

World Council of Churches  
Education and Ecumenical Formation

## January 2003



### INDIA

left : *feasts in the Monasteries of Ladakh* - centre : *The Temple of Dwarkadhish* - right : *Mosque of Jhanjiri Masjid*  
top : *Christmas in a church.*



This quarterly journal aims to encourage sharing and cooperation among all who are working for the renewal of the churches through programmes of ministerial formation. All correspondence regarding MINISTERIAL FORMATION should be sent to the address below. Submission of relevant articles, reports and news is welcomed. Items in this journal do not necessarily reflect the views of the WCC and its programme on Education and Ecumenical Formation (formerly Programme on Theological Education).

**P.O. Box 2100, 150, route de Ferney, 1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland**

Letter from the Staff.....	3
Note on contributors .....	4
Relevant and Effective Theological Education in the 21 <sup>st</sup> Century India .....	5
<i>John Joshva Raja</i>	
Deconstruction of Academic Theology and Reconstruction of Dalit Theology .....	17
<i>P. Mohan Larbeer</i>	
<i>Tätou Tätou E.</i> : Ecumenism and <i>Māori</i> Contextual Theology .....	25
<i>Turi Hollis</i>	
La Contextualidad Y Lo Ecuménico En La Educación Teológica Venezolana .....	30
<i>Romer Portillo</i>	
The Contextual and Ecumenical in Venezuelan Theological Education .....	38
<i>Romer Portillo</i>	
Eastern and Central Europe Context: Problem of Theological and Religious Education in the 21 <sup>st</sup> Century .....	46
<i>Vladimir Fedorov</i>	
Women's Context on Religious Rebirth in Modern Russia: Witness from St. Petersburg .....	52
<i>Marina Shushova</i>	
Comparative Bible Study Genesis 10-11: An Approach from Argentina .....	57
<i>Néstor O. Míguez</i>	
Un acercamiento a génesis 10-11 desde el pueblo qom de Argentina .....	66
<i>Néstor O. Míguez</i>	
The Ecumenical Perspectives for Contextual Theologies .....	75
<i>Shirley Lal Wijesinghe</i>	
Inter-Faith Reality and Ecumenical Theological Education .....	82
<i>K. P. Aleaz</i>	
Tribute to Richard Shaull .....	89
<i>Aharon Sapsezian</i>	

---

**MINISTERIAL FORMATION** will be produced two times a year by the staff of Ecumenical Theological Education Programme from the year 2003. Subscription: US\$ 10 (or equivalent) for one year, although free copies are available for those person or institutions, who, for whatever reason, cannot make a payment. Please note in the interest of economy, receipts are not issued for payments made by cheque or bank draft unless specifically requested. Thank you for your understanding. MF is also available on website:<http://www.wcc-coe.org> . (For any question, please contact Nyambura Njoroge [nn@wcc-coe.org](mailto:nn@wcc-coe.org) ).

Cover picture: INDIA - left : *feasts in the Monasteries of Ladakh* - centre : *The Temple of Dwarkadhish* - right : *Mosque of Jhanjiri Masjid* - top : *Christmas in a church*.

**LETTER FROM STAFF**

Dear Readers,

Happy New Year!

The feeling of newness is best felt at the dawn of a new year. Even if some of us do not pen it down, we automatically decide to try to do, live better, change perspectives or get refined. It is a new beginning, a new start. So we all wish you a right beginning!

Theological perspectives also get refined, become anew, maybe with every new serious deliberation. It is no longer just an institutional collaboration. It involves the whole community: Christian and beyond, human and beyond. Without a community in context it cannot be peoples' theology. The ecumenical character of theological education will lose its meaning.

In this issue of *Ministerial Formation*, the main focus is on developing theological, biblical and religious education thinking from different countries. Our writers have explored various elements from different perspectives of contextual theology from evangelical and ecumenical perspectives. We hope they are all of interest to you. More than that, we hope that they will provoke you to reflect on your respective contexts and to add a chapter on this ever-unfolding retelling of God's walk/talk with humanity.

Strengthened afresh, let us work together to develop a truly ecumenical theological education.

With this issue, we say many thanks and God-speed to Magali Roussel who left WCC in December 2002.

Many blessings and cheers in 2003.

*Wati Longchar (India)*

*Jose Duque (Costa Rica)*

*Vladimir Fedorov (Russia)*

*Françoise Faure & Nyambura Njoroge (Geneva)*

## **NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS**

**John Joshva Raja** is a Presbyterian of the Church of South India and teaches Communication at the United Theological College, Bangalore, South India.

**P. Mohan Larbeer** is a Presbyterian of the Church of South India and teaches Dalit Theology at Tamilnadu Theological Seminary, Madurai, South India.

**Turi Hollis** is a Māori priest and is an Archdeacon with the regional *Hui Amorangi* (diocese) of *Te Waipounamu*, that is part of the Māori Anglican Bishopric of Aotearoa. He is also the Ecumenical Chaplain at the University of Canterbury in Christchurch, Aotearoa-New Zealand. At present he is on study leave completing a Ph.D in Māori and Religious Studies at the University of Canterbury.

**Romer Portillo** is the President of Programa Abierto de Capacitación Teológica (PACTO) at Maracaibo, Venezuela. He is a member of Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) and part of the Latin American Black Theology Movement.

**Vladimir Fedorov** is a Consultant for Central and Eastern Europe in the Ecumenical Theological Education Programme of World Council of Churches. He is a Professor of Church History, Ecumenics and Missiology and a Priest of the Russian Orthodox Church. He established the Orthodox Institute of Missiology, Ecumenism and Religious Movements and serve as its Director.

**Marina Shishova** is a graduate of Russian Christian Institute of Humanity in St Petersburg, a theologian and religious science specialist. She is a member of the Russian Orthodox Church and the President of Interchurch Partnership “The Apostolic City – Nevsky Prospect” in St Petersburg.

**Néstor O. Míguez** is Professor of New Testament at the *Instituto Superior de Estudios Teológicos* (ISEDET), Buenos Aires, Argentina. He is a Methodist Pastor and member of EATWOT. He is also an author of many articles on Latin American Biblical Hermeneutics.

**Shirley Lal Wijesinghe** holds a Licentiate in Sacred Scripture from the Pontifical Biblical Institute of Rome, and a Doctorate in Biblical Exegesis from the Catholic University of Louvain (Louvain-la-Neuve). He has lectured on Contextual Hermeneutics of the Bible in Hong Kong, India, Italy, the Philippines, Senegal and Taiwan. He is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka.

**K.P. Aleaz** is Professor of Religions at Bishop’s College and the Dean of Doctoral Programme of North India Institute of Post-Graduate Theological Studies, Kolkata, India.

**Aharon Sapsejian** former Director of the WCC Programme on Theological Education.

## **RELEVANT AND EFFECTIVE THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN THE TWENTY FIRST CENTURY INDIA**

*John Joshva Raja*

### **Introduction**

Theological education becomes relevant when theologians start interacting with, and challenging the ongoing ministry in the world. In order to identify its effectiveness in twenty first-century India, a broader discussion on its purpose, content and praxis should be initiated. In India there are more than 60 regional and national seminaries that are affiliated to the Senate of Serampore College. Recently many discussions were held at regional and national level on the content, form, method and praxis of theological education in India (2001-2002). As part of this ongoing discussion by the Asian theologians, I was asked to present this paper during the General Council of the United Theological College, Bangalore. In this paper I made an attempt to highlight a number of issues in the present praxis of theological education in India, and proposed a new system of interactive learning that might address some of the associated problems.

The United Theological College is known for offering integrated theological training with a high academic standard and at the same time provides ministerial programmes and practical experiences for men and women to prepare themselves for varied ministries. The mission statement of the United Theological College affirms that the College “seeks to provide students with conceptual tools, spiritual discipline and practical skills which will **equip** them for a relevant ministry in the church and in society, responding critically to the religio-cultural heritage and socio-political-economic reality of India”<sup>1</sup>. The purpose of ‘theological education’ is to equip men and women for the diverse ministries to which they are called. In a similar manner Ross Kinsler notes that the purpose of theological education is to motivate, **equip** and enable the people of God to develop their gifts and give their lives in meaningful service.<sup>2</sup> While appreciating the dynamic characteristics of such learning, this paper raises a few questions regarding its relevance to the context of the church and people in the twenty first-century India.

The definitions of ‘theological education’ use the word “equipping”<sup>3</sup> in relation to training men and women to the diverse ministries. The use of this word may be interpreted as if the ministerial candidates who join the theological college are seen as empty bottles, being filled during their theological training and goes back to the churches as resourceful and equipped ministers. To some extent such an understanding has dominated the pedagogical praxis of theological education.<sup>4</sup> Despite the achievements, theological teachers and theologians have accepted that there were problems in the education they impart and declared in the Oslo Consultation that:

---

<sup>1</sup> United Theological College Society, 2000, Memorandum of Association: Rules and Regulations and Bye-Laws. pp.10-11

<sup>2</sup> Ross Kinsler, 1983, *Minister by the People*. Geneva: WCC.

<sup>3</sup> The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary (Oxford: Clarendon Press Vol 1, P. 847) defines the word ‘Equipping’ as ‘providing with the physical or mental abilities for a task’.

<sup>4</sup> A.P.Nirmal, 1984, ‘Patterns of Theological Education for A Pluralistic Ministry in India’, pp.46-57 in *Theological Education and Development*. Papers presented at the National Theological Teachers Conference, April 1981, ed by Henry Wilson, Gnana Robinson and Christopher Duraisingh,.

“We acknowledge that some patterns of theological education have not assisted the churches to move forward, to respond to hurting people, to relate holistically to the earth, or to be people-focused and Christ-centred. We confess and grieve that we have sometimes ignored crucial insights about life and God in our work as theological teachers”.<sup>5</sup>

### **Context of the Theological Community**

There is a need to recognise the role of the church and the socio-cultural context in which the theological student was brought up. The tradition, faith and worldview with which he or she joins a theological college need to be starting the point of learning in the ministerial formation. Theological education should be seen as a process that begins even before a student begins his or her career in a seminary. An Asian theologian, C.S.Song defines theological education “as a process through which a person learns to be human through what God has been and done in Christ”.<sup>6</sup> If it is a learning process to be a human by fulfilling God’s will through his or her ministry, then the process begins even before he or she joins theological education. His or her faith and worldview are shaped by the context of his or her church and society. The present practice of theological education does not provide enough space for the students to express the religious and social meanings with which they join the college. The theological courses are offered with a standardised and fixed curriculum. The process of learning is based on the top-down model<sup>7</sup>. It is campus and classroom based. This demands a new definition of theological education in order to address some of these problems.

In this paper theological education is defined as an ongoing process in which participants (theological teachers and students) are engaged in creating, sharing, interpreting, mediating and analysing each one’s faith experiences and religious meanings in relation to one’s contexts, traditions and communities. As participants, each one is enriched through dialogical and interactive education.<sup>8</sup> In this sense theological community has to recognise the experiences and meanings with which students enter into the ongoing discourses of theological education. In the interactive method of learning, the participants share and reflect upon each other’s faith and socio-cultural experiences.

The meanings do not simply flow from the teacher to the students but are shared between them. Students possess certain cultural, political and religious meanings, which are shaped and influenced by their contexts. By enabling the students to critically reflect upon their own experiences, the theological teachers learn together with them.<sup>9</sup> This does not underrate the academic and scholarly exercise in a theological institution. A wide range of meanings is presented to the students during their ministerial formation. During this time the teacher needs to interact with those meanings of the

---

<sup>5</sup> *Ministerial Formation*, 1997, WCC, Vol 77, April, p. 38.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted by Stephen G Mackie, 1969, *Patterns of Ministry: Theological Education in a Changing World*. London: Collins, p.70.

<sup>7</sup> In the top-down model, the students learn from the teacher. In this model the theological meanings flow from teacher (top) to the students (down).

<sup>8</sup> The word interact means to act reciprocally on each other or to behave in a way that influences and responds to another. The way the word used in this article refers to the way of sharing, constructing and exchanging meanings between people as individuals or as groups and also between institutions.

<sup>9</sup> While recognising the meanings within learner (as he or she comes from different cultural, social and denominational contexts), the teacher enables him or her to develop the critical thinking. Through such an interactive learning the student neither accepts all those meanings that are available to them nor becomes passive to the existing realities in the churches. In this process, both teacher and student are learners together as both share, reflect and evaluate each other’s experiences within their own understanding and participate in each other’s search for meanings.

student while helping him or her to be aware of the other available meanings. If the student's meanings are found relevant and meaningful, he or she should be encouraged to share them with others. This concept is similar to Paulo Freire's "problem posing" and "dialogical" education.<sup>10</sup> The theological resources are themselves the result of reflection on practice, and are to be used to contribute to contemporary reflection in order to enlighten present practice and obedience.<sup>11</sup> During the interaction a wide range of meanings of faith and life evolve.

A variety of meanings is made available to all the students in order to reject, test, negotiate or choose those which are appealing and relevant to them. The students and teachers select those meanings that are relevant and acceptable to their context. There is a need for theological education to develop an interactive type of education through which the students can critically rethink their past experience and reflect upon it along with other members of the community. This is where our quest for a new theological paradigm begins.

In the interactive model of learning, the students are encouraged to communicate and articulate their different intelligence through various cultural forms and methods.<sup>12</sup> For instance the students with a particular gift may perform a sermon through a skit instead of a preaching it. In this model the teacher is not only a learner along with the student but also a facilitator and so the gap between the two is reduced. Such ideas appear in the WCC study process on Holistic Education (1999-2001). Under the topic 'Holistic Education in Ecumenical Perspective', the members of WCC study process states,

Guided by a 'mechanistic world view' education often instrumentalises and dichotomizes people and their relationships, with each other and the divine. Far from acknowledging the learner as being subject of her/his destiny, much of the present model of education reflects a divorce from realities and history.<sup>13</sup>

They also affirm individuals as persons in the context of community. Through holistic education they believe one can build communities in which people learn together from their differences and also learn to value their own personal strengths, and are thus empowered to help one another.

There are a number of metaphors in India to picture this interactive relationship between a theological teacher and a student. One of the well-known metaphors is the Gurukulum (teacher's place) model in which though the authoritarian type of 'Guru' (teacher) is often highlighted,

---

<sup>10</sup> Paulo Freire, 1973, *Education For Critical Consciousness*. New York: Seabury Press. In "problem posing" education learners are no longer passive listeners rather they act as critical co-investigators along with the teacher. Boston notes, "The purpose of problem-posing education is to get each person to speak his own words of the other world rather litanize the words of others" (Bruce O Boston 1974, "Conscientization and Christian Education" in *Learning for Living*. Vol 13, 3, January, p.101.)

Freire was convinced that "neither ignorance nor knowledge can be absolute, and human beings in creating and recreating their knowledge are engaged in a permanent act of discovery" - quoted from Paulo Freire's *Education for Critical Consciousness*, p.118, 119.

For Freire theologically the very nature of human life is characterised by a dialogical communication with God. Pedagogically dialogue is not simply an exchange of views; rather it is the reflection upon the human world and relationships, as envisaged by God the creator.

<sup>11</sup> John J Vincent, 1979, *Alternative Theological Education*. Sheffield, Urban Theology Unit, p.23. The theological students need to know how to use these resources for their own reflection and how to make them available to the church and encourage it to reflect. They need to be formed as reflective persons and to try to form a reflective community.

<sup>12</sup> F Ross Kinsler, *Ministry by the People*. p.301.

<sup>13</sup> Paper on 'Holistic Education in Ecumenical Perspective' by WCC Study Process on Holistic Education 1999-2001.

the relationship is one of learning together. This is explicitly stated in the Upanisadic prayer, which is referred to in all Upanisadic texts (interpretations of Vedas). Both Guru and disciples chant this prayer when they begin to study the Vedas.<sup>14</sup>

**Saha Naavavathu Sahanav Bhunakthu** May he protect us both together; may he nourish us  
**Saha Veeryam Karavaavahai** both together, may we work conjointly with great energy;  
**Dhejasvi Navadhidhamasthu** may our study be vigorous and effective; may we not hate any;  
**Ma Vidvishavahai Shanti**<sup>15</sup> let there be peace in me, in my environment and everywhere.

This prayer and other similar prayers that are offered by the Gurus along with their disciples clearly show that they both have to learn together and work together towards an understanding of God and other beings.

Though Gurukulam was criticised for its pro-Brahmin stance and for neglecting women in their educational programmes, the model of learning in such Parambara (traditions) were interactive as one can see from the prayer quoted above. Samuel Amirtham, one of the Indian theological scholars argues that theological seminaries should adopt Gurukulam models for learning and living. For him Gurukulam “is a community which worships together, that stays together, grows together, serves together and can theologise together”. He states that some of Gurukulam characteristics - such as community meetings, fellowship groups and frequent common meals - were already adopted by Tamilnadu Theological Seminary, Arasaradi. The main emphasis of this paper is on the relationship between the theological teachers and the students where both should see each other as a learner, listener, and facilitator.

On the other hand Dravidian’s Sangam (gathering) type of learning is more open to women and all communities (regardless of castes) than the Gurukulam.<sup>16</sup> Sangam was a place of discussions and learning of a group of learned and amateur scholars. Thus the Ashram model of learning was linked with Sangam where the Guru teaches not only the Hindu Sastras (religious texts) but also a philosophy of life together with the skills of administration, hunting and martial arts. In this way learning together, an open discussion on a wide range of meanings and nourishing each other with wisdom were part of the Guru-Shishya Parambara (teacher- student relationship) in India while learning about God and the world. Such interactive model of theological learning is not new in India. The present form of theological education caters for one type of intelligence whereas in reality different kinds of intelligence exist. The challenge for theological education is to find a way of accepting and utilising these different gifts for diverse ministries of the church.

The students should not be merely seen as those who come here to ‘equip’ themselves in order to join the ministry, but as those who continue their religious journey along with the faculty members of the seminary. They join the seminary to recognise those meanings that are relevant to their faith, their context and their people. In this model interactions are not merely classroom based nor merely

---

<sup>14</sup> Swami Vimalananda, 1979, Mahanarayanopanisad: Text, Introduction, Translation, Interpretation, in Sanskrit, Critical and Explanatory Notes. Madras: Sri Ramamkrishna Math.

<sup>15</sup> Peace invocation of Maha Narayana Upanisad in Swami Vimalananda, 1979, *Mahanarayanopanisad*, p.xxi.

<sup>16</sup> Dravidians are supposed to be one of the aboriginal tribes in India. ‘Sangam concept’ among ancient Tamils is disputed one. Sangams are gatherings of intellectuals and students. These are dated even before the Gurukul method of learning started in India. There is enough evidence being produced by historians that Sangam existed since 3<sup>rd</sup> Century BC (A.Ramakrishnan, 2001, *Thamizhaha Varalarum, Thamizhar Banbadum* [History and Culture of Tamils], Madurai: Sarvodaya Pannai). These sangams had poets and intellectuals who came together to discuss and dispute issues in society through various forms and means. Auwai was one of the lady poets who participated in the Sangam debates. Many poets were non-Brahminical background as they spoke and disputed in Tamil. K.Radhakrishnan, 2000, *Tamil Ilakiya Varalaru* (History of Tamil Literature), Chennai: Thiruvarasu.

field exposure-oriented, but involve openness towards other meanings - those meanings that are not often heard and those meanings that are often neglected. Some of those meanings might evolve from the past experiences of the students. There need not be any exclusive claim for a particular set of meanings, nor rejection of other meanings. There is a need to hear as many meanings as possible, while also allowing the learner to express his or her own meanings.

In this process a student may recognise a particular meaning that he or she may think relevant to his or her faith, which the teacher may not agree to. In this process both have to interact in order to critically study and recognise those meanings together and then choose accordingly. This is where the interactive model certainly might contribute to a new level of learning though this model is not new as such but simply utilises the characteristics of the old Indian Gurukulam model of education.

### **Context of the Church**

Theological education as a process does not occur in a vacuum rather it occurs in the context of the church and of society. Theological education is part of the churches' ministry. Though a seminary operates mainly within the church, it is not limited to its four walls. Because theological education leads to ministerial formation, there is a need for a closer interaction between the theological institutions and the churches. Listening to each other's views, critical negotiation between their faith experience and meanings, respecting each other's traditions, and striving towards an understanding of a holistic ministry – these are a few characteristics of an interactive relationship.

The interactive relationship between the church and theological college needs to be developed on the basis of mutual responsibility, respect and accountability. J.G. Muthuraj (Professor at UTC) in his response to 'Priorities in Theological Education in India' identifies churches and theological colleges as friends, partners and critics.<sup>17</sup> Such a relationship requires mutual recognition of identities and autonomy. How far apart are theological institutions and the Church? How close are they or should they be? These are the questions at the core of this section.

The concerns among Indian churches are different from the concerns of the seminaries in India. One of their major concerns is to evangelise the masses. The gospel is proclaimed and taught in all the churches' institutions through direct and indirect means and methods. Churches from south India send many missionaries to northern parts of India through different organisations such as the Indian Missionary Society, the National Missionary Society and so on, whereas theological colleges are concerned with dialogue between different religions. Many churches are concern with the expansion of their buildings and institutions whereas theological colleges are raising voices for the poor and the oppressed.

Indian churches are also concerned with their minority rights, which are often taken away from them by the government. Thus their educational and social institutions are indirectly or directed affected and are often closed down. Churches in the northern part of India are under direct attack from the Hindu fanatical groups and fundamentalists. By raising the question of conversion many of the missionaries, churches, converts and their institutions are destroyed by the communal forces in India. Churches look at theological seminaries and colleges for intellectual responses to these issues and problems. Theological schools need to recognise and help the churches to face these issues by reflecting upon them.

---

<sup>17</sup> J.G. Muthuraj, 2001, "A Response to Priorities in Theological Education in India". A paper presented at the regional consultation, Bangalore: UTC.

Theological institutions at times have addressed some of these issues. Because of their liberal approaches some of their teachings and principles could not be applied to the context of the churches. There is a gap between the churches' practice and theological education.<sup>18</sup> For example in theological institutions the students are exposed to a wide range of approaches and views such as Dalit, feminist and liberal approaches, alongside regular, traditional, theological, textual and ministerial teachings. In my ministerial experience I discovered that some of those meanings are irrelevant and cannot be preached through my sermons in the church. I am not arguing that these meanings are irrelevant in themselves, but in the churches, pastors and preachers including myself, find it difficult to preach, or to use these concepts and views because the main concerns of the church members are to some extent different from these praxis-related theologies.

***a. Helicopter Versus Bullock-Cart theologies***

Samartha<sup>19</sup> used a metaphor in order to explain the tension between two Christologies by using the imagery of "Helicopter versus Bullock-Cart". For Samartha Helicopter Christology makes a lot of missiological noise (in a pluralistic context of Asia) and kicks up so much of theological dust that people around are prevented from hearing the voice and seeing the vision of the descending divinity. A Bullock-Cart Christology has its wheels always touching the unpaved roads, for without the continual friction with the ground, the cart cannot move forward at all.<sup>20</sup> Through interaction with the churches, theological community may recognise the churches' theologies which are often concerned with people's faith and traditions (theology from above) whereas the churches may realise the importance of challenging some of the traditional way of understanding faith and life to relate it to their context (theology from below). Taking this argument further Gunnar Stålsett argues that

a theology from above, from God, is reflected and manifested in a theology from below. A Theology from below joins revelation and praxis. It is in this dialogue of the divine with the humane that theology takes shape, and Christ becomes incarnate, to every new generation. This is the starting point of contextuality.<sup>21</sup>

To some extent the relationship between the churches and theological education could be developed by finding a third way between these two theological understandings (theology from above and theology from below).

The theology must be grounded while people's faith experience of God cannot simply be ignored. It is the task of the theological institutions and churches to develop a new theological framework that would enable an easy transition between them. This could be identified as "Theology of Creative and Fruitful Tension" which holds together the two perspectives in a creative tension. It is essential that theological education take spirituality of the people seriously while churches need to consider listening to serious theological issues of everyday life. Theological educators cannot impose their theologies on the churches. Both sides should be reminded of the need for a retrospective look at

---

<sup>18</sup> G.W. Webber 1973, *Innovation in Theological Education: Reflection from United States, in Learning in Context*. Published by Theological Education Fund, Kent: New Life Press, Webber recognizes this problem in 1973 and asks: "If men and women must spend their ministries living as part of the ordinary human community, should not their theological education for at least a significant part of its duration, involve them also in living in a normative manner, and not in the rather peculiar style of an academic institutions?" - p.100.

<sup>19</sup> S.J. Samartha, 2000, *One Christ - Many Religions: Toward a Revised Christology*. Bangalore: SATHRI, p. 131-133.

<sup>20</sup> S.J. Samartha, *One Christ*, p.132.

<sup>21</sup> Gunnar Stålsett, 1999, 'Does Theology need the Church?', *Ministerial Formation*. July p.5.

themselves.<sup>22</sup> The church needs to provide a space for theological colleges to present some of their meanings to its intellectuals and thereby get the feedback from the people. Such activities can take place in rural areas as well as in urban churches where theological teachers can go and speak with a selected group of youths or elders and note their reactions to new theological ideas while also recording peoples' experiences as part of their learning process.

***b. Interacting with the Lay***

From time to time theological education should be taken to the place where the churches are. The interaction between theological institutions and churches should not be limited at institutional level but could include interaction with local congregations and lay members of the churches. For example, new theological concepts should be preached to a few selected congregations and be tested upon the members' acceptance and experience. Their feedback could help the theological teachers and students to understand and reflect upon their own theological precepts.

Lay ministry is an integral part of the holistic ministry of the church, which could be strengthened, with the help of theological institutions. A few courses could be offered by the theological college in order to strengthen their faith and their theological understanding. By opening interaction with a few trained lay people, the theological teachers may themselves learn to review their own socio-cultural and religious meanings. There need to be a closer co-operation between those theological institutions that provide theological training to ministerial candidates such as United Theological College or Tamilnadu Theological Seminary and those that provide theological education to lay people such as The Association for Theological Education by Extension (TAFTEE).

***c. Theological teacher and the church***

A theological teacher and a minister play different roles in the ministry: servant, prophet, evangelist, shepherd, priest and ecumenist. These roles are helpful in order to understand the relationship between the church and the theological institution. The theological institution should take up the role of a servant, prophet, shepherd, priest and ecumenist while interacting with the church. In the same way the Church should serve the college as a servant, lead as a shepherd, guide as a priest and challenge as a prophet. Interactive theological education should take the needs of the church seriously and try to meet its expectations during training, while, at the same time, maintaining academic autonomy. Indian churches are struggling with the credibility of some of their educational and social institutions. In such cases theological institutions need to constructively criticise the churches and help them to correct their institutional practices. The churches should try to clarify certain issues and practices with the seminaries if such issues or practices create a misunderstanding of theological education among the congregation.

Churches need to recognise the theological institutions' ecumenical commitment and academic autonomy as part of the churches' wider ministry. In India church members, and the dioceses are ready to pay for missionaries or for the church extensions. But the theological institutions find it difficult to raise funds from many churches in India. The attitude of church members is that theological institutions should get their funds from abroad. As theological training is part of the extended ministry, the church needs to support theological colleges financially. By supporting the mission and ministry of a theological college, the churches share the vision of theological education along with the college.

---

<sup>22</sup> The old deductive and inductive methodological approaches should be seriously questioned in the present pluralistic context. There is a need for the reproductive approach in which people's experience is taken seriously.

### **Context of the people**

Training for different ministries involves enabling the people of God to understand, interpret and communicate their faith, understanding and experience of God in relation to their context, and also to critically reflect upon their context in the light of their faith, understanding and experience of God. The task of the theological institutions' is to make theological education relevant and effective in the present Indian context. Theological education takes the context of the people as a framework for interpreting the biblical text, their churches' tradition and their faith experience. Unless theological students and teachers recognise the meanings that arise from different contexts, it is difficult to highlight the relevant meanings of their faith and also of their traditions. The theological teacher participates in the students' search for socio-cultural and religious meanings that would relate their faith and their traditions to their contexts. Thus both engages in the people's search for social and religious meanings and enable them to critically identify, reflect and interpret upon those meanings that are available to them.

Theological education requires interaction between the reflective analysis on the global and ecumenical perspective and of local issues and problems, together with the active existential discernment of the presence of God, through active involvement in the local situation.<sup>23</sup> In a globalised, media saturated, multi-faith context, people are engaged in a search for meanings of life and religion. Their faith and worldview are shaped by the process of globalisation, by mediated messages of the media and by different religious claims. One of the major reasons for us to redefine theological education in terms of interaction and dialogue is due to the emerging issues in the fast changing contexts in India.

#### **a. Global context**

I wish to select three major issues that arise from three different contexts in order to highlight the process of 'doing' theology within a particular context. Doing theology involves students and teachers not only learning together, but also finding a way of translating it into praxis that would make an impact in the context. First the process of globalisation is making an impact on every society in India, which has brought in the multinational companies and promoted the values of individualism and achievement. It has contributed to the existing exploitative tendencies of the globalised elite and mighty.<sup>24</sup> One of our faculty members, J Mohan Razu has written extensively on this subject and helped many of us to reflect critically upon the issue of globalisation.<sup>25</sup> In such a context of globalisation, people are engaged in a search for meanings of faith and life. In such context the theological institutions have to play a major role along with the church in bringing awareness about the way the world banks and IMF agencies affect people's lives. By theologising some of these contemporary issues, the understanding of the mission of the church could be widened and also enable the theologians and pastors to play a major role in the wider society where Christians are only a minority.

#### **b. ICE age**

Secondly our age is being identified as the ICE age, which is expanded as Information, Communication and Entertainment age. *The Hindu*, one of the national newspapers says on Sunday, December 31, 2000,

---

<sup>23</sup> Judo Poerwowidagdo, 1993, *Towards the 21<sup>st</sup> century: Challenges and Opportunities for Theological Education*. Geneva: WCC.

<sup>24</sup> Evelyn Monterio, 2001, *Emerging Theological Issues in India*. A Paper presented at the regional consultation on Theological Priorities in India, Pune, March. Due to the liberalisation policy many people's jobs have been made redundant by the private firms whose values also fluctuate according to the market price. This has contributed to an addition of poor masses.

<sup>25</sup> I. John Mohan Razu, 1999, *Transnational Corporations as Agents of Dehumanisation in Asia*. Delhi:ISPCK. and 'The Ideology of Globalisation and the Churches' Response', *NCCI Review*. Vol CXXI, No 1 Jan.

We are in serious danger of becoming a nation where cable and optics fibre will reach most urban homes long before portable water and drainage, and where children in remote areas will have easier access to movies than to schooling.

Our Indian society can also be called a media saturated society where more than 60 cable channels are available.<sup>26</sup> People have structured their social and cultural practices and relationship and their communication through one or some of these media and their programs. In the media saturated society there is a shift in the process of meaning making.<sup>27</sup> Religious, socio-cultural and political meanings are bought and sold in a market of audiences. Regardless of creed, caste and race, the flood of information and entertainment programmes influences people. The churches use the media as an extension of the pulpit in order to proclaim the gospel. There is also a negative attitude among the churches towards people's folk forms, which are the only alternatives to enable people to participate and to become aware of Christian and community values.

The churches should engage in the public debate by using the means and forms of the people to challenge certain values of globalisation and of communal forces. Otherwise the church will remain as an isolated institution in an ICE age. Theological Institutions need to provide skills as well as theoretical training to understand the issues in the media saturated society to the ministers as well as to the students. The United Theological College is one of the best centres in South Asia for providing subjects related to theology and the ethics of communication. Using modern technology we are trying to improve the quality of theological education at the United Theological College. The Department of Communication provides training for street theatre. Students performed this street theatre programme among slum dwellers in order to bring awareness about HIV/AIDs. Our students are also taught to publish their own development-related magazines using computers. They are offered journalism and audio-visual production courses. This is not to make them use such media uncritically. Along with the local schoolteachers we provide awareness about the media to our students, through which they try to read the content critically and thus recognise those values, worldview and ideologies in the media. The department runs postgraduate and research courses for theological teachers from all over India and from some South Asian countries.

### ***c. Religious Fundamentalism***

Thirdly religious fundamentalism has become a threat to the multi-cultural society where people from different religions lived together. Non-Christians, particularly Hindus, are becoming increasingly aware of their identities and so create a new spirit of nationalism.<sup>28</sup> Because of the increasing role of fundamentalists, the confrontation between different religious communities has become a reality in many parts of India.<sup>29</sup> Despite this the majority of people in India believe in the peaceful

---

<sup>26</sup> Private FM radio stations are growing in numbers; news paper industries are increasing Over 185 radio stations with 293 transmitters sending programming that reaches 97.3% of the population in India. 792 television transmitting stations broadcasting 19 regular channels. The number of newspapers and periodicals increased from 30,214 in 1990 to 40,000 in 1995 -[www.comminit.com/power\\_point/country\\_communication\\_profiles/tsld004.htm](http://www.comminit.com/power_point/country_communication_profiles/tsld004.htm)

<sup>27</sup> Media has taken away the main role in providing socio-cultural and religious meanings to people at large from the social and religious institutions and thus contributes to the audience's worldview and beliefs.

<sup>28</sup> Halarnkar, S and Mahurkar, U 1999. 'Religious Tension Burning the Cross', *India Today*. 11 January, Internet Version, (<http://www.india-today.com/itoday/11011999/cross.html>) 1-3.

Parihar, R 1999, 'Burning the Cross - If the conflict turns political it's okay for us - VHP' *India Today* 11 January, (<http://www.india-today.com/itoday/11011999/cross.html>) 1-2.

<sup>29</sup> *India Tribune* 1992 'Reaction of Indian Press: Babri Masjid Issue', 12 December (<http://muslimonline.com/babri/babriip.htm>) 1-3.

coexistence of different religions together. Most are searching for social and religious meanings within their own respective faith and tradition that would enable them to live together.<sup>30</sup> Dialogue between different religious communities might solve many of the problems and could help eliminate riots. The recent murders and riots in Gujarat (one of the states in India) challenge Christians to reflect and think again about their mission. One aspect of Christian mission should be reconciliation - reconciliation between warring communities.

Along with its partners UTC held a one-day seminar for the Bangalore journalists on "Perceptions of Islam in the Media" in order to make them aware of the negative perceptions that are often presented to the public about Islam and Muslims. After this programme a national level dialogue between RSS - a Hindu fundamentalist group and Christian leaders was held at UTC to try to reduce the attacks on the churches by the members of these fundamentalists. Many of the faculty members including the principal participated in this programme. Following the attack on minorities in Gujarat, a major discussion was arranged at UTC involving Muslim, Christian and Hindu leaders in order to promote a better understanding between them. In this way UTC is already on the path of establishing reconciliation among different communities. In order to encourage the churches to follow similar ways it is essential for theologians to analyse and theologise such dialogue.

The old questions as to whether one should be theo-centric or Christo-centric in holding dialogue with others; whether salvation exists outside Christianity or not; whether it is possible with or without Christ need not be asked in this context. The main concern is to what extent can there be a process of reconciliation between Muslims and Hindus and to what extent can Christians play a role in this process. Already people from different religions are engaged in a search for meanings of reconciliation within their religious traditions. Theologians, along with the churches, need to engage in different religious communities' search for meanings that would enable them to live peacefully with other religious people. Theological institutions need to take such dialogical and interactive processes to the churches so that their leaders and their lay members also participate and thus enhance the grass-root level dialogue among different religious people.

#### ***d. Theological Institutions and Church together in Society***

Due to all these varied contextual changes, people are already engaged in a search for meaning that would enable them to face the realities around them. It is essential that the theological community along with the church attempt to engage in the people's search for religious and cultural meanings. In order to engage, we need to accept people as they are and go to the place where they are rather than asking them to come to where we are.

Theological institutions along with the churches become 'learners together' in order to understand, interpret the social, cultural and political issues in the light of the theological concepts. This interaction may result in sharing, interpreting and challenging the Christian faith and the churches' traditions in order to relate them to their respective contexts. We begin by interpreting biblical text and traditions to the context in various ways and reflect upon the issues in our context from different theological perspectives. Here a student attempts to participate in the ongoing process of theological education by merging his or her horizon with that of the text and its author. The fusion of horizons is achieved when the text and tradition are interpreted so that their claim upon the present

---

<sup>30</sup> The task for theological education in a multi-faith context is to recognise presence of other religious faiths and the importance of interfaith dialogue. The dialogue that are held by our institutions are very artificial where 'we' a few Christian representatives hold dialogue with 'them' a few Hindu or other religious representatives. This has not made much impact on the people at grassroots level where there is an ongoing dialogue among people of different faiths in their teashops, in their offices and other places. If there is to be a genuine dialogue, one needs to accept the other as he or she is and one needs to go to the place where the other is.

is acknowledged.<sup>31</sup> By fusing the horizons theological community participates in the event of tradition, a process of transmission in which past and present are constantly mediated.<sup>32</sup> Steven Bevans<sup>33</sup> suggests different models to bring together the biblical and church traditions and cultural and social changes such as: Translation, Anthropological, Praxis, Synthetic and Transcendental.<sup>34</sup> These models may provide a platform for theological students and teachers to reflect upon their context from their understanding of the text and tradition. Theological education as a process needs to recognise wide range of models with which the students reflect upon their own context.

***e. Interactive Model of Learning***<sup>35</sup>

An interactive and dialogic model of learning is not a new paradigm. It can be found in the interaction between Jesus and his 'friends'. The present system of theological education needs to consider this way of learning in order to make theological education relevant and effective to twenty first-century India. Through a dialogic and interactive method of learning, the participants in the process of theological education are open to any philosophical and scientific discourse, Christian faith, traditions and experiences and to people of other faiths. It is not an isolated process in the sense that it learns from and contributes to other interactions (i.e. between the theological community and the church, theological community and people of other faiths and the church and the people of other faiths). Theological education has to reflect and address the issues in the context of the Church and also in the context of the people from different theological perspectives.

**United Theological College and Interactive learning**

Being part of the United Theological College, I am proud to say many of these concerns are already being taken into our system of theological education. The faculty is considering a revision of curriculum in order to improve our present system with the purpose of reducing the load for the students, while also including courses from the new emerging fields such as Women's Studies, Communication, Mission and Ecumenism. The curriculum will have to provide many options that would enable the student to choose the subjects according to his or her interest and contextual needs. Our theme for the current academic year is "Growing together in faith, hope and love". The College faculty has decided to send our lecturers to the churches to interact with the pastors and the leaders. Through our publications such as (Bangalore Theological Forum and Mashihi Sevek) we have extensively discussed and reflected upon some of the contemporary issues from different theological perspectives.

The College has assured the churches through different forums that they will co-operate with the churches, with other theological institutions and other centres of education in order to share resources of research and personnel. The College administration along with the faculty attempts to

---

<sup>31</sup> Joel C. Weishammer, 1986, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics: A Reading of Truth and Method*. New Heaven: Yale University Press. Gadamer argues, Understanding is thought as participating in an event of tradition, a process of transmission in which past and present are constantly mediated.

<sup>32</sup> Hans-George Gadamer, 1989, *Truth and Method*. rev. ed. New York: Crossroad, p.290.

<sup>33</sup> Stephen B. Bevans, 1992, *Models of Contextual Theology*. New York: Orbis, p. 27.

<sup>34</sup> The aim of the translation model is to elicit the same reaction in contemporary hearers or readers as in the original hearers or readers. The primary concern of the anthropological model is the establishment or preservation of cultural identity by a person of Christian faith. The praxis model, also known as theology of liberation, is about discerning meaning and contributing to the course of social change. The synthetic model tries to balance the insights of each of the above three models and reaches out to insights from other cultures and ways of thinking. In the transcendental model, the starting point is concerned with one's own religious experience and one's own experience to oneself within the historical, geographical, social and cultural environment.

<sup>35</sup> J J Raja, 2000, *Facing the Reality of Communication: Culture, Church and Communication*. New Delhi: ISPCK.

develop a sustainable process of theological education, which is financially supported by the Indian churches and by other institutions in India. While retaining the academic standard, the College is also committed to the spiritual formation of our students. The task before theological institutions such as UTC is to get involved in shaping intellectual thinking of the nation and to provide a credible critique of political and economic development. By recognising new ways of learning, reflecting, teaching and evaluating, the faculty seeks to understand together the Christian faith in the context of other faiths, and its relevance to the diverse socio-cultural contexts, working alongside the churches, and together with people of India.

## DECONSTRUCTION OF ACADEMIC THEOLOGY AND RECONSTRUCTION OF DALIT THEOLOGY

P. Mohan Larbeer

### Introduction

*Theology?* Which theology we are talking about? Is it the academic, so-called systematic or scientific theology produced by the western intellectuals or the Asian and Indian elites? In today's theological world it is nothing but the work of specialists and the task of intellectuals. In this sense it would be difficult, if not impossible, to speak about the Contextual Theology or the theology of the people.

A theology that is born from people's experience we call "contextual" theology, whereas that theology which we learnt through our colonial experience is "universal theology". So what we call a universal theology is in fact "denominational" theology, denominations so very alien to India. Freedom from the colonial-denominational paradigm should be the first liberation motif for Contextual theology.

The contextual theology is praxis oriented which is prerequisite for any theological reflection. Praxis is not only action; it is basically a relationship: a *relationship within the community*. To be *together in a community* is the fundamental praxis that *anticipates* the kingdom of God. People gathering together in the name of God are the originating experience. Later many other *types* of praxis follow which are concrete and historical. "Praxis is critical reflection on historical as well as contemporary experience. Theological praxis as distinct from theory alone should take seriously all experiences in our church and our culture, critically examine them and reinterpret them if necessary. There are liberative, humanistic visions and values in the tribal Dalit culture which have become long forgotten".<sup>1</sup>

The praxis cannot promote alienation, rather strengthens the system and through that domination has introduces itself to the people. However, it deals with protest, struggle for the rights, and aims towards participation, democracy, and justice. When reflection of faith on a popular praxis of liberation occurs, the people start to *create* theology and produce a new theology, which transforms into prophecies.

Today, the theologies from the west very much dominate the Indian churches and represent one form of cultural domination. They emerged out of their own situations and therefore it cannot be accepted uncritically in the suffering context of (majority Indians) India. "Western Christian theology, after all, was just one cultural interpretation of Christianity and therefore it should not be uncritically adopted without raising the question of their relevance to the Third World."<sup>2</sup> On the other side, we must be faithful to the Gospel and to our peoples and reflect on the realities of our own suffering and struggle and interpret the Word of God in relation to these realities. We refuse to accept academic theology, which negates the action. We should be prepared for a radical break in epistemology, which makes commitment the first act of theology and engages in critical reflection on the praxis of the reality of India.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Theology for our Times* published by Ecumenical Christian Centre, Bangalore 1998 p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> *Frontiers of Dalit Theology* published by Gurukul Summer Institute & ISPCCK, 1997 p. 253.

**Critic to the Academic Theology:**

The present day suffering of India can be traced back to the era of colonialism. One should go beyond to understand the Indian situation. There are specific oppressions, which are older than colonialism. By doing that, we also will find the link between the traditional exploitation and the modern domination. This will also give the real picture of the colonial enterprise and the involvement of the Christian missionary benefactions, which went along with it.

In 14<sup>th</sup> Century the Portuguese Empire started to expand their empire with Columbus reaching the West and Vasco-da-Gama landing in Goa in 1498 and began the international trade with India. In 16<sup>th</sup> Century the Christian Missionary Francis Xavier had taken the European expansion to India. Thus began the era of European Imperialism to all the regions especially to India. The penetration of the Europe into India came through International trade, Christian missionary movement and Expansion of political Colonisation, which paved the way for the imposition of the Western culture and civilisation over the ancient Indian cultures.

Beginning as merely a trade and economic exchange with India, the European rulers like the Portuguese, the British and the Spanish later, also have brought the Christian religion. They also brought with them their own armies to take over political control of India. This resulted in imperial imposition of political authority and claiming India as their colony. So we have had in India, the British, the Dutch, the Danish, the French as well as the Portuguese taking control of different parts of India as their colonies. The most successful among them was Britain, which led them to claim that the sun never sets in the British Empire.

Christianity with this political dominance enforced an oppressive expansion and a destructive exploitation, which led to the exclusion of large sections of the marginalised population in general, the Dalits and the Adivasis/Tribals. The colonisers not only imposed their dominance over the vast majority of the downtrodden but also built allies with the Indian ruling class and the caste. The Indian ruling class and caste Brahmins used this opportunity to sell the dignity of Indians and continue to enslave Untouchables and the Adivasis/Tribals in India.

This process of aligning the ruling class and the ruling caste strengthened the centuries old slave system promoted by Brahmanical Hinduism. 250 million population of this country, the Dalits, had suffered marginalisation ever since the Aryan invaders entered the country. They did impose their Vedic religion with its theories of Karma and cycle of rebirths that legitimated the hierarchical caste system. The conquered indigenous people thus became outcaste untouchables today known as Dalits. The recent invaders from the west found it comfortable with this system. "Thus, the modern colonisers not only imposed their dominance through 'might is right' and 'Divide and Rule' policies, but also allied and collaborated with the ruling class in each of the societies in their colonies in creating newly enslaved or entrenching the already existing working class or slave class, such as the victims of the age old caste system called the outcaste untouchables and tribals in India".<sup>3</sup>

Thus the planned expansion of Christianity with its imperial power strengthened Brahmins and preserved the caste system, which helped the imperial power to rule this country. Thus, it is the dominant and geographical ecumenical expansion of the Aryan races that perpetrated and preserved the permanent marginalisation and inequality of the present day Dalits of India. Truly, these are the victims of the politically dominant ecumenical expansion of Brahmanical Hinduism. Even the missionaries, as a policy, ignored this fact and so the gospel and the academic theology they preached and promoted directly and indirectly justified this attempt. Aloysius Pieris says that Western Christian theology is immune to the current human suffering and rationally justifies the existence of oppression and injustice.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> *Ecumenism: Prospectus and Challenges* published by ISPCK/CSI, 2001. p. 204.

<sup>4</sup> *Frontiers of Dalit Theology* published by Gurukul Summer Institute & ISPCK, 1997 p. 252.

“Traditional Western Christian Theology and the operative Indian Christian theology are familiar bad-fellows, i.e. allies. They are allies, as one of my friends put it, because there is a Freudian-libidinal relationship between them. Hence, any truly Christian Dalit aspiration for liberation in India must start with a critique of both traditional Western Christian Theology as well as Indian Christian Theology. These two go together in theory and practice at all times and in all places. It is these, which together oppress all of us.”<sup>5</sup>

In 19<sup>th</sup> century when the Indians started to produce theology it was in the hands of the upper castes. There were many downtrodden Dalits and Tribals who became Christians but unfortunately the theology making was with the upper caste elites. The liberal Christian elites, because of their education in the West, felt the need for indigenous expression of their faith. Most of them were converts from the upper caste and belonged to Vedic religion. So what they tried as Indian theology was just to interpret the academic western denominational theology from the framework of Vedic Hindu Theology.

“Broadly speaking, Indian Christian Theology in the past has tried to work out its theological systems in terms of either Advaita Vedanta or Vaishista Advaita. Most of the contributions of Indian Christian Theology in the past came from caste converts to Christianity. The result has been that Indian Christian Theology has perpetuated, within itself what I prefer to call the Brahmanic tradition. This tradition has further perpetuated the intuition or interiority-oriented approach to the theological task in India. One wonders whether this kind of Indian Christian Theology will *ever* have a mass appeal.”<sup>6</sup>

Indian Christian Theologians and the theology completely ignored the experience of the Dalits. The Indian Christian Theology reflects only the experiences of mostly upper caste/upper class Christian converts. Indian Christian Theology did not take into consideration the most important factor of the Indian soil, that is the struggles of the Dalits for liberation which should have become the subject matter for the faith expression in India. Indian Christian Theologians ignored the life and faith of the 80% of the Christians in India. This is the commonality cutting across the various diversities of the Christians in India, which would have provided an authentic liberation motif for Indian Christian Theology. It is so discouraging for the Dalit Christians that Indian Christian Theology of the past has ignored it conveniently, or perhaps cunningly or cleverly. “Our contemporary contexts is one of oppression and we are discerning not only the mechanism but also the root causes of oppression. In India, the caste system is the unique social system which is pervasive and which has been primarily responsible for the oppression and dehumanisation of the many. In our context we could boldly affirm that no theological method is adequate if it does not recognise caste as the contextual reality and a major structure of oppression.”<sup>7</sup>

There was a shift in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century from the academic theology to the people centred theology. Third World theologians produced theology on the experience of people, the poor and the oppressed. They gave importance to the faith reflections of the common people. In other words, what they proposed concerned the “poor”, the “oppressed” and the “people” in general but not concrete. Under this general category, the specific oppressions of these people are overlooked or ignored. Most of them used the Marxian framework for their analysis and gave class perspective. “The categories of caste and class, though are closely related, yet they are distinct and in a way, worlds apart. While class is based on one’s achievement, caste is based on birth, the former indicating the achieved status and the latter of the ascriptive status. While class is individual based, with flexibility and openness in terms of mobility, caste is group based and is rigid and fixed. Class is built on economic foundations while caste is based on religious foundations; class and caste are

---

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p. 262.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* p. 259.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* p. 271.

determined by market economy and karma theory respectively. While the principle of competition is the ruling principle in class system, the principle that manifests in caste society is the principle of 'complementarity'.<sup>8</sup> The Marxian theologians took the poor in general but they did not recognise the particular identities under this general identity. Their theology did not recognise the evils of caste, race and sex.

The group of Indian theologians who belong to the category of third world theology are also from upper caste and 'compound wallahs' who are educated either in Germany or in United States interested to develop scientific methods to do theology for the voiceless poor. Whether the voiceless poor are interested in this scientific methodology? This is then whose need? Why it should be systematic? "Should theological articulation be always systematic? If theology as it is understood today is done by the community of believers, or by the community, then why should we be systematic and precise? Who are we and what is our role in the task of theologising and from where and from whom do we derive the right to theologise?"<sup>9</sup>

It has not yet fully spoken about the specific oppression such as caste in the Indian context, though it has made peripheral references to it in the past. In other words, it is yet to come up with an adequate framework of analysis to this specific form of oppression: Caste. It is easier to speak about racism in the West, but what about caste oppression in our own context?

### **Dalit Theology - A Counter**

How much do the emerging Christian Dalit Theology has the right to claim as Contextual Theology? Whether it is a right answer to the issues raised above? How much it is inclusive? Whether this theology will lead to a liberative action? Is it an attempt of a small elite from the Dalit Community? India has the population of more than 1 billion. Out of which 25% are Dalits and 2.5% population are Christians. Around 20 million people are Christian Dalits and the rest belong to indigenous faith, Buddhism and Hinduism.

There are two primary issues, the identity of Untouchability and the identity of religion, which need to be discussed to make Dalit Theology as an authentic contextual theology, which can create wider ecumenism in the Indian Context. Already the caste system and the religious system have put the Dalits as outcastes. So there is an urgent need to challenge the system, which play against the people coming together for wider ecumenism.

The following incident will give the real picture on the operation of Caste, which deals with the identity of Untouchability of 250 Million people relating to the rest.

Mr. Karuppaiah, aged 38, is a Dalit who lives in the Parayar (name of one of the untouchable castes) Street in Thinniyam near Trichirapalli. He had approached the former local Panchayat President Mrs. Rajalakshmi, who belongs to the Dravida Munnetra Kazhaham (one of the leading political parties in Tamilnadu) for allotting a group house to his sister, Bhanumathi, under the Government programme for Dalits. For this purpose he had given Rs.2000/- as bribe to Rajalakshmi who is a Caste Hindu. Even after few months, Karuppaiah was not allotted a house and neither the money was returned to him by Rajalakshmi. In the last Panchayat election held in September 2001 Rajalakshmi did not win. Since he did not get the house and there was no hope in getting that, Karuppaiah demanded his money back. But Rajalakshmi refused to return and after some days started to say that she did not receive any money from him.

---

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* p. 272.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* p. 258

On 20.5.2002, at around 11.00 A.M. enraged by Rajalakshmi's denial, Karuppaiah took up a drum and went around the streets of that village and announced that the villagers should come together to get his money from Rajalakshmi. He also said that unless the villagers' do like that he will now on desist from doing the task of burning the dead the traditional work he used to do. He was accompanied by two other Dalits, Murugesan and Ramasamy. In the evening at 5.00 p.m Rajalakshmi and her husband Subramanian (a former school Head Master) summoned Karuppaiah and scolded and abused him. They also beat him up with chappals for beating drum and stating the fact that he was cheated. They also forced Karuppaiah to fall down at their feet and ask for the apology. Even though he refused to do in the beginning later he did so.

On 21.5.2002, Subramanian, the husband of Rajalakshmi, searched out the other two Dalits, who on hearing that, decided to go to him and ask for an apology. They both went to Subramanian's house, where they were beaten up severely by his henchmen Kudiarasu and Ashok. Rajalakshmi brought a red-hot iron rod and Subramanian branded both the Dalits in their neck and in their hands. Then they brought a drum and forced the Dalits to go around beating it and saying that, "What we had done yesterday was wrong". They did so accordingly. After that, the cruelest form of Untouchability happened. The three Dalits were forced to eat the human faeces, with the threat of further branding.

After this, even after two days, the three men did not tell these incidents to anyone because of Rajalakshmi & Subramanian's threats. They feared even greater punishment or a boycott. Later the local Dalit Movement volunteers came to know of this, took up the issue and highlighted it in the Media. Following this the local police swung into action and arrested 10 persons. Of this, Subramanian went into hiding first and later on surrendered to the police. Out of the 10 arrested 8 have been released. Rajalakshmi and Subramanian have been given conditional bail and are out at present. The culprits are now booked under the general Indian Penal Code and not under the SC/ST PA Act, which provides stringent punishments. This is not an isolated incident, it happens almost everyday in many villages.

So, Dalit Theology has to struggle against the issue of Untouchability and the Caste system and liberate the Dalits irrespective of their religious identity. If the Dalit Theology fails to take this role than it alienates itself not only from the context but also from the suffering people.

The identity of religion also divides the Dalits from coming together to war against the oppressive system. The indigenous faith of Dalit Community was destroyed by the Brahmanical Hinduism and other imperial religions like Christianity and Islam. These religious identities are used by the ruling forces to divide and rule. Even the principles of these religions negate the other. So naturally the Dalits are in different camps. Even the Indian Constitution provides positive discrimination to the Dalits who belong to Hinduism and Buddhism. If the Dalits embrace any other religion they stand to lose these constitutional provisions. So there is a need for Dalit Theology either to transcend these religious identities or to make every religious identity as an inclusive one.

The Indian Church, by and large, is a Dalit Church. More than 75 per cent of the members of the Church in India are Dalits. Does the Dalit Theology have any responsibility for the rest of the 25 per cent who belong to other identities like upper caste, Adivasis and Tribals? Can we as Christian Dalits do theology for the non-Dalits as well as non-Christian Dalits? Out of 250 million Dalit populations in India, only 20 million belong to Dalit Christian. Whether the proposed Christian Dalit Theology will take in to consideration the 230 million Dalits? To what extent does the Dalit community in general accept the "Christian" contribution as its own in its struggles? Whether the Dalit Theology takes into consideration the liberation of the dominant caste or the oppressors?

We need to identify what is “Christian” in the entire Christian tradition and with what emphasis. The adjective “Christian” is preferred by all the Indian Christian Theologians. One has to seriously think how much one has to ponder the word “Christian” in the light of the plurality of Dalit’s faith and cultural identity. Without making a criticism of the missionary movements, the theology, paternalism, confessionalism and traditional Christian theology, we will not be successful in formulating a truly liberating Christian theology in India.

Unless Dalit Theology takes into consideration of plurality seriously it cannot claim as contextual theology of India. It will be doing the same mistake like the other Indian Christian theologians. India’s richness is revealed in its cultural, religious, racial and ideological and environmental diversities. Such a rich plurality gives birth to pluralism. Pluralism therefore, challenges the very roots of the current theological endeavour which demands unity. “This essential unity is in fact imperial and colonial in character. It denies all plurality. This assumed essential unity, for instance in India, found an ally in Advaita Vedanta, which describes the Ultimate Reality or Brahman as *Ekam Advitium* (one without a second). This *Ekam Advitium* is a complete denial of plurality and therefore, imperial in character. This alliance between the old colonial theological paradigm and our own Advaitic paradigm meant the denial of plurality of theological approaches.”<sup>10</sup>

The current theological endeavour emphasis that the Christianity is the only true religion and do not recognise the salvific principles of other religions and faiths. This dominant theology in the Church today professes that Christ is the only way and the entire humanity should accept this. The concept of “Sin” has become handy to establish this rigidity. Even the communities which do not have such concepts as sin and salvation had to be sinful because there was no escape from original sin unless one believes in Jesus Christ through whom any community could be redeemed from the original sin. Plurality and pluralism of religions present a serious challenge to this understanding. “How and who determines this finality and uniqueness of Jesus? Are these claims made by Jesus or are they made on: his behalf by faith communities? How does one perceive the finality of Jesus after historical-critical methods have modified some of the excessive claims made for Jesus in the gospels? In other words, are the assertions made on behalf of Jesus truth claims or the confessional statements of a community? Are they objective claims or the subjective reading of a faith community?”<sup>11</sup> One has to seriously look into the God’s self-disclosure in other faiths especially the faith understanding of the majority Dalits who have their traditional understanding of God’s liberation actions.

“Is it not time for Christians to have another look at such basic tenets as the figure of Jesus, the place of scriptural authority, and the function of Christian traditions, which were all formulated in Europe of a bygone era? At that time and place they may have looked inoffensive, yet they may look harmful today in a multiple religious and social context. Basically, what Asian Christians need is to look again at the relation between God’s self-disclosure in the person and work of Jesus and God’s relation toward all human beings. How special is this revelation in comparison to the experiences of Buddha, Mohammed and Confucius? Does the Christian claim to uniqueness limit God’s freedom to be present to people in other religious histories?”<sup>12</sup>.

We cannot do Dalit Theology within Christian traditions since most of the Dalits do not belong to Christianity, but we have to do it in and through dialogue with other faith traditions, especially the traditions of the vast majority of the Dalits belong to. Dalit theology should not enter into the dialogue with the Dalit Christians who belong to other denominations but must be in dialogue with other contemporary faith challenges and experiences of the different movements. The object of

---

<sup>10</sup> *Theology for our Times* published by Ecumenical Christian Centre, Bangalore 1998, p.29.

<sup>11</sup> *Asian Faces of Jesus* published by Orbis Books, New York, 1993. p. 262.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* p. 262.

this theological mission then can no longer be the conversion but to have a dialogical relationship with other faiths. Dalit theology should involve in mutual correction, mutual interpenetration and mutual enrichment among the other traditions of the Dalits. Dalit Theology needs to transcend the “mono” character and need to adopt the plural character. Dalit Theology should respect each other’s integrity and faith commitment and be prepared to learn from other faiths and appropriate their positive values. It cannot think that people who do not belong to Christianity are “empty”, with nothing to share. The gathering of all their experiences and expectations will enrich the Dalit theology and will give it new horizons in its mission. There is no one sender and one receiver, the roles are interchangeable. People may tend to think that this may end up in syncretism. But as said by R.S.Sugirtharaja, “There is no need to rehearse the arguments for and against syncretism. The anti-syncretistic lobby is based on two ideas. One is that there is a pure, unalloyed and unvarnished gospel that can be planted in any situation. The second is the notion that culture, especially the receiving one, is a static, finished product that is usually evil, and waiting to be purified. Both are based on false premises. First, the gospel narratives indicate that the gospel never existed in a pure state and its power is evident only when it is couched in the historical and cultural experience of a people. Second, cultures are constantly in a process of radical renewal and enrichment.”<sup>13</sup>

R.S.Sugirtharaja claims that the whole debate about syncretism is arising out of the hermeneutics of suspicion. “When the bogey of syncretism is raised, who raises it? Sometimes by Euro-American interpreters who are uneasy when Asians attempt anything. Sometimes the Asian church hierarchy raises it when ordinary people imaginatively mould a rich variety of local symbols to express their understanding of Jesus. Sometimes these ordinary people themselves resist the proposals of Asian theologians to use indigenous components, which Asians feel they have left behind. Ultimately it boils down to questions like who has the power to interpret? Who possesses the truth? What makes the gospel Christian?”<sup>14</sup>

The concept of plurality will open the gates for wider ecumenism involving other faiths. This unity implies conquest of others and also denial of genuine plurality. As Prof A.P.Nirmal suggest that we should move from the concept of unity to the concept of relationality. “The concept of relationality presupposes that the many will remain many. They will maintain their identity and integrity. There will be no one faith; nor there will be one order. One faith and one order only reconfirm the concept of imperial unity. A serious student of Christian theology knows all too well that the so-called ecumenical creeds only tried to safeguard imperial unity and in fact divided the early Church into the orthodox and the heretic”<sup>15</sup>

Today, it is necessary that theological discussion and its ministry become committed in a more radical form to the Dalits and the other oppressed of our country who are waiting for their liberation. We must remember that the Dalits believe people who express their faith and devotion in simple forms even though it looks rudimentary at times. And yet, in spite of their suffering, they have not lost their faith in the liberating, merciful and saving God. In terms of *cultural identity*, it is necessary to lay emphasis on the uniqueness of the people’s culture, that is, each one’s cultural expression. One’s culture should not dominate, influence or destroy the other cultures. The missionary movements and the conversion process in India encourages the Christians to leave their own traditional cultural heritage and join Christian Communities whose life style are largely corrupted by the West. So Dalit theology should not try to alienate people from their own cultural heritage. Dalit theology is also open for mutual criticism and mutual learning. The Dalit Theological reflection should keep this in mind and it should originate from the continuous exchange of experiences within specific cultures. “Cultures and contexts are not static entities; they constantly change and throw

---

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. p. 260.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. p. 260.

<sup>15</sup> *Theology for our Times* published by Ecumenical Christian Centre, Bangalore 1998. p 31.

up wrap and woof of political, social and religious strands in an ever-new fabric. As cultures evolve, as new contexts and experiences emerge, as new questions surface, so features and aspects of Jesus will continue to be discovered.”<sup>16</sup>

Dalit theology also should not forget the role of history of the Dalits in making Dalit theology because it is the past or the past history can tell about the past identity of the Dalits. Today some may be Christian or Buddhist or belong to indigenous faith but only the history will tell the glorious past and how much their ancient identity unified them together. “Therefore for us as Dalits, history is very important, because till now historians either in general, or of the church did not represent the views of our people. But on the other hand, we do need to know our past, which alone will reveal to us the fact that once we were also full human beings, enjoying all the benefits of a normal human being which include land, property, human dignity, natural resources, and human freedom. But this realisation will not dawn upon us until our history is written from our point of view, that is ‘the view from below’”<sup>17</sup>

### **Conclusion**

So any contextual theology becomes meaningless if it is not dealing with the issues really affecting the most marginalised in the society. The Western Academic Theology, the Third World Liberation Theology and Indian Christian Theology, so far ignored the primary problems of the vast majority of the Christian population. Only because of that, they are not able to get the recognition of the vast majority. Only the upper caste and upper class elites who are in the hierarchy of the churches and the society still use those theologies to justify their positions. But the emergence of Dalit Theology is really shaking the foundations of all the other theologies. So the Theological World has to seriously take note of this when they reflect the future of Theological Education.

---

<sup>16</sup> *Asian Faces of Jesus* published by Orbis Books, New York, 1993. p. 258

<sup>17</sup> *Frontiers of Dalit Theology* published by Gurukul Summer Institute & ISPCK, 1997 p. 174

## TÄTOU TÄTOU E. ECUMENISM AND MÄORI CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY

The Ven. Turi Hollis

*Tutira mai ngä iwi,  
Tätou tätou e  
Tutira mai ngä iwi,  
Tätou tätou e.  
Whaia te maramatanga  
Me te aroha.  
E ngä iwi  
Kia tapatahi  
Kia kotahi ra.  
Tätou tätou e*

### **Introduction**

When I was a child my *whanau* (family) and I were involved in a *kapahaka* group (a Mäori cultural performing group) in *Te Waipounamu* (the Mäori name for the South Island of Aotearoa New Zealand). The above words are from a song that we used to sing. There were hand and body actions that accompanied this song to give visual expression to the words. The words speak of drawing peoples from different tribes and origins together to support one another in pursuit of understanding and love. The words: “*E ngä iwi, kia tapatahi, kia kotahi ra. Tätou tätou e*”. may be translated as: “O peoples, enfold one another, be united, to support one another.”

Drawing people together in unity to support one another is a goal that most religions, not just Christianity, prize. The ecumenical movement, particularly in the 1960's and 70's, in the Christian religion tried to negotiate closer co-operation in the hope that organic unity might be possible. The World Council of Churches, the Conference of Churches in Aotearoa New Zealand and its partner, Te Rünanga Whakawhanaungatanga o Aotearoa, are examples of organisational structures that were established to try to bring the denominations closer together. While these bodies talk, publish books and material, and sponsor a range of national and international conferences, organic unity is now really just a pipe dream. Churchianity<sup>1</sup>, with its political and economic realities, has ensured that denominationalism prevails and will continue to prevail.

### **World Council of Churches and Ecumenism.**

Ecumenism is, of course, the abstract noun of the adjective ‘ecumenical’ which means “of or representing the whole Christian world or universal church, general, universal, catholic; worldwide”<sup>2</sup> In the World Council of Churches’ on-line publication on the Ecumenical Movement, it is stated that there “is agreement that the term “ecumenical” embraces the quest for Christian unity, common witness in the worldwide task of mission and evangelism, and commitment to diakonia and to the promotion of justice and peace. But there is no authoritative definition of the term, and it is in

---

<sup>1</sup> This is favourite word of the Rev. Charlie Hare Shortland, a retired Mäori Anglican priest living in Whangarei, Aotearoa New Zealand. I am not sure whether he coined the word but he introduced it to my vocabulary.

<sup>2</sup> Fowler, H W and Fowler, F G (Editors) *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*. London: Oxford University Press, 1960. p. 820.

fact used to characterize a wide range of activities, ideas and organizational arrangements. Perhaps the best-known definition is that formulated by the WCC Central Committee, meeting at Rolle, in 1951:

It is important to insist that the word [ecumenical], which comes from the Greek word for the whole inhabited earth [oikoumene], is properly used to describe everything that relates to the whole task of the whole church to bring the gospel to the whole world.

This sought to expand previous definitions by integrating the concern for church unity and the concern for co-operative mission and evangelism.

More recent descriptions of the goal of the ecumenical movement have sought to take seriously the conviction that the object of God's reconciling purpose is not only the church but the whole of humanity - indeed, the whole of creation."<sup>3</sup>

### Ecumenism Māori Style

There were a number of factors that determined which denomination a *whanau* (family) would belong to. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century the missionaries from the Church of England and the Methodists divided up the north island among them and they were expected to stay within their respective designated regions. The Catholic missionaries, under Bishop Pompellier, planted missions in particular villages despite opposition from the Church of England missionaries. The Church of the Latter Day Saints of Jesus Christ were welcomed into villages that had suffered at the hands of the New Zealand Colonial Government and British troops during the wars in the late 1850's and 60's. This was because many of the missionaries from the mainstream churches were suspected of spying for the NZ Colonial Government. Other villages and communities joined the Ringatu Church because of the wars in the late 1800's and the impact of its charismatic leader, Te Kooti Arikirangi Turuki. Tahupotiki Wiremu Ratana had people joining his church because he offered them hope at a time of despair and social and economic depression in the 1920's and 30's.

Although Churchianity mattered to the hierarchy of the different denominations, at the grassroots this was not the case. In my *whanau* (family), for example, my mother's father was Tipene Tamatea, a Maori from the East Coast of the North Island of Aotearoa New Zealand. My mother's mother was Iranui Huhu, also a Maori from the East Coast of the North Island of Aotearoa New Zealand. My grandfather was baptised, raised and died a member of *Te Haahi Mihinare*<sup>4</sup>. My grandmother was born and raised a member of the *Ringatu Church*<sup>5</sup>. She changed to *Te Haahi Mihinare* after she married. When *Nana* (grandmother) died, clergy from *Te Haahi Mihinare* and the *Ringatu Church* participated in her funeral. My mother was born and raised as a member of *Te Haahi Mihinare*. Like her mother, however, she also attended the monthly *Tekau ma Rua* (the 12<sup>th</sup> Day of the month is when members of the *Ringatu Church* gather for worship and fellowship) when

---

<sup>3</sup> Extracted from: *Towards a Common Understanding and Vision of the World Council of Churches. A Policy Statement adopted by the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches and commended to member churches and ecumenical partners for study and action in September 1997.* This can be found at: <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/who/cuv-e.html>

<sup>4</sup> *Te Haahi Mihinare* was established in Aotearoa New Zealand in 1814 by the Church Missionary Society of the Church of England under the leadership of the Rev Samuel Marsden. Translated into English it means the Mission Church. The 1852 Constitution of the Church of England in New Zealand tried to change this but for the Māori it has remained *Te Haahi Mihinare*. When the Constitution was introduced there was no Māori participation and it was therefore seen to apply to non-Māori only. *Te Haahi Mihinare* was the **Māori** Church. It still is regarded and referred to as such even though today the Constitution incorporates Māori, *Pakeha* (non-Māori) and people from the Diocese of Polynesia.

<sup>5</sup> The Ringatu Church is an indigenous church founded in 1867 by Te Kooti Arikirangi Te Turuki, a Māori leader in the late 1800s.

she could, as well as other gatherings of the church. When she died clergy from Te Haahi Mihinare and the Ringatu Church conducted her funeral.

At the 80<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration<sup>6</sup> of the first Maori woman Anglican priest, the Rev. Puti Murray, it was a typically Maori way of doing things for the prayers of thanksgiving, for the safe arrival of the guests and for the occasion to be taken by a member of the *Ratana Church*<sup>7</sup>. This was despite the fact that there were a number of Anglican priests and a bishop present. The Ratana minister was a relative of Puti and had been asked to take the prayers because of this and because of his connection to the *marae*<sup>8</sup> where the event took place.

Most Māori will worship and enjoy the fellowship of people of other denominations. Denominational differences seldom take precedence over *whakapapa*. *Whakapapa* is frequently translated to simply mean “genealogy”. But to Māori *whakapapa* is more than a list of names of who begat who. *Whakapapa* tell the stories of the lives of the people who are linked together by blood, and the circumstances, situations and events that helped form and succour them. *Whakapapa* describes and explains the origin of Māori and it provides a means by which Māori can identify themselves<sup>9</sup>. It describes and explains Māori uniqueness yet, at the same time, it confirms our interconnectedness with other people.

*Whanaungatanga* (relationships) between people is more important than denominational differences. *Whanaungatanga* is through *whakapapa*. *Whanaungatanga* is about relationships based on obligation. It is obligation to care for (*awhi*), support (*tautoko* and *whakapakari*), cater for (*hapai*), provide for (*manaaki*), and to give attention to one another’s needs with love (*aroha*). But obligation is reciprocal: everyone is obligated to each other. The fact that *Te Reo Maori* (Māori language) does not have an expression equivalent to “Thank you!” or “Please...” exemplifies this. Instead an appropriate long-standing response to a person providing service, or care or help would be: “*E tika hoki!*” (“That is [the] correct [thing to do]!”) A more recent response is to say: “*Kia ora!*” (“Have life!” or “Be life [ful]!”) which is an attempt to find an equivalent of “Thank you!”

As can be seen from these examples, Māori have been very “corporate” in their approach to denominations. By this I mean that the recognised leader of a *whanau* would decide which denomination the whole *whanau* would belong to and every member of that *whanau* would join that denomination. Although this is now changing, particularly among the *rangatahi* (young people, youth), *whanau* still tend to attach their allegiances to denominations that their *tipuna* (ancestor(s)) selected for them. This had a flow on into the villages and communities because of *whakapapa*. The major *rangatira* (chief, leader) and *whanau* of a village could influence other *whanau* to join their particular denomination.

There are always exceptions, however, and the Jehovah Witnesses and some of the pentecostal churches maintain the walls that divide. These particular denominations regard Māori culture as heathen and refuse to participate in Māori events held on the *marae*. One of the saddest funerals that I have presided over was one where the son of a *kuia* (an old and respected woman) was

---

<sup>6</sup> Held at Te Kao, in the far northern region of the North Island of Aotearoa New Zealand, on 27 July 2002.

<sup>7</sup> The Ratana Church is another indigenous church. It was established by Tahupotiki Wiremu Ratana in 1918.

<sup>8</sup> The *marae* is a focal point for Maori culture and Maori communities. Physically it is the courtyard immediately in front of a *Whare Tipuna* (the central building of a Maori community). This is where a Maori community gathers. The *marae* is more than a courtyard. It is a sacred space where important ceremonies, including funerals services, and discussions/debates affecting the life of the community are held.

<sup>9</sup> This applied equally to *whangai* (people who were informally adopted) as well as blood relatives until Māori began to make wills and were affected by laws of inheritance which forced Māori *whanau* to define themselves after the European/Western understanding of including only those who were legally adopted.

forbidden by his church to join his *whanau* beside their mother's coffin. His father had been an ordained minister in *Te Haahi Mihinare* and his mother and *whanau* were strong supporters of *Te Haahi Mihinare*. He had married a woman who belonged to the Jehovah Witnesses' Church. Despite his *whanau* pleading with his wife to let him join them, the fellow had to do his grieving and weeping outside the gate of the *marae*. His wife sat in their car some distance away. He was not allowed to attend the burial. On this occasion *whakapapa* was not allowed to prevail. However, the man's *whanau* still accepted him as one of them and grieved for him as much as they grieved for themselves with the loss of the *kuia*. Such behaviour is not, thankfully, a common practice, but can be found.

### Problems with the WCC definition

This definition is very broad but, from a Māori perspective, the emphasis on the imperative of mission and evangelism suggests a very Eurocentric perception of the Gospel. It tells me that the Gospel is not to be found in the whole world and consequently it needs to be taken to the whole world: this is the task of the whole church. However such arrogance needs to be challenged. Afterall, was not the God whom Jesus called Abba the Creator of the whole of creation and is therefore Creator of Aotearoa New Zealand? Does this not mean that my *tipuna* (ancestors) also knew the God whom Jesus called Abba before the arrival of the European missionaries in Aotearoa New Zealand in 1814?

Does this definition mean that I, a Māori from little Aotearoa New Zealand at the bottom of the South Pacific, can do theology only if I conform to the models of theology and concepts of God that have been approved by European theologians of centuries past? Does this mean that contemporary theologians may be approved as points of reference provided they come from approved theological seminaries and colleges. Just who gives the stamp of approval is open to question. Are they still to be white middle class males who are really approving of those who belong to their club.

I recall attending the WCC Assembly in Canberra in 1991 where Chung Hyun Kyung from South Korea gave a presentation in which she referred to the Korean goddess, *Han*. I was fascinated by the reaction from people, particularly those from the Greek Orthodox Church but not confined to them. There were people who were outraged by her audacity to include any reference to a deity like *Han* in the context of Christian theology. She was accused of not doing theology and for the first time in my life I came across the word "syncretism". I felt considerable *aroha* (love, sympathy, affection) for Chung Hyun Kyung, and yet felt liberated and inspired at the same time. For the first time I felt that my *tipuna* (ancestors) and my heritage were recognised and accepted as legitimate parts of my faith journey and the faith journey of my people. Despite the opposition from the more "orthodox" sectors of the Church, for me contextual theology had arrived. Thankfully since 1991 contextual theology has arrived internationally too.

### Māori Contextual Theology: Te Atuatanga

Increasingly today Māori are seeking to understand their faith and their belief in God in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, and not in the context of Europe or North America. This process is called *Te Atuatanga*. This word *Te Atuatanga* has been only recently coined, but it is not a new theology or a new concept or a new world-view. *Te Atuatanga* is not, however, the Māori translation of the English word *theology*. This is because it is interconnected with *Te Wairua Māori* (Māori Spirituality). *Te Atuatanga* is *Te Wairua Māori*; *Te Wairua Māori* is *Te Atuatanga*. While *Te Atuatanga* and *Te Wairua Māori* are not synonymous, they are nevertheless so intertwined that it can be difficult to distinguish them. Both are equally hard to define. *Te Atuatanga* describes how Māori perceive, understand and relate to all that is: seen and unseen. *Te Wairua Māori* describes how Māori are connected to all that is: seen and

unseen<sup>10</sup>. It is peculiar to Māori because it flows out of Māori *whakapapa* (story, history, genealogy) and Māori *whakapapa* dates from the beginning of time. The context for *Te Atuatanga* is Aotearoa New Zealand, nowhere else in the world.

*Te Atuatanga* pre-dates Christianity in these lands because as a religion Christianity did not officially arrive in Aotearoa New Zealand until 1814. However, the “Creating Power” that brought about the whole of Creation did so before 1814. Māori were here before 1814; Māori were relating to the “Creating Power” long before the arrival of Christianity. Māori *whakapapa* tell us so. And, while it is true that Māori perception and understanding of the “Creating Power” changed following the arrival of Christianity, pre-Christian Māori perceptions and understandings cannot be discarded as being no-longer relevant or valid. They must be considered and included and this is what *Te Atuatanga* endeavours to do.

### **Te Atuatanga and Ecumenism**

In Aotearoa New Zealand *Te Atuatanga* may be the saving of ecumenism, if ecumenism survives at all. Unity, certainly organic unity, among the Christian Churches here, is no longer widely supported even though the concept is. However, survival is the name of the game. The history of Christianity shows that all denominations have continued to play political games to ensure their survival. Compromise and accommodation are tools in that political game. All this mitigates against any form of unity happening. Churchianity, or religious tribalism, prevails.

*Te Atuatanga* has the potential to cut across the denominational barriers by cutting through the political games and to get to the core of the Christian faith: *whanaungatanga*. As explained earlier, however, *whanaungatanga* is through *whakapapa*. *Whakapapa* binds people together through blood ties: thus they are interconnected. In the Christian context, the *Whanau a te Karaiti* (the Family of Christ) is bound together by the “blood of Christ”. This “blood of Christ” is his *whakapapa*, as found in Matthew 1: 1-17 and in the Gospels, which not only establish Christ’s Jewish heritage and his life story, but also his interconnectedness to all humanity. The “blood of Christ” is the blood that Mary shared with the child in her womb and shed when she gave birth to the ‘Son of Man’. The “blood of Christ” is the blood that Christ shed on the cross, which, again, connects him to all humanity as the one who laid down his life for all. *Te Atuatanga* therefore argues for a strong theology of the “blood of Christ”.

*Te Atuatanga* is significant for current ecumenism and the future of the ecumenical movement in Aotearoa New Zealand. It focusses on, and thus causes people to deliberate on, what the Gospel means in this part of the globe and what it means to and for the people who dwell here. It requires us to examine how we relate to one another and why religious tribalism in the form of Churchianity continues to divide the *Whanau a te Karaiti*.

### **Conclusion**

Like *Te Atuatanga*, other theologies have been and are being developed to address particular contexts. These contextual theologies may not be grand narratives but they do provide people with an understanding of their faith and can help them to understand their context. By understanding their context and their faith they can then understand their *whanaungatanga*, or interconnectedness with one another. In the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, the theology of *Te Atuatanga* can provide a way ahead for ecumenism. The problem is that ecumenism and the Ecumenical Movement may have become so political that *whanaungatanga* is no match for Churchianity. Is it too late? Only time will tell.

---

<sup>10</sup> This paragraph is based partly on a discussion I had with the Ven. Joseph Akuhata-Brown, the Rev. Te Waaka Melbourne on Maori Spirituality on 4 June 2002. Te Waaka has written an MPhil thesis entitled: *Wairua Maori Rua Mano: Maori Spirituality 2000*. Massey University, Palmerston North, 2000.

## LA CONTEXTUALIDAD Y LO ECUMÉNICO EN LA EDUCACIÓN TEOLÓGICA VENEZOLANA

*Romer Portillo*

### Introducción

Quienes promueven la Educación Teológica en América Latina entienden que en estos momentos, de crisis y esperanzas para nuestros pueblos, las teólogas y los teólogos tienen exigencias ineludibles: la contextualidad, lo ecuménico y lo pedagógico en horizonte liberador representan algunas de éstas. Como exigencias teológicas no se presentan aislada sino que se interconectan y se complementan en un nivel de complejidad propio de la realidad que vivimos en Abya-Yala: La de sobrevivencia y la búsqueda de alternativas al neoliberalismo. Hablamos de complejidad y complementariedad<sup>1</sup> porque desde estas perspectivas se logra integrar lo más posible los modos más simples del vivir y del pensar la teología, con el universo de la realidad social; toma en cuenta lo uno y lo diverso y procura complementarlo. Por ejemplo, en la cotidianidad se refleja la complejidad cuando las acciones que en ella se dan no se programan, en esta cotidianidad cada uno de nosotros juega varios roles, que a la hora de asumir un modelo educativo teológico alternativo no pueden pasar inadvertidos. Somos padres y madres, esposos y esposas, miembros de iglesias, trabajadores o desempleados, en fin tenemos varios roles que exigen actividades y también demandan compromiso. Hay que aprender a articular esta complejidad cotidiana y social con la educación teológica ecuménica y contextual. Así entonces aparece un desafío para aquellos que impulsan modelos alternativos en la educación teológica.

De esta complejidad forman parte las aspiraciones y finalidades que como pueblo de Dios tenemos. Las aspiraciones que como iglesia tenemos dan la orientación y la dirección al conocimiento y al quehacer teológico, así como a cualquier otra disciplina como la pedagogía y la sociología. En este sentido, todo saber humano se coloca al servicio de las finalidades que el Reino de Dios inspira en las comunidades sean estas eclesiales o no. Esto permite afirmar 1) que la educación teológica debe dar visibilidad y viabilidad al Reino de Dios en el aquí y en el ahora, 2) debe contribuir a la creación del nuevo ser humano y de la nueva ser humana; 3) y debe ayudar a desarrollar una espiritualidad que resalte los valores del Evangelio de Jesucristo. Espiritualidad que descubra lo divino de lo humano y lo humano de Dios, que resista al mal y promueva el crecimiento personal y colectivo. Estas finalidades motivan también por la consecución de alternativas para la supervivencia de muchos proyectos y movimientos, entre ellos los programas de educación teológica alternativa en Abya-Yala, que desde sus inicios han optado por acompañar a los más pobres en la lucha por la defensa de la vida en sus dimensiones de concreitud.

Tomando en cuenta estas reflexiones nos disponemos a abordar el tema propuesto como título de este escrito: *La Contextualidad y lo ecuménico en la Educación Teológica*, y como se trata sobre la educación teológica en contexto, haremos una *breve consideración de la realidad venezolana*, resaltando como ésta constituye hoy una fuente de paradigmas, criterios y valores nuevos para la Teología en América Latina. También consideraremos *lo alternativo de la educación teológica* como propuesta a la construcción de la sociedad justa, inclusiva, libre y sin discriminaciones. Luego, trataremos *lo ecuménico en la educación teológica* entendido éste como la armonía entre lo diferente y lo distinto y como la convocatoria la participación de todos y todas a liberar, restaurar y cuidar el *OIKOS* de Dios, casa que también es nuestra. Por último, analizaremos la experiencia venezolana de un modelo de educación teológica contextual a través

---

<sup>1</sup> Sobre las ideas de la complejidad recomendamos tomar en cuenta los aportes de Edgar Morin, *Introducción al pensamiento complejo*. Traducción de Marcelo Pakman (Barcelona, Gedisa, 2da Edic. 1998) págs 111-119.

del Programa Abierto de Capacitación Teológica PACTO como ejemplo concreto del tema que estamos desarrollando

### **Breve consideración de la Realidad Venezolana**

Estamos en Venezuela viviendo momentos históricos que bien vale la pena considerar. En el país se han dado acontecimientos, cambios y transformaciones dignas de análisis y elucidación, con la finalidad de contribuir a la comprensión de nuevos modelos de ser sociedad y de ser pueblo. En esta década, Venezuela constituye una referencia a procesos de cambios significativos, no solo en lo político, también en áreas valiosas que hasta ahora habían sido ignoradas en la construcción de la sociedad que todos y todas queremos. Uno de los cambios de mayor impacto es el de la Constitución de 1999. La Constitución no solo representa un libro de principios que orientan la convivencia en armonía de la ciudadanía venezolana, ella es resultado de varios factores que se conjugaron para plasmar la propuesta de un nuevo país, de un nuevo Estado y de un nuevo modelo económico social distinto al neoliberal.

Uno de estos factores que promueven el cambio es el reconocimiento del *poder originario* que reside en la mayoría popular, este poder se ejerció en la Asamblea Constituyente, elegida por mayoría popular, y en el referéndum aprobatorio de la Constitución en 1999, también se ejerció cuando por exigencia de las comunidades más pobres, que en Venezuela representa un alto porcentaje de la población, se restituyó el hilo constitucional, después de haber sido roto por el Golpe de Estado dirigido por instancias nacionales e internacionales contra el Presidente Hugo Chávez Frías y su proyecto bolivariano de liberación. La Constitución, producto del *poder originario*, recuerda y descubre en el pueblo el poder que reside en él, y recuerda también que organizadamente y con la participación de todos y todas puede ejercerlo para llevar a cabo sus sueños y esperanzas.

Una nueva utopía también es presentada en esta Constitución: es el protagonismo de los sectores tradicionalmente postergados como los indígenas, los negros, las mujeres, los campesinos, los ancianos y los niños. A los indígenas se les da participación en las tomas de decisiones nacionales solo por ser indígena, se le reconoce sus lenguas como oficiales. Los campesinos se favorecen con la ley de tierra, un enfoque distinto de la producción y la distribución de la tierra como bien común. Las escuelas llamadas bolivarianas están diseñadas para favorecer integralmente a los niños y niñas de más bajos recursos. La propuesta de economías alternativas y el micro crédito favorecen a las mujeres, a los pequeños empresarios y a quienes se organizan en cooperativas.

Todo esto se da bajo la orientación ideológica que valora el ideario de Simón Bolívar, el Libertador, en el pensamiento bolivariano. Así se aprecia aun más lo nacional y lo autóctono. La corriente bolivariana es la referencia teórica e ideológica que funda y fundamenta el actual proyecto nacional en el país. Autoctonismo y nacionalismo son dos principios que contrastan con la propuesta neoliberal de la mundialización y globalización. Hasta ahora el pensamiento bolivariano había sido una referencia teórica importante, pero ha causado sorpresa para muchos la práctica real de este pensamiento y doctrina<sup>2</sup>. Desde esta perspectiva se instaura en Venezuela un cuarto poder público, llamado el poder moral, y desde esta perspectiva se insiste en que los sistemas de gobierno deben tener como finalidad única lograr *la mayor suma de felicidad posible* para todos y todas, especialmente para los más pobres, y desde esta perspectiva se insiste en la integración latinoamericana como proyecto emancipador.

---

<sup>2</sup> Ignacio Ramonet, "Venezuela y el mundo hoy: La transformación de Venezuela, ¿Una utopía posible?", disponible en: *Correos para la EMANCIPACION* (Argentina, [www.emancipacin.org](http://www.emancipacin.org), 2001) Año III, N° 102.

La valoración del *poder originario* y la propuesta de un nuevo marco ideológico bolivariano, que sirve de base al proceso de cambio, tanto en lo político como lo económico, hace visible, en Venezuela, la contradicción con la tendencia neoliberal, generando *conflictividad social* y confrontaciones evidentes, esta confrontación se percibo con mucha fuerza el día 11 de abril de este año 2002: el día del Golpe de Estado y la ruptura del hilo constitucional. De esta forma se han abierto en el país varios frentes de disputas: 1) entre militares de las fuerzas armadas con un minoritario, pero radicalizado, sector de la llamada “sociedad civil”; 2) entre sectores financieros internacionales comprometidos con los movimientos neoliberales de la economía y las políticas internacionales venezolanas que se relacionan con gobiernos de corte socialista como Cuba, Corea, China... 3) y entre los medios de comunicación y difusión social, cada vez más parcializados y cómplices de los sectores neoliberales con la propuesta de proyecto nacional bolivariano. La pugna más notoria se da entre la plutocracia venezolana beneficiada por muchos años por las finanzas petroleras<sup>3</sup> con la mayoría de la población pobre, que en el proyecto tienen una oportunidad. Las causas que generan estas pugnas no han desaparecido todavía por lo que en el país se vive en estos momentos un ambiente de conflictividad permanente.

Otro factor que para nosotros tiene importancia, es la aparición de una nueva espiritualidad menos eclesial y más secular, es una espiritualidad que anima a la resistencia y a la vida. En estos momentos en el país la mayoría de la gente pobre comprende aquel pensamiento de Martín Luther King: *Resignarse es morir, resistir es vivir*. El énfasis constitucional, y de algunas leyes a aprobar, en beneficiar a la gente más pobre, coincide con una línea del evangelio y no se opone a la fe cristiana. Esto es bien visto por las comunidades ecuménicas populares, quienes han visto en el país espacios que se abren para la diversidad religiosa. La libertad de pensamiento y de respeto a la dignidad de las personas impulsa a una espiritualidad ecuménica como apoyo a al proceso de transformación democrático que acontece en Venezuela.

### **Lo Alternativo de la Educación Teológica**

Lo alternativo de la educación teológica en Venezuela tiene que ver con un modelo educativo que forme a la ciudadanía con valores y principios distintos, que ayuden a la construcción de la nueva humanidad, de la nueva sociedad. Lo alternativo no consiste en la sustitución de un modelo tradicional por otro modelo nuevo, sino en un proyecto de mundo distinto. Además de lo metodológico lo alternativo tiene que ver con contenidos liberadores y esperanzadores.

Desde esta óptica, la educación teológica alternativa tiene que ser necesariamente contextual, porque es en la especificidad del contexto donde se evidencia la necesidad de los cambios y las transformaciones. Lo alternativo anuncia el mundo que queremos lograr. Por eso afirmamos que la educación teológica no solo es necesaria para la formación de los líderes eclesiales, tarea que es necesaria, sino que esta educación teológica es una necesidad de la sociedad. Así se le devuelve la teología al pueblo y a la comunidad en sus diversos contextos, y así se trasciende a lo puramente académico, sin ignorar la importancia que esto tiene. Trasciende también a la parcialidad confesional, haciéndose ecuménica, por que la educación tiene como preocupación el Oikos, la casa universal, habitada por todos y todas.

La *educación teológica es alternativa* porque ofrece puntos de vista, perspectivas, que sirven para despertar la conciencia sobre la necesidad de la liberación y la restauración social. Ella promueve valores que son antagónicos a los valores que se promueven en la globalización. La educación teológica alternativa advierte que la evangelización y la pastoral no vienen desde afuera de la comunidad de los pobres, sino que éstas se dan dentro de ella. Los diferentes rostros de la pobreza constituyen una fuente proveedora de insumos, de experiencias y propuestas para la teología en

---

<sup>3</sup> José María Abreu, “Para entender lo que ha pasado en Venezuela” (Quito, CLAI, 2002) N° 24, Dossier 3

América latina. Así, la teología se renueva y adquiere nuevos contenidos para la eclesiología, la cristología, la hermenéutica y la pastoral<sup>4</sup>. Además, la educación teológica representa un espacio de formación y de preparación para las personas indefensas, dándole una conciencia crítica y analítica, que siempre constituye una amenaza para la sociedad neoliberal.

Hacemos notar que el contexto venezolano se presenta como fuente de criterios y valores que refuerzan el modelo de educación teológica que se desarrolla en América Latina. Por ejemplo ya hay quienes están hablando de la Teología Bolivariana de la liberación. Precisamente porque la realidad que sirve de contexto a las distintas formas de hacer el conocimiento en nuestro país necesariamente tiene que ver los procesos de cambio y transformación que se están desarrollando en Venezuela. En este sentido la teología necesariamente tiene que optar y colocarse al servicio de las comunidades de las víctimas, de los que sufren la injusticia, de los más pobres. La teología no se agota en ella misma, ella no constituye un fin, es un instrumento de servicio a Dios, a la iglesia y a los pueblos. El contexto venezolano actual demanda aclarar si la teología está al servicio de modelos educativos opresivos y punitivos, o por el contrario asume modelos alternativos y liberadores, el pueblo quiere que el devenir de la teología sea la liberación y que esta sea un criterio hermenéutico de las aspiraciones populares.

Por el contexto que vivimos sabemos que no existe una sola teología o *la teología*, hay diversidad y múltiples interpretaciones teológicas, a veces se confrontan y son antagónicas. El contexto venezolano obliga a situarse y a asumir posturas éticas, además de definir con claridad las aspiraciones, las finalidades y los horizontes a la hora de hacer teología. Este contexto demanda un quehacer teológico más autónomo, más criollo, más nacional; sin que este quehacer se reduzca a la localidad. La autoctonía y la autonomía pueden ser valores que orienten la educación teológica en nuestros países.

Cuando hablamos de opciones de valores y de finalidades estamos hablando de personas que son las que ponen en práctica estos valores y procuran realizar estas finalidades. Los valores no operan en abstracto se encarnan en actores sociales concretos. Las utopías o las finalidades no se realizan de inmediato se dilatan, se cumplen cuando estén dadas esas condiciones, y en ese esperar realizarlas se plantea considerar lo posible y lo factible. Por ejemplo creemos en la no-discriminación, en la justicia social, en la equidad y la libertad estos valores nos hacen reaccionar ante la pobreza y el racismo antinegro y la discriminación indígena y hacia la mujer. No es lo mismo enunciar los valores que definir sus contenidos. Desde la comunidad los valores se contextualizan y se reinterpretan, se actualizan. El problema no se reduce a enunciar la justicia, la libertad, la igualdad y la solidaridad en universal y en abstracto, sino hablar de estos valores como posibles en un momento dado y en lugar preciso para comunidades específicas.

### **Lo Ecuménico en la Educación Teológica**

Toda educación teológica contextual necesariamente conduce hacia el ecumenismo. Precisamente porque es en el contexto donde se evidencia la diversidad y las especificidades que nos diferencian. Lo natural es ser diferente. Desde esta perspectiva lo ecuménico constituye la armonía con lo diferente y lo distinto, adquiriendo entonces un carácter de complementariedad, resaltando la especificidad y la particularidad de cada contexto en conexión con una realidad mayor, sin desconocer la pluralidad y la autonomía de cada contexto. Lo ecuménico se traduce entonces en la *unidad en la diversidad*.

---

<sup>4</sup> Ver a Támez, "Cristología latinoamericana a la luz de los nuevos sujetos del quehacer teológico" en *Vida y Pensamiento. Jesucristo en América Latina*, (San José, UBL, 2000) Vol 20, N° 1, Págs. 91-104.

El planteamiento de la *unidad en la diversidad* se viene dando en América Latina desde hace ya varios años. Pero en el contexto venezolano recobra fuerza y pertinencia. Se trata de ser educado para la alteridad y para lo ecuménico. Es decir de aprender a elucidar y de hacer esfuerzos por descubrir, conocer y amar al otro en su diferencia radical. Ante los planteamientos de la globalización económica, la globalización de la guerra y la mundialización de un poder político que domine a escala planetaria el ecumenismo se presenta como una alternativa. Lo que se quiere es universalizar la pluralidad propia del género humano y establecer criterios que permitan relaciones humanas más justas y liberadoras. Esto implica la necesidad de afirmar la identidad, cambiar de actitud y convertirnos hacia el otro y la otra, con la finalidad de superar las contradicciones que obstaculizan la convivencia humana. Por eso, se hace urgente educar para lo ecuménico y unir esfuerzos para la construcción de una cultura de paz, del diálogo y la reconciliación.

El ecumenismo recuerda que todos somos uno y que la historia es resultado de la participación de todos y todas. Como señala Álvaro Márquez “ Todos somos uno y en esta unidad esta nuestro destino”, nuestro futuro y la posibilidad de cohabitar el *Oikos* en armonía con nuestra diversidad. La unidad tiene esa finalidad el estar al servicio de los pueblos y las gentes, unidos para la construcción del mundo alternativo. Esto implica educarse en libertad para la libertad, en paz para la paz, en la verdad para la verdad. En esto la educación teológica tiene mucho que aportar.

La experiencia ecuménica en Venezuela tiene ahora un sentido menos religioso, la convocatoria a la unidad no hace distinción entre los sectores que valoran la ciudadanía como factor de unidad. El espacio ecuménico en Venezuela se abre para dar participación no solo a las confesiones religiosas sino a todos aquellos que tienen la vocación para la libertad y la utopía de una sociedad que se construye, teniendo como base la tolerancia y el respeto a los derechos humanos. Podríamos decir que en Venezuela lo ecuménico vuelve a conseguir su carácter de movimiento, el encuentro espontáneo, sin mediaciones institucionales, de cristianos, de militantes de movimientos políticos y participantes de grupos populares con el propósito de articular esfuerzos y hacer alianza estratégica en la consecución de la paz, la libertad y la justicia. En el país se da la oportunidad para que el ecumenismo se revitalice y se le dé una nueva orientación, la transformación y el cambio también llegan a este nivel.

Lo ecuménico ha hecho visible los distintos rostro del pueblo: indígena, negro, mujer, mestizo, de niño y de anciano. El rostro ecuménico tiene muchos matices, es diverso y plural. También es un rostro pobre porque la mayoría de la gente pobre en América Latina son los indígenas, las mujeres, los negros y existen muchos niños abandonados en nuestras ciudades. Estos rostros además de hacerse visible están haciendo escuchar su voz y, además, están cambiando el contenido a las ciencias humanas: teología, sociología, la hermenéutica... En este sentido hacen propuestas alternas a los grandes relatos impuestos por la cultura occidental. La educación teológica ecuménica no se propone como un modelo que se impone sino que se construye desde las especificidades de las distintas historias, culturas, pueblos y personas.

### **Una experiencia de Educación Teológica Contextual: PACTO**

La aparición de nuevos paradigmas liberadores puede darle un nuevo rostro a la educación teológica, con nuevos contenidos y nuevas propuestas que sirven para darle un elemento renovador a la teología de la liberación en América Latina. En los inicios de esta teología lo urgente y lo prioritario era hacer una relectura crítica a la teología dominante, a la iglesia y a la realidad contemporánea. Esto se da al inicio de la teología de la liberación a finales de la década de los sesenta. Sin embargo, ya al pasar más de 25 años, es Jun Mo Sung quien señala que en la mayoría de los pensadores de

la teología de la Liberación se observa una incongruencia<sup>5</sup>. Incongruencia que actualmente tiene vigencia, entre los teóricos y las prácticas históricas por la liberación. Se evidencia por el vacío existente entre los contenidos del discurso teórico y las prácticas comunitarias referidas a los paradigmas originales que le dieron origen. Se evidencia en la ausencia del tema económico y los desafíos que éste conlleva, en los discursos de los teólogos de la liberación; en ocasiones, el tema se torna secundario y marginal. Por eso, el planteamiento de Sung va dirigido a la necesidad de revisar y retomar los paradigmas originales o reconstruir otros que respondan a los cambios de épocas y a las realidades actuales de las comunidades más pobres en América Latina.

Una de las razones de esta incongruencia, señala Jun Mo Sung, es la presencia de un problema de comunicación<sup>6</sup>, podemos añadir, de mediación pastoral y popular, entre los teóricos de la liberación y las praxis históricas por la liberación. Es decir, falta el puente que permita traducir los discursos de los teóricos de la liberación a la realidad de la gente en su cotidianidad. Sung insiste que las preguntas, los desafíos y las motivaciones para la reflexión de estos teólogos, no están llegando desde las prácticas históricas. Por eso, resultan extraños y con poca aplicabilidad en la comunidad. La teología de la liberación se encuentra en evolución y en transformación. En esta transición es necesario mantener sus ejes fundantes: la comunidad, la opción por las víctimas, la crítica ideológica al capitalismo y la ética de la economía de la vida concreta. El contexto de hoy en Venezuela puede servir para este propósito.

La opción por las víctimas y los pobres es un eje fundante que hay que mantener. Desde los pobres y en la especificidad de sus comunidades, se han venido desarrollando varios discursos liberadores, que cada vez más necesitan vincular la fe con la realidad social. En la actualidad, se habla de las teologías de la liberación: feminista, afroamericana, indígena y otras, como la de los ecologistas y las que surgen en los procesos nacionales de liberación. Ya en Venezuela se habla de la teología Bolivariana de la liberación, es decir orientar el quehacer teológico teniendo como marco de referencia las ideas independentistas de Simón Bolívar, sobre todo aquellas que coinciden con las propuestas del Reino de Dios y el Evangelio de Jesucristo. Las víctimas continúan organizándose y generando procesos a los que articula una crítica teológica propia.

De esta manera retorna lo teológico al pueblo. Es decir, que la reflexión y el quehacer teológico se hacen desde la comunidad y para la comunidad. La teología en la actual coyuntura venezolana es patrimonio del pueblo, ya no es una labor o tarea exclusivamente de seminarios, institutos bíblicos, centros teológicos católicos o protestantes. El interés por la teología no es solo de religiosos, son muchos los profesionales interesados en los estudios teológicos, la teología esta llegando a los barrios, a las casas de familias, a las universidades y las organizaciones populares. Sin embargo, también hay en algunos sectores de la sociedad, como comerciantes y políticos conservadores, en usar el discurso teológico para deslegitimar el proceso de cambio que se vive en Venezuela. Por eso, el discernimiento de la teología liberadora de una teología cómplice de injusticia y la dominación es un desafío a asumir en el quehacer teológico en Venezuela.

La educación teológica en Venezuela tiene que valorar el carácter autóctono y local de lo teológico en conexión a un proyecto más universal en América Latina. Es la oportunidad de aprovechar el *Kairos* del cambio para resaltar la venezolanidad de la teología latinoamericana de la liberación. Lo autóctono en lo teológico da originalidad y descubre las raíces populares de la teología, necesario para dar el carácter de pertinencia y de pertenencia, a un pueblo, a la teología. El discurso teológico no es propiedad exclusiva de la cultura de occidente, tiene presencia milenaria en los pueblos de África y América latina. Y Desde la resistencia de los pueblos pobres se ha venido elaborando una

---

<sup>5</sup> Sung, Jun Mo. *Economía, tema ausente en la teología de la liberación*. (San José, DEI, 1994) pp. 81-88

<sup>6</sup> Sung, Jun Mo. *Economía, tema ausente en la teología de la liberación*. Op. Cit p.93

teología distinta que tiene sus orígenes y tiene continuidad, que se mantiene por las aspiraciones y sueños de estos pueblos. Por eso aunque hablemos de una teología bolivariana de la liberación, esta no se reduce solo a Venezuela, en su dimensión integracionista y de un proyecto que va más allá de lo nacional alcanza a otros pueblos.

En esta realidad venezolana la cooperación y el compartir son prácticas que se valoran en las comunidades desposeídas, y adquieren un significado valioso desde la perspectiva de la fe y la práctica del evangelio de Jesucristo. El compartir es una vocación divina y natural. Es una vocación divina, porque la imagen que tenemos de Dios es la del padre proveedor de los recursos que necesitamos para vivir. Él constituye un paradigma para la comunidad de las víctimas, que en su lucha tenaz por sobrevivir, deben compartir lo poco que tienen en sus grupos pequeños con comunidades más grandes. Así, todos y todas podrán tener lo suficiente. Dios provee para que podamos dar y compartir, y para aprender a compartirnos en el dar. Porque el dar para Dios va más allá del hecho de repartir bienes. El dar exige desprendimiento y la comprensión de que nuestras vidas dependen de la gracia de Dios. El amor y la propiedad exclusiva de las riquezas no son compatibles en la perspectiva divina. El compartir es una vocación natural, porque la naturaleza está diseñada por parte de Dios, para ser fuente de provisión de alimentos para todos y todas<sup>7</sup>. Lo natural es compartir y no acumular.

Si el compartir tiene como una de sus finalidades erradicar los males de las víctimas entonces creemos conveniente tomar en cuenta los siguientes aspectos a la hora de decidir y accionar la cooperación:

La *etnia*, que representa un eje transversal, una característica que puede observarse con facilidad, en todas las comunidades de los desposeídos. Los afrodescendientes y los indígenas, en cualquier país o continente, representan los grupos más necesitados. Insistimos en dejar claro que la pobreza tiene rostro negro, indígena y femenino. Estas comunidades son las que más sufren los males generados por la globalización neoliberal. Ellas hacen visible los efectos inhumanos del capitalismo. Los negros y los indígenas son los más pobres entre los pobres en América latina. Por lo tanto, el criterio étnico puede orientar y despertar el movernos a misericordia en decisiones y acciones concretas.

La *educación teológica alternativa* porque ofrece puntos de vista, perspectivas, que sirven para despertar la conciencia sobre la necesidad de la liberación y la restauración social. La educación teológica alternativa es transformadora, contracultura y contracorriente. Ella promueve valores que son antagónicos a los valores que se promueven en la globalización. La educación teológica alternativa advierte que la evangelización y la pastoral no vienen desde afuera de la comunidad de los pobres, sino que éstas se dan dentro de ella. Los diferentes rostros de la pobreza constituyen una fuente proveedora de insumos, de experiencias y propuestas para la teología en América latina. Así, la teología se renueva y adquiere nuevos contenidos para la eclesiología, la cristología, la hermenéutica y la pastoral. Además la educación teológica representa para los negros e indígenas un espacio de formación y de preparación para las personas indefensas, dándole una conciencia crítica y analítica, que siempre representa una amenaza para la sociedad neoliberal.

La perspectiva de *género* porque es un criterio que apunta a fortalecer las nuevas relaciones humanas y da nuevos significados a la feminidad, a la masculinidad y a la familia, desde la experiencia y la historia de los excluidos. En esta perspectiva siempre hay una invitación a reformular los planteamientos, a resolver nuevos problemas y a explicar las cosas con un nuevo lenguaje. El género es una categoría inclusiva y comunitaria, que orienta a aplicar los correctivos que demandan

---

<sup>7</sup> El ejemplo que Jesucristo da con relación a las aves del campo que no siembran ni cosechan y siempre tienen alimento. *Santa Biblia. Nueva versión internacional*, Mateo 6: 25-34.

las relaciones de armonía que deben darse entre todos y todas. La perspectiva de género es un recurso excelente para hacer relectura de la realidad, de la convivencia humana, de la pastoral y de la educación teológica.

En Venezuela, la educación teológica que existía para la década de los años 70 y 80 se circunscribía a institutos bíblicos dependientes de iglesias denominacionales. Estos institutos preparaban a los pastores que exigía la iglesia denominacional, tenían sistema de residencia de tres a cinco años y sus estudiantes eran generalmente varones, aunque a veces ofrecían estudios para mujeres (en recintos separados). Así, la Iglesia Libre de Venezuela, la Iglesia Asambleas de Dios, la Asociación de Iglesias Evangélicas de Oriente, la Organización Venezolana de Iglesias Cristianas Evangélicas, cada una mantenía su propio instituto para la formación pastoral de sus dirigentes, con una capacitación fundamentalista y denominacionalista. El Programa Abierto de Capacitación Teológica surge ante la necesidad de establecer en el país modelos de educación teológica que represente una opción distinta a esta educación teológica denominacionalista, centralista y antiecuménica que existían en Venezuela desde hacía ya varios años.

El Programa Abierto de Capacitación Teológica (PACTO) viene existiendo en el país como propuesta desde hace ya 17 años. Desde ese tiempo se viene ofreciendo, haciendo un modelo de educación teológica alternativo que promueva cambios en lo teológico sino también en la pastoral y en la forma de concebir la comunidad, la iglesia, la misión y la evangelización. El modelo ha sido implementado a través de círculos de estudios y constituyendo redes a escala nacional. Modelo que en el actual contexto venezolano, de transformaciones y cambios significativos, adquiere vigencia y pertinencia. Precisamente porque PACTO es un espacio educativo y de formación desde el cual se capacita al liderazgo y a las iglesias que tienen en común: 1) una práctica comunitaria liberadora, 2) un horizonte teológico latinoamericano y 3) un compromiso claro con el Dios de la vida y con su pueblo. Desde PACTO se ha dado importancia al quehacer teológico ecuménico, crítico y contextual. Y así responder y atender las necesidades de formación de las iglesias y la comunidad nacional en las áreas de predicación, Biblia, estudios de la mujer, educación cristiana, culto cristiano y otras de interés eclesial y social.

El modelo educativo que planteamos es alternativo, diversificado y abierto, que brinda la oportunidad de combinar y valorar el estudio presencial comunitario con el estudio personal a distancia, sin tener que abandonar las obligaciones eclesiales o sitios de trabajo. Combina además aspectos teóricos y prácticos que benefician en forma inmediata a las iglesias y comunidades de fe. Este modelo se sustenta teóricamente en los aportes de la educación liberadora y por la libertad. La educación es un elemento imprescindible de transformación social. Es decir, este modelo de educación teológica forma parte de un esquema educativo que implica cambios, exige creatividad, demanda una revisión y evaluación continua, e invita a reenfocar la pertinencia, el sentido y el significado de nuestros ministerios, de nuestras opciones, de nuestras utopías y de nuestras acciones. Este es el desafío permanente a quienes promueven la educación teológica alternativa en América latina. En este modelo, los procedimientos académicos, las modalidades de los cursos, los programas y perfiles curriculares, la normativa académica no constituyen fórmulas definitivas. Las generaciones evolucionan aceleradamente, por lo que debe haber siempre apertura a la renovación. Por eso, si las circunstancias lo aconsejan, se deben adaptar nuevos métodos de trabajo, dar lugar a distintas alternativas y opciones que tiendan a favorecer a la comunidad eclesial a quien servimos.

En PACTO se está claro que en los momentos actuales en Venezuela existen grandes desafíos y oportunidades para la educación teológica. Es una oportunidad para reafirmar las opciones a favor de las víctimas, para cristalizar los caminos de paz y de justicia, es el tiempo crear espacios de participación y reflexión para dirimir conflictos eclesiales y sociales y para generar procesos de construcción de nuevas ciudadanías, de tolerancia y respeto a la dignidad humana. Estamos en el tiempo de proclamar el año agradable del Señor. ¡Amén!

## THE CONTEXTUAL AND ECUMENICAL IN VENEZUELAN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION<sup>1</sup>

*Romer Portillo*

### Introduction

Those who promote theological education in Latin America understand that in these times of crisis and hope for our people, theologies and theologians are burdened with unavoidable demands: the contextual, the ecumenical and the educational on a horizon of freedom representing a few of these demands. These theological demands are not isolated, but they interconnect and complement each other on a level of complexity proper to the reality, which we experience in Abya-Yala, a reality of survival and the search for alternatives to neo-liberalism. We are referring to complexity and complementarity.<sup>2</sup> It is from these perspectives that we are able to integrate thoroughly the simplest forms of living and theological thinking with social reality. They take into account both, that which is individual and that which is diverse with the purpose of complementing each other. For example, complexity is reflected in our daily living when actions performed therein are not programmed. Each of us performs various daily roles that, in the context of an alternative model of theological education, do not pass by inadvertently. We are fathers and mothers, husbands and wives, church members, employed or unemployed; in other words, we all play various roles that require activities and also demand commitment. We must learn to combine this social and daily complexity with contextual and ecumenical theological education. This yields a challenge for those who promote alternative models in theological education.

As people of God our goals and aspirations are linked to this complexity. The aspirations we possess as a church provide the orientation and direction of knowledge and theological tasks, as well as of other disciplines such as teaching and sociology. In this sense all human knowledge is placed at the service of the objectives that the Kingdom of God inspires in communities, be these ecclesial or not. This allows us to affirm that theological education must: 1) provide visibility and viability for the kingdom of God here and now; 2) contribute to the creation of the new human being (male and female), 3) promote a spirituality that highlights the values of the Gospel of Christ. This is a spirituality that discovers the divine in the human and the human in God, a spirituality that resists evil and promotes personal and collective growth. These objectives are also motivated by the fulfillment of alternatives for the survival of many of projects and movements. Among these are the programs of alternative theological education in Abya-Yala, which from their beginnings have opted for accompanying the poor in their fight for the defense of life in all its concrete dimensions.

Taking into account these reflections, we will now approach the subject of this document: *The Contextual and the Ecumenical in Venezuelan Theological Education*. Since we are dealing with contextual theological education, we will briefly analyze the Venezuelan reality emphasizing how it constitutes a source of paradigms, criteria and fresh values for theology in Latin America. We will also consider the alternative aspects of theological education as a proposal for the formation of a just society, one that is inclusive, free and without discrimination. Then we will analyze the ecumenical aspect of theological education, defining this as harmony between the different and the distinct, and how to call all to participate, to liberate, to restore and defend the OIKOS of God, whose house is also ours. Finally, as a concrete example of the subject we are discussing, we will study the Venezuelan experience as a model of contextual theological education through its Open Theological Training Program (PACTO).

---

<sup>1</sup> Translated by Elisabeth Cook (Universidad Bíblica Latinoamericana)

<sup>2</sup> Concerning the ideas of complexity we recommend the contributions of Edgar Morin, *Introducción al pensamiento complejo*. Traducción de Marcelo Pakman (Barcelona, Gedisa, 2da Edic. 1998) págs 111-119.

### **Brief Consideration of the Venezuelan Reality**

We in Venezuela are experiencing historic moments that are worth considering. This country has undergone events, changes and transformations that should be analyzed and studied with the goal of contributing to an understanding of new models of society and of being a nation. In this decade Venezuela constitutes a reference point for processes of significant change, not just political, but in valuable areas that up to this moment have been ignored in the construction of the society that all of us desire. One of the changes that have made the greatest impact is the Constitution of 1999. The Constitution represents not only a book of principles that promotes harmonious coexistence among the citizens of Venezuela, but it is the result of a number of factors that combined to form the proposal for a new country, a new state and a new social-economic model distinct from the neo-liberal.

One of the factors that promote change is the recognition of the *autochthonous power* that resides in the popular majority. This power was exercised in the Constituent assembly, elected by popular majority, and in the approval referendum of the 1999 Constitution. It was also exercised when, at the demand of the poorest communities, which in Venezuela represent a high percentage of the population, the constitutional thread was picked up again after having been broken by a coup d'état led by national and international groups against President Hugo Chavez Frías and his bolivarian liberation project. The Constitution, a by-product of autochthonous power, reminds and reveals to the populace the power that resides within them. It also suggests that in an organized way, and with the participation of everyone, it can be employed to fulfill dreams and hopes.

A new utopia is also presented in this Constitution: it is the leading role played by those traditionally disregarded sectors such as the indigenous, the blacks, women, peasants, the old and children. The indigenous peoples are given participation in national decision making just for being indigenous; their languages are recognized as official. The laws concerning land favor peasants with a distinct focus on production and distribution of land as a common good. The so-called bolivarian schools have been designed to benefit children of low-income families in a whole and complete way. The alternative economic proposal and micro credits benefit women, small businesses and those who organize themselves into cooperatives.

All this is done under an ideological orientation that values the ideas of Simon Bolivar, the Liberator, in bolivarian thinking. This helps us to enhance our appreciation of the national and the indigenous. The bolivarian current is the ideological and theoretical reference point that forms the foundation for the present national project in this country. The indigenous and the national are two principles that are contrast with the neo-liberal approach of globalization. Up until the present, this bolivarian thinking has been an important theoretical reference; however, the practical aspects of this doctrine have surprised many.<sup>3</sup> From this standpoint a fourth public power called moral power is being established in Venezuela. This perspective insists that providing happiness for all people, particularly the poor must be the ultimate goal of government systems. From this perspective the integration of Latin America is insisted upon as an emancipating project.

The valuing of the autochthonous power and the proposal for a new bolivarian ideological framework serves as the bases for the transformation process in the political arena as well as the economic sphere. It makes evident in Venezuela its incompatibility with neo-liberal tendencies,

---

<sup>3</sup> Ignacio Ramonet, "Venezuela y el mundo hoy: La transformación de Venezuela, Una utopía posible? Available in: Correos para la EMANCIPACION (Argentina, [www.emancipacin.org](http://www.emancipacin.org), 2001) Year III, N° 102.

which generates social conflict and confrontations. One powerful confrontation occurred on the 11<sup>th</sup> of April of this year (2002): the coup d'état that caused a break in the constitutional continuity. Because of this, a number of disputes have come to the fore: 1) between the military of the armed forces and a small but radical sector of the so-called "civil society"; 2) between international financial sectors committed to neo-liberal economic groups and those supporting Venezuelan international policy who ally themselves with socialist type governments such as Cuba, Korea, China, 3) and between the mass social and communication media that are more and more partialized and in complicity with the neo-liberal sectors with respect to the proposal of the national bolivarian project. The most notorious clashes have occurred between the Venezuelan plutocracy who have benefited from oil dollars<sup>4</sup> for many years, and the poor who are the majority of the population and would benefit most from this opportunity. At present the country is in a state of permanent conflict, as the fundamental causes that generate these clashes have not yet disappeared.

Another important factor is the appearance of a new kind of spirituality, less ecclesial and more secular, a spirituality that urges us on to resistance and to life. At this moment most of the poor in Venezuela understand Martin Luther King's thought: "to *surrender means death, to resist means life.*" The constitutional emphasis, as well as some of the laws that support and benefit the poorest of the poor, harmonize with the gospel and are not in conflict with the Christian faith. This is looked upon favorably by grass-root ecumenical communities who have begun to see in this country room for religious diversity. Freedom of thought and respect for the dignity of persons produces an ecumenical spirituality that supports the process of democratic transformation taking place in Venezuela.

#### The Alternative in Theological Education

That which is alternative in theological education in Venezuela has to do with an educational model that instills in its citizens distinct values and principles that aid in the creation of a new humanity and a new society. The alternative does not consist in exchanging a traditional model for a new one, but rather transforming it into a project for a different world. Beside the methodological aspects, that which is alternative has to do with liberating and hope generating contents.

From this perspective, alternative theological education must be contextual, because the necessity for transformation is evident within the particulars of the context. The alternative declares to the world the changes we desire to achieve. For this reason we assert that theological education is not only essential for the formation of church leaders, which is a necessary task, but it is a necessity for society as well. In this way, theology returns to the people and the community in their diverse contexts and in this way it goes beyond purely academic elements, without ignoring their importance. It transcends religious bias by becoming ecumenical, because the principal preoccupation of education should be the *Oikos*, the universal home inhabited by all.

*Theological education is alternative* because it offers different points of view and perspectives that serve to awaken the conscience to the need for freedom and social restoration. It promotes values that are opposed to those promoted by globalization. Alternative theological education cautions that pastoral work and evangelization do not come from outside poor communities, but from within them. The different faces of poverty provide a source of experiences and proposals for theology in Latin America. In this way, theology is constantly renewing itself and acquiring new

---

<sup>4</sup> Jose Maria Abreu, "Para entender lo que ha pasado en Venezuela" (Quito, CLAI, 2002) N° 24, Dossier 3.

significance for ecclesiology, christology, hermeneutics and pastoral issues.<sup>5</sup> Theological education offers an opportunity for training and preparation for defenseless people, imparting a critical and analytical conscience, which constitutes a threat to neo-liberal societies.

We emphasize the fact that the Venezuelan context presents itself as a standard for values that reinforce the theological educational model in Latin America. For example, there are some that are already discussing the bolivarian theology of liberation. The reality that serves as context for the different forms of learning in our country must observe the transformation process occurring in Venezuela. In this sense, theology must offer its services to victim communities, to those that suffer injustice, and to the poorest. Theology is not an end unto itself, but an instrument for service to God, the church and the people. The present Venezuelan context must clarify if theology is serving oppressive and punitive educational models, or on the contrary, is adopting alternative and liberating models. The people want the outcome of theology to be liberation, and that this be a hermeneutic criteria for popular aspirations.

Due to the context in which we live, we know that there is no one exclusive theology, or *the theology*. There are diverse and multiple theological interpretations that at times are opposed to each other. The Venezuelan context compels us to establish ourselves and to take on ethical stances, as well as to clearly define our aspirations, our objectives and time frames when doing theology. This context demands a more independent theological obligation, more indigenous and more national, without reducing this duty to a specific locality. The indigenous and the autonomous are values that can potentially determine theological education in our countries.

When we speak of value options and objectives, we are referring to the persons who put into practice these values and strive to accomplish these objectives. These values do not operate in the abstract, but are personified by real social actors. Utopias and objectives are not reached immediately, but they are fulfilled when conditions are ripe. Contemplation of what is possible is considered in this anticipation for completeness. For example, we believe in non-discrimination, in social justice, in equality and liberty; for these values force us to react against poverty, anti-black racism, and discrimination against indigenous peoples and women. It is not the same to state values, as it is to define their substance. Values are contextualized and reinterpreted from within the community, and they are modernized. The problem is not reduced to asserting justice, liberty, equality and universal and abstract solidarity, but to discuss these as possible values at a specific time and place for particular communities.

### **Ecumenism in Theological Education**

All contextual theological education inevitably leads to ecumenism, precisely because it is within this context that diversity and the specificities that mark our differences manifest themselves. It is only natural to be different. From this perspective ecumenism constitutes the harmonious with the contrasting and distinct. It acquires a complementary character while emphasizing the specificities and particularities of each context in connection with a greater reality, without ignoring the plurality and autonomy of each context. Ecumenism is therefore defined as *unity in diversity*.

The establishment of this *unity in diversity* has been taking place in Latin America for a number of years. In the Venezuelan context, however, it is being revitalized and is gaining relevance. It has to do with being educated for alterity and ecumenism, learning to explain and striving to discover, getting to know and love another person with his or her fundamental differences. Ecumenism

---

<sup>5</sup> See Támez, "Cristología latinoamericana a la luz de los nuevos sujetos del quehacer teológico" in *Vida y pensamiento*. Jesucristo en América Latina (San José: UBL, 2000) Vol 20.1, pp.91-104.

presents itself as an alternative in the presence of the advances of economic globalization, the globalization of war, and the worldwide extension of a political power that dominates worldwide. It strives to universalize human plurality and establish standards that permit a more just and liberating relationship among humanity. This involves an affirmation of identity, a change of attitude and the conversion of one to the other with the goal of overcoming the contradictions that are a barrier to human coexistence. For this reason it becomes urgent to educate for ecumenism and to join forces to construct a culture of peace, of dialogue and reconciliation.

Ecumenism reminds us that we are all one, and that history is the result of everyone's participation. Alvaro Marquez notes "we are all one, and in this unity lies our destiny", our future and the possibility of coexisting with the *Oikos* in harmony with our diversity. The service to nations and individuals is the goal of this unity, to construct in unity an alternative world. This implies educating oneself in freedom for freedom, in peace for peace, and in truth for truth. Theological education has much to offer on this subject.

The ecumenical experience in Venezuela is now less religious. The summoning to unity does not distinguish between sectors that value its citizens as a unifying factor. Ecumenism in Venezuela has opened up to offer participation not only to religious confessions but also to all those with a calling for liberty and for the utopian society being built on a foundation of tolerance and respect for human rights. We could say that ecumenism in Venezuela has regained its personality as a movement of spontaneous meetings, without institutional meddling from Christians, political movements or participants of grass-root movements, for the purpose of joining forces and making strategic alliances in the procurement for peace, liberty and justice. Within the country there is an opportunity for ecumenism to revitalize and acquire a new orientation; changes also reach this level.

Ecumenism has manifested the different faces of the people: native, black, women, *mestizo*, children and the old. The face of ecumenism contains many shades, and it is diverse and abundant. It is also the face of poverty since most of the poor in Latin America are indigenous, black, women and the many abandoned children who live in our cities. These faces are not only becoming visible, but they are also being heard. They are transforming the human sciences: theology, sociology, and hermeneutics. At this level they are developing alternate proposals to the great narratives imposed upon them by western culture. Ecumenical theological education is not presented as an imposed model, but is constructed from within the particularities of distinct histories, cultures, peoples and individuals.

### **An Experience of Contextual Theological Education: PACTO**

The appearance of new liberating paradigms will give a new face to theological education, with fresh content and proposals that serve to infuse renewed energy into theological education in Latin America. When this theology emerged, the priorities and urgencies were focused on a critical analysis of the dominant theology, the church and contemporary reality. This was done at the beginnings of liberation theology at the end of the 1970's. However, after 25 years, Jun Mo Sung has pointed out an incongruity within the thinking of the majority of liberation theology theorists,<sup>6</sup> an incongruity is still valid among the theories and historical practices for liberation. The latter is evidenced by the gap between the content of theoretical statements and practices within the community, balanced against the original paradigms that gave birth to them. This is evident in the absence of an economic agenda and the challenges this implies. In the speeches of liberation theologians this subject at times becomes secondary and peripheral. For this reason the statement by Sung is aimed at the need for reviewing and rethinking the original paradigms or reconstructing others that respond to the changing times and to the present realities of the most poverty stricken communities in Latin America.

---

<sup>6</sup>Jun Mo Sung, *Economía, tema ausente en la teología de la liberación* (San José: DEI, 1994, pp.81-88).

One of the fundamental reasons for this incompatibility, notes Jun Mo Sung, is the presence of a communication<sup>7</sup> problem having to do with pastoral and popular mediation between liberation theorists and the historical praxis for liberation. In other words, a bridge is needed to translate the statements of liberation theorists into an individual's everyday reality. Sung insists that the questions, the challenges and the motivation for theological reflection are not originating from historical practices, and therefore appear strange and have limited applicability for communities. Evolution and transformation nurture liberation theology, and from within this transition it must maintain its essential nature which is: the community, victim's rights, an ideological criticism against capitalism and economic social values in favor of a materialistic outlook on life. The present context in Venezuela can serve this purpose.

The option for the victims and the poor is a fundamental principle that must be maintained. From the viewpoint of the poor and in the particular situations of their communities, a number of liberating discourses are emerging that increasingly need to link faith with social reality. Today we speak of liberation theologies (plural): feminist, Afro-American, indigenous and others such as ecological theologies and those that arise from national liberation processes. Already in Venezuela there is mention of a bolivarian theology of liberation. In other words, the theological task must be oriented within a framework of the independent ideas of Simon Bolivar, in particular those that coincide with the proposals of the plans of the Kingdom of God and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The victims continue to organize and generate processes that articulate an autochthonous critical theology.

In this way theology is returned to the people. In other words, reflection and theological tasks are performed from and for the community. Theology at Venezuela's present juncture is the heritage of the people, and no longer the exclusive task of seminaries, biblical institutes, Catholic and Protestant centers of theology. There are many professionals interested in theological studies; theology is penetrating the poorest neighborhoods, homes, universities and popular organizations. However, there are some sectors of society, which include merchants and political conservatives that use theological discourse to discredit Venezuela's current transformation process. For this reason, discerning between a liberating theology and a theology coupled with injustice and domination must be a challenge taken on within the theological framework in Venezuela.

Theological education in Venezuela must value the autochthonous and regional theological character in conjunction with an expanded universal project in Latin America. The opportunity is there to take advantage of the *Kairos* of change to emphasize the Venezuelan character of Latin American liberation theology. The autochthonous in theology brings forth originality and discovers the popular roots of theology, which is necessary for imparting a character of relevance and ownership to a population, to a theology. Theological discourse is not the sole property of western culture; it has had a millenary presence among the people of Africa and Latin America. A different kind of theology, with its own origins and continuity, has been developing as a result of the resistance of the poor. This theology preserves the aspirations and dreams of the people. For this reason even though we may speak about a bolivarian theology of liberation, it is not limited to only Venezuela. It is characterized by integration and reaches beyond the national boundaries to reach other peoples.

In this Venezuelan context cooperation and sharing are practices valued in dispossessed communities, and they acquire an elevated significance from the perspective of faith and the practice of the gospel of Christ. Sharing is a divine and natural calling. It is a divine calling because of the image we have of God, as a father who provides for our entire daily needs. God becomes an example for communities of victims, who in their fight for survival must share the little they possess in their small groups with larger communities. In this way each and everyone is able to have his or her needs satisfied. God provides so that we can give and share, and also learn to share from ourselves when

---

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.* p.93.

giving. Giving to God signifies more than the action of handing out goods. Giving requires letting go, and an understanding that our lives depend on the grace of God. Love and the exclusive ownership of riches are not compatible in the divine perspective. Sharing is a natural calling because our nature was created by God to be a source of sustenance for all.<sup>8</sup> It is natural to share, not to accumulate.

If eradicating the ailments of the victim is one of the objectives of sharing, then we think it convenient to take into account the following aspects when deciding for and initiating cooperation:

*Ethnicity*, a transversal theme, is a characteristic that can be easily observed throughout all dispossessed communities. The most impoverished groups in all countries or continents are Afro-Americans and indigenous peoples. We insist that blacks, the indigenous and women represent the faces of poverty. These are the communities who suffer most from the evils generated by neo-liberal globalization. These communities manifest the inhuman effects of capitalization. The blacks and the indigenous are the poorest among the poor in Latin America. For this reason an ethnic viewpoint may orient and awaken us to mercy in the concrete decisions and actions we perform.

*Alternative theological education* offers points of view, perspectives, that serve to awaken the conscience about the necessity for liberation and social restoration. Alternative theological education transforms, because it is counterculture and goes against the current. It promotes values opposed to those promoted by globalization. Alternative theological education cautions that evangelization and pastoral work do not come from outside the communities of the poor, but on the contrary, they occur within them. The different faces of poverty constitute a source of nourishment, experiences and proposals for theology in Latin America. In this way, theology is renewing itself and acquiring new relevance for eschatology, Christology, hermeneutics and pastoral work.

Furthermore, theological education provides blacks, indigenous peoples and others who are defenseless with an opportunity for training and preparation, developing their analytical and critical conscience, which is always a threat to a neo-liberal society.

The *gender* perspective, because it is an approach that strengthens human relations, gives new meanings to femininity, masculinity and the family, from the experience and history of the excluded. There is always a motivation from within this perspective to reformulate approaches, solve new problems and define things in a new language. The gender category is inclusive and community oriented, and it orients the application of the solutions that are necessary for a harmonious relation among all people. The gender perspective is an excellent resource for reanalyzing reality, human relations, pastoral work and theological education.

Theological education in Venezuela in the 1970's and 1980's was restricted to Bible institutes subject to denominational churches. These institutes trained only those pastors approved by the denominational church. The system was residential, usually lasting three to five years. Most students were men, although classes were occasionally offered to women in separate classrooms. In this way the Free Church of Venezuela, the Assemblies of God Church, the Association of Eastern Evangelical Churches and the Venezuelan Organization of Evangelical Christian Churches maintained independent institutes for the pastoral training of their leaders, training them under a fundamentalist and denominational point of view. The Open Program for Theological Training emerged from the need to establish in the country a model of theological educational that provides an alternative to those denominational, centralizing and anti-ecumenical tendencies that had existed in Venezuela for many years.

---

<sup>8</sup>The example that Jesus gave concerning the birds of the field that don't plant or harvest and always have their needs met. Matthew 6.25-34.

The Open Program for Theological Training (PACTO) has been functioning in this country for seventeen years. From its beginnings it has been offering and constructing an alternative theological educational method that not only promotes changes in theological issues, but also in pastoral work and in ways of understanding the community, the church, its mission and evangelization. This method has been implemented on a national scale through a network of study groups. This model, in the current Venezuelan context of transformations and significant changes, acquires validity and relevance precisely because it (PACTO) is an educational and training opportunity for leaders and churches who possess the following in common: 1) a practice of community liberation, 2) a Latin American theological horizon and 3) a clear commitment to the God of life and to God's people. From within PACTO importance has been given to theological ecumenical tasks, critical and contextual. In this way they are responding and attending to the formative needs of churches and the national community in the areas of preaching, Bible, women studies, Christian education, Christian worship and other ecclesial and social interests.

The educational model we are proposing is alternative, diversified and open. It permits the integration of community study with personal distance education without the need to abandon church obligations or the work place. It combines theoretical and practical aspects that benefit churches and faith communities in an immediate way. This model is upheld theoretically by the contributions of a liberating education and freedom. Education is an indispensable element of social change. This model for theological educational forms part of an educational plan that requires change, demands creativity, revision and continued evaluation. It invites us to refocus the relevance, the meaning and significance of our ministries, as well as our options, utopias and actions. This is the permanent challenge for those promoting alternative theological education in Latin America. In this model, academic procedures, course types, programs, curricular profiles and the academic guidelines do not constitute definitive methods. Generations evolve rapidly, and for this reason renewal should always be embraced. Thus, if circumstances so dictate, new work methods should be adapted to make way for different alternatives and options that will favor the ecclesial community we serve.

PACTO clearly understands that presently there exist in Venezuela great challenges and opportunities for theological education. There is opportunity for reaffirming victim rights and for solidifying the paths to peace and justice. It is a time for creating opportunities for participation and reflection, to settle ecclesiastical and social disputes and generate the building process of new citizen groups, of tolerance and respect for human dignity. It is time to proclaim the year of our Lord. Amen!

*EASTERN AND CENTRAL EUROPE CONTEXT:  
PROBLEM OF THEOLOGICAL AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN  
THE 21st CENTURY*

*Vladimir Fedorov*

The concept “Eastern Europe” was born when after World War II ended in 1945, the continent Europe was divided into two major political and economic blocs—Communist nations in Eastern Europe and non-Communist countries in Western Europe. Between 1989 and 1991, however, the Eastern bloc broke up. Communist regimes surrendered power in most Eastern European countries. East and West Germany were unified. The Soviet Communist party collapsed, multilateral military and economic ties between Eastern Europe and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) were severed, and the USSR itself ceased to exist. The ideology of communistic atheism was no longer dominant in any E/C European countries. But rebirth of religious life and restoration of human rights were found to entail many problems, many challenges. Some countries which are not at the East of Europe, would not like to be called “Eastern”, and to escape ideological color, they prefer to call themselves Central European. No doubt, geographically they belong to the Central rather than Eastern Europe, but one should realize that the concept “Central and Eastern Europe” is not geographical, but, rather, ideological. It is a post-communist (or better, post-soviet) space. There are some cultural, confessional and historical factors that do not allow the borders of Central and Eastern Europe to be definitely clear. The one aspect is such a post-communistic phenomenon as the East Lands of Germany (the former GDR). This region is very specific. Eastern German lands are now included into the BRD and formally, they do not belong to the Eastern Europe. But in practice, the situation with religious life, with religious education is very close to the East European and they also need cooperation with former communistic countries, need common spiritual remedies, common educational projects. There are several institutions working for the East and Central Europe (the Institute of Diaspora in Leipzig for example or some chairs in the University of Halle and some others) in the former GDR.

Another question is connected with dominancy of Orthodoxy in many Eastern European countries. Today it is important to support and encourage close working relationships between and among Orthodox theological institutions in the region as well as information sharing and facilitating networking with other Orthodox theological institutions in other regions. In this sense, cooperation with Orthodox Church and institutions in Greece, with Orthodox theological institutions in Paris, Cambridge and Paris implies broadening the notion of “the region” beyond the geographical and political entity of Central and Eastern Europe.

Now it’s time to get rid of a regional minority complex, it is important to support the integration process in Europe, to introduce Eastern European Theological Institutions into the World system of theological institutions.

To develop the logic, the whole of Europe needs a common strategy for future development of the education with a special attention to problematic parts of the Europe. Each region of the world needs coordination of different ecumenical educational initiatives and support in activity, not only regions with weak economy.

### **Concrete E/C Europe contextual problems**

Special attention that should be given in Education is related to the following cultural, historical and political realities:

- a) the church life within the post-soviet and post-communist space has been going through turbulent renaissance over the recent decade. The arising problems are primarily rooted in deep secularization (or, rather atheization) of the society and in nearly complete lack of any system of religious education under the communist regime. Attempts at searching for and developing such a system bring about a lot of questions. It would be hardly realistic, and in no case adequate to reanimate the structures or resort to the methods that were the customs before the communist regimes took power. There are countries, e.g. Russia, in which the gap continued over seventy years. The society and the mass consciousness have essentially altered;
- b) while integration in Europe is in the full swing, the Eastern and Central European countries differ as to their involvement in the process. The political aspects relevant to the legal issues (liberty of conscience, teaching religion at state schools, participation of religious communities in programmes for moral education of the society, social service etc.) appeal to the Churches for making clear their position on the matters of social service, interaction among Churches in every European country, call for cooperation of the prevailing Churches and Churches that find themselves in a minority;
- c) the current situation in Eastern and Central Europe seems of interest for the Western Europe and even the world, since it is just in the region that new circumstances emerge, new legislations are brought for appraisal, new patterns of relationships between the Church and the state are being tried; these are not always copies of the West-European models; rather, they may serve examples to follow if reforms are likely to take place in the Western Europe;
- d) ecumenical trends have recently become weaker in the Eastern Europe, particularly, in the countries of the former U.S.S.R. Moreover, there have grown interstate and international tensions among the former "brother" republics. The Churches might prove helpful in reducing conflicts and overcoming the tensions, but adversely, for the time being, inter-Church conflicts (splits and other chronic strains) can only aggravate the tensions, both international and interstate;
- e) a peculiar religious situation developed in the region which turned out to be a sudden and aggressive overflow of new religious (and sometimes, pseudo-religious, i.e. commercial) movements in the early 90-ies which created a perplexing problem, both legal and missionary;
- f) the problems implicit in proselytism have acquired a special poignancy because of increasing activity of many Churches and religious communities. Actions of charismatic communities are especially noticeable;
- g) most urgent tasks that all the Eastern and Central European Churches are to do is, arousing in believers the spirit of mercy and love, encouraging charitable activities and interest in social ethics, and introducing these subjects in educational systems at different levels. Several generations of believers have grown and lived even under overwhelming state atheism when any social activities of the Church and even preaching charity were officially prohibited;

- h) topic of special importance related not only to human rights, but also to Christian peace-making, is the topic of diaspora. This phenomenon requires a thorough theological, religious-sociological and religious-political analysis. Programmes of “ecumenical theological education” is the best possible way fit to deal with the objective of making known and empathized the problems of diaspora. This phenomenon is akin to that of “Churches – minorities” whose status in democratic societies deserves special attention. As Christians, we are responsible not to let-lose the diversity of traditions and national cultures in the process of European integration, and resist negative manifestations of globalization;
- i) priorities in the Eastern and Central Europe should be the Balkan states and the Caucasus; ecumenical educational situation in the Baltic countries also merits special attention.

All the above – mentioned problems, and much more they entail make the mission of the Churches within their countries. “Internal mission” is the most pressing task that all the Churches of the region have in common. In practice, missionary activities of the Church should start with education of children and newly converted adults. It should also include active participation of Churches and missionary projects in all systems of education. So, specific to the region is an exceptional importance of missionary subjects in theological curricula and a need for a new contextual regional missiology. One of the most important aspects of the issue is a share of religious instruction in state educational institutions and prospects for inter-church collaboration for the purposes of religious education.

**The E/C European actual task: theological education as a part of mission and preparing for mission.**

If we understand Church mission not only in classical sense and see our missionary activity as a truly Christian approach to contemporary problems, whether they be economic, social, or pertaining to individual morals, we need to teach future priests and lay people to see Christian answers on various challenges of our changing world. Theological education has in this direction the highest responsibility. Today, theological education must be mission-oriented and should be considered a fundamental part of the mission of the Church.

The methods and character of mission must conform to the challenges of the contemporary world. The analyses of the needs of the Church as related to its mission and of the strategy and tactics of mission, as a subject of missiology, are a special theological discipline.

In Eastern Europe we see a lack of Church analytical missiological work. Churches need a thorough, unbiased study of the religious situation in their countries and in the world at large.

Missiology draws our attention to the fact that the world is constantly changing, thus presenting the Church with new problems and issues, the answers to which may be found in the Holy Scriptures. Yet for the world to pay attention and comprehend, it must be addressed in a language it can understand. Spiritual life demands unceasing activity, ascetic feats, and incessant renewal. Remaining faithful to the tradition of the Church means being successful in avoiding the Scylla of reformation, liberalism, and modernism and the Charybdis of fundamentalism, phariseism, and triumphalism. It is only possible to avoid these by cultivating a profound knowledge of the history and tradition of the Church, a sincere personal faith, and accepting the inner religious experiences, both personal and communal, which begin with penetrating the mysteries of the Church. All these qualities and abilities should be nurtured in theological institutions on different levels.

For many E/C countries, seeing the objectives of theological education not only in qualifying priests for theological seminaries, academies, and University departments but also in preparing laymen to become the servants of the Church, is a new concept. But all Churches in these countries need people who are working in both church and secular capacities as teachers of religion, religious journalists, librarians, museum keepers, publishers, etc.

### **Ecumenical vision of education as missionary perspective**

One of the most important challenges for E/C Europe today is an ecumenical cooperation in education and mission. The concrete and effective way of supporting missionary activity in each Church and of improving ecumenical understanding of our common task is to reorganize our theological education in a missiological perspective. Theological education seems nearly the last source where the Churches can resort to for missionary recruitment. Renewal of parochial life is only possible if there are eager and competent priests and believers that have been trained and instructed by their Church for working with parishioners, for pursuing new missionary tasks set by the Church. Doings of the WCC, so significant and important for the Christian world at large and for its member-Churches, cannot be interesting and meaningful for members of a Church unless the latter are continuously and intelligibly taught relevant subjects. Education is a priority everywhere nowadays, but first and foremost, in the countries – and in the Churches of the countries – that have recently started for a new life, where changing generations also means changing ideologies and world-outlooks.

The first step in this direction in Eastern Europe is to introduce “missiology” into our theological agenda, but even there, first it should be ecumenically oriented. Missiology can open an ecumenical perspective of Christian mission. Only a common Christian mission, a “shared mission” may meet the requirements of the new democratic open civil society, whose institution is nowadays declared by many E/C European countries. A common mission is likely to be the most fertile and efficient path. It is essential that on this path of joint efforts a value that has not before ranked among the missionary ones should be recognized, i.e. tolerance. A peaceful life is impossible in the multi-confessional and multi - religious world without preaching tolerance as a value, without cultivating a taste for tolerance. This concept can be differently defined and referred to, it can be treated as a liberal value, but anyhow, tolerance is one of the priorities in ecumenical education which should make it possible to interpret adequately the many aspects of mission, for example, the phenomenon of proselytism. It is noteworthy that in new Russia, the government approved a special state programme on fostering tolerance among the citizens of the country. For a society that has for years been living under a totalitarian regime, it means much. Were such education a reality, many inter-confessional and inter-religious conflicts might have been escaped. And, reversibly, steps towards preventing inter-confessional and inter-religious crises are beneficial for introducing tolerance as an absolute value.

### **Common mission in E/C Europe**

The need of mission in E/C Europe is motivated by points, which are listed above. Specific of religious situation in Russia for example is acute shortage of priests. The number of theological schools has grown considerably but there is lack of professors. There've been some reforms in theological education in Russia now. However, preparing qualified teachers and researchers in theology also requires a special missiological analysis and missionary strategy. Any mistake in theological education will be multiplied by the number of schools and students. Considering the lack of religious knowledge, the need for common Christian missionary action in the society is obvious. It is not only problem of lack of material resources but also intellectual resources. There is also the need of exchanging experience, even sad experience.

At the beginning of political changes in Eastern Europe, a very well-known missionary and a brilliant missiologist Lesslie Newbigin wrote: “Now that the pressure of Marxism on the greatest of the Orthodox churches has been lifted, I hope that the missionary thinking and action of the WCC will gain new strength and coherence from the Orthodox witness”<sup>1</sup>. However the ecumenical situation in Russia and other countries has become different, and there are now specific barriers to ecumenism, stumbling blocks, which don’t allow to develop cooperation<sup>2</sup>. Improving the ecumenical situation will be possible only through changing and improving atmosphere and curriculums in theological schools.

### **Ecumenical dimension in theological, religious and religious science education. Three aspects of the same task. Overcoming of fundamentalism**

Churches should pay equal attention to religious education and to religious science education in different higher schools as it does to the theological education. Religious education is connected very strongly with theological education, and it means the study of religion and religious knowledge and being prepared to let it bear fruit which thus, becomes available not just to priests or practising believers but to all. Religious education means working to bring society, even a multi-denominational, multi-religious or even largely atheistic society, if not quite as hostile as before, by degrees back to Christian values.

Coordination between theological, religious education and religious science education should work for destruction of false stereotypes and atheistic dogmas, which was rooted in the public consciousness even before the communist regime. This coordination is one responsibility of Churches. The interrelations of three dimensions of education are a social and cultural issue and at the same time a missiological issue. One of the aspects of the topic is “the place of religious education in state system of education”.

In every sphere of education it is possible to show (and we need do it) that conflicts between Christians do not arise out of confessional motives, but out of a clash between two types of mentality- fundamentalistic and creative (practically the same is true with reference to any inter-religious conflicts).

Fundamentalism is a temptation and a main obstacle to common mission. Applying the term “fundamentalism” to Orthodoxy perplexes many. Many think fundamentalism the underlying principle of Orthodoxy, which is strict and faithful in its attitude toward Holy Scriptures and Holy Tradition. Serious objections exist as to so wide a use of this word. Fundamentalism ardently stands for traditionalism while opposing modernism and liberalism. Characteristically, it opposes science, as long as its conclusions are not in keeping with the literal understanding of biblical descriptions of Creation, while maintaining that any non-fundamentalist stance precludes anyone’s becoming and being a real Christian. It has a tendency to decisively Christianize politics, mainly through the affirmation of moral values as the absolute norm of the society.

The concept of fundamentalism appeared within Protestantism, yet, as a phenomenon. It is also well known among both the Catholic and the Orthodox. The type of spirituality making a claim to being the only criteria of the Truth may be found anywhere. It would be incorrect to consider fundamentalism somewhat synonym to conservatism, traditionalism, rigorism, or integrism.

---

<sup>1</sup> A Word in Season, Perspectives on Christian World Missions, Saint Andrew Press Edinburgh, 1994, p. 200.

<sup>2</sup> But there are some projects and form of activities in this direction. See the materials of the CMS conference in Moscow “Together in Mission”, CMC, London, 2001.

At the first glance one may think that fundamentalists are the most active and traditionally pious preachers. Yet a careful observation will reveal that without creativity and the freedom of choice piousness is superficial and does not reach deep where personality is concerned. Usually, fundamentalism is exactly what prevents people remaining outside of the Church from trusting it or being open to fundamentally new ideas and becoming tolerant towards the values they are not used to. Yet the nature of Christianity at large is openness.

Overcoming fundamentalism will serve the interests of the society at large as the way towards its stronger unity, and life without distrust, nationalism, pseudo-patriotism, and obscurantism. Overcoming of fundamentalism is a spiritual way but Churches need to use all resources and especially theological education.

Special task for theological and religious education in E/C Europe is to include social topics in curricula of different theological schools. Leafing through Russian Orthodox Seminary programs of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, one will find basic courses in medicine or even bee-keeping. The introduction of disciplines in today's programs, such as, missiology, psychology, or Christian cultural studies is natural and of no wonder. Probably, there should also be basic courses in political science, finances, and law. At present, it is vital to offer special knowledge about AIDS, to prepare future priests for pastoral work with those infected and affected by HIV/AIDS pandemics.

The Eastern and Central European context as a general post-atheist context requires a thorough analysis not only for the sake of the countries involved, but also for the Western European countries and even other continents. The events that are taking place here today are of the utmost importance for the whole Christian world. It is a kind of experimentation *in vivo*, a laboratory of missionary activities. At the same time, it is an offer open to all the Christian Churches to contribute to reanimating the religious life within the space where by many believed it to be unable to influence social growth any longer. Today, there is a chance, and the challenge should be met ecumenically.

## **WOMEN'S CONTEXT ON RELIGIOUS REBIRTH IN MODERN RUSSIA: WITNESS FROM ST PETERSBURG**

*Marina Shishova*

There was a time when, as most Russian women, I never gave much thought to the problem of females in society. When circumstances forced me to ponder this issue, the first thing I thought was why others, especially my fellow women abroad, were so interested in it and why to me it meant so little. Why struggling for the rights of women in this world, so masculine in its many manifestations, had never occurred to me, despite my being always so active in public life? Then I tried to analyse my life experiences. I would now like to briefly share those thoughts with you.

I will begin with what is simple, the place of women in the public life of the country where I was born and brought up, in the Soviet Union. Everyone knows that “equality across the board” was among the central principles of bolshevism. Bolsheviks did their best to erase every individual feature and turn our people into a faceless mass. This was also true for gender, among other things. For decades, the image of the woman void of femininity, the masculine “comrade-in-arms” was replicated by Soviet propaganda. That comrade was supposed to be in no way inferior to men, even leading in traditionally masculine activities. What the ideologists of “barracks socialism” valued in a woman above all other things were her ability to participate in public production on equal terms. Besides involving women in production, the Soviet regime was busy emancipating them. Women became literate, they were readily admitted to universities, and they could vote and be elected to the positions of power up to the Supreme Council of the USSR. The myth of the emancipated woman was the most exploited by official propaganda because it was the emotion-reinforced version of the myth concerning the freedom of the Soviet man at large. The whole country was made aware of the achievements of women-exemplary-workers, including those engaged in the most physically strenuous work. We became used to the sight of women digging earth, rolling wheelbarrows, driving tractors, or laying rails. Also important was a large demographic misbalance, there being far less men than women. Many men died in revolutions, prison camps and wars. In the first half of the 20th century, the country lost dozens of millions of men, so women carried all the burdens of life. This resulted in what researchers call “the fundamental disruption of gender stereotype”, which occurred everywhere throughout our culture, women being hyperactive, men passive and infantile. In the meantime, the outlook on the relationship between the sexes as hierarchical still remains predominant in our society. This situation is paradoxical. Most sociological polls reflect there being a discrepancy between our notions and reality. The real consequence of the combination of the archaic gender stereotypes and communist propaganda was the forming in public consciousness of two polar images of the woman. On the one hand, there was the Slavic image of Mother-Earth or simply mother fully devoted to caring about her patriarchal husband and their children. On the other hand, there was the modern woman involved in public life on equal terms with the man. Nancy Reece, an American ethnographer, was surprisingly to the point when writing, “It is totally obvious that Russia’s women are by far more demanding to themselves than to men. The Russian woman is forced to perform ‘double, triple or manifold’, being ‘the Jack of all trades’. She will turn herself inside out trying to be always and everywhere on time”.<sup>1</sup> Such is the situation in our society.

What can I say about the situation in the Church? It is just as paradoxical. On the one hand, women are not allowed to do what men can do in the Church. They are not admitted as members of the clergy, not allowed in the altar, cannot preach (1 Corinth. 14.34). Priests admit that “Women in

---

<sup>1</sup> Nancy Reece, “Gender Stereotypes in Russian Society as Seen by an American Ethnographer”, in *Ethnographical Review* No. 5, 1994.

church are often given the roles of housemaids, cooks or cleaners. This is because men first assigned these roles to their mothers, wives, then to all women”<sup>2</sup>.

On the other hand, it is known that women played a key role saving the Church during its worst time, the years of the Soviet regime. There is no way to exhaustively recall everything. I will give a number of examples. It is known for a fact that mostly women rose to the defence of sacred relics and resisted the closing of churches and the confiscation of church valuables in 1920s and 1930s. In those years, many countryside churches were not closed only because their wardens were women who categorically refused to give up church door keys to district soviet representatives. In 1930s, despite their fear, for it was very dangerous, women brought Sacred Gifts they were entrusted with by priests to prisoners and exiles. This happened very often.

In 1960s, during Khrushchev’s persecution of believers, and in 1970s, practically women alone attended prayer services. According to archpriest Vitaly Borovoi, “Women stood firm and saved the Church. It was not priests who preserved it. Priests served the Church, often at the price of their lives. Confessors, they became martyrs. But it was this iron guard who needed to pray and serve and who saved the Church. They will remain faithful to the end and the Church can depend on them”.<sup>3</sup> I would like you to notice this expression, “the iron guard”. In any other cultural context, it would have sounded strange if applied to women, but not in our cultural context.

What is it, the uniqueness of our historical destiny, our special national character or the tradition of our Church?

A little about the philosophical tradition: the place of the woman in Russian philosophy, especially the Russian religious philosophy of the Silver Age<sup>4</sup>, is also unique. Nowhere else, not in one single trend of the European tradition, so much attention has been paid to the woman and nowhere else the woman has ever had such significance as the outlook on the world is concerned.<sup>5</sup>

Fyodor Dostoyevsky said the spiritual perception of the Russian destiny could be found with the elders. In the meantime, the elders particularly worshipped the Holy Mother of God. St. Seraphim Sarovsky said the most important quality in the elders was mother-like love for people: “Be unto others like their mother”. They especially cared about nunneries. The elder Amvrosy founded a nunnery in Shamordin, where a thousand nuns lived. That monastery was known by its active charity. There were an orphanage, a sanctuary for persecuted fugitives, a hospital, a female nursing home, and a school preparing young girls for female professions. Amvrosy envisioned the nunnery as a place for educating Russian women. The two surprising personalities of the 19th century, the elder Amvrosy and St. Seraphim Sarovsky with his Diveyevo nunnery gave themselves to the spiritual upbringing of women. In his book, *The Woman and the Salvation of the World*, whose central question concerned the mission of the woman, Pavel Yevdokimov also wrote about spiritual motherhood.

Allow me to quote: “The woman psychologically and socially formed by the world is also formed by the mystery of her own nature. Is she just the sexual partner of the man and the mother of his children assisting him in his public life? Is there not an absolutely primary and obvious connection betraying the existence of a certain specifically feminine mystery?” He further continued: “There is no talk of making the woman into the ‘comrade’ or the manlike Amazon. On the other hand, women must not be used for ‘family life’ in the Church – in the wider sense. We are talking of a certain charismatic condition, something that the woman brings as a constructive element into holistic human reality”. So the truth as to the mission of the woman may be found not on family or ancestral level and not in the social sphere. “The truth is found on the spiritual level of charismas revealed in

---

<sup>2</sup> *Russian Women and the Orthodoxy*, Saint-Petersburg, 1996. P.185.

<sup>3</sup> Archpriest Vitaly Borovoi, *Laymen in the Church*, Moscow, 1996. P.52.

<sup>4</sup> It means the end of XIX and the beginning of XX century.

<sup>5</sup> At least, in the works by V. Solovyov, N. Berdyayev, V. Rosanov, etc..

the prototype of the nature of the female”. It does not matter if a woman procreates or remains celibate or is active politically or not. Important is her participation in creation while answering the Divine Fatherhood with human Motherhood. In the Orthodox prayers, the Mother of God is named the Elysium, the Gate of the Kingdom, or the Heavens. This is no lyricism. With these names the liturgical realism offers actual reality as the axis of history. Pavel Yevdokimov and other Russian philosophers and theologians believed that the more secular was a civilisation the more masculine, the more desperate and the further removed from true feminine origins it was. They also believed the woman was religious by her very nature and that religious was the metaphysical significance of that nature. Because of her religious structure, the nature is an act of life-giving integration, so only the woman can oppose the destruction and dehumanisation the modern masculine spirit retreats into. Nikolai Berdyayev wrote, “Allow women access to every sphere of life, to all the benefits of culture and let them be educated the way men are and to have political rights... Indeed, feminine interference in politics means the curbing of the power of politics. Then only the nature of the female becomes original and creative”.<sup>6</sup>

Now that the world seems to go crazy, tanks and bombs used to destroy terrorism, while instead just provoking it, and while the number of casualties keeps growing, one cannot but feel that what is female in life is being removed from it. I like very much the following words of Pavel Yevdokimov: “There was a time when the woman said, ‘Let it be so’. And there will be a time for the woman to say, “*Non, non sic futurum esse non possumus*”, which means ‘We can no longer go on this way”.

What shall we do in this situation? I can hardly wait for our discussions to begin, to hear about your impressions of the events and your thoughts. When speaking about the paradoxical nature of the situation existing both in the society and the Church, I did not give any answers, just asked questions. Speaking about actual activities, I believe that religious enlightenment and education are the most important areas where there is a serious need for feminine participation. For the most part, our clergy agree with this. Archpriest Vitaly Borovoi said, “Today, our clergy cannot handle this, being overloaded with services. To launch educational process the Church must use lay pedagogues. And those are mostly women. This is their mission, which is more important even than the mission of priests. Church used to have women missionaries. In this field, women grasp things easier than men. If prepared correctly, women will truly play the roles of apostles, of whom we just have several, while we need thousands and dozens of thousands apostolic women. I call laypersons apostolic not in the sense that they must continue the mission of Apostles, but in the sense that they should spread Christianity”.<sup>7</sup>

I will ask two more questions in this connection. First, how can the issues of women’s spirituality in our Christian culture be added to the programs of the existing educational system? Secondly, how is the topic *The Woman in the Church: Her Role and Mission, and her Charisma* is represented in theological and religious education? And how this representation can be enriched?

Going back to what Father Vitaly said, I will note that today that the notion of the *Apostolic Service of Laypersons* has entered theological consciousness not just in the Roman Catholic but also in the Orthodox Church. Now the topic of the apostolic service of women may become an important component of the theology of mission, that is, missiology. It would be useful not just to ponder what can be expected in this way from contemporary theological education for clergy and laypersons, but also to suggest exact ways, to find out what already exists yet needs to be developed further, and to understand how modern education can be enhanced to become adequate to the challenges of the new millennium.

---

<sup>6</sup> N. Berdyayev, *The Metaphysics of Sex and Love // Russian Eros or the Philosophy of Love in Russia*, Moscow, 1991, p. 252.

<sup>7</sup> Archpriest Vitaly Borovoi, *Laymen in the Church*, Moscow, 1996. P.56.

As I have noted, the topic *The Woman in the Church* is important for missiology. On the one hand, it may become a topic in moral theology. It may also take a special place in the course of agiography, which is regrettably missing from most theological schools. Surely, we could follow the Western standard and introduce the course of “feminist theology”. Yet today it is too early for that as concerns the Orthodox educational system. Besides, there is no such thing as our own Orthodox theology in anthropology or religious sociology.

The aspects of this topic are many, yet I will not stop at what I have mentioned. I will, once again, remember the words of Pavel Yevdokimov who said; “The woman will find herself in spiritual motherhood. Then, being essentially a new creation, she will give birth to God in the souls, which are empty”.

As an example of women Christian activity I would like to remember the seminar – *The Mission and Role of Women in Contemporary Church Life* – took place at the Inter-church Partnership “The Apostolic City – Nevsky Prospect” in St. Petersburg, on April 22. and 23. 2002. Its participants, 28 in all, were women from various parts of Russia representing the Russian Orthodox, the Roman Catholic, and the Evangelic Lutheran Churches and 5 members of the Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women.

The members of each Church presented their reports reflecting the history of the issue, traditional approaches to it, its content during Soviet and post-Soviet times, and the traditions of the Churches as concerned social and other services wherein the role of women was extremely important.

The discussion that followed revealed that women were highly active in the lives of the Churches represented at the seminar. The existence of a considerable number of projects wherein women from different Churches actively cooperated became evident. Two of the aspects of theological and religious education were paid special attention. They were women’s education as such and the participation and role of women in the educational process. Also discussed were conflicts and cooperation between Churches, wars, terrorism, slave trade, and violence. All present agreed that the special gifts the Lord bestowed on women were needed to resolve or alleviate these problems, and that this was not possible without female participation. The woman is the Spiritual Mother answering God’s fatherhood with human motherhood, the teacher and conciliator. Such are the special services the world needs the most at this time.

The participants concluded that all the topics they had discussed would only create public resonance if the discussion continued in families, schools, and at public gatherings.

Among the issues discussed, there was an important topic of the careful and respectful treatment of the traditions of any one Church and of those of the sister-Churches.

The members of the Initiative Group agree that:

- Special attention must be paid to the study of the contemporary Church, political and cultural situations in Eastern and Central Europe, that is post-communist territories;
- Acknowledge not only the existence of a special situation in Eastern Europe but also the existence of unity between Christian women in Eastern, Central, and Western Europe as concerns the understanding of the discussed problems and the necessity of cooperation between the participants of the female initiatives existing there.

The members of the Initiative Group stated they would undertake to do the following:

- Inform the leaders of the participating Churches of the outcome of the seminar and ask for their assessment of the contemplated program of cooperation;
- Clearly define the spheres and individual projects where effective ecumenical cooperation between women is possible;

- For the purposes of the aforesaid cooperation and in order to increase the effectiveness of the group's own programs to ask the leadership of the Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women to accept this Initiative Group as a collective member of the Forum;
- To develop suggestions as to the inclusion of the issues discussed at the seminar into various theological and secular educational programs. Suggested as one of the possible versions is the inclusion of the social and feminine issues in the course of missiology;
- To organize cooperation in educational projects with the educational team of the World Council of Churches (WCC) on the basis of the St. Petersburg office of the WCC's consultant on theological education in Eastern and Central Europe.

## **COMPARATIVE BIBLE STUDY. GENESIS 10-11: AN APPROACH FROM ARGENTINA**

*Néstor O. Míguez*

### **Setting the Context and method**

Before going into the Bible study, I would like to make some explanatory remarks. This presentation comes from a biblical scholar that works among indigenous people, at least several weeks a year. That has a double consequence: on one hand, that means that I have been challenged by the questions and experiences brought up by the interplay with the Qom people of the north of Argentina. On the other hand, my training at the academic level also brings in its own approach, with its load of questions and methods that cannot be ignored. Therefore, this is not an “aboriginal interpretation” of a biblical text, since I remain, notwithstanding my empathy with the aboriginal cause, a newcomer, and in that sense an outsider, to their cultures and ways of life. Rather, I bring an interpretation elicited in the more “professional” circle by the struggles of the aboriginal people of my country, as they strive to recover their land and to maintain their cultural identity. That is, though resonating an intercultural and intertextual approach to the biblical text, it is still the work of someone trained in the western tradition of biblical hermeneutics. My purpose here, among other things, is to show how this works, as an exercise of dialogue and mutual confrontation and enrichment.

This is part of an experience in recovering the identity and characteristics of an original culture through the features of another. It is not my purpose and aim here to go into a deep analysis of the advances, ambiguities and contradictions that are part of our project. But to say it briefly, the “evangelization” of the “indians” brought about the denial of their own identity, cultural traditions and world view (the use of the word “indians” to name the original inhabitants of what we now call “the Americas” is demonstrative of this). “Now that we are new creatures in Christ, the things of old should be put aside”, they were taught to say. “Now that we have salvation in Christ and expect His coming, we can not risk our eternal fate backsliding into the sorcery and idolatry of our ancestors. We should not care any more or struggle for our material being, but cling to our new spiritual realm. The struggle for land, organizations for legal rights and that kind of things mix with politics and are worldly dangers, which we should avoid embracing this new faith and accepting our lot in the sufferings of this world”. Since more than 90% of the Qom people were Christianized into this kind of message, cultural identity, the people’s organization and even the native language is endangered. Some of their more capable leaders (including many aboriginal pastors of the pentecostal and evangelical churches) have become aware of the destructive consequences of this kind of preaching. But at the same time they realize that a direct confrontation and total rejection of the Christian faith that most of the Qom people now share will only contribute to divide even more an already weakened people.

So the task is to undo the evil with the same tools used to do it. Since the Bible has become the authoritative Word, it is necessary to reopen the understanding and interpretation of the biblical message through a new reading of the text. Our challenge is to show that the way the Bible was read for them by the approach of the previous missionary vision can be enlarged and modified by a more profound reading, resorting to the biblical text as a whole, and paying due attention to the diversity and plurality in the text itself. In that manner the Bible message is a way to recover some of the denied dimensions of their culture, but also to empower their own myths and traditions under a new light. Our task has been that of facilitating the dialogue between the Qom people and the people of the Bible, trying to put aside, as much as possible, the presuppositions of the dominant biblical interpretation of the western culture. Through the authoritative word of the Bible there is a possibility of re-establishing the enduring validity of their own tradition, though modified by this

interaction; as also the “white culture” needs to be modified by the exchange. It is a task of building bridges, a two way avenue through which it is possible to come and go, to enrich the different cultures through the exchange and in that effort also to mobilize our understanding of our human pilgrimage. It is also about questioning rigid power structures and unilateral impositions of sense and meaning. We recognize it is a risky task, full of questions and traps. So far (we have been doing this already for about fifteen years now) it seems that we are collecting some positive fruits.

Some contents of the Bible message that we used to consider as its core become irrelevant in the situation. Others, that we regularly ignore, suddenly become utterly pertinent. Themes that seemed of secondary importance come into the focus of our attention. Texts that we normally bypassed as irrelevant acquire a new meaning, and others that seemed that could be interpreted in only one sense, become polisemic, and the “obvious” interpretations become dubious. The situation, the quest for a new validity of old struggles, and the differences in tradition and culture create new dimensions, pitch new shades, and compel to bring some nuance to the study of the text, realizing that here are things in the text that we have never noted before, and, even more curiously, some things that we always read are really not there. In that experience, the dialogue opens for us the pages of the Bible, and the Bible becomes a place of encounter. We recognize that this has not always been the experience of the use of the Bible in the missionary field.

Different methodological approaches are being used in this endeavor. Obviously, the comparison of biblical narratives with the Qom myths has helped to see the parallels. If the previous missionary theology had stressed the contrasts, we are now pointing to the coincidences. This has a double effect: on one hand, it permits to show that some elements of the biblical narratives were already there in their culture, perhaps told in another way or using different metaphors and imaginary, but they were part of the culture of the ancestors, so there is no need of a complete denial. Ancient tales were not totally demonic, but another way of processing the same basic human experience of God’s presence (Acts 14:16-17). On the other hand, it provides a way to overcome a fundamentalist reading of biblical narratives. In the comparison it becomes clear that many biblical texts use a language, which clearly resembles that of their own poems, legends and myths. So the idea that we find in Hebrew and Christian Scriptures things which are poetic, legendary and mythical becomes not the imposition of the learned against the simple, but a “matter of fact” conclusion of dealing with the diversity of “sacred” texts. And, out of their own worldview they know how to deal with mythical language better than with western positivism, and much better than western positivism (including fundamentalism) has done.

It is true that literalism has worked its way into that culture up to certain degree, but the fact that it is still a predominantly oral culture makes it more flexible. In the case of Qom people they had no written language until the second half of the XX Century<sup>1</sup>. Written word has an extraordinary power, because of its “magical” halo, since it came with a powerful invasion. But the literary has more a symbolic power than its content. What impacts on the Qom people is that it is written, more than what it says. This going into a written culture from an oral one creates, once again, a dual opportunity from a methodological point of view. One is the fact that something is written opens the door for the need for a reader to interpret, and, therefore for the acquisition of the tools to read and interpret. It also forces to translate, and in the exercise of translation, the need of interpretation becomes clear. How do you translate “king” in a culture that never had kings, but always an elder’s council? Or “shepherd” into the language of fishermen and hunters? The need to search for new

---

<sup>1</sup> The creation of a written language for Qom laq’taq, using the western Roman alphabet, was the work of Mennonite missionaries, in order to translate the Bible. The first Grammar and Lexicon are from 1970, and came from the hand of those missionaries. It circulates in a photocopied edition. A new revision is under way, now in the hands of a Qom team of the United Biblical Society.

metaphors into the native language clearly shows the limits of literalism. It also brings to the fore the dialectical diversity within “Qom laq’taq”, so some times more than one interpretation is needed. On the other hand, it creates a conscience of the possibilities, riches and limits of different cultures, and the relationship between language and worldview and the importance of the “vital worlds” for the understanding of any message. In that sense, and this has been recognized and stressed by the native leaders, the effort to translate and read the Bible in their own tongue has had as a by product an increase in the study and use of the local language.

The other issue is that, through the exercise of comparison, as they put in letters their own legends and myths, they discover that not every clan or tribe told the story the same way. What do we do? Make a mixture of the different versions? Put them together side by side? Select one and despise the others? But then those set aside will try to find their way into the story. So there is a need to recognize the diversity of ways the story has evolved and how the array of traditions mix, contradict, correct, supplement and explain one another. This extant experience in their own culture facilitates the discovery of the same process in Scripture. The elaborate analysis of the historic critical methods is simplified by their own experience, but, for the same reasons, the synthetic approach of canonical reading results necessary. It recognizes that the distinct versions are to be held together as an expression of a whole in plurality.

Obviously, we can point out many other ways in which this experience has influenced our biblical and theological framing. I have only highlighted these aspects because I will be using some of them in the following reading of the biblical text of Genesis 10-11.

### **Genesis 10-11: Family, language, land and nation**

It is my purpose to use these two chapters as the text to read from the different cultural approaches. I propose it as a test for intercultural reading because in my own experience it is one of those biblical passages whose interpretation I have most dramatically modified. I still have the notes of my first Pentecost Sermon, preached more than thirty years ago, in which I used the classical contrast of Babel and Pentecost. At that time my interpretation of Babel was based on my recent theological training. As I go through those early notes and read once again Von Rad’s commentary<sup>2</sup>, which I used at that time, I now realize the incredible ethnocentrism of that interpretation. I began to modify my reading when some years later, when recently appointed as professor in the Bible Department of ISEDET, I had to deal in a new way with the Babel story as an important text for the understanding of linguistics, as advisor, together with J. Severino Croatto, for the Master’s final paper of a visiting African student<sup>3</sup>. Working with him I began to realize that the issue of the imposition of “one language” is the problem that the text deals with, and the differentiation of tongues should not be read as God’s punishment but as a liberating act. But, when working with the Qom people, I posed other set of questions to the text; it demanded an even more radical change, which took me to read the Babel narrative within the framework of the preceding chapter and the ensuing genealogy. Probably it is not the last stage of my story with this text.

High criticism has dealt with this text separating Yahwistic (Y) and Priestly (P) traditions, and the genealogies from the Babel account. Then considered each part by itself, and gave a meaning to the different parts according to the questions of genre, historical setting and traditions. Within this reading tactics the genealogies had to deal with the Y attempt to show the link of the primeval history with the Abrahamic Covenant, while at the time of the formation of the P tradition it was incorporated with the purpose of understanding the situation of the nations that surround Israel. Gen 11:1-9 becomes an autonomous story with a theological consequence related to human Titanism as

---

<sup>2</sup> G. Von Rad: *Genesis. A Commentary*. The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1961. Original German edition 1956. In the following I have chosen to contrast with Von Rad because it was the most progressive European reading at that time. But it also shows clearly how ethnocentric can a progressive reading be.

<sup>3</sup> Juan Manuel Ekó Ekó Ada. *La torre de Babel. Signo de libertad en el plan salvífico de Yavé. Génesis 11:1-9*. ISEDET, Buenos Aires, 1991.

a sin against God. The interpretation that I am proposing is a quest to read the stories together, see them in their unity, and project their meaning as they are imbedded in the extant canonical rendering. The convergence of these traditions brought together the different interests and viewpoints and established a way of reading them together that must be respected. In our dialogue with peoples of other cultures we should respect the unity of the discourse in which they describe their worldview. Why should we proceed in a different way with the people that wrote our sacred text?

Gen 9 closes the story of Noah. Gen 10-11 links this major story, which contains a Covenant, with another major Covenant story, that of Abra(ha)m, that begins in Gen 12. The first verse of Gen 10 and last verses in Gen 11 act as hinges for the Scriptural context. But those chapters, that take us from the one single *surviving* family to the one single *elected* family is full of meaning in itself, because it has to give account of diversity. It is more than a list of nations, a story of Titanism and a family tree. It is a whole diagnosis of the dynamics of power in the issues of nation, land, family and language. All of them key issues in questions of culture and dominion, and certainly prominent in the debates concerning mission.

When we look at the distribution of the text as a whole at surface level, we find a genealogy enriched by two inserted stories, those of Gen 10:8-12 and 11:1-9. Both of these enlargements are narratives related by one common feature, that of Babel, in the land of Shinar. And both talk about power: Nimrod, the first to be a “mighty” man, and the city, tower and name of those who aspired to become heavenly. In the Bible, Babel/Babylon is a name related to oppressive and destructive power, from Genesis to Revelation, even if sometimes it becomes an instrument of God’s wrath. But the basic scope of the text, with the form of a genealogy, is more than that; it is the affirmation of some characteristics that form the idiosyncrasy of each people. And that should be taken into our analysis.

After the first list of Noah’s descendants (those of Japheth), the text brings an expression that becomes a blueprint for the following lists: “in their lands, with their own language, by their families, in their nations” (Gen 10:5b). The expression is repeated after the descendants of Ham (Gen 10:20) and Shem (Gen 10:32). But it also points to the fact that those names of the first list pertain to peoples that live in islands and the seashore (5a). Hence, the text not only points out to the fact that there are different names, but that each represent a singularity in their dwelling place, in the ways their families are conformed, in the language they speak and in the fashion, symbols and structures through which they organize themselves as nations, as political entities. The relationship of the different cultures to their geographic environment and the way they organize the use of their territory (and indirectly, their economy) is also considered.

Though all coming out of a single seed, plurality is recognized as they spread through the earth. The specifying of family, land, tongue and nation is not fortuitous: they constitute the claim of major issues of identity. They specify the way humanity is organized: through family ties, a given territory<sup>4</sup>, a linguistic community, and the relational traditions that constitute a people, a nation. Take away any one of these, and the others will weaken, and sooner or later tend to disappear as well. In the experience of Israel, faith in the God of the ancestors, and the promise to be reestablished, became a force to hold through the times of peril in which one or more of these facts for survival were endangered or lost. The first 7 verses of the Book of Daniel also speak to this point as they tell

---

<sup>4</sup> In the Qom laq`taq there are no different concepts for land, earth and territory. They are the same. A land is the place where people live, but they live in that land because it provides a living. As different from other indigenous cultures of the Americas, they do not consider land to be a deity, but the creation of the Creative aspect of God. God is named *ñi`lotapeqná*, but as Creator God’s name is *Qartá*. God’s Spirits (plural) are the keepers of creation, and in that mood they are called *no`uet*. The missionaries thought that this was polytheism, but the Qom people explain that the one and only God receives different names according to the different actions God performs, to the different ways God makes Godself manifest. In that sense, it is clear that their experience is similar to that of the Hebrew Bible. The Spirits of God (cf. Rev. 4:5 and 5: 6), the *no`uet*, are in charge of dealing with the human beings to provide for their living. So the earth is not divided in territories, but in different realms of creation according to the different *no`uet* in charge. The peoples, then, form different groups according to their different activities, and the *no`uet* they have dealt with.

about of the loss of land, national identity symbols, language and family ties (the change of names<sup>5</sup>) and relates it with Babylon. This quotation is not at random. Because in the great text (the Bible as a whole), it helps us to look at what Babel/Babylon stands for.

The first interruption of the genealogical sequence is a side remark on the person of Nimrod and his doings. He is introduced as a son of Cush, and the first to become mighty on earth (Gen 10:8). He became a mighty hunter “in the face of God.” That expression allows for contradictory readings. It might be considered “at God’s sight,” but also “in confrontation with God.”<sup>6</sup> When we afterwards associate this expression with the idea that the people of Babel wanted to reach heaven, this second meaning may be considered with a high chance. But this hunter is also the first to construct a kingship. He becomes powerful not only as a hunter killing the animals<sup>7</sup>, and a mighty man in God’s face, but is also the first to establish political power over other human beings. And the beginning of his kingship is Babel at Shinar. And his second dwelling place is Assyria<sup>8</sup>, and there he builds Nineveh, another city with a history of cruel imperial dominion. The fact that Nimrod is named as son of Cush, whose land is traditionally placed in Africa, south of Egypt (or, in another version, south of the Arabian peninsula, in front of Egypt), but appears as a mighty hunter on a safari in places like Shinar and Assyria indicates someone who begins to covet and occupy other land than that of his family. So this insertion here anticipates the following one. It gives us the name and characteristics of the mythical king that builds Babel, of his political aspirations.

Now, this short story is set in the middle of the catalogue of founding fathers of different nations. Other peoples and nations and languages already exist. This is not a primeval story of a founding father and the situation of humanity as a totality, but the thrust of one human group among others. Nimrod is singled out in this whole story as the first to go out of his family land, to be able to use hunting and warfare weapons, to build imperial cities, to establish kingdoms, to become mighty in God’s face. And he is associated with the name of Babel.

Chapter 10 also gives us the names of the different caananite peoples and a hint of the land proper to the different families (vv. 16-19), and the descendants of Shem, and the fact that the land was distributed at a given time, that of Peleg (25). Contradictions in the description of peoples and land in this part of the text shows that we are confronted with a disputed land, and prepares the way for

---

<sup>5</sup> The obligation to change names to denote submission to other culture, and to create artificial family ties is abundantly exemplified in history: the case of Africans taken as slaves to North America, forced to be named after their owners family name is a very noted one. In the case of the aboriginal people in Argentina, they were compelled to register their children with “Christian” names, and use as family name that of the “legal” owner or white tenant of the land they inhabited. Only after the 1994 constitutional reform they were permitted to name their children with traditional names, though family names can only be changed through such arduous and costly judicial and bureaucratic formalities that it becomes impossible in practice.

<sup>6</sup> The rabbinical interpretation goes in the line of linking the name Nimrod to *marad*, “to rebel against”, as the prototype of every rebellion against God. While considering this as a dubious semantic possibility, J. Severino Croatto, does support the translation of *lif’ne* as “confronting God”. *Exilio y sobrevivencia. Tradiciones contraculturales en el Pentateuco. Comentario de Génesis 4:1-12:9*. Lumen, Buenos Aires, 1997, pp. 332-334.

<sup>7</sup> “Hunter”, here, should not be considered as the nomadic pickers and hunters, but warrior hunters, who exercise by hunting their abilities for battle. Nomadic hunters do not establish kingdoms nor build cities. See, Croatto, *Exilio...* pp.333-335 for the technical base for this interpretation.

<sup>8</sup> The interpretation of this text is ambiguous, since it can be read that the same Nimrod moved to build these other cities, or that Assur (other person) came out of the Nimrod clan to build those new cities.

the appearance of some new people that are not yet in this list. The land is described not only by their landmarks, but also as noted in the case of Japheth, by the characteristics of the land (the hills, in 10:30). We cannot go on now into the details of this passage, but it becomes meaningful for the interpretation of the final verses of Chapter 11. We should take notice that, in the canonical reading order, we already know all these happenings when we go into Chapter 11.

Chapter 11 begins with the so-called “Babel tower story”. From a textual approach an inclusion indicates what we should look for: “land” and “language” are in the opening and in the closing sentences (11:1 and 11:9). This is a text about land and language. But since we already had in the previous verses some notice about land and language as distributed through the earth, when we read that “all the land” had one way of naming things (11:1), we are aware that this is not something about the whole of humanity, as an undivided entity. It is not “all human beings”, but all of that dwelling place. It is, as said, a group that departed from their original land and moved towards the land of Shinar. It is about that people that the text talks. To try to give to this “coming from the east” any geographic coherence is to miss the point. What matters is a people on the move, from one land to another, a people that decides to build a city by using new technologies (v. 3), to reach heaven and to “have a name”. The forethought of being dispersed through the earth is already there (v. 4). So, if they are dispersed, they think, their name will still stand as a one name of a powerful and heavenly high city and people. So this is not a project of “titanism” of humanity as a whole, but of the quest for power and fame of a given group. The building of Babel, we are reminded, is the building of the first kingship. Is the hegemonic project of a people moving from their original land, and in the quest to impose their name on the whole face of the earth. All are to talk in the same way, name the things as they name it. They will be able to watch all over the earth, since their tower reaches heaven<sup>9</sup>. The text does not mention any intention of defying God, but of imposing their might to the rest of humanity.

But the story is also about building a city and a tower. In fact the emphasis is laid upon the city being built, a fortified city. This “nomadic” people that wandered into the plains of Shinar decided to change their way of life and establish a new type of society. The construction of this city and its fortress is also an expression of the will to exercise power. There is a double sense of exploitation. The city that oppressed the surrounding rural area, but also that creates a massive labor force in order to provide the bricks for such a huge construction. We should remember that building bricks for huge state buildings was the condition of slavery for the Hebrew people in Egypt. That city is the announced uprising of the State that controls and oppresses the peasants and the enslaved workers<sup>10</sup>.

Now, not because of feeling challenged, but in the will to know what these men are up to, God “descends”. While the Nimrod squad wants to climb to heaven, the God of heaven descends. God wants to know what is going on earth. Not here, or in any other part of the story, is God pictured as angry or in a punishing mood. The word and idea of punishment, which abounds in most commentaries, is not mentioned in the biblical text.<sup>11</sup> The figure is, rather, that of a caring God interested in the human creature. Human beings (and also divine beings –Gen 6:1-6) have already gone astray once, and the flood was necessary to stop them. God decides to be more watchful now and to intervene! So God descends to see the city and the tower. God reflects on what God sees, that this people are one and with the same language and determined to go on imposing that condition to the rest. Nowhere the text says that it is a consideration on humanity as a whole. It is a people (‘*am*, v. 6) in the quest of unifying all under their own rule.

---

<sup>9</sup> Milton Schwantes, in his article “La ciudad y la torre. Un estudio de Génesis 11:1-9” (in *Cristianismo y sociedad*, Ns. 69-70, 1981, p. 98) argues in favor of considering the Tower not a religious monument but a military fortress.

<sup>10</sup> For a full development of these interpretation see M. Scwantes, op. cit., pp. 95-101.

<sup>11</sup> Von Rad (among many others) says: “Therefore God resolves upon a punitive, but at the same time preventive, act...” (*Genesis...* p. 145). Similar expressions are repeated throughout the commentary to this story. Most of the Commentaries coincide in this point. Even in the work of Schwantes he uses this idea, thought towards the end of the article he slightly sees a more creative action in God’s intervention.

So God descends and decides to put an end to that project (v. 7). Now, in the biblical tradition, when God descends from heaven it is a liberative act. We never read that God comes down in order to punish. God does not need to move from heaven to punish. But God comes down to join the people to overcome oppression. So, for example, we read in Ex 3:8, when God comes down to deliver Israel from the Egyptians and take them again to their assigned land. The same can be said of the Christian tradition. God's Christ descends, not to punish but to save. So the fact that God comes down and confuses *their* language *there*, so that they could not understand each other, is not a punishment on the whole of humankind, not even a preventive act, but a liberating action, that checks the imperial ambition of that people assembled at Shinar, and in that act God ensures the possibility of freedom for other peoples, families, lands and tongues. It does not say that the different languages were created there, as western tradition reads. It says that God confused their language as a tool to put an end to the quest for power of those first conquerors. Even less can we affirm that "Now God breaks up the unity of mankind; he confuses their language so that men, who no longer understand one another, have to separate".<sup>12</sup> Humankind was already growing in different directions, nations were already formed, each had their land and tongue. And that does not deny a common origin, but it is the outcome of it. Chapter 11 comes after chapter 10. So when it comes to the building of Babel, by the Cushite Nimrod, God acts to ensure as much as possible the continuity of that previous human achievement of diversity, and interfere with the Nimrod/Babel desire to put everything under his/their sole kingship. So they were scattered before they could make a name to impose over the whole earth, and a unique language in which every nation should speak. So there is no possibility of one nation unifying the totality of land, or one language to be considered as the only "international" tongue. The unifying of all of earth and humanity under one king, and the imposition of one language is the sin, and diversity is not a punishment!

So, the multiplicity of languages is not the consequence of human sin and God's punishment, but the result of God's liberative action. In the same way, the unity of the land in which a people dwells, over against the conquest of others, the family ties and its ethnic symbols that gives them separate identities are not obstacles that hinder human plenitude, but means which serve to live a human life.

It is interesting to note that, in the last book of our Bible these topics reappear. The slaughtered lamb is dignified for it "ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation." (Rev 5:9; the same expression in 7:9; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6). Because of the characteristics of Apocalypses the land is not mentioned, but nevertheless not forgotten. Next verse (5:10) will say that all of them will reign over the earth. In the vision, Babylon, the great prostitute, is able to establish dominion on "people, multitudes, nations and tongues" some time before its end (17:1, 15). But finally, when John of Patmos sees the fall of Babylon he hears the voice from heaven that reminds that "for her sins are heaped high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities" (18:5). What Nimrod could not do initially with bricks, the Babylons of history have accomplished with their oppressive sins! God does not need to come down to punish the city. The angels from heaven proclaim the fall of the city. We have heard about the founding of the city, we also hear about its final destruction, for in that city "was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slaughtered on earth" (18:24). But when God descends from heaven, with the celestial Jerusalem, once again it is to liberate, to rescue the saints, to wipe their teary eyes, to end all suffering and death, to dwell among

---

<sup>12</sup> Von Rad, G. *Ibid.*, p. 145.

them as the God, for they are God's people (Rev 21:1-7). Nevertheless, even in the end nations are not denied or dismantled, but as they are saved they walk in the light of God, and their kings submit to the heavenly city all honor and glory (21:24).

As we return to Genesis for the last part of chapter 11, we come back to the genealogy. V. 10 takes us back to 10:21, the Semitic family. We can not follow now in detail the development of this family, but we can note some characteristics of this list: it does not speak of the different lands and languages, but concentrates more on family history. This roll comprises the times in which each forefather lived, and highlights the fact that they "had other sons and daughters" (vv. 13, 15, 17, 19, 21, 23, 25). Daughters were not mentioned in the previous lists. In v. 29 the names of the wives are also given. Women are now included in the list, yet in a secondary position. So now the emphasis is laid on establishing the importance of family ties. It also shows that the previous list does not close the catalogue of all existing peoples. Others are to be added, as the existence of Israel shows. And land and language will be given to them also. In that sense the following texts will have to deal with the struggle for land, and the coexistence of more than one people on the same place.

### Some implications for our context

It will be impossible to point out the many things implied in this approach to the text in the short time we have here. As people who are aware of the questions and problems posed by Christian missions and the use of the Bible in them, many here can surely signal more issues than I can do myself. Let me only mention a few points for the following debate:

- § The problem of land, distribution and preservation. Dominant urban cultures conceal the underlying problems of land. But they exploit surrounding territories, imposing their own economic needs on the people. Land is not only a location, a territory, but the dwelling place for peoples, who understand their world according to the characteristics and possibilities that each land offers. The conquest of land is a denial of other peoples, but not the only one. Imposing foreign ways of using and exploiting the land, breaking the relationship of a people with their environment is also a way to take away the land, even if they are held legally the owners. The problem of land is intrinsically related to the issues of family, language and people. The fact that they are enumerated in the same formula shows that the "ancient" Bible writers already were aware of this.
- § The issue of language as a key point for inculturation (or syncretism, which I certainly prefer). This has always been a central point, and the plurality of languages has been considered by the imperial missionary tradition as a hindrance for the transmission of the Christian message. What does it mean that that plurality is to be seen as a liberative act of God? Not only for native peoples whose languages are denied, or forced to the borders and at the edge of extinction (in the same region in which the Qom people live, there also lived the "vilela". Though there still some survivors of that people, they have lost their language and there are no more users of "vilela"). With the present trend in globalization the question is for all. Languages are ways of naming our vital world and our vision of that world. When a language is substituted by others, or one tongue is imposed as *lingua franca*, worlds and visions are oppressed. When I speak Spanish to my Qom brothers and sisters, I am reminding them that they are an oppressed people, and that, notwithstanding my empathy with them, I represent the oppressive culture. When I write this paper in English I go through a similar experience.
- § Families and nations are imbedded in power structures, and, at the same time, they generate the experiences through which power images are created and established. The introduction from outside of different ways of family conformation and ties into a given society, or forcing them into new ways of production, are a way of superimposing new power structures into it, that generally enhance the most negative facts of the already existing powers. If family and national

structures are going to change, these cannot come about by the creation of yet another source of power imposed over them, but by the emergence of new realities (sometimes in dialogue with other ways of life) that help people reshape their own live from within. It is interesting to study, in that sense, the change in the role of women towards the end of Genesis 11. We are still in a patriarchal setting, but women begin to be mentioned, and their particular condition (Sarai is barren) is to be of great interest for the following story.

- § In our experience, it was through the opening of a new meaning to a text that was always interpreted in a negative sense that a positive affirmation of family, nation, land and language was sanctioned. It was possible to compare times (the Qom people reached the territories they claim about the same time in history that the Abrahamite family was formed), and to lay stress on the importance of ancestors, their doings and the way they formed their families and nations. If it is true for the Israelites, it should also hold true for other peoples as well. Uprootness because of the “new creature” is not a must. According to Matthew, Jesus’ genealogy begins where the genealogy of Gen 11 ends, it is in continuation, not a repudiation of the previous history. The introduction of the new does not deny history, but gains for it new meanings.

Mission is about creating power, reading texts, and interpreting a message. In that sense, Pentecost is not the restoration of a pre-Babel humanity, but the affirmation of the common heritage of human race in equality. The different tongues were not eliminated, but confirmed, for the Spirit made that “we hear, each of us, in our own native language” (Acts 2:8). Peoples and lands are named in their diversity, not to be blamed but to be incorporated, as spaces were God is manifested and received. Not the fragmentation of post-modern globalization, but the dignity of the plural as part of a liberating act of God.

## **UN ACERCAMIENTO A GÉNESIS 10-11 DESDE EL PUEBLO QOM DE ARGENTINA**

Néstor O. Míguez

### **Estableciendo el contexto y el método**

Antes de entrar al estudio de la Biblia, quisiera hacer algunos comentarios explicativos. Esta presentación viene de un estudioso bíblico que trabaja entre el pueblo indígena por los menos varias semanas al año. Esto tiene una doble implicación: por un lado significa que he sido desafiado por las preguntas y experiencias que surgen de la interacción con el pueblo Qom del norte de Argentina. Por otro lado, mi capacitación a nivel académico también conlleva su propio acercamiento, con su carga de preguntas y métodos que no se pueden ignorar. Por ende, esta no es una “interpretación indígena” de un texto bíblico, ya que sigo siendo, a pesar de mi empatía con la causa indígena, un recién llegado, y en ese sentido un extranjero a su cultura y a sus formas de vida. Más bien aportó una interpretación que surge en el círculo más “profesional” por las luchas del pueblo indígena de mi país, en su lucha por recuperar su tierra y por mantener su identidad cultural. Es decir, aunque refleje un acercamiento intercultural e intertextual al texto bíblico, sigue siendo el trabajo de una persona capacitada en la tradición occidental de la hermenéutica bíblica. Mi objetivo aquí, entre otras cosas, es mostrar cómo esto funciona, como un ejercicio de diálogo y de confrontación y enriquecimiento mutuo.

Esto forma parte de una experiencia en la recuperación de la identidad y características de una cultura originaria a través de los elementos de otra cultura. No es mi objetivo aquí entrar en un análisis profundo de los avances, las ambigüedades y las contradicciones que forman parte de nuestro proyecto. Pero en pocas palabras, la “evangelización” de los “indios” resultó en la negación de su propia identidad, tradiciones culturales y visión del mundo (el uso de la palabra “indios” para nombrar a los habitantes originales de lo que ahora llamamos “las Américas” es muestra de ello). Les enseñaron a decir: “Ahora que somos nuevas criaturas en Cristo, las cosas viejas se deben hacer de lado.” “Ahora que tenemos salvación en Cristo y esperamos su venida, no podemos arriesgar nuestra suerte eterna regresando a la hechicería e idolatría de nuestros antepasados. No debemos preocuparnos o luchar por nuestro ser material, sino aferrarnos a nuestro nuevo ámbito espiritual. La lucha por la tierra, las organización en pro de los derechos jurídicos y ese tipo de cosas se mezclan con la política y son peligros mundanos que debemos evitar, abrazando esta nueva fe y aceptando nuestra parte en los sufrimientos de este mundo”.

Ya que más del 90% del pueblo Qom han sido cristianizados por este tipo de mensaje, la identidad cultural, la organización del pueblo e incluso el lenguaje originario están amenazados. Algunos de sus líderes más capaces (incluyendo muchos pastores indígenas de las iglesias pentecostales y evangélicas) se han dado cuenta de las consecuencias destructivas de este tipo de predicación. Pero al mismo tiempo reconocen que una confrontación directa y un rechazo total de la fe cristiana que la mayoría del pueblo Qom ahora comparte, solo contribuiría a dividir aún más un pueblo ya debilitado.

Así que la tarea es deshacer el mal con las mismas herramientas usadas para construirlo. Ya que la Biblia se ha convertido en Palabra autoritaria, es necesario abrir la comprensión e interpretación del mensaje bíblico por medio de una nueva lectura del texto. Nuestro desafío es mostrar que la forma en que la Biblia les fue leída, el acercamiento de la visión misionera anterior, puede ser modificada y ampliada por medio de una lectura más profunda, que se acerca al texto bíblico como un todo, prestando la atención debida a la diversidad y pluralidad existente en el texto mismo. De esa manera el mensaje bíblico es una forma de recuperar algunas de las dimensiones negadas de su cultura,

pero también para potenciar sus propios mitos y tradiciones bajo una nueva luz. Nuestra tarea ha sido la de facilitar el diálogo entre el pueblo Qom y el pueblo de la Biblia, buscando hacer a un lado, hasta donde sea posible, las presuposiciones de la interpretación bíblica dominante de la cultura occidental. Por medio de la palabra autoritaria de la Biblia existe la posibilidad de restablecer la validez duradera de su propia tradición, aunque modificada por esta interacción; así como también la “cultura blanca” necesita ser modificada por el intercambio. Es una tarea de construir puentes, una avenida de doble vía por medio de la cual es posible venir e ir, para enriquecer las diferentes culturas a partir del intercambio, y por medio de ese esfuerzo también movilizar nuestra comprensión de nuestro peregrinaje humano. Tiene que ver también con el cuestionamiento de las rígidas estructuras de poder y las imposiciones unilaterales de sentido y significado. Reconocemos que es una tarea arriesgada, llena de preguntas y trampas. Hasta ahora, (llevamos casi quince años trabajando en esto) pareciera que estamos recogiendo algunos frutos positivos.

Algunos de los contenidos que considerábamos centrales en el mensaje bíblico son irrelevantes en esta situación. Otros, que regularmente ignoramos, de repente se vuelven decididamente pertinentes. Temas que parecían ser de importancia secundaria ocupan nuestra atención. Textos que normalmente evitábamos como irrelevantes adquieren un nuevo significado, y otros que parecían tener solo un sentido, se vuelven polisémicos, y las interpretaciones “obvias” se vuelven dudosas. La situación, la búsqueda de una nueva validación de antiguas luchas, y de las diferencias de tradición y cultura, crea nuevas dimensiones, lanza nuevos tonos y obliga a traer algún matiz al estudio del texto, reconociendo que hay elementos en el texto que nunca antes hemos notado, y, aún más curioso, elementos que siempre leíamos que en realidad no están allí. En esta experiencia, el diálogo nos abre las páginas de la Biblia, y la Biblia se convierte en un lugar de encuentro. Reconocemos que ésta no siempre ha sido la experiencia con el uso de la Biblia en el campo misionero.

Se están utilizando distintos acercamientos metodológicos en esta labor. Obviamente, la comparación de narrativas bíblicas con los mitos Qom ha ayudado a ver los paralelos. Si la teología misionera anterior había enfatizó los contrastes, hoy estamos señalando las coincidencias. Esto tiene un efecto doble: por un lado permite mostrar que algunos de los elementos de las narrativas bíblicas ya existían en su cultura, quizá expresados de otra forma o con diferentes metáforas e imaginaria, pero eran parte de la cultura de los antepasados, así que no hay necesidad de una negación completa. Los cuentos antiguos no eran demoníacos, sino otra forma de procesar la misma experiencia humana básica de la presencia de Dios (Hch 14.16-17). Por otro lado, provee una forma para superar una lectura fundamentalista de las narrativas bíblicas. Por medio de la comparación, aparece el hecho de que muchos textos bíblicos usan un lenguaje que claramente se asemeja al de sus propios poemas, leyendas y mitos. Así que la idea de que encontramos en las escrituras hebreas y cristianas cosas que son poéticas, legendarias y míticas, se convierte no en la imposición de lo erudito sobre lo sencillo, sino una conclusión de hecho, que surge de manejar la diversidad de los textos “sagrados”. Y, de su propia visión del mundo saben cómo manejar el lenguaje mítico mejor que con el positivismo occidental, y mucho mejor de lo que el positivismo occidental (incluyendo el fundamentalismo) lo ha hecho.

Es cierto que el literalismo ha logrado adentrarse hasta cierto punto en aquella cultura, pero el hecho de que aún sea una cultural predominantemente oral la hace más flexible. En el caso del pueblo Qom, no tuvieron lenguaje escrito hasta el siglo 20.<sup>1</sup> La palabra escrita tiene un poder extraordinario por su halo mágico, ya que acompañó una invasión poderosa. Pero lo literario tiene más poder simbólico que su contenido. Lo que impacta al pueblo es el hecho de que sea escrito, más que lo que dice. Entrar en una cultura escrita desde una cultura oral crea, nuevamente, una doble oportunidad desde una perspectiva metodológica. Una es el hecho de que algo escrito abre la

---

<sup>1</sup>La creación de un lenguaje escrito para los Qom laq'taq, usando el alfabeto romano occidental, fue el trabajo de misioneros menonitas, con el fin de traducir la Biblia. La primera gramática y léxico es de 1970 de la mano de aquellos misioneros. Circula en versión fotocopiada. Se está trabajando en una nueva revisión en manos de un equipo Qom de las Sociedades Bíblicas Unidas.

puerta para la necesidad de un lector o lectora que interprete, y por ende, para la adquisición de las herramientas necesarias para leer e interpretar. También obliga a traducir, y en el ejercicio de la traducción, la necesidad de interpretación se hace aparente. ¿Cómo traducir “rey” en una cultura que nunca tuvo reyes, sino un consejo de ancianos”? ¿O “pastor” en el lenguaje de pescadores y cazadores? La necesidad de buscar nuevas metáforas para entrar en el lenguaje indígena muestra claramente los límites del literalismo. También realza la diversidad dialéctica dentro de los “Qom laq’taq”, por lo que a veces se requiere más de una interpretación. Por otro lado, crear consciencia de las posibilidades, riqueza y límites de diferentes culturas, y la relación entre lenguaje y visión del mundo y la importancia de los “mundos vitales” para la comprensión de cualquier mensaje. En ese sentido, y esto ha sido reconocido y enfatizado por líderes indígenas, el esfuerzo por traducir y leer la Biblia en su propia lengua ha producido, como efecto secundario, un aumento en el estudio y el uso del lenguaje local.

El otro asunto es que por medio del ejercicio de la comparación, al poner en letras sus propias leyendas y mitos, descubren que no todos los clanes o tribus cuentan las historias de la misma manera. ¿Qué hacemos? ¿Mezclamos las diferentes versiones? ¿Las ubicamos lado a lado? ¿Escogemos una y rechazamos las demás? Pero entonces las que fueron rechazadas buscarán la forma de entrar a la historia. Así que existe la necesidad de reconocer la diversidad de formas en que la historia ha evolucionado y cómo la colección de tradiciones se mezcla, se contradice, corrige, complementa y explica entre sí. Esta experiencia de su propia cultura facilita el descubrimiento del mismo proceso en la Escritura. El análisis elaborado de los métodos histórico críticos es simplificado por sus propia experiencias, pero, por las mismas razones, el acercamiento sintético de lectura canónica resulta ser necesario. Reconoce que las distintas versiones se deben entender juntas como una expresión de un todo en la pluralidad.

Obviamente podemos señalar muchas otras formas en que esta experiencia ha influenciado nuestro marco bíblico y teológico. Solo he resaltado estos aspectos porque estaré usando algunos de ellos en la siguiente lectura del texto bíblico de Génesis 10-11.

### **Génesis 10-11: familia, lenguaje, tierra y nación**

Mi objetivo es usar estos dos capítulos como el texto para leer desde diferentes acercamientos culturales. Lo propongo como una prueba para la lectura intercultural porque, en mi propia experiencia, es uno de los pasajes bíblicos cuya interpretación he modificado en forma más dramática. Aún tengo mis notas de mi primer Sermón de Pentecostés, predicado hace más de 30 años, en el que usé el contraste clásico de Babel y Pentecostés. En aquella época mi interpretación de Babel se basaba en mis estudios teológicos recientes. Cuando reviso esas notas y leo nuevamente el comentario de Von Rad,<sup>2</sup> que usaba en aquél momento, reconozco el increíble etnocentrismo de aquella interpretación. Empecé a modificar mi lectura algunos años después, luego de haber sido designado como profesor en el Departamento de Biblia de ISEDET. Tuve que enfrentarme en una forma nueva con la historia de Babel como un texto importante para la comprensión de la lingüística al servir como guía, junto con J. Severino Croatto, para la tesis de maestría de un estudiante visitante africano.<sup>3</sup> Trabajando con él, empecé a darme cuenta de que el asunto de la imposición de “un lenguaje” es el problema que presenta el texto, y que la diferenciación de lenguas no se debería leer como un castigo de Dios sino como un acto liberador. Pero, al trabajar con el pueblo Qom, presenté otro conjunto de preguntas al texto, que demandaron un cambio aún más radical, que me llevó a leer la narrativa de Babel dentro del marco del capítulo anterior y la genealogía subsiguiente. Es probable que esta no sea la última etapa de mi historia con este texto.

---

<sup>2</sup>G. Von Rad. *Genesis: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961). Versión original en alemán, 1956. He elegido contrastar con Von Rad ya que era la lectura europea más progresista de aquél momento. Pero también muestra claramente qué tan etnocéntrica puede ser una lectura progresista.

<sup>3</sup>Juan Manuel Ekó Ekó Ada. *La torre de Babel. Signo de libertad en el plan salvífico de Yavé. Génesis 11.1-9.* (Buenos Aires: ISEDET, 1991).

La alta crítica ha trabajado con este texto separando del relato de Babel las tradiciones Yavistas (J) y Sacerdotal (P) y las genealogías. Luego ha considerado cada parte por sí sola, dando significado a las diferentes partes según las preguntas de género, contexto histórico y tradiciones. Desde esta estrategia de lectura, las genealogías tenían que ver con el intento de J de mostrar la relación de la historia primitiva con la alianza abrahámica, mientras que en la época de la formación de la tradición P, fueron incorporadas con el objetivo de entender la situación de las naciones que rodeaban a Israel. Génesis 11.1-9 se convierte en una historia autónoma con consecuencias teológicas relacionadas con el titanismo humano como un pecado contra Dios. La interpretación que estoy proponiendo es la búsqueda de leer las historias juntas, verlas en su unidad, y proyectar su significado a partir de su ubicación en la versión canónica actual. La convergencia de estas tradiciones reunió diferentes intereses y perspectivas y estableció una forma de leerlas juntas que debe ser respetada. En nuestro diálogo con personas de otras culturas, debemos respetar la unidad del discurso por medio del cual describen su visión del mundo. ¿Por qué debemos proceder de manera diferente con las personas que escribieron nuestro texto sagrado?

Génesis 9 concluye la historia de Noé. Génesis 10-11 une esta historia principal, que contiene una alianza, con otra gran historia de alianza, la de Abra(ha)m, que empieza en Génesis 12. El primer versículo de Gé 10 y los últimos de Gé 11 funcionan como bisagras para el contexto literario. Pero esos capítulos, que nos llevan de una sola familia sobreviviente a la sola familia elegida, están llenas de significado en sí mismas, porque tiene que dar razón de la diversidad. Es más que una lista de naciones, una historia de titanismo y un árbol genealógico. Es todo un diagnóstico de la dinámica de poder en asuntos de nación, tierra, familia e lenguaje. Todos ellos temas claves en preguntas de cultura y dominio, y ciertamente prominentes en debates respecto a la misión.

Cuando observamos la distribución del texto como un todo a nivel superficial, encontramos una genealogía enriquecida por dos historias que le fueron agregadas, las de Gé 10.8-12 y 11.1-9. Ambas historias agregadas son narrativas que se relacionan por un elemento común: Babel, en la tierra de Senaar. Y ambas se refieren al poder: Nemrod, el primer hombre “fuerte” y la ciudad, torre y nombre de aquellos que aspiran ser celestiales. En la Biblia, de Génesis a Apocalipsis, Babel/Babilonia es un nombre que se relaciona con el poder opresor y destructivo, aunque en algunos casos se convierte en instrumento de la ira de Dios. Pero el alcance del texto, con la inclusión de una genealogía, es más que eso; es la afirmación de algunas de las características que componen la idiosincracia de cada pueblo. Esto lo debemos tomar en cuenta en nuestro análisis.

Después de la lista de los descendientes de Noé (los de Jafet), el texto incluye una expresión que se convierte en modelo para las listas que siguen: “por sus territorios y lenguas, por sus linajes y naciones respectivas” (Gé 10.5b). La expresión se repite después de los descendientes de Ham (Gé 10.20) y Shem (Gé 10.32), pero también señala el hecho de que los nombres de la primera lista son de pueblos que viven en las islas y zona costera (v.5a). Por ende, el texto no solo señala el hecho de que hay diferentes nombres, sino también que cada uno representa una singularidad en su lugar de morada, en la forma en que están conformadas las familias, en el lenguaje que hablan y en la forma, los símbolos y las estructuras por medio de las cuales se organizan como naciones, como entidades políticas. También se considera la relación de las diferentes culturas con su entorno geográfico y la forma en que organizan el uso de su territorio (e indirectamente su economía).

Aunque todos surgen de una sola semilla, se reconoce su pluralidad cuando se esparcen por la tierra. La especificación de familia, tierra, lenguaje y nación no es casual: constituye la afirmación de asuntos claves de identidad. Especifican la forma en que la humanidad está organizada: por medio de lazos familiares, un territorio dado<sup>4</sup>, una comunidad lingüística y las tradiciones relacionales que constituyen un pueblo, una nación. Si eliminamos uno de estos elementos, los demás se debilitan, y en algún momento tienden a desaparecer también. En la experiencia de Israel, la fe en el Dios de los antepasados y la promesa de ser restablecidos, se convirtió en una fuerza que los mantuvo en

momentos de peligro cuando uno o más de estos elementos de sobrevivencia peligraban o se habían perdieron. Los primeros 7 versículos del libro de Daniel también se refieren a este punto, ya que se refieren a la pérdida de la tierra, de los símbolos de identidad naciones, del lenguaje y de las relaciones familiares (el cambio de nombres)<sup>5</sup> y lo relaciona con Babilonia. Esta cita no es fortuita, ya que en el texto más amplio (la Biblia como un todo) nos ayuda a ver lo que Babel/Babilonia representa.

La primera interrupción de la secuencia genealógica es un comentario parentético sobre la persona de Nemrod y sus acciones. Es introducido como un hijo de Cus, y el primero en convertirse en hombre fuerte sobre la tierra (Gé 10.8). Se convirtió en un gran cazador “delante de Yahvé”. Esta expresión permite lecturas contradictorias. Se podría leer: “a la vista de Yahvé”, pero también: “en confrontación con Yahvé”.<sup>6</sup> Cuando relacionamos luego esta expresión con la idea de que el pueblo de Babel quería alcanzar el cielo, el segundo significado adquiere mayor probabilidad.

Pero este cazador es también el primero en construir un reinado. Se vuelve poderoso no solo como cazador que mata a los animales,<sup>7</sup> y un hombre poderoso frente a Yahvé, sino que es también el primero en establecer poder político sobre otros seres humanos. Y el principio de su reinado es Babel de Senaar. Su segunda morada es Asiria,<sup>8</sup> y allí construye Nínive, otra ciudad con una historia de cruel dominio imperial. El hecho de que se nombre a Nemrod como hijo de Cus, cuya tierra tradicionalmente se ubica en África, al sur de Egipto (o, en otra versión, al sur de la península de Arabia, frente a Egipto), pero que aparezca como un gran cazador de safari en lugares como Senaar y Asiria, señala una persona que empieza a codiciar y ocupar tierra que no es de su familia. Así que este texto agregado aquí anticipa el que le sigue. Nos da el nombre y las características del mítico rey que construye Babel y sus aspiraciones políticas.

---

<sup>4</sup>Entre los Qom laq'taq no existen diferentes conceptos para tierra, terreno y territorio. Son una misma cosa. Una tierra es el lugar donde las personas viven, pero viven en esa tierra porque les provee sustento para la vida. A diferencia de otras culturas indígenas de las Américas, no consideran a la tierra como una deidad, sino como la creación del aspecto Creativo de Dios.

<sup>5</sup>El hecho de forzar a otros y otras a cambiar de nombre para denotar la sumisión a otra cultura y para crear lazos familiares artificiales ha sido abundantemente ejemplificado en la historia: el caso de africanos llevados como esclavos a Norteamérica, obligados a asumir el apellido de sus dueños, es un caso señalado frecuentemente. En el caso del pueblo indígena de Argentina, fueron obligados a registrar sus niños con nombres “cristianos”, y usar el apellido de su dueño “legal” o del arrendatario blanco de la tierra donde habitaban. Solamente después de la reforma constitucional de 1994, se les permitió usar nombres tradicionales para sus hijos e hijas, aunque para cambiar el apellido se requieren trámites burocráticos y judiciales tan arduos y costosos que en la práctica se vuelve imposible.

<sup>6</sup>La interpretación rabínica relaciona el nombre de Nemrod con *marad* “rebelarse en contra”, como el prototipo de toda rebelión contra Dios. Aunque J. Severino Croatto considera que este es una posibilidad semántica dudosa, apoya la traducción de *lifne* como “confrontando a Dios”. *Exilio y sobrevivencia. Tradiciones contraculturales en el pentateuco. Comentario de Génesis 4.1-12-9* (Buenos Aires: Lumen, 1997), pp.332-334.

<sup>7</sup>“Cazador” aquí no se debe entender como de los cazadores y recolectores nómadas, sino más bien como los cazadores guerreros quienes ejercitan en la caza sus habilidades para la guerra. Los cazadores nómadas no establecen reinos ni construyen ciudades. Ver Croatto, *Exilio...* pp.333-335 para el fundamento técnico de esta interpretación.

<sup>8</sup>La interpretación de este texto es ambiguo, ya que se puede entender que este mismo Nemrod se trasladó para construir estas otras ciudades, o que Asur (otra persona) salió del clan de Nemrod para construir esas nuevas ciudades.

Esta corta historia se ubica en medio del catálogo de los fundadores de diferentes naciones. Otros pueblos, naciones y lenguajes ya existen. Esta no es una historia primitiva de un padre fundador y la situación de la humanidad como una totalidad, sino el desarrollo de un pueblo humano entre otros. Nemrod es identificado en toda esta historia como el primero en salir de la tierra de su familia, en usar herramientas de caza y guerra, en construir ciudades imperiales, en establecer reinos, en hacerse grande frente a Yahvé. Y es asociado con el nombre de Babel.

El capítulo 10 también nos da los nombres de los diferentes pueblos cananeos y nos dice algo respecto a la tierra de las diferentes familia (vv.16-19), los descendientes de Sem, y el hecho de que la tierra fue distribuida en un tiempo dado, el de Peleg (v.25). Contradicciones en la descripción de los pueblos y la tierra en esta parte del texto muestra que se trata de una tierra disputada, y prepara el camino para la aparición de nuevos pueblos que aún no están en la lista. La tierra es descrita no solo por sus puntos destacados, sino también como en el caso de Jafet, por las características de la tierra (los montes en 10.30). No podemos entrar en este pasaje en detalle aquí, pero se vuelve significativo para la interpretación de los últimos versículos del capítulo 11. Debemos notar que, en el orden canónico del texto, ya conocemos todos estos acontecimientos cuando llegamos al capítulo 11.

El capítulo 11 empieza con la así llamada “historia de la torre de Babel”. Desde un acercamiento textual una inclusión nos indica lo que debemos buscar: “tierra” e “lenguaje” se encuentran en las frases que abren y cierran la la historia (11.1 y 11.9). Este es un texto acerca de la tierra y el lenguaje. Pero como en los versículos anteriores ya tuvimos alguna información acerca de cómo tierra y lenguaje están distribuidos alrededor de la tierra, cuando leemos que “toda la tierra” tenía palabras idénticas (11.1), sabemos que esto no es característico de toda la humanidad, como entidad sin divisiones. No se refiere a “todos los seres humanos”, sino todos los que vivían en ese lugar. Es, como dijimos, un grupo que dejó su tierra original y se trasladó a la tierra de Senaar. El texto se refiere a ese pueblo. Tratar de encontrar coherencia geográfica en la frase “desde oriente” es inapropiado en este contexto. Lo que importa es un pueblo que está en movimiento de una tierra a otra, un pueblo que decide construir una nueva ciudad usando nuevas tecnologías (v.3), para alcanzar el cielo y “tener un nombre”. El anticipo de la dispersión por toda la tierra ya está ahí (v.4). Piensan que si son dispersados, su nombre permanecerá como un solo nombre de una ciudad y pueblo poderosos, celestiales y elevados. Así que este no es un proyecto de titanismo por parte de toda la humanidad, sino la búsqueda de poder y fama de un grupo particular. Recordemos que la construcción de Babel es la construcción del primer reinado. Es el proyecto hegemónico de un pueblo que se traslada de su tierra originaria en la búsqueda de imponer su nombre en toda la tierra. Todos y todas deben hablar de la forma en que ellos hablan, usar las mismas palabras que ellos usan para nombrar las cosas. Podrán extender su mirada a toda la tierra, ya que la torre alcanza hasta el cielo.<sup>9</sup> El texto no menciona ninguna intención de desafiar a Dios, sino más bien de imponer su poder sobre el resto de la humanidad.

Pero la historia también tiene que ver con la construcción de una ciudad y una torre. De hecho, el énfasis está sobre la construcción de la ciudad, una ciudad fortificada. Este pueblo “nómada” que llegaron a la tierra de Senaar, decidió cambiar su estilo de vida y establecer un nuevo tipo de sociedad. La construcción de esta ciudad y su fortaleza es también la expresión de la voluntad de ejercer poder. Hay un doble sentido de explotación. La ciudad que oprime la zona rural circundante, pero que también crea una fuerza de trabajo masiva para suplir los ladrillos para una construcción

---

<sup>9</sup>Milton Schwantes, en su artículo “La ciudad y la torre. Un estudio de Génesis 11.1-9” en *Cristianismo y sociedad*, ns. 69-70, 1981, p.98, argumenta en favor de considerar la torre no como un monumento sino como una fortaleza militar.

tan enorme. Debemos recordar que la confección de ladrillos para grandes edificios estatales era la condición de la esclavitud del pueblo hebreo en Egipto. Aquella ciudad es el anuncio de la institución de un Estado que controla y oprime los campesinos y trabajadores esclavizados.<sup>10</sup>

Dios “desciende” no porque se siente desafiado, sino porque quiere saber qué están haciendo estas personas. Mientras que la cuadrilla de Nemrod quiere alcanzar el cielo, el Dios del cielo descende. Dios quiere saber qué está pasando en la tierra. Ni aquí, ni en ninguna otra parte de la historia aparece Dios como enojado o con deseos de castigar. La palabra e idea de castigo que abunda en la mayoría de los comentarios, no se menciona en el texto bíblico.<sup>11</sup> La figura es, más bien, la de un Dios cariñoso, interesado en la criatura humana. Los seres humanos (y también los seres divinos, Gé 6.1-6) ya se habían desviado una vez y fue necesario enviar un diluvio para detenerlos. ¡Dios decide ahora ser más cauteloso e intervenir! Así que Dios descende para ver la ciudad y la torre. Dios reflexiona sobre lo que ve, que este pueblo es uno con el mismo lenguaje y que está decidido a seguir imponiendo esa condición sobre los demás pueblos. En ninguna parte el texto dice que es una reflexión sobre la humanidad como un todo. Es un pueblo (*‘am*, v.6) en busca de unificar todo bajo su propio reinado.

Así que Dios descende y decide acabar con ese proyecto (v.7). En la tradición bíblica, cuando Dios descende del cielo es un acto liberador. Nunca leemos que Dios baja para castigar. Dios no necesita moverse del cielo para castigar, pero baja para unirse al pueblo para superar la opresión. Así, por ejemplo, leemos en Ex 3.8, cuando Dios viene para liberar a Israel de los egipcios y llevarles nuevamente a su tierra asignada. Lo mismo podemos decir de la tradición cristiana. El Cristo de Dios descende, no para castigar, sino para salvar. Así que el hecho de que Dios baje y confunde *su* lenguaje en *ese lugar*, para que no se pudieran entender entre sí, no es un castigo para la totalidad de la humanidad, ni siquiera un acto de prevención, sino un acto de liberación que detiene la ambición imperial del pueblo reunido en Senaar. En este acto Dios asegura la posibilidad de libertad para otros pueblos, familias, tierra y lenguas. No dice que los diferentes idiomas fueron creados aquí, como leemos desde la tradición occidental. Dice que Dios confundió su lenguaje como una forma de ponerle fin a la búsqueda de poder de esos primeros conquistadores. Menos todavía podemos afirmar que “... Dios quebranta la unidad de la humanidad; confunde su lenguaje para que los seres humanos que ya no se entiendan entre sí y tengan que separarse”.<sup>12</sup> La humanidad ya estaba creciendo en diferentes direcciones, ya se habían formado naciones, cada una con su tierra y lengua. Esto no niega un origen común, sino que es su resultado. El capítulo 11 viene después del capítulo 10. Así que cuando llegamos a la construcción de Babel por el cusita Nemrod, Dios actúa para mantener la continuidad del logro humano anterior de diversidad, e interferir con el deseo de Nemrod/Babel de ubicar todo bajo su reinado. Fueron esparcidos antes de que pudieran construir un nombre para imponer sobre toda la tierra, y un único lenguaje en el que toda nación debería hablar. Así que no existe la posibilidad de que una sola nación unifique la totalidad de la tierra, o un lenguaje que se considere el único idioma “internacional”. ¡El pecado es la unión de toda la tierra y humanidad bajo un rey y la imposición de un lenguaje, y la diversidad no es el castigo!

Así que la multiplicidad de lenguajes no es consecuencia del pecado humano y castigo de Dios, sino el resultado de la acción liberadora de Dios. De la misma manera, la unidad de la tierra en la que un pueblo mora frente a la conquista de otros, los lazos familiares y sus símbolos étnicos que les otorga identidades distintas, no son obstáculos a la plenitud humana, sino medios que sirven para vivir una vida humana.

---

<sup>10</sup>Para un desarrollo más amplio de esta interpretación ver M. Schwantes, *ibid.*, pp.95-101.

<sup>11</sup>Von Rad (entre muchos otros) dice: “Por ende Dios se decide por un acto punitivo, pero también preventivo...” (Génesis, p.145. Expresiones similares se repiten a lo largo de su comentario a esta historia, aunque hacia el final del artículo ve en la intervención de Dios una acción algo más creativa.

<sup>12</sup>G. Von Rad, *Ibid.*, p.145.

Es interesante notar que estos temas reaparecen en el último libro de nuestra Biblia. El cordero degollado es dignificado porque “comprase para Dios con tu sangre personas de toda raza, lengua, pueblo y nación” (Ap 5.9: la misma expresión se encuentra en 7.9, 11.9, 13.7, 14.6). Por las características de Apocalipsis, la tierra no se menciona, pero sin embargo no es olvidada. El siguiente versículo (5.10) dice que todos ellos reinarán sobre la tierra. En la visión, Babilonia, la gran prostituta, logra establecer dominio sobre “pueblos, muchedumbres, naciones y lenguas” antes de su fin (17.15). Pero finalmente, cuando Juan de Patmos ve la caída de Babilonia, escucha la voz del cielo que le recuerda que “Porque sus pecados se han amontonado hasta el cielo y Dios se ha acordado de sus iniquidades” (18.5). ¡Lo que Nemrod no podía hacer inicialmente con ladrillos, las Babilonias de la historia han logrado con sus pecados opresores! Dios no necesita bajar para castigar la ciudad. Los ángeles del cielo proclaman la caída de la ciudad. Hemos escuchado de la fundación de la ciudad, también escuchamos de su destrucción final, porque en aquella ciudad “fue hallada la sangre de los profetas y de los santos y de todos los degollados de la tierra” (18.24). Pero cuando Dios desciende del cielo, con la Jerusalén celestial, nuevamente es para liberar, para rescatar a los santos, para limpiar sus ojos de llanto, para terminar con todo sufrimiento y muerte, para morar entre ellos y ellas como Dios, porque ellos son el pueblo de Dios (Ap 21.1-7). Sin embargo, aun al final las naciones no son negadas ni desmanteladas, sino que al ser salvadas caminan en la luz de Dios, y sus reyes le llevan su esplendor (21.24).

Al regresar a Génesis para la última parte del capítulo 11, regresamos a la genealogía. El v.10 nos devuelve a 10.21, la familia semítica. No podemos seguir en detalle aquí el desarrollo de esta familia, pero podemos notar algunas características de esta lista: no menciona las distintas tierra y lenguajes, sino que se concentra más en la historia familiar. Este rol cita el tiempo en el que cada antepasado vivió y resalta el hecho de que “engendraron otros hijos e hijas” (vv.13,15,17,19,21,23, 25). Las hijas no se mencionan en la lista anterior (cap. 10). En el v.29 los nombres de las mujeres también aparecen. A partir de allí las mujeres son incluida en la lista, aunque en una posición secundaria. Así que ahora el énfasis está en establecer la importancia de los lazos familiares. También muestra que la lista anterior no cierra el catálogo de todos los pueblos existentes. Otros deben ser agregados, como muestra la existencia de Israel. Y les serán dados también tierra y lenguaje. En este sentido los textos siguientes tendrán que tratar la lucha por la tierra y la coexistencia de más de un pueblo en un mismo lugar.

#### **Algunas implicaciones para nuestro contexto**

Sería imposible señalar aquí las muchas implicaciones que surgen de este acercamiento al texto. Como personas conscientes de las preguntas y los problemas que presenta la misión cristiana y el uso de la Biblia en ella, muchos y muchas seguramente podrán señalar más temas de los que yo puedo sugerir. Quiero solo mencionar algunos puntos para el debate:

- El problema de la tierra, su distribución y preservación.

Las culturas urbanas dominantes esconden los problemas subyacentes de la tierra. Pero explotan territorios circundantes, imponiendo sus propias necesidades económicas sobre la gente. La tierra no solo es una ubicación, un territorio, sino una morada para los pueblos, que entienden su mundo según las características y posibilidades que cada tierra ofrece. La conquista de la tierra es la negación de otros pueblos, pero no es la única. La imposición de formas extrañas de usar y explotar la tierra, rompiendo la relación de un pueblo con su ambiente, también es una forma de quitarles la tierra, aunque legalmente sean los dueños. El problema de la tierra está intrínsecamente relacionado con los temas de familia, lenguaje y pueblo. El hecho de que se enumeren en la misma fórmula muestra que los escritores bíblicos “antiguos” ya estaban conscientes de ello.

- El tema del lenguaje como punto clave para la inculturación (o el sincretismo, que ciertamente prefiero). Este siempre ha sido un punto central, y la tradición misionera imperial ha considerado la pluralidad de lenguas como un obstáculo para la transmisión del mensaje cristiano. ¿Qué significa que aquella pluralidad sea vista como acto liberador de Dios? No solo es liberador para los pueblos indígenas cuyos idiomas son negados, o quienes son empujados a las fronteras y al borde de la extinción (en la misma región donde viven los pueblo Qom, también vivían los “vilela”. Aunque sobreviven algunos de ese pueblo, han perdido su lenguaje y ya no hay personas que usen “vilela”). Con la actual tendencia en la globalización la pregunta es para todos y todas. Los lenguajes son formas de nombrar nuestro mundo vital y nuestra visión de ese mundo. Cuando un lenguaje es sustituido por otros, o una lengua es impuesta como *lingua franca*, se oprimen mundos y visiones. Cuando hablo en español con mis hermanos y hermanas Qom, les estoy recordando que son un pueblo oprimido y que, a pesar de mi empatía con ellos, represento una cultura opresora.

- Familias y naciones están incrustadas en las estructuras de poder y, a la vez, generan las experiencias por medio de las cuales las imágenes de poder son creadas y establecidas. La introducción, desde afuera, en una sociedad de diferentes formas de conformar la familia u obligarles a implementar nuevas formas de producción, son maneras de imponer nuevas estructuras de poder, que generalmente resaltan los elementos más negativos de los poderes ya existentes. Si las estructuras familiares y nacionales van a cambiar, no puede ser por medio de la creación de otra fuente más de poder impuesto sobre ellas, sino a partir de las nuevas realidades (en ocasiones en diálogo con otras formas de vida) que ayudan a las personas a recrear su propia vida desde adentro. Es interesante estudiar, en este sentido, el cambio en el papel de las mujeres hacia el final de Génesis 11. Aún estamos en un contexto patriarcal, pero se empieza a mencionar las mujeres, y su condición particular (Sarai es estéril) será de gran interés para la siguiente historia.

- En nuestra experiencia, fue por medio de la apertura de nuevo significado para un texto que siempre se había interpretado en sentido negativo, que se sancionó una afirmación positiva de familia, nación, tierra y lenguaje. Fue posible comparar momentos (el pueblo Qom llegó a sus territorios más o menos al mismo tiempo en la historia en que se formó la familia abrahámica) y enfatizar la importancias de los antepasados, sus acciones y la manera en que formaron sus familias y naciones. Si vale para los israelitas, debe valer también para otros pueblos. El desarraigo a causa de la “nueva criatura” no es una obligación. Según Mateo, la genealogía de Jesús empieza donde termina la genealogía de Génesis 11; es una continuación, y no un repudio, de la historia previa. La introducción de lo nuevo no niega la historia, pero adquiere nuevo significado para ella.

La misión tiene que ver con crear poder, leer textos, interpretar un mensaje. En ese sentido, el Pentecostés no es la restauración de la humanidad pre-Babel, sino la afirmación de una herencia común de la raza humana en igualdad. Las diferentes lenguas no fueron eliminadas, sino confirmadas, porque el Espíritu permitió que “cada uno de nosotros les oímos en nuestra propia lengua nativa” (Hch 2.8). Los pueblos y las lenguas son nombradas en su diversidad, no para ser culpabilizadas, sino para ser incorporadas como espacios donde Dios en manifestado y recibido. No en la fragmentación de la globalización posmoderna, sino en la dignidad de lo plural como parte de un acto liberador de Dios.

## THE ECUMENICAL PERSPECTIVES FOR CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGIES

Shirley Lal Wijesinghe

Though the struggle to contextualise theology is still a thorny question in some churches, it is a success story in many quarters of the world. Over the last three decades small groups who reflect upon their experiences in the light of Kingdom values have mushroomed throughout the world and they are beginning to make a steady impact on the world order. What are the uniting factors in these rich and diverse experiences of being Christian and being Church? This article attempts to draw attention to the evangelical dynamics that give unity to this contextual diversity.

The findings are the results of an action-reflection programme woven into a course in theology by the staff and students of the Asian Institute of Missiology, Colombo, Sri Lanka founded in 1997. The course was designed in response to a need to strengthen those working in grassroots groups giving direction to pastoral care and/or guidance. Answering a call to be authentically Christian many dedicate themselves to the cause of God, which is the cause of human being in diverse communities, church movements, associations, organizations and even without the backing of any such group thus working alone. Those who have some institutional strength often invite resource persons to strengthen themselves and this is true even in the area of Christian inspiration. But in Sri Lanka only a few grassroots groups are sustained by *regular* programmes/courses in Christian inspiration. The programme of theology at the Asian Institute of Missiology in Colombo, Sri Lanka has created the forum for those involved in diverse ministries and apostolates at the grassroots to come together for theological reflection. To my knowledge it is the first regular Diploma programme in Theology in Sri Lanka attended by both Roman Catholic and Reformed Christians.

The evangelical dynamics discussed here are based mainly on the Exodus from Egypt and the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus, the two foundation events of the Christian Scriptures and from creation theology, which has an inbuilt ecumenical dimension.

### The Exodus

The Exodus cannot be understood as one among many events of liberation. It is the founding event of the imperial slaves becoming a nation. In this episode the slaves refused to imitate the oppressive system after they were liberated from the Egyptian domination. In a world where the masters of the Nile river valley civilization and the Euphrates-Tigris river valley civilization were struggling for hegemony, Israelites began as the slaves of the Egyptian superpower. But once they were liberated they refused to have a king in liberated Israel. This is dramatized in Exodus 15-18: "The Lord will reign for ever and ever." It was probably an age old practice that the leader of the liberation struggle was made the king. We have a glimpse of this practice in Judg. 8: 22-23: "The men of Israel said to Gideon, 'Rule over us, you and your son and your grandson also; for you have delivered us out of the hand of Midian.' Gideon said to them, 'I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you; the Lord will rule over you.'" Why did the liberated Israelites refuse to have a king? It is because the institution of kingship would gradually produce a class society including slaves in its lower strata. "The Lord will reign for ever and ever," means that no one will become a king in Israel, in other words that no one will be above another and no one will be below another in Israel. Everybody is radically equal<sup>1</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> I owe the insight to Prof. G. E. Mendenhall.

Yet everyone is equal only in human dignity. Each one is endowed with many gifts and often people are not equal in their gifts, talents and capacities. This is precisely the point. The human dignity of each person could be assured only if those who have greater gifts serve the rest with their inborn and acquired talents and not work towards upward mobility to be served by those who have lesser gifts. Human dignity of each person is assured only in a structure where everyone is at the service of the other. The question is crucial in the case of leadership. Those who have leadership qualities often demand the services of those who are endowed with lesser gifts and this paves way to structures of domination<sup>2</sup>. In Exod 14: 31 Moses is designated as a servant. He is a servant leader who does not become a king but remains a true leader who serves the Israelites by guiding them to the Promised Land. Moses is not made a king thus paving the way to 250 years of contrast history<sup>3</sup>.

Due to this contrast theo-ideology it was difficult to found kingship in Israel. Perhaps the historical circumstances of the late 11th century or the early 10th century BEC needed some type of institutionally structured leadership for the survival of early Israel before her enemies and that may be one of the reasons for the emergence of monarchy in Israel. It may have been due to the inadequacy of charismatic type of leadership to motivate and move a population spread over a large territory for concerted action. Of course the question of ambition on the part of some individuals and groups may have played a significant role as well in the emergence of kingship in Israel. In spite of the social forces which may have been at play in calling for a radical change of the type of charismatic leadership found in persons like Moses and Joshua, the theo-ideology of YHWH's kingship excluding any human person to claim the title may have been at work in Israel's early history. 1 Sam 8: 1-22<sup>4</sup> reflects this dilemma.

What concerns us is the spell of contrast history where the charismatic leadership renounced powerful royal leadership. This remains a liberative value inscribed in the sacred scriptures for generations to learn that such leadership renounced royal power, which was always advantageous to the person. Instead they embraced a new type of leadership which demands self-giving commitment on behalf of the people. This is reflected in the prayer of Moses found in Num 11: 11-15: "Moses said to the Lord, 'Why hast thou dealt ill with thy servant? And why have I not found favour in thy sight, that thou dost lay the burden of all this people upon me? Did I conceive all this people?...I am not able to carry all this people alone, the burden is too heavy for me. If thou wilt deal thus with me, kill me at once, if I find favour in thy sight, that I may not see my wretchedness.'"

### **The God of Exodus**

The formulations of the Ten Commandments in catechetical training in many churches often begin with the question of "One God". Though this is theologically accurate it misses some important dynamics of biblical revelation. The quotation of the ten commandments both in Exod. 20 and Deut 5 begin with the reference to the liberation from Egypt: "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before me." The question of "One God" is an academic formulation, whereas the Ten Commandments found in the

---

<sup>2</sup> S.L. WIJESINGHE, "Scriptural and Theological Bases of a Methodology for Catholic Social Thought in Asia", *Launching the Second Century. The Future of Catholic Social Thought in Asia* (ed. T. FERNANDO-H. O'SULLIVAN) (Hong Kong 1993) 30-31.

<sup>3</sup> N. LOHFINK, *Das Jüdische am Christentum* (Freiburg 1987) 71-87. On this question cf. also N. LOHFINK, "Von der 'Anawim-Partei' zur 'Kirche der Armen'. Die bibelwissenschaftliche Ahnentafel eines Hauptbegriffs der 'Theologie der Befreiung'", *Biblica* 67 (1986) 135-176; N. LOHFINK, *Option for the Poor. The Basic Principle of Liberation Theology in the Light of the Bible* (Berkeley, California 1987) 27-52; N. LOHFINK, "Poverty in the Laws of the Ancient Near East and of the Bible", *Theological Studies* 52 (1991) 34-49.

<sup>4</sup> For a redaction-critical study of 1 Sam 8: 1-22, cf. M. O'BRIEN, *The Deuteronomistic History Hypothesis. A Reassessment* (Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 92; Freiburg Schweiz, Göttingen 1989) 109-115.

Bible is an expression of life. The God who liberated Israel is a God of slaves, the rival of the gods of Egyptian and Assyro-Babylonian kings who justify and produce slavery. Furthermore, if there is a king in Israel it is YHWH who liberated the Israelite slaves from the Egyptian domination and none other. Furthermore, YHWH the God of slaves makes a covenant with the liberated Israel that it will not produce oppression and domination practiced by the imperial powers of Egypt and Mesopotamia within its borders.

### **The Land of God**

Historical-critical studies have demonstrated that Israel did not conquer Palestine. The record of heroic belligerent ventures in the book of Joshua amounts to no more than nationalistic fervour at the time of the Babylonian exile or at a similar moment of national abasement to boost up the national identity. The majority of biblical scholars agree that the wondering Israelites occupied the empty terrain of the western hills of Palestine and this is called the 'pacific infiltration'<sup>5</sup>.

Exodus was not only leaving Egypt, but also having a portion in the Promised Land<sup>6</sup>. Radically different from the West Asian imperial/national ideologies, Israelite theo-ideology assured lands to the common people. In the neighbouring countries lands belonged to kings, but in Israel land belonged to YHWH. "The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine" (Lev 25: 23). In the nations where the ownership of lands was in the hands of kings, they could accumulate land. But according to ancient Israelite thought, the Israelite kings could not accumulate land. It is sufficient to read the episode in 1 Kings 21 where Naboth refused to sell or exchange the ancestral land to Ahab, the king of Samaria. "But Naboth said to Ahab, 'The Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my father.'" (1 Kings 21: 3). The question at stake here is the inheritance. The land that belonged to YHWH was given as an inheritance to the people.

A careful analysis of Leviticus 25<sup>7</sup> demonstrates that land meant the "means of production". In ancient Israel lands were the main means of production. The means of production belonged to YHWH, hence it was shared by the common people and could not be accumulated by the king. The theology of the Jubilee meant, "equal ownership of the means of production" assured to every Israelite family. This is a radically liberative evangelical dynamic revealed in the Bible.

Assuring equal ownership of the means of production to every family of a particular nation, and to every family on earth remains a dream in an unevangelised pagan world. It demands a radical spirituality, radical turning to the Lord, a radical conversion. It means a personal, social as well as structural conversion. Assuring equal ownership of the means of production is not part of the modern day human rights language. The UN charter on human rights does not include this. The process of globalisation of the economy, which excludes millions of people, is a reverse step against this evangelical dynamic. It drives powerful persons and groups to accumulate wealth at the expense of the powerless. Guaranteeing equal ownership of the means of production to everyone born to this earth means eradicating poverty, thus, assuring human dignity to all; it means minimising violent struggles; it means leading people to live simple lifestyles. This will minimise deforestation, depletion of natural resources, global warming and holes in the ozone layer. This could be achieved only through a deep spirituality of renunciation.

---

<sup>5</sup> J.M. VAN CANGH, "Les origines d'Israël et de la foi monothéiste. Apports de l'archéologie et de la critique littéraire", *Revue Théologique de Louvain* 22 (1991) 305-326, 457-487.

<sup>6</sup> A. SPREAFICO, *Esodo: memoria e promessa. Interpretazioni profetiche* (Suppl. Riv. Bibl. 14; Bologna 1985).

<sup>7</sup> For a comprehensive study on Lev 25, cf. G.C. CHIRICHIGNO, *Debt-Slavery in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (JSOTS 141; Sheffield 1993) 303-343.

“Renunciation” is a deep-seated value in Asian religions. It is the medium of inter-religious dialogue in Asia. In fact renunciation is common to all religions; it is constitutive of the monastic traditions of all religions. The contextual formation in Asia needs to deal at length with the question of renunciation of power as in the case of the early Israelite leadership, and renunciation of wealth as in Jubilee theology. This is the **first universal axiom** for all contextual theologies irrespective of provenance.

The name of God YHWH, “I am who I am” revealed in Exod 3: 14 is linked to the liberation of Israelite slaves. In Exod 5: 2 Pharaoh makes it clear that he does not know YHWH and that he need not heed to his voice. The narrative indicates that YHWH has tied his identity to the slaves who are the refuse of West Asian imperial powers. Aloysius Pieris explains that this is revealed only in the Bible and totally absent in all non-Semitic religions<sup>8</sup>. This is the **second universal axiom** for contextual theologies.

“No liberation theology can claim to be rooted in the word of God if it does not hold together the two biblical axioms mentioned above: (1) the irreconcilable antagonism between *God and mammon*, and (2) the irrevocable covenant between *God and the poor* (i.e., a defense pact against their common enemy: mammon.”<sup>9</sup>

### Creation Theology

Creation theology demands an extensive study. For our purposes we shall limit this inquiry to the creation stories narrated in Genesis 1-3<sup>10</sup>.

At a time when Christians are arriving at a mature understanding of creation and evolution, humanity is threatened with extinction due to the excessive exploitation of the earth and the environment. Millions are already struggling for portable water. Water resources have dried up due to excessive deforestation, and masses of water have been polluted due to chemical waste. The percentage of Carbon Dioxide is on the increase, threatening life and vegetation seriously, which is the ultimate sustenance of food cycles are in the process of disappearing. Non-Christians and specially the Buddhists in Sri Lanka complain that Christian theology of creation is partly responsible for this devastation. Many would of course argue that such faulty theologies are the results of erroneous interpretations of Gen 1: 28: “...multiply and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” But the question is once the damage is done it takes centuries to rectify the situation.

The focus found in the creation stories narrated in Gen 1-3 is mainly concerned with a theology of creation, which attributes goodness to the creator and evil to the misgivings of human beings. The good God who created the universe never planned evil, and the evil experienced in the contemporary situation of the author/s are explained to be the result of the inordinate appetite of human beings. Gen 3: 1-24 is a masterpiece on the origins of evil. Of course the bible student can never approach this text as a scientific treatise on the origins without vitiating the story. It is an existential interpretation of the biblical author/s probably using older material from different cultural settings.

The two creation narratives found in Gen 1: 1-3: 24 namely Gen 1: 1-2: 4a and Gen 2: 4b-3: 24 present a God whose sole intention is human well being. Gen 1: 1-2: 4a visualises a universe born from a background of darkness and waters<sup>11</sup>. Gen 2: 4b-3: 24 depicts a desert background and reflects the Palestinian experience which depended on rain waters unlike the Egyptian or Assyro-

---

<sup>8</sup> A. PIERIS, *An Asian Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, New York) 120.

<sup>9</sup> A. PIERIS, 120-121.

<sup>10</sup> On Genesis 1-3, cf. J.-L. SKA, *Genesis 1-11* (Rome, Unpublished 1986) 1-30.

<sup>11</sup> In Exodus 14 Israel is born out of darkness and waters. For a comprehensive study of the symbolism in this episode, cf. J.-L. SKA, *Le passage de la mer. Etude de la construction, du style et de la symbolique d'Ex 14,1-31* (Analecta Biblica 109; Rome 1986).

Babylonian empires that depended on Nile and Euphrates-Tigris respectively. What interests us is specially the order of creation in Gen 2: 4b-25 namely (1) human being, (2) food, (3) freedom and (4) communion. Gen 1: 1-2: 4a depicts only that which is positive; similarly there are no negative elements in Gen 2: 4b-25. There is no test involved in this episode. 'To eat and not to eat' and 'to eat from any of the tress but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil' are the 'gift of choice' not extended to slaves, prisoners and the like. Hence it is not a test but the offer of a positive gift endowing human beings with freedom. To have the fill with food provided by the trees is not sufficient to be truly human, but also freedom, which is constitutive of human existence. Furthermore, the components food and freedom alone are also not sufficient in being human and hence the symbol/s of communion is/are offered as the climax of divine creation. The crown of creation is man and woman in communion. Man names the animals thus indicating the unequal nature of the relationship between human beings and the animal kingdom, hence human being does not find an equal partner for communion and communication from among the animals. He is exuberant before his equal the woman and poetry is born before her. Man sings before her and she is named in the passive thus excluding any element of domination in the newborn relationship. They can be naked before each other, in other words they have no fear of their vulnerability, of their state of being exposed to danger, of their weakness for no one exploits the weakness of the other. This is a rich symbol of communion.

The situation completely changes in Gen 3: 1-24. The episode is forensically structured<sup>12</sup>: the misdemeanour (3: 1-7); the inquiry (3: 8-13); the verdict (3: 14-19) and the execution of the judgment (3: 20-24). The key question is the interpretation of the symbol of the serpent. Although the serpent has been interpreted as evil in late Jewish and Christian thought, the serpent symbol in early Hebrew literature may not vouch for this interpretation. Numbers 21: 4-9 presents serpent as the "appetite". The serpent symbol in Gen 3: 1-24 seems to be similar to this. Furthermore in John 3: 14 resurrected Christ is compared to the lifted up serpent in Num 21,8. "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life." The "appetite" is neither positive nor negative. It is constitutive of being human. But people have to decide from the world of freedom and not from the world of the appetite. According to this story the first couple deviates from freedom to the world of the appetite. The fault is allowing the appetite to decide for themselves.

Listening to the serpent and deciding from the world of the "appetite" leads to disastrous consequences. This is immediately apparent in Gen 3: 7: "Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons." In a world of communion man and woman were naked and no one exploited the fragility, the weakness of the other. This world is now broken as man and woman have begun to decide from the world of the appetite. As a result they have to safeguard themselves from the aggression of each other, hence they can no longer remain naked and have to protect themselves. In Gen 3: 20 we read: "The man called the woman Eve." In Gen 2: 23 woman was named in the passive denoting equality between man and woman, whereas in Gen 3: 20 the relationship has deteriorated to an oppressive, exploitative stage. Domination reigns when people chase after the dictates of the appetite.

This story is probably a socio-spiritual analysis of the Israelite history. It may point to the monarchical period where equality gradually disappeared from Israel. The post-exodus community saw human dignity endowed to every Israelite family. But this disappeared with the megalomachinery of kingship, which progressively succumbed, to the temptation of reproducing imperial rule within

---

<sup>12</sup> On juridical processes in the bible, cf. P. BOVATI, *Ristabilire la giustizia* (Analecta Biblica 110; Roma 1986).

the precincts of Israel. It was due to the insatiable appetite for power prestige and wealth. In fact these were forbidden by the constitution of kingship in Deut 17: 14-21.

According to Deut 17: 14-21 the Israelite kings were prohibited to multiply horses, wives, silver and gold. The prohibition to multiply horses, symbolises accumulation of power; and wives, lust after the prestige of a harem; and silver and gold as the accumulation of wealth. A king without power, prestige and wealth was not considered a king. Here is a corrective of Israelite kingship, which could guarantee human dignity to all. But it was not to be. The kings of Israel fell into the temptation of the insatiable appetite for power, prestige and wealth, which led to the destruction of the Israelite nation.

Genesis 2: 4b-3: 24 remains true even to this day. This is one of the best socio-spiritual analyses of the human society and the human situation. It is a perpetual warning against the insatiable appetite for power, prestige and wealth, which lead to destruction. At a time when the global policies are accelerating the process of accumulation of global riches in the hands of a few, thus reducing millions in the third world to abject poverty, there is a clear mandate for the heroic task of calling to renounce the insatiable appetite for power, prestige and wealth. It is an indispensable global element for all contextual theologies.

### **The Baptism of Jesus**

In Deut 17: 14-21 the kings of Israel were prohibited to accumulate power, to lust after prestige and amass wealth, but history records that they succumbed to these temptations and the kingdoms of Israel and Judah were destroyed reducing life span of the Israelite and Judean royal rule to a period little over 400 years. Jesus was also tempted like the kings of Israel. "The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. And he was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to him" (Mk 1: 9-11). Through the parallel account in Mt 4: 1-11 and Lk 4: 1-13 we learn that Jesus was also tempted to change stones to bread, to jump from the pinnacle of the temple, and to possess all the kingdoms of the world. The three temptations symbolise the acquisition of power, prestige, and wealth; use power to change stones into bread, exhibit the prestige of jumping from the pinnacle of the temple without being hurt, and bow down before the wealth of the kingdoms of the world. In other words Jesus was tempted to be a king like the kings of Israel. But the gospels record that he resisted this temptation, renounced power, prestige and wealth. But then what was the alternative?

Jesus' baptism in Jordan may have been a foundational experience for his mission<sup>13</sup>. We presume that a glimpse of this experience could be caught in the Marcan narrative. At the baptism of Jesus the voice from heaven declares Jesus to be a king, and he is not called to be a king like the kings of Israel who acquired power, prestige and wealth to exhibit royal identity, but a king like the suffering servant of YHWH: "Thou art my beloved son; with thee I am well pleased" (Mk 1: 11). The quotation is a combination of Ps 2: 7 and Is 42: 1 indicating royalty through service. This king does not possess the classical identity of a West Asian king who wields power, commands prestige and lives in luxury, but rather he is the suffering servant of YHWH who was oppressed, afflicted, and like a lamb led to the slaughter (Is 53: 7). This is the alternative of a poor and powerless kingship that Jesus of Nazareth was called to be<sup>14</sup>.

In a crisis situation of struggle for power narrated in Mk 10: 35-45 Jesus speaks of his baptism on the cross. The circumstances were the request of the Zebedean brothers James and John to sit one at his right hand and one at his left in his glory. The root "baptism" occurs six times in this

---

<sup>13</sup> A. PIERIS, "Asia's Non-Semitic Religions and the Mission of the Local Churches", *An Asian Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, New York 1988) 35-50.

<sup>14</sup> S.L. WIJESINGHE, "Marcan Baptism. A Sri Lankan Hermeneutic", *Christianity and Colonisation and Globalisation* (Logos 36, No. 3/4; Colombo 1999) 75-84.

episode, and it is the cup of suffering and death, which he has reconciled himself to. In Mk 10: 35 as well as in Mk 14: 24, Jesus indicates that his life is given up for **many** like the suffering servant of Isaiah (53: 12) who poured out his life to death bearing the sin of **many**, and this is constitutive of the Christian identity: “You know that those who are supposed to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mk 10: 42-45).

Being baptised into Jesus’ death and resurrection, every Christian in community is called to the same royal vocation, to the same dignity of the sons and daughters of God through a serving and life-giving pattern of existence. It is an art of living and dying, welcoming salvation from God. It is at the same time a life of renunciation of Mammon, the accumulative tendency of assimilating power, taking refuge in prestige and placing security in wealth. The churches have begun to recognise that all women and men of goodwill who live in the spirit of renouncing Mammon and engaged in the art of living and dying for the other are in the paths of salvation.

Being baptised into Christ Jesus is the fundamental vocation of all Christians and the basis of all theologies. Undoubtedly it is a call to renounce power, prestige and wealth, and as seen above this call to live a simple life style is not unique to the Christian vocation for it is also the common heritage of the world religions and certain ideologies. The same fundamental vocation demands acquiring the art of living and dying for the other. That Jesus who is God’s covenant with humanity, whose life-blood poured out for many (Mk 14: 24) is truly the son of God as announced by the story teller in Mark 1: 1 and declared by the centurion in Mk 15: 39 indicates something unique in Christian revelation. The Son of God struggles, suffers, and lays down his life for the salvation of women and men in the world.

### **Conclusion**

The foundational events of the Biblical revelation are Exodus from Egypt and the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. These events underline that welcoming salvation in God demands renunciation of power, wealth and prestige so that every one born to this earth be assured of his/her human dignity. This is the common heritage that the Christians share with the spirituality of world religions. The Exodus from Egypt and the paschal mystery of Jesus also reveal that God has made a covenant with the poor, the slaves, the destitute—all those who have been robbed of their human dignity—for their liberation and wholeness. The creation narratives discussed above confirm the exodus theology that structures of oppression are human constructs and blunders not designed as part of the plan of creation, and that these misdeeds could never be justified as divine will. The New Testament discovers for us that Jesus the slave of God who reveals the God of slaves is God’s covenant with the destitute of the earth endowed with the mission to convert the whole humanity towards God’s salvation.

The two axioms, namely “the irreconcilable antagonism between *God and mammon*, and the irrevocable covenant between *God and the poor*” are indispensable universal principles to count any theology worthy of God-talk, which means liberative.

## **INTER-FAITH REALITY AND ECUMENICAL THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION**

*K. P. Aleaz*

The struggle of Christianity to come to terms with inter-faith reality is an ongoing struggle in which ecumenical theological education has perhaps a prominent role to play. This is because inter-faith reality is a concrete living reality for many a theological students in the Two-Thirds World. Our positive approach to inter-faith reality supplies us with a new vision for ecumenical theological education and the paper attempts to analyse the diverse dimensions of this vision.

Inter-faith reality reshapes the vision of a theological student in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in a number of ways. The student is enabled to understand and use the resources of the diverse religious faiths as the common property of humanity. He/She is enlightened to uphold the glorious relational convergence of religious experiences. He/She is enabled to experience a growth in the richness of the diverse religious experiences through mutual interaction. Moreover he/she is encouraged to proclaim the liberative elements in other religious traditions, when such elements are destroyed by vested interests. Also, he/she grows to be broad hearted enough to seek forgiveness for the damage done by Christianity to other religious faiths by way of destruction of the local religions and cultures as well as by misinterpretations of their tenets; and to provide appropriate compensation to the extent it is possible. These are possible in terms of a perspective in theology of religions in the context of inter-faith called Pluralistic Inclusivism.

### **1. Pluralistic Inclusivism**

Pluralistic Inclusivism inspires each religious faith to be pluralistically inclusive i.e., on the one hand each living faith is to become truly pluralistic by other faiths contributing to its conceptual content and on the other, Inclusivism is to transform its meaning to witness the fulfillment of the theological and spiritual contents of one's own faith in and through the contributions of other living faiths. Such a perspective rejects the other schools in theology of religions Exclusivism, Inclusivism and Pluralism as defective. According to Exclusivism one's own religious faith is the only valid path to liberation and that is the criterion by other faiths are understood and evaluated. Inclusivism accepts the divine presence in other faiths but rejects them as not being sufficient for liberation apart from one's own faith. According to it, all the truth in other religions belongs ultimately to one's own faith, which is its fulfillment. Pluralism holds the view that all religions are equally salvific paths to the one God. The Ultimate Reality upon which the faith of all believers is focussed in every religion is the same, though interpretations of its essential nature may vary. Exclusivism is its own rejection, what Inclusivism has is only a disguised exclusivism and Pluralism is not a solution to pluralism.<sup>1</sup> Such a perspective of Pluralistic Inclusivism has the potential to re-structure ecumenical theological education.

---

<sup>1</sup> Cf. K.P.Aleaz, *Harmony of Religions. The Relevance of Swami Vivekananda*, Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1993, pp. 162-65; "Religious Pluralism and Christian Witness- A Biblical- Theological Analysis", *Bangalore Theological Forum*, Vol. XXI, No. 1, Dec.-March 1990, pp. 48-67; *Theology of Religions. Birmingham Papers and Other Essays*, Calcutta: Moumita, 1998, pp. 168-99.

## **2. Religious Resources Conceived as the Common Property of Humanity**

Pluralistic Inclusivism is a perspective for the ecumenical theological student in inter-religious relations in which all the religious resources of the world are considered as the common property of the whole humanity. All religious experiences and traditions are simultaneously ours. We do not have any one particular religious tradition alone as our own and others as belonging to others. All are mine as well as all are for all others. All belong to all. It is a religious perspective in which while remaining in one's own religious faith-experience, one can consider other faiths as one's own, as the common property of humanity, for an increasingly blessed and enriched life. Here the otherness of the other is negated. Our natural tendency is to affirm the separate identity and uniqueness of our religious experience as compared to the other religious experiences. After affirming the separateness, we may try to dialogue with the others, seeking an opportunity for authentic witness of our faith as well as learning from other faiths. Pluralistic Inclusivism is an entirely different perspective than this. It is the affirmation of the inter-connected identity and uniqueness of all religious experiences as our own and here our witness is to a world faith and our theology is a world theology.<sup>2</sup>

## **3. A Relational Convergence of Religions**

For a new vision of the ecumenical theological education, Pluralistic Inclusivism suggests the relational convergence of religions. An important aspect of relational convergence of religions is mutual conversion. Being born in a religion does not mean that we should die in that religion in the same way as we were born. We can get converted into the true spirit of once own religion and in that very conversion get converted into another religious experience as well. For example, if the gospel of God in Jesus has to emerge from the hermeneutical context of India, we can rightly say that Indian Christians are in a process of converting to the Indian religio-cultural context.<sup>3</sup> The Indian religio-cultural context will decide the content of the gospel of God in Jesus for India. The gospel is not pre-formulated, but is in the process of formulation. The faith experience of the Indian Christian is not pre-formulated, but is in the process of formulation through the guidance of Hindu and other religious experiences. Indian Christian theology is a conversion of Christian theology to the Indian religio-cultural context.<sup>4</sup> In the very conversion to Jesus in India, there is a conversion to the religio-cultural context of India, effecting thus a double conversion and this hinds to the possible relational convergence of religious experiences.

Ecumenical theological education is challenged to evolve a more comprehensive role for other religions in Christian experience than what has been envisaged in the past. To reduce the role of religions to liberational praxis is a reductionism. To reduce the interpretation of religions solely in terms of Folk tales again would be a reductionism. Of course our focus should be the people, as has been emphasised by the Asian theologians; but people centered on a comprehensive religious life. How the comprehensive religious life of people of other faiths is related to the gospel of God in Jesus is the basic question to be answered in the third millennium.<sup>5</sup>

## **4. Growth in the Richness of Religious Experience**

*There is growth in the richness of religious experiences by mutual sharing and separatist tendency in religious experience is discouraged by ecumenical theological education. All are common resources and they are used commonly. There is social justice maintained in the realm of religious experiences by sharing with those who do not have, but this is an*

---

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 176-80.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. K.P.Aleaz, "Conversions: Some Indian Christian Reflections", *NCC Review*, Vol. CXV, No. 1, Jan. 1995, pp.28-42.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. K.P.Aleaz, *Religions in Christian Theology*, Kolkata: Punthi Pustak, 2001.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. K.P.Aleaz, "The role of Asian Religions in Asian Christian Theology", *Asia Journal of Theology*, Vol.15, No.2, Oct. 2001, pp.268-87.

entirely different attitude from that of imposing upon others forcibly what they do not want. Pluralistic Inclusivism always maintains humility to see that others have better things than us.<sup>6</sup> The superiority of others is always affirmed in it, rather than claiming our own superiority. In other words, here there is a reversal of the positions of Exclusivism and Inclusivism which maintain one's own superiority in religious beliefs over against others as well as which try to impose one's own convictions on others. According to Pluralistic Inclusivism, if one is intimately familiar with one's own religious system alone, that is a very religiously poverty stricken condition; exclusivists are thus religiously very poor. Pluralistic Inclusivism upholds just distribution of religious resources. If economic justice is very hard to attain, as one has to fight for it, the case of resources related to religious experiences may be of easy access though Patriarchy and initiation procedures may try to create barriers. The point is, there is a possibility for "religious justice" in the world, which is economically unjust due to the oppression of the South by the North. Imposing one's own faith on others is the only religious injustice, and the Semitic religions as well as the colonial rulers have resorted to this in some areas and periods in the past.<sup>7</sup> If so, the call of Pluralistic Inclusivism is for religious justice; for the just distribution of religious resources. There is no more imposition of religious resources, but only the whole-hearted mutual reception of these by people of diverse faiths. If religious separateness and rivalry have caused much bloodshed in the history of humanity, Pluralistic Inclusivism should cause the opposite. In Pluralistic Inclusivism there will no more be any killing of others; there will only be self-sacrifice for the sake of others; there will only be self-sacrifice for the growth of the religious experiences of others as well as for the growth of one's own religious experience.<sup>8</sup>

##### **5. Ecumenical Theological Education is to proclaim the Liberative Elements in other religious traditions, when personal stakes destroys such elements**

The 21<sup>st</sup> century theological student is not any more for pointing out the defects in other faiths to be corrected by Christian faith, as if Christianity is free from all defects. Rather, he/she stands for the correction of the defects of other faiths by those faiths themselves. He/She is no more to condemn other religions, rather to affirm the liberative elements in them, overcoming the existing misrepresentations of these by their own adherents of personal stake. Today we condemn only the misuse of religion. For example, caste and communalism are two evils manifested in the Indian society in the context of Hinduism. It is easy for a theological student to condemn Hinduism for the evils of caste and present the gospel of God in Jesus as an alternative to Hinduism as has been done, for example, by J.N.Farquhar: Caste cannot provide equality, social freedom and social justice and it is remarkable that these social principles spring directly from the teachings of Jesus on the Fatherhood/Motherhood of God and the universal brotherhood/sisterhood of humans.<sup>9</sup>

Rather than doing this, the Christian theologian is to proclaim the gospel that the caste factor can be corrected through resources from within Hinduism itself. He/She proclaims that the serious problem of Dalit oppression can be countered with Advaitic resources.<sup>10</sup> Advaita Vedanta stands for a rejection of caste system and this we know from the Practical Vedanta of Swami Vivekananda:

---

<sup>6</sup> For example Christians may maintain that the richness of Advaitic experience can teach them many a things which they do not possess. Cf. K.P.Aleaz, *The Relevance of Relation in Sankara's Advaita Vedanta*, Delhi: Kant Publication, 1996.

<sup>7</sup> S.J.Samartha, *One Christ Many Religions. Toward a Revised Christology*, Bangalore: SATHRI, 1992, pp.36-41.

<sup>8</sup> Jesus may be considered as the symbol of self-sacrifice and Advaita Vedanta provides an ideological basis for self-sacrifice. Cf. K.P.Aleaz, *An Indian Jesus from Sankara's Thought*, Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1997.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. J.N.Farquhar, *The Crown of Hinduism*, London; Oxford University Press, 1913.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. K.P.Aleaz, "The Convergence of Dalit-Advaitic Theologies: An Exploration", *Indian Journal of Theology*, Vol. 36, No. I., 1994, pp.97-108.

One who is established in the bliss of the Infinite will feel the whole sentient and insentient world as one's own Self. Then that person cannot help treating all people with the same kindness as he/she shows towards himself/herself. This is what the Swamiji meant by Practical Vedanta.<sup>11</sup> The Atman is absolute, all pervading and infinite and each individual soul is part of that Universal soul. Therefore in injuring one's neighbour, a person actually injures oneself.<sup>12</sup> In the Atman there is no distinction of sex or Varna or Ashrama, or anything of the kind.<sup>13</sup> Hence, if the Dalit theologians hold that the sufferings of the Dalits should be the basis or starting point of Dalit theology, Swami Vivekananda is inspiring them to add to it the basis of the one Innermost Atman shared by all alike as well.<sup>14</sup> Thus the 21<sup>st</sup> century ecumenical theological education upholds the liberative elements in other faiths to fight against the evils manifested today through a misrepresentation of those faiths. Right interpretation of the tenets of other religions to remove social evils is an important aspect of an ecumenical theological student's duty, mission.

Religious communalism<sup>15</sup> is the other evil manifested in India today in the context of Hinduism through the activities of the Sangh Parivar. Hinduism has an inherent power to tackle this evil from within and the duty of the theologian in this context is to proclaim that power for the benefit of all.<sup>16</sup> While understanding the use of religion in communal politics we should note that religion is neither the cause nor the end of communalism, but only its vehicle. Religion is made to serve politics as a garb or rationalization. In communalism religion plays an entirely extraneous role or a role of a mask because we find communalists to be both non-practising religionists and shirkers of theology. We have to distinguish between religion as an ideology or a belief system and the ideology of religious identity, which is communalism. In fact, to understand communalism, or the ideology of religious identity we have to go outside the sphere of religion and explore the spheres of economics and politics. Religious difference is a basic element of communal ideology and politics and it is used by the communalist as an organizing principle and to mobilize the masses. However, religious difference is not the cause of communal ideology and politics.<sup>17</sup>

The glorious fact the contemporary ecumenical theological education can proclaim is, Hindu religion as an ideology nullifies the ideology of religious identity which is communalism because in Hinduism religious pluralism is theologically accepted in the following ways:<sup>18</sup> Already in the Rg Veda (1.164.46), by pointing out that Sat (Truth, Being) is one but sages call it by different names,

---

<sup>11</sup> Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. VII, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition, Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1969, p.163. Cf. Pp. 91, 197; Vol. I, 13<sup>th</sup> Edition, Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1970, pp. 364, 389-90.

<sup>12</sup> *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. I, pp.384-85; Vol. III, 10<sup>th</sup> Edition, Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1970, p.425; Vol. II, 12<sup>th</sup> Edition, Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1971, pp. 414-15.

<sup>13</sup> *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. VI, 8<sup>th</sup> Edition, Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1968, p.327.

<sup>14</sup> K.P.Aleaz, *Harmony of Religions. The Relevance of Swami Vivekananda*, op. cit., pp.222-23.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Bipan Chandra, *Communalism in Modern India*, New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1989; Asghar Ali Engineer, *Communalism and Communal Violence in India* (A special issue of *Islamic Perspective Vol.IV*), Bombay: Indian institute of Islamic Studies, 1988; S.K.Ghosh, *Communal Riots in India*, New Delhi: Ashish Publishing House, 1987; P.R.Rajagopal, *Communal Violence in India*, Delhi: Uppal Publishing House, 1987; R.Thapar et. al., *Communalism and the Writing of Indian History*, Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1969; M.S.Golwalkar, *Bunch of Thoughts*, Bangalore: Vikram Prakashana, 1966; S.Arulsamy(ed.), *Communalism in India. A Challenge to Theologising*, Bangalore: Claretian Publications, 1988; S.Lourdusamy, *Religion as Political Weapon*, Calcutta: Multi Book Agency, 1990.

<sup>16</sup> In the context of Hindutva the new paradigm for mission then is not dialogue as G.R.Singh conceives. Christian faith need not come into the picture at all for reconciliation. The power for reconciliation has to emerge from within Hinduism itself. Cf. G.R.Singh, "Hindutva and a New Paradigm for Mission", *The South India Church Man*, Oct. 1993, pp.2-4.

<sup>17</sup> Bipan Chandra, op. cit., pp.158-90.

<sup>18</sup> S.J.Samartha, "The Cross and the rainbow: Christ in a multi-religious culture" in *Christian Faith and Multiform Culture in India*, ed. by Somen Das, Bangalore: United Theological College, 1987, pp.22-29; Ramesh Chandra Majumdar, *Indian Religion*, Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1969, pp. 54-62.

Brahmanism tried to solve the clash between one religion and another. The Bhagavadgita faced with the possibility of many margas (paths to God) suggested that those who worship other gods in reality worship Krishna (9.23,24; 7.21; 4.11). The orthodox Hindus argue for religious pluralism saying that plurality is rooted in the diversity of human nature itself, in the principle of adhikarabheda (difference in aptitude or competence) and therefore the question of superiority or 'uniqueness' of any one dharma over others does not arise. Further, Advaita Vedanta and Syadvada of Jainism promote harmony of religions. The Christian theologian can make such meaningful proclamation as these provided he/she is also willing to listen to the interpretations of Christ and Christianity provided by people of other faiths. Liberative religious utterances are authentic only in the context of mutuality.

**6. Ecumenical theological education is to seek forgiveness for the damage done to other religious faiths by way of destruction of the local religions and cultures as well as by misinterpretations**

In order to become qualified to proclaim the liberative elements in other religious traditions as indicated above, the first step needed is, repentance for the sins committed in the past by Christianity, the sins of destroying other religions and cultures as well as of deliberately misrepresenting other religious tenets. The early missionary undertakings were accompanied by the exploitation of indigenous people, genocide, land theft, slavery and oppression, and the WCC at the Canberra assembly exhorted its member churches to conversion, active and ongoing repentance and reparation for past sins as a prelude to reconciliation.<sup>19</sup> The Assembly rightly called upon member churches

To negotiate with indigenous people to ascertain how lands taken unjustly by Churches from indigenous people can be returned to them;

To support self-determination and sovereignty of indigenous people, as defined by them, in church and society;

To protect burial grounds and sacred sites of indigenous people from desecration and destruction and to work towards the return of ancestral remains, artifacts, sacred objects and other items belonging to indigenous people;

To protect freedom of indigenous people to practise their traditional religions.<sup>20</sup>

The damage done by Christian missions was not only to indigenous people of various lands but to peoples of all the different religions by distorting their religious teachings. In a lecture delivered to the Western audience Swami Vivekananda lamented: "You train and educate and clothe and pay men to do what? To come over to my country to abuse all my forefathers, my religion, and everything. They walk near a temple, and say, ' You idolaters, you will go to hell' ."<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> Michael Kinnamon, (ed.), *World Council of Churches. Signs of the Spirit. Official Report. Seventh Assembly Canberra, Australia, 7-20 February 1991*, Geneva: WCC, 1991, pp.216-19.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 276-78.

<sup>21</sup> Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol. VIII, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition*, Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1971, pp.211-12.

Misinterpretations of the theological concepts of other faiths by Christian missionaries and theologians have been a common feature in India and today there is a need for us to seek forgiveness for this. A.G.Hogg<sup>22</sup> misinterpreted the doctrine of karma, P.D.Devanandan had the arrogance to say that the classical Hindu theology is incapable of giving an ideological basis for the new anthropology emerging in Independent India and where it is failing, to find a solution the revelation of God in Jesus Christ has got an answer to give. He was for a Christian apologetic, which would explain the difference between the Christian and the Hindu understanding of religious fundamentals.<sup>23</sup> According to Surjit Singh too, Advaita philosophy, the foundation on which, the structure of the Indian world still rests,<sup>24</sup> is largely ahistorical, apersonal and atemporal<sup>25</sup> and his effort is to indicate a way to safeguard the reality of personality, human and divine, of history, of time, and of the world by recapturing the New Testament significance of the person and work of Jesus Christ.<sup>26</sup> Ecumenical theological education will endeavour to put an end to the misinterpretations such as these.

There are some theologians in India who have tried to correct such Christian misinterpretations of Hinduism and there is a need for us to strengthen their hand. For example, Samuel Rayan, through his exposition of Bhagavadgita has rejected the criticism raised against Hinduism by some people that it does not give sufficient importance to the historical dimensions of human life. For Gita "history is time open to God and on the move, maturing towards its own wholeness which is already present in the presence of its Lord within its heart."<sup>27</sup> The road of death is samsara, which is cyclic time, and the path of life is history, which is time open to Krishna's love and ripening into life with him. We have also tried to show elsewhere that in Advaita the ecological, historical and social dimensions are theologically asserted and thus the ontological understanding of the structure of Being is properly related to the problems of life on earth, of life in relation to earth.<sup>28</sup> Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya, P.Johanns and R.V.De Smet have explained to us that Nirguna Brahman does not mean Impersonal Absolute; rather it corresponds to the Christian notion of God. Nirgunam only means that the attributes which relate the Infinite to the finite are not necessary to His/Her being.<sup>29</sup> It means Absolute Personality or Supreme Personality.<sup>30</sup> It denotes the Fullness of all perfections in absolute simplicity.<sup>31</sup> By affirming interpretations such as these ecumenical theological education has the responsibility to assure our Extra-Christian brothers and sisters that we will no more be unChristian destroyers and manipulators.

---

<sup>22</sup> A.G.Hogg, *Karma and Redemption. An Essay toward the interpretation of Hinduism and the Restatement of Christianity*, London: CLS, 1909; *The Christian Message to the Hindu. Being the Duff Missionary Lectures for 1945 on the Challenge of the Gospel in India*, London: SCM Press, 1947.

<sup>23</sup> P.D.Devanandan, *The Gospel and the Renascent Hinduism*, London: SCM Press, 1959, p. 55; *The Gospel and the Hindu Intellectual. A Christian Approach*, Bangalore: CISRS, 1958, pp. 25-27; *Preparation for Dialogue. A collection of Essays on Hinduism and Christianity*, ed. by Nalini Devanandan and M.M.Thomas, Bangalore: CISRS, 1964, pp.38-40, 164-68.

<sup>24</sup> Surjit Singh, "Ontology and Personality" in *Indian Voices in today's Theological Debate*, ed. by Horst Burkle and Wolfgang M.W.Roth, Lucknow: LPH/ISPCK/CLS, 1972, p.74.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.75-87; Surjit Singh, *Christology and personality*, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, n.d., pp.19, 139, 143-51, 140-41, 151-58 etc.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.19, 143-90 etc.; Surjit Singh, *A Philosophy of Integral Relation (Samyagdarsanam)*, Madras/Bangalore: CLS/CISRS, 1981, pp.29-35, 44, 56. For misconceptions of Hinduism by Schweitzer, Bouquet and Zaehner Cf. D.S.Sarma, *Renascent Hinduism*, Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1966, pp.70-81.

<sup>27</sup> Samuel Rayan, "Indian Theology and the problem of History" in *Society and Religion: Essays in Honour of M.M.Thomas*, ed. by Richard W. Taylor, Madras/Bangalore: CLS/CISRS, 1976, p. 175.

<sup>28</sup> K.P.Aleaz, "Vedic-Vedantic Vision in Indian Christian Theology of Nature", *Bangalore Theological Forum*, Vol. XXV, No. 1, March 1993, p. 36.

<sup>29</sup> B. Upadhyaya, "Notes", *Sophia*, Vol.I, No. 4, July 7, 1900, p. 6; "Notes", *Sophia*, Vol. I, No. 2, June 23, 1900, p.7; Summary of the lecture by B. Upadhyaya, "Hinduism, Theosophy, and Christianity", *Sophia*, Vol. IV, No. 12, Dec. 1897, pp. 1-2.

<sup>30</sup> P.Johanns, "To Christ through the Vedanta", *Light of the East*, Vol. IV, No. 5, Feb. 1926, p.5; *Ibid.*, Vol. III, No. 8, May 1925, pp.3-4.

## **7. Conclusion**

The following are our concluding observations:

- (a) A particular perspective in theology of religions called Pluralistic Inclusivism enables the 21<sup>st</sup> century theological student to reshape his/her vision taking into consideration inter-faith reality. Pluralistic Inclusivism encourages on the one hand, each living faith to become truly pluralistic by other faiths contributing to its conceptual content and on the other hand, in it Inclusivism transforms its meaning to witness the fulfillment of theological and spiritual content of one's own faith in and through the contributions of other living faiths.
- (b) In the new interfaith vision of the theological student all the diverse religious resources of the world are conceived as the common property of the whole humanity. All religious experiences of the world are simultaneously ours.
- (c) The new vision further envisages a relational convergence of religious experiences. For example, in the very conversion to Jesus in India, there is a conversion to the religio-cultural context of India, effecting thus a double conversion. Ecumenical theologians are challenged to evolve a more comprehensive role for other religions in Christian experience.
- (d) There is growth in the riches of religious experiences by mutual sharing and any separatist tendency in religious experience is discouraged by inter-faith reality.
- (e) Ecumenical theological education now stands for the correction of the defects of other religious faiths by the resources of those faiths themselves. It affirms the liberative elements in them, eliminating the existing misrepresentations of these by personal stakes. Caste and communalism in India are demonstrated as destroyable by resources of Hinduism itself.
- (f) If in the name of mission, Christian imperialists have attempted to destroy local religions and cultures, and Christian thinkers have misinterpreted the doctrines of other religions, the first step in ecumenical theological education is to seek forgiveness for the damage done as well as eliminate all the prevalent misinterpretations.

---

<sup>31</sup> R.V.De Smet, "Ancient Religious Speculations" in *Religious Hinduism. A Presentation and Appraisal* ed. by R.V.De Smet & J Neuner, Allahabad : St. Paul Publications, 1968, p.46.

**A MEMORIAL TRIBUTE TO RICHARD SHAULL (1919-2002)**

The Programme on Ecumenical Formation of the World Council of Churches pays tribute to the memory of Rev. Prof. Richard Shaull who passed away on October 25th, in the USA, at the age of 82. As a presbyterian missionary in Latin America from 1942 to 1965, and specially as a professor of Church History and Ecumenics, first in Brazil, from 1952 to 1962, and later in the USA, Richard Shaull embodied the ministry of ecumenical theological formation at its best. He was a powerful inspiration to students and colleagues by his unreserved commitment to a Christian vision of social ethics and to the role of the church as servant of the Kingdom of justice. Among his several writings, "Christianity and Social Revolution" (1953) was an epoch making and pioneering contribution to liberation theology in Latin America and beyond. As a steadfast witness to the world-transforming Gospel of Jesus Christ he exerted a lasting impact in ecumenical thinking and action worldwide. We deeply mourn Richard Shaull's departure and give thanks to God for his fruitful and blessed ministry, and we do so in the certainty that in Christ death has no power.

Written by  
**Aharon Sapsezian**