

# **Indian Theology: A Journey of Decolonizing the Heart**

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## **1. Greetings and Thanks**

I give my heartfelt thanks to all the people who were so kind to invite me to participate in this exchange of pastoral and theological decolonizing experiences. Accepting this invitation was difficult for me, because the written word has never flowed easily for me. So, here I am before you to share what my eyes have seen, what my ears have heard, what I have learned on the path with my people, what my dreams have made me, what my great teachers have awakened in me, and what God continues to spark in my spirit. I'm grateful to our grandfathers and grandmothers for this opportunity they have given us. I'm grateful to life for allowing all of us to meet here in this event. I'm grateful to the universe and to those who came before us in the journey of history.

## **2. Dreams Have Marked My Life**

One night I dreamed that:

*I was at the foot of a great mountain, and in it was a cave you could enter.*

*Someone told me to go into the cave.*

*Once inside, I was handed two precious stones.*

*I took them and once in my hands, they changed into traditional musical instruments of my people.*

*At my touch, the strings brought forth songs of the great prophets...*

*Then, I left the cave, went behind the great mountain, and sat down beneath the trees.*

*It was a place unfamiliar to me.*

*Then, people of different ages began arriving; they sat down next to me forming a circle.*

*They asked me to speak, to tell them who I am, where I was from, and where I was going.*

*I spoke. I don't remember what I told them, but I watched their joy as they listened to me.*

When I was 17 years old, I began to read the Bible, searching for something that could give sense to my life, something that could guide my way, or something that could inspire my heart in the face of the marginalization and poverty that we in my community were living in.

A strong desire to serve my people was born in me...was it by being a lawyer or a priest? I wasn't sure, and the question kept spinning in my head. Talking with my parents about my dream of being a priest was something unthinkable for them. At that time, I used the little shack we used to store corn as a prayer space at night. It was a space to listen to and ease, or lighten, my heart, a place to speak alone with God. After several nights, I began to have repetitive dreams. They provided me a lot of clarity about God's invitation for my life. I felt it was an invitation to serve through the priesthood. With great difficulty, I left my home and my community to enter the San Cristóbal diocesan seminary. At the same time, I felt the desire and great necessity to learn about my ancestors, to better understand my own culture, to accept my Tzeltal blood and my Tzeltal name.

In my home and my community, I was always jPetul.<sup>1</sup> When I started high school, I wanted to reject my Tzeltal self in order to be accepted in the *mestizo* student population. Upon entering the seminary, I felt accepted as I am, motivated and also accompanied, or guided, on the journey to encounter my own heart, the history of my ancestors, and my Mayan-Tzeltal identity. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the people who welcomed me into the diocese: the pastoral ministers (the missionaries, both men and women); my village's

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<sup>1</sup> "Petul" is "Peter" in the Tzeltal language, and "j" is the prefix used for men's names, while "x" is used for women's. (Brown, Penelope. "Up, Down, and Across the Land." *Language Sciences* 30 (2008) 174. [http://pubman.mpdl.mpg.de/pubman/item/escidoc:58798/component/escidoc:58799/Brown\\_2008\\_up.pdf](http://pubman.mpdl.mpg.de/pubman/item/escidoc:58798/component/escidoc:58799/Brown_2008_up.pdf))

*principals*, or elders;<sup>2</sup> the seminary rectors, my advisors, and especially jTatic (Bishop) Samuel Ruiz.<sup>3</sup>

### **3. The Emergence of Indian Theology in the Diocese**

The seminary opened its doors to me and allowed me to connect with the diocese’s pastoral programs. It made it possible for my heart and spirit to reconnect with the communities that preserve the spiritual practices of my ancestors and, at the same time, get to know some pastoral ministers who highly value the Mayan culture.

My heart opened to drink from the two fountains of spirituality. The seminary gave me what I needed to understand the Christian faith, and the communities—along with their elders—began to fill my heart with ancestral wisdom. From the beginning, I felt deeply that both spiritualities fulfilled my expectations and that the two paths made possible what I longed for in the depths of my heart.

I proposed to the rector that he allow me the opportunity to speak with the National Center for Assistance to Indigenous Missions (CENAMI), so that together with Bishop Ruiz, they could help me pave the way for the formation that my heart needed.

My trip to Mexico City to speak with the priests of CENAMI and Bishop Ruiz coincided with

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<sup>2</sup> In Tzeltal society, *principales* are the respected elders of a village who hold the majority of the political and religious authority and have already served in the cargo system. The Tzeltal cargo system is a civil-religious hierarchy of one-year positions (*cargos*). (Stross, Brian. “Tzeltal Marriage by Capture.” *Anthropological Quarterly* 47:3 (1974) 329, and Vogt, Evon Z. “Structural and Conceptual Replication in Zinacantan Culture.” *American Anthropologist* 67:2 (2009) 343)

<sup>3</sup> “Tatic” is “an affectionate term for ‘Father’” in the Tzeltal Mayan language. (Glassman, Steve. *On the Trail of the Maya Explorer*. Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2003, p. 201) Samuel Ruiz, bishop of the Diocese of San Cristóbal de las Casas and longtime champion of southern Mexico’s poor and Mayan peoples, died in 2011 at age 86. He embraced liberation theology and the preferential option for the poor, and his great legacy is the existence of the indigenous church in Chiapas. (<https://www.ncronline.org/news/global/mexico-chiapas-state-bishop-ruiz-leaves-large-legacy>)

the First Latin American Meeting on Indian Theology that was held in Mexico City in September 1990. Among those invited to that meeting were four diocesan priests who had a long history working in indigenous ministry. And there, I encountered Alberto Velásquez, a Jesuit seminarian who, at that time, was just becoming familiar with the Diocese of San Cristóbal. We both had a strong desire to participate in the meeting, but we weren't invited. When we spoke with the CENAMI team, they told us that there wasn't any space left for us. But then, we made our case to Bishop Ruiz, and he told us that we could stay and that he personally would talk with the event coordinators. He also told us not to worry about meals and lodging, because that could be resolved through some of his acquaintances. And that's what he did. We stayed at CENAMI and went to the meeting. It was a blessing for both of us. Doors opened, and my formation began just as I wanted.

When the meeting concluded, Bishop Ruiz and the diocesan priests commissioned us as members of the regional Mayan coordination group for Indian theology. The the Mayan people of Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Mexico would participate in this group. The first assigned task was to prepare and hold the first meeting of Mayan Indian theology in Mexico, and then the first regional meeting which we held in October 1991 in San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas.

The start of the journey was far from easy. Many of the diocesan pastoral ministers had doubts and suspicions with regard to the words "Indian theology." The most persistent questions were these: What is Indian theology? Why do we need Indian theology if we already have liberation theology? Why talk about an indigenous church if we're already building the church of the poor? Won't Indian theology risk weakening the people in their search for liberation? Won't Indian theology serve just to send us back to a past that practiced

witchcraft? What would happen with the Word of God in the Bible that has been accepted in the peoples' hearts? etc. These concerns were not only in the hearts of the pastoral ministers but also in those of most of the early catechists.

The early catechists were certainly trained to teach the Word of God written in the Bible, to create community awareness about reality, to teach new practices that would improve community life, to combat practices that weren't life-giving like alcoholism and witchcraft (the misuse of God-given gifts), murder, etc. But they were also encouraged to stamp out our own way of seeing, feeling, and living life...our way of relating to and communicating with God, the Universe, and Mother Earth. And so, this way of ours began to die...we began to lose heart...and the spirit of our ancestors drifted further and further away.

As a result, when we began to develop a Indian theology program, the elders found it difficult to pick back up what had been rejected. They felt as if they were trying to eat something they had vomited. And the first catechists resisted accepting Indian theology, because doing so implied recognizing the mistakes they themselves and the missionaries had committed.

To begin the profound awakening of our heart and spirit, we had to hold a ceremony to reconcile with our traditions and with the spirit of our ancestors. The main focus was to ask forgiveness for having allowed, or having contributed to, the destruction of our spiritual journey. The church officials present there asked for forgiveness on behalf of the first catechists, while the pastoral ministers did so on behalf of the first missionaries who arrived to these lands. The men and women elders, with tears in their eyes, granted us forgiveness in the name of our grandmothers and grandfathers. We all felt a very heavy weight lifted. This occasion brought us much clarity and strength to continue our journey in Indian theology.

#### **4. Some Concepts of Indian Theology**

##### ***What is Indian Theology?***

After several meetings on Indian theology, we came to the conclusion that our Indian theology is a phrase that communicates, shows, and accounts for the deep sense of the experience of God we have as native peoples. This theology, or spirituality as others call it, isn't something that has been born in recent years but rather something that has been present in every stage of our history as a people. It has been—and is—the leaven and the strength for our journey.

Indian theology or spirituality is present in practices and thinking of the Christian churches that believe in the possibility of developing a synthesis between the two spiritualities, in the traditional religion that preserves a large part of the native spirituality, and in the indigenous movements that resist the capitalist world system and that collaborate for "Another Possible World" together with other social movements.

##### ***Who Practices Indian Theology?***

We recognize that the subject of Indian theology is the community. The community experiences God in every moment of its life and therefore gives birth to its own theology. Those of us who have been the founders, promoters, or partners in the process undertake the work as if we were midwives who help the community to open its heart and speak of its own experience of God. Our companions are the pastoral ministers and professional theologians who participate in our meetings. These meetings are ecumenical, and the bishops participate as companions on the journey.

The original impetus for Indian theology came from Indigenous and non-Indigenous pastoral ministers of the entire continent. This was also the case in the Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas and the Mayan Region, but very quickly the coordination changed hands to community and parish leaders.

Currently, the program coordination is rich and vibrant, with young people and women representing the Chole, Tzeltal, Tzotzil, Tojolabal, the peninsular Maya of the Yucatan, and mestizo peoples. Most of the pastoral ministers who currently participate in the coordination efforts are Indigenous. This coordinating team has been trained or formed through workshops and certificate programs.

### ***Why Do We Practice Indian Theology?***

The theology that we do isn't meant to be published in books or discussed with academic theologians. Instead, first and foremost, it's intended to inspire, encourage, enliven, and guide the life of our communities...to nurture and strengthen the hearts of those working to cultivate, protect, and defend life and to walk in solidarity with our brother and sister peoples who dream and build Another Possible World, a new home, for all of us.

This theology is a voice of protest against any system of death and against the churches that seek to preserve a colonizing evangelization. It is also a voice for the construction of Another Possible World and Another Way of Being Church.

That's why, on several occasions, our leaders have been able to participate in meetings convened by the bishops' conferences and have insisted that "we, as Indigenous, aren't the world's problem but rather part of the solution." And we strive to be active within the church

without giving up our Indigenous identity. In our journey of Indian Christian theology, we aren't trying to leave or break away from the church—we're trying to be part of it, within it, fully involved and living our faith out of our own identity and heart.

### ***What are the Root Sources of Indian Theology?***

Our Indian Christian theology draws from two spiritual paths. First of all, we acknowledge as our own source the hundreds and millions of myths held in the heart of the elders, the Maya Codices;<sup>4</sup> the Popol Vuh;<sup>5</sup> the Books of Chilam Balam;<sup>6</sup> the Mayan Calendars;<sup>7</sup> the traditional rituals, ceremonies, music, and songs; the content of the prayers; the dances, dreams, and symbols, etc. And second, from the path of Christian spirituality, we acknowledge the greatness and sacredness of the Bible, the liturgy, rituals, traditions, etc.

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<sup>4</sup> The Maya Codices are bark-paper books, estimated to have been “written no earlier than the 12<sup>th</sup> century AD . . . and used to set dates for rituals, often by linking them to astronomical events. The pages of the codices usually depict a deity and include a series of glyphs describing what the deity is doing. Many pages of these books also contain lists of numbers that allowed the Maya to predict lunar and solar eclipses, the phases of the moon, and movements of Mars and Venus.” Nearly all of the Maya’s written records were burned by Franciscan missionaries in the mid-sixteenth century, and today, only three authenticated codices remain, all housed in Europe; there is a fourth, in Mexico City, whose authenticity is disputed. [Zorich, Zach. “The Maya Codices.” *Archaeology* 6:65 (2012) 29]

<sup>5</sup> Popol Vuh, which means “Book of the Community” in the K’iche’ Mayan language, narrates the Maya creation account, weaving together “stories concerning cosmologies, origins, traditions, and spiritual histories. It is considered by Mayans as their equivalent to the Christian Bible and is held in deep reverence by them.” (The Newberry. “Popol Vuh.” <https://www.newberry.org/popol-vuh>)  
“In this story, the Creators, Heart of Sky and six other deities including the Feathered Serpent, wanted to create human beings with hearts and minds who could “keep the days.” But their first attempts failed. When these deities finally created humans out of yellow and white corn who could talk, they were satisfied.” (Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of the American Indian. “Living Maya Time: Sun, Corn, and the Calendar—Creation Story of the Maya.” <https://maya.nmai.si.edu/the-maya/creation-story-maya>)

<sup>6</sup> The Books of Chilam Balam are “a group of documents written in Yucatec Maya [the language of the Maya of the Yucatan Peninsula] with Spanish characters during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. A principal source of knowledge of ancient Mayan custom, they contain myth, prophecy, medical lore, calendrical information, and historical chronicles. Although originally there were probably many documents, only a few remain. Those of Chumayel, Tizimín, and Maní (towns where they were written) are particularly important for Mayan history. *Chilam balam* means ‘secrets of the soothsayers.’” (Encyclopaedia Britannica. “Books of Chilam Balam: Mayan Literature.” <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Books-of-Chilam-Balam>)

<sup>7</sup> “...the ancient Maya developed one of the most accurate calendar systems in human history....[they] had a fascination with cycles of time. The most commonly known Maya cyclical calendars are the Haab [a 365-day cycle that approximates the solar year and is divided into 19 months], the Tzolk’in [a 260-day cycle that matches the cycles of the moon], and the Calendar Round [made from interweaving the Haab and Tzolk’in]. Aside from these, the Maya also developed the Long Count calendar to chronologically date mythical and historical events....This is very similar to the Gregorian calendar system that counts days, months, years, centuries, and millennia.” (Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of the American Indian. “Living Maya Time: Sun, Corn, and the Calendar—“The Calendar System.” <https://maya.nmai.si.edu/calendar/calendar-system>)



Because the Christian faith was imposed on us and the Bible considered the only source of revelation, it has not been easy to accept that the books and narratives that come from our Indigenous spirituality could also be the word of God. During the time of bishops Samuel Ruiz and Raúl [Vera],<sup>8</sup> we could read and reflect on some of the texts of the Popol Vuh and Chilam Balam in the Eucharistic celebrations. But with the arrival of Don Felipe, this stopped because he says they are not the word of God.

### ***What is the Language of Indian Theology?***

Our theology is not about discourse or books. Above all, it is about myth, symbol, and ritual. Thus far, it has been experiential, more so than reflection or discourse. And in this lie its strength and newness. Theological experience is what feeds the heart and fortifies hope. Trying to put our experience of God into words is very restrictive and limiting. Speaking, dancing, and being together in community is what fills our whole being, and there are no words that can thoroughly express all that we experience and feel. We have discovered that we can't talk about the Creator and Master Builder if we haven't first discovered or felt Him in our lives, in Mother Earth, in the universe, in our work, and in carrying out the tasks that He himself has entrusted to us.

## **5. The Road Indian Theology Has Traveled**

In order for Indian theology to emerge in the Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas, it was necessary to hold several courses and workshops with some of the diocese's pastoral associates and ecclesial servants from various parishes. There was a need to discuss the urgency of

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<sup>8</sup> Bishop Raúl Vera is a Dominican who was Coadjutor Bishop to Bishop Samuel Ruiz in the Diocese of San Cristóbal de las Casas. Now bishop of the Saltillo Diocese in northeastern Mexico, he is also president of the diocese's "Fray Juan de Larios" Center for Human Rights and president of CENAMI, the National Center for Assistance to Indigenous Missions.

dialogue between the Gospel and our culture...the necessity of a true inculturation or incarnation of the Gospel...and the recognition that God was already with our people long before the conquest and colonization. And that, as indigenous peoples, we also have a salvation history...we have sacred books, spiritual guides, wisdom, our own spirituality...and we also had great prophets.

The courses and workshops helped us to see, in a different way, our own history and the presence of spirituality in traditional religion. Before beginning to develop a pastoral program for Indian theology, the catechists had a discussion...and there was an attitude of rejection and refusal. They had been taught to say that, before the Bible and the Catholic Church arrived to our lands, our grandfathers and grandmothers were lost.

Interest began to grow in the communities, parishes, and the diocese as people began to discover the importance of Indian theology for the emergence of an autochthonous Church and also to understand that its strength and capacity to serve as “leaven” are instrumental in building Another Possible World and new home for everyone. As founders and pioneers of the Indian theology program, we began to work with parishes that weren’t familiar with it or didn’t have the support of pastoral agents. We saw the need to strengthen the coordination teams by including more participation by members from the grassroots.

At the same time, we instituted a process for training new leaders. Nowadays, the coordination is well established. And all of us take on the work of reclaiming and strengthening:

- Our historical memory
- Our symbols
- Our mythologies
- Our spiritual guides, wise men and women
- Our sacred places
- Our ceremonies
- Our cultural values
- Our traditional music and dance
- Our sacred books
- Our dream of *Buen Vivir* or a new home for everyone<sup>9</sup>

Indian theology has been growing in the heart of every person...in the hearts of communities, parishes, the region, and the continent. We have held 25 conferences of Mexico's Mayan peoples. Regionally, in Mesoamerica, we have held eight conferences and another eight at the continental level.

The practice of our Mayan Indian theology is supported by the people who participate and the parishes that host the conferences. We've learned that it's sustainable if we work at the grassroots community level.

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<sup>9</sup> This is very loosely translated as "living well," but it's a much more complex and all-encompassing concept. It "has existed as a worldview for millennia and, at its core, is about communities living sustainably with mother nature....Maria Estela Barco Huerta of DESMI...eloquently described *buen vivir* as being based on a concept of deep, great respect, or *Ich'el Ta Muk* in the Mayan language, that each person has for the spirit, or *Ch'ulel*, of every other living being, which includes humans, animals, nature, and the spiritual realm....Professor Mauricio Phélan of the Central University of Venezuela...explained three distinct harmonies which exist within communities practicing *buen vivir*: (1) Harmony within yourself: physical, mental, and spiritual components; (2) Harmony between communities: between yourself and your family, your community, your neighbors, your colleagues, institutions, and markets; (3) Harmony with nature: mutual balance between human activities and environmental health. When harmony with and amongst individuals, communities, and the natural world are achieved, then *buen vivir* is achieved." (<https://www.idex.org/blog/2016/09/buen-vivir-old-but-fresh-perspective-on-global-development>)

In our journey, we've reflected on some of the following topics:

- Indian theology as leaven and strength in the effort to construct a world without evil
- Indian theology and spirituality in our Mayan altars
- Indian theology and the youth, our children
- Our spirituality of water, the wellspring of life<sup>10</sup>
- Our spiritual understanding of corn (*maize*) and our task to serve as its guardian<sup>11</sup>
- Our spirituality of Mother Earth and our task to defend her<sup>12</sup>
- Our experience of God in migration
- Our heart's dream—Buen Vivir
- The Mayan calendar, path of spiritual growth

## **6. The Methodology, or Way, of Indian Theology**

In our workshops and conferences on Indian theology, we cover five steps:

STEP 1—EXPERIENCE AND FEEL THE LIFE OF THE PEOPLE. This theology is born out of the life of our communities, out of the experience we have of God in the life we are living. It's a life mixed with flowers and thorns, joys and sorrows. To do theology, we must live deeply and feel deeply.

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<sup>10</sup> For example, the Maya regard natural wells called *cenotes* as sacred. "Ancient Maya believed that the rain god Chaak resided in caves and...cenotes. Maya farmers today in Mexico's parched Yucatán still appeal to Chaak for the gift of rain." (<http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2013/08/sacred-cenotes/guillermoprieto-text>)

<sup>11</sup> As Juana Batz Puac, a K'iche' Maya Day Keeper, explains, "Our Creation Story [Popol Vuh] teaches us that the first Grandparents of our people were made from white and yellow corn. Maize is sacred to us because it connects us with our ancestors. It feeds our spirit as well as our bodies." Day Keepers are specially trained Maya in the "highlands of Guatemala who have a calling to become calendar keepers. They use the sacred 260-day calendar as a symbolic system of values to guide their communities." (<https://maya.nmai.si.edu/the-maya/creation-story-maya>)

<sup>12</sup> For the Maya, "the concept of 'Mother Earth' is taken literally. Before planting or construction, the Maya offer a prayer of forgiveness to the Earth for the injury that's done to her by the tools, and they offer an explanation for why the work is necessary for the crops or to shelter the family and so on." (Thomas Hart. *The Ancient Spirituality of the Modern Maya*. Albuquerque: UNM Press, 2008. p. 30)

**STEP 2—SHARE IN EACH OTHER’S LIVES.** A second step is to share life’s problems and pleasures, to join and bring together—in community—our sadness and joy. The theologian of the people searches for, or creates, the spaces where we can talk about what makes us brothers and sisters in this life.

**STEP 3—TOUCH THE HEART OF GOD.** This is when, together, we decide to encounter God deeply in a ceremony in a sacred place, which could be a cave, a hill, a lagoon, or a church. In the ceremony, we open our hearts and our spirits to listen to God’s heart...to hear what He senses and says in light of the reality we are living...to hear once again His heart’s desire, or dream, for humanity.

The ceremony is a special space where we enter into the life of God in order to look at things through Him, through His eyes. And so, we separate ourselves from normal life to enter into His life. The celebration helps us to open our hearts and our minds to identify God’s response to our needs. In the ceremony, we reflect on the sacred texts of our ancestors and of the Bible...we give offerings to God...we say prayers...we dance...and we invite, or ask for, dreams.

**STEP 4—ARTICULATE GOD’S RESPONSE.** During or after the ceremony, there are those who hear, feel, see, or dream God’s response. After finishing the ceremony or experiencing God’s presence, some of those who serve the community explain to us the response that God is giving. Knowing how to read or interpret God’s reply is a service undertaken by those who possess considerable wisdom and hearts that are in harmony with the heart of God. In our conferences, too, all of us together—with the help of the Spirit—seek

to understand God's response or invitation. In this way, we re-learn, collectively, how to look for God's answer in our lives. Often, the message we receive is an invitation for us to take on a commitment or a task in order to change our lives and change our reality.

STEP 5—BUILD A NEW REALITY. Coming down the hill, up out of the cave, or leaving the celebration, we return to reality to live out what we experienced together with God. In this step, we bring all that strength back with us and work for change in our lives. When we make the Mayan altar, we celebrate being at one with ourselves, with Mother Earth, with all of creation, and with God. And then, afterwards, we must live out this harmony at home and in the community. In this step, we have to give witness in our daily lives to what we believe, what we celebrate, and what we say.

## **7. The Present State of Indian Theology**

Our awakening as Indigenous peoples continues to evolve. We've quickly moved from a passive resistance to an active one, making our voice heard—in protest and proposals—in churches and in society. In the churches, those of us promoting Christian Indian theology have said that we want to be Christians without giving up our Indigenous identity...and that, for the good of humanity and Mother Earth, we must sit down to dialogue respectfully with openness of heart and spirit.

Our awakening as Indigenous is a delight for many people, but it also causes worry and fear for others. In the institutional Church, there are those who support and accompany us in our awakening and on our theological journey...there are those who see our awakening, and speak of it, with fear and suspicion...and there are those who openly speak out against Indian theology and who search for ways to bring a stop to it. However, we say that there is no

turning back on this journey.

The Catholic Church and some Protestant churches have gradually become, especially in terms of statements and documents, our main ally in reclaiming and restoring Indian spirituality and theology. In particular, in its Third Synod and the last 10 years of its Pastoral Plans, the Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas has recognized Indian theology's contribution and has made commitments to strengthen it. Nevertheless, in practice, instead of carrying out the work and ministry assigned to them, many pastoral ministers ignore or block our development. In Protestant churches, there is much work to be done.

In the reality in which we find ourselves as Indigenous people, we keep re-encountering our rejected self and spirit, our sacred spaces, our history as seen by our grandfathers and grandmothers, our forgotten elders, our forgotten myths and symbols, our ceremonies, our gifts and charisms, our sacred books and texts, our spirituality, and our dreams.

On our journey, we have realized how important it is, in all the processes we are creating, to ensure that everything is handed down and passed on. So, we invite and impassion the hearts of the new generation to be nourished by the wisdom and spirituality of our ancestors. These days, many young men and women are drinking in the ancestral knowledge. They are awakening and finding their own path and their own role, or mission. There are 500 to 600 representatives of the Indian theology program who come to our annual conferences, and 30% of them are young people.

We continue working towards the reconciliation of the two spiritualities that dwell in our heart (the Mayan and Christian spiritualities). We continue breaking the bonds that make us deny who we are, where we come from, and where we are going. It has also been necessary to

initiate a journey of reconciliation with our spiritual guides—men and women elders—and with traditional religion so that, together, we can strengthen our spirituality, protect life, and defend Mother Earth.

## **8. The Fruits of Indian Theology**

- We joyously undertake and celebrate our work in the evangelization of our communities, and we collaborate resolutely in the building of an autochthonous Church.
- We contribute to strengthening the prophetic voice of our communities, parishes, and diocese.
- We reclaim and integrate into our Christian celebrations our traditional symbols, signs, ritual drink, music and dance, and our myths and sacred books.
- We reclaim and strengthen our traditional healing ceremonies...our ceremonies for Mother Earth, for water, and for our crops...rituals for sowing, protecting life, initiation ceremonies, etc.
- We reclaim the importance of dreams in our personal, family, and community life. And we interpret their importance in community to find clarity and strength for our journey.
- Even if we belong to different spiritual paths, we want our hearts to meet, to encounter each other, so that together we can cultivate life and defend Mother Earth.
- We recognize that the strength of our resilience and our life's work lies in prayer and for that reason, we make pilgrimages to our sacred places to nurture and strengthen our hearts to live out our mission.
- As a pastoral program of Indian theology, we have succeeded in including our input in the Third Diocesan Synod and the pastoral plans of the diocese and parishes. We also



see and celebrate the contribution of Indian theology in the journey of our communities and other pastoral areas in the diocese.

- It has helped us to acknowledge our dignity, to appreciate the seeds God has sown in our hearts, and to sow them into practice so that our communities persevere and live on.
- We reclaim our Mayan calendars as a path to human and spiritual growth, and as a guide to living in harmony with ourselves, with the community, with Mother Earth, and with all of creation.
- We feel empowered to continue strengthening the autochthonous Church and to add our efforts to the building of a better world.
- More women and young people are participating in our conferences. They value the wisdom of our grandfathers and grandmothers, and when they have the floor, their comments and thoughts are taken into account.
- Parish representatives of Indian theology programs are more involved in coordinating the conferences and also in accompanying the community processes.
- We have awakened as a community to protect and defend our Mother Earth, our lands, our native seeds and our rivers, lakes, and springs from the threats of megaprojects like mining, hydropower, genetically modified corn, superhighways, etc.
- We recognize the importance of continuing to bolster our cultural values and our spirituality, because they are our strength and leaven in cultivating the *Buen Vivir* that we, as a people, dream of.

## **9. Challenges for Indian Theology**

- Ensure that our Indian theology doesn't lose its vitality and mission: to awaken hearts and consciences...to generate a spirituality that protects life and defends Mother

Earth...to be leaven and strength in the development of alternative ways of life...and to bolster the autochthonous church in the diocese.

- Inspire more participation by women and the younger generation—boys, girls, and young adults—in community and parish Indian theology programs. Seek creative ways to hand down the ancestral wisdom and spirituality and to train them to carry out the mission they are discovering.
- Create spaces so that the spiritual ways and Indian theology present in traditional religion, Christian churches, and Indigenous movements may encounter each other, be nourished, and be strengthened.
- Keep working to decolonize our minds, hearts, and spirits and at the same time, help churches to overcome their colonizing philosophy and attitude.
- Take on the task of systematizing our Indian spirituality and theology in order to continue strengthening our communities, to share with other sister theologies, and to prepare for genuine dialogue with Christian churches and theologies.

## **10. Final Thoughts**

Indian theology's 25-year journey has been one of many lessons. There have been suffering and fatigue, setbacks and advances, disappointments and hopes. There have been many rewards in the personal, family, community, and parish lives of those of us who have been developing and mentoring these programs. Nevertheless, we realize that there is still a long road ahead. Several of the men and women pioneers on this journey are no longer with us, but we know that, from some other place, they are watching and walking with us.

We realize that, when our hearts and spirit have fully awakened, we as Maya will take the paths that make us feel the freest to sing our own songs, dance our own dances, think our own

thoughts, speak in our own voice, live out our mission on this earth, and strengthen and affirm the *Buen Vivir* that we will leave to future generations.

May God grant that our hearts meet...that our colonized minds and hearts are healed...and that the colonizing minds and hearts of others are transformed in order to unite our spiritual efforts and energies to make possible the creation of a more human and divine world for everyone and everything.

Thank you very much.