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## Returning to Mother Earth

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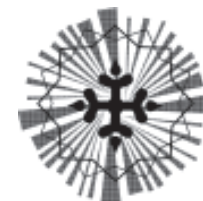
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PTCA Series No. 4

# Returning to Mother Earth

Theology, Christian Witness and Theological Education  
An Indigenous Perspective

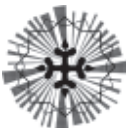
A. Wati Longchar



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Theology, Christian Witness and Theological Education  
An Indigenous Perspective

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## FOREWORD

Understanding one's own context is the starting point of theology. Theology outside of one's context is not a theology. Theology can be done only in a specific context and experience of the people. The context involves both historical and cultural contexts of the people.

The church in Asia is predominantly a church of indigenous people. To be a minority Christian in the context of a religiously pluralistic context involves many sacrifices – loss of job, denial of rights, persecution and so on. Being minority, first, we have faced the reality of being excluded (as a reaction to our exclusive understanding of mission), discriminated against, and marginalized from society, in some places even threatened with death. But second, by struggling as a minority, the Christian churches in Asia have also found an opportunity to use their dynamics and creativity to make a contribution to their people and society. Professor Wati Longchar's work, entitled, *Returning to Mother Earth: Theology, Christian Witness and Theological Education*, is an attempt to make the Christian theology, Christian witness and ecumenical theological and ministerial formation programme rooted in the cultural setting of the indigenous people's context.

Church history has demonstrated that the model of theological arguments was changing constantly. There were three principal theological paradigm shifts, in my point of view, which had taken place in Christian history, which have to do with change of the nature and scope of theology. They are:

1) Christian formation of theology generated from the religion of Judaism formatted by Jesus' community in the early church. A revolutionary transformation was made to both the doctrine of

God and faith community. The Judeo- absolute monotheism was replaced by “a” God of Trinity, and a nation based religion and religious adherents were radically extended to a universal and cross cultural faith tradition.

2) Modernization of Christian theology in reaction to the ethos of rationalism proposed by the enlightenment movement in 17<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> century. In so doing, Christian theology was thus made one of the scientific disciplines, all religious mysteries and spiritual momentum were neglected if not totally opposed.

3) Third world eruption of contextual theologies after the Second World War. The traditionally considered pagan and profane experiences and cultures are taken as substantial elements for theology for the purpose of transforming Christian theology into a liberating power to the oppressed, the marginalized and the discriminated.

It is along with the third wave of the theological paradigm shift of the eruption of contextual theologies from the third world churches, that the “space” oriented Asian way of thinking in contrast to the “time” (history) oriented western way of thinking, accompanying the impact from the global ecological crisis, that a new paradigm of “theology of creation” has been proposed and advocated as a rediscovery of an authentic Christian theology in reaction to traditional theology of “salvation.” Longchar has extensively elaborated “space” centered theology exploring indigenous people’s spirituality. Today’s ecological threats and continuing marginalization of vulnerable communities are growing due to unjust global economic and political structures which challenge the paradigm shift from traditional anthropocentric theologies, which turned out is also Euro-androcentric and hierarchical, to a creation centered theology. A theological construction giving prominence to “creation” corrects traditional theology not only in its falsehood of viewing nature and other creatures beside humankind species indifferently (if not neglecting them totally), but also to enhance Christian theology to reclaim

its roots more comprehensively and faithfully, to include the all three persons of the triune Godhead instead of just stressing on the single second person of Christ, the Son of God. This recollection of Christian roots of theology gives lights also to the weaker parties of human community who are struggling with the power distortion of traditional theologies that re-enforced the inhuman exploitation and oppression of the marginalized sex, race, class and other minority ethnic groups.

Even if we continue to read the Bible with the confession that the human species was created with a particular distinction in the creation order, they are not to claim this as a privilege to dominate over the rest of creatures, but to responsibly work with God for the consummation of the whole creation. They are thus, deserving special mission to be partners of God for the divine continual creation, and are entrusted as stewards to bring reconciliation and healing to the broken world and the devastation of the planet which we are living in. This theological paradigm shift thus, will not simply be a theoretic alternative discovery, but a radical spiritual renewing experience. In the change of the model of theology we have to change also our self understanding and life styles, and as well as rediscovery of our relation to the “others” inclusive of Nature and all the other species of God’s creation.

We thank Rev. Dr. Wati Longchar for this creative and scholarly work and I hope this work will immensely contribute to new way of doing theology, Christian faith practice, Christian witness and ministerial programmes of the churches. We also thank the Just and Inclusive Communities Programme of the World Council of Churches for the support and the Senate Centre for Extension and Pastoral Theological Research (SCEPTRE) of the Senate of Serampore College (University) for publishing this work.

Huang Poho  
Dean, PTCA  
Taiwan

## INTRODUCTION

Everywhere the marginalized communities have awakened and are demanding their right and justice. The assertion of their rights and identity are all connected to control of their land and its resources, their culture and traditions. They continue to challenge our thoughts and actions as Christians. Globalization has opened the door for many indigenous people to leave their home countries to work as domestic workers, factory workers, entertainers in tourist destinations. There are many stories of violence, and even killing of these migrant workers. This is happening because of unequal distribution of wealth. The global competition to control earth's resources has led to war and conflict. The greed for capital leads to control and manipulation of strategic economic locations like Iraq, Palestine and so on. The uncontrolled and one-sided exploitative economic development projects have brought with them various ecological crises. The rape of Mother Earth manifests in uncontrolled logging, indiscriminate use of chemicals in agriculture, inconsiderate disposal of non-biodegradable waste, and human beings' many other 'ecocidal' acts due to negligence, ignorance or greed which are destroying the ecosystem. The indigenous communities who depended on earth's resources are the most affected people.

With the increasing influence and impact of materialism, secularism, and liberalism in the postcolonial era, the indigenous people continue to experience challenges and stagnation in spirituality. These include loss of focus in discipleship and spiritual formation, loss of indigenous wisdom, character and values, and infiltration of western culture and ideology through the neo-Pentecostal and new religious movements' influences. The information technology that promotes a consumerist life-style also contributes to the fast decline of the indigenous cultures and discrimination against minorities.

All these issues are complex and are interrelated to culture,

spirituality, power and proper management of earth resources. Theology has to take a stand for the victims of hegemonic structures of oppression and other dominant powers. The future of contextual theologies such as indigenous people's theology will also be determined in its ability to create counter movements and theology against hegemonic powers and life threatening forces. All these problems challenge us to search for a new way of doing theology, Christian witness and theological and ministerial formation programme of the churches. This work makes a humble attempt to responding to those issues and concerns.

Except for a few articles, most of the papers have been published in different journals. Since the papers were presented on different occasions, there is a bit of repetition here and there, but I have retained the original documents so as to enable the reader to see the connections and comprehend the arguments with ease. However, I have made substantial revision in most of the articles. I would like to thank the editors of the following Journals for giving permission to reproduce the articles in this book: (a) *International Review of Mission*, No. 388, April 2009 (Pages 64-76), (b) *Clark Journal of Theology*, Vol.II, No.1, January-June 2010 (pages, 38-50), (c) *Asian Journal of Theology*, No. 26, Vol, 1, April 2012 (pages 29-43), (d) *Journal of Theologies and Cultures in Asia*, Vol. 11, 2012 (pages, 141-158, 159-174).

I would also like to pay homage to the late Ms. Maria Chavez Quispe's contribution to this work. She inspired me much in understanding the rich resources of indigenous spirituality in doing theology. She has made several valuable comments on several articles which helped me to sharpen my thoughts. Due to delay in preparation of the manuscript, I could not give her the document on time for writing the "Foreword". The book would have been greatly enriched had she been still alive. We pray for her soul to rest in peace.

I would like to record a special word of appreciation and thanks to my friend Dr. Deenabandhu Manchala, the Programme

Executive of Just and Inclusive Communities Programme of the World Council of Churches for journeying with us in our struggle for justice and peace. His sharp and critical intervention has made a great difference in writing this book. We also thank Just and Inclusive Communities Programme of the World Council of Churches for making the resources available for publication of this book.

I also like to thank Dr. Huang Poho, the Dean of PTCA for writing the "Foreword" and encouragement to publish this book as part of PTCA Series publication. Poho has been a great colleague and friend in theological journey.

Thanks also to Dr. Iris Devadason for the language correction, Dr. M.T. Cherian, Associate Dean of SCEPTRE, Dr. Atola Longkumer, Rev. Khayaipam Khanrang, Dr. Moa Tzudir, and Rev. Dr. Limatula Longkumer, my wife, for going through the manuscript and giving valuable suggestions. Thanks to Ms. Aparna Biswas, Ms. Mary Chang and Mr. Premanshu Sinha for helping with typesetting and proof reading. A big thank you to Ms. Debabani Basu for the attractive cover design.

I hope this humble work will be found to enrich us all in our faith journey.

Wati Longchar  
Kolkata  
November, 2012

