

A CRY FOR LIFE: THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE THIRD WORLD*

Cry, Cry, Cry for Life

For the living, for the dead
For the desert, for the sea
Poisoned fish, birds with broken wings
Poets with no words
Singers without a song

Cry, cry, cry for life
For the little children, fighting in the streets
Playing with toys, guns and grenades
For Afro-Amerindian mothers, weeping out of sorrow
Wondering about their children's fate

Cry, cry, cry for life
For South Africans, robbed of motherland
Fighting apartheid, denied of liberty
For Korean people, ridden with hunger
Yearning to be united, for half a century

Cry, cry, cry for life
For Natives in the Americas, guardians of wisdom
Staring at the sun, not allowed to dance
For Jamaican youths, captives in Babylon
Wanting to return, but no promised land

Cry, cry, cry for life
For the Indian Dalits, outcasts in their own land
From day to day, burying hundreds who die
For the refugees, exiled in diaspora
On the willow tree, hanging their harps and sigh

*This is a statement from the Third General Assembly of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians, January 5-16, 1992, Nairobi, Kenya.

**Cry, cry, cry for life
For the peasants who produce our food
But go to bed with empty stomach
For workers who keep the wheel turning
But carry heavy burdens on their backs**

**Cry, cry, cry for life
For the courage, for the hope
For the forest, for the stream
Bodies may die, spirit never dies
In our struggle, we burst in songs
As a new day dawns, we will shout in joy**

Introduction

The Third Assembly of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) met at the Methodist Conference Centre in Nairobi, Kenya, from 6 to 13 January 1992.

For EATWOT members, friends and observers, it was a historic occasion. EATWOT was conceived here in Nairobi in 1975, and inaugurated at the University of Dar Es Salaam a year later. It is gratifying that, after fifteen years of steady growth in membership and programmes, EATWOT has again come to Africa.

The Assembly meets at a time when the Third World in general and Africa in particular are going through unprecedented changes. The poor and the marginalised groups have discovered their collective power, and the impact of their corporate cry for life is opening up avenues for their participation in decision-making and processes. Signs of hope are clearly discernible all over the African continent from Cape to Cairo; encouraging changes have taken place and continue to take place in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Angola and Kenya.

These signs of hope, however, are countered by new problems and the frustrations they give rise to: ethnic consequent exodus of refugees and displaced people. Foreign interference in local affairs, deteriorating economic situation, population explosion, the growing incidence of AIDS, deforestation, the growing gap between the rich North and the poor South on the one hand and between the third-world politicians who siphon off national resources into foreign banks and cling to power and the worsening poverty of the people.

While African theologians have been reflecting on these problems, the gathering on the African continent of EATWOT members from Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, Native American and minority people in the USA, together with EATWOT's long-time friends and observers from other countries has been a source of great encouragement. This has given the African theologians on the continent strength to be more determined and cry much louder - a cry for life, life in all its fullness.

The cry of the Third World is not a passive cry of resignation to the realities of death. It is a strident witness to the persistence of life. The cry for life is not a cry of despair, sorrow, hopelessness or grief. It is a cry that denies victory to torture, detainment, starvation and military might. It is a cry for bread, rice, water, land, housing, jobs, health care.

The cry of the Third World is indeed raised from the midst of misery and from within situations in which the forces of death are rampant; in which children die by the thousands from diseases related to malnutrition while elsewhere food is wasted, milk and grain are destroyed, and resources are hijacked from life's needs to a life of luxury and to the production of weapons of annihilation. The cry of the Third World is from the midst of the politics of the powerful who rule by torture, assassination and the contriving of the disappearance of women and men, and who commit aggression through proxy wars. The cry raised from the midst of structures designed for our subjugation, marginalisation and extinction, through distorted priorities, skewed agricultural policies, unjust trade arrangements and inhuman economic manipulations and pressure tactics - all practised and imposed in brutal and subtle

ways by neo-colonialism and the international imperialism of money built up through the atrocities, cruelties and robberies during the era of military colonialism. The cry is from places where people are killed everyday for maintaining that the poor have a right to live and for believing that children must be given food, and justice must be practised. The cry comes from within situations in which domination is transnational, and counts on allies in our own midst.

The third-world cry for life is *one, Multi-tonal* cry. It reflects the various ways oppression assaults third-world life. It carries the cries of countries protesting economic indenture to IMF and the World Bank. It contains the cries of nature against technological devastation. It contains the cries of religious cultures oppressed by the dominant ones. It carries the cries of the innocent massacred by the bombs of the sophisticated technology of war. It carries the cries of indigenous, tribal and Aboriginal peoples of land, civil rights, autonomy and cultural respect. It carries the cries of refugees, children, displaced people and those afflicted with AIDS, cries against the discrimination of homosexuals, those who suffer from economic oppression, women forced into prostitution, victims of drug abuse and the unjust politics of health care. It carries the cries of Blacks against apartheid. It carries the cries of the dalits against the apartheid of caste oppression. It carries the cries of women against patriarchal dominance and sexual violence.

The urgency of the third-world cry for life drew EATWOT to Nairobi. We gathered to listen to the challenges posed by that cry. What does the cry mean for our spirituality? What does the cry say about Jesus? What does the cry do to our commitment? EATWOT assembled in Nairobi to boldly proclaim that even in the midst of the "New World Order", or racism, sexism and capitalism, God has not disappeared. God has not failed the third-world people. **God IS PRESENT** in the third-world cry for life?

Structures of Oppression

Structures of oppression are global and local, external and internal. We are faced with a new global coalition that controls world economy, world politics and world information and communication systems. These evolve an international security system into which the internal security of every third-world country is annexed. We are under the grip of a market economy that is being directly controlled by the financial institutions of the powerful countries. It is a foregone conclusion that under such a kind of economic arrangement the condition of the poor and socially disabled will not become better. While increasing globalization of market economy would seem inevitable, what should be the safeguards that can prevent its catastrophic aspects on the poor and the marginalised?

Developments in the last few years make us wonder whether such safeguards are possible at all. Global institutions are intimately connected with the political process. The disappearance of cold war and the break-up of the socialist system in Europe have left us in a situation where world politics tends to be under the increasing control of a single power maintained by aggressive militarism targeted primarily at the Third World. In the new military and political configurations the poor in the Third World are expendable. It is this reality that compels us to believe that the emerging new world order is anti-people and anti-life. Meeting in 1992, the year that marks the 500th anniversary of the colonial conquest, we are painfully aware that the tentacles of power are still colonial in one form or another.

The collapse of the historical expressions of socialism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union raises with urgency questions about alternative ways for Third World development. It is now clear that the major causes for the failure of historical socialism are non-democratic forms of government, the imposition of a centralized economy, the denial of people's participation and their ethnic and cultural identity and of freedom for the spiritual development of the people. The present crisis was brought out by people asserting and fighting for their rights and freedom in a context where imperialist frameworks persisted.

The collapse of this historical model of socialism does not mean the demise of the values, goals and utopias of socialism. However ambiguous historical socialism might have been, some of its achievements cannot be ignored, as for example advances in economic democracy and towards the elimination of absolute poverty, and towards education and health for all, full employment and the development of sciences and sports. One would hope these gains will be preserved in the changing circumstances.

Our analysis of the global context is incomplete if we do not address ourselves to the growing divisions among our own people in the Third World and the violence committed on one another. To a large extent they are the result of a process of internalizing the aggressive values of dominant societies. Our elites perpetuate their dominance over the majority, increasing the misery of the poor. Among our religious institutions there are churches in most places which tend to be elitist, racist and sexist. By and large these churches have lost the moral credibility to respond to the cry of the world for life.

Emerging Currents

Yet our situation is not completely dismal and hopeless. We hear the stirring of people, we see their resistance to oppression. There are movements which assert their hope and life. They provide inspiration and vision for a new way of living.

The Irruption of Women: A Cry for Life

For many decades, women of the Third World have been active participants in struggles for justice, for human rights, for economic and political freedom and in movements for the integrity of creation. Around the 70s there was a fresh wave of activism when women of Asia, Africa and Latin America and the US minorities started identifying themselves as women and naming the specific forms of violence and marginalisation they experience, while continuing their active solidarity within and critical support for the struggles of other oppressed groups in their societies. The need for some measure of autonomous existence and an agenda of action focusing on women arose out of their disillusionment with

political processes and movements that did not recognize the gender-specific forms of oppression women experience.

Out of such experiences, women have articulated new paradigms of political and social analysis as they discovered that traditional ways of understanding society were far from adequate. They have also provided a strong critique of the Euro-centred development paradigm, and the untold levels of suffering it causes, particularly to women and children. They search for a new anthropology - a new way of understanding what it means to be human. Patriarchy, as a system of graded subjugation, has been identified and its pernicious roots, that weave into other structures of oppression, have been exposed and targeted for concerted action. Patriarchal structures have legitimized scandalous forms of dehumanization of women and men, and women's right to self-identity and dignity has been violated.

The violence that women experience can be overt and even brutal - rape, incest, battery in the domestic sphere, prostitution especially related to tourism and the rest and recreation industry for defence personnel, and violence related to certain religious and cultural practices. This overt form of violence against women can be extended to the abuse of women's bodies by medical technologies, particularly reproductive technologies, and the rampant use made of third-world women for testing new pharmaceutical formulations. There have been forced and sometimes surreptitious and massive sterilization of third-world women.

The subtle forms of violence women experience cannot so easily be articulated but have for centuries been eating into the psyche of women, eroding their self-esteem. This takes various forms - denying to women their right to self-expression out of their own wisdom, which expresses a perspective different from the dominant mode, or rendering women invisible. The oppression of women by patriarchal religion, including Christianity, and the androcentric language and interpretation of scriptures are other expressions of this. The marginalisation women experience in the church is indeed another form of violence against them.

But hope lies in the fact that women affirm that they will not be silenced as they reclaim their own history and heritage and celebrate their own religious and spiritual resources. Hope lies in their affirmation that a holistic and creation-centred theological feminist and womanist paradigms are important for the empowering of the communities in which they live and for the healing of the broken relationship between humanity and creation. Hope lies in the solidarity of women around the world in opposition to any structure or system that threatens their rights.

Movements of Black Peoples

The Civil Rights and Black Power movements of the 1960s were the resistance movements against white racism in the United States of America. The Black poor came out to assert their dignity and to fight until freedom comes. The source of their resistance is their spirituality and their hope is found in the power to say "no" to death and "yes" to life.

In South Africa the anti-apartheid struggle gave birth to the Black Consciousness movement. Blacks in South Africa have set foot on the path to being autonomous subjects of their history. The current movement of liberal democracy in Africa is not seen as life-saving. The poor will be even more powerless. They will be alienated from their land and get deeper and deeper into the culture of violence. In this situation we witness young people's anger and resistance against marginalisation.

Black women have begun to articulate the multi-dimensional nature of black oppression. For them it is not just an issue of RACE, or CLASS, but also an issue of gender. Black women are saying "no" to racist, classist, patriarchal oppression and "yes" to freedom for all Black people. Black women and men throughout the diaspora are saying "Yes" to the richness of Black cultural heritage.

Out of the development of Black Consciousness throughout the diaspora, emerged Black theologies, particularly in the USA and South Africa. Black liberation theology (USA) today is continuing to articulate the empowering message of the Gospel of Jesus in the struggles of Black and other oppressed peoples throughout the Third World. The Black poor believe in the God of life who affirms their dignity and empowers them to fight against the forces of death.

In South Africa, in the first ten years during which Black Theology concentrated on enabling Black people to re-discover their God-given humanity which was denied by white people, white Christians and white theologians, they faced an uphill task. The Black theology (S. Africa) has been challenged to respond to other concerns and issues as well. They have come up with radical perspectives on Christology and ecclesiology while anti-apartheid and anti-racism commitments remain the context of their theology. Recognizing the invisibility of their experience within the Black Theology movement, Black women are developing their own distinctive theologies. They are attempting to articulate the meaning of God, Christ, the church and culture from their own perspectives. The womanist Theology (USA) and women in Theology in Africa are significant manifestations of this movement.

Indigenous Movements and Religions

Those who have been the most oppressed and dispossessed for the last 500 years are today emerging as a great source of new life and energy. The autochthonous peoples of our Third World, called Indios or Indigenous in the American continent, are coming forth with new proposals for life which question radically our modern societies, churches and theologies. Even though these peoples have been consistently exploited, and excluded from the economic structures of society, they possess a life-giving force which is unlimited. Their demands for their traditional rights for the land and for their religious-cultural identities constitute a great reserve of life and offer new hope for all the peoples of the world, especially for the poor.

In the face of the social models imposed by the First World on the

peoples of the periphery, the indigenous people cry out to be seen and recognized not through the images of western mirrors, but through their own proper mirrors so that others might see them as they really are and want to be. The indigenous peoples have always been deeply spiritual and lived in communion with God. As their old cultures re-look at Christianity through their own traditions and struggles for life and survival, they can provide the churches and their theologies with possibilities of great enrichment and profound renewal. This offers opportunities of discovering and manifesting other faces of God that throughout the ages have been known by the native peoples but not known or appreciated by the Western Churches. These insights will greatly enrich other religious traditions of the world. As western civilization continues to self-destruct through avarice, moral depravity, individualism and the over-all ethic of death, indigenous peoples can offer new hope for life for these dying peoples. The ancestral rites, traditions, myths and utopias of the indigenous people constitute an important source of spiritual energy. This energy has kept the indigenous peoples alive, and sustained them with hope amidst the most adverse circumstances of their long and painful historical journey throughout many generations. In today's very fragile new world order which is desperately looking for alternatives for survival, especially the survival of the poor and starving peoples of the world, the ways of life and beliefs of the indigenous peoples offer an important humanizing force and thus an important saving force for the very survival of our common humanity.

The Hispanic struggle in the United States

In spite of being considered for many years as pilgrims, migrants, strangers, foreigners, temporary and transitional communities, today the Hispanic/Latino people in the United States feel moved to personal and collective recuperation that includes both their spiritual strength and their transforming energies by the growing self-awareness of being a people with its own characteristics, its own ways of reading, communicating, celebrating and sharing life. So far, in spite of being around 20 million in the U.S., the dominant structures have designated the "minority" category to address this people, thus affecting not only its self-understanding as a people but its experience of God as well. Therefore, in

addition to suffering the consequence of the unjust present order, this people has been forced to develop an inferiority complex that leads to the personal and collective perpetuation of an attitude of servility to benefit the dominant minority.

For Hispanic/Latino people, however, hope has not vanished. Even though the traditional religious vision has alienated this people from its responsibility towards its own reality and destiny, the experience of faith has also been and continues to be a source that allows it to recognize its own values and resist the current aggressiveness caused by religious, spiritual and cultural colonization. In this respect, the theological task is to strengthen its transforming potential as well as its solidarity linkage with other peoples and the capacity to struggle and resist the forces of death. We celebrate with joy those indicators that already reveal signs of the emergence of the Hispanic/Latino people as a cry for but also a smile towards life. Among these are the refusal to disappear within the Anglo-Saxon "melting-pot", at the cost of losing its identity, the refusal to continue as strangers and foreigners in our own land or to be second-class citizens, and the re-affirmation that in Spanish or "text-mex", or "Span-glish", or "poncho", it is possible to be a vital part of a people with their own identity. Among them are also the affirmation of women, not only as agents of their own destiny, but also as a changing force with their own initiative and their own unique ways of verbalizing the experience of faith, the discovery that true identity consists in preserving intrinsic human dignity and the responsibility we have assumed in supporting our families left behind in our respective countries, including a serious commitment to improve their real condition of life and affirming that there is no salvation if it is not collective and communitarian. We rejoice in the increasingly committed faith of those whose God is not the one in whom, according to its currency, America trusts.

Ecological Movement

The interconnectedness between commitment to the renewal of society and the renewal of the earth is clearly seen in the struggle of many marginalised groups all over the world. The indigenous people everywhere and many groups who have been traditionally dependent upon land and sea-farmers, fisher folk, agricultural

labourers -have kept these two dimensions together in their movements for liberation. The stubborn resistance of the poor tribal women in the now famous Chipko movement in India against the government's decision to turn their habitat into a mining area and the cry of the poor in many other countries whose habitats are threatened by the demands of modernization have brought home to us the inseparable link between the struggle of the poor and ecological issues. Integral to the struggle for justice and liberation is the struggle for preserving the integrity of creation.

Such movements remind us that the ecological crisis is created by modern industrial and technological growth and modern life-style. The western industrial growth model is uncritically and universally accepted as a paradigm of development. Ruthless exploitation of nature and fellow human beings is the necessary consequence of this development. Decisions about the kind of goods to be produced and the type of technology to be used are influenced by the demands of consumerist economy where the controlling logic of growth is greed and not need. This creates imbalances between different sectors and allows the massive exploitation of the rural and natural environment for the benefit of dominant classes. Much of the profit oriented growth which destroys the eco-balance is engineered and controlled by multi-nationals based in USA, Europe, and Japan and a few other countries. They often use the Third World as a market for powerful pesticides and drugs which are banned in their own countries.

The ecological movements are demanding an alternative form of development which calls for a halt to the violence committed to nature and human beings and the unlimited demand for non-renewable resources. These movements are bringing to our awareness how some countries are forced to trade their forests and national resources for debt relief and to be dumping places for nuclear and chemical wastes from rich nations, causing massive ecological destruction. They have brought a new awareness about our dependence on the earth. We belong to the earth. We share a common destiny with the earth. This has sharply challenged the modern view of reality and demands a reevaluation of currently held values and perhaps a recovery of old values. The issue is about all of humanity living in right relations with nature. The impact of this perception on our visions for an alternate society is critical for

our theologizing. In this regard our own spirituality can be informed by the spirituality of the indigenous people whose fundamental principle is harmony with the universe.

Our theology should be, and largely is, shaped by these emerging currents in the movements of our people. We learn from their experience of struggle and their resistance to the situations of oppression. We drink from their wells (Gustavo Gutierrez) - the spiritual resources that sustain them. We have been insisting that our "method is our spirituality". It is therefore appropriate that the spirituality of the Third World became the focal point of our theological reflection at this Conference.

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

Spirituality for Life

The very word 'spirit' is an acknowledgement that human life is propelled by a principle beyond human power and knowledge. Unable to define this sense of being touched by the beyond, the word spirituality has come to our aid as a convenient term that articulates the sense of our being moved by a spiritual energy to hold on to life and to live it to the fullest. Spirituality spells our connectedness to God, to our human roots, to the rest of nature, to one another and to ourselves. Our spirituality is our experience of the Holy Spirit moving us and our communities to be life-giving and life-affirming. The Spirit itself makes intercession for us with groaning which cannot be uttered (Rom. 8:26).

We live our spirituality in creative response to the cry for life, the cry for God. We celebrate our spirituality in songs, rituals and symbols which show the energizing Spirit animating the community to move together in response to God. All existence is spiritual, our way of life as third-world peoples is spiritual. The spiritual traditions of indigenous peoples - Native Americans, Aborigines, Maori's, Dalits, Tribal peoples of India and Black Africans in Africa - are a powerful reminder of this fact. The spirituality of these people recognizes the "personhood" of all things in creation and leads therefore to a deep respect for nature. They are rooted in nature and therefore live a life of reciprocal dependence with

the rest of creation. There is a life force that urges them to seek the glory of God and of creation by seeking the glory of the whole of humanity, for so to do is to *seek* a humanity fully alive. Spirituality is described as that which fuels theological reflection to generate a more immediate and attainable vision of a just and peaceful world.

There is no room for romanticizing spirituality. It is a cry for life, a power to resist death and the agents of death. Spirituality is the name we give to that which provides us with the strength to go on, for it is the assurance that God is in the struggle. Spirituality involves people's resistance to dehumanization and fills the quest for self-discovery, self-affirmation and self-inclusion, for in each of us in the whole human community is the urge to live and to live fully as human beings. It is the strength of the call to life that leads to various life-giving rituals of Native Americans.

This quest for life is one that seeks to be attained in an environment that is imbued with and reflects the justice and glory of God. Our language about spirituality uses expressions such as "spirituality for liberation, spirituality for struggle, spirituality of involvement, spirituality of combat". The current use of spirituality is not one that directs us to the next world but to justice here and now. Spirituality is not a call away from life but the life force that urges us on to do justice and to resist evil. We are dealing here with Jesus' spirituality, one that is the source of justice and righteousness.

What are the springs of this spirituality among indigenous peoples? One encounters spiritual experiences and praxis that reveal God in creation. Their spiritualities are deeply rooted in land. The alienation of such peoples from their lands is a cause of spiritual and often even physical death. The violation of their space and place becomes the violation of the very spiritual values that hold the people together. In Black Africa the cosmic religions that undergird the cultures of peoples have provided their spirituality and have continued to do so in the Afro- Caribbean cults. African peoples call us to a life-force that is earthed and efficacious. Life now is celebrated by and through myths and symbols. This enables the construction in this world of a world beyond oppression, a celebration of hope. It is a spirituality that creates and sustains

community. Recognizing this demands that we share spiritualities across religions whenever fullness of life and justice are sought. Women relate positively to this spirituality. Women's cry for life, women's sharing and caring, is a way of resisting death and struggling for life for the whole of humanity, men, women and children, and for all creation. The cry for balance, harmony, mutuality and reciprocity comes from the womb of life, it is the spirit groaning to give birth to a new humanity and community. In all communities of women and men reaching out to life and resisting death, prayer becomes a threat to those who violate life.

The authenticity of one's spirituality is demonstrated by one's involvement in the struggle and the theology that results from it. That is why the context of our lives influences both our spirituality and our theology. Consumerism and pollution have us in their bondage. We constantly face the clash of conflicting ideas. In the context of the gathering threat to health and life itself, we can have recourse only to the deep spiritual resources that are available to us as God's children. These forces of fragmentation threaten to create in us a life-denying passivity. This we resist, for spirituality is expressed in activities that defeat death. Spirituality is linked with commitment to life.

The Jesus of Faith

As Christians our spirituality is rooted in the Jesus spirituality, even as our struggles for liberation are rooted in our experience of Jesus, which awakens us to the need for struggle and empowers us to sustain the struggle. This empowering experience of Jesus is not that of the Christ of the Christological dogmas, who has little relevance to life, but that of the Jesus we meet in the Gospels. This Jesus is the Jesus who experiences the conflicts we face, undergoes suffering as we do, shares in our joys and sorrows, and remains faithful to his mission even when it brings him to death on the cross.

The many faces of Jesus that are encountered in the experiences of our people need to be identified. They provide a genuine guide for interpreting the mystery of the Jesus reality. They help us avoid the pitfall of intellectual abstraction and root ourselves in the

reality of people.

To follow the Jesus of faith, first, is to follow one who is unrelentingly critical of the power relations in the structures of society that engender injustice and oppression. Second, it is to follow someone who believes that it is necessary to embody in community our vision of the new, more just society, as well as the discipline to work to realize our vision in this world. Third, following the Jesus of faith means following one who was dedicated to feeding the hungry, clothing the naked and fighting for the liberation of oppressed people.

But if the Jesus we encounter in the Gospels as our inspiration and empowerment is seen as merely the human Jesus, it may be asked, why follow him instead of following some other spiritual leader like Mahatma Gandhi or Martin Luther King. In the ultimate analysis there is no answer to this outside our faith.

For us Jesus is the Lord, and fully Lord - but this does not mean that we need to impose him on everyone else. For though Jesus, we believe, truly puts us in touch with God, so that God is present to us in him, the absolute mystery of Godhead cannot be wholly comprehended in Jesus. For God is beyond all name and form, and the many insights we have into God cannot singly or collectively exhaust the mystery of God's being.

Our Christology, then, must not be an imperial Christology, such as developed in the post-Constantine era or such as was brought to us by a colonial Christianity which denied other religions (and other cultures) the right to exist, and claimed a monopoly for salvation. Jesus' own words are not the triumphalistic words of the imperialist Christ of the colonial Christianity, but words of love and service. He comes so that we may have life and have it in abundance; he comes that we may be one; he comes not to be served but to serve and to lay down his life as a ransom for many (John 1:10; Mark 10:45).

It is his followers who give him religious titles and make him into a militant conquering Christ. Such an understanding of Jesus does

not cohere either with our experience of struggles nor with our third-world spirituality. In our struggles for liberation we have discovered a common commitment in people belonging to quite different faiths; and our religious life as third-world Christians is in fact lived out of two great traditions - both the Christian tradition and the traditions of our indigenous religions.

The Bible and people's life and traditions

Similarly, the reading and interpretation of the Bible too must obtain within a context of life. The poor read the Bible in the context of their struggles, their cultures as women, third-world Christians and indigenous peoples. They do it in their communities and animated by their spirituality. In the past we have read the Bible to the people. Now the people read it for themselves. The Bible begins to live in the lives of the people and the lives of the people bring the Bible to life.

For many centuries the Bible has been interpreted from the point of view of a western patriarchal and dominant culture. The Bible was used as an instrument for the spiritual conquest of America, Africa and Asia. It continues to be a tool of class, race and gender oppression of the large majorities of third-world peoples.

The people are now freeing the Bible from these wrong interpretations and recovering its text, its history and its inspiration on the basis of their own tradition of revelation and salvation.

God has revealed God's nature and being from the beginning of creation, and God continues to be revealed in nature, people's cultures are religious traditions. Revelation has always been alive and defective in the lives and religions and cultures of indigenous peoples, in the liberation movements and in the day-to-day struggles of the downtrodden. This kind of revelation is the first book of God. God gave to us the Bible as a second book to reveal to us the fullness of God's word and to transform the cosmos and the lives of our people in a big epiphany of God's presence. The Holy Spirit itself guides us in the discovery of God's revelation in our personal existence and in our community.

The Bible constitutes a historical memory and consciousness of the people. The people maintain their tradition and re-read it continuously to discover God in the changing situations. In the Bible itself one can see the struggle of people against the manipulation of scribes and the teachers of the law. The Bible teaches us to get over those texts which are oppressive in the new context. The Bible is self-critical and has the capacity to expose the oppressive elements in the lives, traditions and cultures of our people.

The Bible is read and interpreted in the Third World in a communitarian way. the community appropriates the Bible in a spirit of prayer, faith and celebration. This enables the people to make critical discernment in the society and in the church. We are encouraged by witnessing the contribution to this significant movement by women who are re-reading the Bible.

Commitment

"As our method is incarnate in our theology, so our spirituality is enfleshed in our commitment to and work for the liberation of the oppressed "- Samuel Rayan

A crisis of commitment is a reality for the people of the Third World. As new governments come to power with promises of a better life, our people's movements are muted. As political leaders compromise away justice, our people are left in a quandary. What are the people of the Philippines and South Korea to do now that they have toppled one oppressive regime and another regime comes to power which falls far short of their vision for life? What are the student resisters of South Africa to do as "high-level" talks proceed for a more "democratic" South Africa? What are the people of Nicaragua and Haiti to do as they face countless obstacles in hoping and struggling for liberation? What does it mean to be committed when governments talk endlessly of freedom, justice, and democracy, but grant it to only a few?

The rapidly changing world situation forces us to examine the nature of commitment. Commitment means a radical conversion to the God of liberation and life. Conversion is becoming aligned with God's mission for the world. Sometimes this conversion forces persons into struggle. For other conversion emerges out of

the struggle, and for yet others it is an on-going experience. What is important is that conversion takes place. Conversion is not merely to an institutional church, a particular religion, or even to a social system. Conversion is to the God of justice, peace and life. It is the radical experience of conversion that helps maintain one's commitment to the reign of God. Conversion makes commitment meaningful because it becomes a commitment to radically change the world.

To be committed to the people's struggle for life is to be committed to a world where there shall be justice, freedom and new respect for all of creation. To be committed means not just settling for resolutions of regional and national conflicts. To be committed means not selling out the vision for personal gain. To be committed means standing fast until anything which threatens the full humanity of any person is destroyed.

Commitment varies with the particular context of struggle. To a Ghanaian it might mean speaking for the rights of women in church and society. For a Mexican-American it might mean leading a group of poor men and women to stymie the daily function of a local bank. For a Filipino it might mean mobilizing to oust the U.S. military bases from its shores. To a South Korean it might mean working towards the reunification of the Korean people and for peace.

There is a price to commitment. Commitment might lead to harassment, marginalisation, ecclesiastical sanctions, arrest, torture or even death. To be committed means there is no cost too great when one joins God's mission to make the world a place where life is valued for all of God's creation.

Within the lines of commitment to justice, there may be legitimate differences in the strategies and priorities for reaching our goal. Our task is not to judge the justice commitments of others. The cry for life challenges us to continually affirm our commitments to transform all reality so that all life can thrive.

A Specific Challenge

1492 - The Beginning of Today's New World Order

In the last two decades of the fifteenth century "A new world order" was born: the Portuguese went around the Cape of Good Hope into the Indian Ocean (1485); Columbus in search of a passage to the "India's" arrived in the Caribbean islands (1492); and Vasco da Gama touched Mombasa in Kenya on his journey to Calicut in India (1498). Soon after, France, England, Holland and the other countries of Europe would begin competing in their efforts to conquer, colonize, missionize and exploit all the other continents and their peoples.

Africa, the Americas and Asia were now destined to become absorbed into this new European world order! Europe's growing and expanding trade, strengthened by its military, political and economic power, imposed its culture and religious traditions all over the other peoples of the world.

When the ruling elites of Spain, England and other European countries are celebrating 1992, the "Discovery of America" and "The Encounter between Two Worlds" the native peoples of the Americas are launching another campaign "500 YEARS OF INDIAN, BLACK AND POPULAR RESISTANCE". This "Encounter of two worlds" was experienced by the indigenous peoples of the Americas not as encounter but just as a tragic genocide. A Maya-Quiche poet described the arrival of the Spaniards in Guatemala in 1528 as follows:

"They taught us fear
They came just to wither the flowers
So that their flower may blossom
they damaged and swallowed our flower."

In Africa, the Europeans provoked the birth of modern slavery with a tremendous upsurge of the traditional Islamic slave trade by the opening of the "middle passage", the Atlantic Slave trade. According to Lerone Bennett, Jr, an African American historian, in his classic book *Before the Mayflower*, the period between 1444 and 1850 is a period in which Africans lost an estimated forty million people, many of whom died in Africa during and after their

capture or on the ships in the middle passage. South Africa was colonized; the land was forcefully taken from the Africans by white settlers. The abominable system of apartheid was created. It was also during this time that Asians from today's Philippines were carried as slaves to Mexico.

Henceforth humanity was divided into two: White-Christian-Europe versus all others: western civilization and culture versus all others; the western academic tradition versus all others; the capitalist system versus all others; the white peoples versus all others. Through a coming together of various forces, the European white men would henceforth see themselves and their way of life as normative for all the other peoples of the world and themselves as the natural masters of the rest who by "God's eternal will" were born inferior and hence had developed inferior ways of life based on false religions.

Through the process of modernization, Europe and later North America were so convinced of their own superiority that they would develop historical, philosophical and theological teachings about the fundamental inequality of the races. This would further the moral legitimation to colonialism with all its mechanisms of exploitation of the colonies and their peoples.

In terms of the expansion of the Christian faith, the sword and the cross came together. So evangelization came to Africa, America and Asia supported and enforced militarily and politically. Thus colonialism was, generally speaking, justified religiously. Many of the first missionaries were opposed to the violence of the enslavement and exploitation of the indigenous populations in America, but the Christian religion was an essential part of the colonial order. Hence even the best of the missionaries were, in effect, the agents of the ultimate violence: the destruction of the religious systems which were the inner roots of the life of the people.

When the missionaries opposed the colonizers, they were persecuted and expelled and their missions; for example Jesuit Guarani's projects in Paraguay were simply destroyed. This collision between Western Christianity, Catholic or Reformed, and

the colonial powers, carried with it the religious legitimation of the Black enslavement and produced a theology of enslavement instead of offering the gospel of liberation.

So evangelization as spiritual conquest, especially after the military conquests, distorted the gospel and profoundly hurt the Indian spiritual life. The Aztec theologians replied to the Franciscan missionaries in Mexico:

"Let us die!
Let us perish!
Because our Gods are dead."

Search For Alternatives

Beyond Capitalism and Socialism

The historical expressions of socialism have failed in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. But we do not accept international capitalism, dominated by the TNCs and the main capitalist countries, as an acceptable social order for the future. Unbridled capitalism, with its emphasis on technology and productivity, offers no acceptable future for the masses of the poor and for nature, and it provides an atmosphere for the growth of insidious racism.

We commit ourselves to a more community-responsible form of social organization that ensures life for all and uses the resources of nature caringly. In our search for new alternatives we re-affirm certain fundamental values, which can help evaluate and correct deficiencies in each historical experience.

Every society should endeavour to ensure: sustainable economic growth to meet human needs without exploitation of persons and nature; a just distribution of incomes and wealth without overly curbing the need of initiative and due reward for work; fair trade with and among nations, without permitting a few oligopolies to control and manipulate the markets for resources and products; the civil and political as well as economic, social cultural and religious rights of all, especially the poor and the marginalised;

and international social justice based on relationships of solidarity and mutuality.

These require an ongoing effort to meet the basic needs of all: food, work, land, shelter, health, education and leisure. The fullest democratic participation of all persons at all levels is a means of treating all persons and groups with dignity, of providing space for ethnic and cultural identity and spiritual development, of promoting relationships of mutuality irrespective of gender and sexual orientation, as well as of (at least) reducing exploitation, competition and waste.

It is not within our competence to provide one blueprint for the structures of future development everywhere. We are, however, more than ever convinced that the power and strength for our future should emerge from the accumulated experience for survival and resistance of oppressed and poor people, and also subjugated or marginalised cultures.

Along with the people's movements emerging throughout the world, we can endeavour to influence different social systems and areas of social life in the direction of practically realizing the values we hold, correcting unwholesome trends. We urge a new style of politics and a paradigm of relationship in which people can be truly fulfilled and not exploited and dehumanized. Both private and public enterprise should be made efficient, meaningful in productivity and socially responsible. Individuals, companies, elites and all power-holders are subject to the higher demands of the right to life of each and all persons, and the common good of humanity. We should resist the efforts at "privatization" merely because of capitalistic pressure. The public sector often needs to be safeguarded to serve the people.

We should work to bring about effective checks on the accumulation of private profit by companies, and of power by rulers. This is a most difficult and challenging task in the present world situation, and more so with the capitalistic, so called "New World Order".

The TNCs must be brought under effective forms of public control at national and international levels by people's pressure. Public enterprises, especially in poor countries, and the international agencies such as UNCTAD and GATT can be valuable agents in developing countervailing power vis-a-vis the TNCs and the world political powers that exploit and dominate the poor. The Non-Aligned Movement needs to be strengthened for this.

Within nations the rulers and elites must be obliged to serve the people, and not misuse power, generally in collusion with the TNCs and foreign powers, often coming as donors of aid.

People Power

In the present national and global situations, it is the enlightened and sustained commitment of alliances of people's movements that can bring about practical action towards reaching such desirable goals. The very magnitude of the crisis and its global nature can motivate such movements in all countries to try to work together to save humankind from this present misery.

As an organization of theologians we can contribute by participating in the people's efforts, learning from them and supporting them by our faith, analysis and commitment.

We need to work everywhere to share in existing movements, and helping to form, strengthen and correlate peoples groups and movements around their felt needs. Such basic Christian and basic human groups can be the primary bases for national and global people's movements.

For this we need to develop our methodologies of analysis of situations at all levels to see the deeper causes of our problems; ways of promoting practical commitment undeterred by opposition and the difficulties of the tasks.

The core inspiration of our faith and of the other faiths and persuasions of the peoples can be a powerful motivation for such commitment. We can develop inter-faith relations while mutually correcting non-liberative trends in each of them.

In the face of the enormous power of the forces of exploitation, and the destructiveness of war and violence, we need to develop

effective means of resistance. Ultimately our hope lies in creating a non-violent society. Recent experience has shown how governments and even super-powers can be impacted by the organized non-violent movements of people power.

We can participate in the emerging movements of people power working for justice in the relationships of gender, racial, ethnic and social groups, among cultures and religions and with nature. The hope for the future lies in the convergence of such efforts towards desirable goals as against the combined exploitation by economic, political, military and cultural super-powers. Our hope is especially in the new movements such as of women, indigenous peoples, black, the urban poor, farmers, dalits and others. Thus the environment movements have sometimes prevented companies and governments from doing damage to nature. The women's movements have contributed immensely to safeguarding human rights against sexual abuse, and worked for peace within and among nations.

While working at local and national levels we can help generate people's movements for the reform of the United Nations and its agencies such as the Security Council and the UNCTAD. It is imperative that the IMF and the World Bank be made responsible, at least, to the governments of all the nations, and not be dominated as at present by the rich countries to the utter detriment of the poor almost everywhere.

As a movement of theologians we shall endeavour to develop relevant theologies to understand and respond to this global human crisis. Our response to the cry for life can be partly in the effort to transform the thought patterns and value orientations of Christians to be more truly disciples of Jesus. We shall try to influence Christian reflection, spiritual life, and practical action within our communities, nations and internationally.

We need to carry out during the coming five years an intense programme in these directions and influence the churches as global organizations so that they may truly contribute to the emergence of better human relationships at all levels. The churches, thus motivated and mobilized, have a tremendous potential for responding meaningfully to the cry of the people everywhere. We

would thus help fulfil the mandate of Jesus to take the message of love and service to all the peoples of the world.

The repentance and resolute corrective action of Christians, especially of the affluent and dominant culture, can be a meaningful witness to our faith, a strengthening of the dialogue of the faiths, and a cementing of collaboration among persons committed to justice everywhere, regardless of particular religious beliefs.

In this we honour the memory of the numerous martyrs who have given their lives in recent decades for the liberation of the poor and the oppressed, and we commit ourselves to endeavour to contribute our combined mite towards this cause.

We trust that the organized power of the people, resisting the illusion of the "new World Order", going through the night of resistance, will help usher in a new dawn when people's power triumphs over the present forms of exploitation and takes us all towards a more livable and human world.

All these demand a price from each one of us. It is the call of Jesus Christ to all disciples to take up our cross and go forward towards a more hopeful future for all. It is precisely for this journey into the future, listening and responding to our people's cry for life, that we need a spirituality that does justice to our faith convictions on the one hand and our commitments to the aspirations of our people on the other.

We see the Spirit in the ancient gong
Calling us to silence, to listen
The embryonic rhythm life
Vibrating, resounding, all embracing

We see the Spirit in the water
Cleansing our body, healing our soul
We drink from the same cup
Renewing, sustaining, replenishing

We see the Spirit in the fire
Irrupting with passion, like a volcano
Our anger against injustice
Burning, glowing, fast-spreading

We see the Spirit in the circle
Learning Miriam's dance, taking first steps
In solidarity with all women
Dancing, chanting, spiralling

We see the Spirit in the colours
Taking pride in our culture, our rites
Black, yellow, brown and white
Celebrating, living, rejoicing

We see the Spirit in our bonding
Confessing our brokenness, our division
I hope we offer to each other
Visioning, struggling, empowering.