of cultural identities.”<sup>50</sup> Although, Srinivas identifies this phenomenon as a process of social mobility and calls it “Sanskritization,” he rules out the possibility of upward social mobility for the untouchables or the Dalits through a process of Sanskritization.<sup>51</sup> What is a projected and standardized Indian culture? It is nothing but the exploitive dominant culture of the non-Dalits, and the Dravidian culture of the indigenous Dalits is forgotten and rendered obsolete.

### **Caste Consciousness and the Body: Violence**

Directly inflicted violence is always directed to the body. The marked bodily features provoke and generate violence arising from prejudice and homophobia. Violence is directed toward persons and

therefore it is personal. Our body is central to our being. Earthly life begins from the body and ends with the disintegration of the body. Recent developments in body theology, such as body spirituality, embodied human flourishing, and Eros-body dynamics underscore the centrality of the human body. In theology, any violation of the human body is a violation of the divine body.

Statistics show that the Dalit Christians become victims of violence in different parts of India from the non-Dalits, both by Christians and non-Christians, which include “harassment, intimidation, or ridicule simply for the purpose of degrading, humiliating, or stigmatizing group members.”<sup>52</sup>

Violence toward the Dalit Christians is both personal and communal in nature. There have been events when a whole group of Dalit Christians became the target of violence. The studies of Shiri, Oommen, and others<sup>53</sup> report several such concrete instances of violence directed to the Dalit Christians from upper caste Hindus and non-Dalit Christians over the years have been a “Dalit Holocaust.”<sup>54</sup> Although Rajarigam do not claim deeper parallels between the Jewish Holocaust and Dalit genocide over the years, I think the subjective experience of oppression, violence, and killings of the Dalit Christians could aptly be attributed to an “untold holocaust” that had faded into a selective historical amnesia.

Biological differentiation is a systematic structural construction of caste consciousness among the Indians to discriminate and subjugate the majority of Christians who are Dalits. Various forms of violence directed toward the Dalit Christians systematically and structurally produced and carried out through biological abuse and even killing. The escalating violence directed toward the Dalit Christians in the villages shows the interconnectedness of the oppressive structures of caste and sexuality.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, it disseminates a shared knowledge among the oppressed Dalit Christians that they are preys to physical and mental violations owing to their lower caste identity and lack of

power. A sense of fear effused out of this shared knowledge benefiting the dominant to perpetuate subjugation and domination over the Dalit Christians. Reprehensibly, the non-Dalit Clergy exerts a type of repressive violence toward the Dalit Christians and their clergy with a rational and evil motive of maintaining the hegemonic power and leadership roles in the Church. Often, oppositional consciousness and resistance from the Dalit Christians breed irrational violence, hatred, and apathy, of which both are culpable.

### **Caste Consciousness in the Society: Powerlessness**

Caste consciousness makes the Dalit Christians socially powerless. Connecting the notion of powerlessness to human dignity, Sennett and Cobb argue that powerlessness is embedded in the self. The self feels powerless mostly as an outcome of the distribution of social status in the society, where the socially superior class or caste dominates the powerful positions while the less powerful were deprived of freedom to control their own lives.<sup>56</sup> They continue to argue that caste societies create oppressive images of human dignity produced from the ideology of “worthiness.” The superior castes have more worthiness and coercing people below them was justified in such societies on the grounds of superiority and power, gradually perpetuating a morality of caste with its wounding image of the dignity of the human being. Human dignity and power in a society, where caste consciousness determines and influences the division of labour (division of labour is one of the major tenets of the caste system) are maintained and controlled by the powerful. Powerlessness, therefore, “designates a position in the division of labour and the concomitant social position that allows persons little opportunity to develop and exercise skills.”<sup>57</sup>

Oppression generated from powerlessness affects two different areas, human dignity and upward social mobility, of the social life of the Dalit Christians. Human dignity is a central principle of Christian anthropology. It unifies humanity on the fundamental principle of the “image of God” that all are equal and humanity is one. Sadly, Indian

Christians have a dualistic anthropological concept of the human person that the upper caste Christians have the fullness of humanness and the Dalit Christians are deficient, lower in rank, and limited. Theologically, it contradicts the doctrinal concept of “Imago Dei” when considering the Dalit Christians as inferior, marked, and devalued. As the term “Dalit” designates, a fractured, torn, oppressed, and broken image of the human, this fractured image of the human belied the principles of Christian anthropology. Accordingly, social consciousness of caste and its consorted devalued human image of the Dalit Christians convey to the society a theological hokum that Christianity is no better than whatever is out there. It creates an “epistemological suspension”<sup>58</sup> of the sociology of knowledge a system produces to feed its members. The system feeds itself from its own negative oppressive ideology.

Apparently, upward social mobility is the social magic sociologists and social reformers extol as a required sine qua non to break the yoke of oppression. The ambiguity of caste consciousness evades the possibilities of social mobility. The ambiguity consists in the fact that the Dalits themselves practice Untouchability. The phenomenology of caste underscores the fact that even among the Dalit Christians themselves, each caste claims its superiority over the other and considers its intrinsic worth on the premise that there is another caste out there that is inferior and polluted. My argument could empirically be proven from my subjective experience of the two Dalit Christian communities in Kerala, “pulayas” and “parayas,” two former untouchable castes. When it comes to caste relations, especially, marriage, the former claims superiority over the latter, and marriage relations are limited between these two castes, let alone with other castes, on an ideological ground of endogamy.

As mentioned earlier “Sanskritization” as a principle for social mobility is not viable to the untouchables. Besides, it poses only positional changes and does not lead to any structural change; ultimately, a systemic change is impossible. Sahay argues that today

“regardless of what happened in the past, castes with economic and political power do not think of sanskritising their style of life but re-emphasise their discrete character by highlighting the superiority of their own ideologies, customs, rituals and styles of life. They are not ashamed of their identities, but on the contrary, feel proud of them.”<sup>59</sup> In general, an emerging social consciousness of caste makes the Dalit Christians powerless, curtails their social mobility, and confines them to social oppressive structures.

Did conversion to Christianity elevate the social status of the Dalit Christians and provide them with an upward mobility? This is a debated question in Dalit scholarship. There are scholars who argue that the Dalit Christians attained a certain level of upward social status by becoming Christians compared to their fellow Dalit brothers and sisters in Hinduism. Clearly, this claimed acquired social status is determined in comparison to an equally oppressed group and not dominant groups like the upper caste Syrian Christians or the “Other Backward Class” (OBC) Latin Christians. Early conversion documents of the pulayas in Kerala attest that during the conversion process, before baptism, the pulayas were forced to take an oath that they will not consider themselves equal in status to the upper caste Christians and that they will consider themselves as untouchables even after becoming Christians. I would like to quote that document from 1858, originally in *Malayalam* language, showing the social construction of caste consciousness through internalization and religious legitimation of caste.

Question: Are you receiving baptism thinking that you can leave your masters and runaway to some other place? Answer: No. wherever we are we will work for them. Therefore, we agree to work for our masters. Command: because you received baptism and therefore becoming proud, would you not give customary distance to the upper castes on the road according to the custom of the place? Answer: we are ready to keep more distance on the road when we see the upper castes. But we just want to know

God. Command: Since you are receiving baptism, if you think that you leave your status and gain the status of the upper caste Christians, there is no merit in that. Whatever your status is, obey the creed as children of God. There is no reason to change your status. Answer: we will remain as pulayas, we need only the creed.<sup>60</sup>

Keeping a prescribed or customary distance and spatial ordering were oppressive practices of the caste system to affirm the social rank and status of the upper castes. Apparently, conversion to Christianity did not produce much improvement in the social or economic status of the Dalit Christians. The early Dalit Christian conversion accounts show the reinforcement of caste rank and social status of the upper caste Christians and Hindus affirming the low birth status of the Dalit Christians. Deliege argues that today, the Hindu Dalits are neither poorer nor oppressed than the Dalit Christians.<sup>61</sup>

### **Caste Consciousness in the Economy and Politics: Marginalization**

Young argues, “marginalization is perhaps the most dangerous form of oppression. A whole category of people is expelled from useful participation in social life and thus potentially subjected to severe material deprivation and even extermination.”<sup>62</sup> Being a marginal person can be a relative concept. A high caste person from a dominant group, who is poor, could be a marginal person seen from the perspective of poverty even if that person belongs to a dominant group and enjoys the privileges of the dominant group. The interesting phenomenon is that a Dalit Christian is always a marginal person. Whether rich or poor, since the caste consciousness of pollution ascribed to the very nature of a Dalit Christian, it makes this person from a cultural and social perspective eternally marginal. Stonequist provides us a clear notion of the experience of marginality:

One who is poised in psychological uncertainty between two (or more) social worlds, reflecting in his soul the discords and harmonies, repulsions and attractions of these worlds; one of which

is often “dominant” over the other; within which membership is implicitly based upon birth or ancestry (race or nationality); and cohere exclusion removes the individual from a system of group relations.<sup>63</sup>

Stonequist’s notion mirrors Du Bois’ notion of “double consciousness.” Marginality gives Dalit Christians an excruciating pain of exclusion, “otherness,” and alienation. In a caste-oriented society, various determinants such as wealth, education, economic status, politics, occupation and cultural identities affect the Dalits’ marginality. Each determinant is interconnected and influences one another. The root of Dalit Christians’ marginality is the ideology of caste. Therefore, if caste consciousness of economic status determines Dalit Christians’ marginality, it affects their economic, political and religious status. I want to look at the notion of marginality and the subsequent oppression of the Dalit Christians from the perspective of an economic determinant.

Material deprivation produced by marginality contradicts the principles of justice. Injustice and inequality prevail in a society where one group lives in poverty while others have plenty. Economic disparities manifest in Dalit Christian’s economic underdevelopment. History proves that the Dalit Christians never owned or controlled the means of production, especially the land. Land ownership is controlled by the dominant castes, the high-ranking property owners. They economically exploited low-ranking landless, poor Dalits, all the while degrading the Dalits with ritual emphases on their predestined inferior status, were forbidden from owning land. Before the abolition of slavery in 1855 by the Travancore Government, Dalits were sold and bought as commodities in the market as labourers. These slave labourers were remunerated with a small amount of the produce on a daily basis.<sup>64</sup> Thus, very early in the history of the Dalit Christians, categories of differences were constructed, rooted in economics, and consequently those differences were transformed into systems of economic inequality and oppression. And such inequalities are maintained time

and again by the dominant system oppressing the Dalit Christians through a successful retention of the structures of caste oppression. Poverty and caste consciousness are interconnected and the development of the Dalit Christians demands the eradication of caste consciousness from the Indian society.

Politically, the “reservation policy” becomes the primary economic determinant. Caste becomes the deciding factor in granting reservations to the Dalit Christians. Under the Indian “protective discrimination” polity, the constitution grants reservation and other benefits to the members of the SC and ST communities in the public sector. The Dalit Christians have been denied the reservation privileges of SC and ST for legal and political reasons. There is an ongoing struggle to regain reservation privileges for the Dalit Christians. Overall, as Wilson argues, the Dalit Christians are “twice alienated,”<sup>65</sup> alienated from the very faith and religion they embraced seeking liberation, and by the state who discriminates them denying the benefits and privileges enjoyed by the Dalits.

### Conclusion

As Lebacqz argues, oppression is a possible window to injustice and therefore to justice, I consider this study of the oppression of the Dalit Christians, which illustrates various forms of injustice, as a window that opens to the possibilities of formulating an ethic of Justice for the Dalit Christians. This study is only the first step toward a Dalit Christian ethic of justice. My contention is not to accuse the oppressors for their past deeds, but rather through a “deep remembering” bring to our memory the injustices of the past so that it could not be repeated, and to take a stand, a perspective, a horizon, and a starting point learning from the past so that a new social order could be established. As Arokiasamy argues, “moral commitment demands a struggle against the unjust socio-economic, cultural factors and political institutions and structures with a view to creating a just, humane society and social order.”<sup>66</sup> The present state of oppression is a continuation of the evils

of the past. For the oppressed Dalit Christians, the image of the human is the oppressor. Hence, the Dalits emotionally try to subvert their imposed subhuman existence by accommodating or exchanging places with the oppressor. Caste consciousness promotes an ineluctable structural dependency of the oppressed Dalits on the oppressor and their ideology in this process of exchanging places in search of justice. Sadly, it is not justice. By defining the nature of oppression we open the scope of justice from a clumsy idealistic principle to a concrete reality which has to become the life experience of every person.

Contemporary development of caste consciousness, which challenges emerging Dalit Consciousness, is pathological and detrimental to the development of the oppressed Dalits. The emerging caste consciousness would increase cast-based affiliations and pigeonholing, gradually they would develop a renewed interest in the caste system bringing newer forms of oppression back into the society. On the other hand, an emerging Dalit consciousness is an engine of evolutionary social change. As the Dalits become aware of their position and place in the society, they no longer succumb to the subordinated positions defined by caste consciousness, but would become artisans of their own history and emerge from the marginal existence to a powerful social force by developing an oppositional consciousness of resistance and self-affirmation of their subjectivity.

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### Notes

1. A definition of the term "caste" and its development has been well illustrated in the study of Dumont. Space limit does not allow me to incorporate that into the essay. Refer to Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus: An Essay on the Caste System*, trans Mark Sainsbury (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1970), pp. 21-22.
2. Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 22-23.
3. Dipankar Gupta, "Introduction: The Certitude of Caste: When Identity Trumps Hierarchy," *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 38, no. 1&2 (January-August 2004): xiii.
4. The name "Untouchable" is a derogatory term today. The people who were not included in the four "varnas," literally outside the caste system, formerly called, Untouchables or Harijans have now taken the name Dalits to identify themselves in the Indian society.
5. Dumont proposed the hierarchy thesis of the caste system on the basis of an ideology of purity and pollution. I will come to Dumont's thesis later in this discussion. Ref. Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus: An Essay on the Caste System*, trans. Mark Sainsbury (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1970).
6. Untouchability and other forms of discriminations were legally abolished under Article 17 of the Indian Constitution. Two other significant legislations, the Acts of 1955-56, Hindu law on marriage and inheritance as well as Untouchability offence Act of 1955 solidified the rights of "scheduled castes" replacing the "dominant" status of caste making it illegal and replacing it by "dominant" status of Indian citizenship.
7. Indian social reformers as well as politicians aimed a unified India on the grounds of political and cultural identity. Gandhi worked toward making the "Untouchables" a part of this national identity by calling them "Harijans" (children of God) to emancipate them from the stigma of caste and integrate them into the new national identity, but in vain. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar followed a different path toward Dalit liberation, focusing on the evils of the caste system itself, and calling for an integral liberation of the Dalits in Modern India from the stigma of casteism.

8. The issue of identity politics and caste have been discussed recently by prominent Indian sociologists such as Dipankar Gupta, Lucia Michelutti, Gaurang R. Sahay, and G.K. Karanth in the Journal *Contributions of Indian Sociology* 38, no. 1&2 (January-August 2004).
9. Marion Iris Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 156 ff.
10. Gail Omvedt, "Untouchables in the World of IT," *Contemporary Review* 284, no. 1660 (May 2004), 286.
11. See Imants Baruss, *Alterations of Consciousness: An Empirical Analysis for Social Scientists* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2003); Gerd Sommerhoff, *Understanding Consciousness: Its Function and Brain Process* (London: Sage Publications, 2000).
12. Sommerhoff, *Understanding Consciousness*, 6.
13. *Ibid.*, 9, 37.
14. See M. N. Srinivas, *Social Change in Modern India* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1966), p. 3; Andre Beteille, *Caste, Class and Power: Changing Patterns of Stratification in a Tanjore Village* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1965), p. 46; Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus*, pp.65-89; Hans Ucko, *The People and the People of God: Minjung and Dalit Theology in Interaction with Jewish-Christian Dialogue* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2002), pp. 92-96; M.E. Prabhakar, Ideology of Oppression: Caste and Untouchability." *Religion and Society* 45, no. 4 (December 1998), pp. 5-36 for an elaborate understanding of varna, sub-castes, and the place of the untouchables in the caste system
15. Michael Moffatt, *An Untouchable Community in South India: Structure and Consensus* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979); Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus*.
16. Gupta, "Introduction," ix.
17. Gupta, "Introduction," xiii; I. P. Desai, *Untouchability in Rural Gujarat* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1976)
18. One of best studies of castes and its cultural forms in India so far has been the study of Edgar Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, published in 1909 in eight volumes. Refer to the section of "Thanda Pulayan" a Dalit community in Kerala for more information of the cultural symbols and practices of this community.
19. Sathianathan Clarke, "Subaltern Culture as Resource for People's Liberation: A Critical Inquiry into Dalit Culture Theory," *Religion and Society* 44, no. 4 (December 1997): 89-90.
20. Tracy E. Ore, "Part I: Constructing Differences," in *The Social Construction of Difference and Inequality: Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality*, (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing Company, 2000), 5.
21. Gaurang R. Sahay, "Hierarchy, Difference and the Caste System: A Study of Rural Bihar," *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 38, no. 1&2 (January-August 2004): 115.
22. Lucia Michelutti, "'We (Yadavs) are a Caste of Politicians': Caste and Modern Politics in a North Indian Town," *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 38, no. 1&2 (January-August 2004): 43-71.
23. Gupta, "Introduction," vi.

24. Steven M. Parish, *Hierarchy and Its Discontents: Culture and the Politics of Consciousness in Caste Society* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 101.
25. Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 41.
26. W.E.B Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Bantam Classic Edition, (New York: Bantam Books, 1989), First Published in 1903, 3.
27. Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 60.
28. An empirical study of the economic conditions of the Dalits conducted by Godwin Shiri serves as empirical evidences for my argument. Refer to Godwin Shiri, *The Plight of Christian Dalits: A South Indian Case Study* (Bangalore, India: Asian Trading Corporation, 1997).
29. Gustavo Gutierrez, "Church of the Poor," in *Born of the Poor: The Latin American Church since Medellin*, ed. Edward L. Cleary (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 15-16.
30. "Indian's Shining Hopes: A Survey of India," *The Economist*, February 21, 2004, 18.
31. Beteille's analysis of caste to identify it with class in Marxism, as he himself admits, limits the analysis and comparison of caste with class due to the complexity of the caste system. Refer to Andre Beteille, *Caste, Class, and Power: Changing Patterns of Stratification in a Tanjore Village* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965).
32. Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, ed. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 223.
33. *Ibid.*, 225.
34. Sahay, "Hierarchy, Difference and the Caste System," 116-120.
35. Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics*, 227.
36. Howard Williams, *Concepts of Ideology* (New York: Wheatsheaf Books, 1988), 112.
37. Under the government of India "protective discrimination" policy, the castes those were considered untouchable under the caste system are given special reservation and privileges to improve their social and economic position. Under the name "scheduled castes" and "scheduled Tribes" the government has listed certain number of untouchable castes on a schedule.
38. Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, "Burlando al Opressor: Mocking/Tricking the Oppressor: Dreams and Hopes of Hispanas/Latinas and Mujeristas," *Theological Studies* 65, no. 2 (June 2004): 344.
39. Archbishop George Zur, *Inaugural Address: Catholic Bishops Conference of India* (New Delhi, India: CBCI, 1991); quoted in James Massey, *Dalits in India: Religion as a Source of Bondage or Liberation with Special Reference to Christians* (New Delhi, India: Manohar, 1995), 82.
40. Felix Wilfred, *From The Dusty Soil: Contextual Reinterpretation of Christianity* (Madras, India: University of Madras, 1995), 123; Robert Deliege, *The Untouchables of India* (New York, Berg Publishers, 1999).
41. Marilyn Frye, *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory* (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1983), 33.

42. Karen Lebacqz, *Justice in an Unjust World: Foundations for a Christian Approach to Justice* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1987).
43. Arvind P. Nirmal, "Toward a Christian Dalit Theology," in *Frontiers in Asian Christian Theology*, ed. R.S. Sugirtharajah (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), 33.
44. Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 48.
45. Kurian, Sunil George, "Struggle for Survival-Experience of Dalits (in Vijayapuram Diocese) in Kerala," *Religion and Society* 42, no.2 (June 1995), 11-24; and "The Christian Dalits' Experience: A Case Study of the Palai Diocese," *Religion and Society* 45, no.4 (December 1998), 69-88.
46. Wilfred, *From The Dusty Soil*, 129.
47. Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 52.
48. *Ibid.*, 59.
49. Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, *New Visions for the Americas: Religious Engagement and Social Transformation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 114.
50. Moffatt, *An Untouchable Community in South India*, 4-5.
51. M.N Srinivas, *Social Change in Modern India* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1966), 91.
52. Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 61.
53. Refer John O. C. D. Pallath, *Brother Roche: A Missionary Prathibha* [Brother Roche: A Visionary Missionary] (Kalamassery, India: Jyotirdhara Publications, 1993); George Oommen, "Dalit Conversion And Social Protest In Travancore, 1854-1890," *Religion-online*, <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=1119/> (accessed December 20, 2004); Palakunnel Mathai Kathanar, *Palakunnel Valyachante Nalagamam* (The Diary of Palakunnel Valyachan) (Changanacherry, India: Death Centenary Committee 2000, 2000); Godwin Shiri. *The Plight of Christian Dalits: A South Indian Case Study*. (Bangalore, India: Asian Trading Corporation, 1997).
54. Sarah Anderson Rajarigam, "Theopathos: A Post-Patriarchal Approach to Theodicy in Black, Dalit, and Jewish Holocausts," *Voices from the Third World* XXII, no. 1 (June 2004).
55. For a recent report of the violence directed toward the Dalit Christians, refer *Dalit Christians*, "Problems & Struggles," [http://www.dalitchristians.com/Html/problems\\_struggles.htm](http://www.dalitchristians.com/Html/problems_struggles.htm). (accessed December 15, 2004).
56. Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb, *The Hidden Injuries of Class* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), 37.
57. Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 56.
58. Otto Maduro, *Religion and Social Conflicts* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1982).
59. Sahay, "Hierarchy, Difference and the Caste System," 121.
60. Palakunnel Mathai Kathanar, *Palakunnel Valyachante Nalagamam* (The Diary of Palakunnel Valyachan) (Changanacherry, India: Death Centenary Committee 2000, 2000), 10-11; The customary distance the pulayas have to keep on the road was 90 feet away from the Brahmins and other high castes to avoid pollution.
61. Robert Deliege, *The Untouchables of India*, trans. Nora Scott (New York: Berg Publications, 1999), 163.
62. Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 53.

63. Everett V. Stonequist, *The Marginal Man: A Study in Personality and Cultural Conflict* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1961), 8.
64. See Edgar Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, published in 1909 in eight volumes. Refer to the section of "Thanda Pulayan" a Dalit community in Kerala.
65. K. Wilson, *The Twice Alienated. Culture of Dalit Christians* (Hyderabad, India: Booklinks Corporation, 1982).
66. S. Arokiasamy, "Sarvodaya Through Antyodaya: Liberation of the Dalits in the Contextualisation of Morals," in *Indigenous People: Dalits, Dalit Issues in Today's Theological Debate*, ed. James Massy (Delhi, India: ISPCK, 1998), 299.

## “HUMAN” GOOD AND THE PURSUIT OF LIBERATION

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1. Let us first introduce contrastive methods of research into the notion of the self in the European and Asian philosophical contexts. The comparative method widely used in approaches to various Asian philosophical traditions is distinctly a “Western” one and does not assure either neutrality nor objectivity which are both supposed to be two main characteristics of Western science. As a result, we discover a distinctly asymmetrical approach in the so-called dialog between “East” and “West” in the field of philosophy, also when approaching notions like Good and Womanhood. We have to acknowledge civilizational bias and make clear the interests and priorities disguised in the so-called dialog. The main question should be who is dominating the dialog, and in which language the dialog is carried out. Not only are the so-called Asian members of the global philosophical undertaking carrying

out the dialog in English, but even the concept of the Other is the result of the Western ontological preoccupation, something which is non-existent in the traditions under investigation.

Early in the human history people turned from their encompassing nature and started to look into themselves. Such investigations, conclusions and the knowledge of the psychological conditions and reactions and the nature of the human being emerged all over the world, but “the lack of recognition of these meant that it was the early European models and the dominant suppression of the passion, which influenced the thinking of the personality psychologists. In the second century BC, the physician Galen outlined a theory of personality which stated that there were essentially three domains of the human psyche: the cognitive (intellectual), the conative (intentional), and the affective (emotional).”<sup>1</sup> This rather simple differentiation can still be a suitable orientation for us. The Middle Ages introduced psychological determinism and took the idea of the importance of the humours, or fluids for the human behaviour and acting from the ancient Greeks. An alternative model to this one was phrenology (Gall at the beginning of the nineteenth century and later Spurzheim) with the idea of various mind faculties, located in particular areas of the brain. In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the theory of the importance of bodily shape as the basis of human behaviour resulted in somatotypes (Kretschmer, 1925 and Sheldon, 1954). At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Freud formulated his psychoanalysis on two grounds: firstly, that just one fifth of the human mind is conscious and that four-fifths of it is buried under the surface as the unconscious mind which has great influence on human behaviour, and secondly, that it is possible to see the structure of human mind and personality as: id – primaeval, impulsive part of the personality; ego – part of personality which should satisfy the realistic demands of adjusting oneself to the outside world; as one grows older various moral and ethical patterns of the social environment are internalised into the personality – this is the realm of the super-ego. In various Asian philosophical and religious traditions,

however, the soteriological tendencies direct oneself to the identification with the Self (*Selbst*), which is Atman.

We shall try to show how in Buddhism the concept of the ego cannot be a relevant philosophical preoccupation since it is only the reason, or a consequence of an illusion about an apparent set of differences. The absence of the ego, and the fact that the Buddhist philosophers did not elaborate on the Other does not mean an insufficiency, but is rather a relevant philosophical choice which any philosophy which claims to be global should respect. Even a dialog itself and the politics of discourse are exclusively Western undertakings which are part of the constitutive arrogance of the Western cultural identity. Universalism in the field of philosophy can therefore be seen as an act of domination carried out in the manner of the domineering subject cultivated in the European philosophical tradition. The position of the acting subject was a dominant point in the history of European philosophy and should therefore be questioned on account of its tendency to domination. One of the main philosophical themes in the Asian philosophical traditions is the inseparable unity between philosophical insight and meditation. Philosophy is therefore not developed only on the intellectual level but also on the physical level, since the truth is not only the way of thinking about the world but rather the way of existing in the world. Discovering the truth is an activity beyond the pure intellect, being a psycho-physical awareness in which all instances of knowledge are simultaneously practical and theoretical.

The Japanese understanding of emptiness and the absence of ego (*muga*) developed in the Buddha's main doctrine of the absence of any permanent ego in all sentient beings. It is based on the experience of language and thought which is not based only on the logically-discursive function of language which is supposed to express the absolute truth. The Buddhist Mahayana canon advocates the theory about two levels of truth: relative truth and absolute truth. On the level

of relative truth we distinguish various objects as separated entities of individual forms. The understanding of the absolute truth however demands the cultivation of higher states of consciousness which one can achieve using specific practices. This higher level of truth recognizes objects and events as identical in their nature and connected in a certain whole although recognized as separate entities. The knowledge and cultivation of both levels of truth are possible only with intellectual and logical undertakings which should also necessarily include more direct intuitive experiences. These include also mystical experiences which in Buddhism are not understood as something opposed to reflexive thought. The majority of techniques engendering such experiences include conceptual thought which is only apparently incompatible with ineffable absolute truth to which the philosopher is aiming. Real knowledge therefore cannot be achieved on the basis of theoretical thinking but rather by using the unity of body-mind which does not presuppose any kind of analytical distinction between the mental and somatic.<sup>2</sup>

For Buddhist philosophers, body becomes the supreme cognitive instrument which eventually leads them to the right way of seeing. Knowledge without a personal experience remains something superfluous on which a true philosophy cannot be built. Any knowledge which the philosopher might possess should be rooted in experience, which is seeing. This large emphasis on "seeing" in Buddhism is based on Buddha's notion of interrelatedness of knowledge (*jnana, nana*) and seeing (*pasya, passa*). Seeing is a certain experience which perceives phenomena and things in the state of suchness (*tathata*), with the interrelatedness of everything. Therefore, all knowledge has its basis and is rooted in the right seeing of reality, to which Buddhist philosophy leads oneself. Reason and rationality is not understood as something superior, or something which should dominate other dimensions of the human being. Since it is aiming at the understanding of everything which is understandable, Buddhist philosophy disputes that position in which only certain fragments of Being, those things

and phenomena understood by knowledge alone, could give the image of the entire Being. This philosophy therefore can never be an undertaking based on the pure intellect.

In the main, the history of European philosophy has perceived the Ego as something permanent, unchangeable, and autonomous, unlike that for the human personality. In early Buddhism the notion of non-ego (*anatman*) was developed (as opposed to ego [*atman*]), which might be an eternal and unchangeable essence, independent of anything else. The absence of ego, therefore, means the negation of the absolute reality and any kind of permanent, unchangeable substance. It means also that people do not possess any centre or core, although we do have various mental functions. Here we see a complete negation, the absence of ego, but still the presence of mental, cognitive functions, carried out by the mind, which as such is originally unclear and therefore unable to grasp the truth. Therefore in Buddhism various mind-cleaning techniques are practised, which should free the mind from what Zhuang Zi would label as “illusionary dust of the world.”

It has to be stressed that from its early phases on, Buddhism has developed the distinctions between the self and the absence of the self, and between the clear, concentrated mind and the dirty, confused, excited mind. Since the mind carries out mental and cognitive functions, various stages of mental conditions are specific to it, either clean and clear ones or confused and unclear. Therefore Buddhism is offering a variety of cleaning techniques, which are supposed to be able to help the person in clarifying, and cleaning the unclear mental states. The theories of the absence of ego or egolessness do not imply the absence of the mind, but rather the cleaning and clarifying of it.

Japanese Buddhism, for instance, has parted from the early Indian Buddhist philosophical schools by radicalising the development of the notion of the absence of mind (*mushin*). The clear mind became a synonym for the state of egolessness, and the highest aim for a person on their way to Buddhahood.

One of the most important Japanese Buddhist philosophers Dogen Kigen (1200-1253) developed his theoretical insights on the basis of the daily practice of *zazen*. In his philosophy birth and death (*shoji*) are understood as the first and the last of the four sufferings (birth, ageing, illness and death) which are common to all sentient beings which are able to experience suffering. This is also the central problem of human existence in Buddhism, which is just a part of raising-vanishing process, which we share with all living beings. The way to freedom in which the strong soteriological mission of Buddhism is to be perceived should begin with the liberation from the raising-vanishing process, shared with all living beings. It means also the liberation from birth and death (*shoji*) in the cycle of transmigration which is carried out in the unlimitedness of time and space and is based on the dehomocentric, non-anthropomorphic position in understanding the basic human problem and the liberation from it.

Buddhism does not nurture the illusion of any kind of domineering position of humans in regard to other sentient beings and even less in regard to the gender. The transcendence of human limitations in Buddhism is the way of acknowledging birth and death in the context of the much wider spectrum of the raising-vanishing process which is common to all sentient beings. Freedom is here achieved by acknowledgment of one's real position in the universe and the liberation of any kind of illusions of a special mission or distinguished position for humans (or even “men”) in the world. It includes also the true understanding of birth and death and their meanings. The courageous confrontation with death, and its real acceptance, is the basis of the liberation from birth and death (*shoji*). Dogen's doctrine of *shoji* is based on the notion of egolessness, the state achieved not only by theoretical pondering but rather by the use of practice.

If people seek Buddha outside of birth and death, that is regarded as if heading north to go south, or like facing south to try to see the north star: accumulating causes of birth and death all the more, they lose the way to liberation. Simply understanding that birth and death is

itself a nirvana, there is nothing to reject such as birth and death, and nothing to seek as nirvana. Only then will one have some measure of detachment from birth and death and reach the state in which one would not only be alive, but also aware of being alive.<sup>3</sup>

The liberation here means the achievement of the process of Thinking which is beyond the conceptual thinking and the move from the search for the essence from the ontological to the soteriological level; from the level of recognition to the level of liberation. The acknowledgement of one's own self leads to the forgetting of it, which enables the recognition of the absolute self. The Buddha's nature which is present in every individual is to be discovered only through the recognition or acknowledgment of one's own self in the connection with everything which exists. This, however, is to grasp the absolute self. Selfless behaviour is therefore in Dogen's philosophy and practice the necessary condition for one's liberation and achievement of freedom.

Self-cultivation techniques and various practices lead to the absence of self as the basis for the absence of thought; not thought as such, but rather the egoistical attachment to the self. It means the liberation from the Selfhood or any need to the big Other. This absence of thought, achieved by the practice of zazen, is possible if the individual becomes a pure corporal (bodily) subject and if one is concentrated on the activity itself which is carried out through the body. The absence of self implies also the overcoming of the distinctions between the self and all the rest of the world, which allows the possibility for the presentation of reality. The unity of body-mind is achieved through the practice which is not bodily technique, but rather brings us beyond any duality. The proof of the freedom is the achievement of a level on which the entire world is without any illusionary dust, the dust produced by the objects of the ego.

The negation of the ontological doctrine of the ego in Japanese Buddhism is one of the liberation techniques in the vast tradition of Asian philosophies. The techniques and practices are directed to the

development and transformation of the mind and personality aiming at the achievement of wisdom (*prajna*). Unlike European philosophy which has in its history sought even mathematical models of philosophical thinking, Asian philosophical schools have not put the demands of mathematical proofs in their philosophy. Instead of a rigid intellectual and logical approach, they have employed direct intuitive experience, which is, without doubt, much richer than rationalizations based on a discipline of analysis and separation. The one-dimensionality of rationality is put into question and can therefore not be used as the sole tool for the "analysis" or "comparison" of these traditions under investigation with those of the Euro-American stream of thought. The soteriological project of the traditions discussed becomes evident, since knowing, necessarily interconnects with becoming. This can lead to a certain challenge to the philosophical schools based on the Judeo-Christian-Greek tradition, which have separated the fields of ontology and epistemology, which have in Buddhism been cultivated together, inseparably. The metaphysics of subject and the ontological reductions so well established in modern European philosophical history can prove to be unsuitable for the approaches used in Asian philosophies and therefore also call for the re-examination of the foundations of rationality. The questions of reality and the self encroach upon the realm of the ineffable which remains the source of the great creativity in any philosophical tradition.

The question remains, however, what does the tradition of the cultivation of the absence of the self mean for the traditional Asian worldviews on the verge of modernization (Westernisation) and the possible identity struggles involved in this process? Can the tradition of the absence of the ego expand (and not be annihilated) while being confronted by European and American ideas and values?

2. At this point, Tantra should be introduced into our discussion. It is described as<sup>4</sup>: "Besides Vedas, Upanishads, Puranas and Bhagavad-Gita; Tantra belongs to the "eternal religion" of Hinduism. Its central tenet is the divine energy and creative force of Shakti, who, personified

as deity, is the wife of the god Shiva. Both Shiva and Shakti, also appear separately, at times benevolent, and at other times as fearful deities. It is characteristic that Shiva's symbol is Linga, the male sexual organ, and Shakti's is Yoni, the external female sexual organ. The cult of Tantra can hardly be considered as a religion,<sup>5</sup> and neither is it presented as a mode of reflection. It is constituted mainly by various instructions for actions, which contrast conventional religious patterns, since they nourish that which the majority of people omit as life pleasures. Instead of asceticism and devoted obedience to God the Father, Tantra teaches that the individual should "develop to the climax, one's pleasures and enjoyments, and use the force gathered in the process as the energy for advancement in the spiritual path." And in a way, this becomes quite revolutionary and dangerous for orthodox religions. Among other pleasures that the Tantra nourishes, sexual activities hold an important position in that the tantrics gain their energy from sexual activity which can bring them to ecstasy and enlightenment. Together with their partner, also a practitioner of Tantra, they mainly follow the same pattern (model) of that of Shiva and Shakti. Although Tantra is a practice, it has its own images, teachings, mandalas, mantras, and bodily techniques. The reason why the tantra is mentioned in this context is that the abundance of sexual images are a symbolic representation of the Yin-Yang symbol as the expression of the aspiration to annihilate the duality of the male principle, (method-*upaya*), and the female principle, (wisdom-*prajna*), so that they become one. These are the main characteristics of the ultimate level of this cult – Yoga Tantra.

It is instructive as a model of a spiritual path which encourages us to invest ourselves into our own emotional well-being by not gambling away the joys of everyday life. Such an attitude is based on a way of thinking/living which transcends the mental limits and does not subscribe to the set boundaries of our world and work. To achieve that one has to understand one's own mental system and challenge the accumulated limitations of millions of years. By such undertakings one gains

extraordinary abilities described in various treatises that direct us to the path of mental development and the power of discriminative wisdom where there would otherwise be frustration and move into a mental/bodily realm where pain is replaced with pleasure – the field where we create happiness. By transcending the enforced weakness of woman in society, Tibetan Tantra advocated the importance of sex and the plight of women in a male-dominated world. One of the most brilliant Tantric Buddhist texts from this *ars erotica* canon is Gedün Chöpel's (1905-1951) *Treatise on Passion*, in which the author helped with the prescriptions for men to treat women as true partners nourishing the intimate concern for the sexual pleasure of women and how to achieve it. The soteriological aspect of such treatises is important, since it stresses the compatibility of sexual pleasure with spiritual insight, even more "the arts of love are deliberately used in a process of spiritual development in order to enhance the state of ecstatic orgasm that brings with it manifestation of a more subtle and powerful level of consciousness."<sup>6</sup>

3. The Chinese state Confucianism with its official perversion of the teachings of Confucius attempted to suppress free thinking, imagination, social change and any inklings of the spiritual side of humanity. As a strong reaction to this, various schools and movements which were developing the inner processes and cultivated the unusual wisdom and power developed. Daoism with its doctrine of mysterious female, Mother Earth encouraged transcendence of the mundane world regardless of gender although it understood that women possessed a particular talent for achieving the completeness of human life, the Absolute Good and harmony with nature.

*Tanci* was a literary genre consisting of narratives composed of alternating prose and verse. They dealt mainly with women's family life in Confucian society; the authors (mainly women) described pre-modern women's misery in the Confucian family, as well as their ideals (aspiration to Confucian humanity through their heroines). In terms of thought, these women authors never freed themselves from the

restrictions of tradition; they adhered to Confucianism and believed that their misfortunes were ultimately caused by the corruption of the true Confucian spirit, which they wanted to clarify. They believed in Confucian humanity and in the aim of reform of society through the way of *ren*, which can be attained through individual moral cultivation. Very seldom did a *tanci* pose a challenge to the validity of the Confucian system, more often the authors express their naive support for it. From the very early days Confucianism maintained a double standard for men and women, that is, separate roles. Confucianism held that these separate roles of men and women should be equal in value. However, in actuality men always tended to abuse their positions and privileges, and treated women as inferior beings. The themes in women's *tanci* place a greater emphasis on women's eminence in intelligence and moral virtue. The heroines disguise themselves as men, take examinations, which were exclusively the men's privilege, pass them with honours, and are appointed to high official posts.

In one of the *tancis*, the theme of a woman disguising herself as a man and passing examinations is found. This is a frequent theme; in the case of this *tanci*, however, it is developed in a different way. While in the original play the heroine stops disguising herself as a man when she is asked to marry a woman, in the *tanci* she marries a woman in order to be able to continue to act as a man. A very frequent motif is the adoption of men's identity in order to fulfil wishes which they would not be allowed as women. Marriage between women seems to be a motif unique to these women's romances.

When, after various complications, such feigned marriages between women are disclosed, both the husband and wife marry the same man, while the husband becomes the official wife, and the wife becomes the concubine. These women's works thus have many intelligent and virtuous women characters who carry out what the authors themselves could not do in reality. Their heroines play a significant role in terms of wish fulfilment. Very seldom is a severe

criticism of Confucianism expressed, where the heroine stays in the world of men even though this entails a rejection of women's moral duties.

If we read the *Lessons for Women* from the viewpoint of women's image during the Cultural revolution the opposite principle strikes us: what men are able to do, so also are women. Never asking what this was, we can see how it works in reality by the example of the propaganda poster showing a woman working on the top of a high voltage electric pylon. This kind of "right to be equal" is reminiscent of the ancient Chinese story of Mulan, a girl who during the war dressed up as a soldier and fought courageously in place of her father and at the end of the war accepted the role imposed on her in the new post-war social conditions.

The old Chinese symbol of yin and yang offers another solution which does not impose a decision between one and the other paradigm. It is a means of union or transcendence of two opposites, black and white, for instance. If we put them as two squares one beside the other or one on the top of the other, the priority of one or the other comes into effect. However, the old Chinese *Taiji tu* symbol does not give priority to one or the other.

Yin is spring waters, all passive and female, instinctive and intuitive, soul, depth, contracting, negative, soft, yielding, everything dark and moist, earth, valleys, trees, the nocturnal animals and beings that live in waters and moist places, and most flowers. Yang is active, male, principle, spirit, rational, height, expansion, positive, hard and unyielding, everything light, dry and elevated, like mountains, sky, all diurnal animals and birds. The yin-yang, or *Taiji tu* symbol, represents the ultimate (perfect) harmony of both main forces in the cosmos: each of them carries in itself the germ of the other, in this way expressing that there is no exclusively male and exclusively female nature, but that each of them carries within itself the germ of the other and that the only stable thing within all this is continuous change. The forces are close together,

not in a hostile contradiction, but like collaborators, dependant on each other: one in its essence, two in its outer expressions.

The sexual duality of the human species is a fact, which cannot be denied. The distinction between the male and the female variant moves from purely biological-anatomic peculiarities, through social roles, to the spiritual attitude of both of them. Therefore, the procreative process is dominated by a great degree of emotional ambivalence and is often full of dramatic episodes. Mythology found and created images, which reached back into history to the times of “creation,” when the present duality of sexes did not exist, and human beings or their ancestors lived in the paradisiacal tranquillity of androgyny. If it is true that ontogenesis is the condensed process of phylogenesis, embriogenetical observations might provide a certain support for such a speculation.

The idea of a primordial androgyny of human beings, can also be traced in the Judeo-Greek cultural tradition. Some even search for traces of this in Biblical Genesis. In this direction, the Scandinavian *Edda*, in prose, becomes even richer. Most such indices can be found, however, in Asian philosophies and religions, namely in the field of female or male spiritual orientation. This is the beneficial contribution of the Chinese to East Asia, namely the correlative dialectics which allow, or even demand, that each idea has a counter-pole and that it is in an embrace with its opposite, without causing either element’s uniqueness to diminish as a result of this union. That is why it is possible that the personal and social problems, that are traditionally understood as male, can be dealt with in a feminine way, as these qualities on the spiritual level, in essence, are no longer dependent on biological reality. In the field of spiritual attitude, the characteristics and leading values lose their connotation of sexuality. What was before described as the “feminine,” changes into the *prajñā*-wisdom, and what was described as the “masculine,” changes into *upaya*, rational skill. However, it remains necessary, that both of them – since one conditions the other one – remain in a correlative embrace, meaning that they do not meld into a third, grey, entity, but that each of them retains its specific

typicality. *Taiji tu* diagram harbours, the left half yin with a white dot designating the yang embryo contained in it.<sup>7</sup>

The abstract notion of “the feminine,” (womanliness, feminine nature) – in French, *le féminin*, and in German, *das Weibliche* – as substantivum neutrum, remains together with its opposite, the masculine, connotative of an inherent disparity. It is meant neither as the biological affiliation of sex, nor as gender, the social response, or echo, of this biological affiliation. Rather, it is the spiritual attitude (psychic, spiritual being, mind) which is the norm for psychic manifestations in general, and is its subtle psychosomatic background. It is not necessarily connected with the rude biological differentiation of sex, but rather appears as a quality in one or the other form; either as the individual, the social group or forms of activities, etc., without respect to the biological manifestations of the participants. It is necessary to recall these facts when discussing about “womanhood.”

How does the above described notion of the feminine and its ideological reinvention of “womanhood” in the Confucian context, function in classical and modern Chinese culture and philosophy? In the famous *Yijing*, for instance, this is seen as the hexagram *Kun*, correlated to the male *Qian*; in the philosophy of Yin and Yang, as Yin the Earth, in correlation with Yang, the Heaven; which are united in the famous *Taiji tu* diagram, a sophisticated development of Chinese Neo-Confucianism. Also in the modern context, one should keep in mind the *Dao de jing*, as well, in which Lao Zi gives, as a counterbalance to the existing praxis, priority to the female principle (the feminine). He remains, however, faithful to the Chinese tradition, maintaining that the masculine and the feminine should remain equal, correlative, neither one nor the other vying for dominance. The correlative embrace, “When you know the male yet hold on to the female” (*Dao de jing* 28) subsists in the mythical past where both principles are joined in androgynous unity. The *Taiji tu* offers a possibility of transcending the dilemma between “the virtuous woman without

talent” and the Mulan paradigm or the virago at the top of an electricity pylon.

Like in the Buddhist claim of the absence of Ego, the daoist techniques offer the methods of cultivation by which our Ego becomes less active in discrimination and analysis it loses its grip on consciousness whereby the mind becomes more receptive to the wisdom otherwise hidden to us. In this process of transformation our whole body and being becomes an eternal spring, the source of the circulating internal energy. For this the liberation of our spirit from the earthly realm is needed, so that we never mistake the impermanent for the real. Not being attached to the world and the material clutches of this earthly existence we use the sword (a spiritual symbol) to cut through the illusions of ephemeral things and achieve the greatest treasures of all. “Where there is Ego, the true heart cannot emerge. It is only in stillness and the absence of craving that original nature can be cultivated.”<sup>8</sup> Since, as long as the Ego exists, the heart of the Dao cannot emerge.<sup>9</sup> This process however, is based on the nonattachment to forms. “If you cannot relinquish your attachment to forms, then you will never tame your mind.”<sup>10</sup>

## Conclusion

The above mentioned self-cultivation and self-empowering techniques remind us that life is short and the time of death is uncertain so we should as soon as possible (or better at once!) apply ourselves to attaining the psychic power together with the waves of grace and compassion and not to the worldly pursuits that have but one unavoidable and inevitable end: sorrow. Besides they are instructive since they shed a very clear light to the construction of the male individual and his character and heroism as a bulwark against the intolerable assault of mortality and his incapability to deal with it (and impermanence in its wider sense). The creative living which can be based on such techniques rejects the deadening dimension of spiritual and political stagnation and can bring us closer to the cosmic forces, human purpose and a deliberately chosen Good.

## Summary

This paper is considering the notion of »human« good and its specific connotations from the perspective of various Asian philosophical and religious orientations and their pursuit of liberation. Its particular focus is the construction of a coherent sense of one’s own Selfhood and the possible implications of the Buddhist claim towards the absence of Self in the realm of the notion of womanhood. Can the category of »woman« be valid in the wider culturally constructed frame of identity? It illustrates the pitfalls and dilemmas of the Self-constructing and Self-negating understandings in Asian traditions, particularly the ones that were developing the methods with which they were instructing the people to accept their own mortality. »Die to live« might be an orientation in transcending the Self for the sake of creative living. Like Tantra, it builds on the mind/body continuum, which does not leave any room for the devaluation of emotional (bodily) aspects. The paper concludes with the presentation of some self-knowledge methods which might be helpful for anyone, regardless of sex, gender, spiritual or geographical provenience, interested in the self-empowering methods.

## Notes

1. N. Hayes, *Foundations of Psychology* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 222.
2. Y. Yuasa, *Shintai – Toyoteki shn shin ron no kokoromi* (Tōkyō: Shobunsha, 1977).
3. T. Dobzhansky, »Evolutionary Roots of Family Ethics and Group Ethics«, in *The Centrality of Science and Absolute Values*, vol. 1, Proceedings of the Fourth International Conference on the Unity of the Sciences, New York, 1975, pp. 411-27.
4. *Lexikon der östlichen Weisheitslehren*, ed. S. Schumacher and G. Wörner (Bern: Scherz, 1994).
5. P. Rawson, *Tantra – The Indian Cult of Extasy* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973).
6. G. Chöpel, *Tibetan Arts of Love*. (Ithaca: Snow Lion, 1992), 11.
7. R. H. Van Gulik, *Sexual Life in Ancient China* (Leiden: Brill, 1974), 41.
8. *Seven Taoist masters*, trans. Eva Wong (Boston: Shambala, 1990), 11.
9. *Ibid.*, 48.
10. *Ibid.*, 125.

## THE CRISIS OF RELIGIOUS LIFE IN EUROPE, A CALL TO RELIGIOUS LIFE WORLD WIDE

*José María Vigil*

The events occurring in Europe at the beginning of the XXI Century in the area of religious life are worthy of attentive consideration. In this paper we will focus primarily on religious life, especially as it exists in Spain, but we will keep in mind the larger problem that affects Christianity as a whole, and religion in general in Europe.

### I. SEE a. Statistically

Using numbers as our starting point, it can be said that religious life in Europe<sup>1</sup> has “collapsed”. For those who have not been there, to say “collapsed” can appear to be an exaggeration, but historically speaking, I believe, it is an adequate word. For several decades vocations were scarce, but in more recent years, it can be said that vocations simply do not exist. The very few persons who commit

themselves to religious life are really “the exception that confirms the rule.”

Several years ago in the periodical *Sal Terrae*<sup>2</sup>, José María Mardones, when speaking about the pastoral agents in Spain stated that there was very little room to move and that the situation was reaching “a point of no return”. Today that point has been surpassed and the situation has moved beyond that which Mardones announced: now we are simply trying to prepare for the landing, for the conclusion of the flight. Everything indicates that Western Europe is approaching the time when religious life will disappear as a relevant<sup>3</sup> and vigorous protagonist in society and the church. Indeed, religious life as we have known it, is disappearing.

In a group of human persons, not only is their number important but so also is their age. The median age of religious has reached 65<sup>4</sup> — the age of retirement. As a whole, religious do not enjoy the best of health: the great majority of their members are not flexible enough to change, do not have the ability to renew themselves or adapt to new circumstances or open new frontiers, much less carry out radical reforms. The problem of age (and the corresponding lack of vitality) is as serious as the decreasing number of those actually associated with religious life.<sup>5</sup>

Because of a lack of personnel, many congregations are joining together with others and reducing their houses and regional organizations. It is a clear but sad fact that young men and women do not opt for religious life and thus (speaking in terms that refer to native European members) religious life will no longer exist in Europe in one or two decades unless some very profound change occurs.

On the other hand, in the traditional societies of Africa and Asia, vocations continue to flourish. In some countries, the vocational boom is so strong that the general government of some congregations has been obliged to impose restrictions on the number of admissions into the seminary. India and Nigeria, for example, have large numbers

entering religious life. Poland, however, with its acceptance of neo-liberalism, has ceased to be a source for vocations.

Using Latin America as a comparison, we know that just a few years ago we thought that “secularization” had not left its mark on religious life in Latin America. Vocations continued to flourish. Nevertheless, beginning in 2000, almost all of Latin America had experienced a new movement: most of the religious communities, men and women, observed signs of a new tendency with regard to vocations, namely, a decline in numbers. Religious life in Latin America is being “maintained” at a certain level (it is not growing, nor are its members being sent abroad). It is perceived that a new era has begun, an era that will transform Latin America into the image of “secularized” Europe. This transformation will ultimately lead religious life in Latin America along the same course as that of Europe.

#### **b. Institutionally**

Many theologians affirm that Catholic religious life finds itself in a position of institutional captivity. By nature, religious life is clearly charismatic and prophetic, yet the official institutional Church has placed them within the ironclad framework of Canon Law, thus depriving them of any possible prophetic freedom.<sup>6</sup> Religious life has been assimilated into the institutional functioning of the Church — concretely speaking, the clergy, as an intermediate group, have been completely controlled by the institution and assimilated into it. During this “wintertime” of the Church, religious life is also passing through a time of “interior winter:” a great number of its initiatives have been suffocated and subjected to Vatican control (the elaboration and renewal of their Constitutions, the submission of their publications and other writings, the censure of their theologians [both men and women], the extraordinary intervention against CLAR [Commission for Latin American Religious] and some large religious congregations — Jesuits, Franciscans, Carmelites). Yet most religious communities feel

comfortable with these institutional canonical statutes. Indeed it is an exception when a religious congregation feels that this institutional domestication goes against the very essence of religious life as a religious-cultural movement.<sup>7</sup>

Given the present environment, it can be seen that in many areas religious life is being governed by men and women “administrators”. “This is not the time for prophecy, but for wisdom; not the time for far-reaching expectations, but for limited expectations” — these words are spoken to justify their passivity and connivance. In the past three decades, the risk takers and the creative people have been put aside. It is as though religious life has suffered a hemorrhage that has ceased only because there is nothing left to hemorrhage. Lacking a spirit of renewal and prophetic leaders, congregations democratically elect leaders who are “administrators”, “church people”, “people within the system”, who know how to avoid conflict and accommodate themselves without causing tension to the ecclesial “wintertime”.

As a whole, religious life is no longer viewed as a moral force in European society. For quite some time religious life has become marginalized, lacking in real social leadership, absent from important forums that shape public opinion and the future. Their interventions are closely aligned with the right, with conservative elements and social forces that hinder progress rather than with utopian and inventive forces that lead to a new future. Not even in the current debate about religion and the transformation of society do they make a positive contribution. They reduce themselves to seeking privileged influence and respect for the democratic and secular character of society.

It should be noted, for example, that in Catholic Spain, religious life for the most part identifies itself with the right, politically, ethically and economically. It takes a defensive position and places itself within the framework of the Church, which as an institution has little credibility in society<sup>8</sup>.

### c. Spiritually

Without fear of exaggerating, it can be affirmed that in Europe, religious life as a whole is not alive or overflowing with creativity and restlessness or filled with proposals to discover new roads that lead to the future. On the contrary (not in theory but at this precise minute), religious life appears to be an intellectual desert, including theologically. Few offer an opinion; no one debates; no one takes a risk to point out possible solutions or offer at least a new interpretation... No one expects this nor even desires that this be done. González Faus states that the Catholic Church is still living under a Pontificate of fear. When at one time (during the conciliar period) there was dialogue and spiritual effervescence, now there is only emptiness and even repression. No one speaks of transcendence, but people simply “mark time”, “waiting for Godot”, without explaining what they are waiting for, and fearful at the same time.

It is not as though people have “their swords raised on high” contesting society or involved in some intra-ecclesial theological polemic. There is simply great indifference and apathy. European societies that, fifty years ago, were more than 80% Christian, today have turned their back on Christianity and are not interested in it. In this context, religious life, like the Catholic Church, feels abandoned, as though a divorce has taken place in their old age: there is no one with whom to discuss the matter; life has emigrated with young people to other places and the elders have been left behind to rejoice in a well deserved retirement.

This may seem to be a very negative description but only to those who find themselves unprepared. Those who have reflected on this theme on more than one occasion will find it realistic, even though painful. Religious life in Europe is not only in crisis but in a critical and grave period, perhaps terminal in that which relates to European religious life (not religious life “in” Europe)<sup>9</sup>. A situation that, when viewed with Christian hope, is a “kairos”, an opportunity that calls us together and challenges us.

It should be pointed out that these generalizations would be false and unjust if they were interpreted literally. We must acknowledge the great social service that religious life has given to society, the good will and personal generosity (even heroic) of religious men and women ministering in the midst of a secularized European society. While we refer to some over-arching characteristics of religious life, we do not deny the great good that has been accomplished in particular places.

## II. JUDGE

### • The problem is not with religious life, but with the church

I say this as a way of partially acquitting religious life: yet religious life suffers and shares the global crisis of Christianity. Religious life forms part of the church — a qualified part and is not able to escape the crisis of its global ecclesial point of reference.

Religious life cannot be considered in isolation, apart from its responsibilities. Religious life is part of a package and everything is in that part of the package. Every aspect of religious life is charged with history, primitive references, and ancient foundations that communicate, unconsciously, an unstated but well-known sense of belonging to a pre-modern, medieval and even pre-Christian world.

For example, how do we interpret today obedience, chastity, clericalization (as it appears in congregations of men and women), mission, and the relationship of religious life to the church? How do we interpret these realities and leave aside their monarchical origins, their medieval perspective, their so-called mythology, their pre-modern values, their spiritualistic, monarchist, antidemocratic, enemy of the body, contrary to freedom and human development tendencies? All of these elements are obsolete and yet still play a role in the proclaimed and lived essence of religious life. Is it possible to re-read religious life and “free it from the chains of the past?” Or, having passed through several millennium shackled to secular traditions, today, in an era of change, is the only thing possible, the construction of a new building?

Religious life carries within every piece of its beautiful mosaic, an enormous wealth of references that pertain to an institution (the church, and in a wider sense, religion) that is in crisis. As much as religious life may want to, it cannot separate itself from or wash its hands of this crisis unless it sets itself apart with a clear prophetic rupture.... which, it is incapable of doing right now.

But let us take another step.

- **The problem is not with Christianity but with religion**

Again I say this as a way of partially acquitting the church and religious life: the crisis that Christianity is actually experiencing in Europe is not a crisis in Christianity itself, but a crisis in Christianity as a religion. In the recent past, we have seen this as a crisis in Christianity, but today we are aware of the fact that the crisis is deeper: religion itself is in crisis. If the historical European religion were something else, then it would be this “something else” that would be in checkmate. What is in question is not just Christianity but “the form in which humanity is religious”.<sup>10</sup> This form has prevailed since the beginning of the agrarian society but today the last vestiges of this society are beginning to disappear in vast sectors of Europe and this is the first time that this phenomenon is occurring in history.

During the past ten thousand years, “religions”<sup>11</sup> have maintained themselves as a type of religion that is agrarian by nature. In the present social-cultural context, society is becoming less and less agrarian and must inevitably shed its “agrarian form of religion”, which makes it most inaccessible. It must be understood that religion (in its anthropological-social-cultural form, a form assumed by human spirituality during the past ten thousand years) is going to disappear. Religiosity and human spirituality will continue and endure, but they will be transformed as they pass through a type of mutation or metamorphosis from which something perhaps unrecognizable will emerge.

It would take much space to prove all of this and I do not pretend to do that here. But those who have begun to surmise this “vision” now see these things being clarified: the agrarian world is dying, disappearing and this is irreversible. On this Titanic many things are sinking to the bottom. But neither life itself nor spirituality is sinking. Yes, certain forms are disappearing; an historical figure and a whole social-cultural vehicle is mortally wounded, even though it is predicted that its final agony will be prolonged.

Religious life is an institution that forms part of the Catholic Church, which in turn is an institution configured as a form of religion that, speaking in social-cultural terms, is in decline (in the historical sense that we have made precise here). It is probable, as Tillard says: “if we are not the last of the religious, then we are surely the last representatives of this historical way of being religious. This present way is fading away.” Like the multinational corporation that wants to survive in an aggressive market, so religious life ought to make a great investment in investigation, creativity, human resources, new experiences.... that will allow it to grasp the forms which can crystallize the deepest essence of religious life in the future society. Perhaps, it can survive if it is willing to cast aside every residue of bygone historical forms. Unfortunately religious life is not doing this.

- **The problem is not with Europe but with advanced society**

What is occurring in Europe is not some type of problem that is historically peculiar to this region. Rather it is the result of a social-cultural transformation that is taking place on this continent as it moves from an agrarian society to a post-industrial society and ultimately to a technological society, a ‘knowledge society’, one that is about to be definitively established. If this social-cultural transformation were occurring in South-East Asia or Africa, then they would also be experiencing this “crisis of religion.” This crisis cannot be identified as “European”.

Sooner or later, this social-cultural transformation will take place on the whole planet, and I believe that because of the unification and worldwide extension of communication, this transformation will occur sooner rather than later. It is not that the European crisis will be exported to other continents. Rather, as other areas of the world enter into an advanced form of society and rid themselves of the “infrastructure” of the agrarian society, then they will begin to experience this same crisis.

Thus, the problem of religious life in Europe is not the fact that it is European but that it is lived and inculturated in a society that is in a state of cultural mutation. For example, the men and women religious from Africa and Asia who are ministering in Europe can help the church and religious life prolong the traditions that today are disappearing. It is improbable, however, that these same religious can help open new inculturated avenues that the Europeans themselves do not know how to open. In past centuries, the European missions were established by men and women traveling from an advanced society to a less developed society. It is highly unlikely that a missionary movement in the opposite direction can be successful at a time of such profound cultural change. The needed change can only be assumed and responded to by those who have known, assumed, and lived this crisis within themselves.

- **The problem is not one of “updating” but of “mutation”**

Awareness of this problem is new, and the reader knows that only a minority are fully conscious of this problem. There is great confusion about the actual situation. Everyone perceives that something very profound and very unexpected has occurred, but the magnitude is so wide that no one has been able to localize it, to pin point it, and/or to express it. Therefore, perhaps we are in a time of waiting (this waiting is apart from the unnecessary halt that has resulted from the “ending of the Pontificate”, a waiting that the Catholic Church is now experiencing), and no one dares to undertake new interpretations.

I believe, however, that this much can be said: we are on the top of a hill. We are at a time when a whole new horizon appears before our eyes. The old view has become more distant, relative and is beginning to disappear. The problem has changed radically. The reference point to resolve the problem is not located in the past, (during the past four decades we have referred back to Vatican II). The problem demands that we “break” with the past that is disappearing and create a new present with our anchor placed on a new North, and situated in an essentially different future.

Let me explain. During the last two decades, we have thought, with reason, that the great error of the official church was rooted in her attempts to reverse Vatican II. But things have changed. That was her primary error but it cannot be said that now it is the greatest problem or the first remedy. The ultimate difficulty (the most profound) which only now<sup>12</sup> we are becoming aware of, but which, little by little, will clearly surface before us, is not the problem of frustrated conciliar “aggiornamento” but the “mutation” that is currently taking place. After forty years we have to stop looking at the Council as a point of reference. The “modern world” with which the Council wanted to enter into dialogue, no longer exists; we have a new group to dialogue with. If we tried updating in line with the Council, and even if this updating were successful, it would be completely out of step with the present reality. The problem resides not in the fact that the “modern world” has disappeared, but goes much deeper. The agrarian world that makes possible a type of religion like “Christianity” is disappearing. The Titanic is sinking and it is useless to kick against the goad, trying to fix it, refloat it or redirect it. The problem is not one of reform or re-establishment but rather one of mutation, metamorphosis and recasting.

Unless religious life adopts this perspective, it will continue to put patches on the problem and allow the boat to sink. It will remain enslaved in the smallness of its vision. Its institutions, in as much as they belong to a “religion” in decline, will also inevitably decline. Even

though they are in good health, they will still sink with the Titanic on which they have embarked. The one realistic hope consists in saving only that which can be saved, remaining with what one has and ridding oneself of all hindrances. One must abandon that which cannot be saved and allow death to take over that which must die. “The art of dying.”

What can probably be saved is.... primarily: the talent of religious radicalism and boundlessness, that is, the ability to live on the frontier, free and unfettered in an unknown society that is coming into being, in a society that will help us (by force) strip ourselves of everything that is disappearing with the appearance of this new society... This can be accomplished by those willing to live religious life with all its radicalism, on the edge of the challenge, giving death to that which must die (“Let the dead bury the dead”), co-provoking a mutation of religious forms “beyond religion” and not looking upward (at that which is leaving us or does not allow us to act) nor looking behind us, like a statue of salt (attached to traditions), and trying to renew a religion that is dying.

### III. ACT

I want to make some observations with regard to ways of acting, but also want to allow each person to come to their own conclusions as applicable to their concrete situation.

- The crisis in Europe is a new theological place (“locus theologicus”). During the past three decades Christianity has looked at Latin America, yet at the present time the events taking place in Europe have taken on a theological relevance and a religious significance that merit the attention of Christians everywhere. Europe must be carefully examined, for the present situation of religious life and the Church in Europe, might very well begin to appear in many other parts of the world.
- The lived reality of Europe will, in the future, become the reality of other continents and the present experience of European

Christianity will, in the future, be the experience of other religions. Because of the cultural osmosis created by the present system of communication, the Third World may very well experience this reality before it reaches the stage of adequate post-industrial development. This would indeed complicate the situation and create a state of schizophrenia: a large part of the third world would quickly become a society with a post-religious (post-industrial) mentality, yet find itself in the midst of a society with an infrastructure that is agrarian or simply industrial.

- The “mission to Europe” is not the solution. Religious life in Europe will not resolve its crisis by “importing” diocesan or religious from the Third World or from some other place, nor will the European Church secure its future by “importing”, for example, seminarians from Africa and Latin America. These seminarians and young religious could help maintain the classical activities of the Church, its cult, parish life, popular devotions.... in other words, the traditional aspects, “that which has always been” — the areas that are dying. It will not be easy for these young foreigners to contribute to the construction of a “religion without religion” that is proper to an advanced society or a language that arises from within as the mature fruit of this crisis of classical religion, and arises as a result of having lived this crisis on a very intense level. Help from the Third World might be beneficial for the continuation of classical European religion (but not perhaps for its survival). Only those who have lived and understood the depths of this crisis can create a religious language that is substantially new, coherent, and creative. Indeed, only these individuals can really help.
- The same thing is happening to religious life in Europe: with the influx of religious from other continents, the presence of religious life in Europe can be maintained. This, however, will take on a form that continues religious life but does not truly “enter” Europe or “establish” communities that are really present and incarnate

(not only physically but also mentally and spiritually) in this new model of post-industrial advanced society which is the society that rejects the old form of religious life. This is the only kind of “re-establishment” that can have a future.<sup>13</sup>

- If religious life were a multi-national corporation in crisis, then they would be willing to risk a great part of their budget and invest monies in the area of investigation and creativity in order to survive in a rapidly changing market. If religious life had a vision for the future, then it would invest its primary energies and best human resources in re-inventing the future, in investigating the true nature of the actual crisis and in assuming whatever risk is necessary to create a new future... Religious would have to be experts in such themes as the present religious crisis, the cultural changes taking place in advanced societies, and the profound reconsideration of the nature of religion. They would have to be aware of the serious criticism leveled against traditional and classical religion and be willing to critique those elements of classical religion that have to be abandoned, if it is not to fall into greater irrelevance. They must not only be technical experts in these areas, but also practical specialists, committed to experimentation. It seems to us, however, that nothing like this is occurring.<sup>14</sup>
- It is necessary to respect the rhythm and time of each person. There are individuals, generations and institutions that have fulfilled their mission. Our time is not synchronized with history's time. We have to know how to accept the hour of death; we have to learn the “art of dying”<sup>15</sup>: dying without bitterness, but with hope and trust, dying in such a way that it becomes possible that from our own death, life springs up anew for those who follow us and thus the torch is entrusted to other hands.
- It is also necessary to learn the “art of living”, the art of living in the present time, the present historical “kairos”. This is not the

time to pause and listen nostalgically to the hymn, “Near to Thee My God”, being sung on the stern of the Titanic. We have to learn how to move beyond the past and launch out into the future. We have to stop trying to fix what cannot be fixed and clothe ourselves in new life.

- Re-establish or recast? We see that re-establishment is not the answer. The events of the past 15 years show the failure of the attempts of re-establishment within the system. We must recast the heavy metal that weighs us down, recast it in the furnace, form new molds, recast it outside the system so that instead of being crushed it can have a possible future. We do not need any more attempts of re-establishment, of repeating the past; what we need is a “mutation”, a substantial change.
- And in Latin America? Classically the ravaging “enemy” of Catholicism in Latin America was the “sects”. For some years now, people have begun to speak about the emergence of another enemy: indifference. We are seeing many faithful men and women in Latin America abandoning the Catholic Church — abandoning it not to join other new religious movements, but to enter a state of indifference. This has just begun and will become more serious in the coming years. As we have said, this is occurring not because there is a problem with religious life in Latin America but because there is a problem with “religion” in the actual society that is in the midst of a profound social change, a substantial mutation. Though it has just begun, it is nonetheless a reality on our Latin American continent. If religious life does not carefully analyze this situation and take into consideration the very profound factors that are in play here, then religious life will not resolve their own problems nor the problems of others, because these problems will not have been stated correctly.

*Translated by Charles T. Plock, C.M.*

## Notes

1. Probably some of the same things (concerning this starting point and other matters discussed in this article) could be said about religious life in the United States. I am going to limit myself, however, to a discussion of religious life in Europe, primarily, Spain.
2. "What makes this worse is that we have 'no room to move'. There are no possibilities of reacting creatively. There are only reactions and defensive moves: make an ordered and intelligent retreat, with the least possible 'costs'. In this situation there is no possibility for a creative confrontation with the future to initiate pastoral actions or explore new possibilities." *Sal Terrae* 1022 (April, 1999), 282.
3. Absolute "dissolution" never occurs in the historical evolution of social movements: something "residual" always remains and can be prolonged for decades or even centuries....
4. This fact was published by CONFER in Spain in 2003. This median age also coincides with that of the diocesan priests in Spain.
5. From 1978-2002 — the time of John Paul II's pontificate — the number of priests has decreased by 4%, membership in religious congregations by 19%, lay religious by 27% and women religious by 19%. This occurred at a time when the Catholic population increased by some 300 million persons.
6. "The prophetic movement has been reduced to one more structure of the institutional Church." Cf. Diarmuid O'Murchu, *Rehacer la vida religiosa*, Publicaciones Claretianas, Madrid 2001, 132.
7. "The idea that religious life could have meaning or significance outside of the official Church is something virtually inconceivable for the majority of men and women religious." Cf. O'Murchu, *ibid.* 133.
8. According to an annual survey taken by "Latinbarómetro". "El País", Madrid, October 21, 2004.
9. I want to say here: If within 20 years religious life becomes in great part an ensemble of religious missionaries from other countries, this would mean that "European" religious life had really ended and been substituted by religious missionaries from other continents "in Europe"
10. Here I refer to "religion" not as religiosity or a sense of meaning and depth, rather I refer to "religion" or "religions" as those forms that the spiritual character of the human person set up during that time of change known as the agrarian revolution, forms that humanity has lived with until the present time. Now, however, it is precisely the agrarian society that is disappearing.
11. In the precise meaning that we are giving to this word. Cf. Mariano Corbí, *Religión sin religion*, PPC, Madrid, 1996.
12. This "only now" is simply a way of speaking and can always be contradicted. I want to call attention to the French author Marcel Légaut, who 30 years ago spoke of a necessary "mutation" and metamorphosis in Christianity (his call then parallels my thesis here). He was a visionary who without the actual instruments of anthropological-cultural interpretation, captured that which is no less easier for us to see today. Cf. *Mutación de la Iglesia y conversión personal*, Aubier, Paris, 1975 or *Creer en la Iglesia del Futuro*, Sal Terrae, Santander, 1985.

13. Diarmuid O'Murchu, noting the observations of Raymond Hostie about the "cycles of religious life" states that the appearance of a new form of religious life "will probably not occur for another seventy years." His observations are very interesting though he does not pretend to predict the future. Cf. *ibidem*, 127.
14. The results of the last Congress on the Consecrated Life that took place in Rome in November, 2004, seem to confirm this: its conclusions appear to be more an exercise in literature, poetry and conceptual ingenuity than an exercise in theology, realism and prophecy. The most radical problems of Christianity and the Church are not even mentioned — they simply do not exist. Teilhad de Chardin said that the difficulty does not reside in solving a problem, but in planting the problem before oneself. This was the problem of the Congress on the Consecrated Life. What is worse is that perhaps this indicates that this is the problem with religious life throughout the world, for officially all of religious life was represented at the Congress.
15. "My impression is that God asks religious and the monastic orders to have the courage to truly actualize themselves or accept a peaceful death." Marcelo Barros, Circular Letter of October, 2002.

## GENDERING THE QUEST FOR GLOBAL ECONOMIC JUSTICE: THE CHALLENGES OF WOMEN LABOR MIGRATION TO CHRISTIAN THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

*Gemma Tulud Cruz*

*Migration is a one-way ticket. There is no "home" to go back to*

-Stuart Hall-

### Introduction

"History is always the story of somebody's diaspora"; so goes an oft-repeated quote by Romesh Gunesequera. From Abraham's family in the Bible to the Jews in the modern world, from the voyages of the colonizers to the journeys of America's European settlers, migration is, indeed, a phenomenon that is as old as humankind. In itself, the reality of deterritorialization it spawns already poses serious questions to the theological imagination. Today, however, migration's imbrication with the process of globalization<sup>1</sup>, particularly through labor migration, is offering us new and nuanced insights into the human condition and consequently, challenges for theological reflections.

Indeed, globalization, which spawned an economic polarization that created not only a more mobile transnational elite<sup>2</sup> but also a more dependent underclass, has a lot to do with contemporary migration. Because of the exacerbation of poverty, unemployment, and underemployment thousands of people all over the world leave their homes and countries everyday in search of work or better job opportunities. Excluding the permanent immigrants and refugees who also look for remunerative activities, global estimates of migrant workers by the International Labour Organization run as high as 120 million as of 1995.<sup>3</sup> And this does not include yet those who resort to or fall prey to irregular or undocumented migration, who are often women, as they are usually the easy victims of trafficking, where migrants are kept in bondage or forced into prostitution. According to UNIFEM [United Nations Development Fund for Women], the number of women and children trafficked in Southeast Asia alone could be around 225,000 out of a global figure of over 700,000 annually. There is also a surge in human trafficking in Central Asia especially from Uzbekistan. Upto 10,000 people, composed mostly of young women, are forced into the sex trade by international crime syndicates. This multi-billion dollar industry also accounts for the trafficking of Filipinas and Russian women in US military bases in Korea; the illegal movement of 400 Bangladeshi women monthly to Pakistan; and the undocumented entry of 300 Thai women annually to Australia.<sup>4</sup> Clearly, labour migration, in its unjust dimensions, is increasingly taking on a concrete face, i.e., a woman's face.

Because there is a vast labor reserve from the ever-increasing millions of poor people from Third World countries, migrant workers, especially women, are today's "hot commodities" that can be "acquired" at "cheap prices" as part of the "circulating resources" or capital in the world. Take the case of women migrant domestic workers. There is a structural and global trade in maid. This maid trade turns millions of women into victims by their employers, host governments and its citizens, as well as by their recruiters, their own

governments, and their own next of kin, not to mention by their fellow women. Noeleen Heyzer and Vivienne Wee, in their study of the institutional and global scale of the trade in domestic workers<sup>5</sup>, identify the other groups in the network of people who benefit and perpetuate the worldwide trade in maids. Aside from the recruiters, the employers, and the maids' families, these include the banks, the remittance intermediaries, the lending agencies, and of course the sending and receiving country's economy. To put a more concrete face to this, allow me to share with you the case of the Filipina migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong:

### **The Filipino Women Domestic Workers in Hong Kong**

Filipina migration to Hong Kong started in the 1970s, when Hong Kong was experiencing an economic boom and the Philippine economy was beginning to hit rock bottom. Because Hong Kong housewives had more opportunities to work — or were forced to work to meet increasing economic demands — and local domestic workers were expensive, the demand for cheap or migrant domestic workers arose. Filipinas filled this demand. Hong Kong's further industrialization attracted local workers, including local women workers, to jobs that paid higher than the expanding service sector. This intensified the demand for the English-speaking Filipinas who then came in droves, making Hong Kong today the host city of more or less 150,000 Filipina "DHs" (domestic helpers), as they are popularly called. While they compose the majority of Hong Kong's foreign house help and its largest ethnic migrant group, life for the Filipina DHs is a saga born in the constricting mold of gendered migration, intensified by gendered transitions, and sealed in their experience of gendered violence and unjust working conditions.

### **Gendered Migration**

In a lot of ways, the migration of the Filipina DHs in Hong Kong is gendered.<sup>6</sup> First of all, the global job market is a gendered market, as

women, especially poor and poorer women of color, continue to be segregated in jobs associated with the service sector or care work. Secondly, the Filipina DHs' decision to migrate, which is often a family strategy for upward social mobility, is also gendered. This is so in the way sexual division of labor, rooted in gender stereotypes, plays a major role in singling out the womenfolk to be the one to leave and work abroad. Filipino families think it is but "natural" for the daughter, sister, or wife to apply for the job because domestic work is a woman's work. For single women, families often capitalize on the imposed and popular notion of the language of care among women as nurturance in all aspects, e.g. emotional, physical etc., for them to agree to leave to work as DH. Parents especially tap into the highly ingrained sense of responsibility among women in choosing them to be the one to migrate.

The circumstances surrounding siblings Elsa and Belle's migration to Hong Kong is a perfect example of this. Their father was the one who facilitated their migration process. He first tried to send Belle to Hong Kong when he did not like her involvement with union activities. He even arranged it with one of his nieces, (Belle and Elsa's cousin), who was already working at that time as a DH in Hong Kong. When Belle could not make it, Elsa became the next target. Elsa's account of her last conversation with her father reflects the dynamics not only of the expectation for and socialization of Filipino women for care work but also the reality of patriarchy that is operative within the Filipino family:

"Elsa" he told me, "can you help your sisters in their schooling? Because they like to study and you know that I don't have any capability to send them to college." He said, "Elsa can you help me? Your sisters, they like to go to school."...and so I said, "OK. No problem. This is my opportunity to help.... Don't worry, *Tay* [father], I will try my best to help you."<sup>7</sup>

Hope Antone, a Filipina feminist theologian based in Hong Kong, affirms this patriarchy-rooted ideology of domesticity when she says:

...women have been socialized early in life to do multiple responsibilities in the home — for their siblings, their parents, the elderly, and sometimes even others in the community. This ideology of domesticity is so ingrained that many Asian women feel it is their fate or destiny to sacrifice in order that those who depend on them can have a better life. Migration then becomes an option not only for mere economic reasons but also for the ideological-cultural factor of gender socialization into the ideology of domesticity and multiple responsibilities.<sup>8</sup>

### Gendered Transitions

The Filipina DHs also undergo gendered transitions when they work and live in Hong Kong. For married DHs guilt because of their being “absentee mothers” is a source of much oppression. At the root of their guilt is what they perceive as a transgression of a “good” Christian woman’s proper place and role which is at home with her husband and children. This personal and even societal perception of their sojourn in Hong Kong as a betrayal of their primary duty and responsibility then becomes like a millstone hanging over their neck. Such is this perception that some of them do not even say goodbye to their children nor immediately tell the truth as to where they are going.

To ease their guilt, these DHs find a *tagasalo* (surrogate) whereby they pass on their direct nurturing responsibility to another woman, e.g. their mother, a sister, female cousin, their eldest daughter, or hire the services of a poorer Filipina to be their own domestic helper.<sup>9</sup> These DH mothers, however, still try to make up for their absence by resorting to transnational mothering. They are often known as “cell phone mothers” because they try to do their responsibilities as mothers via the cell phone. Some even help their children do their homework via the mobile phone.

Unmarried, single, or unattached DHs, in the meantime, find difficulties in having a relationship with the opposite sex or, in their own words, “finding a good man to be a husband.” According to a study by Marilen Abesamis titled *Romance and Resistance: The*

*Experience of the Filipina Domestic Workers in Hong Kong*, single DHs prioritize the “white, middle-class male” thinking that marrying a white, middle-class male would mean higher social class, more “freedom” and rights.<sup>10</sup> But this does not happen because of cultural differences exacerbated by the low social regard for them. For others who do get involved with foreigners, particularly Chinese, not being taken seriously remains a problem. As a result, many unmarried DHs, end up preferring Filipino men. But since there are also very few Filipino men in Hong Kong and class boundaries within the Filipino migrant community are very much in place,<sup>11</sup> the “field” for the single DHs becomes all the more limited.

This severe limitation of possibilities for a “husband material” among the single DHs who are socialized in the Philippines that marriage and having children is the be-all and end-all of a woman’s existence often becomes a problem for them as women. This is especially so because most of them are in the marrying age and some quite beyond the marrying age.<sup>12</sup> That is why some who are always asked the big question: “Why on earth are you still single?” get annoyed.<sup>13</sup> The prevalence of this mentality among the DHs and in the Filipino community at home and in Hong Kong explains why marriages are the primary occasions for celebration of the DHs. Wedding pictures even land on the cover page of magazines that have mostly DHs as contributors and readers.<sup>14</sup> Not surprisingly, conflicts or fights about men or boyfriends, especially about boyfriend-grabbing, also occur within their peer groups.

Single DHs, in the meantime, find difficulties in having a relationship with the opposite sex or, in their own words, “finding a good man to be a husband”, according to a study by Marilen Abesamis<sup>15</sup> titled *Romance*.

### Gendered Violence

Gendered violence economically, physically, and sexually also plagues the Filipina DHs. Economically, they and the other foreign

DHs have been victimized a number of times already to solve or alleviate Hong Kong's economic woes. The wage cuts which targeted only the domestic workers — an occupation the Hong Kong government knows is women – dominated — was meant to ease Hong Kong's economic slowdown. The DHs are already systematically made poor in the Philippines. With domestic workers also already the lowest paid worker in Hong Kong, singling them out for further reduction of wages is tantamount to “making the poor even poorer.”<sup>16</sup>

The Hong Kong government further reinforced this institutionalized gendered violence with the proposal to remove maternity protection for foreign domestic helpers. Concocted as a means to offer “flexibility” to employers to terminate their FDH on the basis of “mutual agreement,” the proposal, according to a letter by the Asian Migrant Coordinating Body, is not only “discriminatory, as it is applicable only to those in the category of foreign domestic helpers...[and] racist as it seeks to exclude workers of certain nationalities from enjoying a right available to local workers and those of other nationalities.” It is also “sexist as it targets women for oppression” by considering “pregnancy and maternity as a ‘hindrance’ to more effective and productive labour.” The proposal, the letter goes on to say, “brings us back the age of slavery where the right to bear children was considered a threat to productivity<sup>17</sup> — a violation of the DH's reproductive rights which is a hard-won right of women workers around the world.

The scourge of the Filipina DHs as women comes not only from the Hong Kong government but also from their employers and recruiters. For instance, because of the popular perception and fear in Hong Kong that foreign domestic workers will go to great lengths to snag rich or economically-stable men like their male employers, the DH's physical appearance is usually controlled mostly by women employers. Dress codes are imposed through the maid's uniform. For those who do not make the DH wear a uniform, they require her to wear jeans and T-shirts or other “harmless” and gender-neutral clothes. Moreover, body control and discipline, as women<sup>18</sup> are important adjustments

the DH has to make right at the start. Recruiters, upon the desires of prospective employers, “transform” the DH's body and appearance by dictating her body weight, length of hair, facial appearance (no make-up), kind of shoes to wear, etc. When the external fits the prescribed ideal DH's body appearance, the internal is the next one the recruiters tinker with. Aside from being subjected to the X-ray machine and the weighing scale, the DH's body is exposed to numerous tests as part of the application process. These include tests for hepatitis, syphilis, herpes, and even a pregnancy test. When the DH passes the “body quality control” she is photographed with her “signature” clothes: the standard pastel pink or blue-striped maid's uniform. This “perfect maid” look is then photographed twice: a close-up of the face and a “full body” shot. All in all, the ideal DH must be neat and tidy but not so attractive.

Employers, especially women employers, do not go for pretty domestic workers. If the prospective DH has what mainstream society considers as physical imperfections like acne, scars, birthmarks, and a bit [but not too] dark complexion, the more she will likely be employed. Skin color is a factor that Chinese employers value. Many of them shun women with darker skin because a woman with dark color allegedly scares the children. They also go for those who are more Chinese looking. As a result, there are quite a number of what DHs call “from airport to airport.” These are those who were terminated the moment their employer laid her eyes on them at the airport and saw “how beautiful” or “how dark” they were.

Various forms of physical abuse, in the meantime, plague those who get to actually work. These include slapping on the face or hands or any part of the body, spitting, kicking, being hit with or thrown objects at, beating, etc. Others, like Lilia Dangco get treated more atrociously:

...Six days later (after arriving in Hong Kong), her employer burned her left forearm with a flat iron after she failed to follow her

employer's instruction to put a handkerchief on top of a black long skirt that she was ironing. She was confined at the Queen Mary Hospital. She said her employer warned her not to tell the incident to anybody or her face would be the next target...<sup>19</sup>

In terms of sexual violence, kissing, touching, and sexual advances are the most common forms of abuse for Filipina DHs. This is closely followed by the employer displaying himself naked or asking the DH to touch him. Other complaints include being peeped at by employers when taking a bath or getting changed, videotaping the DH in the bathroom or bedroom, and touching the DH while she is sleeping.<sup>20</sup> Male employers also tend to regard their DH as in-house masseuse who is available for 24 hours. Some make "substitute wives" out of their DH especially if the wife seems not able to provide adequate "sexual services." Some DHs are even turned into virtual sex slaves.

### Unjust Working Conditions

Unjust working conditions, however, account for some of the most common yet most oppressive experiences of the Filipina DHs. For example, a lot of employers provide poor accommodations. DHs are made to sleep on the kitchen or living room floor, near the bathroom, and under the table where they have no privacy.<sup>21</sup> As a result, some sleep for 3-4 hours only because they cannot sleep until everyone leaves the living room or stops going to the kitchen and goes to sleep. It becomes all the more difficult when their employers entertain guests or when they have to serve refreshments at *mahjong* parties which could take place several nights a week.

DHs also encounter problems with their employers when it comes to food. The employers determine not only what the DH eats but also where, when, and how much she eats. Meals can be irregular, late, or inadequate. One respondent in a study by Rita Ybanez complained of being fed with just a piece of bread and coffee in the morning and the next meal is at 3 or 4 in the afternoon. Other respondents revealed how they were given just porridge, noodles, or a hamburger as their food for the whole day.<sup>22</sup>

DHs' bodies also suffer as they are turned into a workhorse. A study done by the Asian Migrant Center in 2001 pointed out that possibly more than 5,000 of the then existing number of Filipino DHs suffer from virtual slavery (0-1 days off per month).<sup>23</sup> Aside from their "official" job as DH, some are actually made to work outside their employer's homes either as unpaid DHs to their parents', relatives, or friends' homes, or as secretaries, nurses, waitresses, dishwashers, medical technicians, cooks, salespersons, messengers, hawkers, factory workers, and researchers.

Recruiters also contribute to this objectification of the DH with the practice of giving a three-month warranty for their "products." They "package" their "products" by advertising even in cyberspace that their "products" are far superior, better trained and more "obedient." Some recruitment agencies offer as much as three free replacements if the employer is not satisfied with the "product." An agency, at one time, even put them on "sale" with a "15% discount" price tag because it is celebrating its fifteenth anniversary.<sup>24</sup> The DH then become like goods in the store where one has the ultimate freedom to choose which to buy and if the "goods" is "damaged" you can return her, free of charge.

Geraldine Pratt, in her article *Inscribing Domestic Work on Filipina Bodies*, narrates another kind of objectification where "a domestic worker's body and function as servant is further objectified by building an equivalence between her and the household décor." The employer made Cora, the Filipina maid, wear a uniform "coordinated with her employer's dishes." Cora was even "asked to wear her black uniform when the black dishes were in use."<sup>25</sup> Nothing beats, however, the names "my Filipino[a]" which means "my maid" and *banmui*<sup>26</sup> which are used to refer to Filipina DHs in Hong Kong. These do not just inscribe domestic work in women's bodies. These racialize it in Filipina women's bodies.

These experiences of the Filipina DHs in Hong Kong that are borne out of their migration as women in the context of globalization raise some critical questions:<sup>27</sup> How does one confront gender injustice beyond boundaries? Or, how does one deal with forced, racialized, and gendered migration fraught with unjust situations? What do these mean to you and me and to humanity as a whole? How does one talk about an age supposedly of global wealth and plenty when global poverty, particularly global feminization of poverty, is the *real* reality? Most importantly, how does one even talk about human dignity and social responsibility when these are sacrificed in the altar of global capital daily? These, I believe, are some of the questions that must be subjected to theological reflections.

### Theological Challenges and Perspectives

As shown by the experience of the Filipina DHs in Hong Kong, labor migration is intensified and abused by global capitalism — the emblem of globalization. The prevailing market economics is hegemonic as it cuts or disregards any ties with other institutions such as religion, family, and politics and even usurps the power of the nation-states. It is exploitative as it tends to look at everything in terms of cost, benefit, and exchange value at the expense of human dignity, especially of the vulnerable in society. Lastly, it is gendered as it reinforces the inequality between men and women, with the latter as the victim.

In short, the prevailing market economics is unjust, especially for women.<sup>28</sup> While women's labor participation, indeed, increased under the aegis of globalization, the global market simply overlays 'female' roles defined in terms of sexuality, reproduction, and domesticity with a market ethos of commodification and the dominance of those who already possess resources. So you have First World over Third World countries, rich Chinese women over poor Filipino women, and the financially-better-off Filipina DHs over poorer Filipinas in the Philippines. Because it also views women as not productive or competitive, they are, therefore, not considered to be entitled to a full share in or control

over available social resources. This starts in the economy of the household or the family where the 'female' roles are ingrained. These "roles" are picked up in the job-market by assigning or leaving women with jobs that are gender-specific and reinforced in the workplace with incidents of sexual harassment and sex-discrimination in terms of wages and promotion. Then this is intensified in the "service industries" where women are turned into commodities. In the global ontological capital women are both consumer and consumed, properties and commodities.

The worse of the lot falls on women migrant workers since migrant labor is not integrated into the global economy. That is why its reputation is that of cheap and exploitative labor. This structural denigration of migrant labor has serious repercussions, especially on women, who are doubly exploited. Because their job is segregated by the international division of labor and devalued by the global economy, the accordance of dignity is minimal, if not downright lacking. Consequently, human rights are also minimal and even nil. Domestic work, for instance, is "invisible" because it is done within the confines of "privacy" of a particular family or household. It is also not usually reflected in labor statistics and is excluded from labor laws. If it does get accorded some kind of legislation, e.g. minimum wage, as is the case of the Filipina DHs in Hong Kong, it is not only the lowest-paid. It is also the first victim in times of economic slowdown or restructuring.

Where does Christian theology figure in all of these? How can it make sense of the prevailing market economics from a faith perspective? Most importantly, how can it come up with a discourse that takes into account *different* women's well-being?

Feminist theologians believe that there is an interaction of the three-fold exploitation or oppression of women, namely gender, race and class, in this issue. Elisabeth Schussler-Fiorenza, for one, asserts that there is "structural interconnections between the gendered economic system of capitalist patriarchy, its racist underpinnings, and women's

global poverty” and that this “must be seen as due to the global colonialisation and systemic exploitation of women’s labor in production and reproduction.”<sup>29</sup> Shawn Copeland in *Interaction of Racism, Sexism, and Classism in Women’s Exploitation* adds that this is very much apparent or strong for coloured women, especially for the domestic workers, who have to sell their very persons as the condition of their labor.<sup>30</sup>

Since the global economy is forged on unjust relations that have roots in socio-political and religio-cultural relations, justice must be the primary theological category for Christian theology to respond to this reality. Usually, theological discourse in view of economic justice is drawn from classical Latin American liberation theology. Although it offers considerable theological basis to address the plight of women as victims of economic injustice, this theological discourse has limitations. First of all, the generic term “poor” is problematic as it totalizes the “subject.” Lumping women with the category “poor” does not necessarily integrate the fact that there is a “woman face” to poverty<sup>31</sup> or to global economic injustice. This failure to integrate the gendering of economics in classic liberation theology’s discourse on the politics of economics then marginalizes women’s experience and perspective.

As it is, the Filipina DHs suffered not just because they are poor but also because they are women. Option for the poor as an option for poor women<sup>32</sup> then makes necessary the broad unmasking of the dichotomy between the private and the public, especially in terms of how it constructs, controls, disciplines, confines, excludes, and suppresses gender and sexual difference and, in effect, upholds patriarchal power structures. Gendered justice in the global economy means shattering this persistent dichotomy because it is the major reason why women get crumbs or nothing at all in terms of economic rights and opportunities. Schüssler-Fiorenza, for instance, laments how women are viewed as economic dependents. They supposedly work

for pin-money until they get married and for extra money to complement the salaries of their husbands. As such, women’s active economic participation is not encouraged. If they do work, discriminatory pay-scale awaits them.<sup>33</sup>

While it can unmask the dualism, equality cannot do as much in terms of shattering it. Justice must be construed beyond equality into that of love if justice is to really be about right relations. Since economic injustice to women is rooted in relationships that are often in the realm of the private, equating justice with love will strike at the “emotional capital” of such injustice — the patriarchal and romanticized notion of love that keeps women enslaved in their own and in other women’s homes. Isabel Carter Heyward asserts:

Love is justice. It is not necessarily a happy feeling or a romantic attachment. Love is a way of being in the world, not necessarily an emotional affect....Justice is the moral act of love. Love is actually justice....Where there is no moral act of love, no justice, there is an evil situation. Evil is the act of un-love or in-justice. It is the doing of moral wrong, specifically of breaking the relational bond between ourselves in such a way that one, both, or many parties are dis-empowered to grow, love, and/or live.<sup>34</sup>

Gendering the quest for global economic justice then means that love must be construed in the context of justice. Here, it is important for Christian theology to expose how the private realm, particularly the family, produces and re-produces gendered ideologies and practices for these are very much a part of the politics of the DHs’ gendered migration and gendered transitions.

Equally important is the need for Christian theology to account for its own contribution in this phenomenon. The socialization of women into domesticity, for instance, is reinforced through a “theology of woman” or a “feminine theology” which advocates that woman’s nature and vocation is to be loving housewife and self-sacrificing mother. This theology becomes even more questionable given the fact that the DHs did not even have the luxury to stay home to take care

of their own children. Hence, this kind of theology doubly victimizes poor women and triply victimizes poorer women of color, since it only reflects the realities of middle-class women who can afford to stay in their own homes and/or not work. Even when these middle-class women go out to work they hire a maid thereby reinforcing the very same (“feminine”) theology, that they ran away from or were running away from, and become the oppressors of their fellow women themselves. The same is true with the DHs who hire other poor Filipinas to take care of their (DHs’) own family in the Philippines and pay the “second-level *Pinay* DH” a paltry sum.

While earlier ecclesiastical teachings cannot imagine women working outside the home and considered it “wrong from the point of view of the good of society and of the family” so much so that it is “an intolerable abuse to be abolished at all cost”<sup>35</sup>, more recent ones maintain that women are equal to men in dignity and responsibility, which, however, must realize itself primarily in her giving self-dedication to her husband and in her loving service to her children.<sup>36</sup> Consequently, these can be viewed as token developments, for mothering, in this sense, somehow still becomes (m)*othering* or motherhood becomes (m)*otherhood*.

What is important is that just/loving relationships must not be confused with complementary relations. This is cheap justice. It is quasi-justice, a token equality. It is exploitation in the guise of affection mirrored in the way the DHs are “conscientized” to migrate for the sake of their families by capitalizing on their responsibilities and sense of sacrifice as “good” “Christian” wives/daughters/sisters. The case of Elsa and Belle, who were “manipulated” by their father by capitalizing on their responsibilities and sense of sacrifice as daughters and sisters, perfectly illustrates this. Indeed, the notion of complementarity can make use of gender difference as a tool for oppression. Authentic just/loving relationships are characterized by mutuality understood as equality without significant difference. Mutual

relations enable or empower others to discover and develop their capabilities to make their contributions, while simultaneously making one’s own. It is about sensitivity and solidarity, affinity and facilitation.

Gendering the quest for global economic justice also entails expanding the usual feminist analytical categories of women namely gender, class, and race, to take into account the case of women migrants who suffer distinct forms of oppression by virtue of being migrants. This requires, first and foremost, gendering the migrant worker, particularly the domestic worker. We have to put a “woman face” to the migrant. We have to find an analytical category that could help in viewing the economic situation of women in migration from a faith perspective.

### Conclusion

Gendering the quest for global economic justice then necessitates covering *different* women’s experience and perspective in two areas: the productive and reproductive work.<sup>37</sup> For women, work outside the home means economic independence and, to a certain extent, personal or political independence. Yet, the notion and practice of work today is still very much hinged on the oppressive reproduction ethics that have existed for centuries in the realm of the private. In fact, as the DHs’ gendered migration, gendered transition, and gendered violence exhibit, the power of these constricting ideologies and practices transcend borders and territories. At the end of the day, gendering the quest for global economic justice is not just a question of whether women are *free* to work but also a question of whether women have *freeing* work. More concretely, it is about how the global economy can serve as a means not just for our stomachs’ satisfaction but also for the creation of living conditions that lead to authentic liberation. Just as Jesus’ story ended not with his death but with his resurrection, Christian theology must insist that in God’s great economy of salvation, love and life, not suffering and death, are the Christian’s final experience.

But let justice run its course like water, and righteousness be like an ever-flowing river (*Amos 6:24*).

### Notes

1. The volume of migration in the last decades is such that it is believed to be responsible for two-thirds of the population growth in industrial countries. The UN's 2002 International Migration Report, for instance, says that there are roughly 175 million migrants, 105 million or 60% of whom are in developed countries. Of these migrants, 56 million are in Europe, 50 million in Asia, and 41 million in North America. "Global Trends" *Migration News* Vol. 10, No. 2 (April 2003). See also Mike Pamwell, *Population Movements and the Third World* (London: Routledge, 1993), 29-30.
2. It has created, for example, a different breed of migrants like the "skilled transients" — corporate managers, consultants and technicians who hop or get transferred from one international branch of the transnational company to another, and the "transnational migrants" — the elite group of rich entrepreneurs who can "buy" citizenship and shuttle or "split their time between Melbourne as a place of study for the children, Hong Kong as the family home, and Vancouver as the business location. Nikos Papastergiadis, *The Turbulence of Migration* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 40, 44.
3. Patrick Taran and Eduardo Geronimi. *Globalization, Labor and Migration: Protection is Paramount* (Geneva: International Labor Organization), 6.
4. Gemma Tulud Cruz, "Coming to grips with prostitution," <http://www.nationalcatholicreporter.org/globalpers/gp041504.htm> accessed December 31, 2004.
5. Noeleen Heyzer and Vivienne Wee, "Domestic Workers in Transient Overseas Employment: Who Benefits, Who Profits," in *The Trade in Domestic Workers: Causes, Mechanisms and Consequences of International Migration*. eds. Geertje Lycklama à Nijeholt and Nedra Weerakom (Kuala Lumpur: APDC, 1994): 44-70.
6. Rhacel Salazar Parrenas, *Servants of Globalization: Women, Migration and Domestic Work* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001) gives a substantial discussion and examples on this based on her study of Filipina domestic workers in Rome and Los Angeles.
7. Nicole Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong: Stories of Filipina Workers* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 18.
8. Hope S. Antone, "Asian Women and the Globalization of Labor," *The Journal of Theologies and Cultures in Asia* Volume 2 (2003), 102. See also Nantawan Boonprasat Lewis, "Uneven Development, Capitalism, and Patriarchy," in *The Power of Naming: A Concilium Reader in Feminist Liberation Theology* ed. Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza (New York: Orbis Books, 1996): 92-3.
9. See, for example, E. Mulong, "Mothers Once Again" *TNT Hong Kong* Vol. 6, No. 4 (June-July 2000): 4-5 and "When Children Become Parent Carers," *TNT Hong Kong* Vol. 7, No. 1 (Feb.-March 2001): 9.

10. Quoted in Ma. Ceres P. Doyo, "Tomboy Love," in Inter-Press Service, *Risks and Rewards: Stories from the Philippine Migration Trail*, (Bangkok: IPS Asia-Pacific): 39-43.
11. See, for example, "Class Conscious" *TNT Hong Kong* Vol. 2, No. 11 (Jan.-Feb. 1997): 10-1.
12. In mainstream Philippine standard the ideal marrying age is around 25. In rural areas the usual marrying age even tend to be earlier.
13. Ping Gonzalez, "Thirty-five and still single", *TNT Hong Kong* Vol. 5, No. 8 (August 1999): 13-4.
14. See, for instance, the cover page of *TNT* Vol. 2, No.2 (February 1996).
15. Quoted in Ma. Ceres P. Doyo, "Tomboy Love," in Inter-Press Service, *Risks and Rewards: Stories from the Philippine Migration Trail*, (Bangkok: IPS Asia-Pacific): 39-43.
16. After failing to impose its proposed 20% wage cut (the employers wanted 35%) in 1998, the H.K. government reduced their minimum wage by five percent during the economic crisis in 1999. Because of growing budget deficit, the Hong Kong government implemented another (and higher) wage cut for contracts signed after April 1, 2003 bringing the HK\$ 3,670 a month minimum wage of the already lowest-paid Hong Kong workers to HK\$ 3,270. See "RP maids' dilemma in HK: Take pay cut or be jobless," <[http://archive.inq7.net/archive/2001-p/nat/2001/dec/24/nat\\_7-1-p.htm](http://archive.inq7.net/archive/2001-p/nat/2001/dec/24/nat_7-1-p.htm)> accessed October 31, 2003; James Tien, "Hong Kong is suffering: Even the foreign maids must be willing to sacrifice" *SCMP* (November 22, 2002); and Daffyd Roderick, "Making the Poor Even Poorer," *TIME Asia* (August 25, 2003).
17. See related report "Maternity benefits for maids opposed" *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (July 4, 1997): 3.  
Nicole Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong*, 72 cites a similar violation of the DHs' reproductive right whereby the DH was given an abortion without her knowledge when her employer brought her for physical exam and pregnancy test.
18. Nicole Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong*, 60-82 gives a more comprehensive discussion on this.
19. "MRV Case Profiles: Lilia Bernardino Dangco" <<http://www.asianmigrants.org/mrvcases/999433070427.php>> accessed February 2, 2003. Cases of abuses are considerable enough to warrant the establishment of Bethune House, a Filipino-run shelter for DHs in distress.
20. Roseanne Calamaan, for instance, was forced by her employers to watch them have sex and was also asked to watch the couple's "private videos." See "Maid 'forced to watch sex,'" *Asia Migrant Bulletin* Vol. 11 Nos. 3 & 4 (July-December 1994), 4.
21. There are also complaints from DHs who are made to sleep in cupboards, cardboard carton cubicles, in the toilets, and on top of washing machines because of the small house of their employers. See "No More Sleeping in the Bathroom," *TNT Hong Kong*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (February 1996), 28 and Julian Lee, "Filipino maids' act of resistance," <[http://info.anu.edu.au/mac/Newsletters\\_an\\_Journals/ANU\\_Reporter/\\_pdf/vol\\_29\\_no\\_07](http://info.anu.edu.au/mac/Newsletters_an_Journals/ANU_Reporter/_pdf/vol_29_no_07)> accessed November 3, 2003.
22. Riza Faith Ybanez, *Conditions in Labor Migration that Contribute to the HIV*

*Vulnerability of Migrant Domestic Workers: A Case Study of Filipino Domestic Workers in Hong Kong*, <[http://caramasia.gn.apc.org/Ritchie\\_HK\\_cdn.htm](http://caramasia.gn.apc.org/Ritchie_HK_cdn.htm)> accessed January 22, 2003.

23. Asian Migrant Center, *Baseline Research on Racial and Gender Discrimination Towards Filipino, Indonesian and Thai Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong*, (Hong Kong: AMC, 2001), 29.
24. Nicole Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong*, 61.
25. Geraldine Pratt, "Inscribing Domestic Work on Filipina Bodies," in *Places Through the Body*. ed. Heidi J. Nast and Steve Pile. (London: Routledge, 1998): 289.
26. *Ban* is the final syllable of the Cantonese term for "Philippines" and *mui* is from "mujai" the lowest servant in the history of the Chinese slaveholding population. See Nicole Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong*, 15, 47, 77 for a deeper analysis on how this name reflects the denigration of the Filipina DHs.
27. See, for instance, Gemma Tulud Cruz, "No strangers in this church," <http://www.nationalcatholicreporter.org/globalpers/gp120303.htm> accessed December 31, 2004.
28. Lisa Sowle Cahill, "Justice, Gender, and the Market," *Concilium* 2 (1997): 133-42.
29. Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza. "The Endless Day: Introduction," *Concilium* 194 (1987), xviii-xix.
30. Shawn Copeland. "Interaction of Racism, Sexism and Classism in Women's Exploitation," *Concilium* 194 (1987), 24.
31. Elina Vuola, *Limits of Liberation: Feminist Theology and the Ethics of Poverty and Reproduction* (New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002) gives an eloquent critique on this.
32. *Ibid.*, 141-55 gives a comprehensive list and discussion of feminist theologians, particularly Latina feminist theologians, who tackle this issue.
33. Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza. "The Endless Day: Introduction," xx, for instance, cites an example of a discriminatory pay-scale in the New Testament, particularly in I Tim. 5:3-16, which stipulate that the widow/elder should receive only half of the payment or honor which is due to the male presiding elder. While male elders and officers of the community should be remunerated independently of their family status and income, widows/elders should only receive financial support from the community when they are absolutely without family support.
34. Isabel Carter Heyward, *The Redemption of God: A Theology of Mutual Relation* (New York: University Press of America, 1982), 18. Margaret Farley, "New Patterns of Relationship: Beginnings of a Moral Revolution," *Theological Studies* 36 (December 1975): 643 also discusses this.
35. *Quadragesimo Anno* no. 71 and *Laborem Exercens* no. 117 quoted in Maria Riley, *Trouble and Beauty: Women Encounter Catholic Social Teaching* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Concern, 1991), 15-6.
36. Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza. "The Endless Day: Introduction," xxi.
37. Carol S. Robb, "Principles for a Woman-Friendly Economy," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* Vol. 9, Nos. 1-2 (Spring/Fall 1993): 147-60 makes a good case for this.

## A LOS 25 AÑOS DE MONS. ROMERO: MEMORIA, DISCERNIMIENTO, FUTURO

*José María Vigil*

Veinticinco años después del martirio de Romero nos encontramos con un panorama realmente nuevo. Partiendo del significado peculiar de Romero, vamos a tratar de extrapolarlo, poniéndolo en relación con la crisis que experimenta hoy día la religión, sobre todo en Europa. Esa crisis europea, que con el tiempo tal vez vaya a ser mundial, no nos puede dejar indiferentes en América Latina.

### MEMORIA

**Romero: símbolo emblemático  
de la opción por los pobres latinoamericana**

Tras 25 años se puede afirmar sin miedo: Romero ha cristalizado en la memoria popular y eclesial y hasta en la opinión pública de la sociedad en general como «el mártir latinoamericano por antonomasia»,

el más conocido y el más universalmente querido, querido hasta por las personas alejadas de la religión.

Nos preguntamos: ¿Por qué? ¿Por pura simpatía suya? No, sino por méritos propios. ¿Cuáles?

Romero no abrazó de entrada la teología y la espiritualidad de la liberación; al contrario, fue un gran conservador (por eso fue nombrado arzobispo), pero, al final de su vida, a los 60 años, «se convirtió»<sup>1</sup>. Se dejó interpelar y cambió<sup>2</sup>. Asumió muy personalmente esa teología y esa espiritualidad y las vivió con toda coherencia, hasta en grado heroico.

Más: como arzobispo logró institucionalizar la opción por los pobres en su Iglesia local, de forma que la práctica pastoral de su arquidiócesis fue de hecho una encarnación o aplicación concreta de esa teología y espiritualidad<sup>3</sup>. No fue la suya una vivencia personal meramente individual, sino que arrastró consigo la vivencia comunitaria de toda una Iglesia local.

Su posición liberadora no fue simplemente práctica, sino que incursionó a fondo en el mundo teológico dando muestras de una lucidez notable. Sus homilías y escritos ocupan hoy ocho volúmenes y son toda una referencia teológica. Su discurso<sup>4</sup> como doctor *honoris causa* por la Universidad de Lovaina es una pieza antológica de la teología de la liberación.

Es por todo ello, y no por mera simpatía o por fama aleatoria injustificada, por lo que Romero es, como decimos, un símbolo máximo de la opción por los pobres, o lo que es lo mismo, de la teología y de la espiritualidad de la liberación latinoamericanas. Hay otros muchos mártires latinoamericanos, pero ninguno reúne en sí esta realización eminente de la opción por los pobres, tanto en su propia persona como, a través de ella, en una Iglesia local, con un respaldo teológico tan serio, y con la rúbrica y el aval del martirio.

### Romero: símbolo emblemático del conflicto con el Estado

Hay que releer la biografía de Romero para recordar la exasperada tensión del conflicto que vivió el pueblo y la Iglesia de San Salvador con el poder del Estado. De hecho, los años del arzobispado de Romero fueron años de guerra, no declarada pero real. Persecuciones, allanamientos, desapariciones masivas, torturas, ejecuciones extrajudiciales, masacres... fueron «el pan nuestro de cada día» durante su labor pastoral.

El Salvador era el país llamado de «las catorce familias»: la desigualdad social era tan fuerte, que 14 apellidos retenían la inmensa parte de las riquezas del país más pequeño y a la vez más densamente poblado de la América continental. 30.000 fueron los campesinos masacrados en 1932 por reclamar justicia. Mayor fue el número de muertos en la guerra que se iniciaba en los días de Romero y que él no pudo detener. Si el conflicto ya era máximo de por sí, tuvo un agravante mayor en el involucramiento de EEUU con su decisiva ayuda técnica y económica al gobierno y al ejército salvadoreños en su represión contra el pueblo<sup>5</sup>.

Pero no se trataba de un gobierno materialista, comunista, ateo... sino, muy al contrario, un gobierno dirigido por unas oligarquías muy «católicas», para las que muchos sacerdotes y obispos fungían como capellanes. Este Estado católico gobernado por la ultraderecha capitalista y conservadora, se empleó a fondo, con toda su fuerza, en una guerra contra su pueblo, para defender su hegemonía y su sistema económico de explotación. Esta represión no sólo fue dirigida contra el pueblo organizado, sino específicamente contra la Iglesia liberadora. «Haga Patria, mate un cura», fue un lema que hizo célebre la derecha salvadoreña en aquellos días. La persecución emprendida contra la Iglesia de San Salvador podría ser comparada a la llevada a cabo por el imperio romano contra los primeros cristianos. Todavía se podría comparar mejor con la persecución sufrida por el primer testigo, Jesús:

como se ha dicho y repetido, los mártires latinoamericanos -Romero mismo el primero- son mártires «jesuánicos»<sup>6</sup>, no simplemente «cristianos». Como Jesús, que fue ejecutado por el poder, Romero ejemplifica el conflicto entre el seguimiento de Jesús en la opción por los pobres y el poder establecido en una sociedad burguesa.

### **Romero: símbolo emblemático del conflicto con la Iglesia institucional**

Romero mantuvo un sentido de Iglesia y una fidelidad a la misma, a toda prueba. Su lema episcopal, «Sentir con la Iglesia», definió de principio a fin su identidad más profunda. Aún hoy preside su tumba.

Sin embargo, el Romero ya convertido a la opción por los pobres experimentó notables dificultades con la institución eclesial superior, la vaticana. Romero sólo conoció los 17 primeros meses del pontificado de Juan Pablo II, pero este corto tiempo fue suficiente para manifestar el conflicto.

El primero en intuirlo fue el propio Romero. A los pocos días de la elección de Karol Wojtyla como papa, en una celebración con sacerdotes, en Opico, los testigos afirman que manifestó: «Yo tengo temor con este nuevo Papa. Me da miedo que no entienda la realidad de nuestros pueblos latinoamericanos. Él viene de Polonia, viene del otro lado... Y, a saber si le da por respaldar al gobierno de Estados Unidos. Para combatir el comunismo, pues. Creyendo que así defiende la fe, que así le conviene a la Iglesia...»<sup>7</sup>.

El tiempo se encargaría de darle la razón, y de hacerle experimentar a él el conflicto personalmente. Cuando fue a Roma, la Curia vaticana le puso dificultades para concederle entrevista con Juan Pablo II, teniéndola que arrancar él mismo a base de llegar físicamente al Papa en la audiencia general y reclamarla<sup>8</sup>.

El testimonio que María López Vigil da<sup>9</sup> de lo que el propio Romero le contó, entre lágrimas, sobre su entrevista personal con Juan Pablo II es extremadamente llamativo: un Juan Pablo II serio y distante, que

no acoge la angustia de Romero, y que no cree en su testimonio personal sobre el sacerdote Octavio Ortiz, asesinado por el Gobierno, sacerdote al que el Papa considera guerrillero. Wojtyla le pide a Romero que tenga buenas relaciones con el Gobierno que está asesinando a sus sacerdotes y campesinos, y se lo pide él, que durante toda su vida en Polonia fue un opositor acérrimo de su gobierno...

No entramos a recordar el caso de la carta de Romero que fue filtrada desde la Curia Vaticana hasta la Embajada norteamericana de San Salvador, que le hizo preguntarse a Romero angustiado: «Pero entonces, ¿Roma de qué lado está?», ¿del lado del pueblo y de la Iglesia de San Salvador, o del lado del Gobierno asesino y la Embajada de EEUU?<sup>10</sup>.

Se puede decir que el conflicto prosiguió después de su muerte: Juan Pablo II excluyó del programa de su visita a San Salvador la visita a la tumba de Romero, incluyéndola luego imprevistamente y fuera de programa, con lo que por una parte «cumplió» pero por otra no consintió compartir con el pueblo salvadoreño su devoción por Romero, dejando claro que no la avalaba.

También podemos ver prolongado el conflicto en el nombramiento del actual arzobispo Lacalle para ocupar más tarde la sede de Romero: un obispo extranjero (en una diócesis superabundante de clero nativo), del Opus Dei (esencialmente contrario a la espiritualidad latinoamericana de la liberación) y general del ejército que asesinó a su antecesor... Es conocida la política conservadora de Juan Pablo II en la selección de los obispos impuestos a las Iglesias locales; el caso de Lacalle, junto con el del sucesor de Hélder Câmara, son probablemente los casos más extremos, de los que la historia difícilmente se olvidará.

Este conflicto eclesial institucional con Romero, no fue con él personalmente, sino con toda la Iglesia de los pobres martirial de América Latina. Juan Pablo II, que, inexplicablemente, ha beatificado y canonizado a más de la mitad de los santos registrados en el santoral

romano, no ha beatificado a uno solo de los miembros de la «inmensa nube de testigos» que forman la pléyade martirial latinoamericana. Ni uno solo. Se trata de un martirio colectivo rechazado, no reconocido, aunque Karol Wojtyła ha efectuado, simultáneamente, algunas de las canonizaciones más contestadas de la historia (la del Marqués de Peralta, José María Escrivá, o la del Emperador Carlos de Habsburgo por ejemplo). Las últimas noticias hablan de que el proceso de beatificación de Romero -que no ha podido menos de ser incoado diocesaneamente- se propondría reconocerlo no como mártir, sino como «confesor»...

A nuestro juicio, las palabras de Casaldáliga a Jon Sobrino continúan siendo de plena actualidad: «Que no canonicen nunca a san Romero de América, porque le harían una ofensa. Él es santo de un modo muy particular. Ya está canonizado. Por el Pueblo. No hace falta nada más»... Se lo decía yo a Jon Sobrino cuando visité el sepulcro del arzobispo mártir. Le decía: «Mira, Jon, que a nadie se le ocurra canonizar a Romero, porque sería como pensar que la primera canonización no sirvió»...»<sup>11</sup>.

## DISCERNIMIENTO

Hemos dicho por una parte que Romero es símbolo emblemático de la opción por los pobres. Y decimos también que vivió un conflicto máximo con el Estado y con la Iglesia institución. ¿Son dos afirmaciones independientes o ligadas causalmente?

Romero no vivió ese conflicto durante toda su vida, sino sólo «después de su conversión», cuando abrazó convencida y coherentemente la opción por los pobres; el conflicto fue tan grave que lo llevó a la muerte, al martirio, y -como decimos- todavía se prolonga hoy.

Veinticinco años después de su martirio, cuando el martirologio latinoamericano ya puede ser mirado con perspectiva histórica suficiente como para evaluar y discernir, queda claro para nosotros

que el de Romero no fue un caso personal peculiar, ni mucho menos excepcional, sino la expresión simbólicamente máxima de una ley general: «La opción por los pobres comporta esencialmente una incompatibilidad utópica tanto con el Estado oligárquico capitalista, como con una Iglesia «de cristiandad»». Creemos que ese conflicto es inevitable e irresoluble. Ahondemos en esta conclusión.

La opción por los pobres y la teología y la espiritualidad que la acompañan, no son una teología más, ni una espiritualidad entre tantas, dentro del mismo sistema de la «Iglesia de cristiandad». Significan más bien un salto cualitativo, un nuevo paradigma, una novedad sistémica, una forma de cristianismo cualitativamente distinta. Ha dicho Leonardo Boff muchas veces que la opción por los pobres es «el mayor acontecimiento de la historia del cristianismo desde los tiempos de la Reforma Protestante»... Tal vez esa apreciación se queda corta: en algún sentido, la forma de cristianismo que la opción por los pobres representa, significa el comienzo de la superación de la forma de cristianismo que solemos llamar «cristianismo de cristiandad», aquel cristianismo que se formó en el siglo IV como sucesor heredero de la religión de Estado del Imperio romano, un «movimiento de Jesús» que acabó convertido en religión de sociedad, religión de Estado, Imperio cristiano, «cristiandad» medieval. La opción por los pobres de la Iglesia latinoamericana aparece en la historia como la primera superación radical de la clásica alianza entre la institución religiosa y el poder de la sociedad, en pro de una alianza directa con los pobres. La opción por los pobres representa el fin de la «Iglesia de cristiandad» a favor de una recuperación del cristianismo como «movimiento de Jesús», como religión de los pobres y de los que hacen alianza con ellos, como movimiento popular profético para la consecución de otro mundo posible, el mundo introducido en el orden de la voluntad de Dios, la utopía que Jesús llamaba «Reinado de Dios».

Hace treinta años, surgió entre las Iglesias cristianas la espiritualidad y la teología de la liberación, un movimiento de renovación que postulaba

de hecho la reconciliación del cristianismo con sus propias fuentes jesuánicas<sup>12</sup>, una posibilidad de volver a ser lo que fue al principio: el «movimiento de Jesús», libre (frente a los poderes) y liberador (de todos los oprimidos). ¿Podría este movimiento transformar y renovar efectivamente a la Iglesia? El movimiento surgía además dentro del continente donde habita la mayoría católica, y prendió en él con mucha fuerza y con prometedoras realizaciones. La experiencia se desarrolló y durante varias décadas ofreció su carisma floreciente a la Iglesia universal y a la sociedad civil. Ésta, por cierto, saludó con júbilo la novedad...

Pero la institución eclesiástica, con el viraje de retroceso anticonciliar que Karol Wojtyla de hecho le impuso, no fue capaz acoger la posibilidad de renovación y conversión que se le ofrecía; al contrario, se retrotrajo a las estructuras de «cristiandad», o sea, hacia la alianza con el poder establecido: por su orientación capitalista, antisocialista y de refuerzo institucional. La Iglesia de la liberación latinoamericana sufrió una represión sangrienta por obra de los intereses capitalistas estadounidenses y mundiales, vivida bajo los regímenes militares de seguridad nacional como terrorismo de Estado en la mayor parte de los países latinoamericanos. En este conflicto la institución católica central abandonó a la Iglesia latinoamericana defensora de su pueblo y se alineó del lado de EEUU, en connivencia con las fuerzas capitalistas y antisocialistas y antipopulares occidentales. Chile, Argentina, Perú serían los casos más sangranamente clamorosos de la connivencia eclesiástica jerárquica con este terrorismo de Estado; Nicaragua y El Salvador lo serían de su alineación con EEUU en el aplastamiento de los movimientos revolucionarios populares. El futuro será muy duro en su crítica a esas páginas trágicas de la historia reciente. El martirio de Mons. Romero destaca ahí -como hemos dicho- como el símbolo emblemático del conflicto entre el nuevo y el viejo modelo de cristianismo, el de la «Iglesia de cristiandad» y el de la opción por los pobres.

No fue posible una Iglesia de la liberación asumida y reconocida dentro de la Iglesia católica ni de otras muchas Iglesias cristianas. Tampoco fue posible evitarla y erradicarla (tan fuerte era su arraigo popular, su verdad y profecía). Y ahí está todavía hoy, marginada e invisibilizada, rechazada por los poderes centrales, no reconocida, perseguida y sofocada con las armas del poder eclesiástico, como -por ejemplo, dentro de la Iglesia católica- el nombramiento e imposición de obispos militantemente contrarios a su espiritualidad y su opción por los pobres.

Preguntémonos, tratando de acercarnos a la problemática religiosa actual: esta inviabilidad de una Iglesia liberadora dentro de la Iglesia católica, ¿ha sido coyuntural o es estructural? ¿Se ha dado simplemente de hecho, o por necesidad intrínseca? ¿Por causa del gobierno del papa concreto que ha sido Karol Wojtyla, o a pesar de él, más allá de él? ¿Con una jefatura de otro tipo al frente de la institución eclesiástica, hubiera sido viable la conversión de una «Iglesia de cristiandad» en una Iglesia liberadora y de opción por los pobres? ¿Sigue siendo posible esa conversión, o es inviable?

Durante estos 40 años que han pasado desde el Concilio Vaticano II, hemos estado pensando que esa inviabilidad era coyuntural, que era debida -entre otros motivos- a una aleatoria y lastimosa contradicción entre las exigencias de los signos de los tiempos y la idiosincrasia concreta de la persona detentadora del poder máximo (que ya sabemos que es personalista y absoluto) en la Iglesia católica, pero que el día en que esa jefatura fuese coherente con las necesidades reales de la Iglesia y del Evangelio, dicha inviabilidad desaparecería. Pensábamos que una Iglesia abiertamente instalada en las orientaciones del Vaticano II desembocaría espontáneamente en la conversión a los pobres. Precisamente, la Iglesia latinoamericana de la liberación, surgida tras Medellín, no era sino la aplicación del Vaticano II a la realidad de América Latina, su prolongación más coherentemente evangélica. Durante 40 años -digo- hemos venido pensando que

cuando el espíritu del Vaticano II, autoritariamente puesto en entredicho por Karol Wojtyła, recupere en la Iglesia el lugar que le corresponde, volverá la Iglesia como institución a acoger la opción por los pobres y la espiritualidad liberadora<sup>13</sup>. Hemos venido considerando que la principal tarea pendiente era la de la recuperación del espíritu conciliar y su «aggionamento» interrumpido, la «puesta al día» tras el tiempo perdido. Pero, ¿realmente se ven así las cosas todavía? Respondamos mirando al futuro.

## FUTURO

A los 25 años de Romero y 40 del Vaticano II, la perspectiva ha cambiado. También aquí ocurre aquello de que «cuando ya teníamos la respuesta nos cambiaron la pregunta». En lo más profundo del cristianismo y de la sociedad las preguntas se han transformado sustancialmente en los últimos años<sup>14</sup>. La crisis de la religión en Europa<sup>15</sup> es quizá el punto visible de un inmenso iceberg epocal que está creciendo silencioso y casi invisible: una masiva deserción de fieles cristianos que se aparta de la Iglesia, una generación joven que en prácticamente en bloque renuncia a entrar, una pérdida casi total de credibilidad<sup>16</sup> y de reconocimiento social, un confinamiento de lo eclesial al campo de lo tradicional-cultural, y una imponente indiferencia social ante la Iglesia<sup>17</sup>, configuran hoy los rasgos mayores de la actitud de la sociedad moderna europea<sup>18</sup>. En esta sociedad europea avanzada, postindustrial, «del conocimiento», las «religiones»<sup>19</sup> van apareciendo cada vez más como formas superadas, configuraciones sociales que la religiosidad permanente del ser humano ha revestido en este último período de la historia, desde hace apenas menos de cinco mil años<sup>20</sup>. Por su parte, la religiosidad arqueológicamente datada del ser humano se remonta a más de 150.000 años. «Religiones», en el concreto sentido en que utilizamos la palabra, sólo las ha habido en los últimos 5000, como la forma de religiosidad connatural de las sociedades agrarias, las que se formaron con el Neolítico. Las instituciones religiosas han sido en ellas como el

*software* que ha servido de programación para los miembros de cada sociedad al darles identidad, pertenencia, ideología profunda, control, sometimiento... mediante una cosmovisión totalizante aportada por unas «creencias» propuestas como indiscutibles a las que se debe sumisión absoluta e incuestionable<sup>21</sup> ...

«Religiones»: ésta ha sido la forma que ha revestido la eterna dimensión religiosa del ser humano desde la época agraria, época que, precisamente, está acabando en la actualidad. Asistimos, en efecto, al momento histórico en el que, en Europa, como el lugar de realización más avanzada, están desapareciendo los últimos vestigios de la sociedad agraria. Entramos en una etapa nueva<sup>22</sup> de la evolución humana, en una sociedad sustancialmente distinta y con una epistemología radicalmente diversa. Los datos parecen avalar la previsión de que las «religiones» -siempre en este preciso sentido que estamos dando a la palabra- conforme avance la implantación cultural de la sociedad postindustrial, la sociedad del conocimiento, van a entrar en una aguda crisis, quedando como realidades del pasado, aunque, lógicamente, esto no vaya a ocurrir ni hoy ni mañana, sino que van a permanecer un buen tiempo todavía, mientras perdure la presencia de la sociedad agraria en nuestro mundo actual... La religiosidad va a permanecer, consustancial como es con el ser humano; las «religiones», por el contrario, como configuraciones concretas sociales de la religiosidad de la edad agraria, van a entrar en franco declive.

No podemos en la brevedad de este texto entrar a presentar ni a debatir a fondo esta reinterpretación de la significación de Romero al ponerlo en relación la nueva problemática apenas vislumbrada actualmente respecto a la crisis de la religión, pero queremos concluir soltando al aire unos cuantos interrogantes que puedan descubrir caminos de reflexión que la figura de Romero nos sugiere.

En la Europa que rechaza las «religiones», Romero sigue siendo una luz, y el gesto martirial suyo y de su Iglesia siguen siendo admirados y acogidos. ¿Será que la espiritualidad y la opción por los pobres eran

ya de alguna manera una respuesta anticipada para la crisis de las religiones en su confrontación con la modernidad? ¿Serán la opción por los pobres y la espiritualidad de la liberación la dimensión más profunda de la religión, y serán por ello las que mejor se van a salvar del declive de las religiones institucionales? ¿Ha sido por eso por lo que la religión-institución se ha llevado y se lleva tan mal con ellas? ¿Será verdad que son incompatibles con la «Iglesia de cristiandad», con las religiones-institución, en cuanto que éstas llevan inscrito en sus propios genes su identidad de «poder religioso-social a la búsqueda de alianza con el poder social» (religión de Estado, religión de sociedad, religión de institución)? ¿Será que la forma de «religión» no es la más adecuada para el Evangelio de Jesús? ¿Será que el cristianismo de liberación debería afrontar el tema de la crisis de la religión y plantearse el paso a una nueva «forma» religiosa, más allá de la forma «religión», más allá de las «religiones»<sup>23</sup>? ¿Será que la renovación futura del cristianismo dentro de la sociedad post-agraria y del conocimiento consistirá en recuperar jesuánicamente su carácter de «movimiento de Jesús»? ¿Será que la opción por los pobres es la versión actualizada de la «regla de oro»<sup>24</sup>, como mínimo y más profundo común denominador ético de las religiones, y que está llamada a salir a la plaza pública de la nueva sociedad mundial más allá del control de una institución religiosa, para convertirse en el fundamento de una ética mundial y una nueva religiosidad mundial?

Aparte de todas estas preguntas que suscita, el aniversario de Romero nos recuerda que sus 25 años se celebran todavía bajo el pontificado de aquel papa «venido del otro lado»<sup>25</sup> que Romero temía que «tal vez no iba a comprender a la Iglesia latinoamericana», y nos recuerda también que, por eso mismo, todavía la Iglesia institucional no está en condiciones de (re)descubrir la opción por los pobres. Pero nos invita a ir más allá. Nos invita a considerar la posibilidad de que la opción por los pobres y la espiritualidad de la liberación tal vez pudieran seguir siendo inviables en la Iglesia-«religión» incluso bajo un Papado reformado, democráticamente elegido, colegialmente desempeñado,

evangélicamente convertido a la Causa de los pobres. ¿Podría pensarse que la opción por los pobres y la espiritualidad de la liberación tal vez están en un nivel de utopía tan elevado -o tan profundo- que su realización plena resulta inviable dentro de la forma histórica institucional de las «religiones»? ¿Podríamos pensar que ese Romero «inviable» y por eso mártir, pero profundamente vivo en la memoria y la acogida de la sociedad civil -incluso la más laica- sería como la punta de ese iceberg enorme, invisible por sumergido, que está pidiendo salir a flote «creyendo de otra manera», dando el paso que el cristianismo todavía no ha dado verdaderamente hacia el tercer milenio, creando esa nueva forma de religiosidad que los más avizorados estudiosos de la religión comienzan a detectar como un clamor sordo pero ensordecedor?

Son las reflexiones y las preguntas que me suscita la celebración del aniversario del martirio de Romero, en un mundo que 25 años después está alumbrando una mutación religiosa epocal, cuya manifestación mayor tal vez hoy día se está dando en Europa, pero que en un mundo mundializado -que en la medida en que lo sea verdaderamente es ya «un solo mundo»-, esa problemática ya no es sólo europea, sino compartidamente mundial. Dejo muchas preguntas abiertas y prometo volver sobre ellas, invitando también al lector y a las comunidades -sobre todo de Europa- a afrontarlas.

### Notes

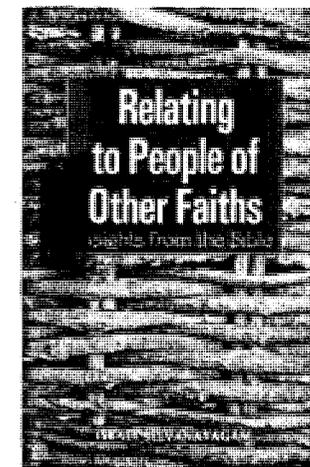
1. María LÓPEZ VIGIL, *Piezas para un retrato*, UCA Editores, San Salvador 1993, introducción, pág. 9. El libro puede ser recogido en <http://servicioskoinonia.org/romero>
2. Zacarías DÍEZ, *En Santiago de María me topé con la miseria. Dos años de la vida de Romero (1975-1976), ¿años del cambio?*, edición telemática disponible en <http://servicioskoinonia.org/romero>
3. Jon SOBRINO, *Mons. Romero*, UCA Editores, San Salvador 1989, pág. 79.
4. Véase en <http://servicioskoinonia.org/relat/135.htm> o en <http://servicioskoinonia.org/romero>
5. Fue célebremente conocida la media de la ayuda económica en armamento al ejército salvadoreño por parte de EEUU: un millón de dólares diario.

6. En varios lugares Jon SOBRINO ha elaborado significativamente el tema del carácter jesuánico de los mártires latinoamericanos.
7. LÓPEZ VIGIL, *ibid.*, pág. 217-218.
8. *Ibid.*, pág. 282-283.
9. *Ibid.*, pág. 282-285.
10. *Ibid.*, pág. 219.
11. CASALDÁLIGA, P., *El Vuelo del Quetzal, Maíz Nuestro, Managua, 1988*, pág. 10. Puede ser recogido en la biblioteca de los Servicios Koinonía (<http://servicioskoinonia.org/biblioteca>).
12. Era, una vez más, la «vuelta al Jesús histórico».
13. Ahora, a la altura del tercer milenio, se tratará de una espiritualidad y una teología cruzada con la teología del pluralismo como nuevo paradigma adicional emergente, abierta a la reconsideración del estatuto de la religión misma -como luego diremos...
14. VIGIL, José María, «Adiós al Vaticano II. No aggiornamento sino mutación»: en la revista telemática «Discípulos», <http://www.ciberiglesia.net/discipulos/07/07eclesiologia-adiosvaticanoII.htm>
15. Véase el número monográfico de la revista teológica «Alternativas» sobre «La crisis de la religión en Europa, nuevo lugar teológico».
16. «La televisión y la Iglesia son las dos instituciones en las que menos confían los españoles, según una encuesta elaborada por el CIS (Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas) simultáneamente con 17 países latinoamericanos para poder comparar las opiniones en todos ellos». *El País*, 21 de octubre de 2004, Madrid.
17. «No creo que la Iglesia española tenga enfrente, hablando propiamente, una ofensiva laicista. Lo que tiene es algo mucho más serio: una enorme indiferencia religiosa; un desprestigio social sin equiparación en Europa; una sociedad que no acepta ya su tutela moral; un descenso en picado de sus recursos humanos; un problema de financiación gravísimo a medio plazo»: Rafael AGUIRRE, «El Correo», 6 de octubre de 2004.
18. Aunque lo digo extrapolando lo que más conozco, la Iglesia católica española.
19. Hablamos de las «religiones» en un sentido preciso que luego concretamos, no nos referimos simplemente a la religiosidad, la espiritualidad o la búsqueda religiosa del ser humano...
20. La religión más antigua, el hinduismo, no sobrepasa los 4500 años...
21. Cfr Marià CORBÍ, *Religión sin religión*, PPC, Madrid 1996, 21-22.
22. Estaríamos en un nuevo «tiempo axial», al decir de Karl JASPERS (*Von Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte*, 1949), o en una «metamorfosis» de la religiosidad, según Juan MARTÍN VELASCO (*Metamorfosis de lo sagrado y el futuro del cristianismo*, Sal Terrae, Santander 1998).
23. Una vez más: en el sentido preciso que estamos dando a la palabra, no en un sentido genérico.
24. Lc 6,31: «Traten a los demás como quisieran que ellos les trataran a ustedes» (traducción de la Biblia Latinoamericana).
25. LÓPEZ VIGIL, M., *ibid.*, págs. 217-218.

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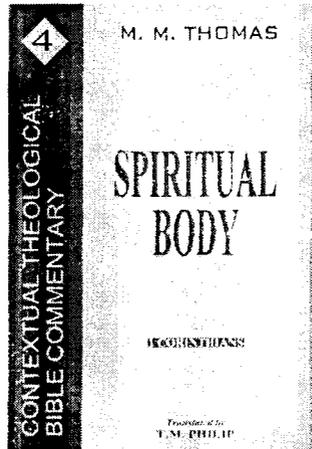
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