

ALONG THE MANY PATHS OF GOD IV

Intercontinental Liberation Theology
of Religious Pluralism

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**JOSÉ MARÍA VIGIL, LUIZA E. TOMITA
AND MARCELO BARROS (EDS.)**

ECUMENICAL ASSOCIATION
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Marcelo BARROS (eds.)**

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Prologue

What this collection of essays seeks to achieve is more important than ever. The authors, like their predecessors in the three previous volumes, are seeking, each in his or her particular cultural/political context, to foster a “teología cristiana liberadora intercontinental del pluralismo religioso.” Their goal is to develop not just a more fruitful diálogo *religioso* between Christians and followers of other religious paths but a dialogue that will also be *liberador*. This is an effort to link current theologies of religions with current theologies of liberation. Happily, this has been a concern and commitment of a growing number of Christian theologians over the past decade. And these volumes of “*Por los caminos de Dios*” have been a significant contribution to that growth.

What I hope to point out in this brief prólogo is why this task – to join interreligious dialogue with interreligious liberation – is more urgent and more complex than ever. My thesis, if I can call it such, is that the main reason and the principle cause of the growing economic injustice in the world and of the dehumanizing poverty that results from such injustice *is itself religious*. The forces that are generating so much wealth and at the same time so much disparity in the distribution of wealth have themselves *become a religion*. The global free market has become a *global exclusive religion*. The religions of the world, both individually and interreligiously, must enter into a prophetic diálogo liberador with this new global religion. Without such an interreligious dialogue with the religion of the market, the dehumanizing power of the market cannot be effectively challenged and “converted.”

Let me, briefly, try to explain.

The religion of the market

Contrary to Samuel Huntington's claim that we are now engaged in a "Clash of Civilizations,"¹ I believe that the clash that is really taking place – and, I would add, *needs* to take place -- is not between civilizations. It is between *religions*! The clashing religions I am talking about, however, are not the traditional religious communities. Rather, I'm referring to the clash – the fundamental opposition -- between the so-called world religions on the one side, and the new Religion of the Market, on the other.

David Loy, in a widely discussed article, has argued carefully and eloquently that the dominant, most widespread, religion in our contemporary world is the "Religion of the Market." Especially in developed countries like the USA, Europe, Japan, this is the religion that most people belong to, and it claims their primary religious commitments. Their devotion to the Religion of the Market *precedes and qualifies* their devotion to Christianity or Judaism or Buddhism.²

For the ordinary faithful, the Religion of the Market means the religion of consumerism. One practices one's faith, one finds salvation, by consuming in the temples that are called shopping malls. But it is a daily liturgy and worship, not confined to Sunday or Saturday or Friday.

For the prelates and potentates of this new religion, the Religion of the Market means the religion of "economism." According to John B. Cobb, Jr. the devotees of "economism" place their full, absolute (we might add: blind) faith in the belief that economic growth, pursued unrestrictedly and without government interference, by individual persons and individual nations, will bring salvation to the entire world. In Cobb's words:

Economism is that organization of society that is intentionally in the service of economic growth. All other values, including national sovereignty, are subordinated to this end, with the sincere expectation that sufficient prosperity will enable the world to meet its non-economic needs as well."³

For the Religion of the Market, based on unconditional faith in economism, the human being is an economic being (*homo economicus*)-- that is, a being "... who rationally seeks to gain as many goods as possible for as little labor as possible. His or her relations with other people are competitive."⁴

1 HUNTINGTON.

2 David LOY, «The Religion of the Market», *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 65/2 (1997) 275-90.

3 COBB, BCS, 4-5.

4 BCS, 11.

This Religion of the Market bears all the features that we find in the traditional religions:

- Its *creeds* are made up of the neoliberal economics of (Pope) Friedrich von Hayak and (Ayatollah) Milton Friedman.
- Its *theologians* or *ullama* are the economists (mainly Western economists).
- Its *missionaries* are the vast army of advertisers who proclaim their message of consumption on “commercials” that fill television and radio broadcasts and on the billboards that populate our cities and landscapes.
- Its *centers of learning* are the economic departments of American and Western universities and their tribunal in the World Trade Organization.
- This religion has its *commandments*, the first of which is “Thou shalt not interfere with the free market.” (Or more traditionally phrased: “the Free Market is the Lord thy God; thou shalt not have strange gods before it.”)
- It has a clear and absolute *soteriology*: “Outside the free-market there is no salvation.” Those who are not “inside” and members of this one true religion are considered heathen or enemies, to be controlled or removed.

A fundamental difference between the religions and the religion of the market

There is a fundamental difference, which is a fundamental opposition, between the ethics of what Cobb calls “economism” (or market fundamentalism) and the ethics of the traditional religions. In amazingly different but complementary ways, the Abrahamic traditions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam), the Asian traditions (Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism), and the indigenous religions are in basic agreement that whatever greater, globalized unity the human race might reach, such unity has to be *based on a balance between self-interest and other-interest*.

Religious ethics are always paradoxical. In a variety of symbols and with different emphases, the religious traditions all tell humanity that, paradoxically but promisingly, self-interest equals other-interest. The grounding visions of the religions call people to a life-giving, peace-giving shift from *self-interest to other-interest*. This “other” is always different from oneself, or more than one’s present self-awareness. It is Other with a capital O (the Source or Inner Life of all) and other with a lower-case ‘o’: one’s neighbor.

So Jesus tells us that we can truly love ourselves only when we love our neighbor. Muhammad warns us that in caring for ourselves, in promoting a good society, we can never forget to care for all others,

especially the poor and neglected. For Buddha, to experience one's own enlightenment is to feel compassion for all sentient beings. In Confucian ethics: "In order to establish ourselves, we must help others to establish themselves; in order to enlarge ourselves, we have to help others to enlarge themselves."

This, therefore, is the question or the challenge that the religions must pose to the promoters of the free market. The religious community must ask the economists, politicians, corporate CEOs: is the *self-interest* you extol balanced by, rooted in, guided by *other-interest*? It sure doesn't seem so. The guiding principle of the capitalistic global system, ruled as it is by market fundamentalism, seems to be: "If we seek our own interest we will also promote that of others." That, according to the religions, must be balanced by: "If we seek the interest of others, we will promote our own." If we don't have this balance, if we don't match our self-interest with interest in the well-being of others, the religions warn, we're in for trouble. In fact, that's the reason why the so-called globalized free market is not responding to, or is actually causing, such a disparity of wealth in our globalized world.

Interreligious dialogue with the religion of the market

Difficult though it will be, the traditional religions of the world must enter into a critical, prophetic dialogue with this new universal Religion of the Market. The religions must engage the captains and the high-priests of globalization and confront them with the "clash," the fundamental difference, between the Religion of the Market and the traditional, historical religions. Religious leaders and teachers must make it clear that at the present moment, given the way the Religion of the Market understands itself, it is not possible for an individual to be a "member" of the Religion of the Market and at the same time a follower of Muhammad or Jesus or Buddha or Abraham. No "double belonging" here. One must choose: either to bow to God/Allah/the Dharma or to bow to the Market.

An interreligious dialogue with the Religion of the Market is extremely difficult mainly because the Market insists, like the Catholic Church of old and like many fundamentalist Christian and Muslim communities of the present, that it is the one and only true religion. All others are false. As is well known from the history of interreligious relations, any religion that claims to be the one and only does not dialogue with other religion; it seeks to convert them.

And yet some kind of dialogue or encounter between the religions of the world and the Religion of the Market is utterly urgent. If the Free Market has assumed the power and dominance of a world religion, if it

informs and directs the lives of people in as pervasive a manner as religion has always done – then is it not the case that the traditional religions of the world must be among the principle means of counteracting this new idolatrous religion of the Market? If it is true that often one needs fire to fight fire, then today we need the religions to “fight” and quell and redirect the Religion of the Market. Perhaps today only the religions can provide people with the vision, the energy, the hope, the perseverance to dialogue with, to struggle against, to win back the followers of the Religion of the Market who have set the god of consumerism and economic growth in the place of the one God who assures us that each of us can find true happiness only in promoting the happiness of all of us.

This collection of essays, and the project it is part of, is one small but significant contribution to promoting a dialogue among religions that will make possible a prophetic dialogue with the Religion of the Market. I am honored to have the privilege of offering an introductory word. And I look forward to the ongoing conversation that these essays will stimulate within the Christian community and within the community of religions.

Paul F. KNITTER
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USA

Presentation

This book is the fourth in the series “Along the Many Paths of God.”

The specific subtitle of this volume is “Intercontinental Liberating Pluralist Theology.” Each of the preceding volumes in the series “Along the Many Paths of God” has gradually focused its content, step by step, in progressive levels. The idea was to use a graduated logic in order to construct the path toward a planetary pluralist theology, that is to say one that is Christian, interreligious and global. In this way it can effectively assist the diverse religious traditions to serve peace and the construction of a new world.

As was the case in the earlier volumes, this fourth book is stand-alone, autonomous and independent of the others. It focuses on the task of presenting and evaluating the current reality of an “intercontinental liberating pluralist theology.” This means that it intends to bring together a first set of data about the current state of this theology at the beginning of its journey in today’s world and on the different continents.

So then, we offer a detailed and layered description of the content of this book, taking as reference its subtitle as an “intercontinental liberating pluralist theology.”

- It is a book of **theology** and not one of religious sciences, sociology of religion or of ecumenism. Nor is it about interreligious dialogue. Our interest is theological. We want to do theology and understand how theology is doing.

- In so far as it is “theology,” we are clearly in the sphere of **Christian** theology. We have not entered the field of “interreligious or *interfaith* theology,” although we still keep our eye fixed on that challenge to which we have made reference several times already.

- But, we insist that we are speaking of a **pluralist** theology. Normally it is called theology **of religious pluralism**, which is, as you know, the new name for “theology of religions.”¹ However, we want to

1 J. DUPUIS refers to this new name or to this “change of terminology” in *Verso una teologia cristiana del pluralismo religioso*, Queriniana, Brescia 1997, pág. 18-19 y 271.

be still more explicit because, strictly speaking, there can be a “theology of religious pluralism” that is not “pluralist,” but rather, for example—and this is frequently the case—exclusivist. A theology of “religious pluralism” could be one that had that “religious pluralism,” as its material object (a theology “of” in the genitive case) but not as its formal object (a theology in which religious pluralism is the fundamental perspective, the stand from which the material object would be treated). The theology of religious pluralism to which we are referring is not just a theology “of,” that is to say a theology that has religious pluralism as its material object, but rather a theology that is, in itself, constructed from a pluralist perspective and in counter-position to the exclusivist and inclusivist perspectives. It is then a truly “pluralist” theology, in the technical sense of the term.

- And we are dealing specifically with a **liberating** theology, or in other words, **of liberation**. It is inscribed in that large category of theology that shares the “dimensional formula” of an “historical reading of reality, one that is kingdom-centered and with an option for the poor.”² As has often been repeated, our series “Along the Many Paths of God” intends to make a precise “cross” between North-Atlantic theology of religions, which is generally not present within the category of liberation theology,³ and the theology of liberation. We want to offer an entry for liberation theology into the field of the theology of religions, which is a new field for it, without ceasing to be liberation theology.

- And we speak of it, finally, as **intercontinental** in order to make it clear that we are not longer set merely within the context of Latin America as were the earlier volumes. Now we have rather leapt beyond the borders and have stretched our antennas toward the other continents. This book is structured precisely by passing in review the state of this (Christian) pluralist and liberating theology on five continents.

So this is the detailed description of the content of this book that sketches its specific subtitle.

This was our intention. Obviously, carrying it out will be no more than an initial sounding. Just the same, in this case, we believe and with all due modesty, that this is the first book that has this objective because it is only in this historic moment that, for the first time, it is possible to speak of an “intercontinental pluralist and liberating theology.”

2 See J.M. VIGIL, *Is there a Change of Paradigm in Liberation Theology?*, LADOC XXVIII(sept-oct 1997)1-13, Lima. Spanish original: ¿Cambio de paradigma en la teología de la liberación?, «Christus», 701(agosto 1997)7-15, México; «Alternativas» 8(junio 97)27-46 Managua; and <http://servicioskoinonia.org/relat/193.htm>

3 Though some of its best exponents, like Paul Knitter, do move in this direction.

The result, as is evident in reading this book, is a heterogeneous and uneven panorama. While some continents have already successfully entered the field and offer numerous results worthy of study, others have barely taken the first steps. In others it is difficult to find theologians (men or women) who have determined to take up the study of this theme. So it is an uneven reality as is reflected in the studies that make up this book.

Paul F. Knitter was kind enough to honor us with a prologue for this fourth volume,⁴ and has done so with the hand of a master and with a visionary capacity for intuiting and presenting the deep meaning of this collection of books: “a small but important contribution to the promotion of a dialogue between religions that makes possible a prophetic dialogue with the religion of the market.” We are very grateful to him for his proximity and collaboration.

In order to help better situate this book for readers that do not know the earlier ones, we want to recall, in a schematic way, the content of the five volumes that make up the series that has as its overall title, “Along the Many Paths of God...” Each of its volumes has its own specific subtitle:

1. The first book, published in 2003, had as subtitle, “Challenges of religious pluralism for liberation theology.”⁵ It merely attempted to clear out this new path by pointing out the main challenges that needed to be addressed. The publishing house Rede⁶ published it in Portuguese and Editorial Misionera Italiana (EMI) in Bologna, published it with the title of “I Volti del Dio Liberatore.”⁷

2. The second volume, published in 2004 and subtitled “Toward a Latin American Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism” attempted to provide the “first responses” to those challenges.⁸ The publication

4 Pedro CASALDÁLIGA honored us with a prologue to the first volume and gave the name to the series: “Along the Many Paths of God.” Methodist bishop Frederico PAGURA, former President of CLAI, wrote a prologue to the second volume. The prologue to the third volume was written by Leonardo BOFF.

5 ASETT, *Por los muchos caminos de Dios. Desafíos del pluralismo religioso a la teología de la liberación*, Verbo Divino, Quito 2003, 187 pp, colección «Tiempo Axial» n° 1.

6 ASETT, *Pelos muitos caminhos de Deus. Desafios do pluralismo religioso à Teologia da Libertação*, Rede, Goiás GO, 2003, 160 pp.

7 BAROS, TOMITA, VIGIL (a cura), *I volti del Dio liberatore. Le sfide del pluralismo religioso*, Editrice Missionaria Italiana, Bologna 2004, 160 pp. See: <http://tiempoaxial/textos/ivoltideldioliberatore.htm>

8 VIGIL, TOMITA, BARROS (orgs.), *Por los muchos caminos de Dios. Hacia una teología cristiana y latinoamericana del pluralismo religioso*, Abya Yala, Quito 2004, 239 pp., colección «Tiempo Axial» n° 3.

is always double. The Spanish version came out in Ecuador and the Portuguese in Brazil.⁹ It also appeared in Italian through the same publishing house in Bologna¹⁰ with a long “epilogue” by Carlo Molari¹¹ who, in this way, initiated a critical and also positive dialogue between European and Latin American theologians.

3. The third book, concluded in 2005, proposed a first attempt at an initial “Latin American pluralist theology of liberation.”¹² In Brazil¹³ it was also published in Portuguese. Italy is now also preparing its publication with the participation of Maruillo Guasco, who continues in this way the Italian dialogue he had already initiated with our Third World theology.

4. The fourth volume is the one the reader has at hand. As we have said, it attempts to evaluate the current world situation of the construction of a “pluralist theology of liberation” from an intercontinental and therefore not just Latin American perspective. In Brazil it was also published in Portuguese.

5. As has been said, this series was conceived as a set of levels. The fifth and final book crowns the series by raising the question of a possible “multi-religious” and pluralist theology of liberation,” from a perspective that is obviously global. By “multi-religious we mean something more than “interreligious,” something also more than a theology pointed toward a preoccupation for “interreligious dialogue.” In short, dialogue cannot be more than a means that points to a further goal. How will theology look when interreligious dialogue achieves its goal, even though that is not the end of the story? Some call it *inter-faith theology* or *world theology*, a theology that is multi-religious, global, *planetary*.... The fifth book is dedicated to this dream and to its problematic. Obviously, it does so in a way that is also multi-religious, etc.

As for its publication, on paper and in Spanish, this series “Along the Many Paths of God” has been published as part of the “Axial Times” theological collection of the publishing house Abya Yala in Quito Ecuador. Its web page address is <http://tiempoaxial.org>

9 TOMITA, BARROS, VIGIL, *Pluralismo e Libertação. Por uma Teologia Latino-Americana Pluralista a partir da Fé Cristã*, Loyola, São Paulo 2005, 231 pp.

10 BARROS, TOMITA, VIGIL (a cura), *Verso una teologia del pluralismo religioso*, postfazione di Carlo Molari, Editoriale Missionaria Italiana, Brescia 2005, 270 pp., collana «La Missione».

11 L. c., págs. 239-267.

12 VIGIL, TOMITA, BARROS, *Por los muchos caminos de Dios. Teología latinoamericana pluralista de la liberación*, Abya Yala, Quito 2006, 207 pp., colección «Tiempo Axial» nº 6.

13 TOMITA, BARROS, VIGIL (orgs.), *Teologia Latino-Americana Pluralista da Libertação*, Paulinas São Paulo 2006, coleção *Pelos Muitos Caminhos de Deus*, vol. III, 312 pp.

As we have said on other occasions, **the ordering of the journey** through a series of five books draws graphic attention to its five levels:

- The **first** book is limited to pointing out the challenges; the four that follow try to construct a new theology in a positive way;

- The **first two** are looking for a “pluralist paradigm,” while the last three consciously take it up;

- The **first three** books are “Latin American” and make for a Latin American theology; the last two go beyond this geo-cultural setting to situate themselves in an inter-continental and world perspective;

- The **first four** are “Christian theology,” while the fifth is already multi-religious;

- **The five books** are liberation theology from a pluralist perspective and cross liberation theology with the theology of religious pluralism, which is the objective of the series “Along the Many Paths of God.”

We cannot end without expressing our very sincere appreciation to all the authors, men and women, who, in accepting the challenge have made possible this collective work and have given up their rights as authors to make this book as accessible as possible to the public.

We want to thank once more the Aachen-based Missions--wissenschaftliches Institut for its support for the realization of this volume.

Finally, we thank the readers, the correspondents and also our critics for their understanding, their critiques and suggestions to keep moving ahead in the construction of this new, planetary theology that is elaborated “along the many paths of God,” and that we hope will, day by day, become more known and recognized.

The very appearance of a book like this presupposes the concrete exercise of dialogue as a spiritual and human path that we hope might one day be the daily practice of the religions of all humanity.

José María VIGIL, Luiza E. TOMITA and Marcelo BARROS

Latin American Theological Commission (2001-2006)
Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians, EATWOT.

The Theology of Religious Pluralism in Latin America

*"If some things can't be reached ... today!
That is no reason for not wanting them...
How sad our paths would be without
The magic of the stars."
(Mario Quintana)*

Introduction

The topic of religious pluralism is becoming increasingly decisive in contemporary theological reflection. The consensus is growing daily around its importance in current theological reflection. According to Claude Geffré, religious pluralism is currently exercising "the role of a new theological paradigm," by situating itself as the "horizon of theology in the 21st century."¹ And the new challenge consists in understanding this religious pluralism not only as a temporary or passing fact, but as a positive reality within the mysterious plan of God. As evidence, Geffré says that "the plurality of the paths that lead to God continues to be a mystery that escapes us."² It is no longer plausible to think that a single religious tradition could contain the full plenitude of ultimate reality. Religious traditions are unfinished and transitory "fragments" in continuous transition to perfection and openness. They share the experience of an interdependence that avoids the risk of isolation and self-sufficiency. They make up the beauty of an ever-expanding symphony.³ And each fragment is animated by a uniqueness or internal truth that is irreducible and irrevocable. The perception of this positive situation of religious

1 Claude GEFFRÉ, *Crer e interpretar. A virada hermenêutica da teologia*, Vozes, Petrópolis 2004, pp. 26 y 134.

2 Claude GEFFRÉ, A crise da identidade cristã na era do pluralismo religioso. *Concilium*, 311/3 (2005) 21. From the point of view of João Batista Libânio, religious pluralism by right is "the most acute theological question:" How are we to consider religious pluralism theologically in the salvific plan of God, João Batista LIBÂNIO, *Olhando para o futuro. Perspectivas teológicas e pastorais do cristianismo na América Latina*, Loyola, São Paulo 2003, p. 143. And also: Carlos PALACIO, O cristianismo na América Latina. *Perspectiva Teológica*, 36/99 (2004) 179.

3 Christian DUQUOUC, *L'unique Christ. La symphonie différée*, Cerf, Paris 2002, pp. 122, 129, 239-240.

pluralism comes from the recognition of the universal salvific influence of God.⁴ Religions are living memories or anamneses of this universal salvific will present in human history.⁵ Each is bearer of a specific singularity that is able to make possible new views about ultimate reality that often escape the heritage available in a specific tradition.

In recent years this topic has awakened the interest of Latin American theologians as well. For Gustavo Gutierrez, religious pluralism represents a “new and demanding terrain,” and represents a call that comes from the poorest nations of the world.⁶ In this sense the new theme does not mean that liberation theology is losing its direction. Rather, it sees itself now called to enlarge its considerations by looking at the pluralist religious dimension present in conditions of poverty on the continent. Specifically, the audacious effort carried forward by the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) merits attention. It has encouraged the elaboration of a theology of religious pluralism based on its Latin American option, welcoming reflection on a topic that is growing on other continents and putting into place a new theological dialogue. It represents the great challenge of facilitating acceptance of a pluralist interreligious perspective in Latin America and developing the links for exchange with liberation theology.⁷

The objective of this article is to try to provide a map of the growing reflection around the theme of the theology of religious pluralism in Latin America by focusing principally on Brazil. I want also to point out those theologians who are working on the topic, the institutes and journals oriented toward the promotion of this reflection and, finally, to lay out some avenues for giving direction to reflection on this continent.

1. Recognition of the challenge of religious pluralism

In current Latin American theological reflection there exists a new sensitivity to the theme of religious pluralism. There is a shared recognition of the presence of a rich and complex mosaic of cultures and

4 Roger HAIGHT, *Jesus símbolo de Deus*, Paulinas, São Paulo 2003, p. 485.

5 Edward SCHILLEBEECKX, *Umanità, la storia di Dio*, Queriniana, Brescia 1992, p. 29.

6 Gustavo GUTIÉRREZ, Situazione e compiti della teologia della liberazione, en: Rosino GIBellini (Ed.), *Prospettive teologiche per il XXI secolo*, Queriniana, Brescia 2003, pp. 97-98.

7 ASETT (Org.). *Por los muchos caminos de Dios. Desafíos del pluralismo religioso a la teología de la liberación*, Verbo Divino, Quito 2003, 13ss. This book was published simultaneously into Portuguese and Italian (EMI, Bologna) 2004. It is the first volume in the series «Along the Many Paths of God», organized by the Theological Commission of EATWOT Latin America, of which this volume the reader has in hand is the fourth volume. (Several of the articles in this first volume were included in “Along the Many Paths of God,” published by LitVerlag, in its Interreligious Series, 2008. – Tr. note)

religions on the continent. As a result, everyone appreciates the need for a theological reflection that is more solid and audacious in order to embrace and reflect on that plurality. We speak of the urgency of establishing a “new regard” toward the Afro-Brazilian religions and the Aboriginal peoples, without which it will not be possible to establish an enriching dialogue: “The destiny and the opportunity for dialogue and interchange among religions depends mainly on the quality and the empathy of that regard, especially on the part of those who are considered the masters and the elders in those delicate human domains.”⁸ There is also a reflection regarding the indispensable challenge of difference, the difficulty of making comparisons with what is different, the other as “irreducible mystery” that calls us to the asceticism of “seeing,” “listening,” and “welcoming.” We need to keep identity open and accept “otherness” as “part of our own identity.”⁹

It is interesting to note how recognition of the value of pluralism is apparent above all among theologians who are committed to reflection and effective dialogue with other religious traditions. When reflecting on the dialogue between Christianity and Candomblé, Volney Berkenbrock points out the key recognition of otherness, the right of each religion to “reserve an untouchable space for the others” and the legitimacy of its claim as authentic religion. For Berkenbrock, “plurality of religions does not constitute in any way a passing phenomenon that should be surpassed, that is to say that ought necessarily to lead to a single religion,” but rather is a “permanent structure in the history of religions.” If we refuse to recognize the value of pluralism, we run the risk of “shutting ourselves off from the mystery of God. This means that the negation of the principle of religious diversity implies rejecting consideration of the understanding of God as such.”¹⁰

In his study and dialogue with Andean communities, Diego Irrarázaval has become aware of new “avenues” to the perception of the presence of God as a major mystery. He expresses his surprise and admiration in face of the various religious ways of searching for the meaning of life, especially among original peoples. It was during a gathering and

8 Frei Carlos JOSAPHAT, *Evangelho e diálogo inter-religioso*, Loyola, São Paulo 2003, p. 127 (y también pp.113-114).

9 Carlos PALACIO, Para uma pedagogia do diálogo. *Perspectiva Teológica*, 35 (2003) 371-372.

10 Volney BERKENBROCK, Diálogo e identidade religiosa: reflexões sobre a base teológica para um encontro positivo entre o candomblé e o cristianismo. *REB*, 56/221, pp. 04-44. See also: Afonso M.L. SOARES, *Interfaces da revelação*, Paulinas, São Paulo 2003, pp. 208-210. Drawing on a similar reflection, Roger Haight stated: «Creo que las personas que no logran reconocer la verdad salvífica de las otras religiones pueden estar dependiendo implícitamente de una concepción de Dios alejada de la creación»: Roger HAIGHT, *Jesus símbolo de Deus*, p. 479.

a dialogue with these people, with their earthy spirituality, that Diego deepened his sensitivity to the Mystery and his openness to the unique ways of naming and celebrating it. He regrets the difficulty this continent experiences in being open to religious richness. It was a mark of liberation theology at one point. He proposes a change of direction in the sense of a recognition of a theology of religious pluralism constructed from the experience of the original peoples. And this would include the need to overcome a certain “Christocentric” language that poses an obstacle to valuing “other ways of believing and seeing fullness.”¹¹

Today, a growing number of theologians in Latin America defend religious pluralism by right or in principle. This is in tune with other authors who are exploring the topic in other ways. Some names stand out such as those of José María Vigil, Marcelo Barros and Faustino Teixeira, since they working on the topic systematically.¹² However, the matter has been included in the reflection of other important authors of liberation theology such as Leonardo Boff,¹³ Diego Irarrázaval,¹⁴ Ivone Gebara,¹⁵ Luiza E. Tomita,¹⁶ Benedito Ferraro¹⁷ and José Comblin¹⁸, among others. There are innumerable dissertations and theses that are being developed on the topic,¹⁹ as well as magazines and specialized publications oriented to welcome and publicize this sort of reflection.²⁰

11 Diego IRARRÁZAVAL, *Un cristianismo andino*, Abya-Yala, Quito 1999, pp. 83-84.

12 José María VIGIL, *Theology of Religious Pluralism*, Lit Verlag, München 2008. Faustino TEIXEIRA, *Teología de las religiones*, Abya-Yala, Quito 2005. Marcelo BARROS., *O sonho da paz*, Vozes, Petrópolis 1996.

13 Leonardo BOFF. Post Scriptum, *Numen*, 5/1 (2002) 37-40. ID, Prólogo, in: José María VIGIL, Luiza TOMITA, Marcelo BARROS (orgs.), *Por los muchos caminos de Dios III. Teología latinoamericana pluralista de la liberación*, Abya-Yala, Quito 2006.

14 Diego IRARRÁZAVAL, *Rutas abiertas y cerradas hacia Dios*, in: VIGIL, TOMITA & BARROS (orgs.), *Pluralismo e libertação. Hacia una teología cristiana y latinoamericana del pluralismo religioso*, Abya Yala, Quito 2005, pp. 227-232.

15 Ivone GEBARA, *Pluralismo religioso: una perspectiva feminista*, in: J.M. VIGIL, L.E. TOMITA y M. BARROS (orgs.), *Por los muchos caminos de Dios III*, pp. 167-181.

16 Luiza E. TOMITA, *Pluralismo religioso y teología feminista de la liberación*, in: ASETT (org.), *Por los muchos caminos de Dios I*, pp. 76-91.

17 Benedito FERRARO, *El desafío de la fe cristiana en un mundo plural*, in: *El actual debate de la Teología del Pluralismo. Después de la Dominus Iesus*, Servicios Koinonía, Libros Digitales: <http://servicioskoinonia.org/LibrosDigitales> (visited October de 2010).

18 José COMBLIN, *La teología de las religiones desde América Latina*, in: VIGIL, TOMITA & BARROS (orgs.), *Por los muchos caminos de Dios II*, pp. 47-70; ID, *Cristología en la teología pluralista de la liberación*, in: VIGIL, TOMITA & BARROS (orgs.), *Por los muchos caminos de Dios III*, 78-94.

19 Among these we can mention: : Roberley PANASIEWICZ, José Maria da SILVA, Cleusa Maria ANDREATA, Eduardo Rosa PEDREIRA, Paulo Agostinho Nogueira BATISTA.

20 The pioneering work developed by JM VIGIL needs to be particularly underlined. It can be seen in the web site Servicios Koinonía: servicioskoinonia.org/relat Also under

2. Latin American theology and religious pluralism

a. Roots of a new sensibility

The entire reflective dynamics of liberation theology was based on the perspective of the poor and their liberation. The particular quality of its hermeneutic work was the re-reading of the Christian tradition by relating it to basic human concerns and in particular the right to the affirmation of life of the marginalized and excluded majority. Because of a concentrated attention to the theme of the liberation of the poor, there were other aspects that ended up not being included in the direction marked by the reflection. According to Carlos Palacio, there were specific resistances to moving in new directions, and also a lack of consideration of other perspectives that were considered at the time to be of little relevance since they were “apparently not liberating. This included modernity, cultures and religions.”²¹ For Diego Irarrázaval what happened was a “lack of theological courage” in going deeper into “the quality of Church in a pluri-religious Latin America.” In his opinion, “liberation theology was not ecumenical in Christian terms (given some exceptions), for it had entered into very little dialogue with the religious worlds on the continent.”²²

Latin American theological reflection has been undergoing changes in recent years and has considerably broadened the spectrum of its study, without losing the fundamental horizon of its proposal. A new sensitivity has been built around the topic of religions, above all at the end of the decade of the 80s, when liberation theology responded in a more mature way to the challenge of welcoming diversity. The first instances of this opening happened among authors who were concerned with topics like indigenous theology (that is to say with the original peoples of Amerindia), inculturation and Afro-Brazilian religions.²³ However, the

his direction is the “Tiempo Axial” Collection, with specific publications on the theme of the theology of religious pluralism (<http://tiempoaxial.org>), the initiative of organizing digital books, equally oriented toward the promotion of the theme (servicioskoinonia.org/LibrosDigitales) and the work with the Latin American Agenda, which in 2003 dealt with the theme of dialogue among religions: <http://latinoamericana.org/2003/textos>. As a channel for promotion of this theme, the work carried out by Rafael ARAGÓN, director of the journal *Alternativas*, published in Managua (Nicaragua) can also be mentioned. There are several issues that are devoted to the challenge of religious pluralism.

21 Carlos PALACIO, Trinta anos de teologia na América Latina, in: Luiz Carlos SUSIN (org.), *O mar se abriu*, SOTER/Loyola, São Paulo 2000, p. 63.

22 Diego IRARRÁZAVAL, *Vertientes teológicas actuales*, in: LC. SUSIN (org.), *O mar se abriu*, p. 101.

23 Among the pioneer works, see: Manuel MARZA, *O rosto índio de Deus*, Vozes, Petrópolis 1989. Marcelo AZEVEDO, *Comunidades eclesiais de base e inculturação da*

decisive inclusion of liberation spirituality²⁴ also has to be factored in, since it favored the creation of a climate essential to openness and welcoming of diversity, of sensitivity to gratitude and availability to what is always the overriding gift of God.

As liberation theology underwent this transition, the inspiration provided by some “seekers of dialogue” was of major importance. These people had devoted their lives to dialogue with the various religious groupings of the continent. In the field of dialogue with indigenous religious, the figures of Bartomeu Melià (a Paraguayan Jesuit priest),²⁵ Xavier Albó (a Bolivian Jesuit priest)²⁶ and Diego Irrarrázaval (a Chilean priest of the Congregation of Holy Cross)²⁷ stand out. In a conversation regarding his experience of dialogue with the Guaraní, B. Melià spoke of how his objective was simply “to try to understand, to share life with the Indians practicing their indigenous religion.” His purpose was never one of explicit evangelization. On the contrary, he wanted to understand the richness and depth of the religion of the Guaraní.²⁸ Other pioneers in Brazil were the Little Sisters of Jesus, disciples of Charles de Foucault, who had devoted their attention to the Tapirapé people since 1952. When they arrived in the region of Tapirapé in 1952, they found a group of 47 indigenous people in the process of extinction. With the help and the support of the Sisters, the Tapirapé group went through the miracle of recovery of their dignity. The missionary experience of the Sisters served

fé, Loyola, São Paulo 1986. Carlos BRANDÃO et alii, *Inculturação e libertação*, Paulinas, São Paulo 1986. Antônio Aparecido da SILVA, *A antiga e a nova evangelização vistas pelos afro-americanos*, en: Paulo SUESS (org.), *Queimada e sementeira*, Vozes, Petrópolis 1988. For further details cf. F. TEIXEIRA, *A interpelação do diálogo inter-religioso para a teologia*, en: Luis Carlos SUSIN (org.), *Sarça ardente. Teologia na América Latina: prospectivas*, SOTER/Paulinas, São Paulo 2000, 421-425; ID, *El desafío del pluralismo religioso a la teología latinoamericana*, in: ASETT (org.), *Por los muchos caminos de Dios*, 112-136. J.M. VIGIL, *Teología del pluralismo religioso*, 279-281.

24 There are three important works that can be quoted on this topic: Gustavo GUTIÉRREZ, *Beber no próprio poço*, Petrópolis 1984; Jon SOBRINO, *Espiritualidad de la liberación*, Santander 1985; P. CASALDÁLIGA y JM. VIGIL, *The Spirituality of Liberation*, Burn & Oates, London 1994. A digital edition is available in the library of Servicios Koinonía.

25 Born in 1932, he has studied the Guaraní people since 1969.

26 Born in 1934, he was concerned with investigating and in sharing in a dialogue with the Quechua, Aymara and Guaraní peoples of Bolivia.

27 Born in 1942, he devoted an important part of his life to communion and work with the indigenous Aymaran communities in Puno (Peru). He was President, until 2006, of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT).

28 F. TEIXEIRA (org.), *Teologia da libertação: novos desafios*, Paulinas, São Paulo 1991, p. 101. (In this book there are very interesting testimonies by these pioneers of dialogue with indigenous religions.)

then as a model for anthropology.²⁹ In the field of dialogue with Afro-Brazilian religions the pioneering role of Father François de l'Espinay (1918-1985) stands out. His experience with the religions of African origin began in 1974 when he settled in the city of Salvador (Bahia). He was quickly introduced into deepening paths of solidarity and dialogue with the faithful of Candomblé. After some time he was chosen as *mogbá*, a member of the Xangó council.³⁰ In a valuable article published in 1987, l'Espinay commented on his radical entry into the world of the "otherness of a different culture." At that moment he extended an urgent invitation to the Catholic community to the religions of African origin regard in a more positive way.

We have to move beyond the limitations based on our exclusivism and our certainty of possessing the unique truth and admit that God does not enter into self-contradiction, that God speaks in ways that are very different and that complement one another, and that each religion possesses a sacred deposit: the word that God has spoken to them. This constitutes the richness of ecumenism, which should not be limited only to dialogue among Christians.³¹

b. The emergence of new contributions

One important contribution to welcoming religious pluralism in liberation theology can be found in the development of a spirituality of liberation. It was out of this reflection that the concept of macroecumenism was born. This concept has its own history within liberation theology since the beginnings of the decade of the 90s. The term appeared for

29 *O RENASCER do povo Tapirapé. Diário das Irmãzinhas de Jesus de Charles de Foucauld*, Editora Salesiana, São Paulo 2002. A similar experience was had by Leenhardt (1878-1954), who spent 25 years with the Canadas people in New Caledonia (from 1902 to 1927). His pioneering work of ethnology and as a Protestant missionary had as its basic objective to revive among the indigenous peoples their "tast for life," that is to say, to lead them back "to valuing their own way of being, their own fundamental principles:" Maria Izaura PEREIRA DE QUEIROZ, *Rumos do pensamento etnológico na França. A atualidade de Maurice Leenhardt*, *Religião e Sociedade*, 14/1 (1987) 66. See also: Eduardo Rosa PEDREIRA, *Do confronto ao encontro*, pp. 29-37. As Eduardo Pedreira justifiably says, "the missionaries anticipated, in the field, the realities that only later would come to be discussed in theological and conciliar circles:" *ibidem*, p. 25.

30 Heitor FRISOTTI, *Passos no diálogo. Igreja católica e religiões afro-brasileiras*, Paulus, São Paulo 1996, pp. 62-65.

31 François de L'ESPINAY, *A religião dos Orixás – outra palavra do Deus único?*, *REB*, 47/187 (1987) 639-650 (cited here: 649). The author reacts to the tendency of religion that accentuate the characteristics that separate them from others instead of seeking what they have in common: "We Catholics possess an excess of the complex of 'totality.' We lack nothing; God told us everything. (...) Hasn't the time come to respect, at least a bit, the creative breath of the Spirit, without so many excusions? *Ibidem*, p. 649. See also: ID, *Igreja e religião africana do candomblé no Brasil*, *REB*, 47/188 (1987) 860-890.

the first time in the book, *Espiritualidad de la liberación* (1992),³² written by Pedro Casaldáliga and José María Vigil. Originally, the expression was associated with a spirit of “openness” and of “welcoming,” present in a liberating spirituality. It expressed the ever-growing welcome of God, always present and available in the history of peoples, even before the arrival of missionaries. In this “integral ecumenism,” God reveals a generous universality: “God is ecumenical, not racist or associated with any ethnic group or any culture. God does not share with anyone in an exclusive way.”³³ The term macroecumenism got its right of citizenship during the First Assembly of the People of God, celebrated in Quito (Ecuador) in 1992. The term was defended several times on that occasion by Pedro Casaldáliga and is incorporated in the final declaration of the gathering. The idea presented in the declaration is that “real ecumenism is larger than ecumenism.” Without minimizing the essential importance of ecumenism, the declaration presents the challenge to be open to macroecumenism: “a new word to express a new reality and a new awareness.” It is a question of breaking with the traditional prejudices in order to be able to “embrace with many arms and even many more hearts the Unique and Supreme God.”³⁴ For José María Vigil, the view that opened up with Latin American macroecumenism anticipates, in some way, a “pluralist” spirit. Already the intuition of a “pluralism in principle” is foreshadowed, although not formulated in an explicit way. Nevertheless, the bonds of inclusivism, though moderated, remain present in the reflections of that period.³⁵

Another important contribution to the reception of religious pluralism came from an openness created within liberation theology toward the area of ecología. As a response to the serious ecological crisis of our time,

32 The first edition was published in 1982 (Ecuador, Bolivia and España). For the various editions of the work see: <http://servicioskoinonia.org/pedro/obras>

33 Pedro CASALDÁLIGA and José María VIGIL, *Espiritualidad de la liberación*, Sal Terrae, Santander 1992, pp. 234. In the field of theology of religions, Raimundo Panikkar had earlier already defended what he called “ecumenical ecumenism,” in order to express a larger ecumenism of “openness toward the whole human family.” Raimundo PANIKKAR, *Il dialogo intrareligioso*, Cittadella Editrice, Assisi 1988, p. 63; ID, *La nuova innocenza*, Servitium, Sotto il Monte 1996, pp. 59-70 («Verso un ecumenismo ecumenico»).

34 Faustino TEIXEIRA (org.), *O dialogo inter-religioso como afirmação da vida*, Paulinas, São Paulo 1997, pp. 149-150. In this article published in the same book, Pedro Casaldáliga explains the meaning of this new expression: “macroecumenism ... is not an organization or a movement properly speaking. It is above all an attitude, a new vision, a spirituality or the expansion of several spiritualities. It is a “mystica.” It is a disposition that we think pleases God, the God of all names...” Pedro CASALDÁLIGA, *O macroecumenismo e a proclamação do Deus da vida*, in: *ibidem*, p. 37.

35 JM VIGIL *Macroecumenismo: teología latinoamericana de las religiones*, en: VIGIL, TOMITA & M.BARROS, *Por os muchos caminos de Dios II*, pág. 73-90. Sin embargo

alternative voices emerged in favor of a new paradigm, characterized by “a new dialogical form of relating to all beings and their relationships.³⁶ In Latin America, a spokesperson for this reflection has been Leonardo Boff, with innumerable works dedicated to pointing out the importance and novelty of the theme for liberation theology. In developing the matter of a new ecological sensitivity that responds critically to the serious contemporary crisis, Boff lays down important foundations for a reflection on welcoming and valuing differences, and for a “new compassion: toward all human beings. These are themes that are directly related to accepting religious pluralism. Leonardo Boff presents the fundamental argumentation for the affirmation of a holistic vision and for a new spirituality that is marked by the imperative of hospitality and communion: “Knowing from the heart, based on communion, generates an open community that includes what is different by embracing the difference.³⁷ For him, the new spirituality that arises from ecological sensitivity welcomes the plurality of traditions. Just as there exists a great biodiversity in nature that requires the participation of human beings for its conservation through caring for and respecting it in order to avoid irreversible extinction, so also there exists a diversity of religion that deserves similar respect.³⁸

We also need to draw attention to the influence of feminist theology for the affirmation of a new sensitivity toward the theology of religious pluralism. Among the Latin American women theologians who are working on this argumentation, can be found Ivone Gebara, Luiza

el concepto de macroecumenismo ha generado resistencias en el continente. Véase por ejemplo: Rudolf VON SINNER, *Hermenêutica ecumênica para um cristianismo plural. Estudos Teológicos*, 44/2 (2004) 36, quien ve el riesgo de una «especie simplificadora de inclusión»; Edênio VALLE, *Macroecumenismo e diálogo inter-religioso como perspectiva de renovação católica, Rever*, 3/2 (2003) 4-5: http://www.pucsp.br/rever/rv2_2003/t_valle.htm According to Valle, the adoption of the concept of macroecumenism by Latin American theology doesn't sit well. It is “problematic and polemic”.

36 Leonardo BOFF, *Dignitas Terrae. Ecologia: grito da terra, grito dos pobres*, 3 ed., Ática, São Paulo 1999, p. 29.

37 L. BOFF, *Viver uma atitude ecológica*, in: Nancy Mangabeira UNGER, *O encantamento do humano. Ecologia e espiritualidade*, Loyola, São Paulo 1991, pp. 11-14. In a doctoral thesis that is still in the preparation stage. (Dialogo e Libertação: para uma teologia cristã latino-americana do pluralismo religioso, PPCIR, UFJF), one theologian, Paulo Agostinho Nogueira Batista, is working on the hypothesis that the ecological turning in the thought of Leonardo Boff was essential for his openness to the theme of a pluralist theology of religions.

38 Leonardo BOFF, *Prólogo, Por los muchos caminos de Dios III*, p. 2. This same idea was defended by Diego Irazábal in the epilogue of the same book. A great French enthusiast of religious pluralism, Simone Weil (1909-1943), stated once that if the other religious traditions “disappeared from the face of the earth, it would be an irreparable loss. The missionaries have already caused too many to disappear.” Simone WEIL, *Carta a un religioso*, Trotta, Madrid 1998, p. 33.

Tomita, Silvia Regina and Wanda Deifelt. The pioneering work of Ivone Gebara calls for special mention with respect to the debate on religious pluralism, especially her emphasis on the challenge of Latin American feminism with respect to patriarchal religion and the absolutisms that are shored up within it. For her, the feminist perspective identifies with the pluralist dynamic to the extent that it operates, from the start, in favor of full citizenship for the right of difference. She recognizes the importance of bringing pluralism into the picture “and of finding ways to live together in the present with it and based on it.”³⁹ This feminist theologian has developed above all a critique of religious language laid out within a patriarchal culture that is exclusivist. Such language ends up developing a concept of a masculine divinity that reinforces the hierarchical structures and serves as an instrument in the colonizing process.⁴⁰ Today theological reflection is speaking out against a certain tendency to frame the divine reality in determinate linguistic representations. There is no way to characterize God in the masculine or feminine gender. As Roger Haight indicates, because of God’s transcendence “we cannot attribute any ontological weight to the gender of God”.⁴¹ Feminist theology has thus contributed to surpassing an exclusivist tendency in Christianity and to opening up a space for “a notion of the divinity that is able to include diversities.”⁴² In this important effort of critiquing androcentrism, important reflections took place in the field of feminine Christian spirituality during the High Middle Ages (XII–XV centuries). At that time many feminine metaphors were in use to describe a more plural spirituality. Even without putting forward a self-conscious feminist agenda, mystics like Marguerite Porette (1250-1310), Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179), Mechtilde of Magdebourg (1208-1290) and Julian of Norwich (1342-1420), provided an important contribution to relativizing traditional theological

39 Ivone GEBARA, Pluralismo religioso: una perspectiva feminista, en: J.M. VIGIL, L.E. TOMITA y M. BARROS (orgs.), *Por los muchos caminos de Dios III*, p. 167.

40 Wanda DEIFELT. *Dios en el cuerpo. Análisis feminista de la revelación*, en: ibidem, pp. 53-66. Y también: Benedito FERRARO, *El desafío de la fe en un mundo pluralista*, en: Servicios Koinonía, *El actual debate de la teología del pluralismo después de la Dominus Iesus*, Libros Digitales Koinonía, 2005, p. 32.

41 Roger HAIGHT, *Jesus símbolo de Deus*, Paulinas, São Paulo 2003, p. 142. Véase también p. 127.

42 Elizabeth GREEN, *Al crocicchio delle strade. Teologia femminista all’inizio del XXI secolo*, en: Rosino GIBELLINI (ed.), *Prospettive teologiche per il XXI secolo*, Brescia, Queriniana 2003, p. 181. The feminist theologians “by deconstructing binary discourses and mono-identities, have opened the way to a provisional God that is not as narrowly defined, is open and very inclusive...” that cannot fit into the limited models of traditional Christianity: Nancy CARDOSO, Edla EGGERT and André S. MUSSKOPT (orgs.), *A graça do mundo transforma Deus. Diálogos latino-americanos com a IX Assembléia do CMI*, Porto Alegre, Editora Universitária Metodista, 2006, p. 6.

language. It was a «parler-femme» that preserved the open and plural character of the unnamable. As Ivone Gebara recalls, this rich experience of medieval women anticipated the contemporary intuition that “the foundational principle cannot be only masculine. Its revelation must be multiple, plural and infinite.”⁴³

2. The difficulties of religious pluralism

There is no way to ignore the place and importance occupied by religious pluralism today. Still, it also a fact that it is difficult for religious traditions to recognize their validity in so far as religious pluralism leads to a situation of “permanent uncertainty” and destabilizes the “self-evidence of the structures of meaning and values.”⁴⁴ Pluralism awakens resistance and unease in identities that are well-established, since it implodes the interpretations that pretend to be unique and exclusive. Many see it as a threat to the extent that it inculcates insecurity in virtue of enlarging the possibilities of interpretation. There are few who “hold to” this new demand. Peter Berger identifies them as the “Just Ones of pluralism.”

In Latin America, the debate around the theology of religious pluralism has also provoked controversies. There are certain Christian theological groups that are more in agreement and sensitive to the challenges of religious pluralism. Meanwhile, others appear to be more fearful, resistant or critical with respect to the developments in his line of thinking. The major difficulty has to do with the uncomfortable elements that the discussion is provoking in the identity of the believer: in the areas of Christology, Ecclesiology, Soterology and Missiology.⁴⁵ As for

43 Ivone GEBARA, *Pluralismo religioso: una perspectiva feminista*, en: *Por los muchos caminos de Dios III*, p. 176. Véase también: Sílvia SCHWARTZ, Marguerite Porete: mística, apofatismo e tradição de resistência *Numen*, 6/2 (2003) 109-126. In her article, Silvia points out how the apophatic discourse of Marguerite Porete favored a “new configuration of gender” toward the deity, which was characterized by the “lack of speech” of “the masculine, mono-typical God.” It is a mysticism that renews the comprehension of the Trinity by introducing feminine presences of Lady Love and of the Stricken Soul: *ibidem*, pp. 120-121.

44 Peter BERGER, *Una gloria remota. Avere fede nell'epoca del pluralismo*, Il Mulino, Bologna 1994, p. 48; ID y Thomas LUCKMANN, *Modernidade, pluralismo e crise de sentido*, Vozes, Petrópolis 2004, pp. 54 e 73.

45 In an article parricularly geared to Protestant circles, the Presbyterian theologian, Eduardo Rosa Pedreira, spoke of the discouragement that accompanies questions about “believing,” “being” and “doing” that are part of any effort at interreligious dialogue. In the field of “discouragement in believing” Pedreira reflects on the tension that the topic incites in the area of Christological affirmation of the uniqueness of Jesus, of the hermeneutic affirmation of the Bible that he is the unique word of God, of the soterological affirmation that salvation exists only in Jesus Christ and of the missiological affirmation that summons the universality of mission: Eduardo Pedreira ROSA, Os desconfortos e desafios trazidos pelo diálogo inter-religioso ao mundo protestante, *Atualidade em*

the Christology perspective, there are theologians who resist a pluralism by right.⁴⁶ Others express their fear in face of the risk of a disorienting relativism.⁴⁷ The major difficulties are related to the areas of Christology and Ecclesiology.⁴⁸ But there is no doubt that maintaining attitudes and positions that are exclusivist, including those that are inclusivist, is turning out to be rigorously problematic today and lacking plausibility.⁴⁹ The reality of pluralism invites Christians to embrace the value and the right to difference as well as to honor the singularity and specificity of the other religious traditions. And to come to this we need to “redefine the terms of understanding of the uniqueness and singularity of Jesus and of his salvific work.”⁵⁰ Still, there remains a lot of resistance around this demanding work even within the circles of liberation theology, as José María Vigil has shown:

Classic Latin American liberation theology (LT) was built on the paradigm of inclusivity and christocentrism. Go through any Christological treatise in LT and you will see that, even though it never falls into the exclusivist paradigm, it also never questions the inclusivist paradigm. It is clear that LT is very generous in recognizing the presence of God and of salvation outside the limits of the Church and that in

debate, 46 (1996) 30-36 (Centro João XXIII, IBRADES). Some of the critiques that have been developed around the theological perspective of pluralism have been presented and summarized by João Batista LIBÂNIO, *Eu creio, nós cremos. Tratado da fé*, Loyola, São Paulo 2000, pp. 429-431.

- 46 See, for example, the reflections of Mário de França Miranda: *O cristianismo em face das religiões*, Loyola, São Paulo 1998, pp. 11-34 (This is a text that is has a profound coherence with the document of the International Theological Commission, of which Miranda is a member: *O cristianismo e as religiões*, São Paulo Loyola, 1997); ID, *As religiões na única economia salvífica. Atualidade Teológica*, 6/10 (2002) 9-26. For Miranda, the discussion of pluralism by right is secondary. In his opinion, what exists is a “unique salvific plan of God,” in which Jesus Christ represents the highest point. Religions do not come along “in order to complete what is lacking,” but rather to enrich the “appropriation” of this truth: cf. *ibidem*, p. 26. See also: Francisco CATÃO, *Falar de Deus*, Paulinas, São Paulo 2001 (Here he questions pluralism by right and defends a “contingent pluralism:” See pp. 211-212).
- 47 Gottfried BRAKEMEIER, *Fé cristã e pluralidade religiosa – onde está a verdade?*, *Estudos Teológicos*, 42/2 (2002) 23-47. This Lutheran theologian is professor of ecumenism in the Escuela Superior de Teología of São Leopoldo (RS). He insists on the disorienting risk of pluralism and proposes an “open exclusivism:” cf. *ibidem*, pp. 29-30 e 39-40.
- 48 Faustino TEIXEIRA, *Eclesiología en tiempos de pluralismo religioso*, en: *Por los muchos caminos de Dios III*, pp. 96-108.
- 49 Faustino TEIXEIRA, *Uma cristologia provocada pelo pluralismo religioso*. *REB*, 65/258 (2005) 311-312; ID, *Karl Rahner e as religiões*, in: P.R. OLIVEIRA & C. PAUL (orgs.), *Karl Rahner em perspectiva*, Loyola, São Paulo 2004, pp. 258-261.
- 50 Leonardo BOFF, Prólogo. *Por los muchos caminos de Dios III*.

this sense it come close to what would be a pluralist position. However, that salvation is definitely always considered ‘Christian,’ that is to say, achieved by Christ.⁵¹

With the extension of this reflection to other continents, Latin American theology has come to take more seriously the topic, even if some consider it a “nest of vipers.” There is an immense horizon opening up and above all the challenge to develop a “new Christology that is not absolutizing.”⁵² The path opened up by Roger Haight—one that is well accepted among theologians on this continent—reinforces a positive embracing of religious pluralism seen as a pluralism by right. This is the thesis that takes up the normative character of Jesus as valid for Christians but holds that the same cannot be universalized for everyone. For Haight, “Christians can relate to Jesus as normative for religious truth regarding God, the world and human existence, while being convinced at the same time that there also exist other religious mediations that are true, and as such, normative.”⁵³

Conclusion

Acceptance of religious pluralism does not mean, as some tend to think, that the Christian perspective is being violated. As Leonardo Boff indicates, “Christian faith has categories that allow for nurturing a positive attitude toward religious pluralism.”⁵⁴ There exists a large heritage of openness present in the Christian Scriptures, as is the case of the “cosmic alliance” established between God and human beings, preceding the alliance with Abraham and Moses (Gen. 9, 9-11); or the presence of the illuminating and universal action of the Logos, *ásarkos* (not incarnated),⁵⁵

51 José María VIGIL, *Cristología de la liberación y pluralismo religioso*, *Por los muchos caminos de Dios II*, pp. 166-167. See also pp. 163.

52 ID, *Macroecumenismo: teología latinoamericana de las religiones*, pp. 87-88. As Marcelo Barros remarks: “We are not trying to rethink Christology so that it will be accepted by the Jews or Muslims. The challenge in reformulating Christology is, for us as Christians, in order to help us be more open to the other and to see the many paths to God:” *Cristología afroamerindia: discusión con Dios*, in *Por los muchos caminos de Dios II*, pág. 172ss.

53 Roger HAIGHT, *Jesus, símbolo de Deus*, pp. 464 e 455. This thesis has been accepted by theologians such as Faustino TEIXEIRA (*Uma cristologia provocada pelo pluralismo religioso*), José María VIGIL (*Teología del pluralismo religioso*) y Benedito FERRARO (*O desafio da fé cristã num mundo plural*), among others.

54 Leonardo BOFF, *Prólogo*. *Por los muchos caminos de Dios III*.

55 Jacques DUPUIS, *Rumo a uma teologia cristã do pluralismo religioso*, p. 413; Xavier LÉON-DUFOUR. *Lettera dell’Evangelo secondo Giovanni* (capitoli 1-4), San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo 1990, p. 165.

operating in all of human history from the beginning of creation (Jos 1,9), or the unlimited action of the Spirit, that communicates a recognition of the “secret presence of God” and of God’s grace among nations (AG 9). There exists at the core of Christianity a call to hospitality, to courtesy and to the acceptance of otherness. For Belgian theologian, E. Schillebeeckx, “acceptance of the diversity of religions ... is part of the essence of Christianity.” The message of God was not closed in on itself, but is rather a message that is open to the unusual and wider horizon of the great mystery of God.⁵⁶

Currently there is nothing more essential than dialogue among religions. It is in this fundamental challenge that the future of religions in society is played out. As Hans Kung points out, “the options are clear: either there is rivalry among religions, the shock of cultures, war among nations, or there is dialogue among religions, as the condition for peace among nations.”⁵⁷ Religions and theologies are being invited to light the flame of a new world that is possible, “one that is characterized by hospitality, refinement and courtesy. An outstanding Brazilian poet said, on one occasion, that “to dream is to awaken within.”⁵⁸ We need to recover the hidden energies of the interior world in order to make possible and to set in place new scenarios in history. And religions have an important role to play in this spiritual renovation, in order to give life and to strengthen that life in all sectors of humanity, and so to incite in hearts a “deep fidelity” and a “horizon of meaning.”⁵⁹

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56 Edward SCHILLEBEECKX, *Umanità la storia di Dio*, pp. 218, 152. From his point of view, “Christians run the risk of forgetting the original theocentric focus concerning the origin of Jesus, falling thus into a Jesus-ology that says very little, or that reduces God to the point of being absorbed in Christ.” Ibidem, p. 167.

57 Hans KÜNG, O islamismo: rupturas históricas – desafios hodiernos, *Concilium*, 313, n. 5, 2005, p. 104.

58 Mário QUINTANA, *Poesia completa*, Nova Aguilar, Rio de Janeiro 2005, p. 461.

59 PARLAMENTO delle religioni mondiali, *Dichiarazione per un’etica mondiale*, en: Hans KÜNG & Karl Josef KUSCHEL, *Per un’etica mondiale*, Rizzoli, Milano 1995, p. 24.

Multiple belonging: a pluralism for the future

In Brazil, The publishing house, Ibrasa, produced a small book by Bede Griffiths, a British abbot who, without ceasing to be a Benedictine monk, became also a guru in India. The book begins with a declaration: “Besides being a Christian, I need to be Hindu, Buddhist, Jainist, Zoroastrian, Sikh, Muslim and Jew. Only in this way will I be able to know the truth and encounter the point of reconciliation of all religions. This is the revolution that has to happen in the mind of Western peoples. For centuries now this has been cast aside, lost in outer space. Now we need to turn within and discover our being, undertake the long and difficult road to the Center, to the profound interior of Being.”¹ .

If he had lived in Brazil, Bede Griffiths would have said that to be fully Christian, he needed to belong also to Candomblé and to the Indigenous traditions. His concept of *being Christian* did not coincide with the dominant theological and spiritual understanding in the Churches, and concretely in the Catholic Church. Nevertheless, in Latin America, that is the life and faith experience of many Christians. Even more: multiple belonging is a necessary and fruitful path of macroecumenical spirituality and of living out cultural and religious pluralism that God offers as a gift of grace for the enrichment of our faith.

To develop this theme, I propose to follow, as much as possible, the Latin American method of *see-judge-act*, taking into account that each of those steps already includes much of the other two.

1. A society of multiple belongings

In every period, human beings have always been complex. But today, more than in other periods, we live in a world in which everything is in an identity crisis: the family, school, politics, the professions, ministries in the Church, and so on. In every period, people could, at the same time, be linked to a cultural group, to an artistic entity, to a social organization, to a political party and, often, to a religious community. These belongings were multiple, but they happened in areas that complemented

1 Bede GRIFFITHS, *Retorno ao Centro*, Ibrasa, São Paulo 1992, pág. 9.

one another without entering into conflict with one another. Today, diversity happens in the same terrain. In Brazil, the daughter of a minister of State joins an opposition political group but maintains ties with her father's grouping.

Today's Western society can be characterized as a kind of rejection of any deep engagement. In a famous talk, on the vigil of the feast of Saint Ambrose, in Milan, the then-Archbishop Cardinal Martini said, "I want to speak of a dark evil, difficult to label, because it is difficult to recognize. It is like a latent virus, one that is nevertheless everywhere. We can call it public or political heartburn. It is the opposite of what the Greek New Testament calls *parresia*: the freedom to call things by their proper name. It's a somewhat neutral disinterestedness, a fear of objectively evaluating proposals in light of ethical criteria. It is a phenomenon that has as its consequence a decadence of political wisdom."²

In daily life, this reality is expressed in a culture of a *lack of commitment* to anything. In the business world, there also exists something like an underlying culture that consists in "acting so as not to commit to anything or to belong to anything." The same sensitivity can be found also in the area of a spirituality that doesn't accept commitment with any institution or concrete project. People want to live an emotional experience but without any long-term commitment and without any other sort of demand in their life. It is important to observe that among ordinary people—I am talking about Latin America—this situation is not as common since many people continue to follow the culture of commitment and belonging.

In the religious field, each religion used to be the expression of a people or civilization. It was normal that every Tibetan was Buddhist, every Chinese was Taoist, every Arab was Muslim and every Westerner was Christian. Candomblé is an African religion and Pagelança is an Indigenous ritual. The world was divided into religions. Some, like Christianity, pretended to be universal, even though, in fact, they never were. Catholicism is Roman, Lutheranism continues to be German and Anglicanism is embedded in English culture. In spite of this, throughout history there has always been some influence of one religion on another and some incorporation of founding elements of a tradition by communities of other traditions. Exchanges like this were common.

For centuries, the world witnessed forced migrations, like the kidnapping of Africans in their homeland, or the imposition of the religion of conquerors on subject peoples. Only in recent times has humanity gone beyond the medieval principle of "*cuius regio, huius religio*" (adopt

² Cardenal MARTINI, *Discurso para la Vigilia de San Ambrosio*, 06/12/1999, quoted in Koinonia, 1(2000)08.

the religion of those who govern). What for centuries happened among the most impoverished and exploited communities of Latin America, has become, in recent decades, a world reality. The number of Muslims now living in Europe can be counted in the millions and as many again in the United States, without mentioning the growing number of Buddhists, Sikhs and people of other religions who live in these countries that were, in earlier times, *culturally* Christian.³

Often, in speaking with Christian groups—and it's probably no different in groups belonging to other religions—one of the most agonizing questions for people is the fear that contact and living with those who are different can lead to a loss of one's own identity. Right now, identity is precisely one of the realities most affected by the changes in civilization. Today we identify with multiple relations and a variety of belongings. We live, at the same time, in various cultural worlds. How can we maintain a single reference that will be evident in our religious belonging? Domenach writes, "Perhaps today we need to go to the individual to find the real collective phenomenon, that is to say an abundance of opinions and diverse tastes, and sometimes contradictions. Who knows whether, in fact, the only 'true subject' may not be there."⁴

In studying the phenomenon of the individual who *lives with* a diversity of tendencies and practices, some speak of partition, of *fragmentation of consciousness and of identity*, a phenomenon that is typical of the human condition at the beginning of this century. A recent book by Amin Nalouf, a Lebanese writer, who also bears a French culture, has as its title, *Assassin Identities*.⁵ The identities that kill, he says, are those that insist on being limited to a single belonging. Today, more than ever, every human being needs to "take up all he or she own."⁶ Sometimes the world manages to understand this and, concretely in our case, more easily than the Christian churches.

2. Churches of exclusive belonging

Every Church or religion sets itself up as the correct interpretation or the most adequate synthesis of a path to encounter the divine. In a more theoretical synthesis, each religion sets itself up as an absolute.

3 John HICK, *Teologia Cristã e Pluralismo Religioso, O Arco-Íris das religiões*, Attar Editorial, São Paulo 2005, p. 35.

4 J.M.DOMENACH, *Enquête sur les idées contemporaines*, Ed. du Seuil, Paris 1987, p. 113.

5 See Amin MALOUF, *Identidades asesinas*, Alianza Editorial, Madrid 2004; original francés: *Les identités meurtrières*, Ed. Grasset, Paris 1998.

6 Quoted by Pierre SANCHIS, *Religiões no mundo contemporâneo, convivências e conflitos*, a conference given at the Centro Cultural de Florianópolis, July 2004 (not published)

From a dogmatic point of view, whoever believes that Jesus is the Son of God cannot believe that Buddha or Krishna is so also. Whoever believes that Jesus rose from the dead and that the dead will rise again, cannot believe in reincarnation. In a way, every belief is total and exclusive. It doesn't allow for doubts or free interpretations. People believe because they accept the word of someone who has authority to tell them that things are so and no other way. That sort of discourse does not allow for questioning or divergence of interpretation. Science speaks of relativity and incertitude, while religions go on pretending to be islands of certainty and dogmatic security.

In the modern societies of Europe and North America, as well as in some of the more urbanized areas of Latin America, it is increasingly clear that there is a crisis in religion. It is an institutional crisis and also a crisis of certitudes. Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor says, "In our days, it is impossible to be a Christian, atheist, or anything else, without a margin of doubt. Our situation can be characterized by this fragility, much more than by the idea that secularity has conquered religion."⁷ For this philosopher, the question is no longer one where secularity or atheism go beyond dogmas so much as of doubt and reinterpretation of beliefs in a freer way. Since the 1980s, the Catholic hierarchy has tried to respond to this with a movement toward institutional hardening, a centralization of power, control of theological thinking and repression of the dissident or alternative tendencies. In a celebrated work, Juan Bautista Libânio calls this ecclesial situation "a turning to the great discipline."⁸

3. The natural pluralism of popular religions

For centuries, in Latin America, the Catholic Church remained White and European. In Brazil, up to the 1950s, it was common knowledge that there were Religious Orders that did not accept Black candidates into their convents. In addition, the missionaries felt that it was sufficient to give ordinary people a rudimentary knowledge of the faith. They reserved a more developed understanding to the erudite classes and the clergy. The people developed a Christianity of devotions and oral traditions that were practically independent of official religion. These Catholic traditions flowed in the mixed-race veins of a people made up of different traditions. The worship of the souls in purgatory and the desire for Masses for the deceased is not foreign to Black or Indigenous religions that venerate their ancestors. The Marian devotion that can be found throughout this continent reproduces ancient Indigenous rituals to the Mother Earth. This Catholicism of mixed-race is the key for belong-

7 Quoted by Paul VALADIER, in *L'Actualité des Religions*, 2(fev. 1999)21.

8 João Batista LIBÂNIO, *A Volta à Grande Disciplina*, Loyola, São Paulo 1984.

ing to a unique devotion and makes it possible for two or more different beliefs to exist in the same believing person.

Many popular Latin American religions arose out of the context of dialogue and forced contact with other religions. Indigenous people and also the Blacks who were enslaved during the colonial period, were obliged to cohabit with different sorts of spirituality, including that of living with the various ethnic groups that came from Africa or with totally different traditions of Indigenous peoples, which were formerly considered enemies.

Spiritual traditions from the mountains, forest and plains were forced to find a way to live with colonization and, in order to avoid disappearing, many times they had to mix in. At the same time and from the very beginning, Indigenous and Black religious groups had to fit in and even to integrate themselves into the Catholicism that was imposed on them.

For centuries, the majority of people found a way of following a religious path, in dialogue and by relativizing the dogmas that imposed exclusion. For many centuries now, many people say they are “very Catholic”—and they are—while at the same time, they believe profoundly in reincarnation, or they carry out rituals to their ancestors and recreate their religious universe on the foundation of their cultural references. This is not an eclectic way of belonging. They try to live an authentic and sincere adherence to the official religious tradition which, in this case, given the history of our continent, means the Catholic Church. In Brazil, Mother Menininha do Gantois, the most famous of the Yalorixá in Bahía, was not only Catholic but a member of the religious confraternities of the Church. Every year she had a Mass said on her birthday and the cathedral of Salvador or the monastery Church of Saint Benedict of Bahia was full on those occasions. She knew that the bishops and priests did not accept her double allegiance to Candoblé and to the Church. However, she never gave up as her right to that. Moreover, she defended this same right for all those who belonged to Candoblé and who wanted to be Catholics as members of the Afro community. She even thought that the best way to live the spirituality of the Orixás was through the Christian faith. To be initiated into the terreiro, people had to be baptized and confirmed. It was her way of living her Christian religious identity as a Black. She added an original character to the official Catholic identity.⁹

Many people live this double belonging as a way of living their spirituality. For historical reasons, it often happens that the people who are part of Candoblé and of Umbanda will be, at the same time, Catholics or, in some cases, Evangelicals. In many cases the people from

9 Danièle HERVIEU LÉGER, *La religion pour mémoire*, Cerf, Paris 1993.

one Church or religion quite naturally take up symbols and rituals from the other, in a synthesis that goes beyond official doctrine. Believers in Pentecostal churches hide an image of Our Lady of Aparecida in their rooms and secretly pray to her. Catholics have symbols of Ubanda in their homes and perform rites from that religion such as the incensing of rooms and baths with perfumes. They are not aware that these are rituals that are alien to their Church.

This double or multiple belonging is experienced through the wisdom that is given to many people, who are largely poor and who have endured the repression their ancestors went through, who were forbidden to practice their ancestral religion. This spiritual wisdom consists in establishing a way of negotiating their identity, between its Founding Word¹⁰ and the specific history of the people or group. This is a constant negotiation mediated by authorities who are less inflexible, who know how to respect reality. In the Catholic Church, from early times, conservative bishops recognized that they could not eliminate or condemn this double belonging. Even though everyone taught that syncretism and double belonging was an error, many acted as if they did not see the syncretic quality of popular Catholicism. The same attitude was held by the *pais y mães de santo* (the elders in Candoblé - ed.). They also saw the problems that would arise in their religion and they did not feel they could forbid or condemn the reality.

4. The theological condemnation of syncretism

The official history of the Churches has a lot more to say, much more than those cases and examples of intolerance of what is different and the exclusion of other religions. There are also the good examples of the spirituality of theologians who, in various periods of history, taught tolerance and respect for what is different, and who accepted to live peacefully with other religions and cultures as did St. Francis of Assisi, Nicholas of Cusa, Erasmus of Rotterdam and others. At the beginning of the Modern age, in Portugal and in its colonies, the Inquisition persecuted the so-called “new Christians” and sent them to the stake to be burned alive. They were people baptized in the Church, and then accused of secretly practicing the Jewish Faith. History and literature tell of various instances where whole families in Latin America were persecuted and destroyed by rumors or accusations of what was at the time a form of “double belonging” even before the phenomenon arose among the Afro or Indigenous religions.¹¹

10 Not necessarily consigned to a text.

11 See the theatrical work of DIAS GOMES, *O Santo Inquérito*, el film «O Judeu», de John Tob Azulay (1986) and others.

In 1960, a North American, Judith Hollister, founded the Temple of Understanding near Washington. Among the founding members were the Patriarch Athenagoras, the Dalai Lama, Thomas Merton, Saverpalli Radhakrishnan, Albert Schweitzer, Sithu U Thant and Popes John XXIII and Paul VI. It is a building with six wings, one for each of the great religions: Buddhist, Christian, Chinese, Hindu, Jewish and Muslim. The goal is to “promote understanding and shared experience among world religions, to recognize the unity of the human family and to create in Washington a sort of “Spiritual United Nations.” In 1970, during an Assembly in Geneva, the Vatican and the World Council of Churches sent representatives. The Secretary General of the World Council of Churches, Eugene Blake, spoke against syncretism and asked religions to seek a commitment to peace.

The Second Vatican Council, which opened the Catholic Church to the ecumenical movement, to inter-religious dialogue and to respect for the religious freedom of each person, says: “In the missions, every form of syncretism must be excluded.” (Ad Gentes, 22) As late as 1999, the Vatican document on ministry to cultures taught that “the inculturation of the faith and the evangelization of cultures constitutes a binomial that excludes all forms of syncretism” (no. 5). This has been the permanent teaching in various speeches and pronouncements of the Popes and bishops. In Latin America, CELAM organized a symposium in San Jose (Costa Rica) in 1992. It has as its title: “Indifference and Syncretism, the Challenge and Pastoral Proposals for a New Evangelization.” The conclusion of this gathering totally condemned any form of syncretism.¹²

5. Liberation Theology, pluralism and syncretism

One of the first theologians who broke with the negative thinking about syncretism was Leonardo Boff when he said that, “Church structure is as syncretic as any other religious expression.... Pure Christianity has never existed nor can it exist.... Syncretism, then, does not constitute a necessary evil nor does it represent a pathology in a pure religion. It is its normal state.”¹³

On the level of culture, an independent thinker like Edgar Morin states that, “No doubt, we need to fear simplifications and syncretisms that degrade the cultures they mix with. But, we need to point out that

12 Cf. CELAM, *Indiferentismo y Sincretismo, Propuestas pastorales para la Nueva Evangelización en América Latina*, Simposio de Costa Rica, CELAM, Bogotá 1992.

13 Leonardo BOFF, *Igreja: Carisma e Poder*, Vozes, Petrópolis 1982, pág. 151.

14 Edgar MORIN, *Penser l'Europe*, Ed. Gallimard, Paris 1987, quoted by Pasteur Vincent SCHMID, *Vers le Réel*, in *Voies de l'Orient*, 79(avril- juin 2001)15.

15 Carl F. STARKLOFF, *Incultural and Cultural Systems*, Theological Studies 55(1994)66-80; 274-294.

there is no pure culture. All have mixed blood, including our own.”¹⁴ No real inculturation is possible without some form of syncretism, that is to say without the integration of symbols and signs.”¹⁵ In Asia, theologian Michael Amaladoss states: “Often it is those who represent the system (the institution) who accuse others of syncretism when their practice does not stay within the limits established in their system. But those who have those so-called syncretic practices find a unity of meaning in them. To them those practices don’t seem them so artificial or competitive. This whole set of symbols and meanings, then, has to be researched more deeply by people who are independent of the system.”¹⁶

In Asia, Aloysius Pieris maintains that the meta-cosmic soterologies like Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam are able to establish ties and be integrated with cosmic religions of a culture or a people. Between a religion that is expressed in meta-cosmic terms—where for example, God is revealed in history—and a cosmic religion— where the divine presence is in nature and in the forces of nature—a serene and fruitful coexistence can be established. At the same time that a person or group professes a meta-cosmic faith, elements of the cosmic religious practices can continue to be kept and integrated in the explicit faith in a new way. Irreconcilable elements will be suppressed while others will continue underground in a secret existence.¹⁷

By this analysis, it is possible that someone might be, at the same time, a Christian and a member of Candomblé or of an Indigenous tradition. It would be impossible to be at the same time, a Christian and a Muslim, or a Christian and Hindu. However, there are cases of monks and devout Catholics who declare that they are Christians and Hindus: Bede Griffiths, Henri le Saux, Cornelius Tollens. Others, like Louis Massillon, could state that they were both Christians and Muslims. In Brazil, Kardecist Spiritualism is a philosophy of a religious quality but with a meta-cosmic tonality. While it wouldn’t fit into the category of a cosmic religion, many ordinary people see themselves as Catholic and Spiritualists, without seeing any contradiction. The phenomenon is more generalized and goes deeper than any logic within a theological or intellectual framework. It follows rather the lines of a lived experience. In Europe today, there is a group that is looking for this sort of dialogical synthesis within Islam and in the cultural context of Europe. It is a circle devoted to exploring

16 M. AMALADOSS, *Quelqu’un peut-il être hindou-chrétien?*, in «Chémins de Dialogue» 9(1997)155-156.

17 Aloysius PIERIS, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, Orbis, Maryknoll 1988, pp. 71- 74.

18 The existence of such a group, its location in society and in a culture that is “strange” for it, as well as the dialogue it supports, both with the Muslim world as well as with other Western, Christian and “Free thinking” intellectuals, illustrates well the role of a necessary connection between an internal reflection on its own tradition—a reflection provoked by

and debating with a view to opening up avenues for a Western Islam, one that is capable of taking up the social framework of modern democracy without losing its identity. It is a group supported by Muslim intellectuals in Europe, who are watched with interest by their colleagues in the Arab countries and accompanied by Western intellectuals who also learn much along with their Muslim companions.¹⁸

With respect to the encounter of Aboriginal peoples of North America with Christianity, Achiel Peelman speaks of four sorts of responses: double acceptance, religious deformation, syncretism and what would clearly be conversion. Double acceptance is an attitude of tolerance in which a person gives external assent to the new religion without abandoning his or her own interior convictions. The person in question is socially Christian, as are many in Brazil or Europe. Religious deformation accepts the two religions simultaneously: the two sets of meaning and ritual respond to different needs in life and are practiced in different social contexts. This is the most common form of double belonging. The same author calls syncretism the phenomenon that melts together or mixes the two sets of meaning. The symbols of one are filled with the meaning of the other. An orixá is identified as the Virgin Mary. Certainly, this form of syncretism exists, but it is not the only kind and syncretism cannot be reduced to this syncretism of confusion. The fourth sort of response or attitude of an Indigenous person faced with Christianity is what the author calls conversion: a change of religion from one to the other.¹⁹

These four attitudes occur, in fact, among Indigenous and Black peoples in Latin America, as also throughout the world. Nevertheless, we need to grasp additional nuances and distinctions that the tradition is not accustomed to bring forward. Anthropologists and students of religious sciences say that syncretism is a universal process in the history of religious groups that come into contact with others: many have a tendency to make use of connections they have learned of in the world of the other in order to give new meanings to their own universe. Syncretism could also be a way for religious groups to be elevated into a process of redefinition of their own identity when they are confronted with a symbolic system from another group or society.

the transformation of this tradition through its contact with the other—and the interchange of ideas that came with that from outside, from the other. In another context, it is what I propose for Afro and Indigenous theology and ministry. An important starting point is the option not to minimize differences. On this point of not wiping out differences or closing one's eyes to them, see OTÁVIO VELHO, *Contribuição ao debate na USP depois do 11 de setembro*; sobre la complejidad creativa de la problemática del surgimiento de un Islam occidental, cf. TARIQ RAMADAN, *Être musulman à l'Europe*, ed. Tawid, Lyon 1999.

19 Achiel PEELMAN, *Christ is a Native American*, Orbis, Maryknoll 1995, pág. 66

Why then do theologians and anthropologists come to see the syncretism in a positive way when historically authorities and intellectuals always viewed it negatively? The only explanation we have is that the openness happens when the question is permitted analysis not with confessional eyes or through the lens of an institution, but looking at the people with love and preoccupation for their life and liberation. This is the lens that allows syncretism and multiple belonging to be seen positively. It is the only way to see that, in this process of synthesis and dialogue, the specific qualities and the differences in each group or religion are not, fundamentally, something negative. And to see that what double or multiple belongings reveal is the increasingly clear awareness that the great religious syntheses, wither that of Christianity or of an Afro or Indigenous religion or we could even imagine one of the great Asian religions, are like logical systems that are secretly present in the interior of each person or in a determinate community culture, and they define identities without necessarily generating a fundamentalist or repetitive adherence to a closed structure with truths that present themselves as unchangeable. On the contrary, persons or communities that live this form of religious belonging discover—or can discover—that they find both in the essence of their religion of origin and in the other religion that attracts them and to which they adhere, a fundamental and irreplaceable value, a value that has to be recognized and spiritually welcomed, a value that is found in the union of two or more paths that are ordinarily irreconcilable.²⁰

6. A pluralist Christian theology of double belonging

For a pluralist theology of liberation, one ecumenical objective is peace, justice and a commitment to defend the environment, which is threatened by the current dominant socio-economic system. Building on that base, we seek to construct a true communion among different religious communities with their diverse doctrinal, ethnic, linguistic and ideological elements. If the finality of this ecumenical effort is unity, reciprocal relationships between the different communities constitute, for us, the most fundamental ecumenical work. Since the 1960s, many of those who worked on ecumenism were aware that the primordial meaning of ecumenism is the unity of humanity as part of the divine plan for the world. Ever since the General Assembly in New Delhi (1961), the World Council of Churches has given attention to this broader ecumenism that is not

²⁰ Something of this attitude—recognition that in each great religious tradition there are specific foundations that are “constitutive of truth”—can be found already in a Joint Statement written in Jeruslaem in 1928 during a meeting of Evangelical Churches. See the Intervention of Pastor O.H. DE SOUZA, *João XXIII e o diálogo entre as religiões*, Ibrades, Rio de Janeiro 1994, p. 53.

restricted to the unity of the Churches. In fact, the original meaning of the term *oikoumene* is “the entire inhabited world.” This primordial meaning of the term helps us understand what inter-religious ecumenism means. In Asia, the various religious traditions constitute the fundamental social forces. These traditions have to be in mutual communion and dialogue in order to promote the communion of communities. Christian ecumenism, understood as a relationship among the Churches, has meaning not only as an intramural effort by a divided Christianity. It is also a movement that is capable of sustaining and contributing to this wider communion that is the most urgent priority of the world today.²¹

Among the lower-middle and poor classes, this inter-religious communion often takes place in the heart of each person. I believe that the proposal of Raimon Panikkar continues to be appropriate, namely that of going beyond inter-religious dialogue through a deep intra-religious dialogue. This means that each believer dialogues not only with someone from the outside but also takes on the task of addressing the questions that have risen up in the various spiritual traditions. We need to express our faith, not in a relativist way, but relationally. “The finality of inter-religious dialogue is understanding. This is not a matter of conquering the other, or of coming to full agreement, or to a universal religion. The ideal is communication, that is to say trying to fill in the pit of ignorance among different cultures in the world, by allowing them to speak and openly present their own intuitions in their own languages.”²²

Thus we see that the terminology of double belonging is inadequate and does not correspond to what, for the most part, happens. In the long experience that I have in this field, I have never felt a double belonging and I have never heard this expression from anyone, nor have I perceived that anyone felt that way. Double belonging would be a double or parallel path. It isn't that way. A woman who is a *mãe de santo* in Candomblé, is at the same time the coordinator of a basic ecclesial community in the Church and does not feel that she is practicing any “double belonging.” It is as Black and out of her Afro religious and cultural belonging that she feels she fulfils the conditions for being Christian. For centuries, the type of syncretism that exists between Christianity and Indigenous and Black religions is an example of spiritual synthesis and of an immense ecumenical effort brought about by simple people from the grassroots in order to promote a living union between two or more religious traditions that, historically and by all appearances seem to be irreconcilable.

21 Cf. F. WILFRED, *Ecumenisme as a Movement of Justice: focus on Asia*, in Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflexion 58/9(1994)573- 583, quoted by J. DUPUIS, *ibidem*, p. 366.

22 R. PANIKKAR, *The Intrareligious Dialogue*, New York 1978, p. 27.

The current ecumenical and inter-religious movement cannot take off from zero and disregard a spiritual synthesis that has already been lived for a long time and that has much to teach us. In a book of theological dialogue, Claude Geffré asks whether Christianity can accept a double belonging. He replies that “To the extent that Christianity does not enter into competition with another religion. I believe in the possibility of a double belonging. A person, who is converted to Jesus Christ, is baptized and who really lives in the Spirit of Christ, seems to me to be able, on the spiritual level of the bodily and mental discipline of asceticism and also on the level of gestures of adoration and praise, to continue taking up elements that are alien to historic Christianity. I am convinced that those cases of double belonging, if the expression is legitimate, are a promise of new historical faces of Christianity. The form that Christianity took historically, twenty centuries ago, does not prejudice the future and does not deny the utopia of a truly global Christianity, a Christianity that continues to be true to itself and to be truly rooted in all the great cultures. When I say rooted in cultures, I recognize that this is not an appropriate way to speak because if it is really rooted in different Western cultures, it will also necessarily be rooted in different religious traditions.”²³

In line with this vision, a Christianity that would want to be rooted in cultures will also have to be rooted in the religious traditions that are expressions of those cultures. So it is that Christianity should not take the place of Candomblé or of Umbanda or of an Indigenous tradition. Rather, it should receive from them the spiritual inspiration that is proper to them and give its contribution so that all religious traditions can be, more and more, human and, as human, divinized.

7. A future form of spiritual pluralism (by way of concluding on a path without a conclusion)

This reality that we inappropriately call “double or multiple belonging” opens up for Christianity and for other religions a new way of being: an inclusive religion that takes on—we might say, adopts—the other, in its own bosom. This openness happens through a spiritual and even mystical experience.²⁴ This mystical quality does not exclude theological reflection. On the contrary, it presupposes it. But it is an internal reflection and not a contradictory debate. The other is respectfully waiting for the result of this reflection in order to, in turn, nourish his or her own reflection and the future dialogue. This would be the contemporary mission of Christian theologies that are Black and Indigenous. They cannot

23 Claude GEFFRÉ, *Profession Théologique*, Ed. Albin Michel, Paris 1999, p. 242.

24 Not the “systems,” but the “lived worlds,” Habermas would say.

or should not be the arm of the ecclesiastical system for incorporating Blacks or Indigenous peoples. Thanks be to God they were not and are not that. On the contrary, Indigenous and Black theologies should be the signs of an advance in the difficult and arduous field of living in an intrapersonal pluralism that corresponds to what Panikkar calls intra-religious dialogue, as the departure point for a theological deepening of Indigenous or Black spirituality. The same can be said of the current role of Afro pastoral ministers: they cannot be those charged by dioceses or parishes with co-opting people from Afro cultures so that they are better encased in the system. They are prophets of a new macro-ecumenism that lives pluralism in the concrete setting of spiritual life.

If the Christian churches ought to be like Jesus, and if Jesus was clearly not exclusivist, the Churches should learn to live with this openness to the other and to valuing what is different. In a world where, as we said at the beginning, societies cultivate non-commitment and non-belonging, to have people who feel so committed to belonging to two or more religions, ought to be valued as a prophecy that is not just spiritual but also social. It is clear that there would be a way of belonging to several religions that would mean not belonging to any of them, but this is not what we are talking about here. On the contrary, this theological reflection is taking place by drawing from many examples of people who are deeply committed to the Gospel and to its human and social consequences, in their relationship with two distinct communities.

Evidently, every spiritual path is a journey of love and is not expressed intellectually. It is like a mystagogy. It is a mystery that is only explained in the intimacy of life relationships. Nevertheless, the fact of having existed for so long and as a healthy element, of having helped and continuing to assist today in the life so many people—by its fruits you will know the tree—reveals a prophecy that we can welcome and that gives witness to the vocation of all religions—and in our case, of Christianity—to be incapable of being explained by itself alone and to have no reason of itself for existing. Double or multiple belonging shows that every religion has to be a light that illumines the path of the divine project for the world and that invites everyone to relativize our exclusivities. No one is the owner of life and of the sacred. We can simply be lovers that place ourselves at its service. There is no property title for the divine; access is free for every search that bears fruit in the heart. No mortal can put a stop to the strong winds. The mystery is our Peace and the religious paths are our parables of love.

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Salvación indígena y afroamericana

En América Latina, vivencias sagradas de la población indígena y afroamericana pueden ser entendidas en sí mismas y en los nuevos contextos mundiales, y también en dialogo con la fe cristiana en la Salvación. Nuestro continente incluye grandes sectores que se autodefinen como cristianos y también muchos sectores con otras formas simbólicas. Además, lo religioso y espiritual y también lo eclesial es reelaborado por las comunidades de fe, que asimilan factores globales de varias maneras. Se trata pues de realidades plurales y dinámicas ante las cuales no caben interpretaciones simples (lo esencialmente cristiano, o bien lo indígena y lo afroamericano en sí mismo y segregado de otros mundos). Junto con reconocer la complejidad de cada temática, vale ensayar lecturas del aporte indígena y afroamericano a la reflexión cristiana. Esto es explicitado por acontecimientos teológicos indios y afros de carácter continental¹.

La motivación de fondo no es sobreponer categorías bíblicas o doctrinales a vivencias de armonía con el universo, de identidad y solidaridad local, de felicidad en todas sus dimensiones. Más bien cada vivencia -ya sea de pueblos originarios o de afrodescendientes- tiene su sentido y valor propio. En torno a ello deseo añadir una lectura cristiana. Tal lectura forma parte del ser discípulo de Jesús, profeta del Reino e Hijo de Dios. El ha dialogado con la samaritana, con la siriofenicia y cananea, con el centurión romano, es decir con varios tipos de culturas y espiritualidades. Teniendo al Señor como modelo, cada persona que cree en Cristo es interpelado, dialoga, y redescubre el sentido de la salvación, gracias al contacto con realidades distintas a la propia.

1 Sobresalen tres «Encuentros Latinoamericanos de Teología India» realizados en México, Panamá, Bolivia (y publicados por: CENAMI, México 1991; CENAMI, México 1994; IPA, Cuzco: 1998), y valiosas recopilaciones: N. SARMIENTO, *Caminos de la Teología India*, Verbo Divino, Cochabamba 2000, y M. MARZAL y otros, *Rostros indios de Dios*, Abya Yala, Quito 1991. Por otro lado, se han hecho tres consultas latinoamericanas de Teología Afro, en Nueva Iguazú y en Sao Pablo (y publicadas en: DEL, San José 1986; Paulus, São Paulo 1997; Atabaque, São Paulo 2004).

Comienzo anotando la realidad dinámica y desafiante en que se desenvuelven las religiones. Luego entro en la temática de la salvación. A continuación anoto la reciprocidad (indígena) y la simbiosis (afroamericana) como indicadores de «salvación» anhelada y celebrada en América Latina; anotaré sobretodo lo recogido por instancias cristianas existentes en ambientes indígenas y afro-americanos.

Éstas lecturas claramente toman distancia de las posturas hegemónicas. Las hegemonías son intolerantes y ponen obstáculos al dialogo entre diferentes modos de creer. Esta prepotencia a menudo forma parte del comportamiento cristiano; esto no ocurre cuando el paradigma es el Evangelio. El hecho que uno forma parte de la comunidad eclesial que confiesa a Cristo como Salvador nos llena de alegría y certeza, pero no conlleva negar el valor de diversas espiritualidades de la Vida.

1.- Dinámicas globales y religión

Las formas simbólicas en general, y en particular las de pueblos indígenas y afro-americanos, tienen gran energía y procesos internos de transformación. Además se han desenvuelto con varios grados de contacto con estructuras cristianas en América Latina y con factores en el mundo de hoy. Quiero recalcar unos factores envolventes.

Hoy vemos que lo religioso y lo espiritual crecen innovadora y polifacéticamente, y tienen gran peso en todo el planeta; además, el imaginario moderno y posmoderno replantea lo sagrado. Los sistemas simbólicos renacen y son reconfigurados debido a los entrecruzamientos entre culturas/religiones. En medio de estos procesos, las cuestiones principales son, a mi modo de ver, la absolutización del mercado mundial y el neo-politeísmo de bienes de consumo. Son cuestiones que afectan a las nuevas generaciones indígenas y afro-americanas (a las que no cabe pues mirar con romanticismo).

Hoy el ser humano anda deslumbrado en medio de un bosque de símbolos y un torbellino de cambios; y uno necesita la seguridad interior que provee la religión. El orden global no es estable ni equitativo; el proceso de cambios es acelerado, desigual, desconcertante. Prolifera la incertidumbre. «La mayoría siente el vacío de la muerte, no tiene donde poner su fe... la inseguridad contemporánea viene de esa confusa claridad de que estamos entre dos mundos: por lo tanto suspendidos sobre el vacío»². En este escenario incierto,

2 J.J. BRUNNER, *Globalización cultural y posmodernidad*, FCE, Santiago 1998, 36, 43; ver R. ORTIZ, *Mundialização e cultura*, Brasiliense, São Paulo 1994; N. GARCÍA C., *Consumidores y ciudadanos, conflictos multiculturales de la globalización*, Grijalbo, México 1995; K.J. GERGEN, *The saturated self, dilemmas of identity in contemporary life*, Harper Collins, New York 1991.

la gente busca «sentirse bien». El cristianismo en parte es reducido a un mecanismo de dicha interior (un superficial “ser feliz” con ropaje religioso).

En términos mundiales se despliega un marketing de ofertas religiosas plurales y sincréticas; la muchedumbre compra y consume «bienes de salvación que ofrece la industria cultural contemporánea»³. La religión es en parte absorbida por pautas de status material; ella es valorada en la medida que da bienestar inmediato y cuantificado, en la medida que da «salvación» para la multitud cuya insatisfacción es inducida por la sociedad de consumo. También llama la atención como la política democrática ha sido subordinada a la economía; los representantes del pueblo son gerentes de desarrollo. A grosso modo puede decirse que se ha globalizado la religiosidad de la felicidad subjetiva; esto implica reemplazar la creencia por la experiencia, y reforzar el individualismo⁴.

La privatización de lo religioso se correlaciona con la sacralización del mercado y su peculiar politeísmo. Lo primero necesita lo segundo, y viceversa. El consumo de bienes de salvación personal se lleva a cabo gracias al mercado totalitario. Se presupone que cada faceta y sentido de la existencia proviene del mercado total; éste resuelve todas las necesidades humanas; hasta llega a ser un ídolo. «La divinización del mercado crea un Dios-dinero: *in God we trust* (lema inscrito en el dólar estadounidense)»⁵. Me parece que lo idolatrado por la gente es, no el mercado-en-sí, sino sus diversos y fascinantes bienes simbólicos; en otras palabras, encaramos una compleja problemática politeísta. Aquí hablo del «politeísmo» ofertado y consumido en el mercado de bienes modernos.

El hecho que bienes percederos sean idolatrados no agrada a quienes son creyentes en el Dios Salvador. Cabe impugnar y relativizar cualquier absoluto humano. Esto es un gran reto espiritual al interior del mundo actual. Si la teología no asume este reto, ella es beneficiaria o al menos cómplice de la nefasta sacralización. Es evidente que se trata de fenómenos complejos, que requieren de una crítica a la economía/cultura/espiritualidad con sus rasgos totalitarios. A mi parecer cabe una crítica, y no una demonización del mercado (ya que éste vale como forma de interacción económica). La problemática de bienes humanos sacralizados es una ineludible preocupación para el creyente.

La globalización conlleva un mercado de bienes simbólicos. Se trata de un fenómeno uniformizador, pero paradójicamente tiene un carácter politeísta. La dinámica del consumo implica novedades, rápidamente descartadas

3 C. PARJER, *Religión y postmodernidad*, CEPS, Lima 1997, 73. Ver A.P. ORO, C.A. STEIL (orgs.), *Globalização e religião*, Vozes, Petrópolis 1997.

4 Ver L.R. BENEDETTI, «A experiencia no lugar da crença», en M.F. DOS ANJOS, *Experiência religiosa, risco ou aventura*, Paulinas, São Paulo 1998, 28-31.

5 F. HINKELAMMERT, *Teología del mercado total*, Hisbol, La Paz 1989, 59; en vez de globalización, este autor prefiere: «totalización del mercado y su lógica», *El grito del sujeto*, DEI, San José 1998, 228.

y reemplazadas por otros inventos que nos deslumbran; son objetos fascinantes a los cuales se les atribuye la solución de todas las necesidades humanas. También he subrayado que la realidad moderna no es religiosamente neutral ni simplemente secular. Más bien genera muchos y cambiantes absolutos.

El politeísmo presente en la globalización hegemónica constituye un buen desafío para las teologías cristianas (y me parece que de modo especial para comunidades indígenas y afro-americanas) atentas a los signos de nuestros tiempos. Dado este gran reto, las diversas religiones tienen que reencontrar energías propias. De lo contrario cunde la alienación. Al indígena, a la población negra, a todos los sectores mestizos, les afecta el politeísmo efímero, el éxito individual, el fundamentalismo intolerante, los absolutos materiales. Tomando en cuenta estas realidades, a la teología le corresponde tanto explicitar la fidelidad al Dios vivo como denunciar la existencia de dioses falsos. También a ello contribuyen las ciencias humanas y las sabidurías del pueblo, que desenmascaran absolutos que deshumanizan.

Por otra parte, existen factores globales con un sentido solidario y genuinamente esperanzador, y con calidad espiritual. En la subjetividad moderna existe capacidad de libertad (que incluye rechazar lo religioso cuando encadena o cuando es hipócrita). También hay que valorar alternativas de carácter global, como son las nuevas redes sociales y el afán económico con equidad, y como son el juego, la risa, y la fiesta del pobre postergado pero simbólicamente libre. Otros factores son el desarrollo de buenas relaciones de género, y la praxis ecológica sin la cual no sobrevive el planeta.

Éstas y otras grandes líneas de humanización significan que existe «otra» globalización (en contraposición a la hegemónica). Pues bien, en la población originaria, mestiza, y afro-americana, las personas creyentes asumen los retos alternativos. Puede ser al reflexionar la solidaridad y esfuerzos cotidianos para vivir con dignidad, al hacer teología de la fiesta y el buen humor, de la subjetividad y las relaciones de género, de la ecología y la economía a favor de todo ser humano. Éstos discursos y acciones forman parte de modos como el pueblo latinoamericano esta reimaginando y reconstruyendo la realidad. Se trata pues de un amplio quehacer a favor de la justicia en la historia y con el medio ambiente que Dios ha creado para todo ser viviente.

Tenemos, por lo tanto, factores hegemónicos, y también existen líneas de acción alternativa, que envuelven a personas y grupos humanos, incluyendo a las comunidades originarias y a afro-descendientes. Varios tipos de factores globales influyen en las vivencias de dichas comunidades. Esto merece ser tomado en cuenta al examinar la problemática religiosa india y afro. Es decir, uno ubica los fenómenos religiosos en el terreno amplio donde se desenvuelven. Además son evitadas lecturas idealistas y a-históricas que sólo exaltan lo indígena y la negritud. Lo propio, por muy amado que sea, no constituye un absoluto; ni puede pasarse por alto factores deshumanizante que afectan a la población originaria y a cualquier comunidad.

2.- La temática de la salvación

Las actitudes que predominan hoy son la auto-salvación (derivada del acento moderno en el sujeto) y el vínculo con objetos sacralizados (que aunque no sean tratados como «dioses», sí funcionan como dadores de bienestar). En estos contextos, uno es confrontado por el mensaje cristiano, que no es egocéntrico ni centrado en cosas; muy por el contrario, la actitud creyente radicalmente afirma la salvación divina a través de Jesucristo.

La tendencia actual hacia la auto-salvación esta sustentada por las vigas maestras de la civilización: ideología yo-ista con mucho peso en la economía y los medios de comunicación, la subjetividad moderna y posmoderna, difusión de terapias de auto-estima y auto-ayuda, orientación de la religión y la espiritualidad hacia el bienestar personal, confusión ante la vorágine de imágenes y ante la incertidumbre del cambio de época. Recalco que no se trata de problemáticas simples, ni provienen directamente de lo religioso. Más bien, el cambiante escenario mundial y sus vigas maestras son las que afectan la condición de creyentes.

Nos envuelve un carnaval de demandas y de ofertas religiosas y espirituales, que son interiorizadas de manera ecléctica e inmediatista. En la larga historia de la humanidad, lo sagrado ha dado sentido, y nos ha conectado con uno mismo, el medio ambiente, la comunidad, la divinidad. En sociedades que se definen como «desarrolladas», lo sagrado tiende a ser cada vez más un objeto de consumo, descartable, y de felicidad pasajera. Cabe pues encarar las sacralizaciones de hoy: en la economía, trato social, juegos de azar, religiosidad sanadora, y tanto más. Cabe también, a cada comunidad creyente, tomar distancia de sacralizaciones de hoy que deshumanizan. Al respecto, comunidades indígenas, afros, mestizas, tienen mayores recursos propios de espiritualidad, en base a las cuales hacen una crítica de las seudo salvaciones.

Ahora bien, quienes creemos en Cristo adherimos a un Salvador, y lo hacemos teniendo en cuenta que existen muchas religiones. Esta realidad suscita debates. Una actitud es contraponer el relativismo moderno con la verdad absoluta. Esta postura se hace presente en el documento *Dominus Iesus*⁶. Se manejan conceptos considerados objetivos, y se tiende a sacralizar lenguajes teológicos (que ¡son relativos!) al desear condenar el relativismo. Por otra parte, la exaltación de lo relativo resulta siendo incoherente; ya que el relativismo se auto-constituye de una manera dogmática. Otra postura es apreciar la salvación con sus dimensiones universales. A mi parecer vale dedicarse a dilucidar el sentido de Cristo Salvador para pueblos con diversas religiones y espiritualidades.

6 Ver, Congregación de la Doctrina de la Fe, *Dominus Iesus* (2000); el relativismo es examinado en los párrafos 4, 5, 22; la verdad en párrafos. 4, 5, 7, 22; y el objetivo es la «salvación de todos por el conocimiento de la verdad».

Una vía es discernir las maneras como la población vive su fe. Ciertamente es bueno dejar atrás posturas de exclusión y discriminación ante las religiones. Pero, a menudo la evaluación es hecha de modo superficial y dicotómica. Un ejemplo es el bien intencionado documento latinoamericano de Puebla (1979). Nos ha incentivado a ser lúcidos; pero lo hace con un esquema simple de positivo/negativo (*Documento de Puebla* 454-456). Por ejemplo, la cuestión del «sentido de la providencia de Dios». Esta cuestión se mueve entre la postura de ponerse ciegamente en Sus manos, auscultar señales de Vida, y la resignación ante cualquier acontecimiento social. Vale pues un discernimiento de significados salvíficos en la religiosidad (sin un esquema de bueno/malo).

Otra vía es reconocer símbolos de salvación en cada búsqueda creyente. En el caso de los cristianismos inculturados por poblaciones indígenas, mestizas, afro-americanas, ellos son eminentemente simbólicos y cordiales. Estas poblaciones tienen gran capacidad para relacionar una entidad con otra diferente; y para acoger y cultivar señales sensibles de realidades trascendentes. La sacramentalidad (según la perspectiva católica) corre por las venas de la población latinoamericana. Pero no se limita a una u otra iglesia. Tanta ritualidad latinoamericana muestra la importancia de símbolos, que configuran la espiritualidad y la praxis de cada día en la mayoría de las personas. Dios es amado en realidades concretas y cotidianas que tienen valor simbólico. Por ejemplo, instancias como el nacer, el constituir pareja y familia, el morir; son instancias que conllevan un compartir material y vínculos de vida: oración y comida, risas y pleitos, alianzas y compromisos.

Espero no tergiversar el cristianismo latinoamericano en comunidades originarias, mestizas, afrodescendientes y las demás, al describirlas en términos de salvación. Es un ser cristiano que no está orientado a saber algo de Dios, ni a ser rígidos militantes de la Iglesia, ni a aferrarse a una serie de mandamientos, ni sólo a resolver pecados. Hay sentido del mal y el pecado, hay sabiduría en la fe del pueblo y sus modos de pertenencia eclesial, y hay responsabilidad ética. Pero lo principal son vivencias de salvación, la que es acogida en formas muy precisas; ésta salvación proviene de Dios, y resuelve malestares de cada día y da sentido a la Vida. Se trata de vivencias con expresiones simbólicas.

Durante décadas la religiosidad de gente sencilla ha sido descalificada por sus ritos y creencias. Aquí, como en cualquier práctica de la fe, se requiere un discernimiento, con criterios humanos, bíblicos, eclesiales. Sin embargo, los abundantes ritos y creencias expresan -entre otras cosas- las complejas dimensiones simbólicas de la fe del pueblo. También expresan formas inculturadas e inreligionadas del cristianismo popular.

También ha sido descalificada la manera «pragmática» como la salvación es entendida y vivida por la población latinoamericana. En este asunto (como en lo dicho anteriormente) sufrimos la incomunicación entre élites (que tienen

sus esquemas) y comunidades humanas con su concreto caminar simbólico hacia Dios. La salvación es concreta y eficaz. Esto tiene su fundamento en Cristo, que es el único camino de salvación. Pues bien la acción evangelizadora de la Iglesia no cancela las religiosidades de la gente; ni éstas son paralelas y alternativas a lo primero. Más bien, el pueblo de Dios está al servicio de la salvación de la humanidad. Siguiendo el mandato de Cristo y movida por el Espíritu, la Iglesia se hace presente «a todos los seres humanos y pueblos para conducirlos a la fe, a la libertad y a la paz de Cristo... (y a la vez) el Señor puede conducir por caminos que El sabe a quienes ignoran el Evangelio» (Vaticano II, *Ad Gentes*, 5 y 7). Dicha necesidad y sacramentalidad de la Iglesia no tiene que ser contrapuesta a las religiones existentes en el mundo de hoy.

Esto último ocurre, por ejemplo, cuando a la fe se le atribuye la aceptación de la verdad revelada, y las religiones son reducidas a simples búsquedas de la verdad. Es una problemática planteada en algunos textos oficiales. «Debe ser firmemente retenida la distinción entre la fe teológica y la creencia en las otras religiones... la fe es la acogida en la gracia de la verdad revelada... las otras religiones... es cuando el hombre, en su búsqueda de la verdad, ha ideado y creado en su referencia a lo Divino y al Absoluto» (*Dominus Iesus*, 7). J.I. González Faus advierte que el documento maneja una «noción de verdad más griega que bíblica»; ésta es siempre una verdad abierta y acompañada de la gracia⁷. Puede añadirse el problema de ver la «verdad» separada de la acogida de la Salvación. Según designios misteriosos de Dios, toda persona es hecha partícipe de la pascua de Cristo.

Gracias a la fe, personas y comunidades acogemos la Revelación y la Salvación, con sus mediaciones eclesiales. En cuanto a las culturas/religiones pueden ser apreciadas como senderos hacia la verdad y la salvación, en cuanto sintonizan con la voluntad de Dios que ama a toda la humanidad. En este sentido también puede ser valorada la interacción entre religiones. Ella forma parte de la comprensión de la misión de la Iglesia, que no descalifica a las religiones y que descubre en ellas señales de Dios. Ésta comprensión de la salvación es también un reconocimiento de Jesucristo como camino/verdad/vida para toda la humanidad. El Señor de la Vida no es propiedad privada de un grupo selecto. Podemos pues afirmar simultáneamente la salvación en Cristo, la misión de la Iglesia, y los valores simbólicos en las religiosidades de los pueblos. Más adelante lo haré en torno a la reciprocidad indígena y a la simbiosis afro-americana.

Es decir, no hay que limitarse a distinciones entre fe y religión, entre iglesia y religiones de la gente. Más bien interesa como la humanidad es salvada por Dios; e interesan las formas simbólicas como se vivencia la salvación.

7 J.I. GONZÁLEZ FAUS, «La cruz de la *Dominus Iesus*», *Selecciones de Teología* 157, 2001, pág. 53.

Al reflexionar en comunión con la fe de pueblos de América Latina, sobresale su capacidad de interiorizar el Evangelio de la Vida según los códigos culturales y religiosos de cada pueblo. Esto tiene como telón de fondo la salvación en Cristo con sus mediaciones humanas y sus formas simbólicas. En un encuentro en Santiago⁸ se ha preguntado si son ¿todas las religiones caminos ordinarios de salvación?; y se ha respondido que el camino ordinario es Cristo. El lenguaje es inadecuado; ya que de hecho existen caminos humanos donde Dios se hace presente, y teológicamente también reconocemos el Camino. Por mi parte opino que no es la religión lo que salva, sino la acción de Dios. Su voluntad universal de salvación afecta a cada persona y comunidad humana en sus circunstancias concretas, incluyendo las formas religiosas.

Paso a continuación a ver primero elementos en el modo indígena de Vivir, y luego formas afroamericanas. Lo hago con la perspectiva ya indicada: Dios ama y ofrece universalmente su salvación; pero esto tiene que ser sopeado en diversas culturas y espiritualidades. Lo hago -como ya lo indicaba- en base a sectores cristianos que celebran y redescubren su fe en dialogo con dichas identidades. (Otro tipo de reflexión es la que subraya lo indígena o lo afro en sí, y sin relación con formas cristianas existentes en este continente).

3.- Reciprocidad en los pueblos originarios

Con respecto a pueblos indígenas y sus portavoces, personas de todo el continente se han sentido «llamados a abrir los jardines de estas rosas perfumadas a hombre y mujeres de otros pueblos, para que su fragancia se esparza por doquier: es la fragancia de Dios « y añaden: «queremos producir un cambio verdadero que construya una casa grande en donde vivamos todos los pueblos de la humanidad»⁹. Esto además de ser lenguaje poético, también es una propuesta espiritual y profética. La reciprocidad se lleva a cabo en comunidad y en comunión con la Tierra; lo cual conlleva un pensar enraizado en lo ritual y festivo, el mito y la mística, lo cotidiano y lo político.

Pues bien, la reflexión en torno al pluralismo religioso tiene que encarar dramas del pasado. El colonialismo negó al ser humano, al negar la calidad espiritual del indígena. La institución cristiana sistemáticamente agredió las religiones originarias (al tratarlas como animismos, como míticas, como carentes de revelación). La arrogante «civilización cristiana» ha sido ciega y sorda ante lo Sagrado presente en nuestros pueblos. Sus religiosidades han sido cosificadas, convertidas en folclor, y tachadas como un primitivismo pre-moderno.

Hoy cabe apreciar esa creatividad religiosa, que contribuye al porvenir humano polifacético. Puede ser apreciada como diversos caminos hacia la Vida-

8 R. POLANCO, en *Teología y Vida*, XLII, I-2, 2001, pág. 148.

9 III Encuentro Taller Latinoamericano, *Teología India*, IPA/CTP/IDEA, Cuzco 1998, 10.

Misterio. Ésta es una vivencia indígena que yo he acompañado. A ella se suma mi inquietud cristiana, la pluralidad de culturas y religiones ¿en qué sentido es obra del Espíritu, y manifiesta varios componentes del Cuerpo de Cristo?

También pregunto qué impacto tiene el pluralismo religioso indígena en la teología latinoamericana con vocación liberadora. Ella se siente incómoda con el esquema que pone por un lado la novedad cristiana y que pone, por otro lado, la dimensión religiosa. El esquema de fe/religión resulta discriminatoria hacia esta última. Desde sus inicios la teología de liberación ha conjugado espiritualidad con praxis y con análisis crítico; pero poco ha sopesado las religiones. Recién van siendo reconocidos valores salvíficos en las espiritualidades indígenas.

A continuación voy a centrarme en lo que muchos consideran el eje del modo de ser indígena: la reciprocidad. Ésta realidad puede ser leída en clave de salvación. Al respecto se han dado pasos en las ciencias humanas, y por supuesto también en la reflexión creyente.

Con respecto a las disciplinas humanas, desde el siglo pasado el cientifismo nos ha ocultado una realidad que es holística. Esto -atestiguado por milenarios modos de ser autóctono y hoy también por una actitud científica denominada holística- enmarca el conocimiento humano. La crítica sistemática -inventada por la modernidad- es uno de los buenos criterios modernos asumidos por la población amerindia. En ésta hay varias posturas. Por un lado, el esencialismo, es decir lo indio-en-sí y contrapuesto a todo lo que no es propio; este esencialismo es postulado por una minoría ilustrada. Por otro lado, ser «integrados» a la sociedad envolvente, negándose a sí mismos; esta postura tiene bastante peso. También hay una gama de formas condicionales de participar en la modernidad; algunos replantean lo moderno según pautas indígenas y mestizas; algunos van caminando con un pie en el ámbito indígena y con el otro pie en el mundo globalizado; algunos, para unos asuntos (como lo económico) siguen reglas mundiales, y para otros asuntos (como los familiares y festivos) actúan según sus propios principios.

El mayor logro, a mi entender, es que sectores indígenas progresan con sus rasgos propios, y de modo principal con su “relacionalidad”. Se trata de nuevos vínculos y organismos generados en la ciudad, de asumir la ciencia y el trabajo moderno, pero orientándolos a beneficios y festejos propios, y tantos otros rasgos cotidianos. Así la gente no se deja subordinar a los absolutos de la propaganda y la publicidad. Más bien, como anota H.C.F. Mansilla: «lo bello y razonable puede estar en lo pequeño, lo heterogéneo, lo tradicional... el adelantamiento técnico y la preservación de viejos valores culturales»; y por su parte, Domingo Llanque ha detallado la combinación de lo tradicional y lo nuevo, la serie de cambios modernos en el mundo indígena peruano¹⁰.

10 H.C.F. MANSILLA, *Los tortuosos caminos de la modernidad*, CEBEM, La Paz 1992, 96; y Domingo LLANQUE, *Vida y Teología Andina*, CBC, Cusco 2004, 11-30.

La gente siente que el progreso es alucinante, rápido, y con varias facetas. El maltrato a nuestro medio ambiente y la pauperización humana apuntan hacia un eco-humano-suicidio; aunque hay cierta auto-corrección del sistema (p. ej. limitaciones al armamentismo atómico). Otra faceta es la globalizada capacidad tecnológica, productiva, comunicacional; casi todos los habitantes del planeta anhelan y exigen el uso de estos logros modernos. Pero, estos logros positivos van de la mano con la auto-victimización de multitudes excluidas; como explica E. Dussel: en el «mito de la modernidad» la víctima es culpable y sería inocente el victimario de pueblos expoliados¹¹. Es lamentable como tanta gente marginada se atribuye la culpa de esa condición. Por otra parte, existen vías contestatarias y alternativas. Muchas sociedades -y aquí resaltan las indígenas y mestizas- no aceptan ser regidas por la totalitaria razón del mercado ni por la privatización de la existencia.

Junto con encarar y sopesar estas realidades, ellas son modificadas y a veces reconstruidas por las poblaciones indígenas.

Sobresalen varias líneas de acción. 1- La estructuración indígena de su espacio y tiempo vital: casa, actividades económicas complementarias, ciclo de celebraciones propias, etc.; y a la vez participación en la cotidianidad moderna. 2- Cultivo de su sensibilidad, saber, simbología; donde resaltan relaciones familiares, con difuntos, con espíritus protectores, y modos indígenas de visualizar a Cristo, María, Santos/as. 3- La comunidad indígena, al no ser dualista ni excluyente, se desenvuelve bien en medio de tantas (y positivas) «diferencias» modernas; busca consensos y líneas de mejoramiento en común; así puede -por ejemplo- conjugar algo tan tradicional como sus oraciones de sanación con la medicina moderna. 4- Otra importante línea de acción es asimilar tecnología, ciencia, desarrollo, pero generalmente con cautela y combinando lo propio con lo nuevo, para que el progreso sea sustentable y seguro.

Estas líneas de acción conllevan principios éticos que se caracterizan por la reciprocidad: 1- responsabilidad cotidiana, a fin de convivir bien con los demás, 2- valorar la propia producción simbólica y sapiencial, dando primacía a relaciones fecundas, y dando este sentido al progreso moderno, 3- interactuar entre seres diferentes y complementarios, establecer consensos, y líneas de bien común, y 4- no absolutizar lo moderno, sino que sopesar sus aciertos y confrontar sus fallas.

Considero que la perspectiva india tiene calidad holística (lo cual también es manifestado por otras maneras de pensar hoy la fe); esto difiere de la globalización moderna que se propone ser universal y definitiva. La ética y teología india tienen calidad holística, dada su comprensión del cuerpo y de la humanidad en el cosmos; por reconocer lo «relacional» como fundamento de todo; por poner la alegría festiva como meta de la peregrinación humana; por responder a la gracia divina. Esto se contrapone a «pilares espirituales»

11 Ver E. DUSSEL, *El encubrimiento del otro*, Abya Yala, Quito 1994, 91.

de la modernidad: la economía determina la política y la religión, el éxito en el obrar humano es absolutizado, se pone como meta humana la satisfacción instantánea de deseos de poder, y, el «yo-ismo» es la vara con que se mide a Dios. Vemos pues que la reflexión indígena tiene la capacidad ética de sopesar la modernidad globalizada y a la vez ofrece sus propias orientaciones básicas.

En la teología moderna, se trabaja preferentemente con conceptos; y es una labor hecha por individuos. Se trata de personas expertas, especializadas dentro de la Iglesia, con un amplio bagaje de conocimientos transmitidos de modo conceptual. Algo muy distinto encontramos en las reflexiones hechas desde los márgenes, en dialogo con sabidurías de las personas preferidas de Dios¹². También es el caso de la teología de pueblos indígenas. Ella tiene portavoces y temáticas acordes con el clamor de la creación y la humanidad. Sus medios de reflexión y comunicación son un lenguaje holístico (festejo ritual, pensamiento, afectividad, oración, responsabilidad histórica, etc.). No es un ejercicio mental, ni es antropocéntrica. Se trata de comunidades sabias cuya fe es un vínculo -mediante símbolos- con el Misterio. La sabiduría proviene de toda la tierra donde los seres humanos explicitan relaciones y sus conocimientos.

En las sabidurías milenarias, y en los actuales procesos de teología india, quién cree, festeja, trabaja, habla, ama, piensa, es una realidad humana, cósmica, espiritual; se trata de componentes distintos y complementarios, enraizados en la tierra y admiradores del cielo. Se invoca -como lo hacen los mayas- a Dios como “Corazón de la tierra, Corazón del cielo”. Por consiguiente, no hay “un sujeto” teológico, en el sentido de un individuo definido como autónomo y racional. En cuanto a Dios, no es tratado como “objeto de conocimiento”. Por lo tanto, la perspectiva autóctona tiene su propio sentir y lógica. ¿Cómo explicarla, si se emplean lenguajes dominantes? Al usar estos lenguajes, para poder comunicarnos, lo hacemos con precauciones, matices, precisiones, a fin de no desfigurar el ser y pensar indígena.

Una serie de eventos continentales van explicando estos asuntos¹³. El primer Encuentro de Teología India ha dicho: “el sujeto...es la comunidad indígena, enraizada en la tierra donde surgen y crecen sus ritos y mitos”. El segundo Encuentro decía: “los pueblos indios comunicamos nuestra fe con flores y cantos...; como lo hace Dios Creador que está presente en el caminar de la comunidad, luchando y sudando en el campo y sembrando vida para

12 El modo latinoamericano de reflexionar la fe puede resumirse como una praxis de relaciones; ver mi capítulo «Nuestro paradigma: pensar el amor», *Teología en la fe del pueblo*, San José: DEI, 1999, 159-176. Jon Sobrino ha definido la teología como «intellectus amoris»; *El principio misericordia*, Sal Terrae, Santander 1992, 49-50. 70-71.

13 Conclusiones en primer Encuentro de *Teología India* (CENAMI, México 1991, 315), segundo Encuentro de *Teología India* (CENAMI, México 1994, 184), Tercer Encuentro de Teología India (IPA, Cusco 1998, 172-3).

todos. Para nosotros hacer teología es un trabajo comunitario que nos llena de alegría y nos abre horizontes”. En el tercer Encuentro se afirmaba: «nuestras teologías dan cuenta de nuestra relación con la tierra... y damos cuenta del equilibrio o paridad entre los géneros, lo cual es inherente a nuestras culturas... las teologías indígenas serán festivas, celebrando la vida y nuestras relaciones con la tierra y las fuerzas espirituales que emanan del Creador».

También vale tener presente la calidad mestiza de sujetos y pensamientos indígenas. Muchos insisten que el tema mestizo es problemático. Así es. A menudo los estados y las iglesias usan emblemas mestizos para negar lo indio (todo es absorbido y resignificado en lo mestizo). Por otra parte tenemos hechos macizos: poblaciones y elaboraciones mestizas que son portadoras de lo indígena (p. ej. procesos de migración y reconstrucción urbana de la existencia indígena). En el Perú, J. M. Arguedas vivió en dos mundos y le atribuyó al mestizaje unas notas bien positivas¹⁴. Muchas vivencias mestizas aportan un sentido relacional; esto es un aporte al sujeto indio.

En términos generales, el sujeto no está aislado; por el contrario todo es relacional. Vivimos y pensamos como parte del cosmos, como varón y mujer, en comunidad. El pensamiento es circular, mestizo y pluricultural, histórico; pero también ha sido y continúa siendo agredido y tergiversado.

Ahora bien, ¿cómo es el paradigma relacional? El hermoso tejido de pensamientos indígenas puede ser descrito como: «una lógica simbólica, ritual, concreta, vital», que contrasta con la «monocultura que pretende ser mundial»¹⁵. La sabiduría simbólica, en torno a lo ritual, ofrece un intenso sentido relacional (muy distinta a una verdad-objeto). Lo que conocemos no son cosas sagradas; son relaciones con lo que da vida. Nos ubicamos en lo sagrado -en términos de las tradiciones autóctonas-. También en el lenguaje cristiano: lo que conocemos es la relación, el amor con Dios que nos manifiesta Jesucristo. No es un «entender la realidad divina». Además, nada es excluido de dicho conocimiento relacional.

Otra gran veta es la eco-visión-acción. Cada ser viviente está conectado y en comunicación con la profundidad de sí mismo y con su entorno (por ello en la ritualidad indígena el Misterio es palpado en seres vegetales, minerales, humanos, espíritus y lugares sagrados, invocaciones de Dios). Estos intercambios tienen como sustentación a la Tierra Madre. Como explica José Esterman (refiriéndose al mundo andino), las múltiples relaciones hacen posible la vida, la ética, el conocimiento¹⁶. Sin relaciones no existiría ni la persona, ni el saber, ni el hacer.

14 Al respecto, F. MIREN, *El discurso de la indianidad*, DEI, San José 1991, 142-146.

15 Aportes indígenas, en *Diálogo sobre metodología teológica latinoamericana*, CENAMI, México 1993, pág. 12.

16 Ver J. ESTERMANN, *Filosofía sistemática*, Salesiana, Lima 1996, la excelente sección «relacionalidad de todo ser», 223-224.

La veta inter-religiosa constituye un caudal de fecundas relaciones. Aquí el hecho mayor es el contacto y aporte mutuo entre cada tradición autóctona y el mensaje cristiano. Esto ocurre no en encuentros formales, sino en la espiritualidad cotidiana, la ética, lo ritual, y también en las imágenes y conceptos de Dios. La calidad de estos contactos es descrita en la Teología Maya como “síntesis vital hecha por nuestros pueblos” y «procesos largos de inculturación»¹⁷. Todo esto impugna un parámetro moderno que es monocultural y además mono-religioso (la religión indígena es relegada al pasado ya superado por «la civilización!»). Más bien, lo que tenemos aquí son vínculos entre religiones que aprecian varios modos de invocar y entender a Dios.

El ser, creer y pensar indígena esta en contacto con todo y no es excluyente; desde la semilla pequeña se hace universal; desde sus identidades interactúa tanto con los valores humanos como con absolutos cuestionables de la modernidad; desde la fiesta, centro del presente indígena, se refiere al pasado y al futuro; entra en relación con el Misterio que envuelve y transforma cada entidad viviente. Es pues un modo holístico de acoger lo que en teología cristiana forma parte de la salvación.

4.- Simbiosis en los pueblos afro-americanos

De las vivencias y sabidurías originarias demos un paso hacia >otros sistemas simbólicos, los de la negritud. Estos pueden ser examinados en una perspectiva simbiótica. Elementos diferentes se conjugan para dar cauce a mayor vida.

A lo largo del continente, la afro-americanidad es escandalosamente maltratada e invisibilizada. A veces hay indiferencia; pero predominan los prejuicios. Todo lo calificado como «negro» tiene connotaciones negativas (implícitas o explícitas). De hecho América Latina es indígena, mestiza, negra, asiática, blanca, morena. Al no asumirnos como tales, fomentamos la mentira y la alienación. La reflexión cristiana sería ciega si no toma en cuenta el racismo en nuestra realidad latinoamericana y en lo religioso¹⁸. El racismo afecta las categorías de la fe, los organismos eclesiales, y los modos de vivir el Evangelio. Bien sabemos que ésta discriminación se entrecruza con otros factores: género, grupos de edad, estructuras sociales, económicas, políticas, afectivas, etc. Por eso junto a la discriminación racial-cultural hay que encarar otras maldades que le acompañan.

17 Prólogo, Tercer Encuentro de Teología India Mayense, Guatemala 1996, pág. 9.

18 En ámbitos cristianos y teológicos ha comenzado a verse el racismo: «Racismo y Religión» en VV.AA., *Cultura negra y teología*, DEI, Costa Rica 1986, 56-67; Loretta WILLIAMS, «Racism and sexism», *Journal of Black Theology*, 7/2, 1993, 73-99, South Africa.

En el contexto afro-americano, «ser candomblezeiro e ser católico ao mesmo tempo não constitui problema»; «a grande maioria dos frequentadores dos terreiros se diz católica»; «os fiéis não sentem contradição alguma entre os orixás e os santos»; «o adepto do candomblé, ao participar dos ritos católicos, transforma-os e reinterpreta-os a partir de sua própria religião»¹⁹. Antonio da Silva aprecia el proceso inculturador hecho por la población de raíz bantú (una simbiosis) y de raíz nagó (un sincretismo); C. Boff anota el «entrelaçamento complexo e contraditório de religião e cultura católica e afro-brasileira»; por otra parte, A. Soares plantea que «o sincretismo é a historia da revelação em ato»²⁰. Estos procesos pueden ser calificados como una «simbiosis» (concepto también usado por A.A. da Silva y por C. Boff), ya que simbólicas diferentes son entremezcladas a favor de la vida.

La comunidad negra manifiesta su creatividad teológica²¹. Por ejemplo lo dicho por Silvia Regina de Lima Silva: «nuestra liberación es también la liberación de tantas imágenes de Dios que justificaron, y siguen justificando, las estructuras sexistas y racistas de la sociedad. Con estos ojos, con todo nuestro cuerpo, con nuestras historias, nos acercamos para disfrutar de la permanente novedad que es Dios/a». En la II Consulta han dicho: «descobrimos um Deus diferente...; a teologia tem de criar possibilidades de ter força para lutar...; uma linguagem simbólica que é uma forma de dizer e não dizer o que sentimos e pensamos...»; y se da prioridad a la teología sobre la salud, educación, mitos, historia, presencia en las iglesias y la sociedad civil.

Ahora bien, en el imaginario afro-americano, «Axé» expresa lo fundamental. Me impresiona la omnipresente fuerza negra. «Axé é força vital, energia, princípio da vida, força sagrada dos orixás... é poder, é carisma, é a raiz que vem dos antepassados...; axé se ganha e se perde; axé é uma dádiva dos deuses...; é sobretudo a casa de candomblé, o templo, a roça, a tradição toda»²². Al explicar los «elementos fundantes» de la teología afro-americana, un teólogo comienza con Dios madre y padre que ha creado la familia humana y la naturaleza, y con Axé como «energía vital divina» en las personas,

19 Citas de Antonio A. da SILVA, «Evangelização e Inculturação a partir da realidade afro-brasileira» en VV.AA., *Inculturação, desafios de hoje*, SOTER, São Paulo 1994, 107; Clodovis BOFF, «O sincretismo Maria-lemanjá», en VV.AA., *Teologia da inculturação e inculturação da teologia*, Vozes, Petrópolis 1995, 98; Roger BASTIDE (retomada por A. Soares, en su *Interfaces da revelação*, Paulinas, São Paulo 2003, 50); Franziska REHBEIN, *Candomblé e salvação*, Loyola, São Paulo 1985, 88.

20 II Consulta, *Teologia Afro-Americana*, obra citada, 153; A.A. da SILVA, artículo citado, 105-106; C. BOFF, artículo citado, 92; A. SOARES, *Interfaces da revelação*, 248.

21 Citas de Silvia R. de LIMA SILVA, «Evangelio, mujer y cultura», en Elsa TÁMEZ (ed.), *La sociedad que las mujeres soñamos*, DEI, San José 2001, 60; y de la II Consulta, págs. 128, 129, 130, 132.

22 Reginaldo PRANDI, *Os candomblés de São Paulo*, HUCITEC-EDUSP, São Paulo 1991, 103-104.

plantas, animales, piedras; y añade: la mujer es «fuente primordial de axé»²³. Al escuchar estas reflexiones, me impresiona su carácter particular y a la vez universal. Existe una forma propia de ser, pensar, festejar, que expresa y es portadora del Axé universal.

En este sentido, la teología con Axé corresponde a la comunidad negra y es relevante para la humanidad. A las personas no-afros nos cabe pues participar en esta realidad. La visión de Cristo y su Espíritu, que brotan de la espiritualidad de Axé, sin duda contribuye a la comunidad negra, y a la vez ilumina el caminar de comunidades cristianas en el mundo. Constituimos un cristianismo polifacético, inter-cultural, inter-religioso. El amor de Dios nos envuelve a todos y todas, asumiendo nuestras diferencias y nuestras líneas comunes.

En cuanto a la reflexión desde la negritud, es hecha en base a sus identidades y místicas como pueblos, como «noseidad». Se contraponen a la «otredad» que coloniza, esclaviza, margina. En el contexto del pueblo negro es «um novo sujeito histórico e novo sujeito teológico» y añade Geraldo Rocha: «é necesario deixar-nos embriagar pela história do negro, pela mística do pobre, pela mística da luta e pela mística do reino»²⁴. Se trata pues del sujeto colectivo, que se embriaga con la mística de la lucha por la vida y por el Reino de Dios. Esto implica ruptura con el yo-ismo moderno y sus mecanismos de subordinación al otro-superior. La identidad del pueblo negro es reconstruida gracias a sus raíces sólidas. Se suma a otras identidades tradicionales y emergentes en nuestro continente.

Con respecto al conocimiento de Dios, las comunidades negras alaban, conocen, y ponen en practica la presencia divina en la historia humana. Entre éstas y otras teologías no caben meros intercambios de ideas. Más bien, se encuentran diversas espiritualidades y se conjugan varias facetas de la praxis liberadora. Se trata de una interacción orientada a la fuente de la Vida. No interesan nociones sobre cosas sagradas; lo que nos apasionan son los acercamientos a la Presencia Divina.

La prioridad es dada, en América Latina, a modos de entender la fe por parte de la humanidad pobre y predilecta de Dios. En el caso de las Congadas en Minas Gerais; un líder dice: «somos católicos... pero a la iglesia no le gustan los

23 Antonio Aparecido da SILVA, «Reflexión teológica a partir de las comunidades negras de Brasil», *Vida y Pensamiento* (UBL de Costa Rica), 17/2, 1997, 60-61.

24 Geraldo ROCHA, «Os APNs e a Reflexão Teológica», VV.AA., *Agentes de Pastoral Negra, 10 anos, 1983-1993*, Atabaque, São Paulo 1993, 68-69. La 1ª Consulta (1984) había planteado el ennegrecimiento del teólogo (a), ya que la elaboración es hecha por «los miembros de la comunidad negra» (VV.AA., *Cultura Negra y Teología*, DEI, San José 1986, 27). Esta «identidad teológica» tiene rasgos culturales: alegría, familia, antepasados, comunidad, etc.; ver Agustín HERRERA, *Teología Afroamericana*, Centro Cultural Afroecuatoriano, Quito 1994, 41-45. Además es una identidad reconstruida, en contra de la violencia social-racial, a través de la familia y de la comunidad del terreiro; como lo explica Heitor FRISOTTI, *Religiones Afroamericanas*, Ediciones Afro América, Quito 1994, 21-23.

congaderos. Hace siglos que vivimos luchando para que se nos reconozca y respete... nuestra fe en Zâmbi. Dios es uno solo. Los indios lo llaman Tupá, los judíos Jehová, y el pueblo negro Olorum. Cada uno debe continuar alabando el Dios de sus antepasados»²⁵. Existen pues maneras en que pueblos pobres se acercan a Dios. Nos cabe pues disfrutar diversos acercamientos hacia el Misterio.

Se trata de vivencias que pueden ser conceptualizadas de varias maneras. Algunos prefieren el concepto de sincretismo; pero esto arrastra muchos prejuicios. Afonso Soares revisa esquemas de la razón occidental; su notable principio de no-contradicción suele conducir a falsas disyuntivas y exclusiones del «otro». Conviene emplear otros conceptos, como los de Lévy-Bruhl sobre analogía y sobre participación. O bien, ver la articulación de elementos opuestos. Según S. Ferretti: «o sincretismo também se enquadra nas características desta capacidade brasileira de relacionar coisas que parecem opostas»²⁶. En vez de emplear el principio de no-contradicción, es más relevante el principio de participación, y lo que aquí estoy recalcando: la simbiosis.

Nos han acostumbrado (a unos más que a otros) a un cristianismo mono-cultural y mono-religioso. Por eso nos desafía convivir y crecer con personas de otras mentalidades y formas de creer. Ser macro ecuménicos es una difícil y bella aventura espiritual. A personas no-afros nos corresponde abrir el corazón a la fe de la comunidad afro, y cuando es posible, con ella celebrar la Vida que a nadie excluye.

Al respecto retomo el aporte de Andrés Torres Queiruga sobre la in-religiónación: «en el contacto entre las religiones, el movimiento espontáneo respecto de los elementos que le llegan desde otra ha de ser el de incorporarlos en el propio organismo, que de este modo no desaparece, sino que, por el contrario, crece. Crece desde la apertura al otro, pero hacia el misterio común»²⁷. En el contacto con la fe afro-americana y sus mediaciones, uno puede interiorizar tales mediaciones, sin negarse a uno mismo.

Por ejemplo, se propone al interior de la comunidad negra resaltar los conceptos de ancestralidad y orixalidad: «para os afro-americanos de origem banto, a concepção de ancestralidade foi importante para entender desde o genio próprio de sua cultura e religiosidade a figura de Jesus Cristo, e para os nagôs afro-americanos a compreensão da cristologia se relaciona com

25 Eugenia DIAS GONÇALVES, «Identidad de Dios en la reflexión de las Congadas de la región metalúrgica de Minas Gerais», VV.AA., *Cultura Negra y Teología*, DEI, San José 1986, 128 (es el testimonio de José Angelo, «capitán» de Congada que se manifiesta a través de la hermandad de Nuestra Señora del Rosario).

26 S. FERRETTI citado por Afonso SOARES, *Interfaces da Revelação*, 58. (S. FERRETTI, *Repensando o sincretismo*, EDUSP, São Paulo 1995). Soares examina los aportes de las ciencias humanas (págs. 46-59), y luego las dificultades en el pensar teológico sobre el sincretismo (págs. 59-69), y luego ofrece sus propias pistas (109-121, 199-237).

27 Andrés TORRES QUEIRUGA, *Del terror de Isaac al Abbá de Jesús*, hacia una nueva imagen de Dios, Verbo Divino, Estella 2003, 307.

Oxalá»²⁸. Esta hermenéutica de la salvación me parece aleccionadora para otras labores teológicas en el continente; podemos repensar la relación con los antepasados y como desde cada cultura aceptamos a Cristo.

Con respecto a la revelación, Afonso Soares no pasa por alto las dimensiones humanas en la fe religiosa, sugiere que el Espíritu actúa en las tradiciones culturales, que «o povo-de santo inreligiosa o que pode ou quer acolher da tradição cristã»; y una de sus conclusiones es que «o sincretismo é a história da revelação em ato»²⁹. Evidentemente es una amplia comprensión de la revelación..

Retomo el debate sobre el sincretismo, que toca nervios muy sensibles de la polifacética fe del pueblo. El asunto más controversial es el sincretismo desde arriba; existe una especie de religiosidad del mercado totalitario, que penetra en el cristianismo. Es un tipo de sincretismo perverso en que poderes de muerte son entremezclados con elementos cristianos. Por otra parte, me impactan los aportes de Soares sobre la fe sincrética; de Ferretti sobre los significados del sincretismo: convergencia, paralelismo, mezcla, separación; y lo dicho por R. Segato sobre «alternância de códigos»³⁰. En mis acercamientos tanto al cristianismo indígena como al afro-americano (siendo tan diferentes) aparece un talante similar que puede llamarse una fe a favor de la vida, una fe simbiótica.

Al ir terminando, recalco varios hitos. Primer hito: festejar y pensar. Sonia Querino lo ha planteado así: «o sagrado não é algo exterior ao corpo... acredita-se num Deus que dança... dançar é um ato divino e também uma forma de resistência aos sofrimentos... o som do tambor e, as vozes humanas convidam o corpo a movimentar-se e coloca a comunidade e os indivíduos em relacionamento»³¹. Antonio Aparecido da Silva anota: «nas comunidades negras na diáspora, tudo assume linguagem corporal, visual e celebrativa»; y esto requiere un discernimiento entre lo que reproduce lo oficial y lo que brota de la creatividad del pueblo³². Esto es dicho sin ingenuidad, ya que la fiesta es ambivalente y tiene que ser abordada con ojo crítico; en ella hay factores deshumanizantes, y ciertamente también hay dinamismos liberadores.

28 Antonio A. da SILVA, «Jesus Cristo, luz e libertador do povo afro-americano», en VV.AA., *Existe um pensar teológico negro?*, 69. Más adelante reflexiona sobre la obra salvadora de Jesús (su martirio va dirigido al Reino de Dios), y lo hace en relación con los mártires negros y su lucha libertaria (pág. 74).

29 Afonso SOARES, *Interfaces da Revelação*, 246, 248.

30 Reseñados por A. SOARES, *obra citada*, 56, 58. Ver también la compilación de ensayos hecha por Pierre SANCHIS, *Fiéis e Cidadãos, percursos de sincretismo no Brasil*, UERJ, Rio de Janeiro 2001.

31 Sonia QUERINO, «Nossos passos vêm de longe: ensaio de teologia afro-feminista», ponencia en la III Consulta Ecuémica de Teologia Afroamericana e Caribenha, São Paulo 2003 (pág. 5-6).

32 Antonio Aparecido da SILVA, «A teologia afroamericana no contexto brasileiro nos últimos dez anos», ponencia en la III Consulta Ecuémica, São Paulo 2003 (pág. 4).

Segundo hito: el racismo, y nuestra afro-humanidad. Corresponde identificarse como tal a la propia población afro-descendiente. Además, cada persona en este continente puede asumir lo afro-americano como parte de nuestra historia y pluriforme identidad latinoamericana y caribeña. A esto se añade el gran problema de la descalificación de la religión afro como si ésta fuera del demonio. (Algo similar ha sido dicho de las espiritualidades indígenas). Tal descalificación forma parte del racismo. Ante esta agresión, cabe «sair da visão diabolisante do vodou haitiano», y positivamente destacar, como lo hace Jean-Robert Michel, «o papel do vodou na luta e resistencia da negritude haitiana»³³. Uno se da cuenta que tal demonización de la cultura-religión afro es un gran ingrediente del racismo.

Tercer hito: gozar el Misterio con «jeito negro». El modo de ser afro-americano -llamado «jeito negro»- va de la mano con esfuerzos de liberación por parte de estas comunidades. Sonia Querino explica la celebración corporal e inter-religiosa de lo Sagrado. «A manifestação do Sagrado se dá por intermédio do corpo e constitui uma digna e legítima maneira de celebrar... (y añade) o som dos Atabaques ressoa em nós, movimenta nossos corpos na comunhão como o transcendente. Creemos num Deus que dança»³⁴. Ella explica que el candomblé contribuye ciertamente a la identidad afro-brasilera y también a otras maneras de ser. Gracias a la mística negra -comunicada y compartida con quienes no somos negros- puede ahondarse nuestra aproximación al Misterio de Dios.

Cuarto hito: sincretismos y pertenencias. Durante la III Consulta³⁵, Maria Cristina Ventura piensa que el pluralismo religioso muestra la «capacidad de negros y negras de tolerar y recrear el cristianismo». Da Silva ha subrayado la energía de las «recriações afro-religiosas na diáspora»; y explica el sincretismo como «prática inculturada em muitos dos seus aspetos, particularmente no que diz respeito ao cristianismo afro-popular».

Lo prioritario, a mi modo de ver, es continuar desarrollando la actitud inter-cultural e inter-religiosa con su trasfondo teológico. No sólo existen fenómenos como el sincretismo, como la desigualdad entre un imaginario y otro, o como la simbiosis entre realidades diferentes. Lo más importante es la revelación universal del amor de Dios. También a lo largo de estas páginas sobresale la Vida sentida y entendida, generada y recibida, por parte de pueblos originarios y por los afro-descendientes. Lo medular no es pues la «religión», sino como ella expresa simbólicamente tal energía de Vivir en reciprocidad, y la capacidad de que elementos diferentes sean conjugados porque son vetas de genuina felicidad.

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33 Jean-Robert MICHEL, «Teología Negra Haitiana», en la IIIª Consulta, 2003, obra citada, 167ss.

34 QUERINO, obra citada.

35 Cito a M.C. VENTURA, A.A. da SILVA, obra citada.

Pluralismo y misión

Por una hermenéutica de la alteridad

El tema «Pluralismo y misión» invita a reflexionar sobre la realidad religiosa plural de América Latina, sobre su identidad y alteridad. La conciencia de dicho pluralismo, caracterizado por credos cristianos, religiones no cristianas y formas diferentes de ateísmos teóricos o prácticos, es un fenómeno poscolonial y, al mismo tiempo, postsecular. Durante la colonización, se podía hablar de un pluralismo clandestino, de hecho, sin ser de derecho. Incluso en las primeras décadas del siglo XX, las religiones afroamericanas fueron perseguidas y sus adeptos, criminalizados.

En la segunda mitad del siglo XX se esperaba que el proceso de secularización acabase con el fenómeno religioso como tal... pero hoy vivimos una efervescencia religiosa, sin pertenencias rígidas a instituciones eclesiales. Una época postsecular intenta responder a la comprensión secularista de la modernidad y anula adaptaciones encerradas en el culto al progreso y a la razón, al vacío y a lo relativo.

El pluralismo religioso va acompañado por prácticas y reflexiones sobre lo plural. Ese pluralismo de la práctica y reflexión misionera y misionológica tiene muchos nombres: diálogo interreligioso y macroecuménico, ecumenismo y misión *ad gentes*, teología de las religiones y teología de la misión. El mismo cristianismo y/o el catolicismo se volvieron fenómenos plurales. En ellos conviven, bajo el techo de la misma fe, prácticas premodernas y coloniales con prácticas y teologías que asumieron los presupuestos político-filosóficos de la modernidad o de la posmodernidad. Con teologías de la liberación coexisten, muchas veces en la misma Iglesia, teologías de la prosperidad, unas apelando al sujeto adulto del pobre, y otras tutelando a los mismos pobres con la providencia divina.

A partir de las diferentes respuestas eclesiales y reflexiones teológicas ante el pluralismo religioso, el pluralismo como tal se volvió un fenómeno interno y externo al propio campo de la práctica misionera y de la reflexión

misionológica. El misterio de Cristo, «como misterio de recapitulación y reconciliación universales (cf. Ef 2.11-22), rebasa las posibilidades de expresión de cada época histórica y, por tanto, se aparta de cualquier sistematización concluyente (cf. Ef 3.8-10)»¹.

La articulación entre «Pluralismo y misión» apunta hacia la necesidad de una hermenéutica evangélica de la alteridad, nunca concluyente, celosa por la simetría constitutiva entre mensaje y método, y atenta a los sujetos de la fe. La construcción de esa hermenéutica es la tarea más importante de la misionología actual. Esa lectura y relectura del misterio de la salvación es hecha originalmente por los sujetos de la fe a los cuales Jesús de Nazaret apunta al escoger sus discípulos y en sus discursos axiales en la sinagoga de Nazaret (Lc 4.14ss), en el Sermón del Monte (Lc 6.20ss) y sobre el «juicio final» (Mt 25.31ss). Se desdobra en prácticas misioneras que, sin negar su respectiva identidad eclesial, derrumban «el muro de separación» (Ef 2.14), no sólo entre samaritanos y judíos, judíos y gentiles, católicos y protestantes, cristianos y no cristianos, sino, sobre todo, entre los leprosos y puros de hoy, entre ricos y pobres, privilegiados y excluidos.

Esa hermenéutica evangélica de la alteridad debe dar cuenta de la «naturaleza misionera» (AG 2) de la Iglesia y del valor salvífico de la alteridad religiosa. Ella será profundamente respetuosa de los misterios y silencios de los otros, pentecostalmente plural y proféticamente certera, en cuanto hace resonar la palabra del profeta con que Jesús anuncia su misión: «El Espíritu del Señor está sobre mí, porque me ungió para anunciar la Buena Nueva a los pobres» (Lc 4.18).

I. En la encrucijada de las tradiciones múltiples

De 15 en 15 minutos pasa frente a mi ventana un ómnibus cuyo letrero («Jardim Itápolis») recuerda las muchas aguas que esa ciudad ofrece a sus habitantes. «Jardim» está en portugués y se refiere al «Jardín del Edén», tan presente en el imaginario de los conquistadores. Todo, en ese país, Brasil, parecía edénico: los indios desnudos, la cantidad de peces, las aguas puras y los árboles frondosos, todo intocado, dádiva divina, como en los primeros días de la Creación, sin necesidad de un «trabajo continuo y monótono»².

1 *L'unité de la foi et le pluralisme théologique. Propositions de la Commission internationale de théologie*. En: «La Documentation Catholique, 1632 (20.5.1973) 459-460; aquí pág. 459, Proposición 1 [original en francés]. Versión italiana en: «La Civiltà Cattolica» (5.5.1973) y versión alemana en: Internationale Theologenkommission, *Die Einheit des Glaubens und der theologische Pluralismus*, Einsiedeln, Johannes Verlag, 1973, pp. 17-95 (Proposiciones comentadas por J. Ratzinger, P. Nemeshegyi y Ph. Delhaye).

2 Sergio BUARQUE DE HOLANDA, *Visão do paraíso: os motivos edênicos no descobrimento e colonização do Brasil*, 6ª ed., São Paulo, Brasiliense, 1994, p. X.

«Itá», en guaraní significa «piedra». Los guaraníes eran los habitantes de este espacio geográfico llamado «Planalto de Piratininga». Más tarde, debido a la primera misa, celebrada por Nóbrega el día de la conversión del «apóstol de los gentiles», Piratininga se convirtió en São Paulo.

Polis es una palabra griega. Representa el origen de la civilización occidental en la Academia griega. Recuerda a Sócrates, Platón, Aristóteles. En Atenas se encuentra la raíz del pensamiento metafísico, que comprende la unidad como totalidad (*unum est totum*). Pero la *polis* también es el lugar de la lógica aristotélica, la lógica del tercero excluido. Los misioneros del siglo XVI que se alimentaron de esa raíz llegaron a América sin preparación para reconocer la alteridad, o mejor, preparados para destruirla.

Allá va mi ómnibus «Jardim Itápolis», «Jardín Ciudad de Piedra». Los nombres de las calles de São Paulo, las estaciones del metro, las estatuas y, sobre todo, las personas: todo respira pluralismo y misión, en los niveles real y simbólico. En las avenidas paulistas, misioneros y cazadores de indios, Anchieta y Anhangüera³, disputan la atención de los transeúntes.

El pueblo heredó de los indios la alquimia de su sobrevivencia, al mismo tiempo catequizados y colonizados; homenaja sus ángeles de la guarda y respeta sus demonios; sabe cómo puede ser útil encender una vela a Dios y otra al diablo. Para el pueblo, en la locura de esta ciudad, el pluralismo de las religiones no es problema. Apunta hacia el hecho de las múltiples resistencias, curas y milagros. Una religión no da cuenta de la multiplicidad de los males, nos dice el narrador Riobaldo de *El gran Sertón: veredas*:

Rezar es lo que sana de la locura [...] Yo aquí no pierdo ocasion de religión. Me sirvo de todas. Bebo el agua de todos los ríos... Una sola, para mí, es poca, tal vez no me llegue. Rezo cristiano, católico, mezclo es cierto, y acepto las oraciones de mi compadre Quelemém, su doctrina es de Cardec. Pero cuando puedo, voy a Mindubim, donde está el creyente Matías, metodista: uno se acusa de pecado, lee en voz alta la Biblia y ora, cantando himnos hermosos. Todo me aquieta, me suspende. Cualquier sombrita me refresca⁴.

Ante la mística de Riobaldo, la *polis* parece petrificada, Itápolis, sin sombra. Las especulaciones metafísicas asumidas por el cristianismo redujeron la realidad a un origen y/o una sustancia. Si el Uno es el Todo, lo múltiple arrastra en sí deficiencias del «ser». Lo múltiple representa la depravación del Uno. La doctrina del origen único descalificó la diversidad de los caminos como desviación, como degeneración. El monogenismo bíblico indujo a leer la diferencias humanas en clave de *degeneración*, causadas por el pecado original, y de *rebeldía* contra la ley de Dios, inscrita en la naturaleza y en el orden

3 Anhangüera significa «Diablo Viejo», nombre dado por los indios al «bandeirante» Bartolomeu Bueno da Silva.

4 João GUIMARÃES ROSA, *Grande sertão: veredas*, 13^a ed., Rio de Janeiro, José Olympio, 1979, p. 15.

cosmológico inmutable; en clave de *pérdida* del estado de gracia, y de *castigo*, de *desvíos* del camino único trazado por Dios en la Iglesia Católica. La historia de salvación, las alianzas de Dios con su pueblo y el cristianismo como tal, sólo tienen el sentido de revertir la dispersión, la fragmentación y confusión. La cristiandad fue el último intento global de recuperar la gracia perdida por la reconstrucción del mundo en su singularidad.

Prisioneros de esa lectura, los misioneros consideraban el pasado de los pueblos autóctonos, no sólo irrelevante para la historia de su salvación, sino que lo consideraban un estorbo para la transmisión de la «verdadera religión». Para los catequistas de la conquista y su teología aún inspirada por el neoplatonismo y el monogenismo, lo plural de las voces y los modos de ser encontrados en las Américas representaba un apartamiento de la verdad única y padronizada en las experiencias históricas y expresiones culturales de la Europa cristianizada.

Hoy podemos decir que la Iglesia pagó un alto precio por las primeras inculturaciones en Europa. Pagó el precio de la helenización, la orientación filosófica, la romanización, y la orientación jurídica, administrativa y litúrgica. Ciertamente, «la verdadera fe cristiana está ligada a su caminar histórico»⁵, pero en éste se infiltran paradigmas particulares e históricamente limitados, que no pueden ni deben ser universalizados como «verdades del camino».

La ascunción del cristianismo por el imperio romano posconstantiniano no fue gratuita. El propio cristianismo asumió las estructuras imperiales que permean las definiciones dogmáticas, las determinaciones del derecho canónico, las prescripciones e indumentarias litúrgicas. Sería temerario construir, a partir de tales adquisiciones históricas, una identidad eclesial irreversible. No se trata de «sistematizaciones concluyentes». En la hermenéutica de los misterios de la fe y en su inculturación en dialectos contextuales, ninguna realización histórica tiene la última palabra. También en las inculturaciones más logradas llevamos los misterios de Dios «en vasos de barro» (2 Co 4,7).

II. El pluralismo entre «todo se vale» y el monismo hegemónico

Entre los especialistas de la evolución humana prevalece hoy la visión monogenista, no a partir de una pareja primordial perfecta, sino a partir de *una* rama de la línea evolutiva de vida. Esa rama común permite pensar el origen biológico del género humano (su unidad e igualdad) y su desdoblamiento en una gran variedad de culturas. La diversidad de la vida humana, por lo tanto, no es resultado de una unidad paradisiaca perdida, sino de una diversificación evolutiva que posibilitó, en un largo proceso de hominización, el surgimiento de la especie humana.

5 Cf. *L'unité de la foi et le pluralisme théologique*, l.c., Proposición IV.

El evolucionismo no afecta necesariamente la visión cristiana de que Dios creó los seres humanos según su imagen y semejanza. La «creación del ser humano por Dios a su semejanza» puede ser comprendida y remetaforizada al interior de un largo proceso evolutivo. En ese proceso de hominización surgieron las culturas y, con ellas, las religiones. Esas religiones son los caminos ordinarios de salvación de sus respectivos pueblos. Las culturas y religiones tienen una normatividad interna. Ninguna de esas culturas y religiones, sin embargo, es, por principio, normativa para otras culturas y religiones. Lo normativo es lo divino que se encuentra, según la fe de cada una, en ellas. Pero lo divino es contado y vivido humanamente, es decir, es histórica y culturalmente mediado. A través de dichas mediaciones en lenguajes humanos, lo divino normativo se vuelve siempre paradigmático, múltiple, histórico y cultural. Jesús mismo explicó el Reino de Dios, que para él era único y absoluto, a través de múltiples parábolas. Esa distinción entre lo normativo y lo paradigmático es muy importante para la misión.

En el pluralismo religioso y cultural se trata hoy, desde el nacimiento de la modernidad occidental, no de una ola, sino del reconocimiento de una raíz. Y esa raíz en lo plural de las culturas y religiones es reconocida públicamente como pluralismo *de hecho y de derecho*. El moderno Estado constitucional, democrático, secular y liberal existe para dar cuenta de la esfera pública plural, por definición pluricultural. Él sabe que debe cuidar bien las raíces culturales de cada uno de los grupos sociales que lo componen, porque de esas raíces se alimenta la conciencia del deber, de la solidaridad y de las normas de sus ciudadanos. El Estado constitucional exige de sus ciudadanos un consenso político metacultural (*overlapping consensus*) y relega a los diferentes credos e religiones a la esfera privada.

No sólo el Estado moderno, también las iglesias y religiones, en su convivencia recíproca al interior de él, reconocen su libertad y alteridad religiosas recíprocas. El reconocimiento explícito de la libertad religiosa por el Concilio Vaticano II, a través de la «Declaración *Dignitatis humanae* sobre la Libertad Religiosa» es, como don de Dios, uno de los presupuestos de la misión. En la mayoría de las iglesias y en una mayoría de los fieles, existe un consenso de que la alteridad religiosa, por ser un don de Dios, es un derecho humano, es irreductible.

En la posmodernidad, el pluralismo se caracteriza por la indiferencia contextual y por el relativismo ideológico. El pluralismo ha de ser defendido en dos frentes: en el de la monocultura hegemónica y en el del pluriculturalismo indiferente. Mientras las luchas por el modelo único, partido único, monocultura, religión única y pensamiento único son visiblemente violentas, las luchas al interior del pluralismo, muchas veces, son luchas escondidas detrás de un pluralismo de fachada. Al interior de las llamadas democracias liberales, que se revisten con una toga de pluralismo, hay obviamente una lucha de clases, una lucha por privilegios que privan de ciudadanía a la mayoría de los ciudadanos, que se alimenta de la igualdad de derechos y deberes, y del reconocimiento de la alteridad. El «término medio» entre pluralismo posmoderno y guerra

hegemónica no es el condominio cerrado, sino la lucha, en la plaza pública, por un mundo de todos. En este mundo, el diálogo dejaría de ser ideológico, el pluralismo, arbitrario, y la unidad sería la articulación de lo múltiple y diferente en una causa común.

III. Hitos para el diálogo

La alteridad religiosa remite al diálogo interreligioso dentro del diálogo intercultural. En América Latina, ambas formas de diálogo están hipotecadas por estructuras históricas del patriarcado, por el capitalismo neoliberal y por la indiferencia del pluralismo posmoderno. La sociedad de clases interfiere violentamente en el diálogo interreligioso e intrarreligioso. Entre siervo y señor, privilegiados y explotados, países hegemónicos y periféricos, no se dan las condiciones mínimas para el diálogo, la libertad y la igualdad.

El diálogo entre culturas, religiones e individuos no suscita expectativas falsas. No promete la superación de la ambivalencia de la condición humana o de la alienación social, ni alimenta la visión de una epistemología total y de una hermenéutica sin misterio. Por eso tiene, como instrumento de comprensión, el diálogo, trabajo y respeto, y la convivencia pacífica al interior de cualquier pluralismo. El diálogo tiene «siempre un carácter de testimonio, dentro del máximo respeto a la persona y a la identidad del interlocutor» (Puebla 1114) y exige, más allá de las convicciones propias y de la disposición para un aprendizaje recíproco, ciertas reglas. Forma parte de las condiciones y de la pauta del diálogo interreligioso:

a) *aceptar medios pacíficos de interlocución y convivencia, lo que no es tan obvio para quien acompaña la historia de las religiones;*

b) *aceptar la posibilidad subjetiva de lógicas contextuales y verdades históricamente situadas que permiten a las personas elegir y defender sus argumentos religiosos sobre la base de opciones no científicas;*

c) *reconocerse como iguales, independientemente del valor que se confiera a las tradiciones recíprocas en cuestión;⁶*

d) *aceptar los cuestionamientos recíprocos que emergen, no en la diferencia religiosa como tal, sino de la falta de coherencia entre las pretensiones defendidas y la realidad vivida;⁷*

6 Cf. Jürgen HABERMAS, *Vom Kampf der Glaubensmächte. Karl Jaspers zum Konflikt der Kulturen*, en: Idem, *Vom sinnlichen Eindruck*, Frankfurt a.M., Suhrkamp, 1997, p. 41-58, aquí: 57.

7 Esa ambivalencia forma parte de cada grupo social. Cuando las religiones no solucionan las ambivalencias de sus adeptos a través de ritos de perdón o de consagración de prácticas de tolerancia, comienzan a proyectar sus inautenticidades a grupos externos que sirven como chivo expiatorio. En la parábola del trigo y la cizaña, Jesús advierte sobre la superación de la ambivalencia en el tiempo escatológico de la cosecha (cf. Mt 13,24ss).

e) *buscar acciones afirmativas comunes para el bien de la humanidad;*

f) *aceptar los silencios y misterios de las religiones que apuntan hacia el tiempo escatológico como fin de las religiones e iglesias, porque Dios será todo en todos.*

Además de estas reglas más formales para el diálogo interreligioso que permiten la colaboración en la diferencia, es importante sumar los argumentos que unen a las religiones y que sirven para una fundamentación normativa de las religiones en la «unidad del Espíritu Santo».

IV. ¿Qué hacer y por dónde comenzar?

Los escenarios religiosos latinoamericanos están constituidos por religiones con horizontes universales y, por lo tanto, con imperativos misioneros, y por religiones locales, sin dichos imperativos, que busca la incorporación o «conversión» de la alteridad. Además de eso existen numerosas mezclas entre cristianismos, religiones afroamericanas, indígenas y formas de espiritismo.

El reconocimiento eclesial del pluralismo religioso se encuentra aún en tensión con determinadas interpretaciones de su imperativo misionero. Se necesita una hermenéutica y traducción de la misionariedad eclesial que no se aparte de la universalidad del Evangelio ni del reconocimiento de la alteridad. Ni la afirmación de que todas las religiones son iguales, ni la tesis de superioridad de los cristianismos, por principio, ayudan a la misión y al diálogo interreligioso en su convivencia con los otros. ¿Cómo desconectar la universalidad del horizonte misionero de una perspectiva que busca la conversión del otro, su integración al gran relato cristiano? ¿Cómo, por otro lado, no ofrecer, en el altar de la alteridad y el relativismo, las convicciones propias, el testimonio de la fe y la relevancia universal de algunas experiencias y horizontes de dicha fe?

La «Declaración *Nostra Aetate* sobre las relaciones de la Iglesia con las religiones no cristianas» diseña, en su preámbulo, un primer núcleo para una teología de las religiones, apuntando hacia aquello que une a las religiones: origen y fin, respuestas a los enigmas de la condición humana, sentido de la vida, distinción entre bien y mal, el porqué de la muerte y, finalmente, salvación y vida eterna, y caminos para obtener una felicidad verdadera (*Nostra Aetate*, 1). Ese fondo común que los cristianos comparten con los no cristianos, permite la conexión evangélica con la mayoría de las religiones. Es el punto de partida de cualquier diálogo salvífico y cualquier labor misionera. Es el punto de partida del apóstol Pablo, quien fue al encuentro de los atenienses en el Areópago y los llamó «los hombres más religiosos» (Hch 17,22), y de Francisco Javier, en la India y Japón.

El pluralismo religioso y el diálogo como instrumento transdisciplinar de comunicación tiene un horizonte universal, invitatorio y responsable ante

los no participantes del respectivo diálogo, en el cual la salvación y liberación no coinciden, pero tampoco pueden ser separadas (cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 31). La misión es otro nombre para ese ir al encuentro convidativo, a partir de una responsabilidad universal hacia los pobres. En esa perspectiva, Puebla profundizó el concepto de asunción al servicio de la liberación integral de la humanidad. El horizonte universal es un horizonte de inclusión, de sensibilización, comunión y participación⁸. El horizonte universal representa la «causa mayor» que une a la humanidad, la lucha por la justicia y la paz, por igualdad y reconocimiento. La causa mayor presupone la asunción y articulación de diferentes «causas particulares y específicas»: la causa de los pueblos indígenas, por ejemplo, el movimiento de los sin tierra, la población que vive en la calle, los migrantes y tantos otros «excluidos».

En esas luchas por la articulación de la causa universal de los pobres, en su especificidad y diversidad, la religión juega un papel importante. Articula el «principio de la realidad» con el «principio de esperanza», codificados en el anuncio de la Buena Noticia del Reino a los pobres. Este anuncio significa: otro mundo es posible y ya está entre nosotros. Apostar al factor religioso en las luchas sociales no significa instrumentalizar la religión o las creencias del pueblo. Significa recordar lo que los protagonistas de esas luchas ya saben, pero que, en horas difíciles y de desesperación, necesitan escuchar de nuevo: «su causa no es meramente una causa anticapitalista, sino la Causa de Dios».

Al decir esto y con esas palabras, se pone en operación el antiguo lenguaje religioso de la filiación divina que hoy, con la escasa socialización religiosa que se da en el hogar, pocos entienden, en un lenguaje secular, sin secularizar su sentido religioso. Tal vez fue eso lo que Puebla quiso decir al pedir a la Iglesia particular «el esfuerzo de trasvasar el mensaje evangélico al lenguaje antropológico y simbólico de la cultura en que se inserta» (*Puebla* 404).

Tal vez necesitamos hoy, como los evangelizadores y evangelizadoras de antaño, componer nuevamente gramáticas y diccionarios para una comprensión y una relevancia mayor del lenguaje cristiano y bíblico. *Gracia*, en esos diccionarios, significaría, tal vez, que no todo puede ser comprado; *conversión*, devolución de apropiaciones indebidas; *estructuras de pecado* podría significar estructuras del capitalismo neoliberal; *sacrificio*, solidaridad. La misión evangelizadora no merecería ese nombre, pues como dijo Paulo VI, si ella «no tomara en consideración al pueblo concreto a quien se dirige, ni utilizara su lengua, sus señales y símbolos, no respondería tampoco a los problemas que ese pueblo tiene, ni llegaría a tocar su vida real» (*Evangelii Nuntiandi* 63).

Estamos en camino hacia una hermenéutica de la alteridad. Eso significa no sólo leer, traducir e interpretar los libros de los demás. Significa también

8 Cf. Conclusiones de Puebla, n°s 400, 457, 468s, 188, 201. La tercera parte de esas Conclusiones profundiza en la perspectiva de la asunción como «comunión y participación».

releer lo propio en el idioma y con los ojos del otro. Esa hermenéutica tiene dos miradas. Con una intenta leer los contextos y culturas, y con la otra, las macroestructuras con sus contradicciones.

En los Arcépagos de este mundo globalizado de la modernidad y posmodernidad se puede decir que, como Pablo en Atenas, este mundo es más religioso de lo que sabe. Habermas advirtió, recientemente, que muchas conquistas de la modernidad, como por ejemplo la subjetividad, la libertad, la emancipación, la autonomía, la lucha por la justicia y solidaridad, son inimaginables sin aquella catequesis milenaria de los misioneros y misioneras que hablaron de singularidad de la persona, justicia universal y de un juicio, del amor a Dios, al prójimo y al enemigo, y de la esperanza en el Reino de Dios⁹. El «trasvasamiento» del mensaje produjo transformaciones profundas, a pesar y más allá de formalismos institucionales. El mundo postsecular asumió visiones parciales del cristianismo que las propias iglesias no registraron más en sus diccionarios.

Nuevos lenguajes ofrecen nuevos lugares para el diálogo y la misión. Los otros y los pobres, hoy, viven insertos en un mundo plural, secular y, al mismo tiempo, postsecular y vagamente religioso y, muchas veces, sin vinculación eclesial. Para ese mundo, el medio es el mensaje. El lenguaje es uno de esos medios que forman parte del mensaje. La tentación de la mimesis, frente a las iglesias electrónicas, es real. El mensaje evangélico, en muchas ocasiones, se encuentra atrapado entre lenguajes arcaicos, y cerrados herméticamente. Ambos lenguajes no dan cuenta de un nuevo intento de inculturación, sin la primera ingenuidad que acompañó a dicho paradigma.

Lo que está en juego es la relevancia de la misión para el mundo de hoy, articulada con su coherencia interna. La relevancia para el mundo transforma nuestras respuestas en preguntas y exige nuevos discernimientos al ver la realidad. Desde Santo Domingo (1992) se instaló en la Iglesia Católica lo que podríamos llamar el «sacrificio de la realidad», por lecturas ideológicas o por la simple ausencia. Frente al vacío espiritual y el pragmatismo pastoral, también en las «Proposiciones del Sínodo» y en el «Documento de participación» para Aparecida, en 2007, necesitamos construir la relevancia externa de la misión de la Iglesia a partir de una nueva lectura de su coherencia interna o, en otras palabras, la construcción de una hermenéutica de la alteridad que forme parte de la hermenéutica de la realidad como un todo, a partir de la fe en Jesucristo, en cuya cruz nos gloriamos (cf. Gál 6,14).

9 Cf. el discurso de agradecimiento de J. HABERMAS, al recibir el Premio de la Paz de los librereros alemanes en la Paulskirche de Frankfurt, octubre de 2001.

V. En los rieles de la coherencia y la relevancia

La misión y el diálogo interreligioso intentan montar el tren del cristianismo en rieles de la coherencia interna y de la relevancia externa. La relevancia hacia el mundo se construye a partir de los imperativos del evangelio y de la conciencia de la comunidad eclesial. Esa conciencia, a su vez, es plural como son plurales las lecturas del evangelio al interior de la Iglesia. Lo que da seguridad a los rieles de la *coherencia* frente a los imperativos evangélicos y a las conciencias eclesiales, y otorga *relevancia*, son las traviesas, colocadas transversalmente. ¡Para que el tren no se salga de los rieles, necesita cuidar las traviesas! A continuación, algunas consideraciones para escoger mejor, enmendar y sustituir algunas traviesas que fueron maltratados por el tiempo.

1. El pluralismo es resultado de una evolución natural, cultural e histórica, por tanto no puede ser considerado un fenómeno degenerativo de una supuesta unidad primordial. Por causa de su multidireccionalidad, esa evolución es ambivalente y debe ser acompañada críticamente

La diversificación de la vida es la condición del surgimiento de la especie humana. Según la comprensión cristiana de hoy, ese pluralismo lo atribuimos a una intención divina y no una decisión divina que tuvo por consecuencia la expulsión del paraíso. En los mitos de expulsión y de la construcción de la Torre de Babel, lo plural de las culturas y lenguas es caracterizado como un castigo divino para la humanidad.

El surgimiento de la especie humana en la historia forma parte de un proceso abierto de diversificación biológica y, por eso, contingente y vulnerable. No sólo son posibles los progresos culturales, guiados por la inteligencia humana. Por la propia naturaleza biológica inherente a los seres humanos, también son posibles las regresiones al reino animal.

En cada época, la potencialidad autodestructiva de la evolución recibirá un nombre nuevo. A lo que las Sagradas Escrituras y los documentos eclesiales denominan «corrupción» por «estructuras de pecado», hoy, en la época del capitalismo tardío, tiene una configuración sistémica. *Puebla* (nº 92) habla «de un sistema claramente marcado por el pecado». Se trata de una sociedad de clases que, en la base de la democracia liberal, simula un cierto pluralismo para escoger. En realidad, ofrece sólo un plural binario entre ricos y pobres, inclusión y exclusión. Las culturas y religiones están atravesadas o amenazadas por las escisiones binarias de dicha sociedad de clases.

Pero el pluralismo de las alteridades múltiples no puede ser reducido al pluralismo hegemónico, protegido por el más fuerte, ni al maniqueísmo bipolar o las «elecciones múltiples» del mercado. La diversidad de las culturas no puede ser reducida a la monotonía de la sociedad de clases. El genio artístico de cada pueblo, que expresa sus sueños y utopías de una manera simbólica, subordina, en la protesta que representa, la sociedad de clases a un horizonte transitorio.

En ese contexto de un pluralismo ambivalente, el papel de la misión, su relevancia evangélica, está tanto en el reconocimiento de la alteridad y potencialidad del más débil y en la protección de sus raíces, como en la lucha por la superación de las escisiones estructurales de la sociedad de clases. De ahí emergen las dos banderas de la misma misión, el discernimiento y la intervención: el discernimiento entre continuidad y ruptura, y la intervención para impedir o para promover ambos, continuidad y ruptura.

2. El pluralismo religioso-cultural permite la construcción de identidades religiosas múltiples, inclusive dentro de las iglesias. Dichas identidades no están demarcadas por muros que separan, sino por arbustos que permiten comunicación e intercambios entre los espacios que dinámica e históricamente delimitan.

Al articular la dimensión ontológica y la histórica de la identidad, es posible afirmar con el psicoanalista Costa Freire: «No nacemos ‘siendo’; somos lo que nos volvemos, y, salvo excepciones, nos volvemos lo que la cultura permite que lleguemos a ser»¹⁰. Las personas y grupos sociales viven, siempre, dentro de sus culturas, los dos momentos: el ser de la herencia y el «llegar a ser» de la historia. Los grupos sociales son herederos y constructores de su identidad.

Los cristianos heredaron de Jesucristo la misión de *estar en el mundo sin ser del mundo*, de sustituir muros por arbustos, por tanto, de derribar «el muro de separación» (Ef 2,14). Esa misión es una misión de paz. «Anunciar la Buena Noticia a los pobres» significa derribar uno de los muchos muros de separación que la sociedad permitió construir, no sólo entre países, sino también dentro de cada Estado y de cada persona.

Al contar a parábola del buen samaritano (Lc 10,25ss), Jesús derribó no sólo el muro étnico entre samaritanos y judíos, mestizos impuros y judíos puros, el muro clerical entre sacerdotes y legos, sino también el muro entre la secta marginal y la religión oficial, entre el discurso y la praxis, la verdad y el amor. Seguir la religión «falsa» de los samaritanos no impide, según la parábola, hacer lo correcto delante de Dios. Lo correcto para la vida eterna se llama práctica de la caridad, no pertenencia a algún grupo.

Derribar muros marcados por la «corrupción del pecado» y sembrar arbustos que garanticen la identidad del otro son tareas de la misión y del diálogo. Sus objetivos son la recuperación de la imagen de Dios en los rostros humanos y la comunicación libre entre iguales y diferentes. En ese proceso que religa el orden de la redención al orden de la creación, Jesús de Nazaret y el Jesús pospascual no se colocan en medio o por encima de las personas, sino al lado: al lado de la samaritana, del migrante, del leproso, del pobre, de la otra y del pecador.

En ese suelo concreto de la encarnación y con las opciones que presupone, la fe no deja espacio a la ideología ni a la hegemonía. Ante «dos rostros sufrientes de

¹⁰ Jurandir COSTA FREIRE, *Prefácio: Playdoier pelos irmãos*, en: Maria Rita KEHL, ed., *Função fraterna*, Rio de Janeiro, Relume Dumará, 2000, p. 10.

Cristo» en los rostros de la humanidad en «situación de extrema pobreza» (*Puebla*, 31ss), donde el despojamiento de la encarnación y redención asume su relevancia histórica y salvífica, caen también otros muros, sostenidos por discursos ideológicos: el muro entre el diálogo interreligioso y el testimonio de fe, entre evangelización explícita e implícita, entre evangelización y sacramentalización.

3. La evolución del pluralismo religioso y cultural es un proceso histórico imprevisible y sin fin. Mientras la mundialización y el capitalismo ejercen una cierta presión sobre la identidad cultural de las regiones, la misión prepara territorios para reafirmar la identidad étnica y religiosa

El 15 de junio de 2005 se llevó a cabo una audiencia pública en la Asamblea Legislativa del Río Grande del Norte, en Natal, Brasil, donde, después de más de un siglo de silencio, tres pueblos indígenas profesan públicamente su indianidad y reivindican su reconocimiento. Los líderes de las tres comunidades entregaron un documento de recogida de firmas que apelaba a su derecho de autoidentificación étnica, garantizada por la Convención 169 de la Organización Internacional del Trabajo (OIT)¹¹, a sus derechos constitucionales sobre la tierra que ocupan y a las políticas de protección y asistencia¹².

En Brasil han resurgido en los últimos 35 años 70 pueblos. La religión de los propios indios tuvo un papel importante en dicha recuperación de su visibilidad. Pero también la religión de los misioneros y misioneras, acusados por la agencia indigenista del Estado brasileño, la Fundación Nacional del Indio (FUNAI), de inventar indios, colaboró en ese proceso de reafirmación de la identidad. La resurrección de un pueblo, con la colaboración de la misión, representa una gracia para la Iglesia, independientemente de la pertenencia religiosa institucional de los indios. La gloria de Dios es la vida de los pueblos o, en palabras de San Ireneo, *Gloria Dei vivens homo*.

El Vaticano II nos aclaró que la justicia de la resurrección no es ningún privilegio de los cristianos. Por la voluntad salvífica universal de Dios, «debemos admitir que el Espíritu Santo ofrece a todos la posibilidad de asociarse, en un modo conocido por Dios, a este misterio pascual» (*Gaudium et Spes*, 22). Los demás caminos de salvación y las otras religiones no son complementarias al camino propuesto por Jesucristo. La complementariedad sugiere «deficiencias». La alteridad no es complementaria a la identidad, sino su condición de ser.

En medio de los discursos posmodernos que hablan de licuefacción de las identidades, se asiste hoy a afirmaciones sorprendentes de identidad y a la

11 Convención nº 169 sobre Pueblos Indígenas y Tribales en Países Independientes, aprobada por la Organización Internacional del Trabajo (OIT), 7 de junio de 1989, en su art. 1, § 2 afirma: «La conciencia de su identidad indígena o tribal deberá ser considerada como criterio fundamental para determinar los grupos a los que se aplican las disposiciones de la presente Convención».

12 Cf. Constitución Federal de Brasil, 1988, art. 210.

reconquista de territorios culturales y religiosos, sin documentos ni libros, pero llenos de vida. Todo en esos procesos de reconstrucción de la identidad forma parte de una cultura oral ancestral. Al contar su historia, al recordar su sufrimiento, y recordar sus tradiciones, los pueblos con capaces de emocionarse, de reinventar su historia y contextualizar su sueño¹³. La identidad es un horizonte que «nos es revelado como algo a ser inventado, no algo por descubrir»¹⁴.

4. El lugar del pluralismo religioso y de la identidad católica es un lugar al interior de «la católica unidad del pueblo de Dios», al cual pertenecen también otros cristianos y seguidores de religiones no cristianas. La unidad religiosa como articulación de su diversidad y construcción de identidad definitiva está inscrita en un horizonte escatológico.

El Vaticano II nos habla de una manera nueva de pertenencia y del llamado a «la católica unidad del pueblo de Dios». Según la encíclica *Lumen Gentium* (13d), forman parte de esa identidad católica los fieles católicos con su pertenencia a la Iglesia Católica, los demás creyentes en Cristo y todos los hombres y mujeres llamados a la salvación por la gracia de Dios. La misión colabora con las tareas específicas en esos tres niveles. Ad intra trabaja la identidad de la fe y la pertenencia de los fieles católicos a la Iglesia Católica. Ese trabajo ad intra se desdobra en la práctica de su responsabilidad ad extra que no aspira a la integración corporativista de los otros a la Iglesia Católica, sino a repartir los dones que cada uno recibió en el servicio a los demás (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 13c) y a la construcción de la paz universal. El pluralismo religioso es expresión de la «católica unidad del pueblo de Dios». La unidad católica es unidad en el Espíritu Santo. Él es el «principio de unidad» (*Lumen Gentium* 13a).

La Iglesia Católica forma parte de la «católica unidad», pero no se identifica con ella. También los creyentes en Cristo y la humanidad pertenecen a esa «católica unidad». A la misión de la Iglesia no le toca incorporar a los demás a lo propio, porque la construcción definitiva de la unidad sólo podrá darse en un horizonte escatológico. «Quien apuesta a unificar las religiones como resultado del diálogo interreligioso, sólo podrá decepcionarse. Esa unificación difícilmente se realizará en nuestro tiempo histórico. Tal vez ni siquiera sea deseable»¹⁵, escribió el entonces cardenal Ratzinger algunos años atrás. El pluralismo religioso es un hecho histórico y la historia es un lugar teológico. La unidad de las religiones y credos tiene un horizonte escatológico, donde «el todo y cada una de las partes aumentan comunicando entre sí

13 Cf. HOBSBAWM, Eric y RANGER, Terence (eds.), *The invention of tradition*, Cambridge, University Press, 1983.

14 Zygmunt BAUMANN, *Identidade*, Rio de Janeiro, Zahar, 2005, p. 21.

15 Cardenal Joseph RATZINGER, *Der Dialog der Religionen und das jüdisch-christliche Verhältnis*, Publicado por primera vez en Internationale Katholische Zeitschrift *Communio*, 26 (1997) 419-429. También en IDEM, *Die Vielfalt der Religionen und der Eine Bund*, 3ª ed., Bad Tölz, Urfeld, 2003, p. 117.

las riquezas y aspirando a la plenitud en la unidad» (*Lumen Gentium*, 13c). En las condiciones históricas concretas, la «unidad católica» significa «unidad humana universal». La universalidad de la vocación divina trasciende las partes confesionales y, al mismo tiempo, intenta articular todas esas partes, particularidades, diversidades y pluralismos¹⁶. La misión de la Iglesia se realiza en la asunción y articulación universales de la humanidad mutilada en sus contextos y en los confines de sus mundos.

5. El horizonte escatológico de la unidad de las religiones y credos, así como la comprensión de la identidad en su dinámica histórica y relacional, permiten pensar en la posibilidad de un reconocimiento progresivo del valor salvífico de las religiones entre sí. La misión y revelación de Dios no son corporativistas. Su condisión entre las religiones puede ser esperada en el proceso de un largo caminar histórico, convergente, dinámico y amoroso.

Al definirse como señal y sacramento de salvación, la Iglesia del Vaticano II echó mano no de la integridad, sino de la totalidad de la salvación como posibilidad histórica, dejando una puerta de la salvación abierta para quienes «ignoran el Evangelio de Cristo y su Iglesia» y se salvan «bajo el influjo de la gracia» y «a través del dictamen de la conciencia» (*Lumen gentium*, 16). Eso no fue una generosidad precipitada sino la afirmación de lo obvio. Un «signo» es algo universalmente precario, porque requiere siempre un contexto histórico-cultural y una comunidad de interpretación. Más allá de la Iglesia existen otros caminos y signos de salvación. «Dios puede, por caminos conocidos por Él, llevar a la fe a los hombres que sin culpa propia ignoran el Evangelio» (*Ad gentes* 7a).

Lo que antes era considerado «idolatría», «herejía», «fetichismo» o «perfidia», hoy, al interior de la Iglesia, es cortejado como religión con «destellos de aquella verdad que ilumina a todos los seres humanos» (*Nostra Aetate* 2b). En otros textos del Vaticano II, las religiones no cristianas son consideradas una «preparación evangélica» (*Lumen Gentium* 16, *Evangelii Nuntiani* 53), «pedagogía para Dios» (*Ad gentes* 3a) o «semillas del Verbo» (*Ad gentes* 11b, *Lumen gentium* 17). Todo esto era bastante poco, pero formó parte de un proceso evolutivo de la mentalidad católica que va del no-reconocimiento de entonces al reconocimiento precario de hoy. Obviamente, ese proceso no llegó a su fin, porque la propia «Iglesia de hoy aún no es aquello que está llamada a ser» (*Puebla* 231).

Los cristianos forman parte de un proceso continuo de revelación a través de una comprensión siempre mejor de la práctica de Jesús y de los signos de Dios en la actualidad. Las religiones no cristianas no son pasajeras, sino nuestra comprensión de ellas. Como Iglesia pertenecemos a la humanidad que

16 Cf. Joseph RATZINGER, *Konzilsaussagen über die Mission außerhalb des Missionsdekrets*, en Johannes Schütte, ed., *Mission nach dem Konzil*, Mainz, Grünewald, 1967, pp. 21-47, aquí: 29.

prepara el Evangelio de la Gracia. La verdad de la fe cristiana está ligada a su caminar histórico. «La ortodoxia», afirmó la Comisión Teológica Internacional, ya en 1972, «no es un consentimiento a un sistema, sino la participación en un caminar de fe»¹⁷. En la verdad de la fe, el valor dinámico del camino como práctica de caridad precede al valor estático del sistema.

La prueba de la ortodoxia cristiana está en la pobreza de Dios. La ortodoxia cristiana se reviste, no de eficacia, sino de señales de pobreza de Dios mismo: *kenosis* y encarnación, pesebre y cruz, pan eucarístico y los pobres de cada época. «La pobreza es la verdadera aparición divina de la verdad»¹⁸, escribió el entonces cardenal Ratzinger, y, a partir de la teología latinoamericana, agregaríamos: la pobreza en su concreción de los pobres. Lugar de la epifanía de Dios, por excelencia, son ellos, los crucificados de la historia, los que cayeron en manos de ladrones, los leprosos, hambrientos y los hermanos y hermanas menores de Jesús. En ellos, la Iglesia reconoce «la imagen de su Fundador pobre y sufriente» (LG, 8c). Ellos -hijos de la madre para el mundo- son los protagonistas de la misión y tienen como Padre al Espíritu Santo.

Si Auschwitz fue necesario para redescubrir y reconocer que «la salvación viene de los judíos» (Jn 4,22), ¿qué va a ser necesario para reconocer el valor salvífico de las religiones no cristianas que orientan a más de dos tercios de la humanidad? El hambre de los pobres, el desempleo y el subempleo de los afro-americanos y la violencia contra los pueblos indígenas, ¿no serían razones suficientes para decirles que la solidaridad de los cristianos no tiene precio y que no es la voluntad de Dios que los cristianos golpeen con el martillo de la ortodoxia en las columnas de su frágil identidad?

Por la multiplicidad de las culturas y por la pobreza de sus habitantes, América Latina tiene un papel importante en la construcción del macroecumenismo mundial. La pobreza siempre es resultado de una destrucción cultural. Debajo de las grandes ruinas sobreviven culturas devastadas que esperan con manos extendidas la Buena Noticia de Jesucristo. Un continente, predominantemente católico aún, que se abre al diálogo con el mundo y las religiones, será una señal de gratuidad del Evangelio. «Vivamos el misterio de la multiplicidad que es hija de la gracia, en unidad del mismo Espíritu que anima, robustece e ilumina nuestra Iglesia»¹⁹, sirviendo a los pobres y a los otros, para bien de la humanidad.

Paulo SUESS

Traducido del portugués por Leopoldo Cervantes-Ortiz

17 Cf. *L'unité de la foi et le pluralisme théologique*, I.c., Proposición IV.

18 Cardenal Joseph RATZINGER, *Der Dialog der Religionen und...*, en Idem, *Die Vielfalt der Religionen...*, pp. 93-121, aquí: 116.

19 Palabras finales del entonces presidente del CELAM, mons. Avelar Brandão Vilela, en su discurso de apertura de la Conferencia de Medellín (1968).

Syncretism: Theological Significance in a Pluralistic-Theology Perspective

Afonso Maria Ligorio SOARES*

This text intends to defend, in a schematic a way as possible, the theological significance of religious syncretism, understanding it in the human-divine dynamics of revelation. Using the form of small theses, I will try to explain to the readers that syncretism is the revelation of G's in operation, because there is no other way for us to acquiesce to the mystery other than by degrees, in a fragmented fashion, between advances and setbacks, daylight and twilight. To imagine it in any other fashion is simply to deny that this encounter of ours with G'd can be human and historic.

1. Syncretism always was and still is be present in the historical relationships between the religions. Even those who reject it, tend to do so using a religion which, to some extent, is, in turn, syncretic.

Many different words fight for the attention of the pluralistic theology in these times of urgent dialogue. We have the words **Ecumenism** (the Christian faith being celebrated between the different Churches in

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one common celebration), **inter-religious dialogue** (all religions harmoniously living-together), **Macro-ecumenism** (ratified by the Assembly of the People of G'd, in Quito, 1992), **Inculturation** (the expression preferred by the Catholic Church; protestants prefer the word **contextualization**) and **Inreligionation** (the word suggested by Torres Queiruga to say that all religions change from the inside out, through contact one with the other). In fact, as has already been stated on different occasions, people inreligionize everything they can or would like to accept from the new tradition coming from the outside. Many practitioners of the Orisha, Umbanda, Voodoo, Santeria traditions, or the other religious variables of our Indian and African heritage feel themselves to be fully Catholic. They accepted the Christian graft (quite often by force, it should be remembered) into their traditions of origin, they purified that which for them seemed to be inhuman or had no meaning, they mixed in that which they considered of little importance and ended up keeping intact what they considered to be positive and enriching for their own originating cosmivision. The question is that, from close up, this is in no way different to what is normally referred to as... **syncretism**.¹

The reality of syncretism and two-religion membership continues to be one of the most delicate and controversial points of inter and intra-religious dialogue, not only for Catholic theologians most attuned to the Roman paradigm, but also for those most sensitive to the CEBs (TN: Basic Christian Communities). In fact, we all know that it is no exception to the rule to find whole Latin-American communities living their popular Christianity, without renouncing their ancient spiritual traditions.

It should be remembered however, that Christian syncretic cohabitation is not any invention of Latin-American Indians or Afro-descendants. A veritable dialectic game is to be found in the history of the nations wherein first of all, the conquerors tried to impose themselves eliminating the religion of those conquered (antithesis); then the conqueror ended up accepting the most valid and strongest elements of those being conquered (tolerance, peaceful coexistence); then finally, a synthesis is reached. Christianity, being a universal religion, could not avoid syncretism, since

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1. STEWART, C. & SHAW, R. *Syncretism/antisyncretism: the politics of religious synthesis*, p. 2.

it called upon itself the responsibility of embracing, at least in principle, the fullness of plurality found in the human species. Its main argument for such a remarkable task lies in its certainty that the revelation of G'd to humanity reached, in Jesus of Nazareth, a depth never equalized either before or after (the plenitude of revelation). In this lies, at one and the same time, both the excellence and "Achilles-heel" of the whole of the Christian dogma. How reconcile the absoluteness of the G'd who reveals himself with the inevitable relativity of the means used and its results? Let it be said once and for all: any religion that claims to be universal and which bases its argumentation on the belief that the absolute centralizes itself in human relativity located in time and space, cannot theologically ignore the analysis of the benefits and limitations of hybrid spirituality.

Is it not in a little strange that the Christian Churches summarily reject religious-theological syncretism (that is, the effort to join together elements which, logically, could not be united) and, at the same time, placidly state that, in Jesus of Nazareth, we find present, in one and the same divine person, two natures (human and divine), both radically distinct, without any mixture, (con-) fusion or separation? Would not the efforts made by ordinary folk to join together different, and possibly contradictory, gods in the same religious experience bear some similarity with the ingenious symbolic-theoretical formulation of the Trinitarian doctrine, which seeks to establish the difficult balance between the monotheistic conviction and the experience of the multiple in the divinity? From an anthropological-pastoral point of view why should it be suspect to "venerate" the ancestors and the spirits of nature (= orishas) when Marian devotions veneration of the Catholic saints are considered to be appealing and pedagogically important? Does anyone in their sound mind really believe that the popular- Catholic experience knows (and must know) how to distinguish, in keeping with hierarchical patterns, between *dulia*, *hyperdulia* and *latria*? And what are we to say about the clear relationship between Christian sacraments /sacramentals and magic?

It is a fact that the Catholic hierarchy, even if with more modesty today, continues resistant when it comes to thinking about the best way to deal with syncretic spirituality. Deep down, it is a question of power. At the same time, completely indifferent to the whole controversy, large segments of the population in our countries continue to worship their gods while practicing some Christian rites fully convinced these ways of understanding and practicing religion are certainly Catholic. "I'm a Roman Catholic apostolic Spiritualist, thanks be to God", so said Sonia, the *ialorixá mãe* (TN: Macumba priestess).

2. Syncretism is, above all, a practice which comes before our theoretical options and ideological banners

Our proposal here is simply to bring to the foreground experiences which, perhaps, are still subject to the religious catacombs. We are in no way launching a campaign for the ample, general and unrestricted syncretization of all religions. It is, in the first place, a question of admitting a *de facto* syncretism; and only then, does the question about what can be learned *theologically* from this given fact make any sense.

Consequently, nobody should feel obliged to take part in such experiences, or hide away from them, out of fear of retaliations. Nevertheless, both extremes can perhaps be detected among militant Christians. Tolerated in pastoral practice in the name of Christian charity, such behavior is repudiated in official statements and documents. Fortunately, however, recent years have been characterized by a timid revision of this position².

On the other hand, it would be naïve to not-consider that much of the syncretic practices lived by our people are fruit of the violent manner in which Christianity imposed itself throughout the whole of Latin America, giving the people no choice but to adopt distorted camouflaged and fragmented habits taken from their traditions. Because of this, the present-day movements to rediscover these ancestral traditions are well received, avoiding having to “pay tolls” to Christian/Catholic rituals. According to some of the Brazilian Macumba priestesses connected to this re-Africanization movement: “our religion is not a sect, a primitive animist practice; consequently we reject syncretism...”³

It is true that the rupture caused by syncretism does not imply the abandoning of Catholicism. According to the priestess Stella de Oxossis, whoever wishes to continue being Catholic, should make their own personal decision. If they want to venerate Orgum and Saint Anthony, there is no problem; on the condition that they are conscious of the fact that “they are different energies”.⁴ However, things have changed; the leader-

2. Cfr. For ex. Soares, A. M. L. *Revelation Interfaces*, PP. 59-69; 72-91.

3. Cfr. Consorte, J. G. *Em torno de um manifesto de ialorishás baianas contra o sincretismo. Faces da tradição afro-brasileira. [About the Bahian ialorishá manifesto against syncretism, in Caroso, C. & Bacelar, J. (Org). Aspects of Afro-Brazilian Tradition]*. PP. 71-91 (here: 88-91).

4. *Ibidem*. P. 73.

ship of the distinct religious traditions are beginning to meet on an equal footing, being able, or not, to opt for a two- religion membership.

On the other hand, new routes are being painfully tested, by the more progressive Christian sectors, among which we find the Negro Pastoral Agents (NPAs) with their many ramifications throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. The intention of their Catholic majority is to rediscover Negro traditions and reaffirm their cultural identity. And it is here that, inevitably, the question of how, in practice, is one to deal with the de facto syncretism, or two-religion membership, of the members of these communities. To what extent is the Christian militant allowed to go ahead in the search for authentic African roots? Is it possible, at one and the same time, to be a conscientious Negro and a Catholic? The question is the same wherever we find ourselves: can I be Aymara and Christian, Hindu and a follower of the Gospels, Chinese and a regular Sunday Mass-goer, Bantu and a believer in the resurrection?

Having peacefully admitted that such connections have already been made in reality, we can then go on to the next point: has this de facto situation - not artificially concocted by the eccentricity of some theologians -, something to teach us not just from the pastoral, but more specifically, from the theological point of view?

3. Syncretism seems more of an anthropological constant and should be studied using the best scientific resources, independent of our axiological presuppositions

Leaving the ecclesial theological prohibitions to one side, the theme of bricolage and cultural hybridism followed its own course in scientific literature. Some approach it using the evolutionist theory; others go along with culturalism and see it as a stage involving conflicts, adjustment, assimilation along the road to the desired acculturation; others still inaugurate a phase of more sociological explanations, analyzing the capacity of the native to “digest” in his way the foreign novelty; and so on. One thing is certain and that is that yesterdays myths, one by one, are disappearing: the theory of syncretism as a cover-up to dribble colonial rule; the hypothesis of syncretism as a resistance strategy; a synonym with patchwork juxtaposition, bricolage (Levi-Strauss) or an indigenous agglomeration (Gramsci), because they would not explain the cases in which religion continues as an integrated whole. There is a greater awareness of the price certain beliefs paid for being tied to determined theories. Or, of the reductionism of seeing syncretism in the ring of bipolarities of the type purity versus mixture, separation versus fusion etc.

So as to avoid inevitable confusions, I resort to S. Ferrari and his list of three variations of the main meanings given to the concept of syncretism. Starting off with from the hypothetical zero case of separation or non-syncretism, he arrives at level three, convergence or adaptation, passing through the two intermediary levels: mixture, junction, or fusion (level one) and parallelism or juxtaposition (level two). Thus:

(...) there is convergence between African ideas and other religions. Regarding the concept of God or regarding the concept of reincarnation; (...) there is *parallelism* in the relationship between orishas and catholic saints; (...) a *mixture* in the observation of certain rituals by povo-de-santo (TN: people-of-saint – Candomblé), such as baptism and seven-day Mass, and (...) *separation* in specific rituals in Candomblé temples (*terreiros*) such as the crying-drum or *axexê*, *arrambam* or *lorogum* rituals, which are different to the rituals found in other religions.⁵

However, theologians such as M. F. Miranda still prefer inculturation to syncretism and say that it is better to “banish, once and for all” this concept from the world of theology because a correct, orthodox syncretism today gets the name of inculturation, which does not come loaded with negative readings of the past as is the case with the word syncretism”.⁶

4. Two-religion practice is one of the possible natural consequences of inter-religious dialogue, with syncretism as the threshold.

If the term is not a unanimous one, at least there are advances regarding the acceptance or tolerance of the reality represented by the word. Behind this new disposition are, for example, the decisions taken in Vatican Council II in relation to ecumenism and dialogue with other religions. An exemplary case in Brazil was that of Friar Boaventura Kloppenburg. Up to the eve of that same Council, his writings always had an undisguised apologetic flavor against spiritualists and Umbanda adepts. “It was a syncretism”, he later admitted, “that for me seemed unacceptable from the point of view of an authentic Christian life”.⁷ In 1968,

5. FERRETTI, S. F. *Repensando o sincretismo [Rethinking Syncretism]*. PP 41-74 (here: p.91).

6. Cfr. Miranda, M. de F. *Inculturação da fé; uma abordagem teológica. [Inculturation of the Faith; a Theological approach]*. SP: Loyola, 2003. Pp. 107-127 (Here p. 287).

7. Cfr. Kloppenburg, B. *Os afro-brasileiros e a umbanda. CELAM. Os grupos afro-americanos [The Afro-Brazilians and Umbanda. CELAM. Afro-American Groups]*. PP. 185-211.

during the *First Latin-American Continental Meeting of the Missions*, in Melgar, Columbia, Kloppenburg presented a study which still has its echoes up to the present time: "Evaluation of a new pastoral stance in relation to Umbanda"⁸ Basing himself on the Council and referring to Pope Paul VI's message, *Africae Terrarum* (Oct/29/1967), he stated:

The African, when he becomes a Christian, does not renounce his identity, but rediscovers the ancient values of his traditions in spirit and truth. We, however, because we were Europeans, westerners of the Latin Church (...) incapable of imagining a sacred dance to the sound of drums; we wanted the African, just because he lived beside us, to renounce being African (...). It was complete, presumptuous ethnocentrism on the part of the Europeans and the Church which had come from Europe. But the Negro, when he got his freedom (...) went back to the *terreiro*, the drums, to the rhythm of his origins and the myths of his language. From the depths of his being (...) burst forth the old religious traditions of Black Africa...⁹

Leaving to one side possible inexactitudes in the words referring to the Afro universe, the testimony given by Kloppenberg set the tone for the following decades, as in these words by Dom Helder Camara, when questioned about his friendship with the leaders of the Negro religions: "What I do is recognize their right to practice their religion. On getting to know them, I see that they are people with so much faith and they are so dedicated to others that I can only say that this integration does good".¹⁰

With this same spirit, another of the prophets of dialogue between the religions, François de L'Espinay, a catholic priest and Xangô no Ilê Axé Opô Aganju minister, lived out the final years of his life in Salvador, Bahia (1974-1985). He went as far as being chosen to be mogbá (member of the Xangó council) in the Ilê. Something unheard of.

The day the father-of-saint asked me to be a member of the council, he was aware that I had to go through an initiation rite. This was a major problem. I did not know what it was. Was it against Christianity?

8. Article published in REB, 28, PP. 404-417, and reedited in REB, 42, PP. 506-527.

9. Cfr. Idem. Article on a new pastoral stance in relation to Umbanda. P. 410.

10. Lima, P. P. *Brazil: Crossroads for the Religions*. In: *Além-Mar*, no. 532 (<http://www.agencia.ecclesia.pt/noticia.asp?noticiaid=13877>).

I cannot renounce either Christianity or the priesthood. It was then I noticed that it had nothing against Christianity. (...) In our Candomblé I promised fidelity to Xangô. This, in no way, separates anyone from fidelity to Christ.¹¹

If this practice is to become the norm, many people will ask, how is one then to continue to justify the mediation of the Church or its salvific role (Lumen Gentium 14)? As if anticipating the questions, François already said on that occasion:

Why should G'd demand contact using the mediation of a translator, instead of directly through his word? He reveals himself as Father. But, does not a father speak the same language as his children? (...) G'd, to me, would seem to be much bigger, and more alive. He is not to be summed up in a rigid formula; he is not the prisoner of his options. He does not make exceptions between his children. Nobody can say: "It was to me that he revealed himself and to me alone".¹²

Will the Church be in any way diminished by taking this step forward? Frankly, if this is to be the rice for serving the kingdom of G'd, so much the better. After all, we do say that the Church is to be the yeast and not the whole cake. What is wanted is that everyone gets a taste of the quizomba cake; chewing yeast is, to say the least, indigestive. Worse still: to get the taste of yeast when you tasting the cake, is a bad sign. With which François would have promptly agreed, since, in his opinion:

All that is needed is that we relinquish our demarcation lines based on exclusivism - with the certainty that we possess the one and only truth -, and admit that G'd does not contradict himself, that he speaks using many different forms, which are mutually complementary, and that each religion has its share of the sacred: the Word given it by G'd. This is the full richness of ecumenism, which should not be reduced to a mere dialogue between Christians.¹³

The pioneering work of L'Espinay is no longer an isolated case, and reechoes in a multitude of macro-ecumenical community experien-

11. Quoted by Frisotti, H. *Teologia e religiões afro-brasileiras*. In: Cadernos do CEAS Especial - 300 anos de Zumbi. *Afro-Brasilian Theology and Religions*. In: CEAS Special - 300 years of Zumbi. 1995 (<http://ospiti.peacelink.it/zumbi/news/ceas/e300p21.html>).

12. *Ibidem*.

13. L'Espinay, F. de. *A religião dos orixás: outra Palavra do Deus único?* [The Orisha Religion: another Word from the one God?] In. REB 47/187: 649.

ces worldwide. But there are experiences more baffling still, when they start from the other extremity, from the leadership of the autochthonous religions fascinated by the Christian tradition.

This is the case of the *Comunidade Católica Apostólica de Nosso Senhor do Bonfim* [TN: Our Lord of Bonfim Catholic Apostolic Community]. José Carlos de Lima – also known as Pai Simbá [TN: Umbanda Priest Simbá] –, so as to better serve the spiritual needs of his Umbanda people, decided to get a degree in theology. He studied in the São Paulo Archdiocesan faculty, and went as far as being ordained deacon by the Catholic Church, going on to become a priest in the Anglican rite. Sometime later, he officially asked for a leave of absence and founded the above-mentioned Spiritualist Church. There, as well as his mediumistic functions, which he performs every Thursday as Pai Simbá, he presides over a monthly mass in a rite quite similar to the Roman Catholic one, where, during the homily, he “receives” the spirit of Fr. Gregory, dead now for more than ten years, and who had the name of being a real “father to the poor”, as well as being a visionary and miracle worker. Fr. Gregory leads the celebration with his German accent until after Communion, then leaving immediately to allow the medium to continue with the closing rites and the dismissal of the faithful.

Fr. Lima’s project is an extremely enlightening one. It is an example of an important movement in significant sections of the Latin-American population: remaining tied to their religion and culture of origin – or in their most important traits that continue to exist – they approach Christianity to obtain from it everything and anything that will enrich their own cradle experience. They give absolutely no importance whatsoever to our offended western pride. They imagine that, if there is something good and true in the Christian tradition, they also have a right to relish it, in their own way.

5. A hybrid experience may very well point to the divine desire to autocomunicate itself. Theology should not treat it merely as an item of pastoral strategy.

Even while not being aware of the syncretic exploits of Fr. Lima, His Holiness Pope John Paul II, during the *ad limina* visit of some Brazilian prelates, in his pronouncement stressed the importance of the question of popular religion and saw religious syncretism as one of the principal threats. For the Holy Father:

The Catholic Church looks upon these cults with great interest, but considers as being harmful the concrete relativism of any joint acti-

vity or any blending between them, as if they had the same value, putting at risk the identity of the Catholic faith. The Church feels the obligation to reaffirm that syncretism is harmful **when** it endangers the truth of the Christian rite and the expression of the faith, to the detriment of an authentic evangelization.¹⁴

If I understand the pontifical message correctly, there may, perhaps, be a margin of dialogue to deduce that, if the syncretism does not endanger the truth of the rite etc., it is to be welcomed. After all, as Benedict XVI's predecessor knew quite well, the truth of the rite or the expression of the faith does not appear from one moment to another and any authentic evangelization presupposes the very long process of incarnation of the Gospel spirit in the lives of people and communities. Furthermore, the Pope would seem to admit that the one and only group of criteria available to people to judge if the Gospel is, in fact, "Good News" is its own autochthonous culture and, consequently, cannot automatically abandon it to become "evangelical".

I do not know if the Brazilian bishops informed the bishop of Rome, on that or on other occasions, that the Candomblé people are only capable of saying yes to Jesus when they compare him with Oshala and other orishas – and only those who are aware of the pertinence of both terms can make the comparison. I do not know if our prelates counter-explained that, instead of leaving Christianity to one side and continue only with their own gods, the "people-of-the-saint" preferred – following the impetus of gratuitous love – to stay with the orishá Jesus, respecting the catholic prayers. Be that as it may, the Afro-popular condescendence is for me one more of the these gratifying surprises of the ways used by G'd to reveal himself, always unexpectedly breathing where he wills.

On different occasions and for some years now, the unfolding involved in the actions and example of people such as L'Espinay and Simbá have been a challenge to the faith, the spirituality and the way of doing theology for many people. The conclusions which, little by little, one is forced to draw are in no way comfortable for the Church- institution, and perhaps neither are they in any way pleasing to the majority of Catholics – including here those who have the two-religion membership, but who do not want to admit it reflexively. It is, likewise, easy to save syncretism as a sociological condition of all religion, after all, none of them, as a cultural fact, exist independently of the many traditions to which they are indebted. But what is one to deduce theologically from the option of a Catholic priest who never saw the need to apostatize his

14. L'Osservatore Romano, February 1, 2003. The stress on the word "When" is mine.

primitive faith to embrace the spirituality coming from the orishas? “What should be the real function of the Church in these situations of syncretism and two-religion membership? What services are expected of Christians in contexts such as these? Is doing good for the people the equivalent to converting them (in their totality) to a more orthodox Christianity? In short, is salvation-liberation of the People of G’d synonymous with people maturely joining this community called Church?”¹⁵

To answer the questions raised by the action of Fr. François – and so many other people who are militants today in different (macro-) ecumenical movements -, Christian theology must turn its attention to the very guts, the very foundations of the Christian faith, that is, to the possibility and modalities of human access to the supposed evangelical good news. An epistemological discussion done without any haste will be able to form a theology of revelation more capable of including in its circle other possible ways of divine autocommunication in history, other revelation interfaces.

In the end we ask ourselves: would experiences such as that of Fr. L’Espinay still be characteristically Christian, or are they to be located in some other spiritual tradition which is neither Christian nor specifically Candomblé? Would it be a case of “syncretism back again” (as Piere Sanchis suggests), or of inculturation (as many would prefer) or of inreligionization (according to Torres Queiruga)? It is a strategy – a risky one, we might say – for the reediting of the *plantatio ecclesiae* or a gesture lived out in the gratuity of someone who expects nothing in return?

6. Syncretism is not a stage along the road to full Christianity, but proof that no religion has the power, permission or mandate to fully drain the meaning of life.

The advantage a controversial word such as syncretism has over its well-behaved cousin *inculturation* is that the former immediately makes it clear where exactly the theological-dogmatic problem rests: the revelation of G’d contains clear ambiguities, errors and contradictions which have to be explained as essential components and not just circumstantial rejects of the process of divine auto-communication to humanity. As Cardinal Lercaro said, fifty years ago, it is necessary to remain prudent even in the presence of blatant errors out of respect for the very (the

15. SOARES, A. M. L. *Impasses in Catholic Theology...*, quoted article, p. 124.

human way of acquiescing to) Truth itself.¹⁶ This reinforces the importance of allowing the real subjects of the experience to be subjects, even if the price is the loss of clear and distinct ideas. As S. Vasconcelos said, in that providential formulation: “The theology that takes its subject into consideration stutters and stammers for intellectual honesty”.¹⁷

Well then, how is one to theologically and ecclesialogically read the syncretic experiences? Will examples such as that of Fr. François, which gave rise to so many beautiful, prophetic and liberating experiences in our communities, have opened the sluice-gates to an about-turn in the Christian self-understanding? A new category could be useful for the understanding of what is going on in us and around us. I venture to throw one into the debate: the *syncretic faith*. I imagine that a more open theology (fundamental and dogmatic) will not run away from admitting, with the help of the sciences of religion, the radically human condition and conditioning of the accessibility to any faith, religious or otherwise.

Synthetic faith is absolute regarding the fundamental values that are at stake in the apparently contradictory choice of religious meanings (faith dimension); but it is relative regarding the effective results attained (ideological-syncretic dimension). One may speak, therefore, of a *syncretic* faith to identify the very way a faith has of “making itself concrete”. In fact, there can be no faith in the pure state; it manifests itself in the praxis.

If we want to, we can bring *syncretic faith* close to inculturated faith. Provided that we clearly see the difference of routes, that is, the viewpoint from where the popular religious concept is being observed. The ecclesial community offers to inculturate or inreligionize the gospel message; the people respond, welcoming the “good news” in keeping with its real significant structures. To profess inculturated faith is to presuppose something transcendent, an absolute value definitively guaranteed by the Absolute Being received in the faith. On the supposition that such a truth lies within its custody, the Church proceeds to communicate it beyond its original frontiers. But when I say *syncretic faith* I emphasize that the breath of the Spirit is already in operation beforehand in the other cultural traditions, against or even despite contact with Christian communities.

16. Cfr. Segundo, J. L. [O dogma que liberta. 2 ed.] *The Dogma that Liberates*, Paulinas, 2000, pp. 141-144.

17. I heard her make the referred to allegation during a debate on multiple religious membership in the international Ecumenical Forum – France, Germany, Brazil: “*Risking the Faith in our Societies*” (Belo Horizonte, 7-12/4/2003).

Furthermore, we could still ask ourselves where the catholicity of these syncretic experiences/witnesses is so well known to us. “In my father’s house there are many mansions”. Taking our inspiration from this, the aspect of *catholicity* is widened to contemplate a plurality of experiences all of which have in common the meeting with Jesus of Nazareth. It may be true that not all of them begot or will beget the “following” *strictu sensu*, but they all met Jesus along the road (to Emmaus?). In the end, catholicity is not the exclusive property of the Catholic Church institution.

As the above-mentioned Vasconcelos used to say the church is catholic because it already lives salvation escathologically. Thus no historical configuration of Christianity would be normative – although, in my opinion, the primitive Christian community continues to hold its referential mythical-symbolic fundamental aura. The minimum we can make use of will be a few consensual criteria, which will prevent us from “beating our heads” along the way. In our case, we have Tradition (with a capital T), the Sacred Scriptures and the vitality of the communitarian Experience. The three reciprocally complement each other. Tradition on its own or running parallel degenerates into traditionalism; the *sola Scriptura* can fall into literalism, fundamentalism (or, at most, exegesis without hermeneutics); the communitarian Experience of the present, on its own, will go no further than a club or urban tribe.

The rediscovery that the revelation of G’d is a historic process following stages each of which have their own meaning, but none of which are definitive, stands out as the great acquisition of contemporary Christian theology (*Dei Verbum* 15: divine pedagogy). In this process, the people of the Bible (authors and readers in the communities) always tried to inflect in human language the breathing and the echoes of the Holy Spirit. Whence the power (and the weakness) of the Christian *umbral* (TN: spiritual place): this intrinsically depends on the inescapable experience which only makes sense if the individual goes it himself. And neither is it guaranteed that the result may necessarily be in conformity with clear-cut ecclesial community (at least along today’s lines). Even if it could, this would not exclude the inevitable ambiguity of the concrete translation of this encounter, that is, of our everyday spirituality.

This ambivalent process is no defect; our perfection consists in us being imperfect, unfinished, improvised, not closed in any determinist way. Otherwise, we would not even be human. Because of this the syncretic experiences, despite the inevitable ambiguities which accompany any biography or historical process are, at the same time, *variations of the experience of love* (Or if you like, eventualities of grace, gratuity, or spirituality). And where there is love there is no sin. The father-of-

the-saint (in Candomblé) refuses to separate himself from the Church and neither will he give up his rituals, why is this? Maybe it is because, as Friar B. KLoppenbergr says: “They are the ones who most love the Catholic Church in Latin America, despite being the ones that suffer most at her hands”.

I love saying over and over again that the history of divine revelation is a love story between G'd and humanity, that has history as its nuptial bed chamber. This is because the road followed by people to arrive at their dogmas is also part of revelation, that is, through their moving forward and falling back, their hits and misses, sins and gestures of love. Only thus are we capable of understanding how the full collection of auto-excluding “revelations” put together and preserved side by side by the biblical editors constitute today, for a major part of humanity, the “Word of G'd”. In short, other possible variations, starting from the one original intuition, have their place in what we conventionally refer to as Christian Tradition. This is the case of the abrahamic faith to which Jews, Christians and Muslims all refer back to. And if that is the case, then syncretism can only be the history of revelation in action, because it consists in the route followed by divine pedagogy in the midst of the popular religious inventions.

The syncretic stubbornness/audacity does not want to give up either of the two loves (Catholicism or Candomblé; reincarnation or Sunday Mass; worship of the ancestors and the evangelical fight against injustices; movement through the stars and the via crucis. It wants both; it is against monogamy. If we demand explanations we are told what the poet Drummond already referred to as the “The no-reasons for Loving”. Perhaps a despairing type of answer for the old scholastics (because, as the phrase-maker Vasconcelos once said, “When one explains, one confuses”), but essential to the mysticism of yesterday, today and forever. This is something fascinating for the one who is living the experience, but still continues to be something terrifying, as it is a wisdom that is tasted and, from there on, gives life to a new power, derived from the age-old *non-powers* (the queers, the afro-descendents, the women, the youth).

However, there is no need to be in any hurry to baptize the multiple religious experiences that are taking place; they are already valid and have their place in the astonishing *mandala* of answers to the self-communication of *He* who loved us first. For the one who carries in his/her blood the marks of the Christian tradition, there is no need to worry here, since the place and manner for worshipping G'd is not important, on the condition that we do it as Christ himself did, in Spirit and Truth.

Perhaps, after all, the most difficult equilibrium in these pluralist times may be that subtle distinction that we need to keep in mind when we talk about *catholicity*: preserve ourselves from the steam-roller where “everything fits” - that post-modern eclectic refrain – and turn our hearts in the direction of “everyone fits” – this, yes, utopically evangelical and evangelically plural. ¹⁸

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18. A similar distinction was proposed during the above-mentioned Ecumenical Forum in Belo Horizonte (Cfr. above).

Christian Identity and Theology of Religious Pluralism [TRP]

José María VIGIL

SEE

Religious pluralism and its effects

If, when faced with liberation and Liberation Theology, many Christian churches felt challenged by alleged risks implicit in the field of ethics both in practice and in policy, now when faced with the actual reality of religious pluralism and TRP, churches feel challenged in their very identity and especially in the field of their theology. Religious pluralism questions their very identity. The center of debate in coming years will be “the Christian identity”: “this is “Christian,” that is not; up to a certain point one is “Christian” but from there on one is “un-Christian.” This debate concerning religious pluralism and inter-religious dialogue already actually exists. Why?

When one side of the debate reflects a uniform, monochromatic experience, then stepping into an exclusive experience of pluralism can cause a crisis in all fields, not only religious but also psychological, social, cultural etc. For the person who was born and raised in a mono-religious, homogeneous environment, it is difficult to fully appreciate religious reality.¹ And when she or he finally ventures into pluralistic reality, inevitably she experiences new situations that disturb her “monotonous existential formation”.

As an example, this phase has been well documented in development psychology as the time when a child receives a little brother or sister. Until then it was the “only child,” the center of activity, the king or queen of the home. But, with the arrival of a new member of the family, everything changes for the child: it is no longer the center of everything; it no longer is what it had been, and others no longer consider it to be what it had been.

The child has to readjust itself. An external event changes its identity as daughter or son and sister or brother. As Ortega y Gasset said, “I

1 “They who know one (religion), know none” according to the classic formula by F.M. MÜLLER, *Introduction to the Science of Religions*, London 1873, p. 16..

am I plus my circumstances". My circumstances, which do not depend on me, shape me into who I am, and in that sense I am the one who depends upon my circumstances. Circumstances can change who I am, my identity, since I am not only I by also my circumstances.

This is what is happening to religions with the arrival of our present pluralism. They were born and raised in their own human family as special realities: without sisters but rather as the only daughter. In each family, that is, for each cultural society, one religion. Each of them was, without discussion, the "only child", the center, the true religion, without anyone to cast a shadow or compete the field. But recently, all over the world at the same time thanks to the phenomenon of globalization and the generalization of communications, a little sister appeared and even worse, several sisters, and even many sisters. Religions ceased to live isolated, and in today's world they have inevitably come to be present to each other, and this new circumstance has changed the life and existence of each and every religion. In their new life in the human family, they have ceased to be, inexorably what they had been and have been forced gradually to accommodate themselves to a new role. Perhaps even "a new identity"? They began to feel unsteady with their millennially old identity, which they had always considered to be their particular very own.

And there we are. Just beginning. Starting to feel the challenge of old identities that do not fit into today's human family, in this historic time that we are living. In fact many religions do not want to accept the fact that they are no longer what they were, and they are reluctant to upgrade their classic experience, which includes their millennial identity. They want to stand by and wait a bit longer to see if the cracked and crumbling building will remain in place without having to be rebuilt... That is the debate, the actual crisis, the struggle between new and old. And so it is necessary to reflect upon the challenges that religious pluralism poses for the Christian identity ².

JUDGE

Reflecting on the *identidad* Christian identity

1. There is no "one only" Christian identity neither diachronically nor synchronically.

This is the first reflection we must come up with: there is no such a thing as "THE Christian identity," neither diachronically (over a period of historical time) or synchronically (at the same moment in history).

² As a general bibliography on the Theology of Pluralism, see: <http://latinoamericana.org/2003/textos/bibliografiapluralismo.htm>

Christianity has varied greatly **diachronically** all through history. Firstly because Christianity doesn't exist from a founding moment. The historical Jesus never intended to found a religion: Jesus died a Jew, and his disciples continued to be Jews for quite a while. They separated from the Jewish religion only afterwards and even then still without a real proper religious identity. Nascent Christianity kept on evolving until it was fully shaped up in the IV and V centuries by the great councils. Across twenty centuries Christian identity has assumed configurations of great variety: from the Christian asceticism of the hermits and the Desert Fathers, to the heights of the Golden Age of the great mystics; from the warlike Christianity of the crusades and conquerors, to the tender Christianity of Francis of Assisi; or from the external and visible ecclesiology of Trent, to the interior Church of the Mystical Body of Christ.

Examined theologically, the doctrinal essence of Christianity has also passed through profound and even contradictory transformations. Items that at one time were considered as not only belonging to the Christian identity, but integrating its very essence, and whose denial made a Christian susceptible of being expelled from communion (or even excommunicated), at another time pass over to a secondary plane of importance, or what is even more striking, they were actually excluded from the Christian identity.

We can ask diachronically: is there “a Christian identity” down through history? It is clear that there is not. It is obvious that the problem is not solved by the affirmation of the historical socio-juridical continuity of the religious institution. It is usually said that the Catholic Church, for example, is “the oldest institution” in Occident. But we ought not confuse the social and legal identity of the institution with the theological, religious, ethical-practical, doctrinal identity of the religion that is expressed by her. Within the same juridical institution we find religions that are really very different and that have been sheltered by her over the course of history.

Synchronically at any given moment in history, we can say the same: there is no one and the same Christianity existing at a determined point in history. Rather, there are many Cristianities³, with very different readings or identities of Christianity. Elsewhere I have suggested that basically we can distinguish four:⁴

- a doctrinal theoretic reading,
- a practical moral reading,

3 FIERRO, Alfredo, *Teoría de los cristianismos*, Verbo Divino, Estella 1982.

4 I've made a detailed description of these “readings” on: *Is there a Change of Paradigm in Liberation Theology?*, «East Asian Pastoral Review» 42(november 2005)336-352, Manila.

- an ontological ritual reading,
- an historical Utopian reading.

These are different “Christianities” that cohabit - right here and today - beneath the sociological or legal umbrella of the same institution. Is it the same Christianity of that person for whom being a Christian is fundamentally paying contemplative attention to the divine guest of the soul, ‘My Beloved Three,’ as the Christianity of that person for whom being a Christian signifies ‘to live and struggle for the cause of Jesus’? Do those people live the same Christian identity who focus their Christian life on sacramental worship and the avoidance of sin by the scrupulous practice of ecclesiastical morals, as that of those people who live their Christianity with a socio-political commitment to the liberation of the poor? Is God the same for a Saint Simon Stylites, or a President George W. Bush, as for a Bishop Pedro Casaldaliga? Can we speak of “one and the same Christian identity” as being common to all that we here have called “readings” but that could also be called “Christian Identities”? If we would wish to establish “THE Christian identity”, on just what would we base it? Perhaps on an essential group of dogmas? How about on some minimal ethical imperatives? Maybe on a set of traditions? Could it perhaps be a sense of belonging to and the acceptance by an hierarchical community? Synchronically speaking, it is not possible to speak of a real and unique Christian identity, even though ‘the institution’ officially declares that there exists only one “Christian identity”.

Besides these different synchronous “readings” of Christianity as factors of variation in a Christian identity, we have to consider their intersection with **different paradigms** that deal specifically with TRP. As we know, these are synthesized in these three: exclusivity, inclusion and pluralism⁵. Specifically, Catholic Christianity has passed nineteen and a half centuries (the 97.5% of its history) in exclusion, until the Second Vatican Council which officially accepted the transition to inclusion which had already been in preparation during the years immediately previous.

As we have maintained elsewhere, in final analysis inclusion and exclusion really have much in common. Although inclusion no longer considers that outside of it there is no salvation, nevertheless it still hangs on to the vision that outside of it there is no autonomous salvation but only a salvation “shared” with it. Inclusion, in a certain way keeps on being exclusive since it holds that even though my religion is not the only one, it certainly is the best, the foundation or source of the others, and the one that includes them all: it is a religion that is so inclusive that it assumes exclusive priority for itself.

⁵ Regarding this and other classifications, see the seventh chapter of my book *Theology of Religious Pluralism*, Lit Verlag, Zürich - Münster, 2008, p. 69 ss.

Despite a certain congener between exclusive and inclusive it is well to recall the crisis caused by the break with exclusivity in the Catholic Church on the occasion of the Second Vatican Council. There was a strong rejection by conservative and fundamentalist sectors, that accused the Council of changing her Christian identity and with breaking away from essential tradition. The missionaries, professionally obliged to refer constantly to the Christian identity, objected: "Does a missionary imbued with an exclusive paradigm preach the same "Christian identity" as a missionary imbued with an inclusive paradigm"? Besides the ordinary legal and institutional coverage, the Council of Constance in 1452 affirmed that all non-Christians were destined for hell-fire. And now the Second Vatican Council optimistically recognizes the presence of salvation beyond the borders of the Church. Do they both really reflect the same religion, the same Christian identity? As we say, they both legally form part of the same Church, but as for their human and religious content, the "religions" shaped up by them are very different.

Therefore there is a great difference between a Christianity that is inclusive and one that is pluralistic. Do they both respond to the same Christian identity? If, during the current theological transition, the great Christian majority were to pass from inclusion to pluralism, would it maintain its present Christian identity, or would it have changed substantially? Are those correct who say that Christianity cannot be pluralistic (that between Christianity and pluralism there exists an essential incompatibility), and that the pluralists are not Christians (that pluralism is outside the Christian identity)? Might it be that "pluralist Christianity" is really and simply just "post-Christianity"?

2. Religious identity is dynamic

We have already partially expressed our vision when saying that the same identity did not exist throughout history. This obviously is because the identity changes, moves, varies, evolves.

Religious identities are dynamic, just as the human person is dynamic, just as it is spiritual and open. The human person knows fidelity and other values held in respect as unquestionable, but at the same time it is also open to new experiences, new enrichment, also new religions. It enjoys coming to know something, to learn, compare, reflect and, inevitably, it changes, matures, and grows. It is just as impossible to hang gates on open fields as it is to place limits to human spiritual experience.

When religions meet or establish contacts, inevitably there are filtrations, influence, borrowing and lending, giving and receiving, assimilation, osmosis just as well as mixtures, adaptations and syncretism. This has been our daily bread all down through history. In the current world of today, for the first time religions are being forced to live together in

a planet-conscious society, where unavoidable mutual influence, and “cross-fertilization” have become simply inevitable, and even recommendable⁶. Pure identities stand to loose, and a “colored Christianity,” so beautifully expressed by Leonardo Boff, appears as the universal Christian future in the long term.

If religious identities are dynamic and change so much, how can we escape the conviction that this dynamism will continue functioning today, in a way even more rapid and profound than in the past? The world today is unified, global and fully self conscious as a result of the revolution in communications and has been turned into an effervescent laboratory with on-going and intense permanent dialogue, mutual influences, and new and unforeseen fertilizations. Religious identities are expected to continue evolving. In fact, we are already conscious of some conspicuous phenotypic mutual inter-relations, such as the huge influence in Occident⁷ of Eastern spiritual trends or currents.

In this context, we must posit the questions: What will happen to religious identities faced with an experience that is new in its intensity, depth and extension such as is religious pluralism? Will identities escape feeling tensions? Or as might be logically expected, are they going to be deeply tensioned and strongly influenced?

3. Official determination of a religious identity occurs by an act of will.

Among the conflicts of religious identity to which we refer, we wish to give special attention to actions of institutions (by their officials) against groups or individuals (especially theologians) who are evolving their religious identity as a result of religious pluralism. Institutions define the official identity of their religion and Christians who accept a pluralist paradigm tend to collide with it. These conflicts already exist, and are simply heirs to conflicts that have been occurring historically for similar reasons.

These battles don't take place in the air, nor on a “virtual plane,” much less in some ethereal heaven. They are not struggles between pure essences or religious identities. Besides reflecting the presence of superior and autonomous religious values, they tend to manifest the power struggle between groups of people for economic, social or cultural reasons. Obviously, the reasons put forward - revelation, Scriptures, theologies, canon law, traditions, cultural identities - have the appearance of

6 «Only by cross-fertilization and mutual fecundation may the present state of affaires be overcome; only by stepping over present cultural and philosophical boundaries can Christian life again become creative and dynamic»: R. PANIKKAR, quoted by P. KNITTER, *No Other Name?*, Orbis, Maryknoll 2000, 223.

7 Recall the case of the Jesuit Indian (and “Hindu”?) Anthony de Melo and the overwhelming success of his publications.

being objective, and frequently even divine, but even if they were such, they would always be susceptible to being fitted into different interpretive ensembles. Theory, culture and religion are always extremely susceptible to intellectual elaboration, reinterpretation, and / or misconstruction.

When referring to conflicts of religious institutions, we must realize that the definition of official religious identity coming into debate assumes that it has already been determined by an act of will. An official religious identity is the fruit of an official decision. And as such, it is the result of speculation not only theological, but also practical, into which come into play interests of all kinds plus random factors such as the “correlation of forces,” the concrete people involved and so on.

At any historical moment, the official religious identity does not drop from heaven, but is determined in official offices according to contingencies as just reviewed above with many possibilities both human and divine, and largely with randomized interests, people and circumstances.

The Council of Nice would not have been what it was, had it not been for Constantine’s imperial interests and the correlation of forces in the decadent Roman Empire at that time⁸. The excommunication of Luther (the decision to freeze the Catholic identity excluding his claims) would not have taken place except for the proliferation of a corrupt clergy in a decadent church. If the correlation of forces had been favorable, the condemnation of the Gnostic Christianity of the early centuries,- a movement amply extended and of great promise - would never have occurred, and for centuries or millennia the Christian identity would have been influenced by theoretical and mystical components of which it has been deprived⁹. The change of Christian identity by the Second Vatican Council was due to the intuitive genius of a John XXIII, who was able to interpret the correct moment and seize the opportunity for a profound, necessary and overdue change in the Catholic Church. The posterior involution following Vatican II, has been produced because of the “untimely death” of Albino Luciani and the election, to a great extent fortuitous, of Karol Wojtyła in the Conclave of 1978. The traditional conservative Christian identity which dominates the Catholic Church today would be markedly different, if those historical actors, who have managed to assume power in recent years, had been other persons or the same persons but with different intentions and interests.

Applying all this to our theme, forces us to ask ourselves: Is the TRP experience going to run into conflicts regarding the Christian identity that has been determined by institutional officialdom in our particu-

8 VIGIL, J.M., *Theology of religious pluralism*, p. 158ss.

9 PAGELS, Elaine, *Los evangelios gnósticos*, Crítica, Barcelona 1982.

lar actual situation (with these social and ecclesiastical actors, with their interests and their fears)? We must approach this not as a problem of immutable, necessary essences but as the outcome of political decisions taken by ecclesiastic institutions, decisions to a great deal contingent and fortuitous.

Official Christian identity is a human creation, an act of will, an institutional decision. If ecclesiastical officialdom does not understand the transformation and the challenge that religious pluralism and its theology represent then conflict is inevitable. But it is important to have a clear vision regarding the “epistemological foundation” and at the same time regarding the “political character” of this “official Christian identity.” TRP would not be up against the resistance that it is encountering if at the highest levels of decision making there were other people with minds that were open and less biased.

ACT

The specific problems of the Christian identity when faced with religious pluralism. The Second Vatican Council has significantly renewed Christianity in these years, but even so, it is clear that a large percentage of Christian baggage both doctrinal and classic-theological has not been modified for centuries. Doctrines and theological visions of the Councils, plus century and even millennia old traditions, are still in place forming part of the Christian treasure chest and playing an important role in what so many theologians have chosen to term the “essence of Christianity,” or as we here prefer to call it “Christian identity”.

Faced with this, today’s TRP really implies a strong questioning of Christianity’s “self portrait”¹⁰, its “Christian identity”. There are Many elements of Christian identity that TRP calls into question and proposes that they be reconsidered or simply reformulated. In final analysis with so much questioning and revision, we begin to ask ourselves: are we still in the same Christianity as before TRP? Do we maintain the Christian identity in the TRP, or have we breached its borders? But first it is necessary to draw up a list of those challenges that TRP presents to traditional elements of a Christian identity¹¹.

• From a negative to a positive vision of pluralism

A radical and complete transformation has taken place regarding this topic. Pluralism as religious plurality, had been considered in

10 Significantly, Torres Queiruga titles his book: ‘Dialogue of Religions and Christian self-understanding ‘ Diálogo de las religiones y autocomprensión cristiana (Sal Terrae 2005) maintaining that the experience of religions pluralism, inevitably has implications for their self-understanding.

11 I have dealt extensively with these challenges in an article published on the webpage of CETRA, Centre d’étude des traditions religieuses: <http://www.cetra.net/ca/2006/02/70/desafios-de-la-teologia-del-pluralismo-religioso>

Christianity as something negative, impossible to be good, something that could never be desired by God. By a series of optical effects, we had come to think that Truth was one and that there could be only one path intended by God for all humanity. A plurality of religions was recognized as existing but as an unfortunate aberration, a deviation from the plan of God which could never be desired by the divinity. In fact, the Bible focuses upon human sin as the source of the dispersion of languages and cultures (and religions) in the legend of Babel.

This negative religious pluralism, in fact but not by right, was something evil that had to be remedied and fought against. Traditional Christianity fights against religious pluralism trying to bring it down and redirect it to the desired final conversion of all human beings to the only true religion and so to form “one flock and one shepherd.”

TRP proposed here implies a radical change: pluralism is not evil, but actually beneficial. Besides it is desired by God and forms part of his plan. It comes to be like a religious bio-diversity intended to reflect the infinite richness of God. In this view TRP is perceived as sacred, a plurality that must be preserved and helped to grow.

These two positions are essentially different and even opposed. Do they put in danger the permanence of the Christian identity? Are they compatible with the same Christian identity? Is this affirmation regarding TRP officially accepted and within the limits of what one may think and live legitimately within the Christian identity?

- **From an external almost magical revelation, to Revelations in peoples.**

Revelation has classically been considered as the essential foundation upon which the Christian edifice was constructed. Coming directly from God, from outside of humanity, almost divine in its literality, entirely supernatural, it consecrated its fundamental principles in an untouchable way, with a divine¹² authority. And it was also a unique revelation: it was “THE” revelation that in fact was destined to be transmitted by us to all peoples.

The experience of plurality of religions and our knowledge of them today makes unfeasible the classical distinction between revealed and natural religions: all religions are revealed, and no longer can we speak

12 As supreme teacher of the full and final revelation and as the basis of the Church until the end of time, traditional theology recognizes in the apostles the special privilege, to have received by infused light an explicit knowledge of divine revelation greater than all theologians or the entire Church has or will have up to the consummation of the world.

Therefore, all dogmas already defined by the Church and as many in the future might be defined were in the minds of the apostles, not in any mediate, virtual or implicit way but in a manner immediate, formal and explicit. Their way of knowing the revealed deposit was not, as in us, through partial and human concepts, which contained implicitly

of “THE” Revelation but “the Revelations.” Also we understand much better the processes of gestation of that Revelation, which are not external and unrelated to history, but processes of maturation of the religious experience of peoples, in which are strongly involved human, social and cultural components of each of them. Revelation is considered in a much more human way, one that does not allow us to make sacred our own perceptions, attributing them to God and then becoming subject to them because of the sacred character we ourselves have bestowed upon them.

TRP accepts this much more humane vision of ‘revelation’, by which one of the most central mechanisms for the functioning of religions is fundamentally transformed. In TRP we come to have a different relation with the Word of God, one that binds us to and charges us with a different mission. TRP claims that it is no longer we who have exclusive access to ‘THE’ revelation, but rather we share our experience of God with the experiences of other peoples and obviously this implies that our attitude can not remain the same. Is it possible that different modes of understanding can fit within the same Christian identity?

- **From “a chosen people” to recognition that there are no chosen ones.**

For nearly two millennia, Christianity has considered itself as the ‘New Israel’ and heir to the promise, the new “chosen people.” That has garnered it a world-wide self-esteem. Historically, however, the Christian West has been the principle source of revolutions, expansionism, invasions, conquests, colonizing and neo-colonialization¹³. It is easier to live without a guilty conscience in situations of domination and oppression of others when one belongs to a people that, in final analysis, has been chosen by God to save others, to civilize them, bring them progress, and above all else to “evangelize them.”

But with religious pluralism, with knowledge of other religions we discover that awareness of being ‘the chosen people’ is a phenomenological trait common to religions. All peoples believe themselves chosen by

and virtually much more meaning than they expressed and demand time and effort to unravel or explain what they contain. It was by divine or infused light, which is simply a supernatural intelligence, to update and enlighten just like that all that was implicit or virtual. F. MARIN-SOLA, *La evolución homogénea del dogma católico. (The homogeneous evolution of Catholic dogma)* Madrid-Valencia ²1963, 157-158.

13 For Toynbee, all religions have fallen into these sins, but the greatest offenders have been Judaism, Islam and Christianity. “Of these three, according to Toynbee, Christianity has the highest record for intolerance and arrogance. His words are harsh: “We should try to purge Christianity of the traditional belief that it is unique. “ Toynbee acknowledged that the exclusive mentality is congenital to Christianity, inherited from its relative Judaism, and that it has become intrinsic to Christian belief. He was convinced that exclusivity does not belong to the Christian essence since it could be discarded without affecting the essence of the Gospel “: Paul F. KNITTER, *No Other Name?*, p. 41.

God and endowed with a position of priority in relation to other races and religions.

TRP, moved by its on-going investigation, reflection and maturation, has come to the conclusion for the need to 'renounce the category of election'¹⁴. There are no 'chosen ones'. It is impossible that God would choose one people and postpone or abandon the others. TRP is looking for an ontological and epistemological re-conversion for religions: for them to stop assuming and believing themselves to be 'the chosen people', and begin to recognize that such a vision has been a "mirage", a spontaneous religious-cultural mechanism from which they must come off and recognize that it was simply "a way of speaking". So now we have the question: Is the religious identity changed for those who had believed to be the chosen people of God, but now they no longer hold this? Haven't we always considered being "the" people of God, the "chosen people" to be an essential element of our faith? Is one still a Christian who like pluralistic theology does not hold this?

• A re- encounter with the historical Jesus

With this we come up against the most sensitive point, the one quickest to call down excommunications and condemnations (for denial of Christian identity) against whomsoever oversteps the officially established boundaries. It is good to keep in mind, as has been said way back in history, that the four great so called ecumenical councils somehow have come to replace the four Gospels. The Gospels would pass through centuries in the shadows, far away from the hands of the Christian people while the Christological visions of these councils were immortalized in the creed and the catechism, more or less the forefront of Christian life. Theologically speaking, the central dogma of Christianity would come to be the Christological dogma. Who does not accept it literally would not be recognized as Christian. In this field Christian identity was strictly previously mapped out.

The three major Christological themes that pluralistic theology posits as being in need of reconsideration are: inclusive Christ-centricity, the incarnation and the meaning of the title Son of God. Here we are unable to offer an exposition that would even slightly do justice to this problem, so we simply invite the reader to go deeper into it.¹⁵

In short, pluralistic theology calls for a review of the Christological constructions worked up by these councils: the historical conditions of

14 TORRES QUEIRUGA, in *Vaticano III. Cómo lo imaginan 17 cristianos y cristianas*, capítulo «El diálogo de las religiones en el mundo actual», Desclée, Bilbao 2001, p. 70ss.

15 See the articles by Marcelo BARRROS and José María VIGIL in VIGIL (org.), *Along the Many Paths of God*, Lit Verlag, Zürich - München, 2008.

their celebration, their peculiar history, the non-ecclesial interests and influences that were rampant all through them, the epistemological conditions, criticisms and hermeneutics The Council Fathers ran up against all of these which conditioned the quality of their premises and validity of their, conclusions based on them. Briefly, TRP is calling for a critical reconsideration to remove any taint of absolutism from their texts. These have been considered as untouchable and un-interpretable for more than fifteen hundred years, to the extent that some consider them such a part of the bulwark of fundamental Christianity as to fall outside the scope of modern methods of interpretation and epistemology.

Keep in mind that frequently Christ-centrism is the object of a ‘confessional language’ which is open to all kinds of exaggeration. The famous words of Dostoevsky have frequently been misused as a model: “If somebody could prove to me that Christ is beyond truth and that truth is not in him, I prefer to remain with Christ rather than with the truth”.¹⁶ This exaggerated zeal of Christ-centric devotion occurs much more frequently than we imagine, even in the official ecclesiastical speeches of our days¹⁷. It seems that in this line, there is no limit, and that all exaggeration is not only permissible but “*nunquam satis*”. Gesché calls to our attention : “In our theology, as Congar often recalled, you can find a non-Christian Christ-centrism. Any Christianity that makes an absolute of itself (or of Christ) and his revelation, would be idolatry”¹⁸. TRP proposes a reconsideration of the exaggerated, absolute and indiscriminate character of certain propositions of Christology. But for those of a more conservative vision this already places this theology on dangerous terrain outside the Christian identity.

• Death and resurrection of the mission

Christianity is a religion with a universal vocation and pretension for expansion, and with a desire to convert everyone in order to finally realize the “one flock with one shepherd.” The missionary mandate is literally put right into the mouth of Jesus just as though he himself had founded a new religion and had confided to it the division of the world to be converted. Historically, the Christian missionary enterprise has accompanied conquerors and slave ships, colonizers and empire builders together with commercial domination. And all this has been carried out

16 *Correspondence* I, Paris 1961, 157, in a letter to the baronesa von Wizine.

17 Check out the last that we came across while writing these pages, in the Discourse of Benedict XVI on Feb. 10, 2006 at the Plenary Meeting of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Of John Paul II ‘s just recall his discourse for the International Day of Global Communications, May 12, 2002.

18 GESCHÉ, A., «O cristianismo e as outras religiões», in TEIXEIRA, *Diálogo de pássaros. Nos caminhos do diálogo inter-religioso*, Paulinas, São Paulo 1993, 56-57.

always with the conviction of bringing salvation to those without it or with a very limited chance for it.

Today pluralistic theology brackets out many of the assurances of the mission. First because «theology of religions» that is, TRP considers them differently. All religions are true and they are all valuable, they are all supernatural and in all of them is found the saving presence of God. Therefore, the missionary can no longer think of going to a place where there is a 'salvation vacuum'. Much less go to "save" a people; salvation is not in question much less does it depend upon him. Nor does he go to convert people. Why should they have to convert since they are already in the religion which God has placed in their path? The missionary with a pluralistic spirit is not out to convert to Christianity good Buddhists or good Shintoists or good Muslims, What he ought to strive for is to make them better Buddhists, better Shintoists, better Muslims. Conversion is no longer the goal, but continues to exist as a possibility, and obviously not only in the direction towards Christianity, but also in the opposite direction.

Mission is no longer to conquer nor proselytize, but rather to share: to give but also to receive; to announce as also to receive the announcement of others; to bring the good news just as to receive the Good News from others; to fulfill others just as much as to permit others to fulfill us. No longer is it a mission to extend and implant the Church, but rather to enrich the Church by sharing and receiving the religious richness of peoples. But is this pluralist vision of the mission still a Christian mission or has it lost its traditional missionary identity?

So up to here we have reviewed a few of the important highlights where the TRP is producing a challenge and making big waves rocking the boat in essential points of the Christian identity. The friction is obvious, and for quite a long time has come up against official positions of many churches. We cite here as an example from the rousing reaction among the Protestant Churches against the publication of the Christological proposal by John Hick¹⁹, and the threats of censures even excommunication in the case of Tissa Balasuriya-against theologians such as Dupuis and Haight who have attempted exploring the possibility of remaining Christians within the pluralist paradigm. It is now years since Cardinal Ratzinger, as prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, declared that the new enemy of the Christian faith was theological pluralism²⁰. The Declaration *Dominus Iesus*, by the same Cardinal Ratzinger did nothing but declare open war on the TRP. Despite the relative or apparent calm during the first year of the reign of Benedict XVI,

19 HICK, J., *The Myth of God Incarnate*, Westminster Press, Philadelphia 1977.

20 The so-called pluralist theology of religions had developed progressively since the 50s,

technically the open war continues²¹, and TRP is threatened to be considered “outside the Christian identity”.

It makes no sense to argue about names...

To discuss identities (“this is or is not Christian”) comes down to being the same as arguing about “names”, grade marks or labels that we would like to stick on to opinions or attitudes that are what they are in themselves regardless of what we choose to say about them. We have already mentioned that entities are dynamic, they move and evolve. We have also stated that official decisions about what is or is not Christian, what can be called Christian and what, after a certain point, can no longer be called Christian -- all these things depend on free decisions that are willful, political, contingent, non essential and that right now ‘are so’ but could have been otherwise. This is what the classic adage still reminds us: *de nominibus non est quaestio*. There is nothing to discuss about an official decision: it is simply sufficient to study the correlation of forces, the persons involved, the interests that came into play etc.

It is impossible to “hang fixed gates in an open field”. Those who follow their urge to search and feel driven by the power and dynamism of life, will come to experience thousands of transformations in their identity, growing with their experience and enriching themselves in their very own Christian identity. Beyond labels and discussions they come to find life and plural reality.

Pointing towards a new crisis of paradigm shift

I usually maintain that it has been the lot of my generation to witness and live through four major paradigms in our Christian life:

- a) the paradigm of Christianity or neo Christianity, which we come to know already as children before the Vatican II. This was in fact the traditional model of medieval Post Tridentine Christianity of most Catholics;
- b) the renewing paradigm by Vatican II embraces many dimensions of renovation: it was the encounter with modernity, with the values of the human persona, its religious freedom, history, reason, criticism. This was the first “paradigm shift” in which we were privileged to take part;

but only now has become the center of the Christian conscience. Somehow or the other, this advance has come to occupy today-with regard to the strength of its problematic and its presence in various cultural fields - the place formerly occupied by Liberation Theology in the previous decade. Besides, it joins up with it and in many ways and tries to give it a new and modern look . J. Ratzinger, Report on the current situation of faith and theology. in: CELAM, *Fe y teología en América Latina*, Celam, series «Documentos Celam» n° 148, Bogotá 1997, p. 17

21 VIGIL, J.M., *El actual debate de la teología del pluralismo religioso. Después de la Dominus Iesus*, Libros Digitales Koinonía, available at: <http://servicioskoinonia.org/LibroDigitales>

c) the freeing paradigm of Liberation Theology and its spirituality, that introduced into Christianity a new dimension, a political gospel-dimension with the option for the poor, an historical and eschatological dimension. This came to mean a re-conversion to a Council Christianity -- a new birth;

d) the pluralist paradigm, that has implied overcoming the inclusive model officially accepted by the churches during the 1960 years, and whose effects, challenges and conflicts are still going on.

These four paradigm shifts have meant truly deep changes, sometimes (or in some sectors at least) they have brought about serious crisis, because of the profound transformation of 'Christian self-understanding' (or reformulation of Christian identity) that they have implied. The crisis and conflicts of Christian identity accompanying the fourth paradigm are precisely the central theme of this study.

And so, as we said, although we are just at the beginning of the crises that the pluralist paradigm involves, our present history is moving along so swiftly that we can already bear witness to a new paradigm and a new crisis looming on the horizon. I am making reference to the crisis of religion itself, of "religions", which will move the question of Christian identity to a new and deeper level converting it into the very question of religious identity. The question is no longer just 'what is the Christian identity' but now rather 'just what is religion.'

We can not enter here into a thorough presentation of the subject. Instead we refer the reader to an interdisciplinary group that since 2004, holds its sessions in Barcelona publishing the results of their Encuentros²². We also recommend the works of María Corbi²³, which serve as a starting point or working hypothesis of a cultural anthropological character. We can summarize their approach in the following:

Different new phenomena, such as increased knowledge of history and prehistory, archeology and paleontology, lay out with clarity before our eyes the origins of contemporary concrete forms of religiosity of the so-called 'great world religions.' They have not been "always" -- they really just arrived "since yesterday." The oldest, Hinduism, does not exceed 4,500 years. But humanity has existed for much more time on earth, and today, for the first time we are coming to know sufficient about those first stages of development of humanity to realize that we can clearly distin-

22 FIRST MEETING OF CAN BORDOI (August 2004), "Obstacles to spirituality in the twenty-first century European societies," CETR Centre d'Estudi de Religions Tradicionals I, Barcelona 2005. SECOND MEETING OF CAN BORDOI, June 28 - July 2, 2005, "What religious traditions can offer to XXI century," CETR, Barcelona 2005.

23 See: *Religión sin religión*, PPC, Madrid 1996. See also the site of CETR: www.cetr.net

guish between the religious or spiritual dimension of the human being itself, and the specific “religions,” which appeared during the agrarian era, when man abandoned earlier forms of socialization into tribes and hordes or other similar groups, and then began to build the first cities, the first City-States and early Empires, first in Mesopotamia and shortly afterwards in Egypt some seven thousand years ago. “Religions” come from that era, and today we know a lot about their gestation and social role with which they were formed to enter the scene. But, the religiosity of human beings is much older. Humans have always been religious, but only in the past millennia religiosity has taken on the form of “religions.” During 40,000 years, in the Paleolithic age, man lived a very different kind of religion, before the appearance of ‘religions.’ This means that we are forced to accept this distinction: what is in crisis is not religion or spirituality, but the concrete form that religiosity has assumed in the recent past millennia, which we have been referring to as “religions.”

On the other hand we have the current transformation of society. Now we come to the society of knowledge which coincides with the disappearance of the last redoubts of the agricultural society, as is happening in Europe, where we have the great crisis of “religion.” Apparently this would be the end of religions. But is it the ‘end of religions’, or just the end of religiosity? We respond: the current situation does not respond to a perversion of today’s society, nor just to the lack of adjustment of religious institutions to modern times, but to the disappearance of the ‘agrarian society,’ which was the matrix in which current “religions” were conceived and which was its necessary human substrate. Without an agrarian society, “religions” are going to enter into a process of disappearance. What will continue to exist will be religiosity and spirituality, but very probably in profoundly transformed configurations.

Applying this to our thesis, we no longer need wonder about Christian identity when confronted with the experience of religious pluralism. Faced with the crisis of religion, now it will be necessary to posit a more basic question, one about religious identity itself. In final analysis just what is religion, religiosity and spirituality? Much of what we have normally taken for granted will have to be re-thought..

If the Christian identity has felt and still feels challenged by the experience of religious pluralism, it is logical that it will feel still more challenged by the experience of the end of religions, if only to discover the need to make a personal quantum leap, and then perhaps to take on a “post religious Christian identity.” But that would be the subject of another study.

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Translated into English by Justiniano LIEBL

Asian Theology of Religious Pluralism

Edmund Kee-Fook CHIA

Several months ago an article appeared in a well-known newspaper of my country, Malaysia, which lambasted the theology of religious pluralism.¹ The Malaysian author took to task the propositions put forth by pluralist theologians, which he says John Hick represents, suggesting that they undermine the very existence of religions. He charged that the theology of religious pluralism negates and denigrates the absolute truth claims of the various religions as it relativizes them, thus challenging and questioning their uniqueness. He attributes this to the West's fear of truth derived from religions and surmised that the theology of religious pluralism is a consequence of western secular liberalism.

In my response to the article² I pointed out that it is not so much the absolute truth claims that pluralist theologians are fearful about but how they can be misused and abused. Used within the context of their own faith community truth claims serve to enhance religious life by nurturing the faith experience of the believers. This is much like love claims within a family. Couples and family members need to proclaim their love in an exclusive fashion to one another and they ought to be doing that frequently too. These absolutist love claims serve to nurture the family relationships. But when such love-claims or truth-claims are used to pass judgments on others then they have become weapons of derision and division and serve only to condemn. It is in this way that absolute truth claims become problematic, especially when used as "the truth" by which all other religions are measured.

1 Dr. Musa MOHD NORDIN, «Pluralism 'disguised enmity' of religions,» Malaysiakini (11 octobre, 2005), www.malaysiakini.com.

2 Edmund CHIA, «Religious Pluralism: My daddy's cool», Malaysiakini (21 octobre, 2005), www.malaysiakini.com.

Unfortunately this is a characteristic not totally alien to adherents of religion but more especially (though not limited to) those who adhere to monotheistic religions. There seems to be a logic followed which suggests that the belief in one God leads to the belief in one truth and this leads to the conclusion that there can only be one true religion. Since the believer believes, in all honesty and sincerity, that it is his or her own religion which is that final, definitive, unsurpassable and absolute religion, other religions are perceived as at best lesser versions of this absolute religion or at worse false or even demonic. To support such exclusivistic attitudes the Christian has recourse to Biblical verses such as “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations” (Mt. 28: 18-19), or “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (Jn 14:6), or “There is no salvation through anyone else, nor is there any other name under heaven given by the human race by which we are to be saved” (Acts 4:12).

When such convictions are paired with power (social, political, economic, etc.) the result is a dangerous mix which oftentimes become lethal. History is replete with more than enough examples of cases of violence perpetrated in the name of religious truth. Religiously minded people not only are willing to die for their religion but also to kill for it. This is not at all surprising since if I believe God to be on my side then I see it not only as my right but also my duty to convince, persuade, entice, coerce or even force you and everyone else to accept my religion. Or, I may see it as God’s will or command that I subtly or actively persecute you and everyone who does not share in my religion so that all may give up their heathen ways and be brought into the bosom of God’s love in order to attain eternal salvation (as interpreted by me and according to my own religious tradition, of course).

This is what pluralist theologians are concerned about. Religions have too often been used to endorse and justify the violence perpetrated against the religious “other.” These theologians seek, therefore, to “relativize” not so much God or Truth or the Ultimate Reality but only the claims to God, Truth or Ultimate Reality. It is not God whom they fight against, but claims which mortal human beings are making to having a monopoly over God or interpretations of Truth. Theirs is not so much to deconstruct truth claims for deconstruction sake but to preach against the “myth of religious superiority,”³ for the myth has already contributed way too much to the interreligious conflict and violence that is so pervasive around the world.

3 This is the title of a newly released book, featuring pluralist theologians of six religious traditions, of whom the more prominent are John Hick and Paul Knitter. See Paul Knitter, ed., *The Myth of Religious Superiority* (NY: Orbis, 2005).

This paper takes as starting point this myth of religious superiority. It explores the issue of religious pluralism, with reference especially to its antecedents and development in the post-Vatican II Church. The implications of a theology of pluralism and how it has worked out within the context of Asia, as articulated through the statements of the Asian bishops, will be spelt out. Special attention will be paid to how the other religions and revelations feature in God's divine economy of salvation. Finally, the paper will point to the difficulties and challenges such a theology is posing and will end with a note of hope for the Asian Theology of Religious Pluralism.

Religious Pluralism: A Western Concept?

Before proceeding further it is important that we first address the fact that religious pluralism has often been perceived as a Western concoction. Without doubting that Western scholars such as John Hick, Paul Knitter, Leonard Swidler, and Wilfred Cantwell Smith have indeed made significant contribution to the theology which goes by its name, I am not sure if we can attribute the phenomenon of religious pluralism to the West. It is kind of like saying that Jean-Paul Sartre was the inventor of nothingness just because he authored a book on the subject. Or, worse still is the suggestion that Asians are aping the West when they begin to talk about nothingness. Surely Buddhists throughout Asia have a much more cogent notion of the concept than does Sartre.⁴

The same can be said of religious pluralism. Asians are beginning to talk about it not because it is a Western agenda but because it resonates with their personal and lived experience. The context of religious pluralism, to be sure, is something which many of us in Asia have grown up in and are very much used to. It has become so much a part of us that we can even say it is already a constituent element of the Asian psyche. Just consider the religious landscape of India and China, two countries which together make up the greater part of Asia, both geographically and in population terms. For millennia the many religions have not only been allowed to coexist peacefully but the people have also been generally free to embrace and practice many of them all at once. There was not the need for any one religion to dominate or to regard itself as superior to the others. They each have roles and serve specific functions, much the same way the different languages and dialects serve different ethnic or national communities. Each religion has its own truth and faith claims, some of which are exclusive and absolutist, much the same way

4 See Felix Wilfred, "Towards a Better Understanding of Asian Theology: Some Basic Issues," *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection* No. 62 (December 1998): 890-915, at 904.

people in general perceive their own language as the best there is in the world. What underlies this is that the various religions, different as they are, all serve to enhance humankind and relationships and are aimed at promoting a better quality of life. They also complement one another in their independent efforts towards facilitating cosmic peace and integral harmony.

In short, the experience of religious pluralism is an existential reality for Asians, most of whom live in societies characterized by multiculturalism and multireligiosity. Religious pluralism, therefore, is by no means a Western concept. Addressing it explicitly, whether in the West or in the East, is an attempt to move societies from being merely multicultural and multireligious to becoming societies which are truly intercultural and interreligious.⁵ Where the former is satisfied with peaceful coexistence the latter strives towards enabling the different communities to be in active and wholesome interaction and relationship, not so much despite the differences across religious traditions but because there is much that each religion can learn from one another precisely because of these differences.

Having said that, I can also understand why some Asians seem to sense that the notion of religious pluralism is a Western import. While it is true that the experience of religious pluralism is very much ingrained within the Asian psyche it is also true that this has never been explicitly brought into conscious awareness until very recently. This stems from the reality that experiences deemed natural and ordinary often escape the consciousness of people, much like a fish never knowing what water is. It is no surprise then that religious pluralism has never really featured in the discourse amongst Asians. And, if they did not talk about it, nobody would, since religious pluralism has never been a reality within the experience of peoples living in continents outside of Asia.

To be sure, it is only in the last half-century that the theme of religious pluralism is being addressed by theologians and scholars of religion, particularly those residing in the West. This has partly to do with the fact that the West was predominantly or almost exclusively Christian until that time. And since global hegemonic power has resided in the West for a long time now, if an issue does not feature in the agenda

5 I am using the terms multicultural and multireligious here not in the same way Orlando Espin uses them. I refer to them the way Espin refers to the fact of cultural (or religious) diversity. In any case, Espin argues that it is impossible for people to assume more than one culture at any one time. Whereas Asian theologians take a different stance and speak not only of the possibility of multiculturalism and multireligiosity but also interculturalism and interreligiousity. See Orlando Espin, "The Multicultural Church? Theological Reflections from Below," in William Cenkner, ed., *The Multicultural church* (New York: Paulist Press, 1996), 54-71, at 62.

established by Western scholars then that absence has a way of being mainstreamed, thus contributing to the silence on the issue. But, with the advent of the global economy and communication, trans-continental travel and exchanges, and the influx of immigrants from the East to the West, Westerners are for the first time experiencing first-hand what Asians have been living with for centuries, i.e., the fact of religious pluralism. Thus, for the first time religious pluralism has become an issue and in many cases also a problem.

Such novel encounters can be life-changing and have certainly opened the eyes of many in the West, not only to the fact that Christianity is but one of many religions but also to the conviction that adherents of religions other than Christianity may indeed be attaining salvation (or whatever they regard as the religious end-point) not so much despite their religions but precisely in and through them. John Hick is a classic example of how these encounters have opened up new horizons and provided new meaning for theological reflection. For it was when he moved to Birmingham, a center of immigration during the 1960s, that Hick, for the first time, encountered persons of other religions in great numbers. These encounters were to “convert” him permanently from an evangelically oriented conservative Christian to become one of the most liberal scholars today advocating a radically pluralistic approach to the theology of religions.⁶

Christianity in Asia

As far as Christianity in Asia is concerned it was also only within the last fifty or sixty years that the issue of religious pluralism began appearing on its radar screen in a big way. This is because the 500-year history of Christianity in Asia was actually not so much a history of Asian Christianity but that of Western Christianity as played out on Asian soil. The issues of concern to Christians in Asia therefore were that of their mother-Church in Europe. To be sure, it held on to so much of the characteristics of its mother-Churches that local churches in Asia were like little English, Dutch, French, Portuguese, or Spanish churches. One could even say that churches in Asia were “colonies” of European churches. It comes as no surprise then that Asians in general looked upon Christianity as a foreign religion. In my own national Malay language Christianity is often described as the agama orang putih (literally: white man’s religion). This sentiment remains even until today since in most countries the vestiges of European Christianity lingers on. Note that this section is entitled “Christianity in Asia” and not “Asian Christianity” for Christianity hitherto could not yet be described by the adjective “Asian.”

6 See John Hick, “A Personal Note,” in *Disputed Questions in Theology and Philosophy of Religion* (New Haven: Yale University, 1993), 139-145.

Furthermore, it doesn't help that Christianity was actually spread to Asia in concert with the colonial expansionist program.⁷ It is therefore inevitable that the Church is associated with the imperial powers who, in the eyes of Asians, came primarily for the conquest of their lands. The Cross of Christ came alongside the swords and guns as well as the looting barrels in what the Sri Lankan theologian Aloysius Pieris calls the "unholy alliance of the missionary, the military and the merchant."⁸ Just as the imperialists' aim was the plunder of the resources of Asia, Christianity was also viewed as coming to plunder the souls of the peoples of Asia. The late Indian theologian Stanley Samartha illustrates this situation appropriately by drawing an analogy to the arrival of a helicopter in Asia.⁹ When descending upon Asia -- from above, of course -- the helicopter blew away all that was on the ground to pave the way for the European Church to land.

It didn't matter what the other religions stood for; they were to be wiped out. There was no way Christianity would tolerate these heathen and pagan religions, let alone respect or be nourished by them. Christianity had to be transplanted onto Asia, where it was expected to take roots and bear the same fruits as it did across the European continent. There was only one fate for the adherents of other religions in Asia; they were to be converted. In such an era Christian missionaries "often adopted the attitude that non-Christian religions were simply the work of Satan and the missionaries' task was to convert from error to knowledge of the truth."¹⁰ This was basically the theology of other religions that Asian Christians were brought up to believe for most of the 500-year history of Christianity in Asia.

Things began to change, however, about fifty or sixty years ago. The year 1945 is often regarded as the watershed for this transition. With the end of the Second World War and the Pacific War in Asia and with the subsequent dismantling of colonialism the indigenous peoples of former colonies began to rise up not only against political oppression but also in search of their own indigenous identities. In the words of Samartha:

7 Except for some regions, for example, the Syriac or St. Thomas Christians of the Malabar coast in Kerala, India, who trace their origins back to St. Thomas, the Korean church which was basically imported by local Koreans from China, and other younger Churches, for example, the Church in Mongolia, which was established only in the last few decades, most of the other Churches across Asia were established in the European colonial era. See Georg Evers, *The Churches in Asia* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2005).

8 Aloysius PIERIS, «Asia's Non-Semitic Religions and the Mission of Local Churches,» in *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, Claretians, Quezon City 1988, 50.

9 Stanley SAMARTHA, *One Christ - Many Religions: Toward a Revised Christology*, Orbis, Maryknoll 1991, 115. See also Georg EVERS, op cit., xix-xxii.

10 This quote is a footnote (No. 11) to an article from Vatican II's Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra Aetate*. See Walter Abbott, ed., *The Documents of Vatican II* (New Jersey: New Century, 1966), 662.

Deep down, it is a struggle for identity, a quest for spiritual resources in the fight against injustice. The rejection of religious pluralism, the refusal to recognize that neighbors of other faiths in the world live by their own cherished beliefs and values, is a more serious form of injustice than the merely economic.¹¹

Thus began what was to become a search not only for indigenous identities but also for the resources which help give shape to these identities. The Asian religious traditions factor significantly among these resources. It is no coincidence that the expulsion of Christian missionaries alongside the imperial governors in many countries in Asia was followed by a revival in the Asian religions. This happened all across Asia, thus bringing the religions to the consciousness of the global communities. It was then that peoples in the West began to take notice of Buddhism in Sri Lanka or Thailand, Hinduism in India or Nepal, and Islam in Bangladesh or Indonesia. In some instances this resurgence swung the pendulum to the other extreme (as a form of catharsis against the many years of suppression during the colonial era), resulting in the more extremist forms of these religious traditions coming to the fore. This continues until today and it will be several decades more before the catharsis simmers.

Advent of Asian Christianity

This movement of revivalism or resurgence in the religions did not go unnoticed by the local Christians in Asia. Influenced by the mood and spirit of the times, they, too, began the quest for their own identities, one which could be at once truly Christian as well as truly Asian. Among the more significant issues in this quest was Christianity's relation with other religions. This was by no means an abstract theological issue to be discussed but one which had dire and concrete consequences on the lives of Asian Christians. This is because most Christians in Asia have roots in these other religions or continue to have family members, for example, spouses, parents, and children, who continue to adhere to them. While in the past they were informed by a theology which speculated that all their loved ones were destined to hell unless they were baptized, the quest for a truly Asian Christianity opened up new horizons for a theology which was not only more respectful of the other religions but also enabled them to be perceived in a more positive light.

The one event which provided the greatest impetus to the development of Asian Christianity, like everything else in the Catholic Church, was no doubt the Second Vatican Council. It was so revolutionary that Church historian John O'Malley had this to say about it: "never before in

11 Stanley SAMARTHA, *op cit.*, 2.

the history of Catholicism have so many and such sudden changes been legislated and implemented which immediately touched the lives of the faithful, and never before had such a radical adjustment of viewpoint been required of them.”¹² One of the more succinct ways to summarize these changes and the vision of the Council is by reference to the encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*, issued by Pope Paul VI in 1964. In *Ecclesiam Suam*¹³ (its English title is “Paths of the Church”), Paul VI delineates ways in which the Church must carry out its mission in the contemporary world. The pope spells this out in all its aspects but they can all be captured by one word, namely, “dialogue.” By dialogue, Paul VI refers to the four categories or levels of dialogue which the Church should be engaged in: dialogue with the world and cultures, dialogue with other religions, dialogue with other Christians, and dialogue within the Church.¹⁴

This spirit of dialogue saw its first major expression in Latin America through the Church’s dialogue with the socio-political realities of its context, especially the cruel realities of authoritarian regimes and oppression, resulting in the suffering and poverty which the common people were subjected to. Vatican II’s document *Gaudium et Spes* provided the necessary starting point for the theological reflection: “The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ” (GS, 1). The concrete outcome of this dialogue is what has come to be known as Liberation Theology. We are all aware of the tremendous contributions made by Liberation Theology in the decades following Vatican II, including the challenges it posed to the Church’s Center, as made manifest in the silencing of key theologians and the issuance of the 1984 document *Libertatis Nuntius*: “Instruction on Certain Aspects of the Theology of Liberation.”¹⁵

This same spirit of dialogue took on another form in Asia and at a later phase. Its concerns, like Latin America, was with the reality of injustice and massive poverty, but unlike Latin America, was also with

12 John O’MALLEY, *Tradition and Transition: Historical Perspectives on Vatican II*, Michael Glazier, Delaware 1989, 17.

13 PABLO VI, *On the Ways in which the Church must Carry out its Mission in the Contemporary World*, (Vatican City, 6 August 1964), www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_06081964_ecclesiam_en.html.

14 See Edmund CHIA, ed., *Dialogue? Resource Manual for Catholics in Asia*, FABC-OEIA, Bangkok 2001, xiv.

15 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction on Certain Aspects of the Theology of Liberation*, Vatican City, 6 August, 1984), www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19840806_theology-liberation_en.html.

the fact of the many religions present in the Asian context. The dialogue on this latter concern resulted in what is today known as the Theology of Religious Pluralism. Asian theologians are quick to point out that they have generally been inspired by the theological methodology espoused by their colleagues in Latin America.¹⁶ The Theology of Religious Pluralism takes as starting point *Nostra Aetate*, the “Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions.” Though a very short document issued in 1965, with merely five articles, it has significantly transformed the manner in which the Church relates with people of other religions. In particular, the following article was revolutionary, at least by the ecclesia standards of the 1960s:

The Catholic Church rejects nothing which is true and holy in these religions. She looks with sincere respect upon those ways of conduct and of life, those rules and teachings which, though differing in many particulars from what she holds and sets forth, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men (NA, 2).

Theology of Religious Pluralism

While it was Vatican II which officially “canonized” the exploration of the Church’s relation with other religions, it was really the Asian Church and Asian theologians who were responsible for giving shape to the theology arising from it. The 1980s, in particular, saw this being developed more incisively. A brief but good overview can be gleaned from the words of Jacques Dupuis in his ground-breaking book on the topic, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* :

“Going beyond the problematic of people’s salvation in and through their religious traditions, the new perspective seeks to penetrate more deeply into God’s plan for humankind. It asks about the significance of the plurality of religious traditions in that plan -- and consequently in the unfolding of the history of God’s dealings with humankind which we call the history of salvation.”¹⁷

Thus began in a more systematic manner what has come to be known as the Theology of Religious Pluralism. This theology is different in that it no longer asks about the possibility of salvation for persons of other religions; it presumes that. Instead, “it seeks more deeply, in the light of Christian faith, for the meaning in God’s design for humankind

16 See Jacob Kavunkal, “The Impact of Medellin and Puebla on Asian Theology,” *SEDOS* (February 2000), [www.sedos.org]; and also Michael Amaladoss, “An Emerging Indian Theology: Some Exploratory Reflections,” *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection* Vol. LVIII, No. 8 (August 1994): 473-84, at 475.

17 Jacques DUPUIS, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, Orbis, Maryknoll 1997, 13.

of the plurality of living faiths and religious traditions with which we are surrounded. Are all the religious traditions of the world destined, in God's plan, to converge? Where, when, and how?" In other words, religious pluralism is considered not so much "as a matter of course and a fact of history (pluralism de facto) but as having a *raison d'être* in its own right (pluralism de jure)."¹⁸

While it was individual Asian theologians who made the most contribution to the development of the Theology of Religious Pluralism, the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) also played a significant role. In particular, at the very first FABC Plenary Assembly in 1974, in discussing the theme of "Evangelization in Modern Day Asia," the bishops defined the task of evangelization in Asia as follows:

In Asia especially this involves a dialogue with the great religious traditions of our peoples. In this dialogue we accept them as significant and positive elements in the economy of God's design of salvation. In them we recognize and respect profound spiritual and ethical meanings and values. Over many centuries they have been the treasury of the religious experience of our ancestors, from which our contemporaries do not cease to draw light and strength. They have been (and continue to be) the authentic expression of the noblest longings of their hearts, and the home of their contemplation and prayer. They have helped to give shape to the histories and cultures of our nations (FABC I, art. 14).¹⁹

The Bishops then revealed their own position on this by asking, albeit rhetorically, "How then can we not give them reverence and honor? And how can we not acknowledge that God has drawn our peoples to Himself through them?" (FABC I, art. 15).²⁰ This 1974 Statement, together with the many subsequent statements of the FABC, provided the necessary endorsement by the magisterium of the Church in Asia to Asian theologians as they went about their reflections on the Theology of Religious Pluralism.

Other Religions/Revelations and God's Salvation

It has to be pointed out from the outset that the FABC in general makes little mention of the theme of salvation when discussing the Church's relations with other religions. More specifically, they do not compare these other religions with the Church nor pass any form of nega-

18 Ibid., 10-11.

19 First Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, FABC I (Taipei, 1974), «Evangelization in Modern Day Asia,» in *For All the People of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, Documents from 1970 to 1991*, vol. 1, ed. Gaudencio ROSALES and C. G. AREVALO, Claretian, Quezon City 1997, 14.

20 Ibid.

tive judgment upon them. At most, the FABC affirms the Christian faith in Jesus as the way, the truth and the life (cf. FABC I, art. 7).²¹ This is done without in any way suggesting that other religions or their “savior-figures” are less true or less perfect. Instead, the FABC is explicit in testifying that other religions are indeed “significant and positive elements in the economy of God’s design of salvation” (FABC I, art. 14).

Further elaboration on this can be found in a study commissioned by the FABC and executed by its Theological Advisory Commission (TAC).²² In its publication *Theses on Interreligious Dialogue* (TAC-Dialogue), the FABC theological study-team suggests that it is on account of the Asian bishops’ own personal experience with persons of other religions that they have a “positive appreciation of [the role of other religions] in the divine economy of salvation” (TAC-Dialogue, art. 2.2). This experience, in turn, relies upon the theological conviction that “God’s plan of salvation for humanity is one and reaches out to all peoples” (TAC-Dialogue, art. 2.3).²³ It is therefore inherent upon Christians to discern how God’s saving activity is in operation and made manifest in the other religions. Interreligious dialogue is the mode of this Christian duty. Quoting Pope John Paul II, the Theological Advisory Commission affirms that “by dialogue, we let God be present in our midst; for as we open ourselves in dialogue to one another, we also open ourselves to God” (TAC-Dialogue, art. 1.4).²⁴ Interreligious dialogue, therefore, is “a demand of the Church of its very life as mission” (TAC-Dialogue, art. 2.5).

As an integral dimension of the evangelizing mission of the Church, interreligious dialogue is aimed at the building of God’s Kingdom. Christians believe the Church is the sacrament of this Kingdom, “visibilizing it, ordained to it, promoting it, but not equating itself with

21 FABC I, in *For All the Peoples of Asia*, vol. 1, 13.

22 A word about the Theological Advisory Commission (TAC), which later changed its name to Office of Theological Concerns (OTC), is in order. Constituted in the year 1986, the topic of interreligious dialogue was the first which the TAC attended to, the results of which were published in 1987. The significance of the TAC is that it is composed of a team of theologians officially appointed by each of the Episcopal Conferences, with some bishop-theologians heading it. Most of the studies undertaken are worked at and debated upon over an extended period and are by no means the result of rushed efforts. The teachings or statements of the TAC/OTC are thus very representative of the theological views of the FABC.

23 Theological Advisory Commission of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences, “Theses on Interreligious Dialogue: An Essay in Pastoral Theological Reflection,” in FABC Papers No. 48 (Hong Kong: FABC, 1987), 7. Also re-published in John Gnanapiragasam and Felix Wilfred, ed., *Being Church in Asia: Theological Advisory Commission* (Quezon City: Claretian, 1994), 7-32.

24 *Ibid.*, 5.

it” (TAC-Dialogue, 6.3).²⁵ The Kingdom is certainly wider than the institutional Church. Nevertheless, the building up of the Church is still necessary as it is at the service of the Kingdom. By extension, the building up of the other religions is also as necessary. It can be surmised from here that FABC accepts the phenomenon of religious pluralism as not only de facto but also very much de jure. The plurality of religion is not only tolerated but accepted as part of God’s design of salvation of human beings: “The great religions of Asia with their respective creeds, cults and codes reveal to us diverse ways of responding to God whose Spirit is active in all peoples and cultures” (BIRA IV/7, art. 12).²⁶

This does not in any way imply that the FABC tends towards relativism. To be sure, the issue was specifically addressed at another study-session of its Office of Theological Concerns, the results of which were published in 2000. In the document entitled *Methodology: Asian Christian Theology – Doing Theology in Asia Today (OTC-Methodology)*,²⁷ the FABC-OTC points out that “any discussion of pluralism must reckon with the question of how we understand pluralism in theology in relation to the threat of relativism” (OTC-Methodology, art. 1.1).²⁸ While emphatically rejecting theological positions which claim that all religions are the same or of equal value, the Asian bishops also assert that “just because certain persons and groups are misled in their search for truth, and just because they tend to relativize all reality, we cannot conclude that all pluralism leads to relativism” (Ibid.). The document then quotes from the Eleventh Bishops’ Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue which argues that “diversity is not something to be regretted and abolished, but to be rejoiced over and promoted, since it represents richness and strength. Harmony is not simply the absence of strife, described as ‘live and let live’. The test of true harmony lies in the acceptance of diversity as richness” (BIRA IV/11, art. 15).²⁹ It is this quest for true harmony which continues to inspire the Asian bishops, as well as Asian theologians and all Christians in Asia, to be determined in their efforts to promote the praxis of interreligious dialogue and the concomitant Theology of Religious Pluralism.

25 Ibid.

26 Seventh Bishops’ Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue, BIRA IV/7 (Tagaytay City 1988), in *For All the Peoples of Asia*, vol. 1, 310.

27 Office of Theological Concerns of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences, «Methodology: Asian Christian Theology (Doing Theology in Asia Today),» in *For All the Peoples of Asia, Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences, Document from 1997 to 2001*, vol. 3, ed. Franz Eilers, Claretian, Quezon City 2002, 329-419.

28 Ibid, 333.

29 Eleventh Bishops’ Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue (Sukabumi, 1988), in *For All the Peoples of Asia*, vol. 1, 321

Challenges Encountered by Asian Theology

That the Asian Theology of Religious Pluralism has already made in-roads into the global theological community is beyond doubt and is in fact something quite evident. Like Liberation Theology, not only has its contribution been significant, it has also encountered (or is still encountering) the challenges posed by the Church's Center. My repeated association of Liberation Theology with the Theology of Religious Pluralism is not without reason. Both are prophetic movements from the peripheries of the Church calling into question not only issues of theological method but also ways of being Church. On these scores, they are seen as constituting a great "problem" to the guardians at the Center.

To illustrate this, it suffices to look at an address by the then Cardinal Ratzinger to the presidents of the Doctrinal Commission of CELAM held in Mexico in May 1996.³⁰ Ratzinger begins his speech by saying that "in the '80s, the theology of liberation in its radical forms seemed to be the most urgent challenge for the faith of the church." He then went on to assert that the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe "turned out to be a kind of twilight of the gods for that theology of redeeming political praxis." He then continued his remarks, as if shifting the focus from Latin America to the Asian continent, and said: "relativism has thus become the central problem for the faith at the present time." Elaborating further, Ratzinger said: "the so-called pluralist theology of religion has been developing progressively since the '50s. Nonetheless, only now has it come to the center of the Christian conscience." He continues: "On the one hand, relativism is a typical offshoot of the Western world and its forms of philosophical thought,... on the other it is connected with the philosophical and religious institutions of Asia especially, and surprisingly, with those of the Indian subcontinent."

Actually, hints of the Center's interest in the Theology of Religious Pluralism was already there prior to this 1996 speech. Among the first came in a statement made by Cardinal Josef Tomko, the then Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. In a 1991 address to his fellow cardinals Tomko hinted that interreligious dialogue seemed to be leading towards "doctrinal confusion" and that "although India is the epicenter to this tendency and Asia is its principal camp... these ideas already circulate in Oceania, in some African countries and in Europe."³¹

30 Cardinal Joseph RATZINGER, «Relativism: The Central Problem for Faith Today», Address delivered during the meeting of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith with the presidents of the Doctrinal Commissions of the Bishops' Conferences of Latin America, Guadalajara, México, May 1996, www.ewtn.com/library.

31 Josef TOMKO, «Proclaiming Christ the World's Only Savior», *L'Osservatore Romano* (5 abril 1991)4.

The focus on India as the “epicenter” was subsequently repeated by other curial officials. Cardinal Ratzinger himself, in an address to the presidents of the FABC member-conferences and episcopal chairpersons of doctrinal commissions, also explicitly mentions India: “The problem which arises in India, but also elsewhere, comes to expression in [Raimon] Panikkar’s famous phrase: ‘Jesus is Christ, but Christ is not (only) Jesus’.”³²

But perhaps the clearest challenge posed to the Asian Theology of Religious Pluralism came in the form of the Vatican Declaration *Dominus Iesus*, issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in the year 2000.³³ It actually followed a series of censures upon Asian theologians for their works on religious pluralism. The cases of Tissa Balasuriya, Anthony de Mello and Jacques Dupuis come to mind, but also a number of other Asian theologians though their cases were not as publicized.³⁴ Of these cases, it was Dupuis’ which had the most direct bearing on *Dominus Iesus* and thus on the Asian Theology of Religious Pluralism.

A Belgian who went to India in 1948 to join the Jesuit scholasticate, Jacques Dupuis was to remain in India until 1984, during which time he taught theology in various universities and seminaries. In 1984 Dupuis returned to Europe where he was assigned to teach at the Gregorian University in Rome. It was there that he researched on and wrote the book *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, which saw its first publication in September 1997. Within months, in June 1998, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) initiated a process against the book.

What precisely were the CDF’s concerns about Dupuis’ works? In Dupuis’ own words, the first Notification specifically mentioned “serious errors against essential elements of Divine and Catholic faith” especially in the areas of “the doctrines on Incarnation, Trinity, Revelation.”³⁵ This

32 Cardinal Joseph RATZINGER, Christ, *Faith and the Challenge of Cultures*, (2-5 March 1993) Hong Kong, www.ewtn.com/library/curia/ratzhong.htm.

33 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Declaration Dominus Iesus: On the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vaticano 2000. Texto disponible también en: www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000806_dominus-iesus_en.html.

34 Ver Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Notification Concerning the Text ‘Mary and Human Liberation’ by Fr. Tissa Balasuriya, O.M.I.*, 27 December 1996, Vaticano, www.ewtn.com, www.cin.org/vatcong/tissabal.html; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Notification: Concerning the Writings of Father Anthony De Mello sj*, Vaticano, 24 June 1998), www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19980624_demello_en.html; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Notification on the book Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, Orbis, New York 1997, by Father Jacques Dupuis sj, Vaticano, 24 enero 2001, www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20010124_dupuis_en.html.

35 «Justice Denied, Delayed, Truth Exposed: The inside story of the unfair dealings with J. Dupuis, in a free-wheeling interview exclusively given to ICAN, Indian Currents Associate News (15 abril 2001)10-16, aquí: 11.

was later amended to “ambiguities and difficulties” concerning the “interpretation of the sole and universal salvific mediation of Christ, the unicity and completeness of Christ’s revelation, the universal salvific action of the Holy Spirit, the orientation of all people to the Church, and the value and significance of the salvific function of other religions.”³⁶ More importantly, Dupuis, who is identified very much as an Asian theologian, suspects that in his investigation the CDF’s concerns were much more general. He senses that it is the Asian theologians in general who are the primary concern and his investigation was but a message that they should “stop spreading such ideas that salvation is possible through other religions, or that the other religions can also be recipients of revelation, etc.”³⁷

Sign of Hope for Asian Theology

One of the most critical and at the same time hopeful response to *Dominus Iesus* came from Aloysius Pieris. One of Asia’s foremost thinkers, Pieris spoke on *Dominus Iesus* when presenting a talk at the Ecumenical Institute for Study and Dialogue in Colombo on 30 September 2000³⁸. Instead of discussing the Vatican Declaration, he chose to discuss the background to how the Church operates and why a document such as *Dominus Iesus* was promulgated. Specifically, Pieris looked at the Vatican Declaration in the context of the renewal of the Second Vatican Council and the concomitant “ecclesiastical politics” surrounding the Council which, he asserts, continues even until today.

Pieris begins by observing that the “dynamics of the movement and counter-movements” within the Church today has its roots in the Second Vatican Council. He then reminds that Vatican II was a “renewal” Council and not so much a “reform” Council. A reform, Pieris suggests, is a “controlled and graduated process of change that keeps the institutional set-up of the church intact.”³⁹ Reform is a “top-down” process, or change evoked from the “Center” moving out towards the “Periphery.” The Center issues decrees or procedures and the local churches, or Periphery, implements them. Change is smooth, predictable and well-managed in reform Councils. The First Vatican Council and the Council of Trent were reform Councils. Renewal, on the other hand, is a movement in the opposite direction. “It irrupts from below and works its way up to the top volcanically.” Renewals are initiated mainly by those at the peripheries “where

36 «Notification on Dupuis», preface.

37 Interview with Dupuis, op cit., 15.

38 Aloysius PIERIS, «The Roman Catholic Perception of Other Churches and Other Religions after the Vatican’s *Dominus Iesus*», *East Asian Pastoral Review* 38/3 (2001) 207-230, Manila.

39 *Ibid.*, 215.

fresh and new ideas flow in more freely than in the Center of the establishment.” Pieris elaborates:

Renewalist currents that begin to whirl in the margin of the church surge into centripetal waves that dash on the fortified ecclesiastical structures. The resistance at the Center is inevitable. Yet, there is a gradual transformation to which the Center has to yield.⁴⁰

It is in the context of this Center-Periphery conflict that Pieris suggests he was more or less expecting a document such as *Dominus Iesus*. The Vatican Declaration, according to his theory, is but the Center’s response to the various “irruptions” happening at the peripheries. Irruptions are by no means gentle, pleasant, or welcome. If anything, they are chaotic, abrasive and unsettling. Fear, worry and trembling amidst irruptions are anticipated and understandable responses. *Dominus Iesus* seems to reveal these latter responses, much the same way *Libertatis Nuntius* was a response to the irruption which went by the name of Liberation Theology in Latin America two decades earlier. *Dominus Iesus* betrays a sense that the authors are fearful of the irruption which goes by the name of religious pluralism. Where the irruptions are intense, the Center’s response is adamant, firm and unyielding. That *Dominus Iesus* used such strong language -- “to be firmly believed,” “definitive and complete,” “contrary to the Church’s faith,” “required to profess,” “full submission,” etc. -- seems to suggest that the irruptions from the Periphery must have been very strong.

One could even suggest that *Dominus Iesus* is but a verification of the irruptions coming from Asia, especially in its exploration of the Theology of Religious Pluralism. The Vatican Declaration is, therefore, an expression of the inevitable resistance to the renewal currents coming from Asia. This, of course, is nothing more than an articulation of the dialectics of change. The fresh and new ideas whirling in from Asia are evoking a proportionate reaction from the Roman Center. According to Pieris’ theory the process will continue for a while until such a time the Center is ready to yield. Viewed from this perspective, *Dominus Iesus* is a document which engenders hope: hope that the Vatican II renewal in the area of the Church’s relation with other religions is slowly but surely being effected through the Asian Theology of Religious Pluralism.⁴¹

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40 Ibid

41 See Edmund CHIA, «*Dominus Iesus and Asian Theologies*», *Horizons* 29 (Fall 2002) 278-289.

Some Asian Writings on Religious Pluralism

K.C. ABRAHAM

The relation between Christian faith and the major Asian religions continues to be a dominant theme of Asian theology. The world-views and doctrines of traditional religions exercise a profound influence in moulding the sensibilities of the people of Asia. They breath the air of religious pluralism. In the days of aggressive evangelisation and colonisation, the missionaries were not prepared to see any value in Asian views. Most of them considered the religions in Asia to be discontinuous with Christian faith.

A new awareness of the spiritual values embedded in them surfaced as a result of the objective study of these religions and a closer contact with the votaries of these faiths. Still basing their approach on a theological framework that drew a sharp distinction between Christ and religions, the missionary theologians began to interpret Christ as the fulfilment of the deepest yearnings in the religions of Asia. J.N. Farquhar's *The Crown of Hinduism* (1919) is perhaps the best-known expression of this view. During this period there were bold attempts on the part of Asian theologians to use concepts and doctrines of other faiths for the church's apologetic task. The Hindu concept of *Avatar* was used to interpret the Christian doctrine of incarnation, or that of *sat-chit-anand* (being, consciousness, bliss) for explaining the doctrine of the Trinity. In all these, the superiority of Christian faith was affirmed but with a sympathetic, even if somewhat condescending, view of other faiths.

A new stage was set when Asian theologians like D.T. Niles (1908-70) acknowledged the incognito presence of Christ in Asia's history and religions long before the missionaries came to Asia. A cogent interpretation of this view is provided by P.D. Devanandan (*The Gospel and Renascent Hinduism*, 1964). Writing on the same theme, M.M. Thomas affirmed a more recognisable presence of Christ in renascent Hinduism,

as the title of an influential book of his suggests, *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance* (1975).

In other parts of the region writers tried to integrate gospel and culture. Buddhist experience of nirvana and the reality of the kingdom of God were brought together by writers in Sri Lanka. Christ assumed a cultural face in China. Chinese Christ was the man who was also the Tao in the writings of Chang I-Ching (b.1871) and Chao Tzu-ch'en (1918-56). For Pandipeddi Chenchiah (1886-1959), and Indian theologian, Christ was the cosmic Christ, whose birth brought a new creative energy into the biosphere. An admirable work of this genre was Kazo Kitamori's *Theology of the Pain of God* (1946). Its main theme of pain *itami* was very familiar to people in Japan, who had suffered much during the war.

Theology at this time emerged from an active interaction between the gospel and the religious philosophies of Asia. Concepts, doctrines and symbols of other religions were used freely and critically by Asian churches to deepen their experiences of Christ and to interpret the Christian faith. With this there was a vigorous search for an Asian face of Christ, dismantling the foreignness of Christianity. Profound was their recognition that the Christ reality was greater than formal Christianity and that the Christ was present but unacknowledged in the religions and cultures of Asia.

In recent years, the theme "*people*" has assumed a special significance in the discussions of Asian theology. Korean theologians focused their attention on Minjung. Indian theologians reflect on the experience and struggle of dalits, and women do their theology based on their marginalisation. The irruption of people's histories and cultures into Asian consciousness has brought a critique of the elite-oriented theologies and philosophies of religion.

The Minjung and other sections of the marginalised (not all of whom are Christians) are the theological actors or subjects of theology in the measure in which they struggle against domination. The place of theology therefore is the human community striving for liberation and life, in which the Spirit is at work. The Minjung theology of Minjung and other marginal groups expresses itself in people's stories--- mostly unwritten, articulated in symbols, folk songs, poems, myths, dance and celebration.

The method of doing theology with people's symbols and images holds great promise. Indications are that if this project is pursued, there will emerge a distinct voice in theology that comes out of the deepest yearnings of the people of Asia. Choan-Seng Song of Taiwan has made important contributions in this area. (*Theology from the Womb of Asia*, 1986, is one among many volumes.) Mention must also be made of the work of Kosuke Koyama (*Mount Fuji and Mount Sinai*, 1984) and Masao Takenaka (*God is Rice*, 1986).

Recently a massive volume on Asian Christian Theologies is published listing key theologians and detailed bibliographies by John C. England, Jose Kuttianimattathil and others (Orbis, Mary Knoll, 2002). I cannot do anymore than selecting a few of them whose main interest is religious pluralism.

Hindu-Christian dialogue of Raimon Panikkar

Perhaps the most influential philosopher/theologian in the area of inter-faith dialogue is Raimon Panikkar. His father was a Hindu and his mother, a Spanish Roman Catholic. Having become conversant in Christianity and Hinduism, as well as Buddhism, Panikkar sees his own life as an intercultural-inter-religious pilgrimage. Since he refused to reject either of his Christian or Hindu identity he sees himself as a person with 'double identity' with 'double or multiple belonging': Of the experience he brings to the theological task he says: "... I 'left' as a Christian, I 'found' myself as a Hindu, and I 'return' as a Buddhist, without having ceased to be a Christian."¹

In seeking to explicate the Trinitarian understanding of the Christian faith Panikkar turns to both Hinduism and Buddhism. He views the first 'person' of the Trinity through the lenses of the *advaitan* Hindu doctrine of non-duality and the Buddhist teachings on *nirvana*. Like the *Brahman of the Upanishads*, the first 'person' of the Trinity denotes the dimension of God as the Ultimate Reality, the Absolute, unrelated to the world, and beyond all comprehension. This unconditioned dimension of God can be likened to the Buddhist notion of *nirvana*. In so doing, at variance with classical Christian theology, Panikkar moves away from seeing personal attributes in the first dimension of the Triune God. God, as the first person of the Trinity, is the beyond, the unknown, and the unknowable.

Both the Upanishads and Panikkar had to then deal with the question of God-World relationship. The Upanishads deal with this question by positing two aspects to Brahman: the first, Brahman in Itself, the *Nirguna Brahman*, beyond all names and forms, and the second, *Saguna Brahman*, the aspect of *Brahman* turned toward the world. *Saguna Brahman* is also called *Isvara*, the dimension of *Brahman* in which the whole universe exists, and to whom all humans relate.

Panikkar identifies Christ with *Isvara* of Hinduism. Christ is the creator, it is in him that all things exist and it is through him that humans relate to the Ultimate. It is in him that all things are gathered in; it is into

1 Raimon PANIKKAR, *The Interreligious Dialogue*, New York, Paulist Press, 1978, 2.

him that all things return. He alone is the 'personal' dimension within the Trinity. It is also in the context of the Hindu understanding of *Isvara* that Panikkar develops his concept of *cosmotheodism*, which implies that God, humankind, and the cosmos exist not as independent realities but as interpenetrating, mutually constituting whole. Thus by placing himself in the middle of the Christian, Hindu and Buddhist approaches to understand the mystery of the cosmos, Panikkar arrives at a Christian theology that is Hindu-Christian-Buddhist in its orientation.²

M.M. Thomas: Prophet of New Humanism

While Panikkar approaches Hindu-Christian dialogue and concerns of pluralism from a philosophical point of view, M.M. Thomas views religion through the prism of social reality. Along with his colleague P.D. Devanandan, an astute scholar in Hindu philosophy he founded the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society. It was responsible for responding to the challenges of neo-Hinduism, the emergence of which is significant in the political and social life of people in India.

Christian witness, holds Thomas, is primarily an effort to interpret the new self-understanding of human in the light of the gospel. But in modern India secular ideologies and renascent religions are the bearers of this new vision of humanism. Hence a Christian response to the new humanism in India cannot be conceived apart from a Christian encounter with these ideologies and secular movements. The bulk of Thomas's later writings is devoted to the problems related to this encounter.

Thomas considers the exuberance of secular and religious movements, which seek to transform traditional culture, to be an important development in modern India. In the final analysis the Christian message historically has been a basic determining element in the spiritual ferment which has produced these movements (e.g., the liberal humanism which has influenced Nehru's secularism has its roots in the Christian faith and the Gandhian non-violence is informed by Christian Agape), and they still require the Gospel for their spiritual fulfilment. Therefore, the Church's mission is to bring to bear upon them the insights of the Gospel and to assist them in the task of cultural change. This may mean challenging theological presuppositions (e.g., those of Gandhism) or endorsing a secular ideology (Nehru's open secularism). The criterion for making such a judgement is a concept of humanity that is derived from the Gospel.

According to Thomas, the elements of a new humanism are new awareness of self-hood, historical consciousness, community, and an orientation to the "beyond". An existence open to these dimensions is

2 This summary is given by Wesley Ariarajah in Exchange No.2, 2005

called sometimes “genuine humanism,” or “open humanism”. Some of these dimensions are conspicuously absent in the traditional culture and religions, at least in their doctrines. But today consequent to the impact of Western ideologies and movements which are, directly or indirectly, inspired by the Gospel, there is a search for a new humanism. In this context the main agenda of theological reflection is the relation between this concern for humanness and the Gospel. How does Thomas define this relation? But first we will see how he interprets new humanity in Christ, i.e., his Christology. Of course Thomas has not attempted a full-fledged treatise on Christology along the lines laid down by classical works on the subject. An essential task for him is to interpret the meaning of the person and work of Christ as a response to the revolution in modern religion and society.

Thomas describes Christ’s humanity as “cruciform humanity.” This is his interpretation of the Cross, the humanity that is exemplified in the suffering love of Christ. The message of the Cross when posited against man’s self-justification can release man for a new existence.

The cross of Jesus is also the answer to the human problem of justification of human existence. Responding in faith to the free Divine forgiveness and acceptance offered by the crucified, man is released from the necessity to seek security and justification by his own spirituality and moral or social idealism. But this release from anxiety from the search for means of self-justification is a release for self-giving love of God and neighbour, which the Cross itself reveals as the destiny of man.³

In his analysis of the secular ideologies he had repeatedly drawn our attention to this one danger that lurks in them : the self-righteousness. Therefore it is essential that in our Christian witness they should be confronted with “Jesus’ humanity for existence,” which is a “life of mutual self-giving love.”

Stanley Samartha: Pluralism around Theocentric Mystery

Stanley Samartha, who taught theology of religions for many years at the United Theological College, Bangalore, before moving to the World Council of Churches as the first director of its Sub-unit for Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies, has made a theological exploration into the phenomenon of pluralism. His influential book *One Christ - Many Religions: Towards a Revised Christology* (Orbis, 1991) used as a text book in many theological schools starts with an analysis of socio-political dimensions of plurality. Samartha rejects exclusivism which seeks to

3 *The Secular Ideologies of India and the Secular Meaning of Christ*, p 199.

conquer other faiths, inclusivism which co-opts other faiths without their permission, and a naïve pluralism that considers all religions as equally valid and which leads either to sterile coexistence or to an unworthy competition as unacceptable and fruitless. The best position, according to him, is to affirm God alone as absolute and consider all religions to be relative. This position asserts the distinctiveness of different religions and saviour figures and makes possible a mutually critical and enriching relationships between religions. Samartha makes a radical suggestion when he says that 'instead of raising Jesus to the status of God, a theocentric (or Mystery centred) Christology is to be advocated that emphasises the priority of God, affirms God's love for all and is sensitive to the workings of the Spirit everywhere. Such a Christology will hold Jesus as central to Christian faith and life and understand exclusive claims as expressions of commitment valid within the worshipping and believing community. Instead of claiming a normative and exclusive status for Jesus Christ, it would rather speak of his relational distinctiveness, where he is seen as related to people of other faiths and each religion as a distinctive response to the Mystery.

Liberation Paradigm: Aloysius Pieris and Michael Amaladoss

A distinct emphasis on liberation in the discussion on inter-faith dialogue and pluralism is noted among many theologians. We will select two of them.

Aloysius Pieris: Buddhist-Christian Mutual Baptism by Immersion

Aloysius is known in EATWOT circles for his most provocative observation at the Delhi Assembly (1981) about the character of the reality of other faiths. He said, irruption of the poor is the irruption of non-Christian world. An excellent summary of his main ideas is given by Wesley Ariarajah, another theologian from Sri Lanka who has written on this topic and who was for many years associated with the W.C.C.

Born and brought up in a Christian home, Pieris had a strong Christian formation in a country that was predominantly Buddhist. Having excelled in the study of both classical Roman Catholic theology and Buddhism, Pieris turned his attention to the actual reality or the context in which he had to live and minister as a Catholic priest. He was struck by the two prevalent realities that were so much a part of the life and experience of the masses of Asian people: Asia's abject poverty, and its deep religiosity. This meant that, for Pieris, any theology that does not take these two realities with the seriousness they deserve would not be of any use to the peoples of Asia. On this basis Pieris says that Christian theology and the church needs to have 'baptism by immersion' in Asian poverty and its religiosity. It is only through this 'double baptism' in the

‘Jordan of Asian religion and the Calvary of Asian poverty’ that the ‘church in Asia’ can become the ‘church of Asia’.

It would appear, writes Araiaraajah, that Pieris’ theology is based on four premises:

First, that the Semitic and Sian traditions have two approaches to Reality and on how to deal with the human predicament within it. While they may appear to be contradictory they are, in fact, two ‘instincts,’ ‘idioms,’ ‘movements,’ or ‘poles’ in dealing with Reality.

Second, that while the Christian tradition puts its emphasis on ‘redeeming love’ or agape, the Buddhist tradition places its accent on ‘liberating knowledge’ or gnosis. Both dimensions are necessary for a fuller understanding and experience of ‘liberation’ or ‘salvation.’

Third, that while the Christian accent on self-less love helps us struggle against the ‘enforced poverty’ of the Asian peoples, the Buddhist emphasis on renunciation or ‘voluntary poverty’ would help us from falling into the trap of Mammon – the temptation to greed and acquisitiveness, which is at the heart of our own enslavement and the enforced poverty of the masses.

Fourth, that Christianity and Buddhism need each other in order for us to fully understand the nature of the reality we are faced with and to find ways of dealing with it:

A genuine Christian experience of God-in-Christ grows by maintaining a *dialectical* tension between two poles – between action and non-action, between word and silence, between control of nature and harmony with nature, between self-affirmation and self-negation, between engagement and withdrawal, between love and knowledge, between *karma* and *prajna*, between agape and *gnosis*... We believe ... that the most creative encounter between the East and the West could come from monks whose calling it is to bring about within Western theology a fruitful interaction between Christian love and Buddhist *wisdom*.

Panikkar’s theology arises primarily from his own spiritual journey into Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism. Pieris also has made his own spiritual journeys into Buddhism and Christianity, but complements it with deep concern for the realities of the Buddhist-Christian society in which he is called to do theology. It would appear that the inter-cultural/inter-religious hermeneutic was thrust upon Pieris as he engaged himself with the social and religious realities of Asia in general and Sri Lanka in particular.

Michael Amaladoss

Amaladoss is a deep thinker and a prolific writer who delights in pushing ahead the frontiers of thought. He has written widely on questions regarding Indian theology, the dialogue between gospel and culture, inter-religious dialogue, mission, liberation, sacraments, spirituality and Christology. He sees theology as an integral, multi-dimensional wisdom, at once both personal and dialogical, contextual and critical, which is rooted in the experience of a God who is not “another” being but lives in a unique *advaita* (non-dual) relationship with the core of the human being. He integrates into his theological thinking the findings of the social sciences and makes the word of God interact with the history and context of the people. His concern for social justice and the realisation of the Kingdom of God in India has led him to a serious study of the caste system to explore ways of a truly Christian commitment to social transformation. An accomplished musician himself, he encourages the use of folk arts, street plays and other popular forms of expression in the service of God’s kingdom.

Interpreting Jesus Christ in the pluri-cultural, multi-religious and poverty-stricken socio-economic situation of India., he says that “In Jesus we experience God’s presence and action in the world in a new and unique way. But his presence is not... destructive of other presences of God through the Spirit in the movements of committed people who seek God and God’s liberation and fullness for themselves and for the world. He has not pre-empted history, but has entered into it. Having become human he has not abolished history, but rather become part of it, with all its pluralism and uncertainty.

There are numerous others who write on this theme. To mention a few by name: Nirmal Minz from Gossner Lutheran Theological College, Ranchi is concerned about developing a tribal theology; Albert Nambiamparampil is dedicated to the cause of inter-religious dialogue; A.M. Ayrookuzhiel (died 1996) was a dalit theologian looking at religious pluralism from that perspective; Francis Xavier D’sa SJ has made extensive analysis of religious experience; A.P. Nirmal (died 1995) contributed to the dalit theology and provided an interpretative clue for theology based on the lived experience of pain-pathos; and M.Thomas Thangaraj published an interesting study on *The Crucified Guru* (Nashville Abingdon Press 1994) and K.P. Aleaz has developed a theological methodology which is pluralist and inclusive and is open to insights from other faiths.

Concluding Reflections

It is an undeniable fact that the multi-religious situation enriches our life and its relationships. Therefore it is affirmed that 'the future lies not in shedding or suppressing the particularities of our diverse cultural/religious heritage, but in finding non-hegemonic ways to celebrate them'.⁴ Samartha writes, "To reject exclusivism and to accept plurality, to be committed to one's faith and to be open to the faith commitments of our neighbour's, to choose to live in a global community of communities, sharing the ambiguities of history and the mystery of life- these are the imperatives of our age".⁵ In other words, Religious Pluralism is not only a fact of life but a value to be cherished and nurtured. That is perhaps the fundamental challenge. And this value orientation comes as a critique of the present civilisation that is built on the emphasis on privatisation.

The capitalist value of privatising one's own space and property and zealously guarding it is at the root of modern development. Pluralism give an alternate vision. You receive the other in your private space. It is this public ness that is difficult for us to accept. In our religious consciousness we jealously guard our own God and religion in our private space. We do not want other gods and religions to intrude into our space. But pluralism comes as a demand of the other to come into our space. This requires a new orientation altogether.

Religious pluralism, however laudable and necessary, is also a problem. The horror of September 11 is still weighing down on us. Yes, conflict arising out of religious differences is a horror story. Demonic forces masquerading as religious loyalty is destroying the fabric of civil society in many countries. In India the clash between Hindus and Muslims centred on the construction of a worship place cost many lives. The terrorist attack of a prestigious institution, Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore has rudly shaken all of us. There are other troubled spots for e.g., Sri Lanka. Ethnic conflict is raging in many parts of Africa, and even Europe is not spared by such conflicts.

While we need to analyse the factors leading to these conflicts, one thing seems clear, religions are sometimes co-opted by forces that are non-religious – political, economic and even geopolitical forces. It is a mistake to link terrorism with a particular religion. In Ireland terrorists

4 James ATHIUS: *Towards an Ethics of Community*, p. 200. Canada Cooperation for Studies, Ontario, Canada.

5 SAMARTHA, *Globalisation and its Cultural Consequences in Ethical Issues in the Struggle for Justice*, eds, M.P. Joseph and Daniel D. CHETTI, Tiruvalla, CSS/BTTBPSA, 1988, p. 193.

are not Muslims, in Sri Lanka and in India we have Hindu and Buddhist terrorists. Terrorism is born out of discontent and frustration produced by extreme marginalisation and poverty. The increasing gap between the poor and the rich will continue to be the breeding ground for conflicts and religion will be co-opted by the forces that fight for their survival. No amount of arms and ammunitions will root out terrorism; global justice is the only path to reduce the conflicts.

Terrorism has opened our eyes to look afresh at the social and political dynamics of religious pluralism. My thesis is simple. Our discussion on religious pluralism centred on inter-faith dialogue and co-operation on a formal level does not take into consideration the “ground realities”. They tend to be abstract and theoretical. There is enormous literature on it. For example, we have developed some typologies: Inclusivism, Exclusivism and Pluralism. All these are helpful, especially if we consider religions as systems of beliefs and doctrines. Certainly doctrines and beliefs constitute an important part of religion. However, attitudes towards other religions do not neatly follow the typologies identified. There are many mixed types!. One can be an exclusivist and inclusivist at the same time. In fact both these attitudes are found within the same religion. For this reason these typologies have limited usefulness.

A comparative approach to the study of religions mostly based on their belief system does not address the realities of relationships between faith communities. Power that is embedded in relationships and specially in the relationships between religious communities is seldom reflected upon. Religious conflicts are not about doctrines and beliefs; they are triggered by social and economic factors. The control of resources, political power and the fear of losing one group’s hegemony – all these contribute a great deal to the conflicts. Theology, the language for articulating one’s faith experience should emerge from this live –in situations. We cannot move with a pre-fabricated scheme or a typology emerged from a detached study. In fact people especially those who live in Asia has a fund of knowledge that comes out of their experience of living together with people of other faiths. But when they reflect theologically they tend to resort to a language that has been arisen in another context. Without a measure of deconstruction they cannot evolve any thing that is relevant to their experience and significant for their struggle to build a just and peaceable future. It is sad that the churches in Asia are living on borrowed theology, which provides little or no basis for reflecting the interfaith concerns. Some of the attempts by theologians who wrote about inter-faith have made very little impact on the life of our congregations. We need to pose the question of interfaith not only as “theological” questions but

as questions relating to power, justice and community. It is in the area of human relationships some of the sharpest questions of theology and faith should be raised. I am not proposing a comprehensive framework for dealing with the phenomenon religious pluralism but I want to lift up at least three factors that help us in our deliberations.

a) Religion under the impact of Modernity

All religions come under the pressure of modernism or modernity. It consists of the impact of Western technology, and its value system and life-style. They are spread all over the world by the process of globalisation. The media projects a new culture. Often it is perceived as a threat to the traditional culture and religion. Three kinds of responses are discernible. One, revivalism or fundamentalism. It is argued that modernism/westernisation is destroying our culture, our identity and our religion. We need to preserve the pristine purity of the traditional faith by resorting even to military strength. The extreme form of this is evident in the Taliban regime. The movement has not died down. In fact, the nurturing-grounds are madarasas schools run by their religious teachers. They insulate their students from all forms of secular education of science and critical knowledge. Behind this is the suspicion that the western epistemology based on scientific and secular ideology is harmful. God is the sovereign source of knowledge and therefore secular education is contrary to faith.

Two, the secular option. Some of the intellectuals within these faiths, although a minority who are educated in the western liberal tradition adhere to a secular option, embrace almost uncritically the western/modern science and secular education. Secular option in the midst of multi-religious conflict seems to be an attractive option. In fact, modern politics and education, regardless of any situation is secular. The secular values are spread widely and to a large extent our life is secular. But any attempt to displace traditional culture by western/secular culture i.e., the rejection of religion by secular is not a realistic option. Shah of Iran and his experiment will be one example. The difficulty is, no people can forget their past. The emergence of consciousness of their cultural identity is one of the potent factors necessary for people's development.

A third option is the synthetic model or re-interpretation model. It is agreed that the traditional faith cannot remain frozen. Tradition is dynamic and it should be re-interpreted in terms of challenges of modernity. It is said, "Tradition is the living faith of the dead and traditionalism is the dead faith of the living." Gandhi is a good representative of this view. He maintained his identity as a Hindu but absorbed liberal ideas of the West and reinterpreted Hindu culture. He was also sensitive to the common elements in all religions. The story is told that during the

Hindu-Muslim clash a Hindu who had killed a Muslim couple out of fury approached him. He was repentant and asked Gandhi how to attain atonement. Gandhi told him to adopt a child of the parents whom he had killed and bring the child up in Muslim faith.

There is another stream of re-interpretation in the liberation tradition. According to it, the hermeneutical key is provided by the experience of the poor and the marginalised. In a multi-religious context this option will provide the necessary grounding and a direction that would integrate 'the mystical with the concrete prophetic concern'. In his response to Pankikar's proposal for a 'cosmic confidence' that sustains an inter-religious response and cooperation, Paul Knitter points out that 'it needs to be grounded and inspired by a preferential option for the suffering and the victims of this world'. He further elaborates this point,

But if our criterion for judging what is true or false, good or bad, is no longer "Is it in the Bible or the Upanishads or the Koran?" but rather "Does it remove human suffering and promote life?" – if this be our criterion, then we cannot apply it without listening to the poor and the victims. The oppressed, the marginalised, those who in the past "didn't count" must also have a voice in a soteriocentric dialogue; they must speak with and to the so-called experts. It is their voice and their experience – much more than exegetes, theologians, popes, or even mystics – that will tell us what in our religious beliefs and practices promotes human well-being and thus what is faithful to our scriptures.⁶

Three trends outlined earlier – fundamentalist, secular and reinterpretation/liberationist – are found in all religions in varying degree of intensity. They often exist in tension between each other. It is important to note these divergences of positions when we discuss inter-faith cooperation. The fundamentalist strand in every religion aggressively rejects any attempt to cooperate with different faiths. In fact they clash with each other, especially in situations where they are a majority. But during the past decades we have seen a broad alliance across different faiths by the second and third groups (i.e., secularists and reformers), which we have identified. All who are committed to inter-faith cooperation should commit themselves to strengthen the alliance between these groups across religions. They can also join hands with secular groups for common struggles on justice. Together they will set the stage for a new political culture and for a sustainable society. This alliance of progressive forces in religions will be a counter weight against the obscurantist tendencies.

6 Paul Knitter, "Cosmic Confidence or Preferential Option", in Bangalore Theological Forum, Vol.XXIII, No.4, December 1991, p.23.

b) Religion and Identity

For many people religion provides a source for their identity as people, especially when they face a crisis situation. After the holocaust it was important for Jewish people to realise in a heightened way their identity. For poor and marginalized groups in Asia, religion provides the rallying point for their struggle for human rights and justice. Religion and culture are the sustaining power of social and political movements. Some points need to be noted.

i) Identity is always defined over against the other. Muslim identity is asserted over against Christianity. People in Asia and Africa affirm their national identity over against western dominance. Their culture and religion have been suppressed by colonial rule in the past and the process of globalisation and economic domination in the present.

ii) Identity is perpetuated by primordial symbols and sentiments like land, language and historical memories. For the Palestinians the struggle for their land is so crucial that consider occupation as an assault of their spirit. The tribals in the Narmada valley are prepared to commit suicide when their forests are submerged in water. Religious symbols are powerful in sensitising them to the realities around them. New symbols of globalisation: T.V., KFC, McDonalds etc., are all considered an assault on the traditional symbols and therefore on traditional identity. The imposition of alien symbols hurt their pride – a wounded psyche is created

iii) There is an awakening of marginal identities in many parts of Asia – the tribals, dalits and others. They naturally clash with a revival of nationalist ideology that bears the stamp of religion. The pressure for maintaining a national identity and the necessity for suppressed identities to organise are two forces that influence the body politics. One should not be set against the other. Felix's observation

“The challenge posed by the identities is cushioned by attempting to integrate them within a national framework or common project. In the process, the weaker power position in which the identities find themselves finally result in their being effectively discriminated against. In sum, the ideology of bourgeois liberal nationalism followed by the post-colonial states proves to be quite detrimental to the cause of identities. Not very different is the cause of religious nationalism which tends to suppress the difficult identities through a hegemonic ideology.”⁷

In any situation of a healthy religious pluralism identities of different religions should be preserved. However, we need to reject all absolu-

7 Felix Wilfred.

tising claims in the name of identity, all ethno-centric programmes distort the web of human relationships. We envisage a pluriform community of communities. This comes as a challenge to the homogenising tendency to globalisation.

c) The Crisis of Institutionalised Religion and the Search for Spirituality

Organised religions have lost their authority over people but people seek a life beyond the religions – a spirituality that is non-religious. The picture is complex. In the East, in Asia and other non-European contexts we witness a revival of religions. But often they are being co-opted by fundamentalist and militant forces providing little hope for people in their strivings for a just world. There is a liberative strain often preserved and articulated by the poor and marginalized.

In the West there is conflict and rejection of organised religion. Life is organised by modernists, technological culture. But there is a crisis of modernism effectively articulated by post-modern critic. People are seeking meaning and community beyond the material affluence and consumerist ideology. The discussion on sexuality and ecology are indications of a search for spirituality that goes beyond the patterns of relationships legitimised by organised religion. Perhaps the meeting point between East & West should be spirituality relevant for our times. The focus of religious pluralism is not in constructing a grandiose new religion, but this emerging spiritual question. The spiritual core of the different faiths and the spiritualities of the poor and marginalized will participate in ushering a new world.

- a world in which persons matter over systems and traditions. (The Sabbath was made for humankind and not humankind for the Sabbath. Mk.2:27).

- a world of harmony and cooperation. (“The wolf and the lamb shall feed together” Isa. 65:25).

- a world where there is equality and justice (with righteousness he shall judge the poor; and decide with equity for the meek of the earth” Isa. 11:4).

- a world in which earth has not lost its sustaining power (“a land where you may eat bread without scarcity” Deut. 8:9).

Spirituality is Liberational

The existing vacuum in secularism and modernity should be filled with a new awareness of a spirituality that is dynamic, liberative and life affirming.

Power is the key element in the understanding of spirituality. The capitalist concept of power expressed in having, consuming and dominat-

ing is accepted without question by the modern society. The spirituality of all religious traditions envision a different view of power. Power in giving and sharing is celebrated by the Christian faith and Buddhist tradition. Jesus washed the disciple's feet, the symbol of an alternate model of power. Buddha taught that even the morsel in beggar's bowl should be shared. Sharing and not accumulation is the criterion for a liberated life. "Power which isn't shared – which in other words, isn't transformed into love is pure domination and oppression."⁸ Unfortunately the institutionalised religion has lost this emphasis and becomes a tool of the ruling classes. Aligning with the politics of vested interest, it has distorted its spiritual core. How can we recover this spiritual core?

The above three factors – the response of religions to modernism, their link with identity struggle, and spirituality as a way of moving beyond institutionalised religion – are important for evolving an adequate framework for understanding religious pluralism. They help us to forge an approach to religions transcending their narrow limits.

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8 Dorothee SÖLLE, *Choosing Life* (Elegir la vida), SCM Press, London 1981, p. 55.

Dialogue with Shintoism

Ismael GONZÁLEZ FUENTES

It is widely known that Japanese people are skilled at imitating anything, even improving a given model. Everything has been copied so as to reduce size, improve quality, facilitate use and/or occupy little space. Looking at politics, democracy was 'imposed' by winners, but it has been shaped by the Japanese. So-called 'Japanese Buddhism' is different from any other in the world: arranged, adapted and inculturated. "Made in Japan" is the motto for everything. In the Meiji era (1808-1912), emissaries were sent to Europe by the Japanese Government in order to study government systems, education, the religious world, and so forth. But, when they found so many divisions, so many groups, such different Bible interpretations, they returned disappointed and, in some ways, scandalized. They decided to continue with their three major traditional religions: Shintoism, Taoism and Buddhism. The only subject they felt unable to copy was religion.

When arriving in the East, every missionary feels strongly shaken in mind, eyes raised, full of perplexity and ready to review his or her traditional religious concepts and certainties. With such confusion comes a vital question: Could God leave these two-thirds of humanity in oblivion and neglect? No, impossible! And another question then arises: Where in God's plans is the place for these traditional Japanese religions? A little look into history is needed to help us.

Saint Francis Xavier came to Japan in 1540. For some time, he survived thanks to the charity of some bonzes who received him in their pagoda. He used to engage with them in long and heated theological

discussions. Xavier was a man of his time. He preached with ardent zeal in southern Japan during twenty-seven months. But, less than forty years later, the *shogun* banned Christianity, which became illegal in Japan in 1612. Doctrines, value systems and morality did not fit in with Japanese traditions. From 1635 to 1853, Japan turned its back on the outside world and reinforced its value system and philosophy of life through Shintoism and Buddhism.

In its Declaration, *Nostra Aetate*, on Church relations with other religions, the Second Vatican Council states: "...through dialogue and collaboration...should recognize, preserve and promote those spiritual and moral goods... respecting anything holy and true found in them." (n.2)

In 1969, Fr. Spae, a well known Belgian missionary in Japan, openly comments that "Japanese people are, not just in a natural order, but within the economy of salvation. Their religions are not anti-Christian but pre-Christian. God, who "wants all the Japanese to be saved" (cf 1 Tim 2,4), here operates through an inner call. Responding to this call by preaching the gospel is the mission of the Church". We adopt an inclusive attitude, without assessing too much.

In 1992, Fr. Kadovaki, s.j., already states, "If we want dialogue between Shintoism and Catholicism, both should give up conceptual-dogmatical thinking. They ought to examine what is specific in each religion and set out conditions for communicating with the Infinite. Dialogue like this allows us to see the face of the other and to discover a core of monotheism in Shintoism and certain roots of polytheism in Christianity. We can begin to imagine a new era of interreligious dialogue between both religions. In my opinion, very little has been done with Shinto in this vast field. There is more dialogue with Buddhism. To make dialogue with Shinto possible, we must first try to know it, even if only a little bit.

Shinto

In a pleasant talk with a kammushi (Shintoist priest), he told me at the beginning: "Talking about Shinto is something very difficult. Everything in Shinto is so confused and mixed up. We have no founders or Scriptures in the way you Christians have the Bible, or Muslims have the Koran. If you ask three Shintoists about the nucleus of our doctrine, you will get three different answers, as this is a religion of life, and so feelings and experiences are different for each person and in each place.

Is Shintoism a religion, or a kind of ethics, or a lifestyle typical of this people? "Possibly it is all of these and something else", says Fr. Spae. "Shinto is a collective name designating many creeds; it is a mixture of

attitudes, ideas and ways of doing things, which became a constituent part of the life of its people, of its character and of its identity. Everybody born in Japan is born Japanese and Shintoist. Seventy percent of Japanese people claim to be Shintoist”.

The beginnings are confused and vague. There is no homogeneity, nor uniformity in their practices. There are no fixed creeds, dogmas or organization. But, a pile of different traditions can be found. They were brought by the different ethnic groups constituting the Japanese race: Melanisiens, Tungusics and Southeastern Asians, as well as some contributions made by Manchuria and Korea in 3rd and 4th centuries. The Japanese managed to meld all this and the result is a religion “made in Japan:” Shinto. Until the 8th century, teachings were transmitted verbally by professional reciters and consequently differ from one region to another and changed as time passed.

When Buddhism arrived in Japan during the 6th century, with its organization and doctrine, Shinto stuck to it like ivy, adopting much of its doctrine, worship and morality. While keeping the essentials of its teaching, Buddhism was capable of giving up what was accidental and accepting to live with Shinto as a brother. They carried on together for many years.

However, in 8th century, in order to provide a religious backing for the imperial system, orders were given to put something in writing. As a result, *Kojiki* and *Nihonshoki* came into being. They relate important mythological cycles and recount how Japanese emperors descended from the sun goddess, *Amaterasu*. Later, she sent her grandson Niniji to “govern and rule Earth and Heaven for ever and ever.” Some years later, two other books were written. They describe the Shintoist rites, prayers and rules for celebrations. They do no more than to bring together in writing what people were already celebrating in daily life. Life precedes organization.

Shinto is largely an intra-worldly, utilitarian religion for farmers, fishermen and hunters, who seek prosperity in their work and security against adversities. Japan has always suffered natural calamities, like typhoons, several times every year. There are also frequent and more or less intense earthquakes, erupting volcanoes, landslides, floods, tsunamis and so on. All these were accepted as punishment and, therefore, it was important to be right with the gods, with *Kami*, and also with the ancestors and with nature. There was a need to be grateful and live in harmony.

Today, there are two kinds of Shinto: the State one and another of local temples or *jinjas*. State Shinto protects several temples, like Ise, from which it is believed that the emperor comes, or *Yasukuni*, where

national heroes are buried. Local temples, *jinjas*, are under the custody of district *kannushi*, which used to be hereditary. Japanese, especially in the countryside, belong to a *jinja*, which they support economically, in whose ceremonies and feasts they take part throughout the year and whose surroundings they take turns keeping clean.

Thanks to whom do we live?

Ikasarete ikiteiru: we live because we are brought to life, that is to say, we live because others give us life. Therefore, we live thanks to, in relation with and in dependence on others. This is a definition of Shinto given to me by a *kannushi* when asked about the essence of Shintoism.

Thanks to whom do we live?

a) Thanks to the Kami or gods. At this point, a quite complex mythology comes on stage. *Kami*, gods, are all the divinities in heaven, like sun, moon, lightning, rainbow, and on earth, such as oceans, mountains, trees, birds, etc., in a word, everything appearing as something extraordinary, outstanding, and inspiring fear or veneration. They (the divinities) can even be evil. Their number is as countless as their manifestations, though restricted to their area. This is why Shinto is polytheist, though moving to positions close to pantheism. And, besides, it is animist, covering all beings with life and spirits.

b) Thanks to the ancestors. If they have excelled through any talent in community life, they enter the pantheon of the gods. They don't live far from their successors; they protect, defend and guide them. These ancestors should be fed: every time the family takes food, they must place a bowl with food for the ancestors at the family altar, *kamidana*. It is believed that *Kami* return home on certain days of the year and so the house must be orderly and clean to receive them. Otherwise, they can get angry and inflict a punishment. If the family suffers a misfortune, they will straightaway wonder what the offense was committed against the ancestors and they will try to restore peace through some repair. For example, the might visit the tomb where their ashes are, bring flowers and other favorite things, like tobacco, sake, etc.

c) Thanks to nature. The whole of nature and all within it is sacred. Being led by nature is the fundamental law of Shintoist ethics. There are no absolute, immutable principles or will of any Superior Being. Everything is merely an experience in full docility to the incentives of nature. The final foundations of morality are authority and tradition in harmony with nature, rather than personal conscience. The individual is only of value, if attached to the way of thinking and acting of the group to which he or she belongs. A human being is nothing but a small piece in the immense universe. What matters is to live in harmony with all the

other pieces. That is why the word *wa*, harmony, means submission to each of the community leaders, friendly relation with the members of the group to which one belongs and respect for mother nature, preserving it as it was received.

Dialogue between Shintoism and Christianity

In the pluri-religious context of Japan, dialogue with other religions becomes necessary. It is a dialogue with different religions, with culture and with people, trying to improve their lives and make them sensitive, respecting their freedom and seeking to know their beliefs better. So, we will grow up sharing our richness and showing mutual respect in our differences

A human being, a specific person, with his or her history and culture, is always at the core of religion. And this specific human being is the one to be enriched by religion, which must position one before the mystery, widen one's horizons and give one the sense of life and death. From birth, a human being seeks to be happy, gropes about for truth along the many paths of God. One of these is Shinto.

Shinto is a cosmovision, lived by millions of people though in very different ways. It includes firm faith, purely civic and secularized habits, folklore, and superstitious expressions even to the point of various manipulations due to commercial and touristic interests. Shintoism, like everything alive, can be understood only through an attitude of openness, inspired in empathy, ordered toward dialogue.

Dialogue between both religions will run into difficulties when it comes to doctrine and principles. There is no common base. Shinto has never articulated a systematic theological doctrine. In contrast, in Christianity doctrine has been developed out of proportion. The idea of a personal God, of salvation, etc., which are central in every religion, are totally different. Therefore, in my opinion, we can not sit at a table, face to face, to discuss theologically. If the time ever comes for such an 'encounter,' we could create an agenda with the fundamental questions to which every religion should answer, according to *Nostra Aetate* (n.1): what is man, the sense and purpose of our life, good and evil, the origin and purpose of suffering, the way to true happiness, death, trial and reward, and finally, what is the final and definite mystery involving our existence: where do we come from and where are we going?

Interreligious dialogue is our idea, Western, something of our time. Waves from the West take many years to reach Japan, and when they arrive –if they do- are already very weak. Shintoists did not read about this movement, and some Christians awakened to it not long ago. For most, including the clergy, it is yet unknown.

Shinto doesn't feel any need for dialogue with anybody, either of opening to or of knowing other realities. Followers of Shinto are happy with their ancestral traditions and rites, the habits inherited from their ancestors that recur again and again continuously and invariably for centuries. To today's Shinto the same thing occurs as with Spanish Catholicism in the decade of the 1950s. Who was ready to dialogue with anyone else? We all were content with what we had. Shinto is for Japanese people the same as Judaism for Jews: exclusive, self-sufficient and closed.

Nevertheless, the most important obstacle to dialogue will be the imperial system. The Emperor is believed to come from the mythical goddess *Amaterasu*, whose temple is located at Ise, in the middle of the country. As Mecca for Muslims, Ise temple is for Japanese the place every Japanese is expected to visit once in a lifetime. The Constitution of 1889 stated: "The Japanese Empire is directed and governed by a line of Emperors uninterrupted through ages." "The Emperor is sacred and inviolable." But, the Constitution of 1947 reads: "The Emperor will be the symbol of State and of people's unity, in which sovereign power lies." We must not forget that this last Constitution was an imposition by the conquerors, and is not yet assimilated by the people, for whom the Emperor, in ordinary life, still continues to be sacred and inviolable. For that reason, he is called "the being above the clouds." On January 20, 2005, later Prime Minister, *Yabusiro Nakasone*, made a proposal to amend the Japanese Constitution, so to confirm again the Emperor as head of State. The basis of all this is Shintoism, the indigenous religion.

However, if we can not sit face to face to debate theologically, we certainly can stand beside, walk together and enrich one another, since the Japanese avoid ideological confrontation and so keep harmony.

The idea of our God was developing over time. The same God appears, thanks to Jesus, with two very different faces in the Old and in the New Testament. In Shinto, a superior, superhuman, extraordinary power is identified and is called *Kami*, god. In ordinary life, Shintoists pray, give thanks, feel protected by such a power, energy. They are always worshiping the mystery without a personal face, without knowing exactly who it is. That is their own way; it is not theist. In this sense it is very different from Christianity. It is the same mystery before which all human beings stand with identical reverence and love.

That is the point where dialogue between Shintoism and Christianity could provide profitable lights for both to enrich Mystery's insight on both sides, a perception always incomplete, partial and imperfect.

In my opinion, they see Christianity as a very noble ideal, though not suitable for them. Besides, the example they receive from Christian peoples can be disappointing. Generally, Japanese are educated, well

trained. They know the unedifying history of Europe, with its endless fratricidal wars between Christian nations. They know about the Inquisition, the Crusades and the burning of heretics. Today, they know that the war in Iraq was started by the U.S.A. "in the name of God." And they know that in Ireland, Protestants and Catholics continue fighting. What example is given by Christian nations and people so that Shintoists would take interest and wish to dialogue with Christianity? Maybe the Christians look to them as arrogant, self-sufficient and too sure of owning the truth,

Shintoism is polytheistic and asks Christians: The Father is God, the Son is God and the Holy Spirit is God, are they not three gods? Is anybody ready to explain to them the mystery of the Holy Trinity?

Today, all the religions in Japan are somehow discredited. There have been plenty of abuses on the part of those in charge and people are quite frustrated and distrustful. It could be said that today religions in Japan are offices for religious services: when somebody dies, a Buddhist priest is called; if the blessing of a new house is required, a Shintoist priest is called; if the blessing is needed for a wedding, then they call a Christian minister. The same person seeks a different appropriate minister according to the current need. Everything becomes intermingled and harmonized in one same family, in one same person. There is no other relationship or commitment; only the current problem.

I think that Japanese people are religious, though in their own way. A proof of that are their countless Buddhist and Shintoist temples, their home altars, their constant pilgrimages to well-known shrines during the year, their annual festivities related to Shinto and rice fields, their periodic visits to ancestral tombs. However, they don't want to commit themselves to any specific religion. They want to be free of compromise with any institutionalized group. And so, a religion "without church" has arisen. They believe without belonging.

There could be a dialogue to help us in the field of attention to nature, spirituality of nature, contemplation of nature and a policy of protecting nature. Shintoists live in communion with nature: on the first day of the year, they climb a mountain to contemplate and give thanks for the sunrise; they greet every morning with a prayer to "the sun that comes from heaven." They celebrate with food and drink cherry flowers in a family setting or with fellow workers; they offer the first field fruits at the temple, and so on.

Shintoism can help us to see and feel nature as something essentially "religious," as a space of "religious" experience, to see nature as "God's face," alive and living in everything, as without doubt Jesus lived by taking God out of the temple and worshiping and living Him in nature and in daily life.

Christians know God better conceptually, though that can lead them to worship a “god-concept;” Shintoists express their faith better by taking care of their rites, which are moderate and simple. There is beauty in simplicity. They have a simple and spontaneous manner of living certain universal human values with which they can enrich us

With Shintoists, we Christians are able to share our faith that, without removing mystic transcendence, which is also underlined by Shintoists, God’s face is found in the human being created in God’s image, and particularly in Jesus of Nazareth. We can share, contemplate and meditate together the “myths” in our respective religions, in which a search for one same Divine Mystery is takes place in our peoples, and different perceptions of the same ineffable Mystery are expressed. In Shinto, the central point is the myth of the Emperor’s “divine” origin, that of goddess *Amaterasu*, who sends her grandson *Ninigi* to bring peace to human beings. We Christians can, from our faith, see, as in the coming of the Son of God to this world, the accomplishment of the plan of salvation for this people whom He comes to meet through the way of Shintoism. Together, we can praise and thank the mysterious God, who “in all times, spoke many times and in many ways to all peoples through their prophets and their ancestors” (cf. Heb 1,1).

In order to keep its whole primeval essence, Shinto must overcome two big dangers threatening it: on one hand, a nationalism capable of falling into jingoism and, on the other hand, a materialism and horizontalism that is inattentive to transcendent values. Through dialogue, Shinto would gain universality, since it would cease being a clan religion in order to become a universal religion.

And so, in dialogue both religions can have the strength needed to help this people, who are materially rich and gifted with great religious and human values, but also materialistic and poor in transcendent values.

Finally, I would like to quote a few words of Fr. Spae: “I foresee a glorious future for Shinto, if it restrains itself to what it is really: an illustrious expression of all that is beautiful, good and genuine in the Japanese soul. If Shinto would accept that, it could achieve universality and, without losing its identity, take its followers into a world religion. The traditional tolerance of Shinto and its opening to other ways of thinking have prepared it for this role in a marvelous way.”

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De las cristologías europeas de corte clásico-universalista a las cristologías contextuales asiáticas

Si hay una cosa en la que podrían estar de acuerdo los teólogos cristianos y creyentes de todas las clases y colores es la afirmación de que Jesús, el Cristo, constituye el centro de la fe cristiana. La Cristología, o la «interpretación teológica sobre Jesucristo, clarificando sistemáticamente quién y qué es en sí mismo para los que creen en él»¹, es un tema permanente de la investigación teológica que empezó cuando las multitudes que rodeaban a Jesús, el profeta de Nazaret, se preguntaban, y se han seguido preguntando desde entonces, quién era él. A la pregunta de siempre, «¿Quién decís que soy yo?», se han dado diversas respuestas, según las distintas épocas históricas, como pone de relieve Jaroslav Pelikan en su ensayo que fue un hito *Jesús a través de los siglos*². La historia contrastada del cristianismo da una buena idea de la diversidad de respuestas dadas por los seguidores de Cristo en las diferentes comunidades a la cuestión de su identidad. Ciertamente, los cristianos de todos los tiempos y lugares se han visto confrontados con una diversidad de imágenes de Jesús en el Nuevo Testamento, los escritos de los Padres de la Iglesia y las declaraciones de los concilios. Es indudable que no hay unanimidad en el entendimiento de la identidad de Jesús, incluso en la iglesia primitiva. Hablando en general, los escritores del Nuevo Testamento evitaron conceptos estáticos, metafísicos, prefiriendo conceptos dinámicos para explicar el significado de Jesús. Por ejemplo, por una parte, Pablo fundamentó su

1 Gerald O'COLLINS sj y Edward G. FARRUGIA sj, *A Concise Dictionary of Theology*, corregido y aumentado, Paulist, New York/Mahwah NJ 2000, 42.

2 Jaroslav PELIKAN, *Jesus through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1985. La tesis que suscribe Pelikan es que Jesús no se puede entender fuera de las culturas de los pueblos y que son las culturas de los pueblos las que dan forma a las distintas imágenes e interpretaciones sobre Jesús en la historia humana.

discusión cristológica en los términos del movimiento dinámico del vaciarse a sí mismo (*kenosis*) del Logos pre-existente, seguido por su exaltación en la resurrección (en Flp 2, 6-11).

Pero por otra parte, Lucas escogió empezar con la vida humana de Jesús de Nazaret, su pasión y muerte, seguidos por su ascender a la gloria en su resurrección (Hch 2,22-36; 5,30-32; 10,36-38). Sin embargo, cualesquiera que sean las diferencias que se pueden encontrar en el significado de los distintos retratos de Jesús de los varios escritores del Nuevo Testamento, lo que es claro e inequívoco es el hecho de que todos revelan una pintura exacta del entendimiento sobre Jesús de la iglesia primitiva y de la importancia que tenía para su fe en él. Además, también se encuentra en el Nuevo Testamento una diversidad y pluralidad de imágenes sobre Jesús, como «Hijo del Hombre», «Hijo de Dios», «Maestro», Mesías (*Christos*), Palabra (*Logos*), Señor (*Kyrios*), y Salvador (*Soter*). Estas imágenes revelan cómo percibieron los cristianos de la iglesia apostólica lo que significaba para ellos Jesús en términos mesiánicos y soteriológicos³. En este sentido, J.B. Chethimattam sugiere que «los discursos misioneros de los Hechos de los Apóstoles muestran claramente que la divinidad de Cristo no era el punto de mira del entendimiento de los primeros cristianos sobre la salvación realizada por Jesús», sino que fue principalmente la obra del Padre, el Dios de la Biblia, que en cumplimiento de su promesa de salvación a la humanidad envió a Jesús como un nuevo Moisés, un nuevo David y un nuevo Salomón para guiar a la humanidad en el cumplimiento fiel de la Alianza con Yahvé⁴. Los debates cristológicos de los siglos cuarto y quinto sobre la relación entre la divinidad y humanidad de Jesucristo en el mundo grecorromano tardío introdujeron un cambio de paradigma de la soteriología a la ontología, es decir, de su significado salvífico para los creyentes a pensamientos abstractos filosóficos sobre la naturaleza y persona de Cristo en sí mismo y de sí mismo, como también su lugar como la Segunda Persona de la Trinidad. Así, el Concilio I de Nicea proclamó que Jesucristo es consustancial (*homoousios*) con el Padre, y Calcedonia profesó:

[el] uno y el mismo Cristo, Señor, Hijo único, reconocido en dos naturalezas sin confusión, sin cambio, sin división, sin separación ñsin quitar en absoluto la diferencia de las naturalezas por razón de la unión, sino más bien preservando el carácter distintivo de cada naturaleza, y combinando [cada una] en una Persona e hypostasis- no dividido o

3 Para un análisis más profundo, consultar, e.g., James D.G. DUNN, *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation*, Westminster, Philadelphia 1980; Earl RICHARDS, *Jesus, One and Many: The Christological Concept of New Testament Authors*, Michael Glazier, Wilmington 1988; John P. MEIER, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, Doubleday, New York 1991; N.T. WRIGHT, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, Fortress, Minneapolis 1996; y Ben WITHERINGTON, III, *The Christology of Jesus*, Fortress, Minneapolis 1990.

4 J.B. CHETIMATTAM, «Asian Jesus: The Relevance of Jesus Christ in the Asian World of Religious Pluralism», *Jeevadhara* 27 (1997) 300.

*separado en dos Personas, sino uno y el mismo Hijo y Dios engendrado, Palabra, Señor Jesús Cristo...*⁵

Se debería recordar que cuando los concilios ecuménicos de los siglos cuarto y quinto crearon estas fórmulas cristológicas, estaban movidos, no por las cuestiones del significado de Jesús para la salvación del género humano, sino por los debates altamente polémicos sobre este contencioso entre los teólogos alejandrinos y antioquenos. Ciertamente, los padres conciliares adoptaron una postura defensiva en todo el debate, queriendo apoyar afirmaciones doctrinales sobre la integridad de la divinidad de Jesús y su humanidad en contra de lo que se percibía como afirmaciones heterodoxas.

Claramente, las clásicas formulaciones cristológicas de los siglos cuarto y quinto de la era cristiana se centraron exclusivamente en definir la persona de Jesucristo, la relación entre su humanidad y divinidad, así como su relación con el Padre, antes que su obra salvífica y su significado para la gente, un hecho que no excluye nuevas investigaciones sobre la obra salvífica de Jesús y el significado para la gente en contextos culturales posteriores. Por eso, en la Alta Edad Media de Europa el antiguo poema épico sajón *Heliand*⁶ y el poema anglosajón *The Dream of the Rood*⁷ presentaba a Cristo como un todopoderoso rey guerrero teutónico dentro del contexto de una germanización medieval más amplia del cristianismo. Según James Russell, este desarrollo se produjo:

*Para que el Cristianismo fuera aceptado por los pueblos germánicos, era necesario que se percibiera como dando respuesta a la orientación heroica, religiosopolítica y mágico-religiosa del mundo germánico. Una religión que no pareciera estar preocupada con temas fundamentales de la milicia, la agricultura y la vida no podría ganarse la aceptación entre los pueblos germánicos, puesto que la religiosidad precristiana germánica ya daba adecuada respuesta a estos temas*⁸.

Aunque los maestros critican la imagen del Cristo teutónico rey-guerrero como una desviación del pacifista Jesús de Nazaret, es innegable que esta imagen de Cristo como un rey poderoso, majestuoso y triunfante persistió durante mucho tiempo de la Edad Media hasta la modernidad. Esta imagen triunfalista de Cristo Rey (Christus Rex) fue llevada por los misioneros europeos a Asia, África y las Américas y se usó como justificación para masacres, expolio

5 Traducción inglesa tomada de *The Christology of the Later Fathers*, ed., Edward R. HARDY, Westminster, Philadelphia 1954, 373.

6 Para la traducción inglesa y comentario, véase *The Heliand: The Saxon Gospel: A Translation and Commentary*, traducido por G. Ronald Murphy, Oxford University Press, New York 1992. Para un análisis crítico, véase: G. Ronald MURPHY, *The Saxon Savior: The Germanic Transformation of the Gospel in the Nine-Century Heliand*, Oxford University Press, New York 1989.

7 Véase Bruce DICKINS y Alan S. C. ROSS, eds., *The Dream of the Rood*, Appleton-Century-Crofts, New York 1966.

8 James C. RUSSELL, *The Germanization of Early Medieval Christianity: A Sociohistorical Approach to Religious Transformation*, Oxford University Press, New York 1994, 4.

económico y destrucción sociocultural. Como indica Michael Amaladoss, «la imagen preferida de Jesús en Occidente, al menos la presentada a Oriente, parece haber sido la de Cristo Rey que quiere extender su reinado sobre todo el mundo, sin dudar en utilizar mercaderes y ejércitos en el proceso»⁹.

Más aún, el modelo clásico de *missio ad gentes* se predica sobre una cristología de un triunfante «Cristo Rey» conduciendo un ejército de misioneros para conquistar tierras paganas y rescatar almas paganas de la ignorancia. No es sorprendente que tal afirmación de «Cristo Rey» provoque recelo en muchos no cristianos¹⁰. Más aún, mientras la imagen de «Cristo Rey» sigue resonando hoy en las mentes y corazones de muchos cristianos en Europa y Norteamérica, hasta los mismos cristianos tendrían dificultad en entender la clásica profesión de fe cristológica abstracta de Nicea y Calcedonia, y mucho menos explicar en términos llanos y coherentes lo que realmente significa esta clásica profesión cristológica.

Esto nos lleva a la situación en Asia. Tomando como punto de partida el axioma anselmiano *fides quaerens intellectum*, entonces habrá invariablemente un crecimiento continuo en una apreciación de Jesucristo cuando es entendido y apropiado por gente de nuevos contextos socioculturales. El teólogo indio Stanley J. Samartha lo explicó bien cuando indicó que «la cristología no era una angustiada búsqueda de una ‘sustancia’ alternativa, tanto si es casera como importada de otra parte, para entender de nuevo la naturaleza de Cristo», sino un esfuerzo por contestar la cuestión, «¿cuál es la realidad que encontramos en Jesucristo, el Señor crucificado y resucitado?»¹¹. Sobre la pregunta de la significación de Jesús para otros y su trabajo salvífico, el Nuevo Testamento, los escritos de los Padres de la Iglesia y los pronunciamientos conciliares son siempre el punto de partida y no el final, ya que estas fuentes no pueden nunca agotar todo el abanico de cuestiones y experiencias de la gente en diversos *Sitzen-im-Leben*. La predicación de Jesucristo a cada época y cultura produce necesariamente nuevas formas de entendimiento, respuestas y experiencias de la gente en nuevas situaciones socioculturales, todo lo cual a su vez lleva a nuevas apreciaciones sobre el significado e importancia de Jesús para esos pueblos. Uno se acuerda del Papa Juan XXIII que en la allocutio de apertura del Concilio Vaticano II dijo: «la sustancia de la doctrina antigua del depósito de la fe es una cosa y la manera en la que se presenta es otra»¹².

9 Michael AMALADOSS, «Pluralism of Religions and the Proclamation of Jesus Christ in the Context of Asia», *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 56 (2001) 10.

10 Véase el debate en William Burrows, *Redemption and Dialogue: Reading Redemptoris Missio and Dialogue and Proclamation*, Orbis, Maryknoll 1993, 243-244.

11 S. J. SAMARTHA, *The Hindu Response to the Unbound Christ*, Christian Literature Society, Madras 1974, 41.

12 Discurso del Papa Juan en la apertura del Concilio, en *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott, America Press, New York 1966, 715.

Un buen punto de partida para estudiar los orígenes y desarrollos de las cristologías asiáticas es el libro pionero *Asian Faces of Jesus*, una colección de ensayos de teólogos asiáticos, que investigan las distintas imágenes de Jesús para diferentes comunidades asiáticas y que está editada por R. S. Sugirtharajah. En el prólogo a este trabajo, Sugirtharajah indica las «confusiones y ambivalencias que los cristianos asiáticos sufren sobre las imágenes de Cristo que fueron introducidas primero por los misioneros y que todavía dominan su pensamiento», y resalta «el deseo de los cristianos asiáticos de descubrir por sí mismos la evidencia de su presencia en medio de otras figuras salvadoras de la región y su lugar en ellas»¹³. De aquí que los cristianos asiáticos han buscado caminos de «re-asianizar y reformular a Jesús en términos asiáticos para responder a las necesidades de los pueblos asiáticos»:

Ellos se resisten vigorosamente a aplicar a Jesús cualquier verdad intemporal y bien aceptada sobre él. Para ellos, todas las comprensiones sobre Jesús nacen de necesidades particulares contextuales.... Los cristianos asiáticos continúan la tradición hermenéutica creada por los primeros escritores cristianos... mezclan una amplia variedad de símbolos culturales, intuiciones filosóficas y problemas sociales de Asia con sus articulaciones cristológicas... El punto de las articulaciones asiáticas sobre Jesús es que si la Iglesia del siglo V acertó en mantener el enigma sobre Jesús en el lenguaje, forma y espíritu del período helenístico, ¿por qué los asiáticos no deberían echar mano de sus propias reservas hermenéuticas para formular a Jesús para su propia época y lugar?¹⁴

En otras palabras, los cristianos asiáticos en general, y los teólogos asiáticos en particular, intentan investigar qué importancia y significación tiene Jesús para los pueblos asiáticos y sus realidades y problemas existenciales. Sus intereses son principalmente pastorales y prácticos ñquieren saber qué significa Jesús para las masas de pueblos asiáticos que luchan por hacer frente a los temas existenciales contemporáneos, antes que exposiciones abstractas, teóricas o metafísicas sobre la preexistencia de Jesús o su relación ontológica con las otras dos personas de la Trinidad, o incluso discusiones especulativas sobre cómo se relacionan las naturalezas humana y divina en su persona, porque tales deliberaciones racionales están, frecuentemente, divorciadas de las experiencias de la vida diaria de los pueblos asiáticos¹⁵. A menudo, los

13 «Prologue», en R.S. SUGIRTHARAJAH, *Asian Faces of Jesus*, Orbis, Maryknoll 1993, viii.

14 *Ibid.*, ix.

15 M. Thomas THANGARAJ está seguramente en lo cierto cuando indica que «una cristología que usa el concepto de Logos para explicar el significado de Jesús es relevante o significativa solamente en el contexto de una conversación con aquellos que saben lo que significa el Logos». Véase M. Thomas THANGARAJ, *The Crucified Guru: An Experiment in Cross-Cultural Christology*, Abingdon, Nashville 1994, 139. De ahí que una cristología que habla de la esencia y la sustancia, la naturaleza y la persona, *homoousios* y la unión hipostática tiene sentido solamente para aquellos que tienen alguna idea de las dificultades intrínsecas del pensamiento filosófico de la Grecia clásica, cosa que la mayoría de los asiáticos no tiene.

cristianos asiáticos no empiezan sus reflexiones sobre quién es Jesús desde las formulaciones de Nicea o Calcedonia. Más bien, están interesados en el Jesús del Nuevo Testamento, en cómo les pueda dar esperanza y vida nueva, y cómo puedan encontrar su realidad salvadora en la vida diaria. Las reflexiones cristológicas no se pueden hacer usando un lenguaje de las esencias y una forma de pensamiento abstracto, metafísico, que surgió como una respuesta a controversias cristológicas específicas, que se centran en la dificultad de relacionar las realidades humanas (profanas) y divinas (sagradas) con una mentalidad helenística, tema irrelevante para los asiáticos, con sus diferentes visiones del mundo relacional y cosmológico.

Por eso, una característica importante de las cristologías asiáticas es que son, por definición, teologías *contextuales*, es decir, una «manera de hacer teología en la que se tiene en cuenta el espíritu y el mensaje del evangelio; la tradición del pueblo cristiano; la cultura en la que se hace teología; y el cambio social en aquella cultura, tanto el producido por influencia tecnológica occidental, como por la lucha a nivel de base por la igualdad, la justicia y la libertad»¹⁶. Sobre este mismo tema, Shoki Coe hizo notar que el nacimiento y desarrollo de las teologías contextuales en el Tercer Mundo son el resultado de una preocupación creciente por la necesidad de hacer relevante el Evangelio Cristiano para las necesidades y preocupaciones de la vida humana actual en el mundo contemporáneo, como reacción al enfoque positivista, universalista de las metodologías de la teología tradicional clásica¹⁷. No es una sorpresa que el mundo ha sido testigo de un crecimiento espectacular en las nuevas teologías contextuales, en general, y en las cristologías contextuales¹⁸, en particular.

En relación con las teologías contextuales asiáticas, los teólogos asiáticos evitan a toda costa los pensamientos estáticos, ontológicos y metafísicos

16 Esta definición de teología contextual está tomada de Stephen B. BEVANS, *Models of Contextual Theology*, Orbis, Maryknoll 1992, 1. En contraste con la teología clásica que se fija principalmente en los dos *loci theologici* de la Escritura y la Tradición, Bevans indica que la teología contextual añade un tercer lugar teológico, a saber, la experiencia humana. Según eso, «la teología que es contextual se da cuenta de que la cultura, la historia, las formas de pensamiento contemporáneo, etc. deben ser consideradas, juntamente con la Escritura y la Tradición, como fuentes válidas para la expresión teológica» (ibid., 2).

17 Shoki COE, «Contextualization as the Way Toward Reform», en Douglas J. ELWOOD, *Asian Christian Theology: Emerging Themes*, Westminster Press, Philadelphia 1980, 48-55.

18 Ejemplos de cristologías contextuales asiáticas incluyen: *Asian Faces of Jesus*, ed. R.S. SUGIRTHARAJAH, Orbis, Maryknoll 1993; Stanley J. SAMARTHA, *One Christ – Many Religions: Toward a Revised Christology*, Orbis, Maryknoll 1991; M. Thomas THANGARAJ, *The Crucified Guru: An Experiment in Cross-Cultural Christology*, Abingdon, Nashville 1994; A. ALANGARAM, *Christ of the Asian Peoples: Towards an Asian Contextual Christology Based on the documents of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences*, Asian Trading Corporation, Bangalore 1999; C.S. SONG, *Jesus, The Crucified People*, Fortress, Minneapolis 1990; Peter C. PHAN, «The Christ of Asia: An Essay on Jesus as eldest son and ancestor,» *Studia Missionalia* 45 (1996) 25-55; y Peter C. PHAN, «Jesus the Christ with an Asian Face», *Theological Studies* 57 (1996) 399-430.

empezando sus reflexiones teológicas *en diálogo* con los pueblos asiáticos y sus diferentes *Sitzen-im-Leben*, buscando discernir lo que Jesús está haciendo dentro de sus vidas, problemas, aspiraciones y sueños, y asegurándose de que Jesús no es un extranjero en Asia, y de que su claro y vivificador mensaje de esperanza y amor no se vea enturbiado por el lenguaje especulativo y metafísico de una era pasada. Sobre esta base, M. Thomas Thangaraj critica el «falso sentido de universalismo» y «la cristología positiva» de los teólogos europeos que «suponían que sus articulaciones cristológicas eran a-contextuales y, por lo tanto, aplicables a situaciones globales», insistiendo en que «una cristología que no tiene en cuenta el carácter contextual de sus articulaciones promueve un falso sentido de universalismo y por eso supone que es aplicable a todas las situaciones, épocas y lugares» -un problema que está muy enraizado en todas las cristologías que han sido formuladas en Europa¹⁹-. Como él dice, «en el Nuevo Testamento, la colección más antigua de nuestros documentos referentes a Jesús, no hay una cristología estándar, sino variadas y diferentes visiones del significado de Jesús», y por eso, «no hay una cristología perenne que sea aplicable y relevante a todos los contextos y a todas las épocas»²⁰. Mientras es verdad que Thangaraj puede estar hablando desde una perspectiva protestante asiática, sin embargo, los católicos asiáticos estarían de acuerdo con su punto de vista. De ahí que la Conferencia de los Obispos Católicos de la India en su respuesta a los *Lineamenta* del Sínodo Asiático de 1998 explica:

La Cristología no es nunca un producto acabado, sino en proceso, incluso admitiendo las características normativas de las cristologías litúrgicas, bíblicas, patristicas y conciliares. La experiencia vivida por la comunidad cristiana, siguiendo las reglas indispensables y las diferencias condicionantes de tiempo, espacio y cultura, juega un importante papel en este proceso (énfasis añadida²¹).

De igual manera, en su respuesta a los *Lineamenta* del Sínodo Asiático de 1998, la Conferencia de los Obispos Católicos de Japón también tomó una postura semejante:

Deberíamos intentar descubrir qué clase de Jesús será una «luz» para los pueblos de Asia. En otras palabras, tal como hicieron los Padres de la iglesia primitiva con la cultura greco-romana, nosotros debemos hacer un estudio más profundo de los principios fundamentales de la religiosidad de nuestros pueblos, y, desde este punto de vista, intentar descubrir cómo está Jesucristo respondiendo a sus necesidades. Jesucristo es el Camino, la Verdad y la Vida, pero en Asia, antes de subrayar que Jesucristo es la VERDAD, debemos buscar más profundamente cómo es el CAMINO y la VIDA²².

19 THANGARAJ, *The Crucified Guru*, 25

20 *Ibid.*, 139.

21 *East Asian Pastoral Review* 35 n° 1 (1998) 121-122 (art. 5.2).

22 *East Asian Pastoral Review* 35 n° 1 (1998) 89.

Al mismo tiempo, en un continente donde el porcentaje de cristianos está alrededor del 4% de la población total, y donde los cristianos del Oriente Asiático viven y se relacionan íntimamente con sus otros miembros de la familia no cristianos, amigos y vecinos, hay una necesidad de asegurar que las cristologías asiáticas en general y las confucianas, en particular, no sean de miras estrechas en su orientación y limitadas solamente a una audiencia específicamente cristiana. Tomado como un todo, el carácter diverso y plural de la región del Oriente Asiático, la proximidad de los cristianos a los no cristianos, así como su interrelación, todo pide que el trabajo cristológico trascienda las fronteras confesionales y entre en diálogo con las tradiciones religiosas y culturales del Oriente Asiático dentro de un contexto más amplio²³. Aún más, esto es más que un mero pragmatismo pastoral, porque a un nivel mucho más profundo, los obispos católicos asiáticos han insistido en la Declaración Final de la Primera Federación de la Asamblea Plenaria de la Conferencia de los Obispos Asiáticos (FABC) en que se debería dar reverencia y honor a las grandes tradiciones religiosas asiáticas, reconociendo que «Dios ha atraído a nuestros pueblos a Sí mismo a través de ellas» (FABC I, 15)²⁴. En otras palabras:

Nosotros las aceptamos [las grandes tradiciones religiosas] como elementos significativos y positivos en la economía del designio salvífico de Dios. En ellas nosotros reconocemos y respetamos significados y valores profundos, espirituales y éticos. Por muchos siglos ellas han sido los tesoros de la experiencia religiosa de nuestros antepasados, de los cuales nuestros contemporáneos no dejan de extraer luz y fuerza. Ellas han sido (y continúan siendo) la expresión auténtica de los más nobles deseos de sus corazones y el alma de su contemplación y oración. Ellas han ayudado a dar forma a las historias y culturas de nuestras naciones (FABC I, art. 14)²⁵.

En otro lugar, el Instituto para Asuntos Interreligiosos de los Obispos del FABC (BIRA) ha afirmado que «es una verdad ineludible que el espíritu de Dios trabaja en todas las tradiciones religiosas» (BIRA IV/ 12, art. 7)²⁶, porque «se ha reconocido desde los tiempos de la Iglesia apostólica y afirmado claramente de nuevo por el Vaticano II, que el Espíritu de Cristo está activo

23 Esta intuición está tomada de Michael Amaladoss, quien afirma que el deseo de los obispos asiáticos de redescubrir la cara asiática de Jesús no sería fructífera a menos que se llevara a cabo en «diálogo con las tradiciones culturales y religiosas asiáticas». Ver Michael AMALADOSS, «Pluralism of Religions and the Proclamation of Jesus Christ in the Context of Asia», *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 56 (2001) 10.

24 *For all the peoples of Asia: Federation Asian Bishops' Conferences Documents From 1970–1991*, eds. Gaudencio B. ROSALES & C. G. ARÉVALO, Orbis, Maryknoll 1992, 14.

25 Ibid.

26 *For All the Peoples of Asia*, 326. Ver también art. 8.5 de BIRA IV/ 2, art. 8.5, que afirma que «el Espíritu Santo también está actuando en otras religiones» (ibid., 253); y *Theological Consultation*, art. 43, que afirma que las tradiciones religiosas de Asia «son expresiones de la presencia de la Palabra de Dios y de la acción universal de su Espíritu en ellos» (ibid., 344).

fuera de las fronteras de la Iglesia visible». (*BIRA II*, art. 12)²⁷. Además, las «grandes religiones de Asia con sus respectivos credos, cultos y códigos nos muestran diversas maneras de responder a Dios cuyo Espíritu está activo en todos los pueblos y culturas» (*BIRA IV/7*, art. 12)²⁸. Para la FABC, es «el mismo espíritu, que ha estado activo en la encarnación, vida, muerte y resurrección de Jesús y en la Iglesia y que estuvo activo en todos los pueblos antes de la Encarnación y está activo en las naciones, religiones y pueblos de Asia hoy» (*BIRA IV/3*, art. 6)²⁹.

En contraposición, los teólogos en Europa y Norteamérica, donde los cristianos son una mayoría importante, al menos nominalmente, han hecho teología normalmente dentro de las fronteras confesionales sin ninguna relación con las minorías no cristianas. Sin embargo, en palabras de Thangaraj, «la cristología no es simplemente la comunidad cristiana de creyentes que tiene un diálogo dentro de sí mismo, sino también es mantener un diálogo con aquellos que no participan de su visión del papel decisivo de Jesús para sí mismos y de la orientación para la vida humana»³⁰. A un nivel práctico, hay una necesidad para estos cristianos del Oriente Asiático de interpretar la tradición cristiana recibida en diálogo con las otras tradiciones religiosas de sus vecinos, si el Evangelio de Jesucristo va a causar un impacto en la sociedad en general. La alternativa para los cristianos del Oriente Asiático es cultivar una mentalidad encerrada en sí misma y refugiarse en un gueto autoimpuesto.

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Traducido del inglés por el Instituto Español de Misiones Extranjeras

27 *For All the People of Asia*, 115.

28 *Ibid.*, 310.

29 *Ibid.*, 259.

30 Thangaraj, *The Crucified Guru*, 139.

La interpelación del pluralismo religioso

Teología católica del III milenio

Acaso no responda a las expectativas de los queridos y admirados amigos que me han pedido esta colaboración. Bienaventurados los que tienen pasión por la Justicia -que no hay que identificar con la Ley (Rom 3, 21)-. Lo hago honrado y con mucho gusto, pero quizá la «criada les salga respondona», y ello no sería extraño viniendo de una voz de otras latitudes. Estamos tan indocinados (hubiera casi querido decir colonizados) por los dos pasados milenios, que ni siquiera nos imaginamos que pueda haber una forma de ser católico que no se ciña a las categorías semítico-griegas y al lenguaje latino de estos últimos milenios -aunque se exprese en alemán o bantú dentro del mismo cristianismo-. La petición que se me ha hecho me vuelve a embarcar en un mar por el que intento navegar sin naufragar desde hace decenios; aunque para no ser excesivamente prolijo, me veo obligado a ser muy denso en mis comentarios, por lo que pido excusas, comprensión y paciencia -esta virtud también intelectual tan descuidada-.

Como advertencia preliminar quisiera advertir que, fiel al título de este escrito y a quienes me lo han sugerido, el punto de vista adoptado es el de esta religión, que sufre dolores de parto para no traicionar la autodenominación de católica, que considero aquí como sinónima a cristiana¹.

No cabe duda alguna que en los últimos tiempos, después del medioevo, hemos avanzado mucho en nuestra apertura a los demás, pero aún nos da miedo el *duc in altum* evangélico («boga hacia las profundidades») y tememos perder pie si abandonamos la cultura greco-semítica de estos últimos milenios. Nos quedamos sin categorías y estamos obsesionados por la seguridad: nos

¹ Inicialmente había escrito esta reflexión sin nota alguna; pero al llegar a su novena redacción reduje el texto casi a su mitad. Sin embargo, como todo está relacionado con todo (*sarvam-sarvātmakam*, dice la filosofía india), por una parte no podía evitar las incursiones colaterales y por otra debía explicar por qué lo decía. Esta es la razón de las referencias a mis otros estudios, que he reducido al mínimo.

cuesta aún avezarnos a la «libertad de los hijos de Dios», que no sólo se refiere a la praxis, sino también a la teoría. Pero esta libertad solo se goza y experimenta si nuestro corazón es puro -y automáticamente entonces desaparece el miedo-. No me hubiese atrevido a publicar esta reflexión si toda la empresa no estuviera bajo el lema de la «teología de la liberación» -que, como me atreví a escribir años atrás, debería empezar por la «liberación de la teología»-.

Oyendo tanto hablar de la «descristianización de la sociedad», me pregunto para mis adentros: ¿No será que también el cristianismo se ha descristianizado? ¿No será que, a pesar de las protestas en contra de las «privatizaciones», a todos luces injustas, hemos privatizado también la fe?

Me permito añadir a guisa de aclaración, que mis breves referencias a otras tradiciones no son aditamentos eruditos, sino ejemplos que pretenden ilustrar que, incluso para el entendimiento de la propia tradición, las intuiciones de otras culturas son hoy día poco menos que indispensables. Nos necesitamos los unos a los otros.

I. Interpelación

La interpelación, palabra que prefiero a desafío (demasiado beligerante), no es baladí: nos empuja e «impele» (como sugiere la raíz indoeuropea) a una conversión radical, si pretendemos ser fieles al mensaje cristiano, frente a una tradición casi bimilenaria. Y las conversiones son siempre arriesgadas. Tienen el peligro del enajenamiento (que sólo la mística supera). Pero la coyuntura histórica a la que el hombre ha llegado exige magnanimidad en el ser y en el pensar: ¡Qué teméis, hombres de poca fe!

Hace algo más de medio siglo me atreví a preguntarme si para ser conscientemente cristiano había de ser espiritualmente semita e intelectualmente helénico -y así se lo pregunté una vez a Pablo VI-. Creo que el cristianismo *subsistit* en la Iglesia (Vaticano II), pero la frase no puede invertirse, si por iglesia se entiende sólo una organización o sólo un sistema doctrinal. La filosofía, quiero decir el *pensar* completo (y no meramente lógico), me ayudó a comprender a los que no opinaban como yo, descubriendo que el error es una 'verdad' de la que se abusa -generalmente extrapolándola-. Así comprendí la extrapolación a la que acabo de referirme ya que, según la misma tradición, aquellos que habiendo llegado al «uso de razón», podían descubrir, por lo menos implícitamente, la Verdad y vivir conforme a ella, aunque no se le llamase cristiana. Y así lo dice explícitamente Santo Tomás en el mismo inicio de su *Summa theologiae*, añadiendo además que como la verdad salvífica es superior a la razón, «*necessarium fuit*» que el hombre recibiera una «revelación divina» (y por tanto no debida a las escrituras cristianas, que ni existían ni eran conocidas). Todo era congruente: hay una «Luz verdadera que ilumina a todo hombre que viene a este mundo» (Jn 1, 9).

Podría formular el tema, aunque no explicitarlo adecuadamente, diciendo algo del tenor siguiente: tras dos milenios de un cristianismo injertado del espíritu semítico, de las estructuras mentales griegas y del genio romano (y lo digo con admiración y sin ironía), ha llegado el momento, si pretendemos ser «católicos», de aceptar la interpelación de las otras culturas y de abrirse al resto del mundo que no pertenece al filón cultural abrahámico. Después del entusiasmo del Vaticano II y frente a las voces que más tarde empezaron a surgir pidiendo un Vaticano III, yo abogaba por un Jerusalén II (o Rajgiri III) como símbolo de apertura a las demás religiones del planeta, pues en el de Jerusalén I (Hch 15, 1-21) se consideró superado (no negado) el Pacto de Yahweh con su pueblo, simbolizado por el sacramento de la circuncisión, y el mensaje de Cristo se abrió al que abusivamente se ha llamado «Tercer Mundo», que está representado por dos tercios de la humanidad. Los apóstoles, todos ellos judíos, tuvieron la valentía de aceptar que el «Reino de Dios» les sería quitado (Mt 21, 43). Hoy día, aunque muy lenta e imperfectamente, empezamos a darnos cuenta de ello. No se trata de edulcorar el «escándalo de la Cruz» (Gal 5, 11) reduciendo el cristianismo a una moral natural, pero sí de aplicarlo a nosotros mismos y de no usarlo sólo como producto de exportación para los demás.

La tesis que defendí ya por aquel entonces no decía que la «salvación», para emplear un término cristiano, se encuentra en la *creencia* en Jesús de Nazareth, sino en la *fé* en aquel Misterio que Juan llama el *logos*, los Vedas *vac*, la China *tao*... («equivalentes homeomórficos»²), y que los cristianos reconocen en Jesús el Cristo; pero que no es idéntico a él, aunque tampoco separable de Jesús -que es la Encarnación de lo que en muchas religiones se llama Dios-. Esta afirmación no va en detrimento de la singularidad de Jesús, que para unos es más humano que divino y para otros más divino que humano -siendo así que es totalmente Dios (sólo creíble si Dios es Trinidad) y plenamente Hombre (sólo aceptable si Hombre es más que un bípedo racional)-. La unidad de Cristo no es una integración entre dos naturalezas, a no ser que se desvirtúe lo que Grecia entiende por tal -y aquí empezaría la deshelenización del cristianismo-. Pero ello no es mi tema. Aquí como en la Trinidad hace falta un pensar menos dialéctico, y me atrevería a decir más contemplativo (místico); hace falta acercarse a la realidad simultáneamente con los tres ojos -de los sentidos, de la mente y de la fe, *experiendo, ratiocinando, credendo* dice, entre otros, Ricardo de San Víctor (*De Trinitate*, I, 1 [P.L. 891 A])- De ello hablan tantas tradiciones (incluida la cristiana) que se salvan del reduccionismo de limitar la consciencia humana a la racionalidad, sin caer por eso en la irracionalidad, que sería sólo la conclusión dialéctica. El conocimiento humano abarca mucho más que la comprensión racional, que sería la del *oculus mentis*, como dice la tradición cristiana haciendo eco lejano al uso ciceroniano.

2 Por «equivalentes homeomórficos» entendemos una analogía de tercer grado, esto es, que la función que ejerce una noción en un determinado sistema (por ejemplo, ser un punto último de referencia), es equivalente a la que la otra noción ejerce en el otro sistema.

Y aquí tocamos ya el punto central de la *Interpelación*. Ni el conocimiento sensorial, ni el racional, ni tampoco el de la fe son exclusividad de los cristianos. Las culturas no pueden reducirse a las diversas costumbres del ser humano: no son «folklore». Las culturas nos revelan distintas formas de pensar, de ver el mundo y de vivir en él; esto es, de acercarse humanamente a la realidad y, por tanto, de llegar a la verdad -lo que no excluye que no pueda existir el error, aunque el criterio no es nuestro *concepto* de verdad, sino aquello que designamos con el símbolo de Realidad-. No reduzcamos la verdad a la comprensión racional, lo que tampoco excluye que no pueda haber comunicación (y comunión) entre las diversas formas de pensar. De ahí la importancia capital del diálogo, que es el tema de la incipiente *filosofía intercultural*. El ser humano es dia-logical; esto es, trasciende el *logos*.

* * *

Para abreviar, pongamos un solo ejemplo, aunque capital, de la interpelación intercultural: el *tiempo* como símbolo constitutivo de lo que es real, y con ello la importancia fundamental que la historia juega en muchas culturas, especialmente en las occidentales. Si algo es histórico, si algo ha sucedido en el tiempo (identificado a lo histórico), ello equivale a que es real y por tanto verdadero. En otras ocasiones he contado el caso del que fui testimonio en Vrndavana, la patria «histórica» de Krsna. Un pastor protestante comentaba jocosa y amistosamente con un creyente vaisnava que las leyendas en torno a Krsna no eran precisamente muy edificantes, pero que ello no era esencial teniendo en cuenta que ni tan sólo se podía probar la existencia de Krsna; es decir, que acaso ni tan sólo fuera un personaje histórico, y por tanto real. Lo comparaba a Jesús de Nazareth, sobre cuya existencia histórica (y por tanto real) no cabía duda alguna. Yo estaba un poco nervioso, pero mi amigo creyente en Krsna se mostraba feliz y asentía a todo. Él entendía que Jesús era un personaje histórico muy importante, como un Akbar o un Gandhi, y que en cambio su Krsna, el de su corazón y el de su creencia, tenía mucha más realidad y era más transcendental que cualquier héroe histórico habido y por haber. Muy calladito comprendí yo entonces la importancia de la resurrección, sobre la que los exégetas se devanan los sesos para saber si fue «histórica» o no -identificando de nuevo la realidad con la historia-. Repito que el ejemplo no es intrascendente. No identifiquemos la fe con su interpretación (creencias), como aún diremos.

La discusión del Jesús histórico (identificado al Jesús real) que, dentro de los esquemas de Occidente, representó indiscutiblemente un «avance», no es importante para una buena parte del pensar del Asia, que no vive dentro del *mythos* de la historia. Ésta no es el único criterio de la realidad.

Sin mayores cavilaciones filosóficas es obvio que, si la eternidad es real, ésta no viene *después* del tiempo (que es ya un concepto temporal). La

vida eterna no es la perdurable. La *interpelación*, en una palabra, no es de poca monta. Pero ello no para aquí, como aún veremos mediante otro ejemplo aún más central para el cristianismo: la cuestión de Dios.

II. Teo (logía)

La mayoría de los teólogos, aunque se llamen cristianos, son todavía prácticamente monoteístas, como si la Trinidad no existiera o fuera sólo una «revelación» divina para humillar nuestra mente sin otra transcendencia para la teología, ni por ende para nuestra vida. El *theos* de la teología es todavía monoteísta -aunque pague tributo verbal a la Trinidad-. La teología corriente, sobre todo la oficial, no ha cruzado todavía «el Rubicón» (la imagen geográfica e histórica es significativa). No se ha bañado en el Ganges, por así decir, o en el Amazonas, que todavía es más ancho.

Con agudeza y profundidad, el Cardenal Lehmann, en un comentario sobre la llamada recepción del Concilio Vaticano II (con motivo del cuadragésimo aniversario de su celebración), señalaba que la «cuestión de Dios» se había convertido en el problema central del cristianismo y añadía que se trataba de «buscar siempre de nuevo la faz del Dios viviente».

No se trata de absolutizar nada (la faz de Dios depende también de nuestra mirada), sino sólo de relativizar todas las doctrinas, empezando por la actual -sin confundir relatividad con relativismo-. La misma Iglesia, en efecto, ha cambiado de opinión. A los escépticos les recomendaría que leyeran las Actas de los Concilios -sin excluir los Ecuménicos, en donde se defienden «verdades» que la conciencia contemporánea no puede aceptar-. La verdad dice siempre relación a un intelecto. Para entender un *texto*, hay que integrarlo en un *contexto* y conocer su *pretexto* ³.

Es arriesgado y difícil criticar en pocos párrafos una creencia multiseccular tan arraigada, fecunda y profunda. Pero a mi favor está el que alguien ha de tener la audacia y la humildad de ser el portavoz de los sin voz que, en este caso, no son solamente los económicamente pobres, sino también los pueblos culturalmente marginados por el auto-llamado Primer Mundo.

Tampoco comento el doble error, lógico y metodológico, cuando se tacha de politeístas a muchas de las religiones llamadas tales. Error lógico, porque el *Theos* que el *mono*-teísmo afirma ser Uno no es el *theos* que el *poli*-teísmo considera múltiple. Las dos afirmaciones no se refieren a la misma realidad, no tienen el mismo predicado. Es además un error metodológico enjuiciar bajo un prisma monocultural (el del monoteísmo en este caso) un

3 Cf. p. e., *Paz e interculturalidad*, Herder, Barcelona 2006, pág. 82.

problema intercultural. Desde las premisas monoteístas es muy fácil criticar el politeísmo⁴. El problema está en lo que sea «Dios».

Aparte de las razones políticas (en el mejor sentido de la palabra) del monoteísmo que favorecieron que la iglesia cristiana, después de Constantino, pudiese justificar mejor y más racionalmente su dominio e influencia sobre el mundo de entonces, con Constantino y sus secuelas la «razón de Estado» ha penetrado en el pensar teológico. El pensar racional es un gran aliado del monoteísmo, puesto que justifica la *reductio ad unum* necesaria para la racionalidad. *Mens plura in unum cogit, unde eligere possit* (la mente constriñe la pluralidad a la unidad para así poder elegir) decía ya mucho antes Varrón, después de habernos informado que «*cogitare a cogendo dictum*» (*cogitare* viene de [se dice de] coaccionar): coaccionar la realidad para que se adapte a nuestra forma de pensar racional. El monoteísmo nos da seguridad porque constriñe la realidad a su inteligibilidad racional, reduciéndola a la unidad. Sólo el pensar dialéctico «piensa» que la única alternativa a la unidad sea la pluralidad: o monoteísmo o politeísmo -ambos incompatibles con la Encarnación, que no es ni una cosa ni la otra-.

El desafío al monoteísmo está ahí: Dios no es un Ser (ni por tanto una Substancia Suprema), ni el monoteísmo responde a la intuición profunda del pensar de la mayoría de los pueblos del planeta, a quienes no les ‘entra’ la idea de una transcendencia absoluta. La Trinidad, en cambio, nos dice que el Misterio divino es relación en la que se encuentran también el Hombre y el Cosmos -en lo que he llamado intuición *cosmoteándrica*⁵-. No olvidemos que en la Trinidad, como en la experiencia cosmoteándrica, no hay ningún trío fuera de nuestra abstracción mental -como ya dijo san Agustín cuando lacónicamente escribió que en la Trinidad *qui incipit numerare incipit errare* (quien comienza a numerar empieza a errar)-. Lo que comúnmente se ha venido llamando *teología* se ha reducido casi exclusivamente a la especulación de la razón sobre el misterio divino, postulado como Uno porque la razón así lo exige -olvidando que el propio Tomás de Aquino, en la tercera cuestión de su *Summa*, afirma que Dios no es ni tan sólo substancia-.

La Trinidad, repito, nos revela que Dios es pura relación -pues de lo contrario sería tri-teísmo⁶-. El dogma revolucionario de la Maternidad divina de la Virgen, a la que se la declaró engendradora de Dios, sin intervención de varón destruye toda ideología monoteísta. El Dios monoteísta no puede tener una madre, o Cristo no puede ser plenamente Dios -a no ser que los convir-

4 Cf. el capítulo «Betrachtung über monotheistischen und polytheistischen Religionen» en mi libro *Die vielen Götter und der eine Herr*, O.W. BARTH, Weilheim Oberbayern 1963), pág. 43-51.

5 Cf. *La intuición cosmoteándrica*, Trotta, Madrid 1999, y, más completa, *La realtà cosmoteándrica*, Jaca Book, Milán 2004.

6 Cf. *La Trinidad: Una experiencia humana primordial*. Siruela, Madrid 1998.

tamos en unos personaje esquizofrénicos (cf. Denzinger-Schönmetzer § 564, etc.)-. La devoción popular a María (a pesar de las supersticiones que se le han enquistado) nos da aquí una lección.

Es igualmente bien conocido el reduccionismo de la traducción de *logos* por razón. Como dice la teología más tradicional, la teología es ante todo «ciencia», *gnósis*, o más claramente, el conocimiento de fe (genitivo subjetivo), y este conocimiento, sin ser irracional no puede reducirse sólo a razón. El *logos* es principalmente palabra, que implica un hablante, otro a quien se habla, un sentido y un sonido; todo ello irreducible a razón. Pero además, una teología cristiana no puede arrinconar al Espíritu -que no está subordinado al *logos*-. La clásica *teosofía* rusa apuntaba ya a este misterio, pero esta sabiduría católica, a la que aún se podría llamar «teología» si no compartimentalizáramos la Trinidad, se encuentra aún en gestación. A ella pueden colaborar las otras religiones del mundo.

Hemos ya mencionado la idea tradicional de los tres ojos como símbolos del triple conocimiento humano. De ahí que el conocimiento no pueda reducirse a la mera inteligibilidad lógica. La fe es también conocimiento, *gnósis*, en su sentido más profundo. La fe es auténtico conocimiento, aunque no conocimiento racional -sin ser por eso irracional. En toda fe hay un elemento de duda, puesto que la fe no es nunca racionalmente apodíctica-.

Por otra parte, teología y antropología son inseparables. El mensaje de la Sibila de Delfos nos dice que el autoconocimiento no se reduce a un *autós* individualista -como reconocen casi todas las tradiciones de la humanidad-. Y el mensaje cristiano nos dice precisamente que Cristo es *totalmente* Dios y *totalmente* Hombre -como también potencialmente todos nosotros-. «Vosotros sois Dioses» y «Dios (es) *todo* en todos» son expresiones de la escritura cristiana incompatibles con el monoteísmo. «Dios a quien nadie ha visto» lo vislumbramos en el hombre, su imagen. «Quien me ve a mi ha visto al Padre», dice el mismo Cristo. Desde esta perspectiva la intuición del hinduismo advaita sobre *brahman* y *atman* es aleccionadora⁷. Pero para clarificar esta experiencia nos hace falta superar el «dogomonismo»

Podríamos además apoyarnos exegéticamente en la doble dirección de la frase de la Biblia en su primer capítulo: «hagamos al hombre según nuestra imagen y semejanza». O sea, que siendo el hombre el icono y la semblanza de Dios (sin hacer ahora hincapié en el plural del verbo) debemos mirar al hombre, que está hecho a imagen y semejanza suya, que para saber lo que es Dios. Dicho más claramente, debemos conocer al hombre para saber lo que es Dios. Es importante subrayar que, a pesar del patriarcalismo posterior, el mismo Génesis explícita que varón y hembra los creó, o sea que, para conocer

7 Cf. *The Vedic Experience*, nueva edición, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 2001, pág. 641-778.

la imagen divina, no debemos ni podemos mirar solamente al varón sino al hombre en su ser andrógino completo. A pesar de la utilización posterior de la palabra «Padre», que parece dar una preeminencia al varón, la palabra «hombre» no se refiere sólo al varón y éste no tiene derecho alguno a acapararla. La palabra castellana «padres» es todavía dual, y se refiere tanto al varón como a la hembra. La palabra «Padre» es del género gramatical masculino, pero no se refiere al sexo masculino sino que, como dice más de un Concilio de Toledo (Cf. Denz.-Sch. § 568), se refiere a la «*totius fons et origo divinitatis*» («fuente y origen de toda la Divinidad»), que yo me he permitido traducir como fuente inmediata y origen directo de toda la Realidad.

Y con ello desembocamos en el apartado siguiente.

III. (Teología) católica

Ha sido y sigue siendo una pretensión del cristianismo la de encarnar una religión universal, esto es, católica, no tanto en sentido geo-gráfico de una tierra muy reducida, como lo fue al principio, sino en cuanto representa un anuncio liberador para todos los hombres. Esta pretensión no es intrascendente y ha sido repetida casi automáticamente bajo el lema, interpretado acriticamente y, en sentido literal, de un solo rebaño y un solo pastor (Jn 10, 16), reforzado luego por un monoteísmo de un Dios Juez que parece olvidar que hace salir el sol para buenos y malos y llover sobre justos e injustos (Mt 5, 45). Aún hoy en día los papas usan la fórmula *urbi et orbe* propia del imperio romano para bendecir a todo el mundo.

Acabamos de decir que la catolicidad no puede ser *geográfica*, pero tampoco puede interpretarse como si se tratara de una mera *organización* (que debe tener sus límites). Y éste fue el sentido profundo del *símbolo* «Dios» como nombre universal aunque fuera sólo *común* a la familia indoeuropea, que significa brillar, cielo, aurora (*diva, devah, dyaus, dies, Zeus, Iupiter...*) o simplemente *luz*, como dice la primera epístola de san Juan. General es también el nombre «Cristo», que significa «ungido». Si Cristo fuera exclusivamente un individuo, no podría estar *realmente* presente en la Eucaristía ni identificarse con el desvalido. Si se individualiza, en el sentido individualista, su función de redentor (y mediador) universal, muy fácilmente podríamos caer en la ideología fascista de un «Führer», por decirlo de forma exagerada y polémica.

Tampoco debería interpretarse la catolicidad como *jurisdicción* universal, como fue el caso los papas justificando la conquista de las Américas. Es conveniente darse cuenta que la simbiosis entre la *Torah* hebrea y el genio jurídico romano ha ontologizado el derecho hasta reconocer la existencia de un derecho divino y, en consecuencia, de un Dios Legislador (hasta la justificación de la pena de muerte). Es oportuno también percatarse de la aberración que ello representa a los ojos de algunas otras religiones -dicho sea como reflexión fenomenológica-

Por otro lado, la catolicidad tampoco es un nombre *abstracto* que representa sólo un concepto genérico que abarca distintas especies más o menos análogas. El árbol de Porfirio no nos sirve. Y ahí está de nuevo la *Interpelación* del tercer milenio, que atañe también a la filosofía y a las formas de pensar de la cultura dominante. La un tiempo popular «imitación de Cristo» no tiene por qué interpretarse, por ejemplo, como el mimetismo de *otro* individuo, de un *alius* ajeno y transcendente, sino que puede igualmente verse como nuestra identificación a un *alter*, la *altera pars* de nosotros mismos, que aún no hemos alcanzado por estar en peregrinación hacia nuestra propia plenitud. En esto consiste, por poner dos ejemplos, la ‘realización’ hindú y la ‘divinización’ cristiana -que no significan alienación, ser lo que no se es, sino llegar a ser lo que potencialmente somos-. Lo católico no puede ser lo *particular*, pero tampoco lo *abstracto* (que no tiene vida). Ya los antiguos hablaban del carácter «especular» del conocimiento y del hombre como un «microcosmos». En cada uno de nosotros se refleja el destino del universo y podemos contribuir a él. En esto se fundan la dignidad y la responsabilidad del hombre. Mahatma Gandhi decía en 1947, poco antes de su muerte, que cuando alguien hace el bien el universo entero participa en él⁸.

Es en la catolicidad donde aparece esencial el anonadamiento de Cristo que, privado de toda cualificación (como Dios, a quien no se le puede cualificar) le permite ser universal. Descubrir lo universal en lo concreto, sin por ello identificarlos, es signo de sabiduría. Y aquí la contribución del buddhismo con su reflexión sobre el vacío es de importancia capital⁹.

No se trata tampoco, en quinto lugar, de interpretar el mensaje de Cristo como portador de una *doctrina universal*. Toda doctrina, como cualquier contenido conceptual, depende del contexto en donde ha sido concebido (*conceptus*) y éste depende de la cultura y de sus presupuestos particulares, que le confieren significado, que dependen de presupuestos determinados y que sólo pueden universalizarse si parten de axiomas previamente aceptados. Esta es la fuerza y la debilidad del monoteísmo, que parte de una evidencia racional que se cree universal, olvidando la infalibilidad divina y exigiendo su trascendencia absoluta -que nos obligaría al silencio-. No olvidemos que las palabras que todo ser humano está obligado a utilizar no pueden reducirse a meros conceptos. Las palabras son símbolos, y los símbolos son siempre relaciones -como la Trinidad-. De ahí que la cultura oral no pueda substituirse plenamente por la escrita, como a veces un cierto racionalismo tiende a olvidar.

Resumiendo: la pretensión de catolicidad de la teología cristiana no puede ser abstracta ni doctrinal. Esto es lo que tradicionalmente ha venido diciéndose cuando se afirma que la teología es *intellectus fidei*, intelección de la

8 Cf. *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, New Delhi 1958-1984, vol. 88, pág. 230.

9 Cf. *El silencio del Buddha*, Siruela, Madrid, ⁶2005. En especial pág. 187-254.

fe, en el sentido de la frase de Jesús recogida por los tres sinópticos (con ecos en san Pablo): «A vosotros os es dado conocer los misterios del Reino» (Mt 13, 11; Lc 8, 10. Mc 4, 11 dice simplemente «dado»). La fe es conocimiento, como ha venido sosteniendo la tradición, aunque no sea un «conocimiento claro y distinto», sino un conocimiento experiencial que luego interpretamos según nuestros parámetros culturales e históricos pasando de la *fe* a la *creencia*. La fe es una dimensión esencial del ser humano. Todo hombre tiene fe en cuanto *conoce* que no lo conoce todo, en cuanto *conoce* su propia ignorancia y que existe lo desconocido que lo supera. Al decir conocimiento nos referimos obviamente al conocimiento real; esto es, al personal y no al concepto abstracto de conocimiento -confusión que desde hace veintiséis siglos (Parménides) se ha hecho endémica en la cultura post-medieval de Occidente- 'corregido' luego por el extremo opuesto del nominalismo. Dicho teológicamente, la fe no tiene objeto (*objectum*), como afirma la tradición cristiana cuando la describe como virtud teologal, esto es, que se refiere a Dios «a quien nadie ha visto nunca» (Jn 1, 18). Como somos seres racionales, sin embargo, somos conscientes de ello y lo interpretamos según nuestros parámetros culturales. Esta es la creencia¹⁰. Dicho filosóficamente, hay una relación trascendental entre fe y creencia. Toda fe se expresa en una creencia, aunque el paso inverso no le sea posible a la sola razón (sin la ayuda de la fe), como reitera la teología católica. Se olvida, a veces trágicamente, que cuando discuten un llamado «creyente» y otro denominado «no creyente», no hablan sobre la misma «cosa». El diálogo intercultural, repito, no es una discusión dialéctica -que parte de un punto común de referencia-. El punto común se busca precisamente en el diálogo dialógico¹¹.

Este es un punto crucial y a menudo mal entendido del «ecumenismo ecuménico», como lo he llamado o, más simplemente, del diálogo intrarreligioso.

Algún ejemplo nos ahorrará una explicación más técnicamente filosófica. El hinduismo, entre otras religiones, nos ofrece otra versión de lo que quiere decir católico¹². El hinduismo pretende ser también universal o, en su propio lenguaje, *sanatana dharma*; esto es, *dharma* infinito, sin fin, aunque la exégesis conscientemente universalista de esta expresión del *Mahabharata* sea muy posterior -antes se daba por supuesto, porque no se pensaba compartimentalizando (*componendo et dividendo*, dice Tomás de Aquino)-. Por esto se nos dice que el hinduismo no tiene fundador y, por la misma razón, tampoco tiene una doctrina determinada. El hinduismo es más una actitud existencial que un contenido conceptual. Decir *dharma* hindú es poco menos que una tautología en cuanto *dharma* significa orden cósmico, deber, moralidad, derecho, justicia,

10 Cf. p.e., «La religión del futuro», en FRAIJO M. (dir.), *Filosofía de la Religión*, Trotta, Madrid 1994, pág. 733ss. Y Mito, *fede ed ermeneutica*, Jaca Book, Milán 2000, cap. V.

11 Cf. *Paz e interculturalidad*, o.c., pág. 49ss.

12 Cf. *Espiritualidad hindú*, Kairós, Barcelona 2005, pág. 37-46, etc.

ley, virtud, aquello que mantiene la cohesión del universo... Cuando el islam afirma que todo hombre nace musulmán y que luego es la sociedad la que le confiere «otra» pertenencia religiosa, está afirmando algo semejante. El sufismo «existe desde el principio», dice un consagrado maestro (Hazrat Inayat Khan) «porque el hombre posee la luz que es su segunda naturaleza». Algo parecido podríamos decir del *tao* y de muchas religiones africanas (cf. vgr. la rica noción de *ubuntu*). Lo difícil es llegar a la armonía entre lo concreto y lo universal, y la dificultad se ve aumentada por la institucionalización de tantas religiones que afirman su identidad por diferenciación.

La tarea es delicada e importante. No se trata de defender un sincretismo en donde todo se mezcla o un relativismo en donde todo da lo mismo. Nosotros somos seres concretos, y no podemos confundir una cosa con otra ni afirmar, sin contradecirnos, que todas las doctrinas (que defienden convicciones diferentes) son iguales. De ahí que la mística o la visión clásica del tercer ojo sea esencial a la fe -que no tiene objeto (sería idolatría)- y que hemos distinguido ya de la creencia (que sí lo tiene). Y así llegamos al término de nuestra meditación ñinacabada-.

IV. Tercer milenio

Es significativo que las religiones monoteístas se resistan a esta cronología de origen cristiano y que las demás religiones, no monoteístas, la acepten pacíficamente, puesto que no la interpretan como «Historia de la Salvación», sino como una manera práctica de dividir la sucesión temporal de los acontecimientos sin significación transcendental.

No olvidemos que la reacción laicista de substituir el «antes» y «después» de Cristo (quien, como se sabe, no nació en el año 1) por «antes» y «después» de la «era Común», traiciona su «fundamentalismo», puesto que la tal era no es común para una mayoría de las culturas que no han sido aún «colonizadas» por la modernidad. ¡Ironías de la historia!

En cambio lo que estas culturas interpretan como un síntoma de colonialismo es la expresión «Pueblo de Dios», que quiere substituir la expresión reduccionista de iglesia, olvidando que originariamente «Iglesia» representaba el misterio del mundo que existió desde el Principio, como dice explícitamente la Patrística¹³. La humanidad entera es «Pueblo de Dios» en peregrinación.

Se dirá que la intención del Concilio no era la de empuqueñecer el Misterio, sino precisamente la de liberar la «iglesia-institución» de su monopolio sobre la salvación y universalizarla. Pero los arquetipos traicionan. Para los Padres del Concilio la expresión era liberadora, primero porque se centraban primordialmente en las religiones monoteístas, y luego porque interpretaban «Dios» como símbolo universal, olvidando religiones como el jainismo y el

13 Cf. la obra fundamental de H. DE LUBAC, *Méditation sur l'Église*, Aubier, Paris 3^a1959.

budhismo entre otras o, lo que es aún más grave, haciendo caso omiso de las grandes tradiciones ateas occidentales y orientales. Es significativo que traición y tradición vengan de la misma palabra latina de *tradere*. No hay nada más fácil que traicionar la tradición cuando no se la modifica en la transmisión y se la quiere conservar inmutable.

Como acabamos de decir, la expresión de Tercer Milenio es puramente pragmática y ni absolutiza el tiempo ni tiene significación histórica según una concepción semita de la historia. «Historia» no es sinónimo de tiempo, ni tan sólo de tiempo humano. Dentro de la misma concepción cristiana la salvación sucede en la historia, pero no es un hecho histórico -se sale precisamente de la historia-. La eternidad no es historia. Una experiencia más católica nos hubiera ahorrado muchas polémicas.

Hay ciertamente una contemporaneidad en la que la humanidad entera participa. Vivimos en el presente, aunque con diversas percepciones de lo que sea el pasado y el futuro. El tiempo es una dimensión de todo ser y no una autopista hacia una meta (sobre cuya naturaleza se discute). Como he venido defendiendo, la virtud «teologal» de la esperanza no es de futuro, sino de lo invisible -allí donde está el «Reino de Dios», en lenguaje evangélico. Sin esta experiencia, me atrevo a afirmar, no se puede ser feliz- puesto que las tragedias históricas del mundo no nos pueden dejar indiferentes; sería una *ataraxia* inhumana.

Estamos tocando un punto neurálgico de la teología católica del tercer milenio, que no puede ya por más tiempo anquilosarse en las culturas semíticas (monoteístas, históricas, con un Dios Legislador y Juez) con la concepción de un tiempo lineal (y por tanto de una «vida perdurable»)... Necesitamos una nueva cosmología y un nuevo pluralismo. No olvidemos que el fundamento del pluralismo es la experiencia de la contingencia humana.

En una palabra, la teología actual, como obra de la fe, «no puede vivir de renta» y necesita ser fecundada por las otras religiones del planeta para llegar a ser católica -en donde la frase puede también invertirse, puesto que la catolicidad no es monopolio de nadie-. La contribución de las Américas a esta tarea común es imprescindible, aunque estamos aún dando los primeros pasos. Debemos *liberarnos* de la inercia de la historia: «Nadie que poniendo la mano en el arado y mira hacia atrás...» (Lc 9, 62).

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Why a Pluralist Christology in Asia

Tissa BALASURIYA

Jesus of Nazareth is a well known personality. There has been also a continuous oral and written interpretative tradition about him and the community he began,.

From the earliest times since his death there was a build up of a theological thinking based on the expectations of the Jewish people and of Greek culture. As in other cultures, there were the expectations of the Jewish people for a messiah to come who would liberate them from present miseries and lead them through periods of crisis to an apocalyptic future of plenty, everlasting goodness and glory for the Jewish people. There were interpretations concerning his life on earth, and about his life before and after death. The expected Messiah was called Christ or the one anointed by God to liberate the Jewish people.

There are several biblical texts that could be invoked to develop a theology concerning the personality of Jesus. concerning the personality of Jesus. In the Synoptics Jesus asks, or is asked a question about the Messiah, Mark 12 : 35-37. St. Peter in his proclamation after receiving the Spirit, announces: "All the people of Israel, then, are to know for sure that this Jesus, whom you crucified, is the one that God had made Lord and Messiah." Acts 2 : 36.

The disciples of Jesus thought of him as the Messiah and he was called the Christ. Thus :

St. Paul in 1 Cor. 15: 20 -25 there is a reference to Jesus as the first raised from the dead: "For just as death came by means of a man, in the same way the rising from death comes by means of a man. For just as all people die because of their union with Adam, in the same way all will be raised to life because of their union with Christ."

1 Cor 15: 24 speaks of Jesus as the Christ in apocalyptic terms: "Then the end will, come : Christ will overcome all spiritual rulers,

authorities, and [powers and will hand over the kingdom to God the Father”

The early Church had to evolve their thinking and teaching concerning Jesus in this context of Jewish and Greek culture and traditions. Since they were relating Jesus to the transcendent God who is a mystery beyond human understanding and language, they had to use their imagination and language of imagery and analogy to articulate the position of Jesus the Christ in relation to the one God of Abrahamic monotheism.

The theology of the Church evolved in the first centuries with the Fathers of the Church trying out different combinations of relationships within the divinity, using Greek terminology such as substance, persons and natures : with three persons in the Trinity, being of one Substance, and two natures (human and divine) in Jesus the Christ. They had to elaborate a theological formulation to account for the universal sinfulness of all humanity in the fall of Adam and Eve, and establish Jesus the Christ as the unique and the universal Saviour of all humankind, through the grace of the Church.

A combination of theological creativity, and authoritative doctrinal judgments led to the acceptance of a formulation as at the Council of Nicea in 325. As against the view of Arius that Jesus was not God but God's first created being, the Council elaborated the pre-existence of the Son

“God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one being of the same substance (homoousios) with the Father.”

The impact of the Emperor Constantine was also decisive in the acceptance of the final definition that became the Nicene Creed which has been recited in most Christian Churches throughout the world even up to the present times

There were further debates concerning the relationships within the Trinity, as to how Jesus was human and divine, and the condition of humanity after the fall as proposed by Nestorius, Pelagius and other leading thinkers. If the Son is God and is distinct from the Father, how is the Son God “The tension between the (two) schools, heightened by ecclesiastical rivalries and political intrigue, set doctrinal development on the path towards the Council of Chalcedon (451)”. ...” Chalcedon articulated the dogma of the hypostatic union, and this dogma with its terms of substance, person and nature, came to provide subsequent Christological reflection with its starting point, terms and framework until the present century. ... This body of patristic conciliar doctrine proved a stable possession throughout the Middle Ages and beyond. ” (William P. Loewe in *The New Dictionary of Theology* (TPI Bangalore 1993, p 535-538).

The defined Christological doctrine was (is) that Jesus Christ is the unique and universal saviour of all humanity, due to the original sin of the first parents Adam and Eve. Salvation was through the membership of the (Catholic) Church, through baptism in the name of the Trinity. The Church has the mission to preach the gospel to all nations and convert all humanity to the Church for their salvation. Christianity is the one true religion, consequently other religions were regarded as not true and not paths to eternal salvation.

Such a rigid doctrine prevailed as Christian orthodoxy throughout centuries from 451 onwards. In subsequent periods of history the authority of the Church and the power of the secular rulers were used to enforce orthodoxy in doctrine. The liturgy repeated the formulations every Sunday and the formation of the clergy and faithful was to accept them and hand them down from generation to generation of Christians. Thus these definitions became unquestionable tradition of the Church, with Tradition itself becoming a source of theology. Thus the basic core of Christian theological doctrine continued substantially unchanged in the mainline churches till the mid 20th century, especially till the Catholic Vatican Council II, 1962-65.

One can see a long historical process in which Christology developed. Beginning with the experience of the admirable life and teaching of Jesus,

the statements in the New and Old Testaments,
intellectual issues arising in the churches,
speculation, imagination, evolution of theological formulations
and conflicts, authoritarian definitions backed by political power,
enforcement of doctrine with exclusion of any dissent,
the formulations acquiring the value of tradition,
pastorate and liturgy reinforcing such doctrinal positions ...
growth of power of ruling feudal, national, commercial elites,
neglect of embarrassing original egalitarian thrust of the teaching
of Jesus, consolidation of power of Church linked to secular powers,
European expansion to rest of the world as imperial powers,
intolerance of other religions...
till mid 20th century, (end of colonial empires) opening of
Christianity to inter-religious dialogue.

The divine transcendent is a mystery unfathomable by humans. No one has seen God. As the (Zen) Master would say if one has seen God that is not God. No one has a control over knowledge concerning God and on the impact of divine action. The claims of revelation or divine communications are always externally expressed - analogically, metaphorically and in a given social cultural context.

The power elites in any community tend to interpret such claims of revelation in a manner favourable to them e.g. promoting male domination or the superiority of a particular racial, ethnic or caste group. Hence all claims or interpretations of divine revelation have to be critically evaluated in terms of their own internal coherence and credibility to others *ad extra*.

A relevant issue in this connection is the interpretation of the claims of divine revelation, specially by the three monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Historically Christianity has had three paradigms or models of revelation regarding salvation.

- a. the exclusivist paradigm : according to which only Christianity is salvific.
- b. inclusivist: good persons of other religions can be saved through Christ and the church as anonymous Christians
- c. pluralist: salvation is open to all through other religions or mediations, according to their good life. There can be different understandings of the Ultimate Reality and of the human condition, and of after life.

We offer some basic reflections on these positions.

The divine is unfathomable by humans. No one has a control over knowledge concerning God and the impact of divine action. The claims of revelation or divine communications are always externally expressed analogically, metaphorically and in a given social cultural context.

A. Exclusive Christology

The traditional Christian theology concerning Jesus Christ can be called an Exclusive Christological position since it limits salvation to Christians and that through Jesus Christ, the necessary, unique and universal saviour of all humanity. An exclusivist Christology usually affirms that other religions, though they may possess some elements of truth, do not teach 'the truth' that is able to save its followers.

Due to several reasons this exclusivist Christology is not an acceptable theology for the mass of the Asian peoples who have many recognised seers and saints, long historical traditions, sacred writings and cultures of religiosity akin to the teachings of Jesus and the inspiring message and service of saintly Christian missionaries. Their religions have been a civilising inspiration for their millennial enlightenment and modern liberative struggles against invasion by exploiting Christian powers. In any case so far only about 3-4% of Asians have accepted Christianity.

i) Christianity has a discriminatory religious anthropology combined with an exclusivist soteriology or teaching on salvation.

The Christian position that our ancestors were thought of as not equally loved, by God, since they were said to be in original sin and alienated from God without their causing it in any way or having a way out of sin on their own. This was based on the presupposition of monogenism, that all humans are born of the same first parents. This is not proved, provable or accepted by many today. This is an odd construct of theology and spirituality based on a founding myth regarding the origins of humanity, their original and universal fall, and the creative plan of a Trinitarian God of love and justice and the consequent death of God's only son ! In the whole process, salvation is made to depend on Jesus Christ in such a way that only Christians are directly advantaged. The possibility of baptism of desire for persons of good will is little consolation for those who are not Christians.

The large scale de-Christianisation of the western peoples and the growth of secularism throughout the world no longer tolerate the world-views and hypotheses on which the earlier dominant Christian theologies of revelation were based.

ii) The interpretation given to the life, message and death of Jesus as saving souls by his death to appease God the Father for the sins humanity, diverts attention from the Jesus' message of love and justice in a unjust society that condemned him to death on the cross. This Christology generally interpreted salvation as by Jesus, a God-Man paying a price to an angry God the Father. This would seem to be contrary to the central theme of God is love and love of neighbour and of God which is the criterion of salvation attributed to Jesus in the gospels. The exclusivist and even inclusivist theories are a distortion of the core message of Jesus and an impediment to a correct understanding of discipleship of Jesus. The exclusive and inclusive Christian theologies claim God to be on the side of the Christians to the disadvantage of other peoples and their claims of divine revelations.

iii) Even after Jesus' life and death only a small percentage of Asians belonged to the Church. Asian peoples had well developed religions long before Christianity was brought here with this exclusive theological formulation. They could accept the gospel presentation of the life of Jesus as one exemplary model, without having to give up their traditional religions. The main Asian country that is majority Christian is the Philippines. There the Spanish colonial rulers long exerted undue pressure for their conversion to the Catholic Church. Also there was perhaps no organised religion there such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam and other native religions that had taken strong root prior to Christianity, as in most of the Asian countries.

iv) A theology that discriminates against most peoples in the world cannot be from the transcendent God, whom the other Asian religions

in their better inspirations think of as good and fair to all. This is a criterion *ad extra* of the credibility of this exclusivist model of Christology. It would mean exclusion of the vast majority of global humanity before Christ, and even after Christ, from the saving grace said to be from Christ only.

iv) The view or myth that God or an ultimate transcendent reality would condemn all human beings as sinners even centuries before their birth is unthinkable in our religio-spiritual contexts of Asia. We have religious traditions with sophisticated attempts at explanation of the origin and destiny of human life. Both Hinduism and Buddhism would not countenance an eternal hell, designed by a loving God for the majority of humanity. Eternal punishment for any beings is unthinkable and neither human nor divine.

v) While inspiring immense exemplary good through her missions in all parts of the world, this exclusivist Church teaching and practice at the same time justified the world's worst robberies of land and wealth during over four centuries since 1492. This was linked to the greatest genocide known in recorded human history. Whole civilizations were exterminated by Christians as in North and South Americas. Slavery was justified also till the 18th century.

vi) A grossly unjust world system has been built up mainly by Christians, with the European peoples taking over most of the habitable land of the earth. There is no remedy for the land hunger of the increasing populations of the poor peoples of Asia and Africa. This world disorder is maintained by the cover of international legality, the force of arms, the domination of finance and cultural manipulation mainly by peoples who call themselves Christians.

vii) Compensation due to the colonised peoples has not been urged on the exploiting Christians by the Church. This is a debt that is still due. What is required is a radical transformation of the global order of land distribution among the peoples of the world. The exclusivist Christianity does not pinpoint the gaps in spirituality that tolerate and benefit from centennial plunder and murder. The Christian saints of charity have not been champions of social or global justice, as seen in encyclical "Deus Caritas Est" of Benedict XVI.

viii) The exclusivist Christology has had a bad impact on power holders in the church. Their interpretations have led to long term arrogance and intolerance by powerful Christian churches. They have been invoked to legitimise the Inquisition, colonial invasions and centennial colonisation. The Popes urged the European rulers to invade, conquer and convert to Christianity the peoples of other continents in order to save their souls. (Papal Bulls 1453).

The contradiction between the core teachings of Christianity that God is love and such a lived experience of the oppressed peoples under Christian rulers and dominators during over 1000 years of slavery, crusades, intolerance of others, colonial invasions and wars, would imply that there has been a gravely wrong interpretation of the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth whose Sermon on the Mount, the Our Father and Matt 25: 31-46 stressed contrary values of universal love, sharing, truth, justice and peace.

Due to the exclusivist interpretations of revelation that prevailed in the church up till modern times, the Christian establishment was often unwilling or slow to appreciate historical movements such as the development of science, democracy, and feminism. Still less would it appreciate truth in other religions or even values of non Western cultures. In a one world situation of rapid global communications the Christian a claim of an exclusive rigid revelation is not tenable or capable of helping build a peaceful and sustainable world order.

The main position taken here is that the traditional exclusivist Christology is not acceptable as the theology concerning Jesus Christ because of the damage it has done to the majority of humanity during over 1500 years. Its presentation of God, the human condition, salvation through Christ and the Church cannot be reconciled with the God of love and the commandment of Jesus to love one another. Asia and the world yearning for justice requires a more open understanding of the ultimate reality, a more inspiring example of human relations and a more hopeful presentation of human destiny after life on earth.

B. Inclusive Christology

Due to the millennial tradition of Christian theology with its anthropology of the universal fall, its exclusivist theology of salvation only by the divine-human Christ and the Church, some theologians would like to find a way out for the salvation of the vast majority of humanity who would seem to be damned in that exclusivist perspective. They have tried to devise a sort of back door entrance for those not Christians to enter the Christian heaven. They would say that persons who live righteous lives are “Anonymous Christians”.¹

1 Rahner explains his position thus: Anonymous Christianity means that a person lives in the grace of God and attains salvation outside of explicitly constituted Christianity...” Let us say, a Buddhist monk... who, because he follows his conscience, attains salvation and lives in the grace of God; of him I must say that he is an anonymous Christian; if not, I would have to presuppose that there is a genuine path to salvation that really attains that goal, but that simply has nothing to do with Jesus Christ. But I cannot do that. And so, if I hold if everyone depends upon Jesus Christ for salvation, and if at the same time I hold that many live in the world who have not expressly recognized Jesus Christ, then

The perspective of inclusivism is due to the traditional Christian theologians being unhappy with the rigidity of the exclusivist interpretation of Christology and yet unable or unwilling to question the presuppositions of their theology's exclusivity of salvation due their interpretation of biblical revelation and tradition. But other religions would find this form of theologising as only providing them a sort of second class treatment in a Christian dispensation. It is like an after thought of the Christian theologians, accepting the doctrine of original sin as the condition of the whole of humanity. Even Karl Rahner is so much limited by the tradition that he cannot think of salvation outside of a connection with Jesus Christ and the Church.

The exclusive and inclusive theologies claim God to be on the side of the Christians, relatively discrediting the revelations claimed and the paths to salvation indicated by other religions. Christian theology generally interpreted salvation as by Jesus the Christ God-Man paying a price to an offended God the Father. This would seem to be contrary to the central theme of God is love, and of the love of neighbour and of God which is the criterion of salvation attributed to Jesus in the gospels. Jesus has given this clear basis of God's ultimate judgment on a person's life (Matt: 25). The exclusivist and even inclusivist theories depend on a distortion of the core message of Jesus making salvation depend on the sacramental ritual of baptism and membership of the Church. This is an impediment to a correct and faithful understanding of discipleship of Jesus including life according to the values of love, truth, justice, sharing, forgiveness and peace that Jesus taught and bore witness to unto death.

Given these considerations the Christian churches must investigate as to how and why they were wrong for several centuries on such foundational issues as the human condition, the nature of the divine and the ultimate destiny of humans. Instead of, or alongside theological elaborations such as 'anonymous Christians' and 'baptism of desire', theologians today can seek the deeper root causes of their grave misjudgements in coming to such exclusivist conclusions. It may be said that with such a presupposition of original sin there is no way out for Christian theology without offending others outside of the Church. It was a theology that could pass in a community and culture of established Christians who had the miraculous path to salvation through infant baptism

Only a pluralist understanding of revelations can be acceptable to humanity in a world in which the majority of humans are not Christians. It can be the basis of peaceful global inter-religious dialogue and convivance.

there remains in my opinion nothing else but to take up this postulate of an anonymous Christianity " (from Internet, cf.Karl Rahner: Anonymous Christians).

C. FOR A PLURALIST THEOLOGY challenged by the Asian Realities

Asia is half of humanity with a long tradition of search for the meaning in life in relation to an Absolute Transcendent Ultimate Reality. In this we are dealing with several areas of mystery, the unfathomable, the unspeakable, the unattainable.

Unfathomable Mysteries

The Ultimate Reality >>>> ???<<<<<<< Human Condition
Unknown identity, unknown origins, composition,
Nature Personality, substance, plans destiny beyond this life

Human Knowledge concerning Mysteries

Human Knowledge Imagination Myths Revelation/s Beliefs
Communication in language/s analogically,
metaphors, stories / parables

Religions

Religion core values/seers and saints sacred writings teachings cult
community/authority law social system gender power relations

Theological constructs

imagination revelations descriptions dogmas
Impact of cultures, social systems, power...

This schema shows some of the issues involved in trying to inter relate some factors in the development of theologies, in inter-religious relations and dialogue. They are all involved in different degrees. We can consider the possible impact of sayings attributed to Jesus and their being handed down through the ages by interested parties in different languages in the background of cultures, social systems, with their myths, gender, racial and, national interest s, imperial powers and governors, and apocalyptic expectations.

We referred briefly to the definitions on the divinity of Jesus in 325 by the Council of Nicea convoked and hosted by the Emperor Constantine and finally decided by him, and its decision imposed under his authority, for the sake of unity in his empire. This definition is still repeated in our Churches every Sunday due to continuity in tradition with the cult of most Christian communities.

In Asia the intellectual and practical mindset is often one of trying to reconcile apparent opposites to analysis of reality. If the rational approach in the West is more inclined to the “either ... or“ (aut ...aut) approach, the Eastern is said to be one of “both ... and“ (et ... et). Thus Western Christianity has resort to exclusive dogmatic definitions with a condemnation of adversaries (“anathema sit”) and even exile and excommunication. Asian religions and cultures tend to leave more space for the other, the different, the dissentient especially in speculation concerning

the Ultimate Reality. Asian religions generally co-exist, especially if not under the influence of political powers and caste hierarchies. This is a general statement of a trend with many exceptions. On the whole the overall accent is one of forbearance and acceptance of the other as taught by Lao Tse, the Buddha, the Upanishads and Gitanjali of Rabindranath Tagore. Perhaps Mahatma Gandhi was a better philosophical and practical follower, than any Christian saint, theologian or Church leader, of the non violence of Jesus in public political life. Islam and Christianity too have similar teachings of respect for all religions, though the lived experience may be a less admirable historical record.

A Pluralist Perspective of Religions

A pluralist Christology has to be within the concept of a pluralist perspective of religious. Some considerations for this are:

i) All world religions have a substantial body of good teachings and practices on moral living, This is a reality, other wise humans would not follow them for centuries. Religions deal with the mystery of life and of ultimate meaning in life. Each one can be open to mystery, no one has a monopoly of it, as the mystery is infinite.

ii) No religion can have the fullness of truth concerning the Absolute Ultimate Reality, because this is beyond human ken. No religion has a monopoly of the knowledge concerning God, the Ultimate Reality, or of human salvation and of life beyond death. All religions should be prepared to learn form others including secular society and the progressive evolution of the world.

iii) The religions should accept that there can be different ways of describing the Ultimate Reality or God. Each religion can be faithful to its interpretation of the divine without claiming a control over the divine. Likewise concerning the origin of human life or of life after death no religion can claim an absolute knowledge of what went before or what will happen after a person's death. Religions can have different presentations of their understanding of the divine, expressed in different languages, art forms, cultural backgrounds, rites of worship, community organisation, educational systems. Beyond and beneath all these they can be together in genuine disinterested service of the human community. That is the deepest message, mystique of most of the religions.

iii). The religions can think of themselves as complementary to the common spiritual good of all, rather than competitors. The world religions have a set of core values on which they can agree and cooperate in practical social life. The religions are the world oldest, most widespread peoples' movements. They receive the loyal adhesion of the masses of the people based on local groups, national communities and global networks.

Together they can contribute to develop a world order of sharing, justice and peace. They can promote human rights at different levels and campaign together for issues such as equality between people and respect for each person irrespective of gender, age, class race and caste, fair trade, world peace, arms control, nuclear disarmament, care of the planet earth. Together they can be the greatest benefactors of humanity.

iv) All religions are actually conditioned in their thinking, expressions and actions by the prevailing social order and cultural background. All religions need critical self examination, self correction and repentance for their mistakes such as favouring male superiority and disregarding gender justice. All religions deserve respect and acceptance for the good they inspire and achieve.

v) The main role of the religions should be to contribute to the spiritual betterment of their members and of society at large. They should be less concerned with the external issues such as the formalities of rituals of worship, the buildings such as temples and churches, the legal authoritarian organization of the community, inter-religious rivalry in numbers and power, and even the philosophical and intellectual formulation of theories and dogmas.

“The bells of the temple and the church are different, they may ring at different times, calling their faithful to different services led by different priests. But the tune, the music are the same, the liberating song of the Divine reminding us of the eternal truth, all of us are children of God. ...

The need of the hour is a shift from religion to spirituality... While maintaining the identities of our religions we must go to the basic core message of each of them and relate to issues of love, truth, justice and equality in the actual circumstances of our lives. This could pave the way to a state of spiritual solidarity. It could provide the key to open our respective prison doors. But it is up to us to walk out and forge a new spiritual solidarity that would impact and transform our society and set the agenda for a brave, new world” Swami Agnivesh (in Foreword to Albert Nambiaparambil, *Pilgrims on the Sea Shore of Endless worlds*, Asian Trading Corporation 2002, iii).

Towards A Pluralist Christology

“Jesus of Nazareth is one of the persons most misrepresented and most misunderstood in history. We Christians are largely responsible for this. He was presented in Asia in modern times in the manner he was thought of in modern Western Europe and later North America. This was an understanding of Jesus that suited the Christian religious institution which had become the handmaid of the Roman Emperors and later on

of the medieval feudal lords and rulers, including the papal states. By the 16th century incipient commercial capitalism had subordinated the religious institution to its own requirements.” (cf. Tissa Balasuriya “Jesus Christ and Human Liberation” CSR, Colombo, 1976, p 7).

a) We should try to present the core teaching of Jesus of Nazareth as seen from his sayings and actions : principally that God is love and our call is to love God and love neighbour as ourselves. We can try to articulate the values he emphasized, lived for and died.

“He has chosen me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind to set free the oppressed and announce that the time has come when the Lord will save his people” Luke 4:18-19.

b) The path that Jesus shows for human salvation is universal Math. 25 : 31-46. “I was hungry and you fed me ...”. All humans can go on that path within or without the Church. Jesus has no monopoly of the path to human salvation. Before Jesus was born human salvation was operative. Jesus showed a path, but did not initiate it or open it for humanity.

c) Jesus should not be presented as the unique and universal saviour of all humanity, due to the fall of all humanity into original sin. He presents a unique path to salvation that is open to all humans of all times, and can be taught by other religious leaders also, probably in different words. This path of love for all would bring the kingdom of God on earth, and also save all with or without a religious affiliation.

d) What is important for his disciples is to follow Jesus teaching in practical moral living, rather than trying to define him intellectually according to Greek philosophical categories, such as substance, person, nature. The discipleship of Jesus is a spiritual quest, of being the servant of all, rather than the Lord and master. He came to serve and to not to be served.

These thoughts would demand a radical transformation in the presentation of Jesus the Christ as a partner with all others in the salvation of all and of the world order.

Jesus needs to be liberated from being a captive in traditional exclusive Christology. Theologies and spiritualities can stress on Jesus as companion, fully human and as such linked divinity, beyond forms of possessive religiosity and especially structures of oppression. He shows a way to a more pluralistic understanding among communities of different religions, to be in dialogue of life and action for a different humanity beyond oppression.

There are many sons and daughters of God in the same mission as Jesus trying to pave a path in love and service to all beyond personal and group selfishness. Recognising these several persons does not diminish the divine sonship of Jesus but brings us to a different way of thinking about the communion of saints. Let a pluralistic Christology purify Christian theology and life make them more clearly Jesus like and Christ like. Let Jesus be Jesus, the messenger of the God of love, a liberator of the oppressed and a partner in building a new humanity.

Let God be God, who loves and cares for all beyond all human made barriers.

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Pluralistic African Theology

In line with John S. Mbiti's observation that in African tradition religion permeates every aspect of life (1969) one can rightfully say that African theology also is intertwined in every aspect of life in Africa, directly or indirectly. This is expected given the phenomenal spread of Christianity as well as the constant contact between Christians and non-Christians in the day to day life. Theology is taken to mean the recognition and reflection on God and related manifestations in society, which cuts across faiths.

African theology is pluralistic when one considers the historical thread which has governed the religious scene in Africa: the constant and die hard African indigenous religion, the influence of Christianity and Islam, and the contemporary wave of new religious movements. The pluralistic nature of African theology is also evident when one considers that basically the entire populace is involved – academicians, clergy, lay people, men, women, youth, and children. Another pluralistic nature of African theology is the diverse methodology and the varied approaches of doing it – living it, writing about it. The many theological issues that are of concern and interest to the people is definitely another factor that makes African theology pluralistic. The geographical and linguistic vastness and expanse of the continent is also another element of plurality.

In this plurality, one notes the many ways of God. The analysis here below is an attempt to highlight some broad common issues that are being focused on mainly by theologians in the academy, but it is apparent that they are informed and motivated by their experiences and interaction with all cadre of people and situations in the continent.

When discussing African liberation theology (Fabella and Sugirtharajah 2000), Emmanuel Martey outlines the following as the major five areas of interest and concern – South African black theology, African Women's theology, African (Christian) inculturation theology, African Liberation theology that draws attention to all structures – economic, social and political that dehumanize and impoverish the African, and spiritual healing. These areas or aspects of them are also covered in Maluleke's (1997) analysis on African theology in the twentieth Century and the emerging agenda for the twenty first Century.

The interests and concerns of today are therefore, closely related to and a carryover from the distant and recent past and envisioned future. South African black theology may have shifted from apartheid but not the effect and impact thereof. The scars of apartheid remain apparent as noted in the theological implications and input on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The theologians are also grappling with the other complex issues related to the post apartheid scenario, such as understanding and accommodating one another given the racial and cultural walls that separated the African, Afrikaner and white theologians, and their agenda.

African women's theology is spearheaded by the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians. Phiri (2002) notes that the Circle, founded by Mercy Amba Oduyoye is a community of African Women theologians who come together to theologize from the experiences of African women in theology, religion and culture. In conferences organized in various chapters of the Circle in the continent and in their publication African Women who belong to diverse classes, races, cultures, nationalities and religions have continued to reflect and write about their diverse situations and experiences. A common issue that the Circle is focusing on is HIV/AIDS. Letty M. Russell has described one publication (Phiri et al: 2003) that has contributions from women across the continent and the diaspora as "... a book of theological clarity, courage and hope. The writers detail first hand how women have become the most affected and infected as HIV/AIDS moves like a plague across the African continent. They challenge Christian and cultural traditions and provide concrete suggestions for change in the teaching and practice of the church."

The Circle is also involved in other projects such as highlighting on the hidden stories of women of faith in Africa, where recognition is made of the important role African women have played in the Christian heritage, their struggles and pain, their joys and victories, the history of the church in different countries, indeed the connection between church and society.

Inculturation theology has also remained a key theme for African theologians. As noted in a recent book (Magesa 2004) the theme of inculturation is basically Africanization of Christianity; an analysis of how Africans (should) relate Christianity to their traditional religions, social and moral practices. This is important given the key place the African cultural heritage holds for many Africans regardless of one's academic, social or religious standing.

Africa continues to face challenge in the economic, social and political spheres. The response of theologians to these issues is by addressing and reflecting on themes such as marginalization of the continent, (Kanyadago 2002) the conflicts therein, (Getui and Musyonii 2002) escalating poverty, violence, gender injustice, globalization, environmental degradation and disease (Ndungu and Mwaura 2005). In addressing these issues the questions the theologians are asking include: what is the role of theology in the social

reconstruction of the continent, how and what does the church have to offer in this context.? In this quest, there are indications of hope and prospects for the theologians, the church and the continent. As noted in Dedji's book (2003) the reconstruction paradigm is an inter-faith, inter-denominational and multi-disciplinary enterprise. It is noted further that reconstruction and renewal are new forms of theological hermeneutics developed by African theologians to bring full humanity to the people of Africa.

African theology has had a long history which is sometimes ignored, misunderstood or excluded. Bujo is responding to this, correcting the wrong impressions with the series of books on African Theology, *The Contribution of the Pioneers*. Volume 1 is already in circulation. In this volume (Bujo and Muya 2003) Bujo indicates that the idea of the project is multi-faced – to show that African theology exists and is alive and well, creating awareness on the way traveled, of targets accomplished and of riches often hidden. Acknowledging the pioneer theologians and documenting their contribution is in line with the African tradition that ancestors, old and aged people are a wealth. The effort is also expected to aid those who take an interest in African theology, and who desire either to increase or deepen their knowledge on African theology. The project is also meant as a working tool for students and young people who want to interact with the authors. Another element of the project is that the biography has a list of publications of the main contributions of the pioneer, as well as a synthesis of the author's thought.

African theologians have acknowledged that the Bible is central in Africa. Several texts have been produced that focus on issues such as the history of the Bible in Africa, role the Bible plays in the social development of the continent, constructive ways of using the Bible more relevantly and creatively, interaction between scriptures and readers, and various ways of reading the Bible. (Akintunde 2004; Yorke and Renju 2004; Mugambi and Smit 2004; Wendland and Loba Mkole 2004; 2005).

Apart from the Jubilee (500 years of Christianity in Africa) since Vasco Da Gama, many mission churches in Africa, have or are celebrating their century presence in Africa. This has resulted in theologians highlighting on a historical analysis of specific denominations in Africa their contributions, challenges and prospects. It is also a time when contributions of some of the pioneer African Christians and clergy are also being highlighted.

As the continent has experienced a religious upsurge and challenges thereof and is home to many religions, inter-faith dialogue is a theme that is the concern of theologians. This is the theme that the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) is currently pursuing. The main thrust of inter-faith is to bridge understanding between the different faiths, as well as to provide a faith response to issues of common interest such as violence and conflict. Inter-faith presupposes ecumenism which has had a long history in Africa. The ecumenical movement in Africa has to consider

a paradigm shift given the dwindling financial support to continental bodies such as All Africa Conference of Churches as well as similar national bodies. The agenda of these bodies also requires new lenses given the dynamic social religious and political scenario world wide.

It is important to note that Western theologians resident in Africa are taking an interest in certain theological themes. John S. Pobee, a leading African theologian comments on Stinton's (a Canadian) book, *Jesus of Africa* (2004) as "a striking addition to the burgeoning of African theology and shows that it is no longer solely the preserve of Africans... (the book) reveals an author capable of sensitive scholarship and the humility of a person who has drunk deeply from the springs of African theology."

An outstanding element in Stinton's work is the incorporation of the oral christological views. Healey and Sybertz (2000) have also made a cognition of deep spirituality as well as theological and philosophical insight of the African narrative and oral tradition in their publication *Towards an African Narrative Theology*.

African Independent/Instituted/Initiated Churches and New Religious Movements have captured the interest of postgraduate students as is evident in the theses that have been and are being pursued in various theological institutions and religions studies departments. Some of the aspects addressed include the causes of these churches and movements and their impact in the society. These studies indicate that the aspect of (spiritual) healing features quite prominently in these unique manifestations of Christianity.

The above analysis goes a long way to confirm Maluleke's (1997) observation, indeed prophesy that African theologians are showing a remarkable knack for contextualization, dynamism, innovation and constant introspection. African theology is a growing multifaceted and dialectic movement. As it is, African theology can be likened to a relay, where the baton is passed from one athlete to another. The performance of the team depends very much on the stock they have taken arising from their practices rehearsals, and past performance. The relay also has competitors who have to be taken into consideration. In the audience are fans and destructors. All in all, the history, status and prospects of African theology are a clear indication that there is more yet to be done given the dynamism of society and the emerging trends and challenges, and the fact that many look to theology with hope and anticipation, of a positive response to their concerns and interests.

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Inter-religious Relations in South Africa with reference to Christians and Muslims

This article is in the realm of religious pluralism and ecumenism. It is about the relation between Christianity and Islam as it unfolded in the Cape since 1652 and in the entire country to date. Christianity, as embodied in the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC), was the religion of the ruler whilst other religions and even other churches were not allowed to operate freely and publicly in the Cape colony. Freedom of religion was eventually granted in 1804. As we celebrate in 2004, ten years of freedom and democracy, and thus of two-hundred years of religious freedom, this article looks at what has accrued for South Africa's religious heritage in terms of inter-religious dialogue and praxis as well as ecumenical relations.

1. Introduction

South Africa is a home to several religions among which are the following: Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism and African religion. The interaction among these religions or lack of it cannot be understood and appreciated apart from the socio-political developments in the country since the seventeenth century. In other words, political developments in South Africa have dictated, to a large extent, the manner and the degree to which different religious communities interacted or did not interact with one another. However, our task in this essay is limited to Christian-Muslim relations.

2. Arrival of Christianity

Christianity and colonialism arrived together in South Africa in 1652. That is, Jan van Riebeeck brought his Christianity as embodied in the Dutch

Reformed Church (Coertzen 2001 : 133-153). For the first 150 years the Cape had an official religion, Christianity. African religion was ignored and Islam was expressly banned. As Pillay(1995:71) correctly puts it,

In the years between the first Dutch settlement at the Cape(1652) and the British occupation of the Cape (1795-1803), church/state relations were determined by the widely accepted principle in European nationalism at the time, the principle of «cuius regio eius religio».

The position of the DRC as an official church was so entrenched that other churches were not permitted to hold public services(Hofmeyr 1994: 8-30). For example, George Schmidt who had been sent by Count von Zinzendorf as a Moravian missionary to the Cape in 1737 was refused permission to baptise converts and the honours were done by the DRC(Coertzen 2001 : 133-153; Pillay 1995 : 71-86; Gerstner 1997 : 16-30). Even under the British, the DRC retained its official status. The Anglican Church never quite achieved the status of the DRC during the hundred years of British colonial rule. Catholics were not tolerated and their children and converts were baptised and instructed in the DRC. The situation changed under the Batavian Republic(1803-1806) when in 1804 the Church Order of de Mist gave religious freedom to all religions. Lutherans, Anglicans, Catholics as well as Muslims, for example, benefited from this proclamation(Pillay 1995 : 71-86; Coertzen 2001 : 133-153; Donaldson 1994 : 36-88)

Only then did missionary work among the indigenous peoples and Muslims began in earnest, with the London Missionary Society arriving first in 1799. The Reformed faith had by that time split into three churches namely, the DRC itself, and two Reformed churches established by the trek boers(Elbourne & Ross 1997 : 31-50; Davenport 1997 : 51-67). The free burgers moved further and further away from the Cape in quest for independence from the Dutch East India Company and the Cape colonial government. This group would become the present-day Afrikaners comprising the Dutch, French Huguenots, Germans and other Europeans(Strauss 1994 : 93-121).

Although religious freedom was granted to all religions, Christianity was given predominance over other religions throughout all the centuries until early 1990. And with the ascension of the Nationalist Party to power in 1948, the DRC became again regarded as the state church so much so that it was dubbed, “the Nationalist Party at prayer”. The apartheid constitution of the Nationalist Party regarded the state as not only religious in general but as specifically Christian. By the way, many of the architects of apartheid ideology and the drafters of the constitution and implementers were theologians

such as prime minister DF Malan and cabinet minister Andries Treurnicht; and the DRC lent credence to the ideology by making theological rationale for and justification of apartheid (Kinghorn 1997 : 135-154; Lubbe 1984, 1987).

3. Arrival of Islam

According to Lubbe(1984,1987), Islam was brought into the country in two major distinct phases. Malay, the majority of whom were Muslims, arrived in the Cape between 1667 and 1834. The most notable political exile in this group was Sheikh Yusuf who arrived in 1694, and organised the Muslim community in the Cape. They were slaves and political prisoners who would offer cheap labour. The task was not easy for Yusuf and other leaders since Islam had been banned both in private and public arenas until 1804, when Islam was unbanned by the British authorities through the Church Order of de Mist (Coertzen 2000 : 136; Pillay 1995 : 77). This group constitutes the first phase. Statistically the Muslim population in the Cape was as follows: 922 in 1688; 61 947 in 1788 and 150 000 in 1839 according to Pillay(1995 : 73) quoting B Shaw in “ Memorials of South Africa”(1860). The second phase was constituted by Indian labourers who arrived in Durban in 1860 although only a minority were Muslims. However, a larger number of Muslims arrived after 1860 and most of them were traders and businesspeople. This group was not denied religious freedom, but was prohibited by legislation to own property such as land.

Although many Muslims were labourers when they arrived in South Africa, some of them did improve themselves economically in the last three hundred years and have become the envy of many blacks. In terms of expansion, Islam has not been appropriated by many blacks and less so by whites. Its greatest gains have been among so-called Coloureds and Asians numbering about 60% and 55% of the respective population groups. Four factors could have contributed to the Muslims` slow progress in their proselytising endeavours: Firstly, many of them retained their Arabic culture and led sheltered lives; secondly, some wanted to maintain purity of their religion; thirdly, since South Africa was a pariah state under apartheid, they were unable to access funds from the Middle East and elsewhere; fourthly, there has been a growing perception among black people that as Muslims and Asians in general became wealthier, they also became as ruthless against them as the white people were.

Although all Muslims in South Africa accept the absolute authority of the Qur`an and the Hadith, they are not a homogeneous community. Firstly, there are Indian(and Sri Lankan) and Malay Muslims who are by necessity culturally different. Secondly, they are theologically not on the same wavelength because Indians are trained and educated in India and Pakistan whereas

the Malay receive their theology from Egypt and Saudi Arabia and thirdly, the political outlook between the Ulama (the custodians of canon law and theology), and the Muslim Youth Movement and the Muslim Students Association is not the same. The Ulama are regarded as theologically conservative and politically passive as opposed to the youth who are more theologically progressive and politically militant and activist.

In terms of race classification, the majority of Muslims are either Coloured or Asian. As indicated above, black Muslims are very few in spite of the fact that some Zanzibarian Muslims are living at the Bluff in Durban. Black Christians, who are about 70% of South Africa's population, formed the bulk of the oppressed and exploited people under colonialism and apartheid and the abovementioned ethnic groupings were regarded before the advent of democracy as second-class citizens of South Africa.

4. World Conference on Religion and Peace: South African Chapter (WCRP-SA)

Since ethnic groups in South Africa were separated through the Group Areas Act under apartheid, it had not been easy to organise inter-religious encounters. Asians and Muslims who were and are predominantly Muslims lived in their respective designated areas and blacks who were and are overwhelmingly Christian, lived in theirs on the one hand, and on the other, black and white Christians were discouraged from worshiping together.

In spite of those political obstacles, some religious persons inclusive of major religions came together to form the South African Chapter of the World Conference on Religion and Peace in 1984 (Lubbe 1994). For the first time in the inter-religious encounter in South Africa, about thirty Hindus, Muslims and Christians met from 27 – 29 May, 1988 to explore possibilities of cooperation in the struggle against apartheid and the theme was, Believers in the struggle for justice and peace. It was discovered that they shared a common revulsion against apartheid from their faith perspectives and they agreed on common strategies to fight for national liberation (Kritzinger 1988).

Another important milestone in the life of the WCRP-SA was the national conference held in December 1990 (Kritzinger 1990). More than two hundred representatives of all the major religious communities in South Africa attended. Among the most important decisions taken at the conference was the mandate given to the WCRP-SA to initiate a process to evolve a charter of religious rights and responsibilities, a challenge to religious communities to be self-critical on their teachings and praxis concerning women and to interrogate the government's policy of religious education in schools. No longer should only Christianity be taught in public schools, but also other religions as well. The teaching should be done in the spirit of active appreciation of all the religious traditions and belief systems in South Africa. In

1992, the Charter on Religious Rights and Responsibilities was adopted. The proposed clause on religious freedom reads in part

1. All persons are entitled :

1.1 to freedom of conscience,

1.2 to profess, practise, and propagate any religion or no religion,

1.3 to change their religious allegiance;

2. Every religious community and/or member thereof shall enjoy the right;

2.1 to establish, maintain, and manage religious institutions;

2.2 to have their particular system of family law recognised by the state;

2.3 to criticise and challenge all social and political structures and policies in terms of the teachings of their religion.

5. South Africa'a Religious Landscape since 1994

The Constitution of the Republic of South África, 1996(Act 108 of 1996) is regarded as one of the best in the world and the chapter on the bill of rights reflects almost all what the WCRP-SA has proposed in its religious charter. Although no major inter-religious conferences have been held in South África in the last ten years, with the exception of the world parliament of religions` conference which was held in Capetown in 1999, the ethos of the inter-religious movement had been expressed and concretised in activities such as the Religious Leaders for Electoral Justice which monitored and observed South África`s first democratically conducted elections in 1994, and the National Forum for Religious Leaders which meets with the state president about twice a year. This Forum has been responsible for organising inter-religious prayers at national functions such as those of the inauguration of presidents Mandela and Mbeki respectively. I am rather sceptical about these post-apartheid inter-religious endeavours because their prophetic thrust has been lost and some even regard these committees as government praise singers. The fact that these endeavours have been initiated by the religious desk of the África National Congress led by people such as Rev Cedric Mayson, an ANC stalwart, does not make a good case for the inter-religious ethos since 1994.

As a result of the pressure from religious leaders, two important public institutions have radically changed their policies namely, the public schools and the South África Broadcasting Corporation(SABC). Before the introduction of democracy in South África, this national broadcaster aired predominantly Christian programmes and religious devotions in government schools were Christian. But through the Religion and Education policy document adopted

in September 2003, Christian school assemblies have either been stopped or replaced by inter-religious assemblies and religion education is offered as a non-examinable subject. Religion education is no longer aimed at converting “heathens or pagans” to Christianity, but to expose learners to all religious traditions and their ethical systems. Through the SABC’s policy document on broadcasting adopted in September 2003, all religions have been given equal airtime on a proportional basis. Religious devotions and cultural documentaries on radio and television today reflect South Africa’s religious and cultural diversity. For example, religious time for devotions on television has been proportionally divided among Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Judaism and African Religion. In that way South Africans have begun to engender a culture of religious and cultural tolerance, and most importantly, a culture of appreciation of one another’s value and religious systems.

6. Conclusion

Many of the people who were active during the struggle for liberation have either retired, or have occupied themselves with some projects nationally and internationally. Some of them, including prominent religious leaders are serving in government in various capacities. Although they are contributing significantly to the reconstruction of the country and reconciliation of the citizens, nonetheless the, inter-religious movement has lost focus and its prophetic role as a result. The plight of the poor and the government’s neo-liberal socio-economic policies are challenges facing the inter-religious ethos in South Africa. Patriarchy that characterises all religious praxis and culture needs to be interrogated if women for example were to be liberated and empowered. Health related matters such as the scourge of HIV/Aids cannot be adequately and effectively addressed by religions separately. Child abuse is inherent in all cultures and it is religions working together that will help eradicate this shameful practice. Peace-building in the world today is an enormous challenge to the global inter-religious movement especially that most conflicts seem to be religiously motivated. During our struggle against apartheid, matters environmental and ecological were strategically neglected. But as South Africa becomes more and more industrialised and urbanised, we should join the rest of the world community in the stewardship of creation.

We do not doctrinally know one another as religious communities in South Africa. Why do Muslims believe that the Qur’an is God’s infallible Word? Why do Christians believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the son of God and is worshipped as the second person of the Godhead? What exactly is the Jihad? Can Muslims and Christians interact with one another without one group compromising its identity? What are the fundamentals in each religion that cannot be negotiated and for which religions have waged wars over the

centuries? The questions are endless. But one thing is certain; Christians and Muslims believe in the God of justice and righteousness. One hopes that ten years into our democracy men and women believers would reconstitute the inter-religious movement with a socio-economic mission embedded in our religious traditions and ethos.

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Salvation and Healing: an African theological approach

Salvation and healing are related in that each and both imply restoration when and where there has been brokenness, a return to wholeness, wellness, health and fullness of life.

An African Christian perspective of salvation and healing has to take into consideration the Christian understanding on salvation and healing and involvement in the same, as well as the African indigenous understanding. The two belief systems have a lot in common, as to what salvation and healing entail, the hindrances towards their realization or attainment, and the approaches towards addressing the hindrances. The differences if any may be on emphasis. This discussion takes a collective approach, pointing out the unique aspects as appropriate.

Salvation and healing center on the appreciation and respect for life as God given, and those possessions and values that contribute to fullness of life such as good relationship with God, fertile land, food, healthy children and families, respect for human dignity, security, justice, good health, release of captives, laughter and joy, hope, unity, employment, vitality and deep spirituality.

Unfortunately, this situation could be considered ideal, in that fullness of life is lacking or is partially experienced given the reality of human existence which is characterized by poverty, hunger, diseases, suffering, broken-heartedness, bereavement, broken and estranged relationships at family, ethnic, national and international levels, a degraded environment, drought, accidents, displaced people, loneliness, homelessness, massive and chronic corruption, moral decadence and warped social welfare policies.

While the Christian understanding of salvation emphasizes the individual, the African indigenous recognizes that life is a cycle that incorporates the living, the yet to be born and the dead. The living have a great challenge through their morally upright life styles to pave way for a healthy arrival and

existence of the yet to be born. The living also have to maintain cordial relationship with those who have died by fulfilling certain obligations such as upholding a good family name, by again, leading morally upright lives.

The Christian understanding of salvation is not limited to but emphasizes on eschatological/future attainment. The African belief system views life in its totality, guided by the important consideration, which is indicated in the various myths of creation/origin, that life has a divinely sanctioned beginning, purpose and destiny.

The amalgamation of these two belief systems can be summed up that salvation is therefore not confined to the spiritual realm but to life in its entirety – the psychological, the mental, the emotional, the social and even the cosmic. This also applies to healing which applies not just to an individual's physical well being but to inner healing and rebuilding of broken relationship as well as relating well with nature. For example, there are various taboos that dictate on healthy use of resources such as water and land and respect for fauna and flora.

The reasons as to why the ideal is not realized, hence the need for healing and salvation are varied. They range from deviation from God's plan to the way individuals relate with self, others and the world at large, both the visible and invisible.

In an effort to seek healing there are many approaches taken. One could turn to conventional medicine by visiting hospitals and other medical facilities, which were established and run by missionaries. More often than not, however, many people turn to the African cultural heritage albeit through proxy and in secrecy by consulting healers – who range from diviners who indicate the cause of the ailment to the herbalist or any other specialists who provide a remedy. The remedy could be preventive or curative. The consultation through proxy or in secrecy is because many of the mainline churches have tended to condemn African indigenous healing practices. The African instituted churches, the charismatic and evangelical churches are more accommodating of African indigenous practices.

Healing services in Christian churches range from the physically sick being laid hands on, visits to individuals who are sick at home or in hospitals, the use of blessed oil or holy water and other special symbols. Since healing encompasses other facets of life prayers for good health are extended for various needs such as for those who are socially hurting because of broken families or bereavement. Healing or prosperity related prayers are also conducted when people enter new enterprises such as a new job, a new home, when celebrating a marriage, a birthday or anniversary, when erecting a new building or breaking new ground for planting or when using new implements for work. Reconciliatory rites also invoke for healing. These services are mainly conducted by clergy but it is common also for "anointed" laity to be

involved. The contribution of small Christian communities, prayer cells and bible study groups is also quite substantive.

A significant element of healing are the testimonies that those who have experienced or witnessed especially extra-ordinary cases of healing give. Extra-ordinary includes infertility, chronic illness, acquisition of blessings in form of employment or a spouse. There are reservations as to whether such healing is genuine or a hoax. This continues to create suspicion, but the trend is alive and growing.

Salvation has also caused controversy in Christian circles when it is interpreted to assume that it is only for those who have been “born again” because they have had a special experience or revelation. They are accused of adopting a “holier-than-thou” attitude. This brings about conflict and misunderstanding.

It is apparent that that from the African theological context, salvation and healing are closely linked. The bottom line for both and each is that each individual acknowledges and promotes God’s will for human existence that exhibits fullness of life in days past, here and now and in the future. It is also clear that fullness of life can be deterred or could fall short because of humanity’s actions and thoughts regarding God, self and others including nature.. While salvation may be more inclined towards the ultimate fullness of life at the end of time, healing is more inclined to day-to-day existence.

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People's Liberation from U.S. Minorities' Perspectives

Within the U.S. context, the dominant Christian understanding of salvation is through Jesus Christ only. The effect of this dogma is to use a United States interpretation of the gospel message to spread North American culture and politics globally. Therefore, one gets to God only through submitting to U.S. power and wealth. In contrast, this article looks at U.S. minorities' (or Third World peoples in the remaining First World superpower) perspectives on people's liberation. U.S. minority theologies of liberation have a strong tradition of both recognizing the centrality of Jesus Christ and embracing the omnipotent presence of God covering all peoples and creation. The basic unity among these U.S. theologies is that Jesus Christ is decisive for Christians but not exclusive. God saves individual human beings and liberates communities by offering good news to poor people. Through God's grace of salvation and liberation for the bottom of society, all humanity surrender hierarchies of oppression and become one equal people before Jesus Christ and multiple avenues God chooses.

All peoples and all of creation are offered divine potential to be fully who and what they are created to be through various manifestations of the sacred one. The focus here is on God's many connections to people – not doctrines, religious institutions, sanctioned leadership, or narrow official traditions.

American Indian or Native American theology in the U.S.A. has paved the way in balancing, in harmony, Jesus Christ and other expressions of God's liberating presence and power. For instance, Indian theologians have rewor-

ked Acts chapter 4 from its colonial interpretation of Jesus as the exclusive “savior” of all humankind. Actually, the original Greek and Hebrew define the name “Jesus” as “God the healer” of all humanity.

The focus, suddenly, is not on Jesus at all but on God! Jesus is not identified here as the only source of salvation or as the only savior. Rather, God is identified as the only ultimate source of healing. God is the Healer. This much every Indian person can readily acknowledge. So it has always been in our ceremonies and among our healing specialists since time immemorial. The power to heal always comes from the spiritual energy of Wakonda, even when particular individuals have been identified as the vehicles through whom certain kinds of healing or help can be facilitated.

Yet the missionaries have used this story to proclaim to us a self-serving untruth, that God has only spoken to them and only communicated through Jesus. ¹

Once the marginalized bring their own intellectual common sense and life experiences to the Christian scriptures, it becomes clear that the Bible speaks to the universal saving grace and liberation mission of God. Native American theology even embraces God’s message given to and revealed by the brothers and sisters of human beings, that is, the birds, animals, and plant life. One can believe in Jesus Christ as one’s personal lord and savior and ultimate liberator while being in solidarity with others who receive God’s call in their own unique ways. Those who will not budge from an imperialistic faith in an exclusive and superior Christ serve the U.S. empire’s drive for a single type of globalization made in its image of market and cultural domination.

Similarly to Native American theologians, black theology of liberation discovers the awesome power of Jesus Christ for healing and delivering the oppressed. And, like its Native American brothers and sisters, black theologians open themselves to however God wants to be with the least communities of society. One black theologian writes:

By “theology I emphasize Christian theology – the revelation of a spirit of liberation through Jesus Christ, yet informed by lessons from non-Christian expressions of this same spirit. ...the normative characteristic of God or an ultimate vision is a transcendent will that all of creation be liberated and practice freedom.... However, though a decisive embodiment, Jesus Christ is not the only or exclusive incarnation. ²

¹ Clara Sue KIDWELL, Homer NOLEY, and George E. “Tink” TINKER, *A Native American Theology* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2001), p. 75. Also see Andrea SMITH, *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: South End Press, 2005).

Here the joy of life offered in Jesus Christ recognizes and stands in solidarity with the many ways poor people globally experience the presence of the spirit of liberation. Key are the terms “decisive” and “not exclusive”. Such welcoming of God’s omnipotence and mystery throughout the earth frees Christians from the imperialistic desire to conquer the world, even if missionary intentions are in the right place. The love of Jesus for one people does not call on these same people to condemn other communities’ cultures and beliefs to hell and damnation.

Latino/a and Hispanic theologies (in the U.S.A.) likewise appreciate the complexity of God’s revelation through or beyond Jesus Christ. Instead of starting with official doctrine or church leaders, Latino/a and Hispanic theologians look to the masses of oppressed people and how they worship God. Specifically, popular religion plays a foundational role in the doing of Latino/a and Hispanic theology.

An important characteristic of Hispanic popular religiosity is its grassroots practices that inform and shape theology and in turn affect devotional and spiritual practices. Another feature is that it draws heavily upon indigenous Amerindian and African beliefs and practices, depending on specific local contexts. Since popular religion is a dynamic reality, these various sources are worked and reworked within specific contexts. ³

A turn toward everyday people and their rituals of revealing divine opportunities opens up a whole new possibility of seeing and experiencing what God has done and continues to do for oppressed people. Such a turn suggests the beauty of syncretism – the mixture of the divine being among varying cultures. It also paints a truer picture of how Christianity itself is a hybrid of different people’s cultures, beliefs, and practices. This contradicts the standard text book fantasy of a pure Christian religion. Furthermore, if Christianity is a combination of God’s revelations, then honest Christians can be more receptive to the value of other world indigenous religions. In and of

2 Dwight N. HOPKINS, *Being Human: race, culture, and religion* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2005), p. 170. Also see Dwight N. Hopkins, *Introducing Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1999) and Stephanie Y. MITCHEM, *Introducing Womanist Theology* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002).

3 Miguel A. DE LA TORRE & Edwin David APONTE, *Introducing Latino/a Theologies* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2001), p. 121. Also review Ada Maria ISASI-DÍAZ, *Mujerista Theology* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1996) and Jose David RODRÍGUEZ and Loida I. MARTELL-OTERO, ed. *Teología en Conjunto: A Collaborative Hispanic Protestant Theology* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997).

themselves, the hundreds of spiritualities and religions globally represent the touch of the sacred and, consequently, do not need Christianity to automatically correct or convert them.

Asian American Christian theologians bring their full cultural selves into the doing of theology. As marginalized groups, Asian American Christians (i.e., Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese) celebrate their ancestral traditions from their historical countries of origin. Christianity, therefore, takes on or lives besides certain particular rituals in the U.S.A. Distinct languages, foods, worldviews, special celebrations, clothing, and incorporations of the great Asian world religions permeate what it means to be a Christian Asian American. This multiple reality and holistic seeing of the world birth the potential to go beyond the traditional imperialism of North American Christocentrism. God presents Godself in different ways.

Asian American theologians read the Bible and their status in North America from the perspective of their minority status. Because most of the U.S.A. continues to view them as aliens in their own land, Asian American Christians have compassion for the stranger. Indeed, serving the stranger and being converted by the stranger become the criteria for good Christians. The stranger is the cite of the Christian's salvation. One Asian American theologian states the following:

*It is a strange paradox that the stranger becomes our host. By inviting a stranger to our meal, we can be blessed. By providing us with the opportunity to serve, the stranger blesses us. A stranger is not there to receive our pity and compassion but to save us from our sins – the sins of self-centeredness. In this sense, a stranger can be our messiah, delivering us from our blindness.*⁴

Perhaps God is presenting Christians with salvation not with dominant, patriarchal notions of “no one gets to the father except through the son”. Rather, for poor and working class people, hospitality for the bruised and compassion for the marginalized open the doors to full self-determination and healthy collective self-identity. And submitting themselves to the service of working people and those in structural poverty, the wealthy also receive new ears and eyes to hear and see reality afresh from the perspective of the strangers of society who are at the bottom.

Asian American theology seems to teach that the strangers of Christianity – that is, the many great cultures, spiritualities, and religions of the world – have the key to heaven. This is a profound paradox. The one

4 Andrew SUNG PARK, *Racial Conflict & Healing: An Asian-American Theological Perspective* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1996), p. 134.

who came to serve and to save (i.e., for Christians, Jesus is that One) calls on his followers to abandon the standard traditions of their human-made Christian religion in favor of following that One through the many ways of God. Maybe for Christians to receive salvation, they have to experience God wherever and however God decides to grant universal freedom and liberation to all.

U.S. minorities instruct us about the many ways of God if we look at the liberation practices of people. If we start with the Christocentric dogma that North American missionaries brought to people of color (and, in fact, to the Third World historically), we will fly the flag of Jesus Christ the World's Sole Superpower. This Jesus Christ sees the world as "either-or" – either the way of the Superpower or suffer death. This Christocentrism advances a particular economic, culture, language, and politics of one Superpower by hiding the true intentions of that Superpower under the cover of the following false doctrine. The doctrine teaches that God is so weak in ability and so limited in options that salvation from God comes only through one manifestation of God's power. In this instance, to be a Christian means God calls us to crush other cultures, spiritualities, and religions. Thus, Christocentrism is supported by Empire.

U.S. minority theologies – or Third World theologies within the World's Sole Superpower – show us that God's many paths give us another possible world. A Christian becomes one who actively supports other peoples in their faiths, spiritualities, and cultures. A Christian becomes one who goes about proclaiming Jesus' good news that the poor should equally participate in economic ownership. The original languages of the Bible and reading of the Bible from the vantage of the majority of oppressed peoples confirm this good news. Jesus Christ brings new meaning to missions and salvation. A Christian missionary goes about her or his daily life in different countries or different communities with her or his own country looking for poor people and working people in order to support the way these peoples embrace the many ways of God.

So too, missions becomes organizing with the poor and working people to democratize the economics and power that the wealthy and elite use against the marginalized. The good news of Jesus Christ is to accept God's many ways of being God. Let God be God as the divine pursues the primary purpose of liberation for the "least of these". For, what a Christian does to "these least" represents THE measure for whether or not the Spirit of the Lord is upon us. The movement of people's liberation and learning from other religions mirror the many ways of God. Is Christianity defined by the spirituality of the world's Sole Superpower or by God's freedom to present salvation to the little ones and to celebrate the absolute beauty of the world's religions? People's liberation

from U.S. minorities' perspective points to a God who loves the world so much that this Spirit dwells among us, especially in those who are heavy laden with material and emotional burdens yet continue to struggle for liberation.

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Teología del pluralismo religioso en Europa y en Occidente

El problema del pluralismo religioso en el ámbito de la teología cristiana ha atravesado todo el siglo XX y se ha asomado al nuevo milenio bien planteado, pero aún no completamente resuelto.

Los elementos ofrecidos por la teología occidental de cara a su solución son numerosos y vale la pena reunirlos para lograr esa síntesis que las comunidades eclesiales están buscando con urgencia. Ésta síntesis podrá ser también útil para favorecer la reflexión común que, de diversas formas, actualmente muchas religiones consideran necesaria.

La unificación planetaria de la cultura y de la historia humana, en efecto, exige un nivel espiritual muy superior al que cada una de las religiones ha practicado hasta ahora. Éste podrá ser alcanzado sólo con la contribución convergente de todas las tradiciones religiosas. Esta tarea es percibida y abordada de diversas formas en las varias religiones y también en los varios ámbitos culturales del cristianismo. También en Occidente la teología cristiana se ha visto obligada a examinar de modo renovado el problema del pluralismo religioso. Como observa el teólogo luterano W. Pannenberg, la experiencia del pluralismo religioso no es nueva, ya que en diversos períodos de la historia se ha impuesto como problema para resolver, sin embargo es nuevo el hecho de «que tal situación es acogida seriamente en el interior de las discusiones de la teología cristiana y muchos teólogos la advierten como un desafío a los cimientos de aquello que la doctrina cristiana ha representado a través de los siglos»¹.

El camino impuesto por estos cambios culturales se ha desarrollado en diversas etapas, las cuales han marcado las pautas del desarrollo de la teología cristiana a lo largo del siglo XX.

1 PANNENBERG W., *Pluralismo religioso e rivendicazioni di verità in conflitto fra loro. Il problema di una teologia delle religioni mondiali*, in AA. VV., (Gavin D'COSTA ed.) *La teologia delle religioni: un mito?*, Cittadella, Assisi 1994 pp.. 199-213 qui p. 200.

I. Algunas etapas del camino teológico del siglo XX

1. En un primer momento, en los ambientes que seguían con atención los procesos culturales en curso se desarrolló la *teología de la salvación de los infieles*² para resolver la incongruencia de quien, aún afirmando la voluntad divina de salvar a todos los seres humanos, estaba obligado a tener que admitir que la mayor parte de la humanidad estaba expuesta al riesgo de una eterna condena. Ya el Concilio de Trento (1547) había planteado la posibilidad de la salvación personal mediante el «bautismo de deseo». Sin embargo esta doctrina se quedaba en la perspectiva individual, y no se refería a las religiones en cuanto tales. Los estímulos que incitaban a ensanchar los horizontes provenían particularmente de los historiadores de las religiones³ y de las experiencias de los misioneros, quienes en contacto con ambientes de otras culturas religiosas, encontraban en ellas personas de profunda vida espiritual. Surgieron diversos modelos para explicar la presencia de la gracia divina que actuaba en todos los pueblos. En este ámbito tuvo particular relevancia la *teoría del cumplimiento*, según la cual, a la revelación hebraico/cristiana y en particular su vértice, Jesucristo, se les consideraba una respuesta adecuada a la profunda tensión del ser humano hacia Dios, la cual se ha expresado y continúa expresándose también en las otras religiones. Jean Danielou anotaba: «Las religiones naturales testimonian —y es lo que hay en ellas de valedero— el movimiento del ser humano hacia Dios, mientras que el cristianismo es el movimiento de Dios hacia el ser humano, que con Jesucristo llega a tocarlo, para conducirlo hacia Él»⁴. En este sentido las religiones constituían una «preparación al evangelio». Estas fórmulas representan el objetivo que habían alcanzado diversos teólogos como Yves Congar⁵ y Henri De Lubac⁶.

2 Problemáticas de este tipo estuvieron muy vivas en los años 1930/40. La exposición de todas las opiniones de aquellos años se puede encontrar en DAMBORIENA P., *La salvación en las religiones no cristianas*, BAC, Madrid 1973. Cfr. LOMBARDI R., *La salvezza di chi non ha fede*, Roma 1949.

3 Cfr. por ejemplo TROELTSCH E., *L'assolutezza del cristianesimo e la storia delle religioni*, Morano Napoli 1968, tradotto dalla terza edizione tedesca del 1929; TOYNBEE A., *Christianity among the Religions of the World*, Scribner's, New York 1957.

4 DANIELOU J., *Saggio sul mistero della storia*, Morcelliana, Brescia 1963 p. 131.

5 CONGAR Y., *Vaste monde ma paroisse. Verité et dimensions du salut*, Ed Témoignage chrétien 1959.

6 «Si, conforme al designio de Dios, nos preocupamos por la salvación del género humano, si creemos que su historia es una realidad y aspiramos a la unidad, no podemos escapar a esta búsqueda de un eje y de una fuerza convocante y unificadora, que es el Espíritu del Señor que anima su Iglesia». DE LUBAC H., *Paradosso e mistero della Chiesa*, Queriniana, Brescia 1968 p. 107. Él considera el cristianismo como la respuesta dada por Dios al deseo profundo que Él mismo suscita en el ser humano, deseo al que el ser humano no es capaz de dar respuesta por sí mismo. El Espíritu de Cristo que anima la Iglesia constituye el eje que dirige toda la historia salvífica y el componente unificador de todo el proceso. Cfr. anche *Le fondement théologique des missions*, Seuil, Paris 1946.

Bajo esta corriente también P. Teilhard de Chardin iba elaborando desde hacía tiempo una teoría en torno a la centralidad cósmica de Cristo, basada en una cristología, a través de la cual «Él constituye el único centro, precioso y consistente, que refulge en el vértice que coronará el mundo»⁷. Para justificar la extensión de su acción salvífica, este autor llegaba a atribuirle a Cristo una tercera naturaleza: «Entre el Verbo por un lado, y el ser humano Jesús por el otro, se irradia una especie de ‘tercera naturaleza’ (osaría decir) crística, localizable en cualquier parte de los escritos de S. Pablo, es decir, aquella del Cristo total y totalizador en el que, por el efecto transformador de la resurrección, el elemento individual nacido de María se ha encontrado no sólo en el estado de elemento (o ambiente, o encorvadura) cósmica, sino en el de centro psíquico último de aglomeración universal»⁸. Estas fórmulas han sido criticadas también por aquellos teólogos que bajo otros aspectos son favorables a Teilhard de Chardin⁹.

2. El Concilio Vaticano II (1962-1965) ha valorizado los avances teológicos sobre la salvación de los no cristianos y ha sido un estímulo de aceleración en la reflexión católica. No sólo por las declaraciones que elaboró, sino también por el espíritu de diálogo y de respeto que ha difundido en los fieles con relación a las otras religiones. En éstas y no sólo en cada uno de sus miembros ha reconocido «elementos de verdad y gracia... por una escondida presencia de Dios en medio» de ellas¹⁰, de modo que, para la actividad de la iglesia «todo lo bueno que se halla sembrado en el corazón y en la mente de los seres humanos, o *en los ritos particulares o en las culturas de los pueblos*, no sólo no se pierde, sino que es sanado, elevado y perfeccionado para gloria de Dios, confusión del demonio y felicidad del ser humano»¹¹. Por eso el Concilio invita a los cristianos «a conocer bien las tradiciones nacionales y religiosas de los otros, dichosos por descubrir y prontos para respetar aquellas *semillas del Verbo*, que en ellos se esconden... y caracterizar las relaciones con ellos por medio de un diálogo sincero y comprensivo, demostrando todas las riquezas

7 TEILHARD DE CHARDIN P., *Science e Christ*, (Oeuvres 9) Seuil, Paris 1965 p. 61.

8 *Comment je vois* (1948) in *Les directions de l'avenir*, (Oeuvres 11) Seuil, Paris 1973 p. 214.

9 P. SMULDERS, a propósito de esta opinión de su compañero jesuita, habla de la enormidad teológica y de su afirmación dogmáticamente más criticable: *La vision de Teilhard de Chardin*, Desclée de Brouwer, Paris 1963, pp. 247-251, sobre todo la nota 6 de la p. 249. Emile RIDEAU juzga «un poco demasiado atenuado el puesto dado por Teilhard al Jesús histórico del Evangelio, en beneficio del Cristo glorioso esperado al final de los tiempos, o de un Cristo cósmico que es la energía espiritual del mundo»: *Si o no a Teilhard de Chardin?*, Paoline, Catania 1969 p. 247, donde también admite que «su familiaridad con la Biblia parece insuficiente».

10 Concilio Vaticano II, Decreto sull'attività missionaria della chiesa (*Ad Gentes*) n. 9.

11 Concilio Vaticano II, Costituzione dogmatica sulla Chiesa (*Lumen Gentium*) n. 17, retomado también en el Decreto *Ad Gentes* n. 9.

que Dios en su munificencia ha concedido a los pueblos»¹². Concretamente, el Decreto conciliar «sobre las relaciones de la Iglesia con las religiones no cristianas» afirma solemnemente que «la Iglesia Católica no rechaza nada de cuanto es verdadero y santo en aquellas religiones. La Iglesia Católica considera con sincero respeto aquellos modos de actuar y de vivir, *aquellos preceptos y aquellas doctrinas* que, aunque difieran en muchos puntos de lo que ella misma cree y propone, sin embargo no es raro que reflejen un *destello de aquella verdad que ilumina a todos los seres humanos*... Por ello la Iglesia exhorta a sus hijos para que con prudencia y caridad, por medio del diálogo y la colaboración con los seguidores de las otras religiones... reconozcan, conserven y hagan progresar los *valores espirituales, morales y socioculturales* que se hallan en ellos»¹³.

Esta invitación la puso concretamente en práctica el Secretariado para los no cristianos (Paulo VI 1964), el cual tomó después el nombre de Pontificio Consejo para el diálogo interreligioso, y actualmente (marzo 2006) ha sido integrado en el Consejo para la Cultura. Pero han sido sobre todo algunas clamorosas iniciativas de Juan Pablo II las que han impulsado de manera determinante la transformación de la sensibilidad y del pensamiento católico. La decisión de convocar en la ciudad de Asís los representantes de las diversas religiones (27 de octubre de 1986) hizo estremecer a muchos sectores de la comunidad católica y reveló las actitudes de recelo aún muy difundidas en la Curia romana y en la Jerarquía. Luego le sucedieron las jornadas de oración europea por la paz en los Balcanes (9-10 de enero de 1993) y la jornada internacional *por la paz en el mundo*, con motivo de la segunda guerra del Golfo Pérsico (24-01-2002). Estas iniciativas han representado un momento de condensación en un proceso que está creciendo en los pueblos y que está implicando cada vez a más personas e instituciones. Las religiones han renovado su empeño público resumido en el grito del Papa: «¡Nunca más la violencia! ¡Nunca más la guerra! ¡Nunca más el terrorismo! ¡En nombre de Dios, que cada religión traiga a la tierra justicia y paz, perdón y vida, amor!». La insistencia del Papa en torno a estos temas, según opinión de los mismos musulmanes, ha permitido evitar el choque de civilizaciones que había sido anunciado y que ya parecía haber comenzado.

Otras manifestaciones del Papa constituyen íconos emblemáticos de un diálogo tendente a superar viejos contrastes. Es suficiente con recordar la visita que hizo a la Sinagoga de Roma, o el encuentro con los jóvenes musulmanes en el estadio de Casablanca en Marruecos (19 de agosto de 1985), la peregrinación a Jerusalén con el rezo en Yad Vashem, lugar donde se recuerda la Shoah, y en el Muro del llanto (20 y 26 de marzo de 2000), así como la visita a la mezquita de los Omayyadi de Damasco (6 de mayo de 2001).

12 Concilio Vaticano II, Decreto *Ad Gentes* n. 11.

13 Concilio Vaticano II, Decreto *Nostra Aetate* n. 2.

El impacto detonante de todas estas iniciativas ha estimulado la teología católica hacia una nueva reflexión sobre el significado de las religiones y sobre su valor salvífico. Ella ha valorizado opiniones e hipótesis que hasta entonces se hallaban en estado embrional.

3. También gracias al estímulo de estos eventos y de los documentos que los han acompañado, la reflexión teológica católica se ha configurado cada vez más claramente como *teología de las religiones*¹⁴, con el objetivo de hallar los elementos comunes, las posibles valencias salvíficas y, por tanto, las riquezas ínsitas en cada religión. «Para algunos, tales elementos positivos sólo representaban dones divinos integrados en la naturaleza del ser humano, mientras que para otros se trataba de elementos o «semillas de verdad y de gracia», que simbolizaban los dones personales de Dios hacia los pueblos, presentes en sus tradiciones». La diferencia entre las dos interpretaciones es notable: «En el primer caso, el ser humano permanece impotente con relación a su salvación; en el segundo, Dios le tiende la mano a través de la tradición religiosa de la cual forma parte. En el primer caso, el ser humano puede ser salvado por Dios fuera de y a pesar de su adhesión a una u otra tradición religiosa; en el segundo caso el ser humano se salva estando en ella, y, de alguna manera, por medio de ella»¹⁵.

En el ámbito católico el diálogo ha sido declarado oficialmente un componente esencial de la misión¹⁶ y a la iglesia no se le considera ya como el Reino de Dios en la tierra. La encíclica *Redemptoris missio*¹⁷ y el *Documento*

14 Cfr. amplia bibliografía en Horst W. BÜRKLE *Religioni, Teologia delle*, in *Dizionario Critico di Teologia*, Borla/Città nuova, Roma 2005; aggiungi BOUBLIK V., *Teologia delle religioni*, Studium, Roma 1973; BALTHASAR H. U. v., *Il cristianesimo e le religioni universali*. Una visión de conjunto: Piemme, Casale Monferrato 1987 (original de 1979), p. 22. «La teología de las religiones nació en torno a los años del Concilio Vaticano II, y... los años '60 fueron testigos de una ola de publicaciones teológicas sobre el tema, aunque fueron más pruebas que respuestas definitivas» DUPUIS J., *Verso una teologia cristiana del pluralismo religioso*, (BTC 95) Queriniana, Brescia 1997, p. 9.

15 DUPUIS J., *Il cristianesimo e le religioni*. o. c., p. 21.

16 Ya en el Documento *Dialogo e Missione* (AAS 76 (1984) 816-828; EV 9, 988 ss) se afirma la necesidad del diálogo, y en la Instrucción *Dialogo e annuncio* (AAS 84(1992) 414-446) se expone la convicción de que «el diálogo interreligioso es verdaderamente parte del diálogo de salvación iniciado por Dios» (n. 80, E.V. 13, 377) y se llega a afirmar que las varias religiones desarrollan un papel de mediación salvífica para sus seguidores, incluso admitiendo que «debe ser profundizado el contenido de esta mediación participada» (n. 14.).

Così J. DUPUIS resume la aportación de algunos documentos de Juan Pablo II relativos al Espíritu Santo: «da questi testi emerge gradualmente un insegnamento costante: lo Spirito Santo è presente e attivo nel mondo, nei membri delle altre religioni e nelle stesse tradizioni religiose». *Il cristianesimo e le religioni*. Dallo scontro all'incontro, (GdT 283), Queriniana, Brescia 2001, p. 141.

17 Giovanni Paolo II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 7 dicembre 1990, 25° anniversario del Decreto conciliare *Ad gentes* AAS 83 (1991) pp. 249-340.

*Diálogo y anuncio*¹⁸, publicados por el Pontificio Consejo para el diálogo interreligioso y por la Congregación para la Evangelización de los Pueblos (19 de mayo de 1991) han llevado a cabo el paso decisivo. En estos documentos se considera a la iglesia «sierva del reino, por ser sierva de Cristo»¹⁹. También las otras religiones están capacitadas a ejercer su servicio al Reino de Dios con respecto a sus miembros: «El misterio de la salvación los alcanza, por vías conocidas por Dios, gracias a la acción invisible del Espíritu de Cristo. A través de la práctica de lo que es bueno en sus propias tradiciones religiosas y siguiendo los dictámenes de su conciencia, los miembros de las otras religiones responden positivamente al llamado de Dios y reciben la salvación de Jesucristo, aun no reconociéndolo como su salvador»²⁰.

4. El problema que había que poner en claro era pues el del sentido de la absolutidad y universalidad de la salvación ofrecida por Cristo y el de la relación que existe entre ésta y la actividad de las iglesias cristianas y de las demás religiones. En este contexto, estimulada por los acontecimientos y por la práctica del diálogo, la reflexión teológica ha evolucionado y se ha convertido en *teología del pluralismo religioso*²¹. Es decir, que ha llegado a considerar a las varias religiones como momentos esenciales de una misma historia salvífica, de la cual las religiones representan, en el tiempo y en el espacio terreno, expresiones diversas. El pluralismo resulta ser una riqueza en vez de una dispersión. En este ámbito, la distinción entre las diversas confesiones cristianas ha perdido mucha relevancia, debido al hecho de que el problema de la centralidad de Cristo se plantea de la misma forma para todos los cristianos, los cuales se encuentran igualmente desafiados a poner en claro el problema según sus propios específicos puntos de vista.

Igualmente, la Declaración *Dominus Jesus*²² de la Congregación para la doctrina de la fe (6 de agosto de 2000), que desde hace algunos años es considerada como un epitafio para la teología del pluralismo religioso, en realidad, con el paso del tiempo, ha representado más bien un estímulo, por la seriedad y el

18 *Diálogo e Annuncio*: riflessioni e orientamenti sul dialogo interreligioso e l'annuncio del Vangelo di Gesù Cristo, AAS 84 (1992) pp. 414-446.

19 «La misión de la Iglesia es hacer crecer 'el reino del Señor nuestro y de su Cristo' (Ap 11,15), del que es sierva», *Diálogo e Annuncio*, n. 35 EV. 13, 325.

20 *Diálogo e Annuncio*, n. 29 EV 13, 319.

21 «Il compito della teologia in questo contesto consiste nel domandarsi se il pluralismo religioso, che caratterizza il mondo presente, può avere o meno un significato positivo nell'unico piano salvifico di Dio per l'umanità. Se cioè la fede cristiana in Gesù Cristo, salvatore universale dell'umanità, è compatibile con l'affermazione di un ruolo positivo di altre tradizioni religiose nel mistero della salvezza dei loro seguaci»: DUPUIS J., *Il cristianesimo e le religioni*, o. c., p. 484.

22 Dichiarazione sulla unicità e universalità salvifica di Gesù Cristo e della Chiesa, *Dominus Jesus* in AAS 92(2000) n. 10, pp. 742-765.

rigor con el que examinó el problema y por la repetida invitación a proseguir la búsqueda sobre las razones del diálogo y el fundamento del pluralismo. El destaque dado a la tarea de los teólogos resuena diversas veces en el documento: «la teología hoy en día, meditando sobre la presencia de otras experiencias religiosas y sobre su significado en el plano salvífico de Dios, está invitada a explorar si y en qué forma las figuras y los elementos positivos de las otras religiones forman parte del plan divino de salvación» (n. 14). O bien cuando admite que existen «diversas explicaciones teológicas sobre estos temas» (n. 18) y exige a los teólogos a que continúen la reflexión para resolver las dificultades existentes. En otro lugar reconoce con complacencia que «la teología está intentando profundizar» los modos por medio de los cuales la gracia llega hacia los no cristianos, y se dice que un «trabajo teológico de este tipo tiene que ser estimulado, porque es sin duda útil para el crecimiento de la comprensión de los designios salvíficos de Dios y de las vías para su realización» (n. 21). Este tipo de invitación hay que interpretarla como el reconocimiento de problemas irresueltos, pero también como la convicción de posibles avances a través de la reflexión sobre los datos de la revelación y sobre la experiencia del diálogo interreligioso. Sin embargo es necesario reconocer que el tono del documento y los límites doctrinarios impuestos a la reflexión de hecho han frenado la libre discusión teológica. Tal vez este tiempo de reflexión fue oportuno para preparar con cuidado un nuevo paso hacia adelante.

Esta es la fase de la reflexión teológica que analizaremos con más detalle.

5. Pues bien, según el auspicio de diversos teólogos incluso occidentales²³, la reflexión debería adquirir el aspecto de una *teología interreligiosa del pluralismo*, en la cual cada religión, en diálogo con las otras, se compromete a elaborar una interpretación común de la historia de la salvación y a contribuir de este modo a la construcción de un único horizonte espiritual para la historia humana. Este paso, apenas iniciado, necesitará una confrontación a nivel experiencial y cultural entre los seguidores de las diversas religiones, de modo que se pueda llegar a una común formulación de la experiencia espiritual y

23 David TRACY, por ejemplo, sostiene que: «estamos aproximándonos rápidamente al día en que no será posible una teología sistemática cristiana si no es en una seria conversación con los otros grandes caminos»: *Dialogue with the Others: The inter-religious Dialogue*, Peeters Press, Louvain 1990, p. IX. Claude GEFFRÉ, a su vez, escribe: «Parece que el nuevo paradigma religioso nos invita a reflexionar sobre la que podría ser una verdadera y propia *teología interreligiosa*, o incluso una *teología dialógica*». *Il senso di una teologia interreligiosa* paragrafo del capitolo *Verso una teologia delle religioni*, in AA. VV. (Ed. GIBELLINI R.), *Prospettive teologiche per il XXI secolo*, (BTC 123) Queriniana, Brescia 2003 p. 368. También Jacques DUPUIS anota: «Una teología cristiana del pluralismo religioso debe ser una teología basada sobre la interacción de la fe cristiana con las otras fees vivientes, y debe ser en este sentido, una *teología 'interreligiosa'*», *Il cristianesimo e le religioni*, o. c., p. 180.

hacer posible una activa colaboración por la justicia y la paz de los pueblos y por la salvaguardia del universo.

Estos son, a grandes rasgos, algunos de los pasos de un camino iniciado por la teología cristiana occidental en la primera mitad del siglo pasado y que actualmente parecen orientados hacia una meta definitiva.

II. Las opiniones en el ámbito occidental

Antes de poder examinar los elementos esenciales de una teología cristiana del pluralismo religioso, creo que es necesario situar el movimiento en la multiplicidad de las opiniones expresadas por los diversos teólogos en estas últimas décadas. Los análisis sucesivos ofrecerán los elementos necesarios para comprender las razones teológicas de las diversas opiniones.

Existen diversas modalidades para presentar las diversas posiciones teológicas que han sido asumidas frente al problema de la pluralidad religiosa. Creo que la descripción más clara y funcional a nuestros intereses es la de distinguir cuatro tendencias: el exclusivismo, el inclusivismo, el pluralismo convergente (o inclusivo) el pluralismo relativista. Pienso que a esta subdivisión, que utiliza un lenguaje ya conocido y difundido²⁴, puede corresponder a la cuádruple distinción propuesta por Paul F. Knitter, el cual, colocándose desde una perspectiva fenomenológica, habla de modelo de sustitución (una sola verdadera religión), del cumplimiento (el uno ofrece la realización a los muchos), de la reciprocidad (muchas religiones auténticas llamadas al diálogo) y de la aceptación (muchas religiones auténticas: y así sea)²⁵.

Analicemos brevemente las diversas opiniones, relacionando entre ellas la perspectiva cristológica y la eclesiológica. En cada uno de los teólogos las dos perspectivas no están siempre desarrolladas del mismo modo, pero su conexión está siempre presente.

1. Los *exclusivistas* afirman: «sólo Jesús es el mediador de Dios para la salvación del ser humano y sólo la iglesia constituye su prolongación en la

24 Algunos tienen por inadecuada esta subdivisión, que normalmente es presentada como tripartita, sin distinción entre el pluralismo convergente y el relativista, que creo necesaria. El jesuita cingalés A. PIERIS, por ejemplo, escribía ya en 1993: «Me he vuelto a apropiarme gradualmente de una tendencia asiática, que adapta un paradigma en el cual, las tres categorías (exclusivismo, inclusivismo y pluralismo) no tienen sentido» *An Asian Paradigm: Interreligious Dialogue and the Theology of Religions*, in *The Month* 26 (1993) pp. 129-134 qui 130. También en Occidente algunos teólogos sostienen que es inútil esta distinción. Cfr BARNES M., *Christian Identity and Religious Pluralism. Religious in Conversation*, Abington Press, Nashville 1989. Pienso, sin embargo, que la aportación de la teología occidental aquí analizada, puede ser mejor comprendida a través del citado modelo cuatripartito.

25 KNITTER P. F., *Introduzione alle teologie delle religioni*, (GdT 315)

historia humana». Hacen referencia al carácter absoluto del cristianismo²⁶. En la esfera protestante ha tenido particular realce la posición asumida por Karl Barth, según la cual las religiones son la tentativa presuntuosa del ser humano de justificarse por sí sólo, mientras que la fe en Cristo es la única que justifica al ser humano ante Dios²⁷. En el campo católico, después del Concilio Vaticano II, el exclusivismo ha sufrido una rápida evolución y, tanto en su rígida forma cristológica como eclesiológica, se encuentra sólo en ambientes tradicionalistas que se oponen al diálogo con las otras religiones²⁸. Ciertas manifestaciones de exclusivismo se hallan en algunos teólogos inclusivistas, los cuales, volviendo a proponer fórmulas tradicionales en un contexto de mayor apertura, conservan sin embargo la exigencia de fondo, sin resolver a las claras las contradicciones.

2. Al extremo opuesto se encuentran los *relativistas* (o *pluralistas radicales*), que sostienen que todas las religiones poseen el mismo valor por lo que concierne a la salvación, por lo cual no es muy importante a cuál de ellas se pertenece. Para ellos, «si alguien, hebreo, musulmán, hindú o budista, tiene la misma posibilidad de ser ‘salvado’ que un cristiano, la idea que toda salvación es cristiana no posee más un ‘valor en efectivo’ y no puede suscitar un interés real»²⁹.

Éstos habitualmente son llamados *pluralistas* porque propugnan una «teología pluralista de las religiones», una «teología del pluralismo religioso»³⁰.

26 Después de HEGEL, que había teorizado sobre la absolutez del cristianismo, la discusión ha sido amplia en el mundo cristiano.

27 Algunos discípulos de K. BARTH continúan en la misma línea, como por ejemplo KRAEMER H., *The Christian Message in a non-Christian World*, Edinborough House, London 1947; Id., *Why Christianity of All Religions?*, Lutterworth, London 1962. También algunos movimientos evangélicos y pentecostales se remiten a BARTH para oponerse a todo diálogo interreligioso, porque no hay ninguna razón «para decir que la salvación puede encontrarse fuera de Cristo o prescindiendo de una aceptación explícita de su obra mediante la fe»: Manifiesto de Manila promulgado por la Alianza de Losanna en la Asamblea de julio (11-20) 1989, citado por DUPUIS J., *Il cristianesimo e le religioni*, o. c. p. 153.

28 Escribe, p.e., VAN STRAELEN H., *L'Église et les religions non chrétiennes au seuil du XXI^e siècle*, Beauchesne, Paris 1994, p. 281: «La Iglesia siempre ha enseñado que para ser salvo, el ser humano debe aceptar el mensaje del evangelio, rechazar los dioses falsos y volverse al Dios viviente de Abraham, de Isaac y de Jacob, tal como se ha revelado en Jesucristo». Cfr también VAN STRAELEN H., *Ouverture à l'autre, la quelle?*, Beauchesne, Paris 1982; SPADAFORA F., *Fuori della chiesa non c'è salvezza*, Roma 1992, a todas las afirmaciones de los diversos concilios y de los Padres; NETLAND H. A., *Dissonant Voices. Religious Pluralism and the Quest of Truth*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids (Mi) 1991.

29 HICK J., *Il cristianesimo tra le religioni del mondo*, in AA. VV., *Cristianesimo e religioni*, in *Filosofia e Teologia* 6 (1992) 1 p. 24

30 J. DUPUIS califica este pluralismo a través de la perspectiva «teocéntrica». «Este nuevo paradigma consiste en reconocer que las varias religiones gravitan en torno a un solo centro: Dios. Las religiones, aunque diferentes, tienen todas fundamentalmente el mismo valor como manifestaciones diversas de Dios al espíritu humano en las diversas regiones culturales del mundo». *La cristologia contemporanea nell'area anglofona*, in

Pero en realidad lo que ellos defienden es un efectivo relativismo, porque colocan a las religiones en un mismo plano y, en concreto, no logran captar la «peculiaridad de la religión cristiana con sus instancias de unicidad»³¹. De este modo, según Pietro Rossano, «se pone entre paréntesis la centralidad y la mediación universal e histórica de Cristo, pilar maestro del edificio de la iglesia»³². También H. Küng critica a aquellos que, para evitar «un obtuso y presuntuoso absolutismo», defienden «un relativismo superficial e irresponsable, que relativiza toda verdad y minimiza todos los valores y todas las normas, y por consiguiente proponen un «pluralismo frívolo que aprueba y confirma, indiferentemente, la propia y las otras religiones, sin llamar la atención, ya sea a nosotros mismos o a los demás, sobre los errores que también existen a pesar de toda la verdad». De esta forma favorecen «un indiferentismo» que excluye de la crítica a determinadas posiciones y decisiones religiosas»³³.

3. Los *inclusivistas* representan actualmente, en el ámbito cristiano, el grupo más numeroso, sin embargo se presentan en formas variadas, entrelazadas entre ellas. Su distinción es real pero no siempre adecuada.

3.1. Un primer parecer resalta el cumplimiento de los valores religiosos realizados en Cristo, de modo que todo aquello que se encuentra fragmentado en otra parte, se cree que ya haya sido vivido y presentado por Cristo en plenitud o en modo acabado (*inclusivismo constitutivo*). Por medio de él estos valores han sido introducidos en la historia humana con el fin de que puedan ser recibidos por todos.

ATI, *La cristología contemporanea*, Messaggero, Padova 1992 p. 365 (pp. 330-384). Bruno FORTE califica el pluralismo como un «genérico 'soteriocentrismo' de un Cristo a la par 'con' todas las religiones, donde la separación del Verbo de sus posibles expresiones históricas permite hablar de un Cristo ideal, que viene a hacerse presente en todas las religiones, entendidas como vías de salvación del todo autónomas del Cristo histórico». *La chiesa della Trinità*, S. Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo 1995, p. 114.

31 Así concluye VICARI D., refiriéndose a la intervención de J. HICK, in *Un commento al dibattito Hick-Pannenberg-Geffré su Cristianesimo e religioni* in *Teologia e Filosofia* 6 (1992) 121

32 ROSSANO P., *Introduzione* alla edizione italiana di NECKEBROUCK V., *La terza chiesa e il problema della cultura*, S. Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo 1990 p. 8. Se refiere al capítulo *Religione e cultura*, pp. 98-105.

33 KÜNG H., *Cristianesimo e religioni universali*, Mondadori, Milano 1986 pp. 8-9; cfr. anche Id., *Esiste l'unica religione vera?* Saggio di criteriologia ecumenica, in *Teologia in cammino*. Un'autobiografia spirituale, Mondadori, Milano 1987 pp. 256-286. Rosino GIBELLINI refiriéndose a Küng sostiene que la suya es «una de las propuestas teológicas mejor elaboradas, también porque basada sobre una vasta documentación y sostenida por una larga reflexión», que excluye no sólo el relativismo y el exclusivismo, sino también «el inclusivismo, que acaba por subordinar a la propia religión las otras religiones»: *La teologia del XX secolo*, Queriniana, Brescia 1992, p. 555 e 556.

Por lo general los católicos que pertenecen a este grupo extienden el atributo también a la iglesia. La fórmula por ellos utilizada ya no es la tradicional, «fuera de la iglesia no hay salvación», sino «sin la iglesia no hay salvación». Con esto ellos quieren afirmar la exclusión de la salvación de aquellos que rehúsan los valores de los cuales la iglesia es mediadora en la historia humana. Sin embargo aquellos que, aun no perteneciendo a la iglesia, aceptan, incluso inconscientemente, las propuestas salvíficas, acceden al reino. Raniero Cantalamessa, actual predicador apostólico, «rechaza enérgicamente cualquier teoría que excluye a Cristo del centro del plan salvífico, o que niega a la iglesia su rol de mediadora necesaria para la salvación»³⁴. Sin embargo acepta una cierta mediación también de parte de las otras religiones. Para explicar cómo sea esto posible, él hace referencia a la doctrina de Santo Tomás sobre los Sacramentos del Antiguo Testamento: «Para Santo Tomás estos antiguos sacramentos no conferirían por sí mismos y directamente la gracia santificadora, sino sólo en la medida que suscitan y expresan la fe en el futuro Salvador». Cantalamessa se pregunta: ¿No se podría extender coherentemente tal analogía de las verdades teóricas, a los ritos de purificación del pecado, los sacrificios, las fiestas, etc., y, en este sentido, hablar de tales prácticas y ritos como de una especie de sacramentos por medio de los cuales, en las otras religiones, se lleva a efecto la salvación, siempre, por supuesto, dependiendo de la redención de Cristo?»³⁵.

G. Canobbio afirma que la salvación de cada uno pasa necesariamente a través de la iglesia, «ya que sin ella, definitivamente, no se sabría qué cosa sería la salvación, por el hecho de que no se conocería perfectamente lo que Dios piensa para la humanidad, y ésta no tendría en su interior la experiencia concreta, en forma anticipada, de su destino último»³⁶. También B. Forte supone que la iglesia, «en el misterio universal de la salvación posee... un rol necesario y al mismo tiempo totalmente relativo: dependiendo de lo único necesario, que es el misterio de Cristo en el designio del Padre, la Iglesia es necesaria precisamente en cuanto desempeña el papel de signo profético del don de Dios plenamente ofrecido a ella, y de realización incoativa de la salvación deseada para todos por los designios del Padre». Ciertamente la iglesia «no es todo: pero, ciertamente, existe para todos»³⁷.

34 CANTALAMESSA R., *Cristo nel dialogo interreligioso*, in *Rassegna di Teologia*, 35 (1994) 259-282, aquí: p. 278. Cita Juan Pablo II en la encíclica *Redemptoris Missio* n. 55: «La Iglesia sigue siendo la vía ordinaria de salvación, y sólo ella posee la plenitud de los medios de salvación». El artículo está ahora también en ID., *Preparate le vie del Signore*, Dehoniane, Bologna 1995, pp. 113-135.

35 R. CANTALAMESSA, *Cristo nel dialogo interreligioso*, in *Rassegna di Teologia*, 35 (1994) 279.

36 CANOBBIO G., *Chiesa perché. Salvezza dell'umanità e mediazione ecclesiale*, S. Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo 1994 pp. 182-183

37 FORTE B., *La chiesa della Trinità*, o. c. pp. 105-119: p. 115.

3.2. Una segunda modalidad de inclusivismo presenta a Cristo (y por consiguiente a la Iglesia) como *norma definitiva* para juzgar a las otras formas religiosas, de modo que quien se hace seguidor de Cristo o pertenece a la iglesia posee los parámetros de evaluación para tomar lo bueno que se halla en las demás religiones y para reconocer las vías de la salvación y los males que la impiden (*inclusivismo normativo*). Esta segunda modalidad defiende «el principio inderogable de la peculiaridad del evento cristológico en cuanto causa constitutiva de la salvación y como fundamento de su función normativa universal según el diseño divino. En la actualidad el camino que respeta esta doble exigencia se concretiza verdaderamente en ese momento resolutivo denominado inclusivista, según el cual, en las múltiples y parciales vías de salvación, sigue operando la potencia salvífica Universal del Único Mediador Jesucristo, por lo que ninguna otra religión puede ser considerada vía de salvación sin Él»³⁸.

El teólogo católico G. D'Costa, hindú de Goa, criado en Kenia y formado en Inglaterra en donde enseña, presentando una solución del problema en clave trinitaria, afirma: «Las riquezas del misterio de Dios son manifestadas por el Espíritu y están percibidas y medidas según su propia conformidad con Cristo y en su iluminación por parte de Cristo. A medida que estas riquezas se revelan, Cristo, el Logos universal, se interpreta y universaliza de forma más completa. En este sentido Jesús es el criterio *normativo* de Dios, aunque esto no impida la autorrevelación de Dios que está en acto en la historia por medio del Espíritu». A pesar de ello añade: «Si bien Cristo constituye la norma para comprender a Dios, en realidad no es una norma estática, sino una norma que continuamente se transforma y enriquece por la propia función del espíritu de guiar, anunciar y juzgar»³⁹. A continuación D'Costa aclara que sólo el inclusivismo respeta los dos principios esenciales de un legítimo pluralismo cristiano: «la mediación única de Jesucristo y la voluntad salvífica universal de Dios. Siempre y sólo a través de Cristo, 'componentes de gracia divina' están presentes en las otras religiones que, para sus miembros, son verdaderas mediadoras de salvación»⁴⁰. Creo que también a W. Pannenberg se le podría incluir en este tipo de inclusivismo cuando después de haber declarado el carácter universal de la perspectiva de Jesús (cita en particular Lc 13, 29: «y vendrán de Oriente y de Occidente...»), y Mt 25, 40: «cuando lo hicieron con alguno de estos mis hermanos más pequeños...»), concluye: «Jesús permanece por lo tanto como el criterio final para todos los seres humanos, mientras que sólo los miembros de su iglesia conocen este criterio y pueden estar seguros de esta salvación, a

38 BORDONI M., *La cristologia nell'orizzonte dello Spirito*, Queriniana, Brescia 1995, p. 182.

39 D'COSTA G., *Cristo, Trinità e pluralità religiosa*, en el volumen organizado por él, AA VV *La teologia pluralista delle religioni: un mito? L'unicità cristiana riesaminata*, Cittadella, Assisi 1994 p. 96.

40 Di Gavin D'COSTA cfr anche *Theology of Religious Pluralism: The Challenge of Other Religions*, B. Blackwell, Oxford 1986.

condición de que sus vidas coincidan con su fe»⁴¹. Dupuis cita como «ejemplos de partidarios de Jesús normativo... además de E. Troeltsch y P. Tillich, a los teólogos del proceso como J. B. Cobb e S. M. Ogten»⁴².

3.3. Una tercera modalidad hace referencia a una presencia activa del Cristo glorioso o del Cristo cósmico en las experiencias religiosas de la humanidad, por lo que todas las riquezas que se pueden hallar en las experiencias religiosas de la humanidad son atribuidas a la acción de Cristo y de su Espíritu (*inclusivismo trascendente*). Los defensores de esta línea sostienen que «hay que afirmar que la vía ordinaria para la salvación de toda la humanidad es el evento-Cristo, y que la voluntad salvífica universal de Dios en el Nuevo testamento está siempre relacionada con la realidad de Jesucristo... Aquí se encuentra el punto decisivo de la problemática cristológica contemporánea, a saber, la consideración del evento-Cristo como ‘escatológicamente insuperable’ y ‘absolutamente decisivo’ para cada persona humana que se salva estando fuera del cristianismo, es decir, fuera del reconocimiento explícito de Jesús»⁴³. Hacia esta dirección se habían ya movido, aunque con diversa sensibilidad, muchos teólogos. Raimundo Panikkar, por ejemplo, ha defendido de diversas maneras el convencimiento según el cual «Cristo constituye el nombre de la presencia divina en el mundo por lo tanto una cristofanía se manifiesta en todas las religiones»⁴⁴. Desde otra perspectiva también K. Rahner ha sostenido la presencia de un cristianismo anónimo presente en las diversas religiones⁴⁵. Según él, la iglesia no debería considerarse el ámbito exclusivo de la acción divina, sino

41 PANNENBERG W., Pluralismo religioso e rivendicazioni di verità in conflitto fra loro. Il problema della teologia delle religioni mondiali, in AA VV (cur D’COSTA G.) La teologia pluralista delle religioni: un mito? O. c., p. 203.

42 DUPUIS J., *Il cristianesimo e le religioni*, o. c., p. 156. Egli cita E. TROELTSCH, *L’assolutezza del cristianesimo e la storia delle religioni*, Morano, Napoli 1968 (originale tedesco 1929³); P. TILLICH, *Systematic Theology* voll II-III, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1957-1963; Id., *Il cristianesimo e le religioni*, Mursia, Milano 1970; J. B. COBB, *Christ in a Pluralistic Age*, Westminster Press, Philadelphia 1975; Id., *Beyond Dialogue. Toward a Mutual Transformation of Christianity and Buddhism*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia 1982; S. M. OGDEN, *Christ without Myth*, Harper and Brothers, New York 1963; ID., *Is There Only One True Religion or are There Many?* Southern Methodist University Press, Dallas 1992.

43 AMATO A., *Gesù e le religioni non cristiane*. Una sfida all’assolutezza del cristianesimo, in AA. VV., *Gesù è il Signore*. La specificità di Gesù Cristo in un tempo di pluralismo religioso, LAS, Roma 1992, pp. 45-79 qui 72. Cfr. anche AMATO A., *Cristologia e religioni non cristiane*. Problematica e attualità: considerazioni introduttive, in *Ricerche teologiche* 1(1990) 143-168.

44 PANIKKAR R., *Il Cristo sconosciuto dell’Induismo*. Vita e pensiero, Milano 1970 p. 10.

45 RAHNER K., *I cristiani anonimi*, in ID., *Nuovi Saggi* 1, Paoline, Roma 1968, pp. 759-772; *Corso fondamentale sulla fede*, Paoline, Alba 1977 pp. 393-394; *Cristianesimo e religioni non cristiane*, in *Saggi di antropologia soprannaturale*, pp. 535-571 Paoline, Roma 1965, pp. 535-571; *La Chiesa, le chiese e le religioni*, in *Nuovi Saggi* 3, Paoline, Roma 1969, pp. 427-452.

«la vanguardia históricamente encuadrada en un inmenso ejército en marcha, la explícita organización histórica y social de lo que para el cristianismo constituye un convencimiento que debiera ser comunicado a los seres humanos como *realidad escondida* ubicada fuera de la iglesia visible»⁴⁶. Esta fórmula ha suscitado una discusión muy amplia⁴⁷.

Los teólogos que manifiestan reservas acerca de la atribución de una acción universal a Cristo resucitado, no expresada en dinámicas creadas, critican la modalidad trascendente de entender a Cristo⁴⁸. La actividad salvífica de Jesús resucitado debería ser atribuida a la presencia de Dios actuante a través de su Verbo y de su Espíritu, pero siempre traducida, y sólo a través de dinámicas y gestos creados⁴⁹.

4. Los *pluralistas convergentes* (o *inclusivistas*)⁵⁰ sostienen que es única la Palabra reveladora y salvífica de Dios, pero muchos son los mediadores históricos de la salvación, entre ellos las estructuras religiosas, aunque entre ellas

46 RAHNER K., *Cristianesimo e religioni non cristiane*, in Saggi di antropologia soprannaturale o. c., p. 569.

47 Cfr. RÖPER A., *I cristiani anonimi*, (GdT 6) Queriniana Brescia 1966 (original alemán 1963); FÉDOU M., *Les religions selon la foi chrétienne*, Cerf, Paris 1996, pp. 72-78. Raffelt A. VERWEYEN H., *Leggere Karl Rahner*, (GdT 301) Queriniana, Brescia 2004.

48 Ossa A. COZZI proponiendo un inclusivismo normativo: «el problema no es tanto la presencia del Verbo trascendente en las varias religiones. Lo decisivo es verificar cómo una libertad como la de Jesús sea la medida adecuada al don de Dios y la lógica más correcta para apropiarse de ese don, más que para entrar en la lógica de su donación: *Gesù Cristo tra le religioni, mediatore dell'originario*, Cittadella, Assisi 2005, p. 124.

49 Contra la tendencia a universalizar a Cristo como salvación trascendente y presente por tanto en las varias religiones, DUQUOC insiste en la necesidad de mantener la particularidad hebrea de Jesús y su inserción en la cultura fragmentaria de su tiempo. «Estando así las cosas, la división de las otras religiones resulta indispensable a la autenticidad del anuncio. Transgredirla con el pretexto de no excluir nada, equivale a perder la propia identidad histórica y a debilitar la propia vocación que el modo de implicación de Dios en nuestro mundo revela». *L'unico Cristo*. La sinfonia differita, (GdT 298) Queriniana, Brescia 2003 p. 272. También GEFFRÉ sugiere: «debemos guardarnos de identificar el elemento histórico y contingente de Jesús y su elemento crístico y divino. Es precisamente esta ley de la encarnación de Dios con la mediación de la historia. De otra manera, no sería ya ícono, sino ídolo». *Credere e interpretare* (GdT 288) Brescia 2002, p. 136. Más adelante, en la pág. 138, meditando sobre el misterio de la cruz, escribe: «Jesús muere a su particularidad en cuanto Jesús de Nazaret, para renacer como figura de universalidad, como figura de Cristo. Citaré gustoso esta fórmula audaz de P. TILLICH: 'El Cristo es Jesús y la negación de Jesús'. El Cristo y Jesús son ciertamente una única persona, pero en cierto modo, en el sacrificio de la particularidad de Jesús de Nazaret, el Cristo, a través de su resurrección renace como figura de universalidad, como figura de Cristo. El Cristo libera a la persona de Jesús de un particularismo que lo habría convertido en propiedad de un grupo particular, el de los judíos del primer siglo...».

Cfr supra, nota 8 sobre la atribución de una tercera naturaleza a Cristo.

50 La terminología es variada. DUPUIS J.: «El término más apropiado... parece ser el de *pluralismo inclusivo*, o bien *inclusivismo pluralístico*, que mantiene unidos el carácter

existan considerables diferencias. Los cristianos por medio de Jesús reciben la Palabra de Dios de una forma particular, con la cual están capacitados para captar las sintonías de la propia tradición con las de las otras palabras históricas. La real distinción de naturaleza (sin mutaciones y sin confusiones) entre Jesús, el ser humano sacramento o ícono de Dios (cfr Col 1,15), y el Verbo, Palabra eterna del Padre -distinción que permanece también en el estado glorioso⁵¹-, permite acercarse a otros espacios de acción de la Palabra eterna y del Espíritu, que van más allá de los espacios eclesiales, superando así el exclusivismo salvífico de las estructuras que hacen referencia al Evangelio cristiano. Que sucesivamente esta acción también implique la realidad de Cristo glorioso, no posee relevancia histórica, porque a ella no le corresponden explícitas y conscientes dinámicas humanas de fe en Él.

Sobre todo, el cambio del modelo soteriológico, no ya ascendente (Jesús satisface al Padre con sufrimiento de mérito infinito y expía por los pecados humanos), sino descendente (en Jesús y en su supremo gesto de amor, Dios revela su misericordia y dona el Espíritu que justifica al ser humano) ha hecho entender que las múltiples mediaciones históricas de la salvación no contrastan con la especificidad y la universalidad de la misión de Cristo, debido a que todas reflejan, aunque de modo diverso y según formas culturales que a veces son irreducibles, la misma Palabra misericordiosa de Dios y la misma potencia purificadora de su Espíritu.

Por lo que concierne la iglesia, los pluralistas subrayan su función en orden al Reino de Dios en el mundo: ella es sierva del Reino. La distinción entre la iglesia y el Reino ha permitido superar no sólo el exclusivismo, sino también el inclusivismo eclesiológico, porque ha permitido destacar la presencia del Verbo eterno y del Espíritu de Cristo en acción también en las otras estructuras religiosas.

constitutivo universal del evento-Cristo en el orden de la salvación, y el significado salvífico de las tradiciones religiosas en un pluralismo de principio de las tradiciones religiosas mismas, dentro del único y multiforme plano de Dios para la Humanidad». *Verso un modello di pluralismo inclusivo in Il Cristianesimo e le religioni*, GdT 283 p. 188. También GEFFRÉ habla de *pluralismo inclusivo*, al que define: «la corriente teológica más prometedora al interior del catolicismo». *Verso una nuova teologia delle religioni*, in Gibellini R. (Ed.) *Prospettive teologiche per il XXI secolo*, (BTC 123) Queriniana, Brescia 2003, p. 359. Pienso que es más exacto hablar de *pluralismo convergente*, porque ninguna forma histórica puede tener la presunción de contener todas las riquezas espirituales de las diversas religiones. Todas por tanto son llamadas a intercambiar dones espirituales para converger hacia una situación en la que cada una, conservando y acentuando sus propias características, vive una comunión profunda con las otras.

51 Escribe, por ejemplo, Cl. GEFFRÉ: «El mismo *principio encarnacional*, es decir, la manifestación del Absoluto en y a través de una particularidad histórica, nos invita a no absolutizar el cristianismo. Si el Cristo es universal, lo es como Jesús de Nazaret, muerto y resucitado. El hombre Jesús no es una especie de emanación divina. Su humanidad es relativa, en cuanto histórica, incluso teniendo un significado absoluto y universal». *Pour un christianisme mondial*, in *Recherches de science religieuse* 86 (1998) p. 63.

Por consiguiente, se afirma a las claras la posible función salvífica de las religiones y su convergencia hacia una plenitud que hasta ahora en ninguna de ellas se ha realizado, ni siquiera en el mismo cristianismo. Así como la necesaria referencia de los nuevos tiempos que corren (Lc 12,56-57) constituye la razón para superar el exclusivismo eclesial, así también la búsqueda de los *semina Verbi* (fragmentos de la Palabra) en las culturas humanas implica la variedad de Palabras divinas para la salvación humana, y permite la superación del exclusivismo de la fe cristológica⁵².

La neta distinción que se establece entre pluralistas convergentes y pluralistas relativistas se funda en la decisiva importancia que los primeros confieren al evento Cristo, ya sea en su dimensión histórica o ya sea en su dimensión trascendental. De hecho, mientras en el pluralismo convergente la perspectiva trinitaria permite relacionar la salvación universal que se da en Cristo refiriéndola al Verbo eterno que él humanamente expresa, y al Espíritu que Él dona, en el pluralismo relativista, el achatamiento trinitario a un genérico monoteísmo no consiente la articulación necesaria de la historia salvífica y desaparece la imprescindible referencia a la Palabra y al Espíritu que en Cristo se revelan como agentes divinos de salvación.

Conclusión

A través del rápido y sumario recorrido del pensamiento teológico occidental es evidente que el problema del pluralismo religioso no ha encontrado aún una completa y definitiva respuesta, a la vez que también se evidencia que algunas líneas de orientación y de búsqueda se están entrelazando en una síntesis que se anuncia próxima. Ésta parece apoyarse en dos distinciones. La primera entre la acción divina y la actividad de Jesús, culminada con su muerte/resurrección. La segunda entre la presencia divina en la historia humana y la acción de las comunidades eclesiales surgidas a partir del testimonio de Jesús.

La primera distinción permite observar en la historia los innumerables reflejos de la Palabra eterna y del Espíritu antes de la revelación de Jesús. Éstas conservan sus características y continúan presentando desarrollos en la historia humana con sus específicas particularidades simbólicas y culturales.

La segunda distinción permite discernir los desarrollos que la acción divina realiza en las varias comunidades religiosas independientemente de la influencia eclesial, pero con una profunda relación personal entre ellas. La fragmentación de las diversas manifestaciones de las religiones impone que éstas entren en diálogo y se confronten para hacer emerger lo que de definitivo y de absoluto se conserva en las diversas tradiciones. El cristiano

52 DUQUOC Ch., *Messianisme de Jésus et discrétion de Dieu*, Gèneve, 1984 p. 141.

está convencido de que a través de la confrontación de las diversas religiones el aporte de su tradición se presentará como absolutamente necesario para que la historia de la salvación humana se pueda llevar a cabo. Es por ello que considera el diálogo como un elemento constitutivo de su misión. Ésta se desarrolla en la historia como testimonio de las riquezas espirituales que la aventura humana de Jesús ha introducido en la humanidad y continúa manifestándose en aquellos lugares donde su Evangelio se vive con fidelidad.

La articulación trinitaria de su fe en Dios le permite al cristiano reconocer y aceptar a través del tiempo su Palabra y su Espíritu, y de este modo abrirse a las formas auténticas de humanidad expresadas en las otras experiencias religiosas. Sin embargo el cristiano es consciente de que, debido a su pecado, continuamente contamina el don que debe ofrecer y se resiste al don que debe recibir, y necesita, por consiguiente, una continua conversión. El criterio de las opciones de Jesús le sirven de guía para este camino.

El aspecto teológico, que ha quedado inconcreto y no suficientemente aclarado, tiene que ver con la relación que existe entre la actual acción salvífica de Dios en la historia humana (por medio de su Palabra y el Espíritu Santo) y la acción de Cristo glorioso. Seguramente ésta se expresa actualmente a través de las comunidades que, manteniendo fija la mirada en él (Hb 3,1; 12,2), hacen surgir nuevas formas de humanidad. Pero uno puede llegar a preguntarse si la acción de Cristo glorioso posee también espacios independientes al de las comunidades eclesiales que remiten a su testimonio.

Algunos responden que sí. De hecho, propenden a identificar la acción de Cristo con la del Verbo eterno y del Espíritu, atribuyéndole la misma extensión y profundidad.

Hay otros, sin embargo, que distinguen claramente la actividad salvífica de Dios a través del Verbo eterno y del Espíritu y la de Cristo glorioso, ya que Cristo sigue siendo una criatura limitada y circunscrita en su naturaleza humana, aunque glorificada. Los que siguen esta opinión confirman los límites establecidos por el ejercicio de la fe de aquellos que marchan por el camino trazado por Él. Bajo esta perspectiva los discípulos de Jesús tienen la responsabilidad de hacer eficaz la misión de Cristo, continuándola en el tiempo.

Otros, en fin, prefieren evitar esta problemática y limitar la reflexión sólo al ámbito de la experiencia del Jesús histórico y de las comunidades que por medio de la fe se remiten a su testimonio. De hecho piensan que los límites insuperables de nuestros modelos interpretativos de la actual acción de Cristo glorioso, no permiten dar respuestas a estos interrogantes.

Carlo MOLARI

Voices of dwellers on the boundaries: the meaning of social location for the inter-religious dialogue

In current discussions in the field of religions we are confronted with a variety of terms referring to diversified levels of concern: theology of religion, inter-religious dialogue, comparative theology, comparative study of religions etc...

While all these terms refer to different discussions and positions in the field, I like to emphasize an often neglected area of concern, namely the social location of the persons involved. I will especially focus on some contribution critical feminist theologians can make and do make to the discussion. Due to the limitation of this article I can only develop a few first outlines.

Terminology

The last years we are confronted with a wide range of terms most of them used by Christian theologians to refer to different areas of research and reflection in the wider field of dialogue and confrontations between religions.

With the term 'religions' I emphasize in this article on the plurality of especially institutionalised religions in the world, religions of which Christianity and Christian denominations are only one representation.¹

The term inter-religious dialogue refers to the encounter between people, theologians, religious leaders or otherwise, of different religions.

1 I want to avoid the use of the Latin American construction of 'micro' and 'macro ecumenism', which to my mind blurs the discussion on an international level and closes possibilities to contribute to this international discussion.

The notion theology of religions on the other hand focuses more on the discussion within a certain religious system of thinking. Although these latest two definitions have a distinguished focus in the academy, these two approaches meet each other and influence each other when we look from a critical feminist perspective.

A critical feminist perspective

A theology of religions and an inter-religious dialogue which take into account the plurality within the religions, cannot but start with a critical analysis of the social location of the persons involved and of the political implications of religious practices and interpretations.

This analysis needs to be done at least on three levels: the construction of religion as a vehicle of both oppression and liberation, the context in which the dialogue or theology takes shape and the ambiguous position of some of the believers.

I will shortly explain these points.

1. When we critically look at the institutionalised world religions and their contextual constructions and appearances, some striking similarities and characteristics can be noticed. In Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity the majority of the so called 'sacred scriptures' are written by men. These same scriptures are interpreted for centuries by male religious leaders and male scholars. The mediation between the profane and sacred domain in these religions is mainly performed by men: priests, monks, imams.

Three main founders of these religions/religious systems are male, Jesus, Buddha, Mohamed. In the four mentioned religions the evil is projected into the female -body- and especially male religious mediators are warned to avoid contact with this female evil in order to attain the divine. One more similarity is that none of these religions ever protested against this institutionalised male construction of religion. An inter-religious dialogue which starts from these premises challenges also the theology of religions in each religion. Though these may sound exaggerated and superficial statements, the sad story is that most women in religions are still confronted with the consequences of these constructions.

But there are more similarities between religions: most of the religions have a majority of female believers. Research shows that for many women religion is a support in their day to day life to sustain and transform their reality. As such the religion functions for women as a vehicle of oppression but also as a vehicle for comfort, transformation

and liberation. This is also expressed by the fact that in each of these religions and systems we find subversive traditions of which institutionalised religion loses its grip. Characteristics of these subversive traditions are female imagination and spiritual practices beyond the institutionalised male constructions of this same female divinity. Especially women and people from lower classes incline to these practices and transform the male constructions.²

We may easily conclude that women never had the possibility in institutionalised religions to define the self, the divine and the world. Women are invisible in the construction and ongoing interpretation of religions, and there is an absence of women's issues and gender differentiation in the present reflection on inter religious dialogue.³ The subversive practices are a witness to the fact that mainstream religion and intellectual religious interpretation are merely a result of male elitist reflection.

2. Believers of institutionalised religions, but also their interpreters and religious leaders develop different patterns depending on the context in which the religion takes shape.

Religions are pluralistic in themselves and believers construct their religious identity in relation to the social and political context. Muslims in the Netherlands from Turkish origin in a minority position behave differently from Muslims in Turkey and from Muslims in f.ex. Pakistan. Their relationship to Christians in the respective contexts will also be different. The power issue - who defines the orthodoxy in the discussion, and what is the nature of the religious presence in the location - also influences the encounter between the religions and the result of it.

Nevertheless in most of the official religious encounters, be it theological meetings be it religious parliaments or inter religious liturgies, women are mostly absent and we have to tackle the question why this still occurs. According to UN⁴ statistics women still achieve lower levels of education than men. Of the 130 million children worldwide who did not attend school in 1997, two thirds of them were girls. Parallel to this limited opportunity in education, is the limited opportunity for leadership roles in the many patriarchal religions. Women constitute over half the

2 I refer here to the popular interpretations and veneration of Mary, Kali, Mariammam, Bodhisattva's like Kwan Inn, etc... which are often different from the interpretation of the same in the institutionalised religion.

3 E. Sefcovic, D.Bifano, "Creating a Rhetorical Home for Feminists in the 'Masters House' of the Academy: Toward a Gendered Taxonomy of Form and Content" in: *Women and Language*, vol.27, issue 1, 2004, 55.

4 www.un.org/womenwatch

worlds population, perform two third of its work hours, receive one tenth of the world income, own less than one tenth of the world's property and hold one percent of chief executive positions. Then women's voices might not only remind us of the realities of oppression, but they ask for increased reaction to the situation, they ask for transformation.⁵

The fact that women are the majority of the believers, challenges on the other end the notion of 'expert' in all inter religious encounters.

3. Women take different stands in the way they relate to religion: they conform themselves to the mainline thinking, they take a critical stand against the oppression of women by religion, and/or they incline to subversive and popular practices on the edge of the religions. The dwellers on the boundaries, - the adepts of popular and subversive religiosity and the ones with a critical intellectual stance- could shift the theological content and practice of inter religious dialogue.

A critical feminist contribution to inter-religious dialogue and theology of religions is related to these three levels of questions and will also shift the traditional discussions about inclusivism, exclusivism and pluralism.

Important questions will then be: who talks with whom, who has the power of the definitions, and what is the main purpose of dialogue and theology. While in traditional discussions we speak about three levels of dialogue: the dialogue of heart, dialogue of intellect and dialogue of life, from a feminist perspective we need to focus on the dialogue for transformation of life – with attention to justice issues- and religion.

Some small stories...

First story.

In march 1998, for the first time since the 9th century, the merely Buddhist island of Sri Lanka witnessed the ordination of 35 women nuns in the highest ranks of Teravada Buddhism. This historical event was the begin-ning of a new attitude towards women in Teravada Buddhism which has always opposed the ordination of women fervently.

The ordination was carefully prepared by the women, through self study and through the teachings of a few progressive monks. It was a controversial issue and some of the monks in the highest ranks doubted

5 Chung Ok Lee, "Triple Universal Ethics for a New civilization" in: *Vision for a New Civilization: Spiritual and Ethical Values in the New Millennium*, New York, 2001, 194..

the permissibility of this ordination as the Buddha himself did not ordain women. The women together with some of the monks were clear on the issue: 'if the Buddha did not ordain women and if he did not intend to give women equal places to men, nevertheless the present time demands the use of the spiritual powers of women in the Buddhist Sanga'.

In the same month of march, three days after the ordination of the Buddhist nuns, the church leaders of the Anglican community in Sri Lanka voted on the possibility for ordination of women priests. Several women have been educated as theologians, but were not able to fully participate in leading a community, not withstanding their respected commitment in many parishes. In a meeting between Christian Anglican women and some of the Buddhist nuns, it became obvious that the male leaders of both religious communities did not know about each other's historical steps. The Buddhist and Anglican women on the contrary knew each other very well and had a history of shared interests. The topic of the meetings of these women was never the impact of the ordination on their respective communities. They rather discussed with each other new types of leadership and possibilities to change social and political situations in Sri Lanka and their abilities to impact on human rights issues.

Even though the male religious leaders were preoccupied with issues of inter-religious cooperation, it did not occur to them to inform each other about the ordination of the women.

Second story.

During an exposure of Western theological students and professors in Sri Lanka, some meetings were held on the issue of interreligious dialogue. A meeting was prepared with feminist activists of four religions: Christians, Hindus, Buddhists and Muslims. These women were highly educated - theologians, professors in human rights and sociology, representatives at the United Nations-. They represented a diversity in the way they were still committed to the devotional practices of the religions in which they were well-versed. Some were practicing believers, some called themselves secular. As a group of friends throughout the years they had developed strategies to ask media attention on human rights issues, abortion, and reproductive rights. Fundamentalist trends in each religion, abuse of peoples' rights legitimised by religions had been the focus of their unceasing activism, reflection and educational work. Their critical insights were directed against the negative ways in which religion and culture are intertwined and serve the oppression of liberationist thinking and action. Their friendship and cooperation was inspired by a common search for liberation of women -and men- in the Sri Lankan society. It enabled them to cross the boundaries of religion and ethnicity and to

use spirituality to change society. When this group of feminists asked the Western visitors to take a stand in inter-religious dialogue towards liberation issues in favour of women, the Western group felt uncomfortable and became speechless.

Afterwards a discussion in the Western group took place on the plausibility for a secular Buddhist to ask Christian theologians such questions. Further reflection within the Western group led to the astonishing conclusion, that this encounter and also the work of this group of feminists could not be seen as an attempt of inter-religious cooperation. End of dialogue between 'professional' inter-religious theologians and the women...

Few feminist theological reflections have been done on the issues at stake in these two stories. Does it mean that the 'professional' inter-religious dialogue is not an important challenge for feminist theologians? Or do they work on the edge of the male defined issues and is their reflection, merely based on practices, not yet seen as relevant to the issue? May we expect a particular focus and elaboration on the issues from feminist theologians?

Women's Interests in Religions

The feminist movement as a world movement and the theories on cultural critique created an interest in wanting to know more about each other's religion and the impact of it on social structures of oppression and possibilities for liberation. Some publications argue that the contribution of women and feminists in particular will bring a new approach to the present discussions in the field of interreligious dialogue and the theology of religions.⁶

The feminist movement for change is one of the most powerful social movements in the world. Because of the different locations of women and the variety of cultures and religions, the analyses, the resistance and strategies for change take different forms. The feminist movement influences also women in their religious practices and reflections

6 M. O'Neill, *Women Speaking, Women Listening. Women in Interreligious Dialogue*, New York 1990.

P. Coe, W. Eakin, J. Mc Daniel (eds), *After Patriarchy. Feminist Transformations of World Religions*, New York 1991.

U.King, "Feminism: The Missing Dimension in the Dialogue of Religions" in: J.d'Arcy May (ed.) *Pluralism and the Religions: The Theological and Political Dimensions*, London, 1998, 40-55.

"Roundtable Discussion: Feminist Theology and Religious Diversity" in: *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 16, 2000, no 2, 73-131.

and in each religion there is a growing group of 'feminist theological' thinkers. In their publications two levels of production can be distinguished:

1. In Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity and Hinduism female scholars analyse and unmask patriarchal elements in their religions and religious systems (hermeneutics of deconstruction)
2. They break the invisibility of women in history and make re-interpretations of religion reflecting on the present critical religious experience of women (hermeneutics of reconstruction).

In Hindu thinking, L. Gupta gives an example of these attempts in her re-interpretation of the Hindu goddess Kali. Her hermeneutics of deconstruction of the patriarchal deposits and her political analysis of religious practices brings her to a liberating image of Kali for women now, especially the women of lower classes. Many Christian theologians, but also Buddhist and Hindu scholars refer to methods of reconstruction to write women back into history, freed from patriarchal stereotypes.⁷ Academic research in different religions using these methods of deconstruction and reconstruction is growing fast. It will hopefully have an impact on the mainstream interreligious dialogue, and it could influence deeply the sense of religious identity in the dialogue. Likewise as in the Christian feminist theology this literature is highly veined with personal stories and experiences. Theology and praxis go hand in hand; theological reflection is based on living resources.

Justice as a line of action.

Reality shows that women of different religions do not meet only in universities, but first of all at kitchen tables and in daily life. They realise that they are divided between each other by barriers they did not make themselves. In much Christian feminist theology and feminist critique, especially in the liberation theological stream, the relevance of 'god talk' is related to the issue of justice. Here we find points of convergence with some male thinkers in the field of interreligious dialogue.

L. Swidler and Knitter, well-known for their research in interreligious dialogue argue that theologians need to acknowledge that they will fail their purpose if they do not make poverty and oppression the leading thread for their dialogue. They both try to convince Christian theologians of the priority of justice above intellectual and conceptual theological dialogue. Asian theologian A. Pieris asserts that what is nee-

7 G. Dietrich, *On Doing Feminist theology in South India*, in: *Liaisons Internationales, Coeli*, 54, 1990, 19-28 and 55, 1990, 19-24. E. Harris, *Woman and Man in Buddhism and Christianity*, in: *Dialogue*, vol xix-xx, 1993.

ded, especially in Asia, are not 'base Christian communities' but 'base human communities', in which people from different religions come together on the basis of their shared concern for and praxis of liberation, and on this basis - he states- they will understand themselves and each other ever more deeply and engagingly.⁸

It is indeed difficult for theologians to engage oneself in such thinking, as the second story in the beginning of my text shows. Nevertheless I strongly believe that cooperation on the level of just practices provides the ingredients for new theological concepts and new religious identities. Moreover women on the margins of religions who are used to analyse the power dynamics that divide and subordinate people can enter new insights to the dialogue. A coming together of committed women -and men- across ethnicity, culture, religion and class is always a multi religious dialogue even if religion is not the issue. When women -and men- try in diverse ways to *religare* -connect- in pain and joy, the dispersed lives of people, -due to oppressive structures-, they create a more whole and holy world. Academic reflection is often tempted to follow the beaten track. It is difficult to reflect on religions and religiosity in the concrete historical, cultural, and racial power structures and to unravel them while constantly making new alliances and creating new religious identities. And yet this could be the path...

All hands on deck: doing justice to the spiritual and religious power of women.

In 1991 the Korean theologian Chung Hyun Kyung made a shocking speech during the General Assembly of the World Council of Churches. She presented a theology in which she intertwined indigenous Filipino peoples religion, Buddhist images of salvation and Korean Shamanism. She created a 'Christian theology' that connects with the liberating forces of different religions; thus she wanted to eliminate oppressive and dualistic tendencies in some Christian theology. In her passion for justice, peace and the integrity of creation she made a new Christ and Spirit interpretation combining power-giving liberating elements from different religions.⁹ She dealt in a particular way with the issues of pluralism and syncretism without any fear, because this is the liberating spiritual praxis of many poor excluded women in the world. Parallel to this work, we see attempts of Kwok Pui Lan from Hong Kong, Mercy Amba Oduyoye from Ghana and many more theologians from the countries of the south

8 A. PIERIS, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, New York, 1992, p. xii.

9 Chung HYUN KYUNG, *Struggle to be the Sun again*, New York, 1990, p. 109-114.

who try to deal with 'difference' and 'similarity', taking the abolishment of de-structive powers as their herme-neutical principle. Being feminist theologians they swim like salmon, against the grain of mainline scho-larship and religions. *Rainbow fish precious, picked from the catch. You swim through their corridors, upstream. You've done their task and ours, double labour, familiar as laundry.*¹⁰

Swimming upstream: insider-outsider.

Critical feminist theologians for transformation, belonging to whatever religion are mostly aware of their double position as insider-out-sider.¹¹ As scholars they are insiders because of their knowledge of the institutionalised religion. As women they are merely excluded from the centre and leadership of their own religious traditions, and if feminists, they are related to social movements for change and have learned to analyse the destructive ways in which patriarchy deals with 'otherness' and 'difference'. This insider-outsider position can become an important hermeneutical and methodological tool for reflection in an inter-religious setting. Women have few things to loose in an inter-religious encounter. In a sincere dialogue they can together with women from different religions celebrate the joy of a shared spirituality of struggle, and a shared longing for liberation. In the meantime their dialogue together may be tough and conflicting. The destructive powers of racist, classist and cultural divisions are not easy to attack. Sometimes in the search for connection beyond cultural and religious differences also insider- outsiders, the dwellers on the boundaries, will fail the words, unable to understand each other's languages. But if language and understanding fails there is still a possibility to engage to engage in each other's lives.

I recall a day when a group of Turkish, Afghani and Dutch women came together. They experienced that they were unable to deal with each others particularities of culture and religion, unable to share with each other their mutual critical understanding of each other's culture and religion. A day of singing, dancing and laughter was decided upon as a possible bridge and a period of rest. The Dutch white women were exhausted, their feet hurt at the end of an entire day of dancing in a Turkish and Afghan rhythm. After two, three days only they landed on their own feet

10 R. GOLDEN, S. COLLINS, *Struggle is a Name for Hope. Poetry*, Minneapolis, 1983, p. 20 (Worker Writer Series 3)

11 L. TROCH, *Verzet is het geheim van de vreugde. Fundamenteel theologische thema's in een feministische discussie*, Zoetermeer, 1996, p. 242-247.

again, with a trustful feeling to have at least a bit of routine, ready for the next challenge. The pain and the dizziness after dancing are the sweet sour prices to pay for letting go in the rhythm of each other's broken lives and religions. Although we are strangers in the beginning, we may discover we have known each other for a long time...

*Someday if someday comes,
we will agree that trust and change
is not about safety...*

Lieve TROCH
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The Earth: Primordial reference for religions and for the theology of religions

The liberation of the Earth¹

An absolutely crucial word needs to be said about the importance of our modern understanding of ecology and cosmology in opening up new possibilities for appreciating the role of religious diversity and its implications for our living together.

For the first time in the history of humanity we have the capacity to provide a universal and coherent story of our origins. Science has unraveled so much of the story of the origins of the universe, of our planet and of life on this planet that we are now able to piece together a story that can help us understand who we are in the context of our planet and indeed our universe. In that respect, the “story of the universe” becomes a major inter-cultural achievement that can provide a whole new bridge to inter-religious dialogue and to our identity and place in the universe.

There is a further urgency to addressing the question of ecology in the fact that human activity has come to constitute one of the gravest dangers to future life on this planet. We are all aware of global warming and of the vast extinction of species that is already underway. The urgency of concerted action to arrest the consequences of our irresponsibility is of the highest priority. Even so, the political will often does not seem to be present and our leaders wade through oceans of verbiage with very little concrete results. Part of the incapacity for action can be placed on the shoulders of Catholicism that has, for the last five hundred years (or

¹ Original Spanish text is in ASETT (EATWOT), *Por los muchos caminos de Dios IV*, Ecuador, Abya Yala/ASETT, 2006. See: <http://tiempoaxial.org/PorLosMuchosCaminos>

much more) placed human beings at the apex of God's creation and considered the earth to be an environment to be exploited for their benefit.

The origin of the current crisis of the environment can be found above all in the doctrine of Catholics that sees the "other" as alien and excludes it. This other can be another religion, another culture or even the Earth itself considered as "other" than human. These three "others" are in fact inter-related.

We have much to revise. Moreover this very revision may be an important bridge for bringing together several religious traditions that together could provide the weight and momentum to turn around the environmental struggle for responsible action. The Aboriginal and Afro-American traditions place considerable importance on integration with nature. There is much also in the Hindu tradition that is deeply respectful of all expressions of life. If Catholics were able to reinterpret their own tradition with a view to a more sensitive treatment of the earth, we might be able to go a long way toward building that bridge with other traditions and provide the motivation for serious advances in improving the quality of life on the planet.

One way to begin to look at this question is through the perspective of an option for the poor. In our days a priority task of religion in the world is the elimination of poverty, oppression and violence. Without this major effort religion loses its credibility in face of the crushing reality of the majority of humanity. However, if there is a "poor" and "vulnerable" sector that urgently needs attention as the matrix for the hope of all those billions who live in misery, it is the Earth itself. The liberation of the Earth is urgently needed. Such an effort requires the collaboration of all peoples and all religious traditions. This is particularly so because it was religion that had such an important role in creating the mentality that led to the massive destruction of humanity and of the Earth that we have witnessed in the last 100 years. Only through radical change in this mentality can we come through the crisis.

We need a new theology that can provide a bridge for religion to move out of its own ghetto and begin to practice the collaboration required for real change. A theology that opts for the Earth, a theology of religious diversity that includes the Earth in its agenda touches on values that are important to every religion. It is high time that we mobilized the wisdoms of all the religions and cultures before Mother Earth decides to sweep us from the scene.

There are obstacles of course and they need to be recognized.

The first obstacle is that nature is considered as just an "environment," that is to say a bunch of things that serve to sustain life and human

comfort. Secondly, we need to deal with a scientific shift that took place in the 17th century through people like Newton and Descartes. For them the environment was considered a set of inanimate “natural resources” that are at the disposition of the economy. Plants and animals were even regarded as “machines” that we could reshape and destroy at will and with impunity.

Patriarchy played a major role in all this. For many centuries the Catholic Church taught that women were not equal to men but rather formed part of that nature that they had already decided was an enemy of sinful man whom God had excluded from paradise. In marriage it was understood that the male “acquired” a woman as a piece of property. Women were valued mainly for their reproductive capacity, much as any animal. Thus, women suffered an exclusion that paralleled that of nature. While all this may have become codified in the Middle Ages through matrimonial legislation, patriarchy as such was already present much earlier in the Mosaic Law.

This patriarchal and macho view of being human and of nature disfigured our relationship with God. God was not seen as really present in nature. We thought God just used it to give us lessons and to offer natural resources to satisfy our desires. The Catholic religion seems to have suffered from schizophrenia. On the one hand it said that all that God created is good and serves to know God and on the other hand it said that nature is the enemy of humans who must struggle against it in order to survive. Moreover it insisted that man is above nature and separate from it. Nature exists merely to serve man’s needs and comfort.

Beginning with the 14th century, Europe went through a slow process of secularization that managed to separate the sacred dimension from natural phenomena. This opened up even more doors to the manipulation and exploitation of nature. After this separation had been established, a series of scientists in the 16th century established the scientific method and modern science was born. Unfortunately this turned out to be rooted in a profoundly mechanistic mentality. Newton studied nature to discover its laws and ended up reducing everything to a series of mechanical (mathematical) principles. Descartes completed the job with a total separation between the material world and human consciousness. The industrial and technological revolutions followed. At first the Catholic Church resisted this new approach. Several persons were condemned for having contradicted what the Church believed to be found in the Bible. The case of Galileo is perhaps the best known. Those that studied the human body using dissection ran the risk of falling into the hands of the Inquisition. Nevertheless the scientific method prevailed and the Church largely adapted itself to the results. The Church resisted secularization more because it entailed a separation of church and State,

with the consequent loss of power, than for any preoccupation about the exploitation of the Earth.

Paths to another view

In the twentieth century there were other important shifts: the rejection of patriarchy and a new scientific posture. A new vision has emerged that opens up the possibility of a profound collaboration between Christians and members of other religions for the liberation of the Earth. I will only touch on some of the avenues available for doing so. We begin with feminism.

The feminists state that patriarchy was already well established at the time of Abraham and Moses. For that reason they were interested in reviewing the texts of the First Testament (sometimes called the “Old”) that deal with women. In the struggle for the recognition of their human dignity on an equal plane as that of the male, feminists have reinterpreted at the same time the patriarchal perspective that unites women to Nature. They argue that the patriarchal system has dangerous ecological implications.² If we think that human beings are called to dominate the Earth – conceived as a sum of resources without any intrinsic value – it should not surprise us that the Earth ends up devastated. Feminists accept that women are intimately linked to the Earth – and men as well! They then proceed to reappraise Nature in a positive way. They propose that, as human beings, we recognize our integration in and even our dependence on nature instead of thinking of ourselves as a superior being. They suggest that human beings are part of the Earth and not simply living on the Earth. They insist that women are incarnated, just as men are, in one and the same flesh of the Earth. Finally, they affirm that the Earth is composed of living beings, all of whom bear a divine presence. This is a view of what it is to be human that is much more holistic. Body, intelligence and feelings are seen to be interrelated and complementary. They even insist that feelings have a primary place at the moment of regarding the world.

This perspective of an integration between being human and Earth has barely made its entrance into Catholic theology and is still hotly resisted. Yet it allows for a much greater openness to the religious perspectives of Aboriginal peoples not to mention Hinduism, Buddhism and other religions that are less patriarchal than Catholicism. Recognition of the sacred dimension of all natural and historical reality can even provide

2 Rosemary RADFORD RUETHER, *Gaia and God*, HarperSanFrancisco, 1992. Also Heather Eaton, *Beatitudes for the Earth: A Feminist Approach to Ecological Ethics*, Novalis, 2005.

for a much larger opening to the Islamic world and corresponds to a very ancient Jewish tradition.

Another important path for a theology of religious diversity comes from modern science. In recent years, a few scientists have taken an important new direction in their way of understanding nature. When the first astronauts traveled into space, they saw something that no human being had ever seen in all of human history: a small, extremely beautiful blue planet full of life and yet limited and fragile. The image has served to remind us that, as human beings, we are a small part of an immense planetary history. We are reminded also that we have a decisive impact on the future of life and that, for the first time in human history, physics, biology, chemistry and archeology, to mention only a few of the sciences, can explain to us in detail the whole history of life on this planet and even the history of the universe itself.³ We are the first generation in history that knows exactly how our universe emerged out of nothingness 13 billion years ago. We are the first to know how our planet, Earth, was born 5 billion years ago in a stupendous and yet ever so delicate process that made possible – miracle of miracles – the phenomenon called life. We are already beginning to understand that in order to produce this mysterious creature called a human being who is conscious of itself, the Earth gave it a “genetic code”⁴ that summarizes in itself all that evolution, in all its various stages, had been able to learn about life. We are, for example, the first generation of human beings to know the intimate relationship between the capacity of our eyes to see and the capacity of plants to absorb light from the sun. Finally we are much more conscious today of how the ecological systems function. This is an extremely valuable piece of knowledge. The fact is, now we know! That knowledge entails responsibility.

Scientists are beginning to recognize that animals and plants, as living things, are endowed with consciousness, experience, feelings and not simply instincts. They are much more like human beings than we thought in recent centuries. Human beings have a whole substrate that unites them to plants and animals. This is precisely their genetic code. Scientists like Lynn Margulis and James Lovelock⁵ as well as some theologians like

3 Brian SWIMME y Thomas BERRY, *The Universe Story: From the Primordial Flaring Forth to the Ecozoic Era*, HarperSanFrancisco, 1992.

4 I am placing this phrase in quotation marks to indicate that the reference is not just to the sub-molecular dimension. A human being is an enormously complex organism.

5 Lynn MARGULIS, *Microcosmos: Four Billion Years of Evolution from Our Microbial Ancestors*, Simon & Schuster, 1986; James LOVELOCK, *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1979.

Thomas Berry⁶ go further and suggest that it is easier to understand the activity of the planet itself, with its ecological systems, if we consider it a living being.⁷ Berry is of the opinion that human beings are, in this context, the self-consciousness of the Earth. The “self” here refers not just to that characteristic of consciousness that an individual might have of him- or herself as an individual but also that consciousness in so far as it is able to articulate the broad experience of the Earth of which he or she is an integral part. In that human self-consciousness the Earth itself achieves its articulation and celebrates its experience of God. For this reason, it is important to pay attention to how human experience is rooted in what nature “tells” us. Berry suggests that our experience of God would be totally different if we were living on a planet similar to the moon because we would not have the same language to speak of God.

As I have already said, for some Christians it is blasphemy or even idolatry to speak of Mother Earth (with capitals). Nevertheless, on second thought, why not? When we speak of persons we name them with capital letters (Mary, Peter). Why not also the Earth? Some will say because to treat the Earth as a person, as something living and intelligent would be to transform it into a god. It would be pantheism. Nevertheless, to recognize the Earth as living is not the same as making it equal to God. It is rather to make it a magnificent creation of God.⁸ Karl Rahner, speaking of angels, proposed that they are precisely forces of the universe, messengers and guardians of God. So, above all the natural forces I propose an “archangel” called Earth. Why do we think that this implies denying God his/her place? Or are we denying the dignity of those beings created by God in order to place ourselves subsequently at the same level as God? Is this not precisely what the second chapter of Genesis condemned?

Accepting that the Earth is a living being would lead us to develop a new theology of creation, a theology very different from the one that was taught in the seminary for the last several centuries. Plants and animals, rivers and mountains would be sacred, as sacred as human beings. This would put economic exploitation out of bounds. We would have to develop another moral theology to speak of our relationship with the

6 Berry Thomas, *The Dream of the Earth*, San Francisco, Sierra Club Books, 1988; *The Great Work*, New York (U.S.A), Bell Tower, 2000.

7 There is no scientific consensus on the use of the word life in reference to the Earth itself. Nevertheless, the use of this word in an restricted analogical sense seems to me at the very least extremely appropriate. We are far from understanding what life is.

8 Karl RAHNER, «Angels», in Karl RAHNER (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, The Seabury Press, New York, 1975.

“natural environment.”⁹ The theology of religious diversity would need to develop the foundations for recognition of this bridge with other religions.

Many images of the psalms tell us that the animals, the plants, the rivers and the mountains rejoice to know and praise God. How can we pray all those psalms and not take them seriously? They are constantly telling us how the Earth, the animals, the hills and the rivers praise God.

Let the heavens rejoice and the earth exult,
Let the sea roar and all the creatures in it,
Let the fields exult and all that is in them;
Then let all the trees of the forest
Shout for joy
Before the Lord.... (Psalm 96)

So, they have a religious experience! God speaks to them and they praise their Creator. We are called then to respect them. According to the tradition of Saint Francis of Assisi we should listen to them and unite our voices with those who recognize God. They are beings that know God, that are open to God, that know how to respond in their own way to God. This perspective can be found also in the writings of various mystics such as Hildegard of Bingen (12th century):

I am the fiery life of the essence of God: I flame above the beauty of the fields; I burn in the sun, the moon and the stars. And, with the airy wind, I quicken all things, vitally by an unseen, all-sustaining life. For the air is alive in the verdure and the flowers; the waters flow as if they lived; the sun too lives in its light; and when the moon wanes it is rekindled by the light of the sun as if it lived anew.¹⁰

In summary, the recognition of the living dimension of all nature and of the Earth itself offers another important approach to a theology of religious diversity. If we knew how to relate to the Earth in this way, if we had a theology of creation that incorporated this element, our relationship with other religions like Hinduism, Islam,¹¹ Buddhism and the

9 See Heather Eaton's effort in this sense, *op. cit.*

10 «I am the fiery life of the essence of God: I flame above the beauty of the fields; I burn in the sun, the moon and the stars. And, with the airy wind, I quicken all things, vitally by an unseen, all-sustaining life. For the air is alive in the verdure and the flowers; the waters flow as if they lived; the sun too lives in its light; and when the moon wanes it is rekindled by the light of the sun as if it lived anew». Reproducto en Gloria DURKA, *Praying with Hildegard of Bingen*, Saint Mary's Press, Winona, MN, 1991.

11 I am thinking especially of the mystic traditions like Sufism in Islam..

Aboriginal and African religions would be very different. In this sense Catholicism seems to be the religion that least appreciates what the Earth tells us.

The diversity of religious cultures

Eva and Priscilla are two Sisters of Saint Joseph. They are the daughters of an Ojibway leader, Art Solomon, who helped me recognize the sacred mystery of the communion and community with my native Earth. They have achieved a very beautiful integration between their Christian faith and the spiritual traditions of their Aboriginal culture. In this they carry the legacy of a painful struggle carried on by their father to distance himself from what the Catholic Church had taught him about his culture and to recover the traditions of his people. While many Aboriginal Christians continue to reject those traditions, considering them contradictory to their faith, there is a growing number of Catholics, Anglicans, Protestants and Evangelicals among the Aboriginal peoples who experience a new and positive integration. Nevertheless, for the theologians, these experiences represent a great challenge because the beliefs of this growing number contradict what all the catechisms since the Middle Ages have taught right up until the 1960s. So, we need to look at the question of cultures.

The texts that ground our doctrine of creation did not arise out of nothing. They incorporate many other texts that come from other cultures. So it is that the first two chapters of Genesis incorporate elements from stories about the origin of the universe that existed in various cultures of the Middle East. We also know that some texts, like that of Colossians 1, 15-20, for example, speak of how Christ was present in the process of creation. In this way they reproduce old concepts in the wisdom tradition that are also found in other Middle Eastern cultures. So, in the construction of the sacred texts about creation, the biblical authors knew how to appreciate what was good in other cultures of their times and they managed to incorporate many elements from those cultures into what they were writing.

Catholics however have not always appreciated what other cultures have contributed to human diversity. They thought that only their way of explaining things was valid. They even preferred to deny the contribution of those cultures to their own doctrines. So it is that they considered all the myths of other cultures about the origin of the world and the activity of Nature as pure superstition and idolatry. Recognition of the context in which our own origin myths were written would at least allow for an openness to appreciate the contribution of other cultures to our perspectives on Nature.

The fact is that we are not the only people who have myths, parables or stories about creation. The Aymara people of Bolivia and Peru speak of how they originated out of an encounter of the Sun with the Earth (el Inti with Pachamama) in Lake Titicaca. The Maya speak of themselves as the People of Corn. The Ojibway also have stories about how Turtle Island (North America) came to be and they themselves along with it:

And Kitche Manitou (the Great Spirit) had a vision. He saw the universe and understood that his vision had to come about. So he created stone, water, fire and the wind. Into each he breathed life. From them he created everything else, including the human being. But a disaster came over the world and everything was buried in water. Then the woman-sky lived alone and Kitche Manitou had compassion and sent her a spouse with whom she had sons. They fought among themselves and destroyed one another. With that, the water creatures persuaded her to come down and they persuaded the turtle to rise to the surface. And the little muskrat, ridiculed by everyone, went down to the bottom and brought up a little earth that was placed on the back of the turtle. And the woman-sky breathed life into it. The Earth grew and formed an island full of plants and creatures known as Michilimackinac. Later the woman-earth gave birth to twins, a boy and a girl. They were called Anishnabeg (people) and the creatures of the Earth fed and cared for the children. When the woman-sky was sure of their survival, she went back to her place in the heavens and is known as the first among mothers, the Grandmother (the moon).¹²

Myths like this have served in all cultures to assist people in discovering and preserving their identity over many centuries and in face of multiple adversities. Every culture has its origin myth; every religion proposes a myth about the origin of the world and of its people. So it is that such myths have a fundamental importance in the consolidation of a cultural and human identity both for Aboriginal peoples and for the great world religions. For that reason it is important to take seriously any attempt to know the origin of human beings, of our planet, of the universe. Besides, an attitude of respect for the way in which these things are explained is fundamental if we want to arrive at an inter-religious and intercultural collaboration to defend the Earth and its peoples. In this sense the book of Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God*, deserves special attention for its study of the creation myths in various classical

12 This is my own summary of a much longer story to be found in Basil Johnston, *Ojibway Heritage*, Toronto, McClelland & Stewart, 1976, p. 12-20. There are similar Aymara stories in the appendices of Fernando Montes Ruiz, *La Mascara de Piedra*, Bolivia, Editorial Quipus, 1984.

cultures (Babylonian, Greek and Hebrew) as well as the new myth based on recent scientific explanations. All this opens possibilities for a commitment of our religious tradition to the liberation of the Earth.

The idea that only the Catholic stories are correct and that those of the Aymara, Maya, Ojibway and Hindus are not as valid as those we find in our sacred texts is ultimately self-defeating. Truth itself invites a more humble attitude. All human knowledge, including that of the Word of God, is historical, that is to say that it passes through the mediation of the limited categories offered by human consciousness. It is never complete; it is always subject to revision. For that reason we need to welcome with great reverence every attempt to articulate what God says through these myths as also through Nature.

The perspective of a human being as an integral part of a living Earth and not in any way superior offers elements to reinterpret our Catholic doctrine about the Earth that would allow for a serious opening to Aboriginal religions, Hinduism and Buddhism among others. These points of view may even be useful in dialogue with non-believers and ecologists. It is a dialogue in view of the liberation of the Earth and of all that is contained in it. Human beings (male and female) are then part of the Earth as its self-consciousness. Animals, fish and plants are "our elder brothers and sisters," as the Ojibway say. There is much to be learned from these elders because they existed long before us and therefore have a much longer memory. (Human beings have a history of at best only one or two million years, or even less if we are to consider only our own species.) If we know how to listen, we discover how the animals, plants, fish, mountains, rivers share with us their profound wisdom and can present us with a word of God. They can also teach us how to live and respond to God with an authentic ethic and religion. By reading the prophets attentively we recognize that this was the way they encountered the word of God. In that perspective we respect other living beings and even venerate them as manifestations of the love of the great mystery that is God. This way of relating to the Earth introduces into our ethic the dimension of reciprocity, which is so much appreciated in Andean cultures.¹³ From the Earth we receive life and with this life we help the Life that is the Earth to grow. And in all this we encounter God who is love, source of Life and extravagant in his/her benevolence.

13 "The Andean ethic does not separate the human from the natural. This holistic and cosmic Andean vision is a wonderful contribution to survival on the Earth. Furthermore, the masculine and feminine elements interact in favour of life on mother earth." Diego Irarrazaval, "Eco-human rights," Sacred Earth, Sacred Community, Toronto, Canadian Ecumenical Jubilee Initiative, 2000, p. 273.

It seems ironic that modern science, the foundation of so many ideological notions that have destroyed the ecological systems, offers elements for Catholics to move forward in defense of the Earth and to be capable of dialoging respectfully, even profoundly, with other ancient cultures and religions. Nevertheless, this seems to be the case and it deserves attention.

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Epilogue

Pluralistic Theology: data, tasks, spirituality

This fourth volume “Along the many paths of God” marks a milestone of maturity in the purpose of the collection of reports written to accompany the emergence of a “theology of liberating religious pluralism” from Latin America but with a global scope. After having sought to identify the challenges that the theology of pluralism has set up for liberation theology (first volume), and after having identified initial responses (second volume) as well as having attempted a first draft of pluralistic theology (third volume), in the present book we have tried to review the status of this theology as found on the different continents of our planet. Now it is time to propose some interpretations, even though they be interim, after taking into consideration the panorama that has been unfolded before us.

We plan to do this in three steps: trying to take stock of the data that has been opened up for observation; then trying to line up the tasks that can be foreseen; and finally going deeper into the significance and spirituality of it all.

Balance of the data

Very briefly, we can affirm with modesty but with truth that from the data we have examined on the preceding pages we are in the position to make the following assertions in form of a synthetic balance.

The “**theology¹ of religious pluralism**” (TRP) today is definitely a reality whose significant initial presence on all continents cannot be ignored.

1 We are making reference of course, to Christian theology.

Similarly we can confirm that, although to a lesser extent, this pluralist theology is present at least generically in one of its specific branches such as Christology or Ecclesiology. However, in this field we must admit that this presence is nascent, only just germinal, and not on all continents, with Asia being the most advanced.

Regarding **women and men theologians** we must admit that it is still in a very small proportion of them who seem to have encountered and addressed this new perspective. There are relatively very few known to have produced theological reflections, either generically or directly regarding religious pluralism, and then only as reconstructions of theological branches or treaties in “a pluralistic key.” In this respect we are simply witnessing that on one hand first steps are difficult, and on the other hand the need to be prudent. It’s good to be prudent, but without ever losing sight of the historical urgency.

We believe we can confirm that in general, the **epistemological status** of TRP begins to be grasped as an independent theological form not just “a branch,” or even “a new branch” of an alleged “eternal universal theology” but as existing in its own right, as a “new form of theology,” or perhaps even “the way of existing through which all theology must pass.”² This is still just an intuition beginning to gain more adherents among those who are temperamentally intuitive. Pluralism with its pluralist paradigm, is the new paradigm which has to encompass all theology. Pluralist theology is the future for theology. The pluralistic paradigm is the new ethos and the intellectual matrix into which Christianity has to be poured. These intuitions, we suggest, are already beginning to show their presence in the theological ambient.

This intuition carries with it the perception of the need to “**re-write all theology**,” as Paul Tillich³ prophetically announced shortly before his untimely death. And precisely therein lies the sense of being overwhelmed by the enormity of the task that looms ahead. If liberation theology took 25 years to develop and reach its summit, it seems obvious that such an epochal shift as implied in a pluralistic paradigm, is going to need more time. It will be the time during which religions, Christianity and the others, with all their tremendous symbolic patrimony will have to be broken out of previous molds and poured into new ones.

2 I am applying here, in parallel, what we said of Ecclesial Base Communities in Brazil, in a Portuguese expression almost untranslatable: BCCs are “um jeito de toda a Igreja ser”: “the way of being through which the whole Church must pass in order to be Church.”

3 *The Significance of the History of Religions for the Systematic Theologian*, en *Geschichte der Religiösen Ideen*, (hrsg. von J.C. Brauer), New York 1966.

4 J.M. VIGIL, *Crisis de la religión a partir del pluralismo teológico (Religious crisis arising from theological pluralism)*, «Alternativas» (junio 2005)167-180, Managua.

And to this feeling of being overwhelmed by the enormity of the task, is annexed a feeling of **fear** involved in the challenges⁴ implied. We are continually understanding with greater clarity the intellectual mutations required when faced with what has been the presentation of Christianity. The same is true when referring to modern presentations, even in the case of Catholicism being updated in the light of Vatican II, where even the most innovative approaches of the council are overcome⁵ by the pluralist paradigm.

Regarding Latin America specifically, we can say that our balance allows statements such as:

Although tardy, Latin America has arrived at the current debate over TRP, which was absent throughout the past century. Although incipient, it can be said that Latin America has a voice and has begun to sing its part in this universal concert.

Moreover, Latin America has entered the dialogue with its best known and recognized charisma: its theology and spirituality of liberation. It could have moved into the field with one or the other of the different perspectives or aspects found in pluralistic Latin America. But instead it entered the global debate over theology of religious pluralism by putting into play its explicit genius and showing its native hybrid touch by using its renowned liberation theology to interact with pluralistic theology.

With this move we enter an entirely new playing field not only of Latin American theology, but of liberation theology itself which is moving onward to a new stage. After its previous period, commonly recognized for its diversification into several different theologies because of its “emerging subjects” (indigenous, women, blacks). Now we are entering a new phase of liberation theology which is characterized not by any new subject or object but rather by a new “relevance,” a new “formal object” garnered from its pluralist paradigm.

Obviously, this is not a new stage intended to close out others, nor to replace them, much less to break off from anything. The current emerging subjects and the on-going work of liberation theology continue, and must continue, only now they must take the qualitative leap demanded by the new paradigm. The work already done will be recuperated by converting and transposing it using the key of the new paradigm. Liberation theology was doing a good job from the inclusive point of view. There is no need to drop out anything, but rather to continue while converting everything by the pluralist perspective. This qualitative leap reaches a higher level that is definitely new and will decisively mark “a

5 J.M. VIGIL, *¿Adiós al Vaticano II? Tres superaciones del Concilio*, «Spíritus» 181 (2005) 120-132, Quito; «Alternativas» 12/30 (julio-diciembre 2005) 161-171, Managua.

before and after.” Everything seems to indicate that the theology of religious pluralism is moving into full development and expansion, and can look forward to a promising future.

The tasks

Let’s go on to attempt to point out the tasks that seem projecting themselves into the present and future development of TRP.

Starting with the field of **theology**, the first major task that was launched in all this process was the construction of the so called “Theology of religious pluralism,” i.e. the construction of a ‘theology of religions’ that no longer focused its concern on the very possibility of salvation outside Christianity – treating something already obvious-- but focusing now on the significance itself underlying the plurality of religions.⁶ It would be a ‘genitive’ theology, whose content or material object would be the very plurality of religions: what do they mean in history and in the “plan of God “? This task is still in process, unfinished and very likely to have a great future.

The next step is the elaboration of a theology of pluralism that is pluralistic in itself (neither exclusive or inclusive). It would still not be ‘genitive’, theology, but formally pluralist, i.e. it would assume pluralism as an epistemological perspective.⁷ Within this task, it would be necessary to focus primarily on a «pluralistic theology of religious pluralism» and then the second step, necessarily, would be to address the construction of particular pluralistic theologies, that is, a pluralistic re-conversion of the branches of specific theology: Christology, ecclesiology, theology of revelation, eschatology and sacramental theology. As in liberation theology first there was a general theology followed by an elaboration of various theological branches from the perspective of liberation. Something similar would likewise occur in the field of pluralistic theology, always keeping in mind the words of Paul Tillich: all theology must be re-written from the view point of this new paradigm.

It hardly needs repeating that almost everything to be done lies ahead still in this field of pluralistic construction of specific or sectional theologies. Weak minor incursions into the field of Christology have been made, but more as individual proposals than as accepted and recognized achievements by the theological, academic or pastoral community.

6 This is the reason usually alleged for the recent change of name of this theological branch.

7 It’s the same case as when we were speaking of “liberation theology” as a material theology (with liberation as the material object of this theology) or fundamental theology (liberation as its prospect, or its formal object or its “pertinency”).

It is important to point out that all this construction that lies ahead of us at the same time requires a “de-construction.” This is another simultaneous task. Since we are not stepping into a vacant lot, but rather into one already occupied by very ancient and well founded buildings that refuse to tumble and which have many theologians trying to shore them up. Pluralistic theology and an inclusive theology will not be happy bed mates. The construction of one will require the destruction of the other. The first phase of a new construction will be, in good part, demolition and removal of debris from the site. The task is to present the challenges, discuss them, and then make decisions over the changes to adopt

Apart from the strictly theological efforts themselves, there are other tasks coming to hand to assure that everything proceeds in harmony. Pluralistic theology today finds itself located outside **ecclesiastical and religious institutions** in general. Religions -- Christianity included -- were conceived in exclusivity, and have lived there during millennia. Only a few legitimate exceptions have with difficulty assumed being inclusive. They like to consider pluralism as unattainable and impossible to be assimilated by what traditionally have been religious institutions. They would need time to understand it and to digest and assimilate its challenges. The task of theology would be to proceed with tact and patience to influence these institutions to gradually come to opening up to meet the challenges of pluralism, and then later pluralistic theology.

It will be necessary to assist religious institutions (churches and religions) to become capable of responding with a wisdom loaded with a vision of the future, instead of repeating history and reacting once again according to their selfish institutional interests. The institutions have to come to understand that their only salvation at this historic moment is once again the “paschal mystery”: to accept dying to their selfish interests in order to arise renovated, re-converted, at the service of humanity and associated with all other religions, as the only way to be accepted in today’s society and not get thrown into the dustbin of history.

Tasks of **pastoral** concern must not be left out of this “agenda.” Women and men theologians “run into problems” when confronted with a new paradigm that defies their previous convictions. submits them at times to a relentless de-construction, and forces them to ‘be born again’ and learn to see reality in a way never before experienced. The common religious person is called to re-live the same paschal experience: she is going to have to die little by little to her beliefs, habits, assumptions, previous theologies and spiritualities, and be born again to “another way of believing.”⁸ The transit will not be easy. But by no means should she be

8 A. TORRES QUEIRUGA, *Sal Terrae*, Santander 1999.

afraid, or delay her confrontation. On the contrary, the more she delays the more she will run into large numbers of desertions that are being produced and whose number is increasing every day precisely for not having addressed the problem.

Here is where it has to be repeated again that the theology of religious pluralism is not to be related first off to inter-religious dialogue. Many conceive this relation thinking that this kind of theology is made to prepare for dialogue with other religions. Really, the theology of religious pluralism is an excellent remote preparation for inter religious dialogue, but this is not its first or primary application. I never get tired of repeating that “TRP is not primarily to speak with someone else, but to dialogue with our own selves.” Put another way: “it is not for ‘inter’ but rather for ‘intra’ religious dialogue.” In other words, to talk with ourselves, to repair our inclusive theology and convert it into pluralistic theology. After this indeed, we will be better prepared for eventual inter-religious dialogue. Assimilation of the theology of religious pluralism, is a re-composition of the entire religious worldview of our life and will make sense even though we have nobody of another religion with whom to dialogue.

Its significance: Spirituality

What is it that drives ahead this process and makes TRP exhilarating? Isn't it simply a purely academic theological debate? Is there also a mystic behind it?

It has always been said that underneath every great theological current or movement there lies a deep spiritual experience that caught on in the People of God. They differ from ‘theological schools’ which derive simply by reference to the doctrine of some brilliant theologian. Liberation theology for example, was not a ‘school’; it did not derive from some brilliant mind that opened a school; it was rather similar to a spiritual fire that at a given moment caught on and spread uncontrollably through the People of God. Liberation spirituality came before liberation theology, bolstered it up and furnish it with air and food. The writings of the liberation theologians were not “originals” but rather ‘were copied from’ and recollected from the living experience of committed communities - even up to martyrdom- of the People of God. Once developed and put into a theological format, they flowed as a constant feed back to the same People of God who then recognized themselves in these writings. The role of theologians was only a part of the cycle, but by no means its prime mover.

Something similar – allowing for differences in times, rhythms, and historical moments - might just be happening today. The theology of religious pluralism is springing up simultaneously on a worldwide scale - not

just on one continent - nor because there are one or more theologians who with their know how are “shaping up a school.” There is no such reference or link of dependence to any “founding theologians.” Rather the effervescence is apparent almost everywhere as a movement or spiritual current within the very heart the People of God.

Much less is it a matter of an intellectual or academic interest, as if this theology were of University interest. The interest raised is in the universe and that’s right on the street. Already towards the end of the last century Torres Queiruga⁹ wrote: “Pluralism today exercises an unquestionable appeal, which borders almost on fascination.” Nor can it be denied that the proposal of this theology finds an accomplice in the secret special interests of the People of God. Believers with an open modern mind today “recognize” these developments by theologians of religious pluralism as something that is “being fed back to them”: something they had always considered at least as an intuition and now they recognize as having been formulated and “better expressed.”

Before and supporting theology of religious pluralism lies the spirituality of religious pluralism, which is breathing upon it and causing it expand even without books or a theology: as though by osmosis, or intuition, as the work of the Spirit hovering over “the Many Paths of God.”

We are therefore faced with a new great ‘wave’ of the Spirit hovering over history. The former wave was undoubtedly the spirituality of liberation, which woke up Christianity, on a global scale, to discover the commitment to love as justice as the social and political dimension to which it had grown partially blind. The previous “wave” had been the reconciliation with the values of the modern conscience (science, critical thought, value of the person, religious liberty, human rights, democracy etc.), which came about towards the middle of the past century, and that in Catholicism was embodied in the Second Vatican Council. Now at the beginning of the XXI century we are witnessing the full expansion of this present wave with becoming conscious of a religious pluralism that will profoundly change Christianity and all religions, to the point of becoming a clear mark of a before and an after.

We are not discussing theology, we are experiencing the arrival of a new “wave” of the Spirit, consciously opening a new historical cycle of great significance, which is just beginning, and promises to “make all things new.” While going through a new *axial time*,¹⁰ we are welcoming a new *kairos*, (divine time) to which we open the doors, “without fear,” and with all our intellectual lights turned on.

9 *Diálogo de las religiones y autocomprensión cristiana (Dialogue of religions and Christian self-understanding)*, Sal Terrae, 2005, pág. 25.

10 J.M. VIGIL, *Theology of religious pluralism*, Lit Verlag, Zürich - München 2008.

We want to participate in this renovation that the Spirit is inspiring at this hour. Religion and religions, must be brought up to date, thrown open to this movement of History, caught up, not only in their deeds and understanding of the world but especially in their understanding of self and of the sacred. The historical new time of “globalization” makes this possible.

Religions are living a new experience: for the first time - in the thousands of years of their existence - they not only can, but are forced to stay in touch and live together. This offers them a platform from which previously they were never able to observe. Seeing the others and necessarily having to live with them, they begin to see themselves in their own mirror, and acquire a perspective previously impossible for judging everything that each one had said about itself as well as about the others. The experience of religious pluralism for them is really something new, and this new vision is producing an intimate transformation in them. How do they feel now about the “outside of us there is no salvation,” which almost all of them affirmed and proclaimed day in and day out during the past? Or how do they feel now about their claims of being unique and absolute, themselves and their symbols?

This is a difficult time of transition, of an on-going experience of a new epistemological perspective that leads to re-consider and re-formulate many hitherto held certainties, whose meaning now goes deeper, gets transposed and transformed. Those who are still hanging on tenaciously to incontrovertible securities and historical fixations are those who suffer most. Time must be allotted to digest, and midwives must be furnished to assist the birth. That transition, that epistemological change, that re-thinking and reformulation, that digestion and that birthing delivery: all this is what the theology of religious pluralism signifies for today’s religions. This is the thinking and formulating part of the profound global experience that this great religious ferment represents. Theologians simply “return,” now re-worked, what they received from the profound spiritual movement that is taking place.

To do theology of religious pluralism is not just an academic job. For many women and men theologians, it is a deep spiritual experience. It means being a militant, a theoretician doing practice. To free up new ideas that are being born, to open minds, to demonstrate the obsolescence of out-of-date approaches, to educate people into a new worldwide pluralist religious citizenship -- all this belongs to the theology of pluralism and to the vocation of those who cultivate it.

11 “Religions have to undergo a true “conversion” to review their attitudes and rethinking their heritage “: A. TORRES QUEIRUGA, *Un Dios para hoy*, Sal Terrae, 1997, p. 6.

If religions are in crisis, if we are entering a new axial age, if religions are in need of a re-conversion, the theologian has to devote much of her or his energy to promote this conversion and welcome and listen and guide this axial change which supercedes us all, but in which each of us can collaborate though it be only in an infinitesimal degree.

This is a prophetic work, because it demands conversion¹¹. Theology of religious pluralism today requires prophetic charisma to be able to confront the religions with authority¹². “The task of the theologian today is to; listen to the ever new revelation that is being produced in the “co-creative”¹³ divine-human process; “to speak the name of the revolution that is presently going on.”¹⁴ “The mission of the prophet is to open the vision, criticize the functional oppressive status quo and mobilize everybody towards a new and risky future.¹⁵

But the theology of religious pluralism is not an internal struggle, that is ecclesiastical, or internal to the world of the purely “religious.” It is rather an historic intervention in the public square of the world. It is not a purely religious task. Instead it aims to transform the world. Conscious of the fact that the religious dimension is not a particular deal of some private individuals who might be satisfied with mere gratifying religious experiences, but, rather, the very deep dimensions rooted in profound values that guide the most decisive actions of individuals in history, theology of religious pluralism is aware that is not locked into Byzantine academic discussions, but in an urgent fundamental human problematic. Paul Knitter expressed it beautifully in the preface to this book: only the world’s religions together can save humanity from the great drama that today holds it captive: precisely the hegemony of another “religion” giving it competition, the religion of the Market, which threatens to crumble both humanity and the very planet itself.

The theology of religious pluralism focuses on religions, knowing that they are humanity’s greatest forces and most powerful resources. It wants to transform them, update them, make them cross over to the new “axial age,” accommodate them to an entirely new stage of history.

12 “We need the conversion of religions. Perhaps religions as sociological entities have betrayed their message to a greater or lesser extent, and now we at a moment of hope as we see that they do recognize it more and more; but to recognize also leads to repentance and implies a change. [...] It might just be that religion itself, what we understand by religion, now at the present dawn of the twenty-first century, needs a radical change, otherwise we are not going to get very far.” R. PANIKKAR, *The scandal of religions*, in TORRADEFLOT, Francesc (org), *Diálogo entre religiones. Textos fundamentales*, Trotta, Madrid 2002, pg. 178.

13 O’MURCHÚ, *Rehacer la vida religiosa*, Publicaciones Claretianas, Madrid 2001, pág. 66.

14 *Ibid.*, pág. 62.

15 *Ibid.*, pág. 106.

TRP tries to overcome their resistance, set them free from bonds of long-outmoded beliefs, alleged certainties, overcome their fears to incur in alleged infidelities, to obey exactly the signs of the times in whose favor their very founding principle speaks. Doing theology of religious pluralism is to struggle with all these spring levers, and at times run the risk of persecution by the religious institutions themselves. Theological militancy has its cost, if it is prophetic theology, and not just a theology of functionaries.

Both the clash of North-South as the “clash of civilizations” are conflicts between sectors of humanity inspired by one religion or another. In each of these sectors in conflict, religion continues to play a role: justifying, tolerating or hiding the injustices that result in any collision. If religions had maintained mutual dialogue, if they had discovered that the God of Life and Justice is the Universal God, and if they had established their supreme goal as the observance of that God’s mandate for Life and Justice, then neither the North-South conflict, nor the clash of civilizations could exist as long as both sides of each conflict continue to invoke God. It is increasingly clear that religions must have a change of heart, update themselves, put themselves into harmony with the new demands of brotherhood in a unified world; a world that is totally different from that “small world” into which each religion came into being, and then developed all by itself during thousands of years.

Achieving this new world today is contingent on the existence of religions that are renovated, re-converted and that have jettisoned deeply traditional attitudes that in today’s perspective are seen as pure ballast. These attitudes have part of their existence in the “small worlds” isolated and lonely where even up to this day they have been locked-in during millennia. Religions must, for example, courageously and definitely abandon that mirage to which most have been victims: to consider themselves as the center of the world; to consider themselves as the only true religion, as the only “saving religion” (among those religions that see “salvation” as a goal), as the superior religion etc....

Most religions still hang on to these fundamentalist dead weights. They coexist with an apparent civilized and educated attitude but in private maintain attitudes that are revealed as incompatible with global coexistence of religions. The religion that believes itself to be the only true one, is not living together in peace, but just tolerating others. The religion which believes itself superior does not dialogue, but just simply waits for an opportunity to convert the other. The Cause of the theology of religious pluralism does not lie in a theoretical or academic regional discussion off to one side of the Great Causes of Humanity. The theology of religious pluralism wants all theologies to be “pluralistic” and freed

from all fundamentalist ideas that plague them. It wants all religions to become global and recognize each other as sisters, equals, unique sparks struck from the same human-divine light; it wants all to feel empathy with and exist for all mankind, without being exclusive or inclusive, without a monopoly on salvation, without absolutisms, without proselytism, jointly called upon to assume the responsibility for the fate of global humanity and Life itself, the Planet and the Cosmos.¹⁶

Only “pluralistic” religions, i.e. those that assume coherently the theology of religious pluralism, will be useful to mankind at this new stage of history. Those that fail to take this step, will continue being uncomfortable and health-damaging corsets for humanity, things inherited from long-gone-by ancient times.

A pluralistic feeling or intuition will not fall from heaven into religions. Its acquisition will cost effort, crisis, resistance, debate, tensions, persecutions and much discerning. But it is obvious that sooner rather than later, Humanity will accommodate itself to the new stage of its history and come to express its spiritual dimensions in appropriate instruments. Will religions still be one of these instruments, or at any rate «pluralistic religions»?¹⁷ Will «pluralistic epistemology» permit the existence of “religions” in that future? Will there still be an hour for religions or only one for spirituality?

But now is not the time to answer these last questions, but rather to get moving along the path leading into the future that will bring the answers.

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16 See above in this same book, the essay by Richard Renshaw, which beautifully presents the ecological dimension of the pluralist paradigm.

17 Obviamente, lo decimos no en el sentido de tolerantes o flexibles, sino en el sentido técnico de aceptadoras del paradigma pluralista, frente a la concepción exclusivista o incluso inclusivista.

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