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THEOLOGY AND INDIGENOUS CULTURES OF THE AMERICAS: CONDITIONS OF DIALOGUE

I am opening my remarks[1] assisted by the words so gracefully articulated by Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, the seventeenth-century Mexican prolific writer, who is also known as the first feminist theologian of the Americas. Her words reveal my own sense of the task that I face today:

> Este día, más era para un doctísimo panegirista, para un elocuentísimo orador, para un elegantísimo retórico, que para el débil instrumento de mi discurso.[2]

A prominent scholar in Sor Juana studies, Pamela Kirk Rappaport, translates those words as follows:

> Today's subject would be more appropriate matter for the most learned eulogist, the most eloquent orator, the most elegant rhetorician, than for the feeble instrument of my discourse.[3]

In choosing these words, I want to recognize that, from the moment I agreed to present this paper, a sense of inadequacy invaded me. Once I realized what I had done, it was too late to retract, but dishonoring my word was worse than recognizing my many deficiencies to accomplish such a daring task. To me, it was clear from the outset that it is simply inconceivable that I would do justice to the wealth of wisdom and insight found in the theologies that have emerged from the Indigenous people of the Americas. However, the specific focus of my intervention on the conditions of dialogue between Catholic theology and Amerindian cultures calmed my fears in that I was asked to explore what might these particular conditions teach us about the promises and perils, the flowers and thorns of dialogue.

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[1]I wish to express my sincere gratitude to my friends and colleagues at the University of San Diego, Professor Maria Pascuzzi, for her invaluable help in editing this text, and Professors Joseph A. Colombo and Eugenia Constantinou, for their insightful comments. I am also indebted to the prominent Mexican indigenous theologian, Eleazar López Hernández, for his advice and support as I was giving shape to this essay. Please note, unless I indicate otherwise, translations from Spanish or Portuguese to English throughout this text are my sole responsibility.

[2]Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, *Comedias, Sainetes y Prosa, Obras Completas de Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz*, Edición, introducción y notas de Alberto G. Salceda, vol. 4, Primera reimpresión (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1976) 502.

[3]Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, *Selected Writings*, trans. and introduced by Pamela Kirk Rappaport, preface by Gillian T. W. Ahlgren (Mahwah NJ: Paulist Press, 2005) 201.

Although this focus does not make my task any easier nor does it dissipate the fragility of my understanding, I felt compelled to engage the proposed topic motivated by a desire to find light for my own spiritual and theological endeavors, and to find ways for greater solidarity with the Amerindian communities in theological terms. My intervention here is surely an undeserved privilege, but I want to take advantage of this opportunity to pay homage to the anonymous and often unacknowledged Indigenous ancestors who made possible the *Mestiza* existence of whole generations and my own. Yes, many of us are configured partly as Indians whether by blood or by subject position,[4] but I suspect that many of us including myself have maintained this configuration in a clandestine existence, hidden from our theological frameworks. I also want to pay homage to the past and present Indigenous communities for the strength of their faith in the midst of adversity, and to present-day Indigenous theologians for continuing to foster religious visions that keep alive the hope that we have a future together. With this, I have devised my intervention around three interrelated topics.

First, focusing on the contributions to systematic theology, I present a brief personal assessment of the theological works on, or from Amerindian perspectives produced in the United States and in Latin America.

Second, influenced by my desire to learn more about the contribution and possibilities of the Indigenous theologies that emerge from the context of my own cultural background, I explore some of the conditions contributing to the development of what is known as *Teología India*.

Third, having in mind the concerns about theological dialogue, I highlight the understanding of dialogue in *Teología India* in connection to some crucial issues raised by *Ad Gentes Divinitus*, the Second Vatican Council's Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity[5] that have affected the past and present of this theology.

Finally, I close my remarks by making reference to issues that show the promises and perils of dialogue between Amerindian theologies and the wider theological community and Church.

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[4]On the distinction between *structural position* and *subject position* and its relevance for biblical and theological interpretation, see Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways. Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 2001) 102-107.

[5]Second Vatican Council, *Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity Ad Gentes Divinitus*, in *Vatican Council II: Constitution, Decrees, Declarations, The Basic Sixteen Documents*, Austin Flannery, gen. ed., A completely revised translation in inclusive language (Northport NY: Costello Publishing Company, 1996) 443-97.

A BRIEF PANORAMA OF THEOLOGICAL WORKS: NATIVE AMERICAN THEOLOGY AND TEOLOGÍA INDIA

The question about the conditions of dialogue for theology has to do with seeking clarification about the elements that contribute together to the fashioning of integrated processes of communication that develop at the heart of historical reality.[6] One would expect that after so many centuries of Catholic Christianity's presence in the Americas, there would be a significant amount of theological resources that give an account of those processes in systematic terms. My findings show, however, that in the United States theological arena, clearly this is not the case. There is a significant, and literally overwhelming, body of works done in the broad field of Native American religions and spiritualities, but not all of them are interested in fostering constructive mechanisms of dialogue with Christianity, and some of them openly discard any possibility of dialogue. While this field is highly interdisciplinary and develops approaches consistent with the disciplinary methods of the social sciences, it often provides helpful resources for approaches made within the disciplinary methods of systematic theology.

The works of V. Deloria Jr., a prominent historian and scholar of Native religions, are well known in the broad fields of religious studies and of the study of comparative religions.[7] Drawing insights from these fields, Native American theological explorations have brought to light some of the religious articulations of North American Native Christians, especially those rooted in the Protestant and Evangelical religious experience.[8] As for explicitly theological systematic approaches, the book *A Native American Theology*,[9] written collectively by a historian, a Lutheran theologian, and a retired Methodist minister, represents a pioneer effort at systematizing the theologies of the United States Native American communities, whether Christian or traditional. In this book, the authors recognize that "since Christian theological traditions have become so pervasive in Indian communities, our theology will use many of these categories as comparative

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[6]Ignacio Ellacuría, *Filosofía de la Realidad Histórica* (Madrid: Trotta, 1991). See especially chap. 5, "La Realidad Formal de la Historia," 387-472.

[7]The books that have become classics in the study of Native American religions are Vine Deloria, Jr., *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (New York: MacMillan, 1969); *We Talk, You Listen: New Tribes, New Turf* (New York: MacMillan, 1970); and the recently reedited *God Is Red. A Native View of Religion*, 3rd ed. and 30th Anniversary Edition (Golden CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 1973/2003). See also Vine Deloria, Jr., *For this Land: Writings on Religion in America*, edited and with an introduction by James Treat (New York: Routledge, 1999).

[8]See, e.g., James Treat, ed., *Native and Christian. Indigenous Voices on Religious Identity in the United States and Canada* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

[9]Clara Sue Kidwell, Homer Noley and George E. "Tink" Tinker, *A Native American Theology* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 2001). See also George E. Tinker, *Spirit and Resistance: Political Theology and American Indian Liberation* (Minneapolis MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2004).

starting place, even as we challenge them and propose Indian theological categories that might serve us far better."[10]

From the tradition of Catholic Christianity, the theological and missiological works developed over a period of nearly forty years by C. Starkloff represent both a rich legacy and a vision for an interactive conversation between Christianity and Native American religions. From his pioneer book *The People of the Center*,[11] published more than thirty years ago, to his challenging, latest work *A Theology of the In-Between: The Value of Syncretic Process*,[12] his contribution has been valued by a new generation of Catholic scholars as being thoughtful and creative, careful and effective, as well as dynamic and courageous.[13] Studies made on the history of United States Catholicism appear to be more abundant, but some of these studies address the Indigenous communities only as they are pertinent to understand the colonial times of the United States Church.[14] From the distinctive framework of systematic theology, the book *Christ is a Native American*[15] by A. Peelman, an Oblate priest from Canada, represents a pioneering work in the theological dialogue between Christian faith and Amerindian cultures in the context of the Canadian Indian Christian communities. From the perspective of United States Latino/a Theology, the works of Ana María Pineda have been consistent in engaging the worldview of Mesoamerican religious traditions, especially those that gather *la palabra antigua* (the ancient word).[16] Other than these, I failed to find other systematic approaches elaborated by United States Catholic theologians. Therefore, I have reached the conclusion that, from the stand point of the Catholic Christian tradition, Indigenous theologies are insufficiently systematized.

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[10]Kidwell, Noley, and Tinker, 2.

[11]Carl F. Starkloff, *The People of the Center. American Indian Religion and Christianity* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974).

[12]Carl F. Starkloff, *A Theology of the In-Between: The Value of Syncretic Process* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2002).

[13]Mark S. Clatterbuck, "Post Vatican II Inculturation among Native North American Catholics: A Study in the Missiology of Father Carl Starkloff, S.J.," *Missiology: An International Review* 31/2 (April 2003): 207-22.

[14]See, e.g., James J. Hennesey, *American Catholics: A History of the Roman Catholic Community in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981); Jay P. Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience. A History from the Colonial Times to the Present* (Garden City NY: Doubleday, 1985); Suzanne Hall, ed., *The People: Reflections of Native Peoples on the Catholic Experience in North America* (Washington DC: National Catholic Educational Association, 1992); Chester Gillis, *Roman Catholicism in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); James T. Fisher, *Communion of Immigrants: A History of Catholics in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Patrick W. Carey, *Catholics in America: A History* (Westport CT: Praeger Publishers, 2004).

[15]Achiel Peelman, *Christ Is a Native American* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1995).

[16]See especially Ana María Pineda, "Evangelization of the "New World": A New World Perspective," *Missiology: An International Review* 20/2 (April 1992): 151-61; Ana María Pineda, "The Oral Tradition of a People: Forjadora de Rostro y Corazón," in *Hispanic/Latino Theology. Challenge and Promise*, ed. Ada María Isasi-Díaz and Fernando F. Segovia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996) 104-16.

In significant contrast with the United States panorama, the systematic articulation of both Amerindian theologies and the dialogue between Indigenous religions and Christianity has been developing with notable strength during the last thirty years in Latin America and the Caribbean. *Teología India* is the most common umbrella term that identifies the Indigenous theologies that have erupted into the public arena of this part of the Americas, which is also known as Anáhuac, Abya Yala, Tawaintisuyu, or Tierra de Usen. About the term *Teología India*, three observations are pertinent. I am largely following here the works of Eleazar López Hernández, a *Zapoteca* Catholic priest from the diocese of Tehuantepec (Oaxaca, Mexico), who is the theologian recognized by many as the founder, creator and prominent spokesperson of *Teología India*. First, while the word *Native* has become largely a mere descriptive category, the word *Indian* used in reference to the Indigenous people of the Americas is a foreign word associated with experiences of pain, as well as with a long history of resistance to politics of submission.[17]

Along these lines, the International Articulating Commission of Mayan Indian Theology states that the word *Indian* is offensive because "it has come to be synonymous with nonhuman, nonperson, nonpeople, nonbeliever, that is, someone absolutely deprived of human, civil, political, and religious rights."[18] This word continues to be loaded with ethical and political meanings. Because of its demeaning connotations, those involved in developing *Teología India* collectively decided to maintain the word *Indian* as a self-designation for the purpose of indicating their condition as oppressed,[19] while at the same time for asserting their struggles for the transformation of dehumanizing realities, and for affirming their processes of liberation. Thus, *Teología India* places itself within the frameworks of the theologies of liberation. Second, at the present time there are two main theological currents within *Teología India*. One current maintains the incompatibility between Christian faith and Indigenous faith, as well as the antagonism between Indigenous religions and the Christianity embodied by the churches.

This current is known as *Teologías Originarias* (Originary Theologies), *Teología India-India* (Indian-Indian Theology), or as *Traditional Indian Theologies*. The other current is known as *Teología India Cristiana* (Indian Christian Theology) that develops in the context of dialogue between Indigenous religions and Christian

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[17]Eleazar López Hernández, "Caminos de la Teología India," in *Sabiduría Indígena. Fuente de Esperanza. Teología India II Parte Aportes. III Encuentro-Taller Latinoamericano, Cochabamba, Bolivia, 24 al 30 de agosto de 1997*, ed. Gisela Grundges (Cusco, Perú: Instituto de Estudios Aymaras IDEA-Perú, Centro de Teología Popular CTP-Bolivia, Instituto de Pastoral Andina IPA-Perú, 1998) 195-96.

[18]Centro Nacional de Ayuda a las Misiones Indígenas, ed., *Teología India Mayense II. Memorias, Experiencias y Reflexiones de Encuentros Teológicos Regionales, Guatemala, Guatemala, 2-7 de junio de 1996* (México: Centro Nacional de Ayuda a las Misiones Indígenas, 1998) xv-xvi.

[19]Eleazar López Hernández, "Teología India Hoy," in *Teología India. Primer Encuentro Taller Latinoamericano*," ed. Eleazar López Hernández (México: Centro Nacional de Ayuda a las Misiones Indígenas and Abya-Yala, 1991) 11.

faith.[20] This theological current grows significantly with the support of the churches, and it openly refuses both schisms between Christian faith and Indigenous faith, and between Indigenous faith and fully being Church. According to C. Siller,[21] who is also a Catholic priest at the frontlines of creating *Teología India*, this theological current is recently generating a third expression of *Teología India Cristiana* known as *Teología India Ecuménica* (Indian Ecumenical Theology).

This theological expression would correspond to what J. Scherer and S. Bevans identified over ten years ago, as the emergence of a new "ecumenical missionary paradigm"[22] of Church and of theology. In the context of Latin America, therefore, the term *Teología India* largely encompasses the processes of an explicit *Indian Christian Theology*, but by no means is it restricted to them. The third observation to make is that the term *Teología India* in the singular is used as a global term that brings together the characteristic religious pluralism of the Indigenous communities. As explained by E. López Hernández, that phrase "is a generalization deliberately accepted to simplify things"[23] and to show that, if the past and present dominant systems have unified in poverty and deprivation the Indigenous communities by globalizing inhuman conditions, *Teología India* seeks to unify the diverse Indigenous communities by globalizing a proposal of life and justice for the common good of all.

In terms of the systematic articulation of *Teología India* and its communication to others in written form, it already possesses a strong body of literature, with well over twenty books that address a variety of theological fields and themes in Scripture, systematics, ethics, spirituality, and ministry. While the majority of these books are collective productions that bring together the documentation gathered at continental or national congresses on *Teología India*, some of those books also gather chapters by individual authors. There are also a few significant books of individual authorship. In general, the collective books on congresses include the actual plenary papers and discussions brought forth by the participants from five regions: the Amazonian region, the Southern cone region, the Andean region, the Caribbean region, and the Mesoamerican region. But those books also include specific documents such as consultations, letters, rituals and celebrations, recommendations, conclusions and a report on consensus reached. This format allows the reader to be exposed to the actual voice of the people. To me, these works reveal

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[20]López Hernández, "Caminos de la Teología India," 218.

[21]Clodomiro L. Siller, "Metodología de la Teología India," in *Pluralismo y Teologías en Diálogo*, ed. José Luis Burget and Rafael Aragón (Managua: Editorial Lascasiana, 2001) 199-210. See also Clodomiro L. Siller, "El Punto de Partida de la Teología India (Oferta de Reflexión)," in *Teología India. Primer Encuentro Taller Latinoamericano*," ed. Eleazar López Hernández (México: Centro Nacional de Ayuda a las Misiones Indígenas and Abya-Yala, 1991) 45-61.

[22]James A. Scherer and Stephen B. Bevans, eds., *New Directions in Mission & Evangelization. Basic Statements 1974–1991*, vol. 1 (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1992) ix.

[23]Eleazar López Hernández, *Teología India. Antología* (Cochabamba, Bolivia: Verbo Divino, 2000) 104.

that *Teología India* develops across Anáhuac with high levels of communication, deliberation, and consensus.

Those who take part in these gatherings are not the famous university professors or the prominent world renowned scholars, but grassroots members and leaders of the Indigenous communities, catechists, women and men religious, priests, and bishops. They all engage in a multilevel, interregional, and intersecting dialogue that results in a collective effort at shaping the features of *Teología India*. However, the available literature exists only in the Spanish language, in some of the Indigenous languages, and in other Western European languages, except in English. To me, it is unfortunate that, in view of the scarcity of resources in the United States for an explicit *Indigenous Christian Theology* or for supporting the work of those interested Catholic theologians, this body of literature apparently has found indifference in the United States religious and theological publishing community. *Teología India* is growing at a fast pace, and new insights continue to come to light everywhere. Unfortunately, the United States Catholic theological community is not in step with these developments.

CONDITIONS CONTRIBUTING TO THE EMERGENCE OF *TEOLOGÍA INDIA*

In *Teología India*, the function of the theologian is described as one of acting as scriveners, as amanuensis, as notaries or recorders, and as postal carriers.[24] The Náhuatl language uses the word *Tlacuilo/a* to describe this function. That is why Indigenous theologian E. López Hernández presents himself as functioning as a *Tlacuilo* or scrivener of the community.[25] The theologian, who can be Indigenous or non-Indigenous, has the function of systematizing the religious visions, understandings and practices of the people, and to communicate or deliver them to other communities and to the broader world. This is so, because a key presupposition of *Teología India* is that the subjects of theological elaboration are the communities themselves. These are communities who together share, reflect, and articulate their faith experiences as subjects of thought and action.[26] Theology flows from the living faith of communities who foster religious languages in view of supporting processes that actualize hope, human dignity, celebration, justice, and liberation. That is why the subjects of theology are considered to be "subjects in transformation."[27]

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[24]Aiban Wagua, "Las Teologías Indias ante la Globalidad de la Teología Cristiana," in *Teología India. Primer Encuentro Taller Latinoamericano*," ed. Eleazar López Hernández (México: Centro Nacional de Ayuda a las Misiones Indígenas and Abya-Yala, 1991) 300; Eleazar López Hernández, *Teología India. Antología*, 25.

[25]López Hernández, *Teología India. Antología*, 25.

[26]López Hernández, ed., *Teología India. Primer Encuentro Taller Latinoamericano*, 261-62, 315.

[27]López Hernández, ed., *Teología India. Primer Encuentro Taller Latinoamericano*, 262.

Although professional theologians assist the communities in the critical and scientific articulation of theological language, they do not replace the community as the primary subject of theology.[28] According to Ana María Pineda, "it was crucial that the *tlacuilo* know the symbols of mythology and tradition . . . The *tlacuilo* was the master of the visual communication of the communal history of the *pueblo*."[29] In the process of doing *Teología India* it is often difficult to say who said what because, in spite of the plurality of expressions, the Indigenous communities maintain significant commonalities in terms of their deeply communitarian or collective ways of elaborating thought. They produce highly refined syntheses of their interpretation of how God, the God of Four Hundred Names, The Heart of Heaven and Heart of Earth, that is the Infinite God,[30] is present and active in their midst.

In this way, the Indigenous communities retrieve, reconstruct, and actualize the ancestral art of God-talk. E. López Hernández explains that, in the Náhuatl language, while the term *Tlatoani* refers to those specialized in the interpretation of the life-giving Divine Word, the term *Teutlatolli* means God-speaking or speaking-of-God, which is the abstract concept closer to the term theology as understood in Western European Christianity.[31] In *Teología India*, using the terms proper to their own languages, the Indigenous communities continue to reconstruct the ancestral art of God-talk through engaging critically their own past and present so that, new horizons of life and light are envisioned even against many adversities. Whether under the term *Tlatoani* who operate as *Tlacuilo/as* in doing the activity of *Teutlatolli*, or under equivalent terms in the world of many "autochthonous" (from the Greek α τόχθων, meaning "of the land itself," "indigenous") languages, it is in concert with other Christian theologies that the Indigenous communities of faith seek to give an intelligent account of the reasons for their hope. *Teología India*, succinctly stated, is a religious language that speaks about how the Amerindian communities understand themselves in relationship to God, to nature, to the world, and to other religious traditions from their perspective of faith in God.[32]

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[28]Petul Cut Chab, "Conceptos Básicos de la Teología India Mayense," in *Sabiduría Indígena. Fuente de Esperanza. Teología India II Parte Aportes. III Encuentro-Taller Latinoamericano (Cochabamba, Bolivia, 24 al 30 de agosto de 1997)*, ed. Gisela Grundges, (Cusco, Perú: Instituto de Estudios Aymaras IDEA-Perú, Centro de Teología Popular CTP-Bolivia, Instituto de Pastoral Andina IPA-Perú, 1998) 185-87.

[29]Ana María Pineda, "The Oral Tradition of a People," 108-109.

[30]Centro Nacional de Ayuda a las Misiones Indígenas de México, "Flores de México," in *Sabiduría Indígena. Fuente de Esperanza. Teología India II Parte Aportes. III Encuentro-Taller Latinoamericano, Cochabamba, Bolivia, 24 al 30 de agosto de 1997*, ed. Gisela Grundges (Cusco, Perú: Instituto de Estudios Aymaras IDEA-Perú, Centro de Teología Popular CTP-Bolivia, Instituto de Pastoral Andina IPA-Perú, 1998) 113-14.

[31]López Hernández, *Teología India. Antología*, 99.

[32]López Hernández, *Teología India. Antología*, 92-93; Cut Chab, "Conceptos Básicos de la Teología India Mayense," 183.

The strength and vitality of *Teología India* in contemporary times is the result of many factors that have come together to bring forth the forces and possibilities contained in reality itself.[33] One factor of great significance, that represents a commonality running across every theology of liberation, is the refusal by the traditionally marginalized people to continue being considered as disposable objects or as mere recipients of somebody else's wicked purposes. For the Indigenous communities, this refusal has meant that they no longer remain silent in the face of oppressive systems and elite power groups that have imposed upon them a politics of submission coupled with a politics of assimilation for far too long. In the context of the emergence of the theologies of liberation during the second half of the twentieth century, *Teología India* came to light from a clandestine existence. The notion of the poor and marginalized as subjects of their own historical processes provided opportunities to assert that the Indigenous communities not only conceptualized themselves as subjects of society and culture, but also of the churches and of the theologies that inform their lives. The theological understandings that had been refined for centuries through the intercultural conversations of Indigenous faith and Christian faith, finally saw the light of day. Bishop G. López Reyes, of the Diocese of Verapaz, Guatemala, explains that "this theological project, as a struggle for the dignity and rights of the oppressed and marginalized people, inscribes itself within the theological thought that is expressed in different forms in Latin America, and gives a special breath to the documents of Medellín, Puebla, and Santo Domingo."[34]

Along these lines, another factor that accounts for the growth of *Teología India* is that it has earned the respect and support of many Catholic bishops, priests, and theologians. In spite of stressful conditions imposed upon them by the higher authorities of the Catholic Church, many bishops have provided encouragement and means so that this theological perspective unfolds its roots in the diocesan environment. Prominent among these bishops are well-known names, such as Don Samuel Ruíz, Don Arturo Lona, Don Raúl Vera, Don Alvaro Ramazzini, Don Julio Cabrera Ovalle, including the great figures of deceased bishops such as Don Bartolomé Carrasco, also known as the "Bishop of the Poor," who was until 1999 the Fifth Archbishop of Oaxaca, Mexico, and Don José Llaguno Farías, S.J., who was until 1992, a prominent spokesperson of *Teología India* from his diocese in the Tarahumara Sierras of Chihuahua, Mexico.

A third factor that has highlighted the relevance of *Teología India* is the increasing impact and visibility of the current struggles of the Indigenous people in many countries such as Brasil, Mexico, Equador, Bolivia, Paraguay, Guatemala, and others. In this panorama, the Church is confronted with the need of providing a pastoral and a theological response to the struggles for human rights of the

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[33]On the forces that intervene in historical processes, see Ellacuría, *Filosofía de la Realidad Histórica*, 447-57.

[34]Mons. Gerardo Flores Reyes, "Aspectos Importantes de la Teología India," in *Sabiduría Indígena. Fuente de Esperanza. Teología India II Parte Aportes*, 239.

Amerindian people in terms of the demands of the people, not in terms of the interests of the ecclesiastical institution.

A fourth factor that I want to mention is the role of the ecumenical community in organizing congresses and symposia at both continental and national levels to advance the frameworks of *Teología India*. On this, the work of the Latin American Ecumenical Articulation of Indigenous Pastoral (Articulação Ecumênica Latino-Americana de Pastoral Indígena, AELAPI), and the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) are worth mentioning. However, many other Church organizations are increasingly supporting and adopting the perspectives of *Teología India*, such as the Latin American Confederation of Religious Communities (Confederación Latinoamericana de Religiosos, CLAR), the Latin American Council of Churches (Consejo Latinoamericano de Iglesias, CLAI), and also the Latin American Conference of Bishops (Conferencia del Episcopado Latinoamericano, CELAM), and some members of the International Association of Catholic Missiologists (IACM, Asociación Internacional de Misiólogos Católicos). But other organizations directly connected to the work of the Catholic Church have also played a significant role in the growing vitality and impact of *Teología India*, such as the National Center of Assistance to Indigenous Missions (Centro Nacional de Ayuda a las Misiones Indígenas, CENAMI, México); the Missionary Indigenous Council (Conselho Indigenista Missionário, CIMI, Brasil); the Pastoral Andean Institute (Instituto de Pastoral Andina, IPA, Perú); the Center of Popular Theology (Centro de Teología Popular, CTP, Bolivia); the National Coordination of Indigenous Pastoral (Coordinadora Nacional de Pastoral Indígena, CONAPI, Panama), and *Amerindia*, a significant group of theological and pastoral experts. At the time of this writing, the most recent continental encounter of *Teología India* took place this past April 21-26, 2006 in Manaus, Brazil.

Given these developments, I can safely say that today, the majority of Latin American Catholic theologians are aware that we cannot continue doing theology without engaging in a serious conversation with *Teología India*. These amazing and challenging developments could not have been predicted at the time of the Second Vatican council.

Before moving on to the next section, it is important for me to clarify the following. The scarcity of systematic theological approaches in the context of today's United States Catholicism is not due to the absence or lack of theological activity among United States Amerindian communities. These communities have never ceased in their endeavors to give an intelligent account of the reasons for their hope. In this context, articulations of an Indigenous theology are very much alive and well in the lived experiences of the people, which is where theology finds roots and develops. I would be badly mistaken if I unintentionally suggest that the absence of systematic theological works means the nonexistence of communication between United States Amerindian communities and Christianity, or between United States Amerindian communities and the Catholic Church.

Clearly, the lack of written theological literature can be misleading. This is to say that there is an extraordinary amount of work done by some dedicated members

of the Church, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, among the United States Amerindian communities. Arguably, representative of this work is the Tekakwitha Conference National Center that has been organizing national and regional meeting since 1977 throughout the country. There are also many university-related collections on Native American Catholics, such as the most prominent one at Marquette University,[35] and the list of Indian library collections and records is endless. In my view, there are two possible reasons that account for such scarcity of academic theological works.

On the one hand, it is possible to think that for a large group of the United States theological community, the work of *Teología India* or of a United States Amerindian theology belongs to those involved in missiology or in mission studies. It would not be surprising to find those who still consider theology and missiology to be two separated fields. The work done over the years by C. Starkloff and S. Bevans[36] has sought to overcome this mistaken perception. But in addition to this, as suggested by B. Roy in his report to the Executive Board of the International Association of Catholic Missiologists, it is also possible to think that for Catholic scholars, anything related to missiology is merely a "Protestant issue."[37] Whether accurate or not, in general, the perception is that United States Catholic scholars have remained largely absent from the developments of Amerindian theologies.

On the other hand, it is also possible to think that this apparent indifference of the United States theological community may be just mirroring the apparent overall indifference that the United States Catholic Church displays towards the Native American Catholics. In terms of population, the 2000 United States Census Bureau reports that 4.3 million people identify themselves as American Indian and Alaska Native.[38] In terms of the work done by the Church, the recent report presented by Bishop D. E. Pelotte to the Spring Assembly of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops indicates that, currently 493,615 Native American people identify themselves as Catholic, although this number is probably too low given the fact that

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[35]See, Marquette University Libraries, *Christianity and Native America*, Special Collections and Archives, available online at <http://www.marquette.edu/library/> (accessed 21 May 2006).

[36]James A. Scherer and Stephen B. Bevans, ed., *New Directions in Mission & Evangelization. Theological Foundations*, vol. 2 (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1994); Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1992); Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 2004).

[37]Bertrand Roy, "North American Report," in *An Overview of Missionary Challenges Today*, Report of the Executive Board of the International Association of Catholic Missiologists, Rome, 22-24 June 2001, available online at <http://www.missionstudies.org/IACM/> (accessed 21 May 2006).

[38]United States Census Bureau, *We the People: American Indians and Alaska Natives in the United States. Census 2000 Special Reports*, issued February 2006, U.S. Department of Commerce Economics and Statistics Administration, available online at <http://www.census.gov/population/> (accesed 21 May 2006).

"40 percent of dioceses are unaware of the numbers of Native American Catholics living within their boundaries."

This report also notes that, out of the 195 existing dioceses in the year 2000, "nearly one half of all United States Native Americans live in dioceses that have no office or pastoral program specifically designed to meet Native American needs. Only a few dioceses have a pastoral plan to actively address the pastoral needs of Native American Catholics."[39] Based on the numbers provided by Bishop Pelotte's report, there are in the United States only 27 Native priests, 34 Native women religious, approximately 65 Native ecclesial ministers, and a total of 322 individuals working today in ministry with Native communities. This state of affairs confirms A. Peelman's observation that in North America, "the historical encounter of the Christian missionaries with Amerindians has not yet produced a truly Amerindian church."[40] This unfortunate state of affairs remains true even though in 1981, some fifteen years prior to Peelman's remark, Brazilian theologian P. Suess had already raised the question "where is the Indian Church?"[41] As for United States theologians, I believe that this scholarly community can and should alter this desolate picture of things.

In my mind, whether using the term of the ancient Náhuatl language or using similar terms of other Indigenous languages, the function of *Tlacuilos* and *Tlacuilas* can and should be done by those concerned Catholic theological scholars. I believe that the Catholic theological community has the human and the scholarly resources to contribute to the systematic articulation of the theology that is already there, giving meaning and transforming the lives of the United States Amerindian communities. A. Peelman notes that doing Amerindian theology is not a matter of creating "new theological systems," but that of exploring "new ways of doing theology from the grassroots."[42] In similar terms, as E. López Hernández explains, the theologian—whether Native or not—does not need to invent anything unseen or unheard before because "Teología India already exists today, has existed before, and we believe that it will exist tomorrow. Therefore, we do not need to create it, but rather to recognize it, respect it, and to foster it."[43]

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[39]United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Native American Catholics at the Millennium*, presentation of Bishop Donald E. Pelotte to the Spring Assembly of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 19 June 2003, Department of Education, available online at <http://www.usccb.org/education/statement.html> (accessed 21 May 2006).

[40]Peelman, *Christ Is a Native American*, 14.

[41]Paulo Suess, "Culturas Indígenas e Evangelização," *Revista Eclesiastica Brasileira* 41/162 (Junho 1981): 242.

[42]Peelman, *Christ Is a Native American*, 16.

[43]López Hernández, *Teología India. Primer Encuentro Taller Latinoamericano*, 10.

DIALOGUE IN *TEOLOGÍA INDIA* AND THE INSIGHTS OF THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

The *Popol Vuh*,[44] a book of Maya-Quiché provenance also known as the Book of Advice and the Book of the Community, describes the creation of the world and of the human by the Heart of Heaven and Heart of Earth. In this book, the authors describe their society as one composed by people of many forms, appearance, looks, and languages. There were in large numbers "black people, white people, people of many kinds and many languages, that was delightful to hear them."[45] Instead of representing contradiction or polarization, such pluralism of people was for them the setting for living together. As they asked for the blessing of descendants, the common language of all was the prayer to the Creator and Designer of All, so that every day dawn shines upon them: "Give us many good paths, leveled roads! May the people have peace, much peace, and be happy; and give us good life and a useful existence!"[46] This approach to society as one characterized by pluralism, recognizes dialogue as a condition not only for living together but also for reaching peace and a good life shared by all. In contemporary times, *Teología India* retrieves dialogue from the ancient Amerindian traditions in shaping itself. Furthermore, I can safely say that dialogue is a defining characteristic of this theology in its approach to God, to society, and to other theologies. The term "dialogue" (from the Greek διάλογος = δία, "through," + λόγος, "word") refers to a mode of communication between diverse parties who seek together something of common interest through conversation.

For dialogue to take place, a key premise is the mutual recognition of the equality of the parties involved, and validation of the common interest that brings together equal partners in conversation. In the theological environment, dialogue is also a process in which diverse voices exchange their truths for the purpose of growing together in trust and in sincerity. Dialogue allows equal partners not just to know each other, but to learn together how to share a peaceful and a useful existence in common. For a United States Native American theology, dialogue is necessary so that "Indian people can speak as equals to Christians."[47] As for *Teología India*, dialogue is a term that runs across the different gatherings and written works, but the Third Latin American Encounter of *Teología India* that took place in 1997 is especially enlightening. At this Encounter, the participants agreed that dialogue "is a horizontal communication between equal and different people who share lived experiences, knowledge and expressions for mutual enrichment.

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[44]*Popol Vuh. Las Antiguas Historias del Quiché*, translated from the original text, with introduction and notes by Adrián Recinos (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1947).

[45]*Popol Vuh*, 181.

[46]*Popol Vuh*, 182.

[47]Kidwell, Noley, and Tinker, *A Native American Theology*, 1.

For dialogue to occur, it is necessary to recognize the other person as different, not as superior or inferior."[48] In their view, the Amerindian understanding of dialogue differs from the dominant Western-European understanding of dialogue in that, while the latter approaches dialogue through conceptual speculation for demonstrating their truths, the former approaches dialogue through exchange of life experiences that show common truths in the witness of life. Here, the two terms used in the Spanish language are "demostrar" (to demonstrate) and "mostrar" (to show, to exhibit). Therefore, for them, dialogue requires a shift from the abstract "demostrar" to the concrete "mostrar."[49] Theologically, conditions of dialogue entail the capacity of recognizing the partners in dialogue as equals, as well as horizontal communication and entering into a new space of trust where the different languages of faith are recognized as carriers of truth, as revelations of the many faces of God. Dialogue is not the unilateral delivery of a compendium of speculative truths but a life attitude, a framework and a process for learning how to live together in a peaceful and useful Christian existence.

Teología India recognizes everywhere that the attitude of dialogue that has become one of its distinctive characteristics, is in continuity with the overall thrust of the Second Vatican Council for engaging the plural realties that people live in a changing world through multidimensional dialogue. Consistent with this thrust, *Teología India* seeks to bring to life the fundamental aim of this Council as formulated by Pope John XXIII, which he expressed as "to increase Christians' commitment to their faith, 'to make more room for charity . . . with clarity of thought and greatness of heart.'"[50] The notion of a Church that is aimed at increasing Christians' commitment to their faith with clarity of thought and greatness of heart made room for creativity in envisioning models of Church that best support the incarnation of the Church in a plurality of cultural settings. As I ponder the significance of the Second Vatican Council for *Teología India*, I keep in mind the words of E. C. MacMillan who cautioned against adopting a triumphalistic view of the Council. From an ecumenical point of view, she states that "in many ways, the Roman Catholic Church was a latecomer onto the conciliar scene, for the Second Vatican Council was one of the last in a series of international conciliar initiatives that were well established by the time the Council was finally convoked."[51]

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[48]Ramiro Argandoña, Diego Irarrázabal, and María José Caram Padilla, eds., *Sabiduría Indígena. Fuente de Esperanza. Teología India II Parte Memoria. III Encuentro-Taller Latinoamericano (Cochabamba, Bolivia, 24 al 30 de agosto de 1997)* (Cusco, Perú: Instituto de Estudios Aymaras IDEA-Perú, Centro de Teología Popular CTP-Bolivia, Instituto de Pastoral Andina IPA-Perú, 1998) 82.

[49]Argandoña, Irarrázabal, and Padilla, *Sabiduría Indígena*, 83.

[50]Giuseppe Alberigo, *A Brief History of Vatican II*, trans. Matthew Sherry (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 2006) 9.

[51]Elaine Catherine MacMillan, "Vatican II and the Twentieth Century's 'Conciliar Renaissance'," in *New Horizons in Theology*, ed. Terrence W. Tilley, College Theology Society Annual Volume 50 (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 2005) 252.

According to this, the Second Vatican Council was just one of many other conciliar activities within Christianity that took place "since the middle of the nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth century."[52] To me, the acknowledgment of this fact is important for the Catholic theologian to place the Second Vatican Council within a broader panorama of efforts made by other churches at the renewal of contemporary Christianity. Another cautionary word about the self-understanding of Catholic Christianity that flows from the Second Vatican is raised by M. E. Hines.[53] In her customary perceptiveness, she notes that "much of today's writing on the council simply takes for granted that 'communion' is the primary image of the church at Vatican II." She argues, however, that the exclusive identification of the Church with the image of "communion" not only downplays the richness of *Lumen Gentium*[54] in using various images to express the mystery of the Church, but it also can be easily manipulated to serve the interests of a "more institutional or hierarchical view of the church."[55] In my understanding, the awareness of the broader dynamics that contributed to shape contemporary Christianity, and the awareness of the diversity of images to represent the Church's reality, both had significant effects on the context in which *Teología India* develops. These effects are directly and readily visible in *Ad Gentes Divinitus*, the Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity.

The five-volume *History of Vatican II*[56] provides abundant and invaluable insight into the fascinating process that accompanied the production of the actual texts of Vatican II in general, and of *Ad Gentes* in particular. I am interested in making reference to *Ad Gentes* in this section of my essay because I want to highlight some crucial insights of this decree that are connected to the past and present context of *Teología India*. Volumes 4 and 5 of that collection are especially helpful in learning about the conflicted process of deliberation and the intense drama that took place behind the scenes in putting together *Ad Gentes* as the closing of the Council approached.[57] In my reading of those volumes, I developed the

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[52]MacMillan, "Vatican II and the Twentieth Century's," 251-52.

[53]Mary E. Hines, "Forty Years Later: Does Vatican II Still Matter?" The 2005–2006 John Portman Lecture in Roman Catholic Systematic Theology, Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice, University of San Diego, Monday, 1 May 2006. M. E. Hines kindly sent to me her lecture paper by electronic mail on 9 May 2006.

[54]Second Vatican Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium*, in *Vatican Council II: Constitution, Decrees, Declarations, The Basic Sixteen Documents*, Austin Flannery, gen. ed., A completely revised translation in inclusive language (Northport NY: Costello Publishing Company, 1996) 4-6.

[55]M. E. Hines, "Forty Years Later," 12.

[56]Giuseppe Alberigo, gen. ed., *History of Vatican II*, 5 vols., English version ed. Joseph A. Komonchak, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books; Leuven: Peeters, vol. 1–1996, vol. 2–1997, vol. 3–2000, vol. 4–2003, vol. 5–2005).

[57]In vol. 4, see Norman Tanner, "The Church in the World (*Ecclesia Ad Extra*)"; and Ricardo Burigana and Giovani Turbanti, "The Intersession: Preparing the Conclusion of the Council," in *History of Vatican II: Church as Communion, Third Period and Intersession September 1964–September 1965*, vol. 4, Giuseppe Alberigo, gen. ed., English version

perception that this is one of the most controversial and disputed decrees of the Second Vatican Council. I am not alone in this perception. P. Hünermann, who presents a serene but critical analysis of this decree, speaks about the "uncommonly turbulent history of this document."[58] Gathering a few items of this history, I want to mention four aspects that are both pertinent to *Teología India*, and disclosive of the sophisticated politics involved in creating such a decree.

First, seven drafts were produced by the Commission for the Missions and its experts, among whom Yves Congar and the then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger figured. The eighth redaction, or *textus emendatus*,[59] that was voted to become the final decree represents a compromise made between two strong currents. The decree, in its present form, is the result of these conflicting currents. One narrow-minded[60] current advocated for a more traditional, juridically based concept of mission as an activity that pursues the territorial expansion or the *plantatio ecclesiae* in unchristianized areas under the authority of the then named Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith. The other broad-minded current advocated for a more contemporary and theologically based understanding of mission that, recognized the social and cultural conditions in which people live, and understood the Church's mission as flowing from the Trinitarian God and as grounded in the ministry of Jesus Christ. From within this perspective, which largely reflected the insights of Congar, the writers of the schema on missions sought to emphasize that mission flows from the inner nature of the Church, that it involves the collaboration of the whole People of God, and that its goal is the establishment of Christian communities for the purpose of living a profound Christian life, thus giving full expression to the mission proper of the Church.[61]

In its final version, and to Congar's deep disappointment, the conciliar decree merged both currents hoping to resolve this discrepancy. The confrontation between these currents was so disturbing during the third period of the Council, that Pope

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edited by Joseph A. Komonchak and translated by Matthew J. O'Connell (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books; Leuven: Peeters, 2003) 331-45, 573-84. In vol. 5 see Peter Hünermann, "The Final Weeks of the Council," in *History of Vatican II: The Council and the Transition, The Fourth Period and the End of the Council September 1965–December 1965*, vol. 5, Giuseppe Alberigo, gen. ed., English version edited by Joseph A. Komonchak and translated by Matthew J. O'Connell (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books; Leuven: Peeters, 2005) 427-51. (I am grateful to Susan Perry and William R. Burrows of Orbis Books for making available to me vol. 5 of this collection before its official publication in May 2006 so that I complete this essay with documentation in hand.)

[58]Hünermann, "The Final Weeks of the Council," 445.

[59]Documentos Conciliares, *Documentos del Vaticano II. Constituciones, Decretos, Declaraciones*, Décimoquinta edición (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1971) 477.

[60]The categories "narrow" and "broad" are used by Y. Congar himself to explain the question of the nature and definition of mission during the deliberations regarding *Ad Gentes*. See, Burigana and Turbanti, "The Intersession: Preparing the Conclusion of the Council," 582n.301. I am adapting those categories for the purpose of this paper.

[61]On this see especially Burigana and Turbanti, "The Intersession: Preparing the Conclusion of the Council," 573-84.

Paul VI personally attended the general congregation of the Council to address a crisis situation involving the official schema which was again considered unacceptable to many of the conciliar bishops. As reported by N. Tanner, "this was the only working session of the Council—as distinct from solemn sessions to open or prorogue or conclude the Council—that either John XXIII or Paul VI attended . . . it was the first time that a pope attended such a session of an ecumenical or general council since the Middle Ages."[62] N. Tanner does not speculate about the reasons for Paul VI to unexpectedly attend this working session, but he does not dismiss the possibility that perhaps Paul VI felt some kind of responsibility for his involvement in the various schemas previously rejected.[63] In the end, as this situation illustrates, the deficiencies and advances of *Ad Gentes* are both expressions of the conflicting currents that permeated the Council as a whole.

Second, in light of the guidance offered by *Lumen Gentium* in bringing forth renewed images of Church, and in light of the observations made by P. Hünermann in considering the composition of the commission responsible for the editing, it is hard to understand "the heavily hierarchical concept of the Church that prevails in this document."[64] In accordance with this, I find that the conceptualization of Church presented in *Ad Gentes* is one of a self-centered Church that understands its mission around too many doctrinal certainties. The Church's missionary activities are conceptualized primarily around the centralizing function of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, not around the authority of the People of God to initiate and administer its missionary activities. Those who are at the center of the Church are the members of the clergy, not the people who embody the Church in their own lives. It also assumes the notion of a preexisting essentialist Church that must be replicated or implanted in particular churches.

This kind of understanding corresponds to a philosophical theory that supports the view of a predefined substance of Christianity that must be inserted into incomplete, impure, or imperfect cultures through missionary activities. But this is also the theory behind the theologies of inculturation in which, whether these theologies acknowledge it or not, Indigenous cultural expressions become mere accidents. The continual use of the language of *plantatio ecclesiae* in the final document reveals the image of an arrogant, kyriarchal and eurocentric Church that seeks to spread itself around the world as if it were *the* absolute and exclusive owner of the totality of salvation. A strong sense of superiority and arrogance is conveyed by *Ad Gentes* in its use of a language indicating, as C. Siller notes, that "Christianity possesses Christ, the other religions only possess the seeds of the Word."[65]

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[62]Tanner, "The Church in the World (*Ecclesia Ad Extra*)," 333.

[63]Tanner, "The Church in the World (*Ecclesia Ad Extra*)," 335-36.

[64]Hünermann, "The Final Weeks of the Council," 446.

[65]Siller, "El Punto de Partida de la Teología India," 55. See also, *Ad Gentes*, nn. 11, 15, and 18.

Third, one would expect that a decree that has to do with the Church's mission and with its missionary activity would have made explicit some kind of awareness, or self-criticism, about the rhetorical and practical mechanisms that the Church has used in the past that have proven to be harmful so that they are avoided in the future. This is especially important in light of the context in which the Second Vatican took place. This is a situation in which many Two-Thirds World countries were in the process of establishing themselves as newly independent countries, while others were fully engaged in revolutionary processes of liberation from imperialistic domination by the leading powers of the Cold War era. Historically, Catholic Christianity played a pivotal role in providing the religious rhetoric for the existence of the iniquitous system of Western European colonization. It also provided the conceptual and practical means for the existence of death-dealing patterns of *kyriarchal* subordination.

Included in these patterns are countless mechanisms of terror and torture with which the enterprise of implanting the Church in new territories accomplished the task of subjecting the people and coercing their obedience. *Ad Gentes*, however, makes no reference whatsoever to the centuries of enforced missionary colonization that has left a legacy of destruction. Instead, it presents a glorified image of Church that is endowed with unquestionable perfection, and exempt from any responsibility for its contribution to the holocaust of Amerindian peoples and cultures. This is a Church that has remained impugned for its direct intervention in the torturing and killing of countless people who were condemned as rebellious and idolatrous in the name of a normatively professed truth. No recognition is made of the Amerindians who still walk into the Church carrying with them the bones of their past and present loved ones, who were terrorized or killed for no reason at all. The decree shows no awareness of the lessons that the institutional Church can learn from its own mistakes. It is true that, in some instances, the hierarchy of the Church has apologized for the mistreatment of Amerindians,[66] but apology falls short if it is not accompanied by concrete mechanisms to: fully recognize the truth of what happened, accept responsibility for harm done, implement forms of justice for restoring the dignity and rights of those affected by injustice, establish means for the healing of wounded peoples and cultures, and formally commit the power and resources of the whole Church to preventing the repetition of mistreatment and violence against Amerindians in the future.

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[66]See, e.g., National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Heritage and Hope. Evangelization in the United States*, edición bilingüe (Washington DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1991) 2; National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *1992. A Time for Remembering, Reconciling, and Recommitting Ourselves as People* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1992) 1; Conference of Latin American Bishops, *Fourth General Conference of Latin American Bishops. Conclusions*, in *Santo Domingo & Beyond. Documents & Commentaries from the Historic Meeting of the Latin American Bishops Conference*, ed. Alfred T. Hennelly (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1993) 78.

Fourth, despite its many limitations, *Ad Gentes* succeeded in providing the theological framework for the emergence of an image of Church that in *Teología India* is referred to as the "autochthonous Church," in which this theology finds its roots. Although the term "autochthonous" does not appear in the English text of *Ad Gentes* edited by A. Flannery because it is replaced by the term "indigenous," or by the expression "inhabitants of the country,"[67] this term has served to name the new ways in which Catholic Christianity has engaged in authentic intercultural/ interreligious dialogue with Amerindian cultures. The term "autochthonous" appears three times in *Ad Gentes*: one in reference to the particular churches (n. 6), another time in reference to missionaries (n. 23), and once again in reference to lay people who cooperate in the Church's work of evangelization (n. 41). In *Teología India*, everyone recognizes that the extraordinary growth of "autochthonous" churches throughout Abya-Yala expresses the shift made by the Church from being a perpetrator of aggression against Amerindian cultures, to being at the forefront of an evangelizing mission in terms of justice, human rights, and liberation.

The core principle sustaining the "autochthonous" churches is provided by *Ad Gentes* in its understanding of the whole Church as becoming missionary for the fullness of Christian life: "As members of the living Christ . . . all the children of the church should have a lively consciousness of their responsibility for the world, they should foster within themselves a truly catholic spirit, they should spend themselves in the work of the gospel. However, let everyone be aware that the primary and most important contribution they can make to the spread of the faith is to lead a profound christian life."[68] In the context of the "autochthonous" churches there is an intense activity of critical analysis of the oppressive and dehumanizing structures of society and church that prevent the actualization of the truth of the Gospel. That is why, in this context, the notion of an "integrated evangelization"[69] is crucial, as it involves the work of the Church in restoring the values and dignity of the human person, strengthening the resources and ministries of the communities, and implementing operative means for change and transformation from within the symbols, myths, and rituals of the Indigenous communities.

The "autochthonous" churches develop processes aimed at communicating life and hope to those who seek God's wisdom to find ways for shaping a better future together. *Teología India* finds its roots in the lived experiences, in the critical

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[67]See n. 5, on Second Vatican Council, *Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity Ad Gentes Divinitus*, 449, 478, and 495. See also the official document published electronically by the Holy See at Second Vatican Council, *Decree Ad Gentes On the Mission Activity of the Church*, available online at <http://www.vatican.va/archive/> (accessed 24 May 2006).

[68]Second Vatican Council, *Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity Ad Gentes Divinitus*, in A. Flannery, 489. As opposed to the version of *Ad Gentes* published by the Holy See, I prefer to use Flannery's version because of its formulation in inclusive language.

[69]Msgr. Raúl Vera López, "Comentario a las Exposiciones Acerca de la Situación de los Pueblos Mayas," in *Teología India Mayense II. Memorias, Experiencias y Reflexiones de Encuentros Teológicos Regionales*, ed. Centro Nacional de Ayuda a las Misiones Indígenas (México: Centro Nacional de Ayuda a las Misiones Indígenas, 1998) 38-39.

reflection, and in the transforming dynamics of the "autochthonous" churches. Both are expressions of the Church, and both trace their breath to the life-giving impulses of *Ad Gentes*. Particularly important for the development of "autochthonous" churches are the insights of *Ad Gentes*, such as: support of the "autochthonous" particular churches that grow out of the seeds of the word of God, that should be adequately organized and possess their own energy and maturity (n. 6); endowed with the cultural riches of their nations, these churches should be deeply rooted in the people (n. 15); the episcopal conferences should determine, as they consider it to be opportune, the restoration of the diaconate as a permanent state of life (n. 16); the Church is firmly in place when it is rooted in the social life of the people, it is endowed with the necessary institutions and ministries to live, and possesses its own leadership to spread the life of the People of God (n. 19); rooted in Christ, the particular churches receive from the customs, traditions, wisdom and doctrine, the arts and institutions of their people everything that can serve the purpose of expressing the glory of the Creator, of explaining the grace of the Savior, and of properly ordering a Christian life (n. 22). Taking into account these and other insights of *Ad Gentes*, the "autochthonous" churches understand themselves as particular churches of the Catholic Christianity that flows from the most lucid and liberating perspectives of the Second Vatican Council.

At the present time, however, the development of "autochthonous" churches, with their corresponding *Teología India* is very much imperiled. Recent events indicate that, as opposed to the understanding of dialogue in *Teología India*, some forces located at the highest levels of the Church are seeking to silence, even eliminate both the "autochthonous" churches and *Teología India*. The information that I am using here is found in the published work of E. López Hernández, but also in sources that, at my request, he personally sent to me in preparation for this presentation. Although the events are much more complicated and painful, I will briefly describe what is happening around three main situations.[70] The first one concerns the prohibition to continue the practice of ordaining indigenous faithful to the diaconate.[71] Anyone slightly acquainted with the work of the Catholic Church in the State of Chiapas, México, would agree with me that, for the past fifty years, this work has been and continues to be both exemplary and impressive.

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[70]Centro Nacional de Ayuda a las Misiones Indígenas CENAMI, "Balance del año 2005: Nuevos ataques a la Pastoral Indígena y a la Teologia India," México, D.F., 16 de Diciembre de 2005, available from Conselho Indigenista Missionário CIMI at <http://cimi.org.br/> (accessed 14 May 2006); Eleazar López Hernández, "Datos Sobre el Caso del P. Eleazar López Hernandez," México, D.F., Diciembre de 2005, available from Conselho Indigenista Missionário CIMI at <http://cimi.org.br/> (accessed 14 May 2006).

[71]ALAS, "El obispo Arizmendi está en pláticas para que le permitan auxiliarse con diáconos casados," *ALAS*, *Boletín está semanal de informacón y análisis para la libertad religiosa* 7/11 (Marzo 2006): 10; Bernardo Barranco, "El Vaticano desconfía de los indígenas," *ALAS*, *Boletín semanal de informacón y análisis para la libertad religiosa* 7/16 (Abril 2006): 20-21.

The diocese of San Cristóbal de las Casas is well known for its dynamic and imaginative dialogue with the Mayan peoples and cultures. This dialogue has fashioned a model of Church that, synthesizing the message of the gospel with the Indian symbolic universe, spreads the faith for promoting and sustaining a profound Christian life. Given that in this diocese seventy-five percent of its population is Indigenous, that it covers an extension of approximately thirty-seven thousand square kilometers, that poverty is pervasive, that its surface lacks proper roads to reach remote communities, and that the number of priests is insufficient to give adequate response to the pastoral needs of the communities, the function of Indigenous permanent deacons is an indisputable necessity. At the present time, there are 335 permanent deacons and more than eight thousand catechists, but to sustain processes of an integrated evangelization in a context of pervasive social scarcity, the work of married or unmarried deacons is fundamental. However, since the year 2001, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments issued an order prohibiting any further ordination of Indigenous married deacons. Although this prohibition remains to this day, recent developments have intensified an environment of conflict.

First in November 2004 and then again in February 2005, an anonymous booklet was circulated among many Church related Mexican organizations and was also delivered to every Mexican bishop, in which the authors complain about a resurgence of dissidence by liberation theologians. The booklet is signed by a group self-named the "Lumen Gentium Association," and allegedly claims to have the support by CELAM. In its content, the booklet states that after the Second Vatican Council, what resulted in the Church is the spread of sowers of weed instead of sowers of wheat. The sowers of weed have produced first, the theology of liberation, then the *Teología India* as its heir, and now they have also created a new sect called the "autochthonous" church, all of them bearing a Marxist signature. Specially tragic, the booklet alleges, is the ordination of Indigenous married deacons, and those to be blamed for it are both Don Samuel Ruíz, Bishop emeritus of that diocese, and the current Bishop Don Felipe Arizmendi Esquivel. Thus, the authors of the booklet appeal to the highest authorities of the Church in Rome, to bring a holy remedy to this disgraceful situation.

In this context, during the normative *ad limina* visit of the Mexican bishops to Rome between September and October 2005, the Mexican bishops were instructed to stop the ordination of new Indigenous permanent deacons. Additionally, Bishop Arizmendi received a letter from the Congregation for Divine Worship, issued on October 26, 2005, and signed by Cardinal Francis Arinze,[72] by which he is personally ordered to suspend the eventual ordination of permanent deacons and to interrupt any program of formation of candidates to the diaconate. According to the letter, this policy is being implemented due to the impact of the Diocese of San

[72]See the actual letter published digitally by ZENIT-The World Seen from Rome, on 28 March 2006, online at <http://www.zenit.org/spanish/> (accessed 28 May 2006).

Cristóbal de Las Casas on the universal Church. As stated in the letter, the specific reasons for this policy are as follows.

(a) It remains in the diocese an ideology that promotes the implementation of an "autochthonous" church.
(b) Contrary to the Church's Magisterium and Tradition, the diocese fosters in the deacons the unreal expectation of a permanent diaconate oriented toward married priesthood.
(c) The diaconate is not a designation made by the community, but an official call made by the Church.
(d) The permanent diaconate demands a solid intellectual formation that must be oriented by the Holy See.
(e) The diocese must become open to the realities proper of the universality of the Catholic Church.
(f) The diocese leads the Holy See to appear as being intolerant because it is placed in the situation of rejecting similar petitions for a permanent diaconate oriented to married priesthood.

With this policy, and in the name of the universality of the Catholic Church, the current highest authorities at the Vatican clearly disregard the impulse of the Second Vatican Council in recognizing the authority and wisdom of the local Church in determining the opportune conditions for the restoration of the permanent diaconate.

The second involves the case against Eleazar López Hernández, who is not only a key figure of *Teología India*, but he also serves in various theological and Church organizations at national, continental, and international levels. Since the early seventies of this past century, he became an active contributor to the Movement of Indigenous Priests of Mexico, and in 1975 he was delegated by his bishop to a full-time work as director of the Department of Education of the National Center of Assistance to Indigenous Missions (CENAMI). The quality of his work and his extraordinary involvement in the development of *Teología India* has placed him in other key positions, such as his recent appointment as vice president of the International Association of Catholic Missiologists (IACM). This past July 2005, E. López Hernández was called by his bishop, Msgr. Felipe Padilla Cardona, to have a dialogue with him. During this meeting, López Hernández was given information about a letter that Bishop Padilla received from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), in which the CDF expresses concerns about the orthodoxy of Eleazar's theology. The specific text on which those concerns are based, is a plenary session paper that he presented to the IACM in October 2004, which bears the title: "The Church in Dialogue with the Indigenous Peoples of America: Flowers

and Thorns."[73] As described in that letter, the basic arguments against López Hernández are as follows.

(a) In that paper, a simplistic interpretation is made of the evangelizing work of Church by stating that, historically, this work has neglected proper dialogue with the Indigenous communities.
(b) The paper manipulates texts written by the popes.
(c) The paper gives impulse to religious syncretism.
(d) In its lack of proper historical analysis, the paper presents an incorrect image of the Church.

After the previously mentioned *ad limina* visit of the Mexican bishops to Rome, López Hernández was told by his bishop that the CDF decided to transfer the clarification of his case to the Mexican Conference of Bishops, and that the CDF will intervene only if his case cannot be resolved at the local level.

In late Fall 2005, Bishop Padilla requested that, while a special commission of four Mexican bishops examines Eleazar's orthodoxy, he should abandon temporarily his work at CENAMI and return to the diocese of Tehuanepec to do parish work. This past January 2006, he was assigned to a parish located in the Istmo de Tehuantepec, where he remains to this day until his orthodoxy is cleared. Throughout this time, López Hernánzez has learned from credible sources, one of them being the office of the Apostolic Nuncio in Mexico, that there is a powerful ecclesiastical group, hard at work, to put an end to both *Teología India* and the "autochthonous" churches. Moreover, this group is willing to use every institutional power to achieve this goal. Here, I must add that disciplinary measures are also being promoted against Clodomiro Siller, the director of CENAMI, who also comes from the diocese of Tehuantepec. He has been asked by Bishop Padilla to return to his diocese to do parish work. By removing E. López Hernández and C. Siller from CENAMI, this prominent Center would reduce significantly its capacity to provide expert accompaniment to the "autochthonous" churches at national and continental levels.

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[73]Eleazar López Hernández, "Diálogo de la Iglesia con el Mundo Indígena: Flores y Espinas / The Church in Dialogue with the Indigenous Peoples of America: Flowers and Thorns," Plenary Session Conference delivered on Thursday, 30 September 2004, at the Second General Assembly of the International Association of Catholic Missiologists (IACM). The general theme of this assembly was "Hear What the Spirit Says to the Churches" (cf. Rev. 2:7). Sharing Diversity in Missiological Research and Education: Issues of Theological Language and Intercultural Communication," Salesian Retreat Center Fatima, Colcapirhua, Cochabamba, Bolivia, September 29–October 3, 2004, program assembly available online at <http://www.missionstudies.org/IACM/> (accessed 16 March 2006). I am grateful to E. López Hernández for kindly sending me his conference paper by e-mail on 16 March 2006. This paper is also available in Spanish, online at the web site of the Conselho Indigenista Missionário of Brazil, under the link "Teología India," at <http://www.cimi.org.br/> (accessed 22 May 2006).

The third situation concerns an environment of hostility against *Teología India* by some right-wing Church groups that externalize fear of this theology because, in their perception, it promotes forms of syncretism and of idolatry. By their reactions, in my view, these groups reveal awareness of the radical challenge that *Teología India* is raising not just for Christian theology but also for the Church as a whole. This theology is inviting everyone to continue efforts at dialogue for devising together new ways of doing theology and new ways of being Church. But if dialogue involves recognition of the equality of those coming together for conversation, a predefined notion of a fixed superiority of Western-European Christianity is a peril for a trusting and a fruitful dialogue. Those groups have manifested the following four main reservations against *Teología India*.[74]

(a) With its emphasis on God's revelation in the history of all the peoples and cultures, *Teología India* endangers the unicity of God's revelation because it displaces the fundamental role of normative revelation. In addition, it is unclear to them whether the Indians continue to be polytheist and idolatrous, or not.
(b) With its emphasis on the "seeds of the Word" in all the cultures, *Teología India* imperils the unicity of Christ because it suggests that there may be other incarnations of Christ.
(c) With its speech about building "autochthonous" churches, *Teología India* endangers the unicity of the Church because it destroys the unity of the universal church.
(d) With its emphasis on the Indigenous communities as holders and stewards of their own faith, *Teología India* imperils the decisive role of the magisterium of the bishops.

Those who argue along these lines, in my modest opinion, disregard the fact that the notion of "autochthonous" churches emanates from the insights of the Second Vatican Council in its incentive to new images of Church and to the particular Churches. They also disregard the fact that, as noted by G. Zizola, only a "romano-centric" theological current would maintain the notion that the universal Church precedes the particular churches, but a theological current that is consistent with the renewing legacy of the Second Vatican affirms that "the universal Church exists in the particular churches and only because of them. In other terms, there is no such thing as the universal Church, not even theoretically, without the particular churches."[75]

Those groups also disregard the fact that for *Teología India*, the main concern is not syncretism or abstract idolatry related to Indigenous myths, but the concrete

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[74]López Hernández, *Teología India. Antología*, 139-40. In this paragraph, to maintain the integrity of the arguments, I am merely paraphrasing the terms of this source in my translation.

[75]Giancarlo Zizola, "La Reforma del Sistema Papal," in *¿Otro Modo de Ser Iglesia es Posible?* ed. Rafael Aragón Marina, *Alternativas* 12/30 (Managua, Nicaragua: Editorial Lascasiana, 2005) 92.

idolatry of those who claim to be authentic Christians, while at the same time giving their hearts to systems of injustice. Faith in God's mystery has never been a problem for *Teología India*, but the negation of God through words and deeds by colluding with dominant structures that maintain dehumanizing conditions for the Indigenous communities and for everyone else who lives at the margins of society and Church. The truth about the mystery of God is elucidated not from abstract dogmatic propositions but from the lived faith of those who struggle to remove the obstacles for the actualization of God's Reign of justice and grace. When the world of injustice is made absolute and untouchable, it becomes a false divinity that negates the truth of God as announced and personified in Jesus Christ. When the world of injustice is covered up or validated by absolutist religious rhetoric, it becomes an idol that practitioners of religious ideology worship for maintaining privileges and domination.

Placing one's heart and one's trust in fixed religious formulations, is also a way of practicing idolatry. Thus, the question about idolatry is not elucidated through loyalty to a set of speculative truths, but through consistency of practices that reveal or hinder the work of the Gospel in the transformation of the world. The question about syncretism, as argued by C. Starkloff,[76] is not elucidated through the denial of Christianity itself being syncretistic, but by engaging in a creative process of systematic exploration of the concrete, lived embodiments of Christianity that would bring about new syntheses to enrich itself as it enriches the cultures of the world. In sum, this is a brief sketch of the panorama that *Teología India* faces today. One would not be surprised to learn that, putting these three situations together, some Indigenous and non-Indigenous members of the Church would reach the conclusion that the Roman church is no different today than it was more than 500 years ago. In spite of so much adversity, however, *Teología India* has engendered new spaces in which we are invited in terms of equality to strengthen processes of interreligious and intercultural conversations for learning together how to share a peaceful and a useful existence in light of the Infinite God, the God of Four Hundred Names.

CONCLUSION

I have deliberately placed at the end of my paper the three situations described above because I seek to show some of the issues that become an invitation to think about what still needs to be done in terms of a more effective dialogue between the Amerindian cultures and religions, and the wider theological community. For me, perhaps the central question that remains to be answered collectively is: Do we have a future together? A response to this question entails a common interest for asserting the credibility of Christianity in today's world. But it also entails the necessary work of continuing to develop multidimensional rationales for validating

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[76]Starkloff, *A Theology of the In-Between*.

in systematic terms a plurality of images of Church and of theological languages, while still maintaining unity in the contextual actualization of God's Reign. In this, I suggest, *Teología India* and the "autochthonous" churches are providing great hermeneutical possibilities for theologians to imagine that things can be different, and to find hope in doing so. In my case, what I have learned in putting together this paper is that, being in the setting of competing and divisive theological frameworks, it is crucial to cultivate hope that another world of justice is possible, as well as to strengthen my theological commitment to the emancipatory movements of a Catholic Christianity that is open to devise meaningful religious languages conducive to such a world.

At a more personal level, I want to mention that initially, when I shared with some of my Latina and Latino colleagues that I received the invitation to speak to this assembly about the dialogue between theology and the Indigenous cultures of the Americas, their reaction was that of suspicion and of astonishment. I heard them asking: What do you know about the Indigenous peoples and cultures? What do you have to say about Amerindian theologies? In sum, their questions suggested another unspoken question: Who are you to speak about that theme? I want to respond now to their questions by saying that I consider myself to be greatly blessed by having this opportunity to study, to explore, and to learn more about *Teología India*, because now my own life is affected by it. Reconnecting again to the words of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, I borrow them to say that "I do not study in order to write, and even less to teach (which would be for me disproportionate pride), but only in order to see if by studying I become less ignorant. This is my response; these are my sentiments."[77] By learning more about Amerindian theologies, my intellectual sensitivity has been not only enriched but also expanded. In my mind, the act of learning also comes with its own ethical demands. Now I cannot remain indifferent to the developments of these theologies, nor to the struggles of the Amerindian peoples or to the pains and visions of my Indigenous colleagues who, in the end, embody the deepest roots of this Continent. I am just hoping that my Latino and Latina colleagues, instead of continuing to search for theological resources somewhere else, will also cultivate the desire to learn from Amerindian theologies.

As for what I can say to the broader Catholic theological community, I believe that we all are also greatly blessed because we are invited to witness with our eyes the emergence of a fresh and deeply challenging new theological voice, the voice of those who were forced to remain in a clandestine existence for far too long. In this light, we are subjects who are placed in the privileged position of contemplating a new *kairós* in the life of the Church. This is also true because, for the first time in the history of theology in the Americas, from the setting of Amerindian religions and cultures, *Teología India* intervenes as equal to any other theology in the public deliberations about the present and future shape of theology and Church.

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[77]Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, *Selected Writings*, 258; Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, *Comedias, Sainetes y Prosa*, 444.

In addition to this unprecedented event,[78] such theology brings forth highly valuable articulations in intercultural and interreligious terms, which is also unprecedented. Possibly, the only exception to this, is the literary and theological contribution of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz whose writing, as noted by M. González, "is marked by [the] presence of Indigenous peoples and cultures, including a poem written in the Nahuatl . . . she addresses questions concerning Aztec religious practices and their functions as prefigurations of Christianity."[79]

Again, an environment of internal suspicion, or of ecclesiastical censorship, should not deter us from engaging in fruitful conversation with Amerindian theological methods and content. Not just for me, but for all of us, now we have a choice by learning more about these theologies. We can continue to remain indifferent to these theologies and contribute to keep the field of United States systematic theology as scarce as it is; we can continue to be mere bystanders who look at Amerindian theologies from afar; we can continue to feed the mistaken notion that this is something to be done only by Catholic missiologists or by Protestants, or we can become active participants in their hopes, anxieties, and creations. In my view, *Teología India* or Amerindian theologies represent for us a convocation to dialogue, a proposal to change, and a message of hope. Although this convention already signals a good start, my wish is that sometime in a not too distant future, we can dedicate a whole convention of the CTSA to dialogue with these theologies. Never again a Christian theology without Amerindian voices. Never again a Catholic Christianity without Amerindian peoples and cultures.

I want to close my reflection by making reference to a document that, in my view, captures the vision of those involved in the crafting of *Teología India* for efforts at dialogue within the Church. In preparation for the Fourth General Conference of Catholic Bishops in Santo Domingo,[80] a group of Mexican Catholic bishops requested from CENAMI a consultative document that would gather the voice of the Indigenous communities for a better understanding of the Indigenous reality in the context of the Church. CENAMI commissioned E. López Hernández to write the first draft. This document was subsequently distributed to many Catholic and Protestant Indigenous leaders, organizations, and communities so that they contribute their own insights and concerns in view of producing a consensual document. The final document that was delivered to the Bishops[81] raises pertinent

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[78]See, Raúl Fornet-Betancout, *Hacia una Filosofía Intercultural Latinoamericana* (San José, Costa Rica: Departamento Ecuménico de Investigaciones, 1994) 79.

[79]Michelle A. González, *Sor Juana, Beauty and Justice in the Americas* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 2003) 40.

[80]Alfred T. Hennelly, ed., *Santo Domingo and Beyond. Documents and Commentaries From the Historic Meeting of the Latin American Bishops Conference* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1994).

[81]Centro Nacional de Ayuda a las Misiones Indígenas, "Aportes de los Indígenas a las Iglesias con Ocasión del V Centenario," final text published in *Teología India. Antología*, by Eleazar López Hernández (Cochabamba, Bolivia: Verbo Divino, 2000) 212-19. The following comments are based on this document.

issues to foster a mutually enriching dialogue between the Indigenous communities and the Church's leadership. Because I believe that those issues continue to be significant today, I will highlight next only a few of them.

First, there are more than fifty million indigenous people across the Americas who speak more than 500 different languages. They are neither the remnant of an extinguished people or insignificant minorities. They have not been annihilated but represent the most consistent human population in the midst of an evolving society.

Second, although they are the most impoverished population of the Americas, the progress and survival of humanity and of the earth depend largely on our ability to connect with the sifted wisdom, community structure and organizational methods that the Indigenous people have cultivated through the centuries for the healing and caring of all.

Third, while contemporary cultures and societies are denying God's presence in the human through their subjugation of others, the Indigenous people have affirmed their deep connection to God through their struggles for human rights.

Fourth, the Indigenous people are not opposed to Christian faith, nor are they enemies of the Church. It is not they who have rejected the Gospel of Jesus Christ nor they who have occluded the transforming presence and activity of God's Holy Spirit in their midst. Avoiding false idealizations and acknowledging in them the many limitations that still need to be overcome, the Indigenous communities strongly assert that to be Christians and to perform ecclesial ministries, the Church must cease to consider them idolaters in need of conversion to the true faith and to expect them to renounce their ancestral religions traditions. Such expectation only accomplishes the denial of their self-realization as humans and leads to make of them schizophrenic people who are forced to use masks to cover up their true selves as Christians and as humans. In their view, purification of wicked ways, conversion to the truth of the Gospel, and dedication to work for the Reign of God, are demands that Christian faith raises for the whole Church.

Fifth, the Indigenous communities recognize that, having self-preservation in mind, for centuries they have maintained a prudent silence within the churches. Empowered by Christ's message, however, such an attitude has been replaced across the Americas by courage and audacity to continue their work in the renewal of the Church and in the historical advancement of God's Reign. Respectful communication between equals, sincere and trustful dialogue is what they offer to the Church and what they expect to receive from the Church's leadership.

One final issue of this document that I found to be most inspiring is the strong affirmation of social and ecclesial reconciliation as a goal that the Indigenous communities seek to achieve. In their view, reconciliation is an urgent task for all in the Church, so that we come together in a commitment to build a different future in which the harms done by the Church in the past against the Indigenous communities, are not repeated again. In their view, reconciliation in the Church also requires that the Church's leadership publicly refutes the notion that the Amerindian Christian communities are second-class Christians or incomplete Catholics. This requires a formal acknowledgment of the truthfulness and authenticity of the

"autochthonous" churches, ministries and theologies. In support of this view, the Indigenous communities assert that the message of St. Paul to the Corinthians is again actualized to the letter in them:

> [I]n everything we commend ourselves as ministers of God, through much endurance, in afflictions, hardships, constraints, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, vigils, fasts; . . . in truthful speech, in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness at the right and at the left; through glory and dishonor, insult and praise. We are treated as deceivers and yet are truthful; as unrecognized and yet acknowledged; as dying and behold we live; as chastised and yet not put to death; as sorrowful yet always rejoicing; as poor yet enriching many; as having nothing and yet possessing all things. (2 Cor 6:4-10 NAB)

According to biblical scholar M. Pascuzzi, the context of this biblical text is Paul's argumentation, in his own defense, on the "validity and authenticity of his ministry." Connected to Paul's reflection "on the paradoxical nature of authentic Christian ministry," Pascuzzi notes, this particular text highlights Paul's ethos by stating that "he nor his coworkers have done anything to impede the Corinthians from responding to God's grace fully." Just the opposite, in spite of rejection and harsh criticisms of his work for spreading the Gospel, he has gone through many afflictions and has "demonstrated many other virtues that attest to his authenticity as an apostle." Similarly, by appealing to the Scriptural source to shed light upon the many adversities that they face, today's Indigenous communities appropriate Paul's argumentation to demonstrate the validity and authenticity of their ministry as Catholic Christians.[82]

As the Indigenous Christian communities seek to respond to God's grace from their own circumstances and religious symbolic universe, Catholic Christianity does not need to suppress the "autochthonous" churches and theologies to assert its validity or its universality. Asserting the supremacy of the Vatican-based, Western-European Church does not make the Church more universal but only more romano-centric, more centralizing, and more authoritarian. In the new and challenging sociocultural contexts that we live today, the community of theologians are increasingly refuting the idea that through normative uniformity or dogmatic absolutism, the Church becomes authentically Catholic. On the issue of religious rhetoric in the context of theological diversity, Y. Congar states that "no church or communion has succeeded in convincing the rest that it is in possession of the truth."[83]

In this context, the suggestion that other religious traditions are configured as lesser churches, as incomplete or insufficient churches, presents optimal conditions for power struggles that maintain division and confrontation. On the issue of the Catholic Church's approach to other religions, P. Knitter suggests that we must

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[82]Maria A. Pascuzzi, *First and Second Corinthians* (Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 2005) 110, 114, 119-20.

[83]Yves Congar, *Diversity and Communion* (Mystic CT: Twenty-third Publications, 1984) 161.

move from a perspective of "fulfillment" to a "mutualist" theology, by which the Church overcomes the myth of its "superior, normative, fulfilling, end-point religion for all others."[84] For him, making this shift does not imply to affirm relativism, but to deny "the possibility and necessity of *absolute* truth claims. There is a middle path between absolutism and relativism that is called dialogue, that is, a conversation in which all participants are as committed to witnessing to their own truth as they are open to learning from the truth of others."[85] With regard to new horizons in theology, scholars in the field of moral theology are highlighting similar approaches. N. Rigali speaks about "the globalization of the church" as a world church that, although it "is still in its early developments,"[86] is bringing about new possibilities for transformed theological disciplines and a new awareness of a culturally embodied Church. The authentic catholicity of the Church finds expression in its historically, culturally determined embodiment.

On the issue of affirming the Christian religious experience of Amerindians today, the insight of C. Starkloff remains valid. Over thirty years ago, he suggested that Christian theology can be most valuable as it assists in the liberation processes of Amerindians "by finally confessing to the dignity of those traditions . . . for a sense of one's own history is part of the sense of personal and communal dignity, which liberates through equalization."[87] Accordingly, the authenticity of Christian faith and the universality of the Church cannot be affirmed through the unilateral enforcement of centralizing, romanocentric theological frameworks and religious practices. For Catholic Christianity to affirm its universal existence, the leadership of the Church must recognize, rather than suppress, the truth of the faith rooted in the concrete realities of Indigenous Christians. Theologically, this is a universality that flows from the common living out of the mystery of God revealed by Jesus Christ in the plural contexts of today's world. In other terms, the life itself of "autochthonous" churches is a radical demand of the universality of the Church because they flow from its inner nature. By acknowledging and supporting the culturally embodied churches, as eloquently shown by the existing "autochthonous" churches and *Teología India*, Catholic Christianity asserts both the authenticity and universality of its evangelizing mission.

In the final analysis, the best contribution that the universal Catholic Church can make to the world is to keep alive the vision of making more room for justice and mercy, with clarity of thought and greatness of heart, because what is truly imperiled is not the romanocentric ecclesiastical hierarchy, but the very life of the

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[84]Paul F. Knitter, "Bridge or Boundary? Vatican II and Other Religions," in *Vatican II Forty Years Later*, College Theology Society Annual, vol. 51, ed. William Madges (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 2006) 263.

[85]Knitter, "Bridge or Boundary?" 164.

[86]Norbert Rigali, "New Horizons in Moral Theology," in *New Horizons in Theology*, ed. Terrence W. Tilley, College Theology Society Annual, vol. 50 (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 2005) 53.

[87]Starkloff, *The People of the Center*, 134.

Amerindian communities. By keeping this vision alive, showing it through words and deeds, yes we have a future together.

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MARÍA PILAR AQUINO
University of San Diego
San Diego, California