

ROZS-NAGY Szilvia

*Crossroads on the Path**Encompassing Culture and Faith Tradition in Ecumenical Liturgies*

Third World theologies are theologies where we find a strong sense of wholeness and a strong concern for a harmonious and compassionate web of relationships: intra-personal and interpersonal, communal and societal, global and planetary. Emphases on relationships that are based on justice: no exploitation, manipulation or oppression, but mutuality, deep respect and delicate balance.

AS CLOSE AS YOUR SKIN

Third World theologies¹ made their liturgical revolution and their strong impact on ecumenical liturgies with a *new theological paradigm shift*. They changed the starting point for the understanding of who God is, and this changed the object of theology and worship. The starting point of Third World theologies was the very first thing experienced in our lives: the human body. Black Theology, especially, was a leading force in this respect, experiencing black bodies as the source of all of their discrimination. Black Theology states that God is black. "There is no place in Black Theology for a colorless God in a society where human beings suffer precisely because of their color," James H. CONE writes. It implied that the source of being black is in God, which meant a strong assurance of identity. The body through remembering its origins and its womb was seen as a tool that could lead to the primordial consciousness of the presence of God.

Contrary to the classical Greek and Roman philosophical culture, which has co-shaped Western Christianity, for peoples from the Third World the *body* is neither fallen nor is an instrument of sin but it is the center of the total manifestation of the individual. The body bears witness to the past, lives in the present, keeps the memorial of the Lord, and expresses the discipleship through an ethical life. While in the Roman liturgy the immobility symbolized perfection, in the Third World liturgies the gestures, the flexing of the body, the dances are the forms expressing both the individuals and the community as they assembled before God.

The human voices, the drums, the rhythm and the movement of the dance express the whole worldview, theology and God-relationship of the people. That is why HERSKOVITS argued that what Africa needs is not only black theology but *blackbody theology*. HERSKOVITS maintained that the bodily experiences (being in contact with people, with nature and with the cosmos) and expressions are essential elements of faith. However this effort to create "body-theology" was not confined to Africa only. It helped the other Third World theologies in forming their image of human beings and in rediscovering their own cultural values. At the same time it challenged the First World's image of the body, of the human being, and of the Incarnation. At first experience, it

meant a scandal for the First World. Later on, it was a starting point for the revolution of body that culminated in a conscious incorporation of gestures, movements and dances into the liturgical orders.

THE EVANGELIZED GOSPEL

The Third World theologies re-examined *the centre of the Gospel* that had been brought to them. Their basic concern was what the Gospel spoke to them in their present conditions, and not how to change themselves and make abstractions from their social and political circumstances in order to get the "real" message of the Gospel. Starting their exegesis from the ground of their own contexts they identified three main focal points in the Gospel of Christ.

One of them was the *Way of the Cross*, which became the centre of the Gospel, especially in Latin American liberation theologies. The historicity of Jesus as the "Oppressed One" and "His blackness" are elementary, claimed the Liberation Theology and the Black Theology, if His continued presence is still believed. Jesus is experienced in His closeness as the One Who already shared the reality of human life, which includes hunger, injustice, even persecution, and death and the One who is also present today.

Committed discipleship became the principle and criterion of Christian life. It is necessary, as Leonardo BOFF said, to "join our passion for God with a passion for the people." Discipleship was to be realized by following Christ in living for others, in loneliness, in worry, in agony, through injustices, through humiliation, under the cross, even unto death. In the ecumenical movement we can realize its effects in recognizing that spirituality has a processual aspect. It is a journey that has ups and downs, requires commitment and persistence, includes experiencing the very depth of human life, but Christ always accompanies us on our way. Third World theologies have never stopped at the stage of death and cross. As a matter of fact "historical liberation is a share in Jesus' resurrection," Leonardo BOFF said.

Everyone is called to be perfect and saint (Matthew 5:48) and this calling includes the political field as well. Today not only our own passions and sufferings are to be confronted but the passions of the neighbours as well. *Political saints* can be individuals or groups. They are the poor or those who are fighting for the liberation of the poor, filling the struggles with Christian spirit, sharing the condition and fate of the servant of YHWH. This kind of political holiness is historically needed today, "to be a contemplative in liberation," manifesting Christ who came not only to preach about liberation but also to liberate. Political holiness involves the prophetic courage and the historical patience. This is courage to

¹ Using the term „Third World“ in the article is based on the self-definition of one specified way of theological thinking. The term is not meant to be pejorative but provocative as we still carry within us our history and struggle to find our roles in dialogue, our values to enrich each other, the methods for our future co-operation. In this article „Third World theologies“ encompass several theological ways except the white European and North-American ones.

speak up and to have confidence in people and in their courage knowing their limitations.

Prayer, especially *intercessory prayer* offers a great opportunity for the use of the rich daily and poetic expressions of the *language*. Expressing thoughts and including responses from the faithful rather than being stuck in the bondage of ethereal words. Using the language of the participants and building up the community through prayer put the prayer meetings into the center of base communities. That was connected to the efforts of the ecumenical movement to change the language of theology and to discover the traditional *world-views* to find the way to a more holistic Christian theological worldview. In this process the ecumenical movement enabled both church members and the unchurched to speak, using their own terms and their own languages in liturgy and in prayers. It was more than revolutionary after the long periods when the possible faith-expressions were authoritatively decided upon in Christianity.

THE BODY AND THE BLOOD

Liberation theology brought a Eucharistic revolution into the life of the churches by the rediscovery of its central place in worship services. Liberation theology showed that the celebration of the Eucharist is a special occasion for experiencing the communion with the Suffering Servant of the Lord and with all the faithful and all the little ones. The Eucharist ceased to be simply a sign of hope, love, communion and strength but it was recognized as powerful criticism and motivation for

further work for justice and freedom in the world as well as in the Church.

The other role of Eucharist and of the whole worship service is to lead every divisive factor to reconciliation. Its importance was realized by the Indian theology in common eating and drinking in the idea of the *Agape*. In India a festival, called the *Kinship Festival* has been developed among those churches, which includes Dalits, non-Dalits, Christians and non-Christians. It starts with a procession and water collection from every family. Food is prepared with this water, which will become the two elements of the Eucharist. It is followed by preaching and various cultural activities. This celebration gives a lot of strength to the community uniting the members through symbols that are transforming the physical bodies and actualities. It improves the sense of solidarity, cooperation and mutuality and deepens the encounter with God through the encounter with each other.

ACCOMPANIED VOCATION AND PRESENCE

The Third World theologies also emphasize that humans can experience their own wholeness in a community. Just as there is no separation between the sacred and the secular in communal life, neither is there a separation between the soul and the body in a person. This theology totally changed the "Christian" (ie. Western European and North American Christian) spirituality, theology and practice. They could not continue their purely individualistic practice and theological argumentation.



The communal rites gave elementary importance to the recognition of the ancestors which was a (Third)worldwide concern. It was even recognized by an African conference of bishops stating “becoming a Christian as an African does not sever all relationship with the *ancestors*. Invoking them in Christian worship is consequently a pastoral and liturgical imperative.”

CONTEXTUAL AESTHETIC

Taking seriously the people and their context means also to call into realization their own *aesthetic* in sermons, chants, spells, and spirituals as well as in sound, material, language, and choreography. The Filipino theology especially was eager to develop certain *symbols*, which on one hand carry the story of the people and, on the other hand, they can be used universally. These symbols, the clenched fish, the barbed wire and the burning candle, were able to shake and transform the Church into its true being as worshipping, confessing and witnessing community.

All of them were based on symbolizing both the actual historical struggles against oppression, dehumanization, suffering and the faith, hope in the living Christ who leads to offer their lives for the others. Their last Christological question was how we are going to be liberating symbols and signs of God’s partiality for the oppressed?

That is why the ecumenical liturgies tried to include lots of spiritual dramas, and special choreographs, which combined dances and bodily expressions with issues coming from the communities’ spirituality and action, to deepen the people’s identification process with Christ and with each other.

RHYTHMIC CONTACT

African liturgies also held that rhythmical movement (especially dancing) are specific ways in which contact with the spiritual world can be expressed. *Dances* have a precious place in this new recognition of the body’s meaning and value. They were originally parts and symbols of the turning points of human life (birthday, wedding party, graduation etc.) in traditional cultures. The rhythmic contact with the earth, with the ancestral memory, with the risen Jesus puts the community and the individuals in a motion where they know themselves in a relationship and where they can carry their burden.

We can experience, however, that the decision-making about the inclusion of dance into the liturgy is not a simple one as different kinds of dances exist and *not all of them* can be involved. In church liturgies mainly the chief’s dance, the

head dance, the shoulder dance and the recreational dances are used. Before using traditional dances, studies are needed in the field of psychology, symbolism and context.

The Third World theologies taught us that dances and gestures have an important role especially in the *reconciliation rites*, where through the gestures and the physical touch as a whole, a more conscious and also more intuitive level can be reached. Its experiential value helped the gestures of reconciliation to be present in the ecumenical worship services, like the sign of peace that was not considered and used as common Christian heritage before.

RESULTS

The crisis of worship and liturgical life was realized in the 1960s in the ecumenical movement. The renewal seemed to be found in rediscovering traditional forms of liturgical expressions from the Third World. At the Eucharistic Congresses held at Munich in 1960 and at Bombay in 1964 it already started with the recognition of a long tradition of movement and dance as a form of worshipping outside Europe. Its naturalness questioned whether European Christians are really any different.

In the sixties the European and American student Christian movements took the initiative to introduce the dimension of movement into their worshipping. At the world assemblies of the WCC the first break-through happened in Nairobi (1975). The first elaborated and “natural” liturgical orders, which were built on gestures, movements, dances were created for the Vancouver Assembly (1983). They gave inspiration and motivation for the member churches as well as for several ecumenical communities to find their own ways of including mature participation and activity in their worship services.

Suggested Reading

Leonardo BOFF OFM, *Faith on the Edge*. Orbis Books, 1989.

James H. CONE, *A Black Theology of Liberation*. Orbis Books, 1990.

Elochukwu E. UZURWU, *Body and Memory in African Liturgy*. Concilium, 1995.

Third World Theologies. Maryknoll, 1990.



Rozs-Nagy Szilvia is an ecumenical theologian from Hungary and a member of KÓD (Magyar SCM). She is a graduate of the Evangelical-Lutheran Faculty of Theology (Budapest) and the Bossey Ecumenical Institute (Switzerland). Currently she is writing her PhD on ecumenical and interreligious liturgies. She is a member of the Executive Committee of the Ecumenical Youth Council in Europe (EYCE). She is an editor of *Mozaik*. Her email address is szilvianagyhun@yahoo.com.