

## **In Dialogue with Indigenous Peoples in Asia on Ancestors, Spirits and Healing**

*A study document to be discussed and complemented by the Lutheran churches in Asia*

### **Introduction**

- (1) In the shadow of Mount Kinabalu (the resting place of souls), the highest mountain in East Asia, seventeen Indigenous and non-Indigenous Christian theologians, both women and men from Asia, gathered at Sabah Theological Seminary in Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia. From 15 to 19 September 2004, they met for an LWF study seminar on “Dialogue with Indigenous Peoples: Ancestors, Spirits and Healing.”
- (2) The immediate objectives of the study seminar were to,
  - a) Analyze expressions and practices of Asian spiritualities, promoting interfaith dialogue, research and study on ancestors, spirits and healing
  - b) Discover and examine the implications of Asian spiritualities for the Lutheran identity and holistic ministry
  - c) Prepare the study document *In Dialogue with Indigenous Peoples in Asia on Ancestors, Spirits and Healing*.
- (3) The mid-term objectives are to,
  - a) Discuss the study material and study document in the congregations and training institutions in Asia
  - b) Receive feedback from congregations and training institutions so that the follow-up group can complete the study document
  - c) Present the revised Asia document at the LWF global consultation on “Spiritualism as a Global Challenge to the Church,” in October 2005. This global consultation will elaborate the final document, *Spiritualism as a Global Challenge to the Church – Theses and Guidelines*.
- (4) The long-term objectives are to,
  - a) Reach an increased awareness within the Lutheran churches of the need for correct understanding of Asian spiritualities through interfaith dialogue leading to mutual empowerment, reconciliation, the restoration of relationships and the reclaiming of cultural identity.

- b) Promote the celebration of humanity and mutual empowerment and to learn from one another, affirming the plurality and not the uniformity of spiritualities and practices.
- c) Identify helpful and healthy approaches and attitudes to ancestors, spirits and healing that might aid us in collaborative work, finding a common platform/ground on which to work together, for example in the area of herbal and traditional medicines, friendship and collaboration on mutually beneficial projects, sharing of resources and medical assistance, struggling for justice and peace.
- d) Recognize the challenges for a holistic ministry of the Lutheran churches in Asia, considering that even if not accepted by all churches, a number of Indigenous practices are already (re)-incorporated into the daily lives of some members and in some Asian Lutheran congregations.
- e) Equip the church to help those who believe in spirits within its fold.

The seminar participants formulated this study document in order to facilitate a dialogue in the Lutheran congregations and training institutions in Asia on the above objectives. You are kindly asked to submit your comments to the coordinator of the Asia follow-up group, Dr Wilfred John, Sabah Theological Seminary, P O Box 11925, 88821 Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia, E-mail: [wilfredjohn@stssabah.org](mailto:wilfredjohn@stssabah.org) or [wilber@tm.net.my](mailto:wilber@tm.net.my)

### **Perspectives on and possibilities for dialogue**

- (5) One of the many factors that has contributed to the growth of Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal Christianity in Asia is its rather successful adaptation of the gospel to the cultures of the so-called Third World through its particular attention to the supernatural, spirit healing and similar characteristics. It has very ably brought Christianity closer to the primal religions of the Indigenous Peoples. We need to acknowledge that it is the neo-Pentecostal movement that has drawn the attention of institutional churches to the phenomena of Spirit and spirits. This has resulted in many attempts to articulate a theology of the spirit and its functioning within and outside the church.
- (6) Nonetheless, there has been some hesitancy on the part of the institutional church to grapple with the more popular understandings and perceptions of spirits and their perceived presence and functioning in the world. Despite the presence of many who believe in the world of spirits within the Lutheran church, it has until now failed to address the needs, fears and questions raised by such a belief. Instead, the para-normal, the supra-natural have been explained away as a figment of the imagination or psychotic behavior. Yet, experience and research have shown that there are many within the church, Indigenous and others, who strongly believe in the presence of spirits, good and bad, which influence their lives in many ways. As long as the church fails to address this issue, more and more of its members

will find reasons to approach neo-Pentecostal communities and other such channels to help them.

- (7) Dialogue has been hindered by our preconceived ideas and stereotyping of the Indigenous Peoples as being backward, primitive, irrational and uncivilized. But the church needs to recognize the image of God inherent in the Indigenous People and to respect and accept their beliefs and customs. The New Testament witness calls our attention to the conversion experiences of Peter (Acts 10:9-21) and Paul (Acts 17:16-24) who in their encounter with people of other faiths recognized their religiosity and spirituality, appreciated and dialogued with them and were transformed and edified by the encounter. Scripture too calls upon the church to love and serve the neighbor and to “do to others what you have them do to you” (Mt 7:12).
- (8) The Christian faith compels us to engage in conversations with Indigenous Peoples. Genuine and authentic dialogue between the church and Indigenous Peoples is possible only in an environment of mutual openness and recognition of the need for such dialogue. This would require,
  - a) Understanding and accepting Indigenous Peoples and societies
  - b) Refraining from being judgmental, compassionate or humble in our assessment of Indigenous culture and practices
  - c) Observing some kind of protocol when initiating the conversation
  - d) Respecting the genuineness of their traditions and practices. This involves an openness to change, a willingness to be corrected and changing overt or latent colonialist, triumphalistic and spiritually arrogant attitudes and behaviors
  - e) Responding to queries in ways that show our genuine acknowledgement of the Indigenous Peoples as spiritual peoples
  - f) A willingness to learn and adopt positive elements and practices found in Indigenous culture, to nurture relationships and to be generous in our offerings and gestures to assist in the empowerment of the church and the Indigenous Peoples.
- (9) It is essential that the Lutheran church equip itself adequately to address this issue. A better understanding of Indigenous culture and practices will provide insights into the various types of Asian Indigenous spiritualities impacting members of the church.

### **Who are the Indigenous Peoples of Asia?**

- (10) Indigenous Peoples of Asia are pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies distinguishing themselves from other sections of the prevalent societies. Today they form the non-dominant sections of society. In accordance with their cultural

patterns, social institutions and legal systems, they are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence. These groups are identified variously as the aborigines, tribal communities, Dalits, *Adivasis*, (*adi*-original, *vasi*-inhabitant [India]), the *Bhumiputras* (Malaysia), the *Lumad* and *Katutobo* (growing from the womb of the earth [Philippines]).

- (11) These Indigenous Peoples are foundational communities integral to Asia, whose values and cultures are inextricably linked to the identity of the countries they live in and the region as a whole. But Indigenous Peoples have been victims of doctrines, policies and practices that have advocated the superiority of peoples or individuals on the basis of national, racial, religious, ethnic or cultural differences that are racist, scientifically false, legally invalid, morally condemnable and socially unjust. For long, they have been the objects of fear, baseless presuppositions, overt and covert prejudices, false images and apathy on the part of the church. Hindrances posed by governmental regulations have discouraged the church from approaching and engaging Indigenous Peoples in conversation.
- (12) In the recent past, the cultural wealth, knowledge, practices, ability to maintain harmony between people and nature and diversity of these peoples have been acknowledged and their struggles for land and other rights have led to an awareness of and theological reflection on ecology. Certainly, most discussions on land and ecology have almost always been portrayed as issues of Indigenous and traditional rural peoples. It is also true that most of the well-known ecological struggles and campaigns for land are centered on them. It is essential that we understand what within the Indigenous culture, worldview and humanity enables the Indigenous Peoples to maintain such a harmonious relationship with people and nature. It is known that the perspective derived from their spiritualities has led to a sound and healthy attitude toward others and nature, which in turn has been translated into right actions.

### **Indigenous spiritualities**

- (13) For some, spirituality is a way of life, a way of relating to people, nature and spirit(s). It is holistic, that is, it is connected to or in tune with the divine through body, mind, heart and soul. For others, spirituality is becoming aware of the indwelling divine that energizes and activates a person to relate to the struggle for harmonious relations both with the community and nature. For still others, spirituality is cosmic interwovenness, the breath that interweaves every human and living being. Thus, spirituality is a desired way of transcending all barriers and boundaries in order to relate to all spheres of life—the individual, family, community, society and cosmos.
- (14) Asian spiritualities are conditioned culturally, socially, economically and historically. They are similar to each other in that they emphasize a holistic and intimate relationship with the cosmos wherein the belief in spirits and veneration of ancestors become visible through religious practices and rituals. Beliefs involve

fear and awe of supernatural spirits both good and bad, the use of placatory animal sacrifices in festivals, the pursuit of purity and pollution through caste, tribe or clan systems, the offering of blood libation to the lesser deities or spirits and observing auspicious and inauspicious times in order to achieve a good and fulfilled life.

- (15) Asian spiritualities are a celebration of life and life affirming. In the classical religious traditions, human life is replete with contradictions and polarities. In Indigenous spiritualities, the dichotomy of the sacred and profane, life and death, does not exist in Indigenous spiritualities, and further, life is a continuity of life-death-life. That is, the departed continues to live/visit and communicate.
- (16) Asian spirituality is not only life integrating but a life lived fully here and now. Such spirituality is also influenced by such values as honesty, simplicity, respect for the other, politeness and hospitality.
- (17) Spirits are present in everything in nature and therefore life continues without interruption. Indigenous spirituality stresses the mutual relationship that exists between human beings and nature, and the belief that everything is the dwelling place of the spirits and demons. This characteristic feature of Indigenous culture in spirits, has resulted in the understanding that every element and aspect of nature has a spiritual value and is spiritually significant. Such a belief influences the understanding of life and practice both positively and negatively. It regulates life and affects every action and chore. The ways in which these spirits are or are not treated, result in either positive or negative consequences for the individual and the community. A violation of ethical laws would almost always result in harm or suffering. With the belief in the presence of spirits in every element of nature, the Indigenous Peoples have inculcated respect and love for nature. By instilling fear of the spirits nature has been honored and is protected from violation and abuse.
- (18) Asian spiritualities are communitarian and egalitarian: community consciousness is central to the Indigenous Peoples. Individuals have a role to play and the duty to safeguard the welfare and well-being of the community. Equality of all members is the essence of the community's consciousness. This is expressed in the performance of rituals and celebration of festivals. Further, the communitarian nature is replete with opportunities for women to contribute to the enrichment of the community. For example, from ancient times until today, in many Indigenous communities in the Philippines, women have played a significant role as the *babaylan* (woman priest and ritual functionary). She may also be a *babaihon-datu* (leader of the community), which is indicative of women leadership in the community.
- (19) Asian spiritualities are struggle-centered and change-oriented. The spiritualities are grounded in people's concrete life situations: in the experience of colonization, acute poverty, very limited access to education and political powerlessness. Understanding life as being a human being-nature-spirit continuum, emerging out of a yearning for the divine, involves the aspiration to live in dignity, freedom and harmony with spirit(s), people and nature. As such, spirituality is a struggle against

all forms of prejudice, oppression and injustice and hence, change oriented, which is immediate and here and now. Their spirituality is a critique of the dominant religious ideologies that consider the Indigenous worldview as being inferior and superstitious.

### **Dialogue about the belief in ancestors, spirits and healing as a challenge to the churches**

- (20) The Indigenous Peoples of Asia hold beliefs of spirits and ancestors; spirits are real beings to Asians. There are good spirits and evil spirits (demons, ghosts) and an overwhelming awareness of the spirit(s)/divine. The encounter with it/them can happen at any time or in any place; therefore, everything is a possible site or medium for a possible divine encounter with spirits. This results in the belief that everything is precious and auspicious and therefore there are rituals and practices of communication with spirits and ancestors.
- (21) Every place in nature is a dwelling place of the spirit(s). Disturbing and disrupting harmony is nothing but an act of violating the bond of human being-nature-spirit continuum. Therefore, refraining from unnecessary exploitation of nature and its resources is of paramount importance. Environmental concerns take precedence over consumerism and exploitation.
- (22) Most Western-oriented theologians (Europeans) tend to dismiss empirical evidence of spirits in the Bible as being myths, unscientific, or superstition. Some missiologists explain the spirits phenomena as a kind of worldview while others do not.
- (23) Most Asian Christians do not have difficulties talking about their experiences with spirits. This is because Asians “live” with the reality of spirits and their different manifestations. Studies have shown that in Malaysia, for example, the importation of Western science and technology has not eliminated the belief in and the experience of the invisible and transcendent world even among intellectuals in the Indigenous, Chinese and Indian communities.<sup>1</sup>
- (24) In Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity there is a revival of the pursuit of transcendent, supernatural experiences, especially among the middle classes in Asia. “For the Malaysians the Indigenous beliefs toward the magical and spiritual realms...did not vanish or become repressed into the nether regions of unconscious

What are some of our insensitive acts affecting the ecological balance and resulting in the breakdown of the harmonious relationship between nature and human beings?

Is this Western definition adequate in your church context? Social context? In your region? On your continent? Does this definition raise important issues for you?

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<sup>1</sup> Raymond Lee and Susan Ackerman, “Sacred Tensions: Modernity and Religious Transformation in Malaysia,” in *American Journal of Sociology* 104:3, pp. 934-936.

with Westernization; on the contrary, they were transformed and reworked into structure of organized religion and continue to thrive.”<sup>2</sup>

- (25) We watch movies that depict spirits in different manifestations, documentary programs about shaman/women contacting the spirit of the dead, we hear about spirits and even see their influence on people around us. Some of us even experience this first hand.

Is this type of fear an issue in your region and social or church context? If so, what effective ways have you found to help people who are troubled by such fears? How can we differentiated between this type of “reality” and that of persons suffering from “mental illnesses” who experience similar fears / “phobias”? Are there helpful psychological interpretations of the meaning(s) of such fears?

### **Healing relations with the ancestors**

- (26) Most Indigenous Peoples believe that the spirits of the ancestors can communicate with the living (*hatod*). There are common beliefs that the spirits of the dead return to visit the living at some point after death, (3, 7 or 100 days). There are certain ceremonies/rites to remember, to pay respect or to venerate the spirit of the dead and to bid farewell to the departed souls. Some, like the Chinese, visit the cemetery every year. Some Indigenous Peoples practice this after they have become Christians (e.g., the Rungus and Murut).
- (27) Some Christians continue the practice of remembering the dead, but have eliminated those rituals which could be thought of as venerating the dead. Opinions among the pastors even within the same church remain divided.
- (28) Most Asian Christians believe that after death, the souls go to God and do not interfere or communicate with the living in any way.
- (29) However, there are Christians who fear that the spirits of the ancestors come to haunt them or to take revenge on them if they did not have a good relationship with the dead during their life, or feel that they have not fulfilled their responsibility toward the dead according the Indigenous beliefs.
- (30) We need to enter into conversation in order to clarify these phenomena.
- (31) Bible study is essential to gain spiritual insights, the confidence in Jesus Christ to overcome these fears and to be assured that Christians cannot be demonized. As Christians we do not need to fear evil spirits. Although they may disturb us or tempt us, they cannot harm us because, as followers of Jesus, we share in Jesus’ victory over evil spirits/Satan, “for the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world” (1 Jn 4:4b).

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

- (32) Prayer is a powerful means to overcome such fears. In such cases we need to pray for the spirit of discernment to resolve the problems of guilt and for forgiveness.
- (33) A Malaysian Pastor recounted that in his first year of ministry a villager had reported having seen a giant dark person in his house. He accompanied him to the house and prayed on the spot where this apparition had been seen the night before. The apparition never manifested itself again. After this, other people also requested such prayers.

How can Indigenous Christian groups formulate their own ways for such occasions as honoring their ancestors without worshipping the dead? What about ceremonies to commemorate the dead where the demand is made on the younger generation to settle their obligations to the dead which they have not yet fulfill (these include the money they still owe, such as bride price and other debts and duties)?

- (34) In Asia, most Christians do not encourage such monetary payments because of the burden this places on the living. Moreover, Christians are encouraged to forgive debts as well as personal offenses (*cf.* Mt 18:23).

Are there other ways of including respect and gratitude for ancestors in church life and rituals

- (35) Remembering the ancestors is not against the teaching of the Scriptures. The Israelites were taught to remember their ancestors and therefore lists of ancestors are found throughout the Bible (Genesis 4:1-2; 25-32; 10:1-32; 11:10-32; Exodus 1:1-7; the longest list being in Numbers 1:1-47; the genealogies of Jesus in Matthew 1:1-17 and Luke 3:23-38 continue this tradition of ancestral lists). The recollection of God's deeds among the Israelite's ancestors is common in the historical books of the Old Testament as well as the Psalms. This is done systematically in two Apocryphal books, *The Wisdom of Solomon and The Wisdom of Jesus Ben Sirach*, Sirach 44-50, *Hymn in Honor of Our Ancestors*, (Enoch, Moses, Aaron, David, Solomon, Josiah, Elijah, Hezekiah and Ezekiel) and Wisdom 10-19. The tradition is continued in Hebrews 11:1-12:2 where we read in 12:1: "we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses...".

### **Healing: What is an appropriate understanding of the casting out of evil spirits for Lutherans in Asia?**

- (26) Jesus' proclamation of the imminent coming of God's kingdom and the liberation of people from all forms of oppression is the primary focus of his healing ministry. Thus his casting out of demonic spirits in the gospels is a sign of the presence and power of the kingdom of God (Lk 11:20, Mt 12:28). Our ministry is to proclaim and practice the healing work of Jesus Christ.

Is exorcism a relevant matter in your area/region situation? How do you deal with this? What is your church's view on this matter? If the church's view/position does not seem help those suffering from such phenomena as "demon possession" what approach(es) would you suggest?

- (27) How do we effectively discern the work of the Holy Spirit and the evil spirits? From an Indigenous perspective, possible signs of possession by an evil spirit, include abnormally violent action, abnormal sickness, evil manifesting itself in dreams.
- (28) If symptoms are unclear, people are referred to doctors or hospitals or are prescribed herbal or modern medicine. But when these fail, people will go to a pastor or a *Bobolizan*.
- (29) In our societies and especially among Indigenous Peoples, exorcism is being practiced mostly to drive away evil spirits which hold an individual, family or community in bondage. Jesus also drove away spirits which reduced a human to a nonentity. This is one of the special practices of the *Bobolizan*, who will bring healing and communal and social harmony by discerning and driving away evil spirits, or giving good advice.

**Holistic healing as liberation**

- (30) From the Indigenous Peoples’ perspective , healing is understood in different ways: physical, spiritual, mental, psychological, emotional etc. On the one hand healing is understood as reconciliation with those forces that oppress and dominate the vulnerable. On the other, it is a liberation from the oppressive forces that control and subjugate human beings and God’s creation. It can also be seen in terms of the restoration of friendship and establishing a sustainable relationship between humans and God, among humans and with God’s creation. Healing is holistic with a special emphasis on the relationship with mother earth and animals. Healing is a process which does not take place overnight.
- (31) In Indigenous spiritualities awe, wonder and fear lead to the worship or propitiation/appeasement of the spirits.

Are these relevant/important issues in your church? If so, how do you deal with them? In your view, are these things all a matter of “luck” or “chance”? In your view, are these things all a matter of human responsibility (effort or lack of effort)?

What moves you to worship God? Do awe, fear and wonder have a place amidst all that motivates you to worship God?

How can the church live out this understanding?

What is the significance of “offering” or “sacrifice” in our worship traditions?

(32) Worship is the channel to communicate with the spirit(s) in order to seek favors as well as to appease and to reconcile. Indigenous Peoples are not overly concerned with complex doctrinal reasoning or elaborate rituals but rather with the implementation of their belief system. In other words, events are interpreted mostly as experiences of the divine/spirits. In worship, they use simple and down-to-earth rituals and practices to meet their needs, some of which are blood sacrifices, offerings of grain, wine, fruit and betel leaves. In other words, local and easily available and affordable resources are offered. The community meal comprises sharing the sacrificial offering and reinforcing community consciousness and solidarity. The offering symbolizes the overcoming of evil as well as being a token of gratitude.

(33) Such Indigenous forms of art as painting, music, dance, song, the way of narrating myths, etc., though simple, reflect a clear understanding of the meaning and purpose of the various stages of life as well as life in its totality in relation to the spirit(s). These methods and means of communication not only challenge, but also transform the view and way of life. They provide possibilities for varied and creative ideas for liturgy, ritual and healing worship in the church.

(34) A striking feature of these Indigenous communities is the spiritual and ritual status of women. In almost all the communities we have heard from, the ritual experts were almost always women. This is a feature, which is on the decline as these communities become increasingly “modernized.” Women ritual experts and women priests not only took care of the ritual needs of the community but were also the custodians and nurturers of tradition and other forms of knowledge, such as traditional beliefs and practices, medicine, social norms, etc. This role and status of women in Indigenous communities have facilitated the participation of women in community matters, and the appreciation of women’s contributions. This is most definitely a challenge for the church which has not adequately acknowledged the dynamism and potential of women.

How would women enrich the ritual and worship life and ministry of the church? Reflect and then share your experiences which validate and amplify the above proposals for inculturation.

(35) Psychological difficulties and societal stress are now recognized as causes of sicknesses as well as personal and relational difficulties. On the other hand, some believe difficulties experienced in money matters, marriage (e.g., Muslim – Christian marriages), business, etc. are also the work of evil spirits. In other words, these spirits are now manifesting themselves in different ways. The best answer is Bible study and other forms of spiritual training. In this regard, human sin is often the cause of human difficulties at all levels of society.

(36) The Indigenous way of life is guided by a rather simple set of “do’s” and “don’ts” which require little interpretation. The communitarian way of life provides for the care of the elderly, orphans, strangers and widows. Respect for elders, sharing, honesty and transparency, forgiveness, relationality and accountability to other members of the community are essential features of Indigenous morality and ethics. Offenders and violators are corrected and disciplined by and within the community through a process that enables the individual to acknowledge guilt, repent and be reformed. Such values and processes challenge the church and society.

What are some of the cultural expressions that have potential for transforming the individual’s view and way of life?

What processes do you have within your church that enable individuals to own guilt and be reformed and accepted back into the community?

- (37) The injury inflicted by humans on their relationships with one another, on nature and the cosmos as a whole, either due to violent behavior or the violation of the ethical laws, is in need for healing. It is not just limited to the Indigenous Peoples, but the whole of God's creation.
- (38) Healing is necessary in personal life, family life, community life, in society (ethnicity), among nations and religions. Injury is caused especially to the marginalized in our communities—women, children, people of the land—either because of human greed, oppressive systems and structures, or class and caste distinctions. Systems, structures and class and caste distinctions are human made. While they are supposed to serve human relationships, they are normally exploited by those in power. Because of this, some sections in our society are never able to enjoy their rights and privileges. Humans have caused destruction to God's creation, the mother earth, natural resources, animals, etc. either because of irresponsible stewardship or exploitative greed or both. These are some of the areas where healing is necessary.
- (39) Healing is the will of God because when God created the whole world God saw it was good (Gen 1:31). When the relationship between humans and God was broken, God wanted this relationship to be restored and for humans to live in the right relationship with God, one another and God's creation. In the early chapters of Genesis, salvation is seen as liberation. In our society, humans are suffering from different sicknesses in all realms of life, either due to ignorance, innocence, exploitation or other factors. Due to a fatalistic attitude (e.g., *karma* in the Indian context) some people make only very little effort to be healed. Many accept suffering as either being God's punishment or God's will. They prefer to live with sickness and look for a better tomorrow or a better life in their next incarnation. Others use the name of God to oppress and suppress the weaker sections of God's creation. There are those who are not healed due to their ignorance. Healing aims at enhancing life and facilitates a harmonious, dignified life.
- (40) Because of our prejudices, excluding attitudes, traditions, ideologies, identities, worldviews, lack of respect for and understanding of others the healing process is not taking place in our individual lives, communities, societies and the whole of God's creation. Moreover, dominant religious ideologies hinder the healing process. We are not able to accept those who are different. We hesitate to open our hearts and ears to listen to what others say to us. We look at others from our own perspective and with our own expectations. We fail to recognize that plurality is a gift from God, which will equip us to live in harmony and neighborliness. While we feel that there is

Identify the areas in your own personal, community and societal life where healing is necessary. Identify the causes that give rise to disharmony and stratification in your own context.

Identify the reasons why some people do not want to be healed. Identify the attitudes and approaches of people and systems and structures in our church and society that hinder the healing process.

nothing we can learn from others, there is in fact much we can learn from one another for our own mutual enrichment and empowerment. We tend to impose our own thoughts and philosophy on others, which is a big hindrance in the process of healing.

- (41) Self realization and answering questions such as, Who are we? Who are we with? What is the purpose of God in our lives? mark the beginning of the whole healing process. Once a Chinese pastor said, “God reform the whole world, but begin with me.” It is important for us to know what people expect of us and not to impose our own expectations on others. The process of healing can only begin when we accept and respect others as they are, by listening to and being willing to learn from them. This demands being sensitive to their needs and problems and challenges us to become involved in their struggles. The community and society are in need of healing because of our systems and structures which dehumanize and marginalize people. Indian theologian M. M. Thomas challenges us to address the so called "demonic forces of second nature" in our churches and societies, such as unjust systems and structures, rigid laws and practices that marginalize and oppress some sections. Healing takes place through the practice of love. Dialogue is an important process in healing as can be seen in our life together in community.
- (42) In our churches and church related institutions, healing is taking place through pastoral care and counseling, hospitals, Christian education, protecting people, solidarity with the victimized and marginalized, the rehabilitation of addicts, caring for people with HIV/Aids and participating in the struggle for justice, peace and the integrity of creation. In our societies and especially among the Indigenous Peoples, exorcism is being practiced. In society, healing is also done by the local leaders (charismatic, both within the church and outside). This is a very close to the Indigenous role of the *Bobolizan* (Rungus) the spiritual leader who through healing by driving away evil spirits, or giving good advice, brings communal and social harmony. Among the Indigenous Peoples, the *Bobolizan* also bring physical health through herbal medicine.

Can the church learn from these leaders and their practices? Could they be practiced in the church? How important is dialogue in the healing process?

Identify: the areas where healing is necessary; where healing is taking place; how healing is taking place; where healing is not taking place and why not; how you as a member of the church can meaningfully contribute to the whole healing process.