

ROZS-NAGY Szilvia

The Homo Socio-Spiritualis

in Ecumenical Liturgies

Theologies that emerged in Africa, Latin America and Asia re-examined the centre of the Gospel that was brought to them by Western missionaries. Their main concern was to discover what the Gospel has to say in their present conditions, when they were trying to fight a battle seemingly in vain, because the tools they had received proved to be useless.

The Gospel they were taught lacked real transforming and life-changing power. They realized that unless Jesus Christ is incarnated into their own context, and chooses the local people to be his disciples, he is not able to speak to their heart and soul, and to lead them to conversion (metanoia). Let us examine now together some of the new emphases of the Gospel highlighted by these theologies.

THE EVER-PRESENCE OF GOD

The liberation theologies in Latin America and Asia put the emphasis onto God's love and God's righteousness, claiming that these are God's main properties. Black theology went further and said that God's love contains God's wrath as well, because of God's justice and righteousness.

God's love means being there for the oppressed and marginalised blacks, protecting their dignity, finding a place for their expression of human freedom, and fighting with them against the white oppressors.

We find three very important characteristics of God univocally stated by these new theologies. First of all, God is *Creator and Sovereign*, because God knows the meaning and purpose of all God's creatures, and sustains life and justice.

Secondly, God is *Immanent and Transcendent*, because God, the Infinite, accepted and shared the concrete reality of the finite in Christ. It should be mentioned, though, that God is not limited by historical events or authorities, but is leading God's people out from their marginalisation and oppression.

God's *Providence* is the third characteristic, which is important for those who want to experience God in the present and not only in the future. Faith in God's Providence is a faith in the Power

of God, which is always effective in spite of racial differences, oppressive institutions and evil social and political structures.

THE WAY OF THE CROSS

The historicity of Jesus Christ as the *Oppressed One* in the Latin American and other liberation theologies, and in black theology, is one of the most essential characteristics of Jesus Christ.

When his continued presence is still to be believed, Jesus Christ should be experienced in his closeness to humanity. Jesus Christ is the One who has shared and continues to share the wholeness of human life, which includes hunger, injustice, and many times even persecution and death.

Jesus Christ came to meet people in their own houses and to sit at their own tables, and to go to die on their own streets. When he calls his disciples to leave everything behind and to follow him, he expects the same things to happen to them when following and imitating him (*Imitatio Christi*).

Jesus Christ takes his disciples out from their own villages and cities, but he wants to send them back after his resurrection to serve the people by sharing the good news and by working for the fuller realization and the visibility of the Kingdom of God on Earth.

Discipleship is to be realized by following Jesus Christ in living and striving for others, in family, in community, in loneliness, in worry, in agony; through injustices, through humiliation, through carrying one's (and very often others') cross, even until death.

Facing the realities and needs, the *Northern Luzon Report* stated that spirituality is "a dynamic but painful process of development of a person or of persons, eventually becoming a channel or venue of faith expression, i.e. putting faith in action."

It is a journey that requires commitment and persistence and includes experiencing the very depth of human life. The fact that through the life of Jesus Christ, God became part of the unclean, painful and feared side of human life, gives a different perspective of all suffering and even of death. There is nothing

and no one on this Earth which would be far or alienated from God. Moreover, the way of suffering can be shared with God and can lead to unique revelations about the divine mysteries.

The way of the Cross, however, is not an end in itself. Life does not stop at the stage of death and grave. The steps of suffering and death are temporary but necessary ones to be able to experience and to live out in its paradoxes the victory of Jesus Christ, life in its fullness, since historical liberation is a share in Jesus Christ's resurrection as well.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Western missionaries presented Christianity as a religion that has its main focus on the Other World. They claimed that though the earthly life may be spent in struggles and in humiliation, when one bears these in patience and endurance, there will be a reward after death. Raising the questions of injustice, inequality and oppression did not make any sense in this kind of missionary setting.

The eschatological aspect of worship was to create a hope in the unknown future, rather than to talk about the fulfilment of the Kingdom of God in people's everyday lives. The newly emerged theologies started to talk about the Kingdom of God as a hope for this life.

The already-present reality of God's Kingdom was to be the starting point for the divine entering into earthly realities. The picture of a God Who wants people to suffer was rejected. They introduced God Who wants people to have a whole and happy life, a life in abundance.

The understanding and the existential recognition of the Kingdom of God therefore meant a forceful call for repentance and a renewed conversion, implemented into deeds and action for social justice.

Both conversion and forgiveness became essential elements of this spirituality, as "to pardon means not to fixate the past, but to create possibilities for persons to change and to realign the course of their lives" (Gustavo GUTIERREZ).

The Kingdom of God, which calls for conversion, strives to be expressed in

liberating practices, in the discernment of the signs of the times, and in a greater love. Love has gotten a renewed meaning as well: as it must involve response to others' objective needs, thus bringing objective results.

Everyone is called to be perfect and holy (Mt 5,48). This call includes all the spheres of life, and thus politics as well. In our era characterized by the worldwide presence of various news agencies, one cannot fight for justice locally but has to take into account the global concerns and needs of others as well. Committed discipleship is the main criterion for Christian life.

It is necessary, as Leonardo BOFF said, "to join our passion for God with a passion for the people." Political holiness is also needed today, to be contemplative in liberation, manifesting Jesus Christ, who came not only to preach about liberation, but also to liberate. Political holiness involves prophetic courage, historical patience and responsible action.

This revolutionary understanding supplanted the previous understanding of spirituality, which was claiming that one's own faith is one's own private business and has nothing to do with the actual social and political structures and systems, which are God-given realities to be maintained and not to be changed or challenged.

The new theologies stated that Christian life does not happen only in the spiritual spheres, but it involves one's social context as well, because conversion has always to be personal, but it is never to be just private. Gustavo GUTIERREZ introduced and developed this lifestyle, which used the Kingdom of God as a model of contemplation in action.

CONTEMPLATIVE DISCIPLESHIP

"Only holiness will win the battle of the true Church" (Jon SOBRINO). Holiness can be experienced through the spirituality of the poor both as *tremendum* and *fascinans*. The encounter with the most vulnerable ones on the one hand reveals the dignity and sanctity of every single person.

On the other hand, it shows the depth of loneliness and isolation by its plain cruelty. That is why, without making a life commitment and having an intensive and intimate relationship with God, we cannot serve Jesus Christ in the poor.

Dealing with poverty is not only a question of analysing and changing socio-economic tendencies, but it has several spiritual implications as well. To enter into solidarity with the poor calls for friendship, love and tenderness.

It teaches the essential and basic human values in desperate situations. In order to embrace the totality of this spirituality, one has to see clearly oneself as part of the creation and humanity in its wholeness.

One's body is not one's own property any more, but the body of the poor, which is hungry, humiliated and longs for both material and spiritual salvation. One's self-awareness has to be transformed through the spirituality of solidarity and identification with the oppressed.

This process enables one to experience and understand the essential value of Jesus Christ's liberating power, and to implement it in the people's everyday reality. Following Jesus Christ means walking with the poor, in a *life for others*.

Sharing life with the poor makes one rediscover the meaning of human dignity and the reality of daily-experienced closeness with God. To walk with the poor means to walk with God day by day.

We can witness an unusual process, when an active and practical life leads one to a contemplative life. Paradoxically enough, love is not only the source, but the finality of spirituality, because it presupposes, includes, and fosters contemplation and gives motivation for responsible action.

"I believe that the contemplative, the monk, the nun, and even the hermit, is really a revolutionary. She or he is also bringing about social change. And she or he also bears witness that as well as social and political changes, there is a transcendent reality, beyond death" (Ernesto CARDINAL).

The correlation of human beings

makes the concrete relationship with God intimate. *Discipleship*, meaning following Jesus Christ among the poor and living out hope, joy and trust in God's grace, is among the main emphases in the Latin American and other liberation theologies. Black theology and ecumenical theology used discipleship in a wider sense and talked about the Gospel as Good News for the oppressed and little ones.

In these instances, the centre of spirituality is hope, which makes joy possible in this life and gives place to solidarity: solidarity with God's little ones, a notion which became one of the most important Christian virtues.

THE POOR

Latin American liberation theology was the first to listen to and hear the voice of the poor, and to advocate that the Gospel in its very essence is *Good News for the Poor*. Receiving the Good News into their life, the poor have the deepest joy over it.

Passing the test of misery, they realize through the words of the Gospel that the source of joy is hope, and the opposite of joy is sorrow and not suffering. The poor are the new apostles, calling us to trust in the God of the Poor.

Some theologians did not want to be one-sided, and they wanted to talk about the Good News for the rich, which means offering forgiveness for their sins. But Jesus Christ does not offer us the luxury of two gospels, one for the rich and one for the poor.

The Good News for the rich can be reached through genuine repentance, and through new life realized in solidarity with the poor. According to the Gospels, God took side with the oppressed in Jesus Christ and revealed their divine dignity.

The oppressed and the poor are in a special relationship with Jesus Christ, because they are his manifestations for the world today (Mt 25,40 and 45). Filipino theology brought back into our focus the authentic humanity of Jesus Christ, which means a life lived in transparency for God's work, and a life making present God's Reign by working for justice, fullness of life, and peace.

Suggested Readings

BOFF Leonardo OFM, *Faith on the Edge*. 1989.
CASMORE Gwen – PULS Joan, *Clearing the Way. An Route to an Ecumenical Spirituality*. Genève, 1990.
Religion and Society: Towards a Theology of Struggle. Manila, 1988.

ROZS-NAGY Szilvia is an Evangelical-Lutheran pastor and an ecumenical theologian from Hungary, and a board member of KÖD (Magyar SCM). Currently she writes her Ph.D. on ecumenical and interreligious liturgies. She was a member of the Executive Committee (ExCo) of the Ecumenical Youth Council in Europe (EYCE) from 2001 till

2003, and currently she is the chairperson of the WSCF Central European Subregion (CESR). Her email address is szilvianagyhun@yahoo.com.



“The presence of God’s Spirit in Jesus Christ did not turn him into a supernatural being, but rather served to realize his potentials for full humanness, animating him and making him fully alive, alert and sensitive to the world” (Everett MENDOZA).

The poor cry for overall changes in the world, because they really know and feel that little changes will make a difference neither in their personal lives, nor in their social and political systems.

UNTIL DEATH

The God of Life incarnated into the presence of *death* and made death a way of sanctifying and leading people to life. Jesus Christ, with a will to face suffering and death, became very essential in liberation theology.

The pilgrimage to him and also with him is always to be renewed and remade, as Ernesto CARDINAL puts it: “There should also be people to remind

humankind that the revolution goes on also after death.”

It was mainly Latin American and the Filipino spirituality which valued highly the virtue of being ready for the red martyrdom, for death. It originated also from their experiences of the consequences of their commitment.

“To be ready for death simplifies one’s life, purifies one’s soul, and gives one tremendous courage”(Levi V. ORACION). Though it appears in scandalous and paradoxical forms, involving both the paschal and the festive dimensions of the liturgy, the penultimate nature of God is existential and personal.

This spirituality arose from necessity. Based on concrete reality, this kind of theology and liturgical celebrations are able to confront all people with their own lives, deaths and hopes, and they are able to lead one to experience the deepest sense of solidarity and joy when being part of the *Populus Dei* (God’s people).

HOMO SOCIO-SPIRITUALIS

These discoveries made way for the birth of a Christian who is deeply spiritual and socially sensitive, the *Homo Socio-Spiritualis*. This Christian is informed and educated (keeping the newspaper in one hand, the Bible in the other, and a rucksack full of books on her or his back).

The Christian is also compassionate and fighting, contemplative and sharing the fruits of her or his contemplation, being ready to take active part in the formation of her or his smaller and wider community, be it the Church or the society.

The *Homo Socio-Spiritualis* believes that the three essential ingredients of a revitalized and renewed faith are openness, connectedness, and earthedness, even if they lead one through the valley of pain, suffering or death on the way to the Kingdom of Heaven.

