

THIRD WORLD THEOLOGY

*Statement of the Ecumenical Dialogue of Third World Theologians, Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania, 5 - 12 August 1976**

Introduction

(1) We, a group of theologians of the Third World gathered at Dar-Es-Salaam, 5-12 August 1976, having spent a week together in common study on our role in the contemporary world are convinced that those who bear the name of Christ have a special service to render to the people of the whole world who are now in an agonizing search for a new world order based on justice, fraternity and freedom.

(2) We have reflected from our life experience as belonging to the oppressed men and women of the human race. We seriously take cognizance of the cultural and religious heritage of the peoples of the three continents of Asia, Africa and Latin America. We have expressed our view of history, our perspective on the churches and our expectations for the future. We invite all persons doing theology in the churches to consider our presentations and participate with us and all those who are struggling to build a more just world in order that the believers in Christ may truly be involved in the struggle towards the realization of a new world order and a new humanity.

PART I

THE THIRD WORLD POLITICAL, SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, CULTURAL, RACIAL AND RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND

(3) As we are increasingly aware of the impact of the political, social economic, cultural, racial and religious conditions on theology we wish to analyse the background of our countries as one point of reference for our theological reflection.

(4) The concept of the Third World is a recent one referring to the countries outside the industrialized capitalist countries of Europe, North America, Japan, Australia and New Zealand and the socialist countries of Europe including the USSR.

* The text is by courtesy of IDOC.

(5) The economic standard of living of these countries is low; they are technologically less advanced; mainly agricultural in production; their terms of trade are unfavourable and deteriorating; capital accumulation is small; their external debt is large and growing. The 'Third World' is divided into the free enterprise countries to the Western powers and the socialist countries which generally cut themselves off or have been cut off by the capitalist powers.

(6) The Third World countries are rich in natural resources as well as in their cultural and religious traditions which have given a deep meaning to their peoples' lives. These countries have been historically slow and late in technological development, in modernizing education, health, transportation, and in the general growth of their economies. Traditionally the masses have been subject to long term exploitation by their rulers and chiefs or aristocracy. However, prior to colonization by the Western powers they had a rather self-reliant economy, with a strong sense of communal solidarity. In certain respects some of these areas were superior to the West in sciences, technology, agricultural and industrial methods, architecture and the Arts. Religions with profound philosophies of life and cultures have been the soul of these peoples for many generations.

(7) The principal cause for the modern phenomenon of the underdevelopment of the peoples of the third world is the systematic exploitation of their peoples and countries by the European peoples. From the end of the fifteenth century a large scale and unprecedented expansion of the European peoples brought most of the rest of the world under their military, economic, political, cultural and religious domination. For them it was a triumph of military technology, adventure and zeal to 'civilize' and 'christianize' 'the pagans'. While they contributed to a process of modernization in the colonized countries, they reaped enormous material benefits in the process. They plundered the riches of the Americas, Asia and Africa. Gold, silver, precious stones and raw materials were taken to add enormously to their capital accumulation. Their countries grew in wealth and power by the underdevelopment of these conquered and colonized countries.

(8) Mechanisms of Underdevelopment and Domination:

(a) The Western powers took over all the temperate lands which they could populate with their own peoples. Where the numbers were few and relatively weak militarily, they exterminated the native populations — as in North America, parts of South America, Australia and New Zealand. This was a simple solution with only a few people left to remind us of this most heinous genocide of human history.

(b) In other areas the Europeans settled down alongside the local populations subjugating the latter to their dominations; thus southern America, Central America and Southern Africa. In South America intermarriage has produced a large mestizo population, while the domination continues to be that of the settlers.

(c) In most of the countries which were thickly populated, imperial power was established following the penetration by traders and sometimes of missionaries. Only a few countries like Thailand and the hinter land of China escaped this process. The Russians on the other hand expanded southwards and eastwards up to Alaska.

(d) In the process the Western powers allocated to themselves the free or freed land spaces of the earth and established new sovereign states in them to preserve the land base of raw materials and power for ever for themselves. Everywhere they established a pattern of economic exploitation in their favour. They thus exterminated entire peoples enslaved millions, colonized others and marginalized all, thus laying the base of their development and the underdevelopment of the third world.

(e) The colonizers undermined the economy of the colonies for their advantage. They made their colonies suppliers of raw materials based on cheap labour and markets for their finished goods. They expropriated fertile lands of the oppressed peoples, set up plantations of sugar, coffee, tea, rubber, etc. ... They transported millions of peoples from one country to another to serve as slaves or indentured labour. Thus the Black population in the Americas and Indians in Africa, Malaysia, Srilanka and the Pacific and Caribbean Islands. Paying a mere subsistence wage to the workers and charging high prices for their exports the colonial powers were able to add further to their capital stock. They continued the pillage of the raw materials of these countries of oil, tin, bauxite, copper, timber, gold, silver, diamond...

Thus during centuries the Western European peoples had a free hand in Asia, Africa and South and Central America, North America having become independent joined the race for colonial power, along with Germany, Italy and Japan.

(f) As political independence was gained by these colonies, beginning with the Latin American countries in the last century, a new form of exploitation consolidated itself. In Latin America, Spain and Portugal lost their dominance to be replaced by Britain, the U.S.A. and other Western European countries as the economic colonizers.

In Asia and Africa too the gaining of political independence led generally to the transfer of power to the local elite that continued the economic system established by the colonial powers. Since the 1950's the mode of economic exploitation by U.S.A., Western Europe and Japan of Third World countries has been further strengthened by the horizontal and vertical integration of companies. We have thus the growth of giant Multinational Corporations (MNC) based generally in U.S.A., Western Europe and Japan that have enormous economic, political and cultural power of domination over entire lines of production and commerce. The MNC's have made the exploitation of the poor countries such a fine art, with the advantage of the most developed technology, that the gap between the rich and the poor in the world and within the countries continues to grow.

(g) As we have spoken of imperialistic and political domination. The oppression of blacks and other races in different areas has been brutal and constant.

Women have been discriminated against and oppressed in all levels of both society and the Church. Their condition has not changed in the new independent countries of the Third World. The forms of oppression (political, economic, racial, sexual) have their own identity. They are interrelated and interwoven in a complex system of domination.

(h) In this centennial exploitation of the Third World by the Euro-American people the cultural subjugation of the weak has been an important tool of oppression. The languages, arts and social life of the peoples of Asia, Africa and the Americas were cruelly attacked by the colonizers.

Unfortunately, the Christian Churches were in a large measure an accomplice in the process. The very sense of spiritual superiority of Christians gave a legitimation for conquest and sometimes even extinction of 'pagans'. The theology of the colonizers in most cases was thus attuned to the justification of this inhumanity; and is this not substantially what has passed for Christian theology during many centuries in its relationship to the oppressed peoples?

(9) The People's Republic of China has entered a path of self-reliant growth based on socialism and the people's participation in the direction of agriculture and industry. By cutting themselves off from the capitalistic system they have been able to reverse the trend of continuing underdevelopment that characterized the colonies and the newly independent 'free enterprise' countries. North Korea, North Vietnam and Cuba took similar lines with appreciable results. In recent months South Vietnam, Cambodia and

Laos in Asia, and Mozambique, Guinea Bissau and Angola in Africa, have opted for self-reliant socialist development. Tanzania is attempting a socialist approach without going the whole way of eliminating free enterprise. Other countries in the Third World have varying degrees of socialist experimentation: e.g., Burma, Algeria, Sri Lanka, Ethiopia.

(10) **The Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, considered the Second World** often render assistance to the oppressed peoples of other countries in their struggles for liberation — as in Cuba, Vietnam and Angola. They are a valuable counter-balance against imperialist domination by the North Atlantic powers, along with China and the non-aligned powers of the Third World.

(11) **However Socialism too has its own problems to resolve** — especially in relation to the safeguarding of human freedom, and the very price of the revolutionary process in terms of human lives. The 'aid' given by the socialistic countries while being generally on better terms than that by capitalist countries is also not altogether without strings and disadvantages to the recipients. The foreign policies of the socialist countries tend sometimes to be according to their national self-interest and thereby even to divide the anti-imperialist cause. Further our information concerning socialist countries is rather limited due to the barriers of communications.

(12) In recent years, the very sharpening of the contradictions of capitalism have increased the tensions in the dependent free enterprise countries of the Third World. The rising expectations of the peoples have led to much unrest and revolt. The response of beneficiaries of privileges has been — generally in collaboration with foreign powers — to set up military dictatorships, declare martial law or emergency rule as in most countries, of Latin America, Asia and Africa. We witness today a growing repression of peoples' movements, imprisonment without trial of political dissidents, and a trend towards sophisticated and inhuman torture in these countries. Thus, human freedom is a victim in most parts of the Third World. Conflicts among Third World countries further worsen the condition of the masses of the people. Tribalism, casteism and other forms of religious, racial and sex discrimination are further lines of exploitation.

(13) In international affairs desperate efforts are being made by the Third World leaders to obtain better prices of their exports, to ensure integrated commodity agreements, reschedule external debt, control or eliminate MNC's and military bases, regulate the transfer of technology as through UNCTAD IV. From within the capitalist framework the OPEC countries mainly of the Middle East, have been able to obtain for themselves enormous quantities of

Petrol dollars by the method of confrontation against the consumers of petrol. This has greatly harmed the development plans of petrol importing poor countries.

(14) A theology of the 'Third World' has to take into account this historical situation. It has to ask: What role has the Church been playing throughout these developments at each stage and in every situation? How did Christians react to this phenomenon of the Western invasion of other peoples? What was the prevailing theology? How does Christian theology relate to today's continued exploitation in the World? What is its contribution to the building of a just society? What contribution will the Church make to the liberation of the oppressed who have long suffered due to sexist, racial, and class domination?

PART II:

The presence and role of the church in third world countries

(15) The Christian Churches, while taking their origin from Jesus Christ, the Word of God, and the Scriptures, are institutions composed of human beings and hence subject to human weakness and conditioned by their socio-cultural environment.

(16) Christianity was born in Asia — and reached Africa before it spread in Europe. According to reliable tradition the oriental Churches in India trace their origin to the work of the Apostle Thomas, and the Church in Egypt was begun by the Evangelist Mark at the dawn of the Christian Era. Christianity flourish in Ethiopia, North Africa and parts of Asia in the early centuries, after Christ.

(17) However the present day Churches of Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean have their source in the missionary zeal of the European and North American Churches. The Christianization of Latin American and parts of Asia and Africa, was mainly the task of the Spanish and Portuguese missionaries. In a later phase, missionaries from the other European countries spread the Christian faith — both Catholic and Protestant to the corners of the earth. In Korea, lay Christians from China made the first converts and developed Christian groups for several decades without a clergy or European missionaries.

(18) Missionaries who left their countries to spread the faith in the continents of Asia, Africa and Latin America were persons generally dedicated to the spiritual welfare of humanity. They often underwent severe hardships of a physical and psychological nature. Their labours have given birth to the Christian communities of these continents and these are a testimony to their zeal and devotion.

(19) All the same the missionaries could not avoid the historical ambiguities of their situation. Oftentime and in most countries they went hand in hand with the colonizers — both traders and soldiers. Hence they could not but be, at least partially, tainted by the designs of the searchers for gold, spices, lands, slaves and colonies. While they were zealous for souls, they tended to think that the commercial and military expansion of Western peoples was a providential opportunity for the salvation of souls and the spread of the evangelical message. Thus they collaborated in the colonial enterprise, even when their Christian consciences sometimes felt revolted by the atrocities of the brutal colonizing process. Hence it is necessary to distinguish their good will and the substance of the Christian gospel from the actual impact of the Christian missions in these countries.

(20) The missionaries could think of the spread of Christianity in terms of transplanting the institutions of their Euro-American Churches within, of course, the framework of imperial domination. Thus the new Christians were segregated from their fellow human beings, alienated from the traditional religious, cultural heritage and their community way of life. This process strengthened their hold on the new believers. The liturgy was imported wholesale from the 'mother Churches'; so were the ecclesiastical structures, and theologies. A pietistic and legalistic spirituality common in Europe at the time was introduced in the new churches also. In later times, the Western educational system was spread in the colonized countries largely through the services of the Churches. We have thus the establishment of Christian Churches in these continents more or less as carbon copies of European Christianity, however adapted to the subject situation of the colonized.

(21) In the phases of Western expansion the Churches were allies in the colonization process. They spread under the aegis of colonial powers; they benefited from the spread of empire. In return they rendered a special service to Western imperialism by legitimizing it and accustoming their new adherents to accept compensatory expectations of an eternal reward for terrestrial misfortunes including colonial exploitation. The crafty merchants and soldiers of the West were not slow to see and take advantage of

the presence of missionaries among their captive peoples. The gospel was thus used as an agency for a softening of national resistance to the plunder by the foreigners and a domestication of the minds and cultures of the dominated converts. In fact, the foreign powers often gave the Christians a privileged position of confidence within their arrangements for the administration of the countries. In the process Christian teaching got badly tainted by the search for selfish gain of the peoples who called themselves Christian and exercised power in the name of emperors and spiritual rulers.

(22) The theology of the Christian Churches at this time not only suited the colonization process but was also fed by it. The sense of military and commercial superiority of the European peoples was underpinned with the view that Christianity was superior to other religions which had to be replaced by 'the truth'. Theology for centuries did not seriously contest the plunder of continents, and even the extermination of whole peoples and civilizations. The meaning of the message of Jesus Christ was so blunted as not to be sensitive to the agony of whole races. These are not merely sad historical realities, but the immediate predecessor of contemporary Western theologies. For these latter have not yet learnt to contest the successors of the colonizers — viz. the powerful countries of Europe, North America and Japan. Nor have they evolved a theology to counteract the abuses of the heirs of the colonial merchants, viz. the giant predatory multinational corporations of today.

(23) The Christian Churches in the tri-continental colonial situation fostered educational and social sciences which helped improve the conditions of the population of these countries. Unfortunately their value patterns were such as to fit into capitalistic domination and hence were largely academic and individualistic. With the result that the leadership to whom independence was granted in the colonies (except after a revolutionary struggle) were generally persons schooled in the Western capitalistic tradition. In this way the Churches — perhaps unwittingly — contributed to the formation of local elites that were to be the subsequent collaborators in the on-going exploitation of the masses of the people even after political independence. The social services too, while relieving immediate needs, failed to generate a critical social conscience or support the radical movements for social justice. The Churches thus generally continued to be a sort of ideological ally of the local middle classes that joined the power elite and shared economic privileges with the foreign companies that continued even after political independence in Latin America from the 19th century and in Asia and Africa after the mid 1940s.

(24) We see in the Churches in the three continents the growth of a 'liberal' trend in more recent decades, as a successor to the traditional 'conservative' position. The liberal trends are in favour of the adaption of the Churches to the indigenous cultures to the operation of parliamentary democracy within the framework of free enterprise capitalism. Local religious, priests and bishops have replaced the foreign ones. The theology was thus adapted to suit the post independent situation. However, there was not yet a fundamental alliance of the Churches with the masses struggling for radical social justice.

(25) In more recent years there are groups of Christians all over the world beginning to understand the situation of the exploited peoples more sensitively and more correctly. The leaderships of the Churches such as the Second Vatican Council and the World Council of Churches have given an impetus towards the commitment of Christians for the building up of a just world and for openness to the other religions and ideologies in the world. Several local Churches, Regional Conferences and Episcopates have supported this trend e.g. The Bishops' Conference of Medellin (1968).

The movements of liberation of the peoples from foreign domination now receive more support from the Churches as in the World Council of Churches contribution to the combat against racism. The Church groups are beginning to be more conscious of the injustices in the economic system. Human rights are now being defended by Christian groups including some Church leaders in many countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America.

The Orthodox Churches have struggled along many centuries against different forms of oppression and thus preserving their religious and cultural identity. Orthodox theologians share in the process of renewal as they address themselves to the task undertaken by the Early Fathers of the Church, namely, to find the relevant expression of their faith in struggling against alienating forces and finding renewed meaning for the Christian faith in the present world.

(26) A new vision of a theology committed to the integral liberation of persons and structures is now being developed in the very process of participation in the struggles of the people. This takes different forms in different regions. In Latin America, the 'theology of liberation' expresses this analysis and commitment. In Cuba and Vietnam, Angola, Mozambique and Guinea Bissau groups of Christians have been involved in the revolutionary struggles. In Southern Africa some Christians are also in the centre of the struggle for liberation. Christian rulers in countries like Tanzania and Zambia search new ways of realizing the gospel ideals in the con-

temporary world. In Asia the Christian groups have been in the forefront of the struggle for human rights especially in South Korea and the Philippines.

(27) The study of the traditional religions, the promotion of indigenous spirituality are preoccupations of Christian Groups in Asian and African countries. In several parts of Africa and Asia serious efforts are being made towards the development of indigenous theologies and liturgies, especially theology of religions. The building of truly authentic local Churches is a major preoccupation of many theologians in these countries. Latin America has generated new groups of witnesses to the radical gospel of liberation in almost every country of the continent. Various groups such as women, youth, students, workers and peasants are now contributing much to the renewal of the churches and of a theology relevant to their situations.

(28) There are thus signs of hope in the presence of the Churches in these countries. The search for self-reliance, the participation in the peoples' struggles the indigenized liturgies, the emerging relevant theologies the modern ecumenical movement, renewal efforts in many churches and the relative openness to socialistic changes are harbingers of a more radical christianity.

(29) However a deep challenge remains to be faced. The Churches are still burdened by the traditions theologies and institutions of a colonial past while the countries want to move rapidly into the modern world and peoples clamour for radical change in favour of justice and freedom, all round, inculturation and increased inter-religious dialogue and collaboration.

PART III:

Towards a Theological Approach in the Third World

(30) We affirm our faith in Christ our Lord, whom we celebrate with joy, and without whose strength and wisdom our theology would be valueless, and even destructive. In doing theology we are seeking to make the Gospel relevant to all people, and to rejoice in being collaborators, unworthy as we are, in fulfilling God's plan for the world.

(31) The theologies from Europe and North America are dominant today in our Churches, and represent one form of cultural domination. They must be understood to have arisen out of situations related to those countries, and therefore must not be uncritically adopted without our raising the question of their relevance

in the context of our countries. Indeed, we must, in order to be faithful to the Gospel, and to our peoples, reflect on the realities of our own situations and interpret the word of God in relation to these realities. We reject as irrelevant an academic type of theology that is divorced from action. We are prepared for a radical break in epistemology which makes commitment the first act of theology and engages in critical reflection on praxis of the reality of the Third World.

(32) Interdisciplinary approach in theology and the dialectical inter-relationship between theology and the social, political and psychological analyses need to be recognized. While affirming the basic goodness of creation and the continued presence of God's Spirit in our World and history it is important to bear in mind the complex mystery of evil, which manifest itself in human sinfulness and the socio-economic structures. The inequalities are diverse, and account for many forms of human degradation, and necessitate our making the Gospel the 'good news to the poor' that it is.

(3) The Church, the body of Christ, needs to become aware of its role in today's reality. Not only should it not remain insensitive to the needs and aspirations, but also it must fearlessly announce the Gospel of Jesus Christ, recognizing that God speaks in and through our human needs and aspirations. Jesus identified himself with the victims of oppression, thus exposing the reality of sin. Liberating them from the power of sin and reconciling them with God and with one another, he restored them to the fulness of their humanity. Therefore the Church's mission is for the realization of the wholeness of the human person.

(34) We recognize also as part of the Third World the influence of other religions and cultures, and the need for Christianity to enter into a dialogue with them in humility. We believe that these religions and cultures have a place in God's universal plan and the Holy Spirit is actively at work among them.

(35) We call for an active commitment to the promotion of justice and the prevention of exploitation, the accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few, racism, sexism, and all other forms of oppression, discrimination and dehumanization. Our conviction is that the theologian should have a fuller understanding of living in the Holy Spirit, for this also means being committed to a lifestyle of solidarity with the poor and the oppressed and involvement in action with them. Theology is not neutral. In a sense all theology is committed, conditioned notably by the socio-cultural context in which it is developed. The Christian theological task in our countries is to be self-critical of the theologians' being conditioned by the value system of his environment. It has to be seen in

relation to the need to live and work with those who cannot help themselves, and to be with them in their struggle for liberation.

There was a considerable measure of agreement in the area of the need to do **theology in context** as described above; furthermore, we recognize that our countries have common problems. The analysis of the social, economic, political, cultural, racial and psychological situations showed clearly that the countries of the Third World have had similar experiences of which account should be taken in the task of theologising. Nevertheless, obvious differences in situations and consequent variations in theology were also noted. Thus, while the need for economic and political liberation was felt to offer a vital basis for theologising in some areas of the Third World, theologians from other areas tended to think that the fact of the presence of other religions and cultures, racial discrimination and domination and related situations such as the presence of Christian minorities in predominantly non-Christian societies, reveals other equally challenging dimension of the theological task. We are enriched by our common sharing and hopefully look forward to the deepening of our commitment as Third World theologians.

(37) As we began, so we must end. Our prayer is that God would make us faithful in our work and do his will through us, and continually unfold before our eyes the full dimensions of the meaning of our commitment to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

(39) Our encounter has been brief but dynamic. We are, however, conscious of having shared in a historic session. The President of Tanzania Julius K. Nyerere added light and warmth to our conference by his presence at several of our sessions. We are convinced that what we have one through these days is a unique experience of theologizing from as if were, the other side of the earth and of human history. Rarely, if ever, have theologians of our three continents and solely from among the oppressed peoples of the world met together to re-evaluate their thought, their work and their lives. From it certain creative insights have come forth. As we share them with others we humbly pledge to continue our work together to try to comprehend better the plan of God in Jesus Christ for the men and women of our time.

We have spoken from the depths of our lived experience. We kindly request all to accept our statement as a sincere expression of our consensus from our knowledge of what our peoples have gone through over centuries. We hope it will be of some service in spreading genuine and frank understanding among the peoples of the world.