

DOCUMENT 64



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**Ethnocide:
Mission Accomplished?**

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Cover photo: Indigenous man from the Paraguayan Chaco: the face of a hunter converted into a labourer, 1979 (photo: Luke Holland/RP Ediciones).

IWGIA Document No. 64

Ethnocide: Mission Accomplished?

By Ticio Escobar

**Copenhagen
August 1989**

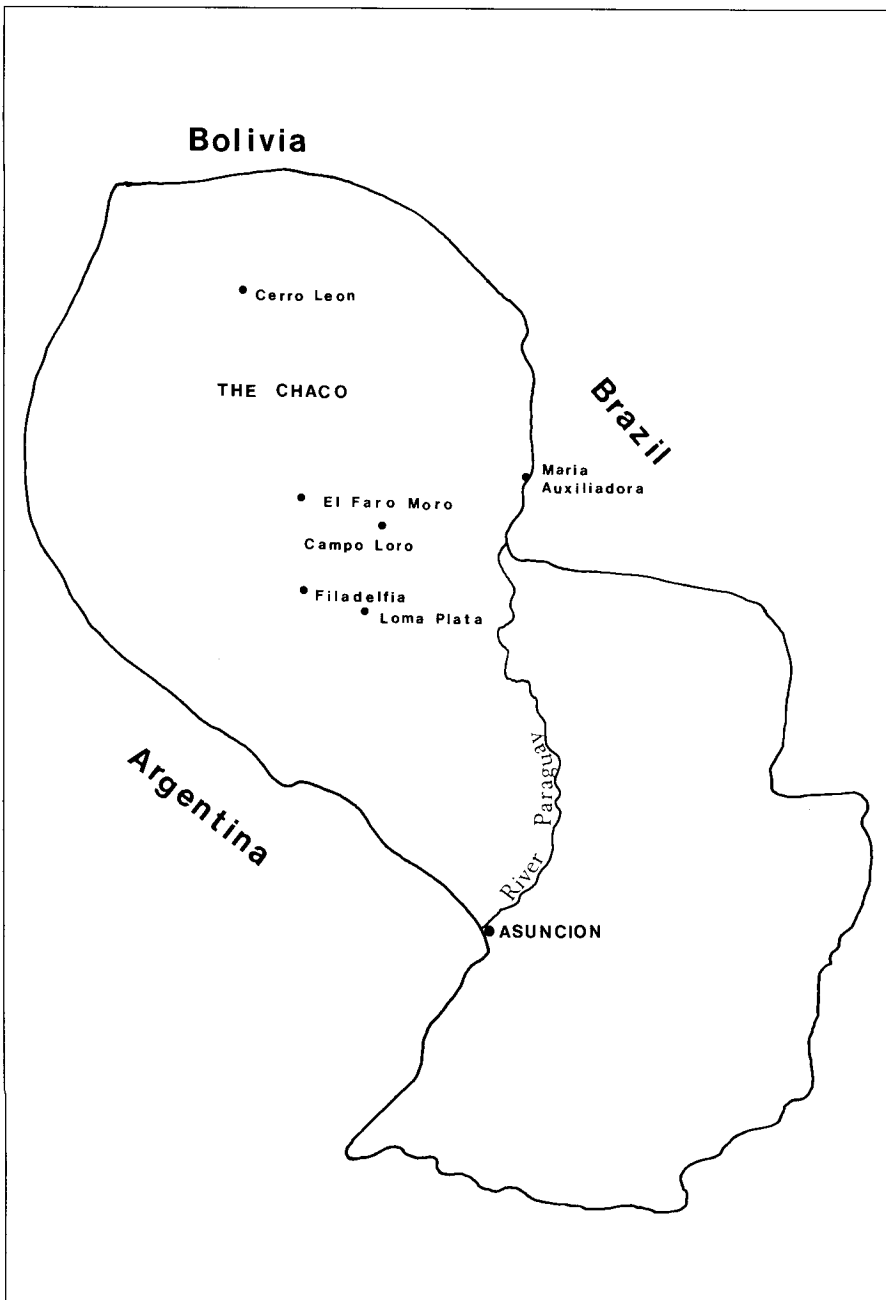
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This document was originally published in Spanish in the book *Misión: Etnocidio* which was published by RP Ediciones in Paraguay in 1988. The translation into English has been made by Richard Downham. The introduction and postscript were written in 1989 and deal with recent events in Paraguay.

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Map of Paraguay.

Introduction

In April, 1989, a Joint Commission, representing four Paraguayan institutions which have been concerned about the practices of the new Tribes Mission among the Ayoreode (also known as Ayoreo), tried to gain access to the mission station of Campo Loro. The aim of the Commission was to look at conditions in the mission and ascertain the fate of the Ayoreode group, the Totobiegosode, who had been brought into the mission in 1979 and in 1986. The introduction to this document is a denunciation of what happened at Campo Loro and demonstrates that the NTM are as active as ever in Paraguay, preserving their control over the indigenous peoples of the region.

Asunción, 21st April 1989

To the Director of the Paraguayan Institute for Indigenous Affairs (INDI), Don Numa Mallorquín

We are contacting you to describe an extremely serious event that happened on Sunday, April 16th, in the New Tribes Mission "Campo Loro". On this date a Joint Commission of members of the Centre of Anthropological Studies from the Universidad Católica, the National Missionary Team of the Paraguayan Episcopal Conference, the Paraguayan Commission of Human Rights and the Commission of Solidarity with Indigenous Peoples, met at Campo Loro.

They spoke with missionaries and indigenous people with the purpose of obtaining information about the current situation of the Totobiegosode, who at the end of the month of December 1986 were captured in the forest and brought to the mission.

The Commission, which consisted of Miguel Chase Sardi, the priest José Zanardini, Ticio Escobar and Oleg Vysokolán, could not fulfill its task for the following reasons.

We arrived at the mission at 11.30 am on Sunday, April 16th and were welcomed by a large group of indigenous people, children and grown-ups, who, friendly and curious, led us to the missionaries' houses.

There, we were stopped by a member of the mission, Mr Robert Ketchump, who received us in a hostile and distrustful manner. When we asked to enter the Ayoreode village, he told us that even Kajoide, one of the representatives on the Indigenous Council, would refuse to grant us authorisation.

We asked Robert Ketchump to let us get in touch with Robert Powell who was in charge of the mission. When he went to find him, the children and the young people who had followed us crept closer, but as soon as they saw the two

missionaries approaching on motor bikes, they quickly withdrew and remained at a distance.

Without greeting us in any way or listening to our reasons for coming, Robert Powell welcomed us with insults and curses. He called us liars and accused us of having caused trouble in the mission. When we suggested discussing these matters with him, he refused categorically and ordered us to leave the mission.

We were immediately surrounded by members of the Indigenous Council who prevented us from talking to the other indigenous people who had drawn closer again and were trying to speak. In spite of the fence between us, we managed to show them some photographs of the Totobiegosode captured in 1979 and they shouted to us that some of them were there at the mission, some were in Filadelfia and others were dead.

We asked to talk to the Council representative, but Mr. Powell refused and ordered us to leave immediately. By this time he was completely beside himself, screaming at us and threatening us with an accusing finger. He then spoke in Ayoreo to members of the Council, evidently influencing them against us, because from then on they began to react more aggressively. We were shoved and pushed towards the aeroplane under a rain of threats and, fearing that the increasing unrest would lead to a dangerous situation developing in Campo Loro, one of the Commission members said to the missionaries: "you are inciting the indigenous people to be violent; we demand that you stop this aggression immediately and we hold you directly responsible for our security". To this Mr. Powell responded: "they do not want to be Catholics, they do not want to be savages, so go away. You are not welcome here". In the face of the growing hostility we decided to return without having fulfilled the aim of our visit.

We bring this information to your attention in order that the Indigenous Institute of Paraguay will take measures to avoid a repetition of the events which took place in the New Tribes Mission in other parts of Paraguay. Indigenous peoples are not the private property of missionaries, in this case, the North American New Tribes Mission.

The national society has the right and the obligation to know what is going on in the religious missions and to seek information about the situation of the indigenous Paraguayans living under their responsibility. Some of these sects, like the NTM, are simply fanatical and ethnocidal.

We are placing ourselves at your disposal in order to give you all the information about this aggressive, contemptible and shameful conduct on part of the members of the above-mentioned mission.

With our most sincere regards,

Chase Sardi, T. Escobar, O. Vysokolán, J. Zanardini

Chapter I: The Holy War in the Chaco

The Facts: Hunting the Hunters

On the morning of December 30th, 1986, in a Totobiegosome forest village, a warning cry was heard from Bajó - a woman who was gathering fruits nearby - warning that *coñone* (Whites) were approaching. The women and children hid themselves in the forest while the men prepared themselves to defend the village.

Suddenly the first eight men of a group of 34 converted Guidaigosode rushed into the village insisting that they came in peace. But the Totobiegosome, afraid that the Guidaigosode would repeat the violent attacks which had taken place on previous similar occasions, quickly attacked the intruders, killing five and injuring another four.

Seeing that the Guidaigosode did not react, the Totobiegosome put down their arms, called the women and children back into the village and decided to listen to the invaders. Together, they buried the dead and made peace according to Ayoreode custom. Then they talked and discussed for many hours until, by the middle of the afternoon, the missionised Ayoreode had persuaded the forest dwellers to accompany them to the mission from which they had come. Once again, the evangelisation process had started.

How do the missionised Ayoreode find the forest dwellers? We have based our brief description on the reports of the Commission of Private Indigenist Organisations (EIP) and the New Tribes Mission (NTM). On December 23rd, NTM pilot, Dean Littin, had spotted the Totobiegosome village from the air. Two days later, during the solemn Christmas ritual in the church at Campo Loro, the headquarters of the evangelical mission, Littin told about 120 members of the congregation of his discovery.

The missionaries did not waste time: by the following morning they had already taken four converted Ayoreode on a reconnaissance flight in order to show them exactly where the Totobiegosome settlement was situated. That same afternoon there was a general meeting where they made their evangelising plans: the Guidaigosode would take the message of salvation to their brothers sunk in the shadows of paganism and try to bring them to Campo Loro, where they would be civilised and come to know the true God. Norman Keefe, the leader of the mission, was informed of the plan and he organised the trip.

Provisions and water were gathered for the journey and they prepared firearms, Bibles and items, such as clothes, utensils and other presents, in order to attract the "savages". The report of the EIP describes what happened:

On the 27th, at 10 am, they left Campo Loro in a convoy of three small lorries driven by the missionaries, Norman Keefe, Robert Ketcham and Dwight Brown. The three lorries left the men at the edge of the forest path and then returned to Campo Loro that same night. The Ayoreode personnel who took part in the expedition were: Cadui and Umasi, Pastors of Campo Loro church, Dejabi and Pajei a Deacon and an advisor, also from Campo Loro.

Three days later the encounter described above took place and then, four days later, on January 4th, 1987, the Ayoreode reached the mission at Campo Loro:

At 6.30 pm, there was a service of thanksgiving with the participation of, and talks from, those who had been wounded. In the talks they praised God for His protection and asked him to receive the Totobiegosode and not to take any vengeance...The Totobiegosode, generally, had a look of suffering, with frightened and terrorised faces.

From the point of view of the missionaries, the campaign had been successful: with only a few dead, the Ayoreode could be redeemed from their state of barbarism, pardoned for their sins and perhaps even one day accepted as civilised beings.

The Background

The Ayoreode constitute the most recent case of indigenous forest peoples who have come into sudden contact with the national society of Paraguay. They have been forced to pass through its institutions and bathed in civilisation so that they can become fit for so-called “integration”. Before the Ayoreode, the Aché were colonised in the last years of the 1960s and at the beginning of the 1970s. Prior to this period they had always lived in their traditional forests resisting contact with the Whites. (For want of a better word and in spite of its ambiguities, we use the word “White” to refer to non-indigenous people in general.)

The Ayoreode, a nomadic hunter-gatherer people, live in the northern region of the Paraguayan Chaco and in Eastern Bolivia. Until the 1960s, they lived in their ancestral homeland. According to Von Bremen, the Ayoreode lack a global political organisation and are divided into local groups which are defined by names based on ecological characteristics within their territory or on important events which have taken place in the area. The denominations of the groups are very flexible and can alter according to changes of membership, fusions and subdivisions (Von Bremen, 1988:19 & 20). For example, the indigenous groups who live in Campo Loro today are called, “Campolorogosome” and those established in Maria Auxiliadora, “Mariaauxiliadorogosome”. The most significant distinctions between the Ayoreode groups nowadays is between the Garaigosome (rural people), the Guidaigosode (village people), and Totobiegosode (people who live in the peccary – wild pig – region).

The Garaigosode were contacted by the Salesian order at the end of 1962 and they live predominantly in its mission of Maria Auxiliadora. The Guidaigosode began to settle at the mission of the New Tribes sect at the end of 1966 and today they live mainly at Campo Loro and, to a lesser extent, at Maria Auxiliadora. The Totobiegosode were contacted by the NTM more recently, in 1979, and still have sub-groups living in the forest.

At the end of the Paraguayan-Bolivian war, known as the “Chaco war” (1932-35), the Ayoreode had fleeting contact with the White world, but it was recently, at the end of the 1950s, when an expansive colonisation front systematically began to advance on Ayoreode territory that they were cornered and their land reduced metre by metre.

At this time, hundreds of outsiders suddenly appeared in the area: hunters came to take ocelot and jaguar skins, military personnel installed posts and opened up roads, oil and construction companies as well as cattle ranches began to operate. They gave no notice of their arrival, but instead invaded traditional Ayoreode territory, pillaged Ayoreode sources of survival and threatened their lives.

The Ayoreode resisted as best they could: there was a period of hostility and conflict which left dead and wounded on both sides, though obviously it was the indigenous people who suffered most: firearms and the diseases of civilisation put them in a position of brutal disadvantage.

The whole black legend of the “Moors”, as the Ayoreode were then called, was invented in these violent times by the Whites to portray a picture of warlike adversaries. The new occupants of Ayoreode lands say the conflict was a real war. This argument justified their firing on the “Moors” or hunting them. A well known illustration of this period is the account that any soldier who brought in an Ayoreode head would gain as a reward release from military service (V. Chase, 1972. 13/14).

As soon as they caught a glimpse of an opportunity, the missionaries arrived, presenting themselves as the “peaceful alternative”. From the end of the 1950s the Salesians searched for Ayoreode in order to bring them to their mission. Ikievi, a young Ayoreode, caught by the Paraguayans in 1956, was turned over to the missionaries and used by them as bait to attract a group of Garaigosode, take them out of the darkness and “bring them to the light of the faith”. In 1962, the first Salesian mission was founded among the Ayoreode and was finally established at Maria Auxiliadora in 1963, outside of traditional Ayoreode territory.

From the end of the 1950s, the New Tribes Mission was also involved in rounding up the Ayoreode, with whom they had already established missions in Bolivia. However, it was in 1966 that the NTM were able to make contact with

the Guidaigosode and initiate their missionary work with them. Two years later, the mission moved further south (to the vicinity of Cerro León). They installed themselves at a place called “Faro Moro” in an attempt to entice the Ayoreode away from their traditional territories towards new centres of colonisation (in this case the Mennonite colonies). Eventually, in 1979, they settled at Campo Loro, the present headquarters of the New Tribes Mission.

From both mission stations, Maria Auxiliadora and Campo Loro, successive expeditions of converted Ayoreode have left to find forest Indians. According to the report of INDI (Paraguayan Indigenist Institute – the official state indigenist organisation):

Similar incursions (undertaken to find the Totobiegosode), the majority of them bloody, were carried out by the Guidaigosode in 1964 and 1965 from the mission of Maria Auxiliadora. Similar expeditions were conducted in 1968 and 1971 by the Guidaigosode, assisted by the NTM, but there were no Totobiegosode killed then. The events of last December (1986) are, in fact, links in a chain events, the latest over a period of time. (Diario La Tarde 6.3.1987)

In addition to these incursions we must add that of 1979, when 24 Totobiegosode were captured with the traditional NTM method of using human bait (27 Guidaigosode), locating the indigenous people from the air and then tracking them down. The 1979 raid was the first time the NTM missionaries had made extensive contact with a group of Totobiegosode. According to the reports, there were no Ayoreode deaths, but the leader of the Totobiegosode group, his wife and daughter refused to take food and died immediately after being captured. Of the 24 Totobiegosode, half of the women suffered spontaneous abortions. As Von Bremen writes, the missionaries were forced to realise that there are many ways to kill a Totobiegosode (1988:22).

The Consequences: When the “Moors” became Ayoreode again

When we consider all of these relatively recent events which affected the Ayoreode, we can conclude that what occurred in December 1986 was not out of the ordinary. It was just another incident – not even the most serious – in the long history of missionary ethnocide which tries to save the “savages” even at the costs of some lives.

However the case of the Totobiegosode, invaded by indigenous evangelicals (who previously shared with them the same culture and history), was different. It moved public opinion and shocked some sections of Paraguayan national society which felt that without their knowledge, they were involved in a dark history of Indian hunts and fanatical persecution.

Suddenly the blood-stained Indian who attacked colonists and fled secretly into the forest without leaving any trace was shown to many White people as a man who, cornered and with his dignity under threat, was making a last gesture of resistance. Eventually, he realised that there was no choice but to turn himself over to those who were going to subjugate him. The “Moor” was converted into an Ayoreode.

Indeed, during 1987 the press developed denunciation campaigns as never before. Various indigenist institutions, both lay and missionary, anthropologists and citizens groups, demanded a clarification of the facts, an investigation into the work of the NTM and some guarantee that these events would not be repeated. Obviously, there were also other opinions, but these were less vocal.

Nevertheless, time, which always passes quickly when there is nothing new apart from reports and clarifications, helps to erase the memory of the events and calms the concerns of the public. The NTM, taking advantage of this, immediately abandoned its traditional hermetic silence to publish a clumsy and cynical declaration which did not convince anyone.

INDI issued a timid report, more preoccupied with describing the characteristics of Ayoreode culture than with setting out the responsibilities of the missionaries. Moreover, INDI did not make an intervention which could have contributed effectively to protecting the physical integrity of the Totobiegosode and the autonomy of the forest dwellers.

In the end, the NTM was not even expelled from FEPI (Forum for Private Indigenist Organisations). The North American sect continued to participate in FEPI meetings and collaborate in projects with institutions which, only recently, had been furious at its activities.

After several months, no one spoke about the matter any more. The NTM worked, probably quietly plotting their next excursion to save the last unbelievers by forcing them to a foreign heaven. In spite of this, various sections of Paraguayan society, still feeling horror and fear at what the NTM had done, became more aware that the Ayoreode, as all indigenous peoples, should have a right to a better fate. No indigenous group should have to deny their identity in order to find a place on the map of Paraguay and to become a part of its history and future. Even though this awareness stems from a long term perspective, it constitutes a certain guarantee for the Ayoreode. If only there is time to appeal to it.



The Ayoreode surround an employee of the Williams Brothers company in one of their first contacts with members of the national society. The employee has painted his chest according to Ayoreode tradition (photo: Pedro Dotto 1958/RP Ediciones).

Chapter II: The Missions of the Mission

The Spiritual Conquest

When we referred above to the impact of sudden secular colonisation on Ayoreode territory, we mentioned that the missionaries, both the Salesians and the New Tribes Mission, had hardly announced the beginning of the evangelisation process before they quickly ensured the completion of their task. This is significant because it indicates that, in principle, missionaries are the other face of colonial expansion. Both secular and sacred bodies share the same project – colonisation. The “spiritual conquest” was just as fundamental to the colonisation of the Americas as military and civil conquest. Throughout the centuries the “spiritual” provided the “secular” with theological arguments for its actions. They used the salvationist theory of the “just war”, established by the Bull of Pope Alexander VI at the end of the 15th century to integrate the indigenous peoples into the subordinate place to which they had been assigned by the Conquest.

In fact, these different methods of conquest were not irreconcilable and the Cross has functioned well as a complement to the sword. The Spanish conquistador, Ruiz de Montoya, recognised this when he wrote: “the spiritual conquest is *mbo aguiyé* (a bringer of good news) to all aspects of life; all means, both peaceful and violent, share this end...” (Susnik 1978:131). Padre Sepp also admitted this when he said: “the poor fishing net of Saint Peter was not incompatible with a well sharpen sword” (Sepp, 1973:188).

The co-ordination between the political-military and the religious conquest has been described well in the work of Ginés de Sepúlveda from the 16th century, *Tratado sobre las justas causas de la guerra con los indios*:

The Spanish had every right to exercise control over the barbarians of the New World...who...were so inferior to them...like children to adults, women to men, cruel and inhuman beings to gentle people, intemperate to controlled and moderate people, finally, I would say, as monkeys to humans.

The author then asks what greater benefit could be given to these slaves of nature:

...than to submit them to the power of those who have converted barbarians who are scarcely humans into civilised humans and as far as is possible, from vicious to honourable and honest people; from uncouth slaves of demons into Christians loved by the true God, and of the true religion...I claim that barbarians can be subjugated to our control under the same right as they can be made to hear the Gospel...how can these barbarians pray if they have not already been subjugated? (See Lipschutz, 1975:71ff.)

Absolutist, intolerant, authoritarian and ethnocentric, the Catholic colonial evangelisation was portrayed as the bearer of a true redeeming mission: to free the “poor wretches” from their destiny as savages, from their primeval condition and elevate them to a plane of humanity which coincided with the lowest rung of a vertical and hierarchical system.

Indigenous people were presented by the missionaries as a picture of inferiority which became almost an obsession in Jesuit literature. Peramás, for example, wrote:

The Jesuits came afterwards and set up a Crucifix; they have achieved a victory, converting to our faith those who obstinately and blindly rendered homage to the demon and converted to civic and political life those who have no more than the appearance of rationality (Furlong, 1952).

Lorenzo maintains:

Their reasoning (that of indigenous people) excels so little that they hardly differ from the irrational; they seem more like standing animals than men with souls, or like satyrs or fauns of the ancient poets (Lorenzo, 1847:412).

Sepp says:

From this story it is clear how little intelligence our native Paraguayans have, so that the first missionaries doubted that the Indians had sufficient judgement to be able to receive the Holy Sacraments (Sepp, 1973:99).

Cardiel also says:

The missionaries discovered some of the most barbaric, bloody and uncivilized Indians in the world...and by means of continuous work and mortal dangers, they managed to domesticate those wild beasts, reducing them first to rationality in large villages and later to the Christian life (Cardiel, 1913:518).

From these prejudices, the task of the missionary clearly emerges: the indigenous peoples should forswear their universe of feelings and accept, *en masse*, Christianity. Indigenous religion was considered as a collection of “childish nonsense without reflection or cult” (Cardiel in Ortiz, 1969:75), “superstitions and the madness of the sorcerers” (Del Techo, 1897:35), “silliness and foolishness” (Montoya in Maeder, 1979:38), or sorcery from “the hands of malicious charlatans” (Sepp *idem*.).

According to these sources, indigenous religion should be radically eliminated for the benefit of the dominant religion – indeed, for the benefit of the system of conquest as a whole. Colombres writes that from the first encounter with indigenous peoples:

Long sermons were recited to the indigenous groups about a God who admitted no other god by his side, about a Pope who represented legitimacy, and about the invading army which was the official agent of the Pope and the military arm of the church, charged with evangelising that corner of the world (Colombres, 1977:133).

The missionary methodology of these times is well explained by José de Acosta in his work, *De Procuranda Indorum Salutte* (Preaching the Gospel in the Indies – the New World). Schwartzmann summarises it as follows:

Unmask the sorcerers; refute them, ridicule their foolishness; separate them, punish them; stress the outward forms of Christian ritual, because ‘the animal people are delighted and entertained by them; destroy the monuments of superstition; ‘imbue gently the tender souls of the children, who are not yet chained with the superstition of their parents, with the Christian discipline and customs...and teach them to make fun of, and ridicule, the trinkets and childishness of their parents. Attract and excite the children with presents and praises, and shame and frighten the older people with the example set by the children’. Since then, this missionary strategy has expanded and preaching in indigenous languages follows the guidance of Acosta point by point (Schvartzman, 1987:158).

This is purely and simply ethnocide – institutional ethnocide, systematic ethnocide. Beyond the declared redemptive objectives, the consequences of the destruction of the indigenous cultures themselves is that the people submit themselves with resignation to integration with the western civilising model.

The missionaries, of course, frequently acted as a brake for the civil hyper-exploitation of the colonising process because they were an alternative to armed confrontation. They also provided a possibility for indigenous peoples to share a God who would protect them from the stigma of their origin and they offered them, at least theoretically, the right to equality.

These advantages were offered to the indigenous peoples, but were the foundation for a paternalism which the missionaries then exploited, to the greatest extent possible, in order to generate dependency. The missionaries then had the power in their hands to convert the indigenous peoples into human beings and defend them from the excesses of the *encomienda* (feudal peonage system), the *rancheadas* (military attacks) and extermination.

The Jesuits, especially, were sophisticated strategists of domination and represented well the characteristics of this “spiritual conquest” which was based more on the subtlety of seduction, pressure and moral blackmail than on the violence of physical force, though this was not rejected as a last resort.

The Latin American states, which emerged in the independence period, found an interesting solution to the indigenous problem in this paternalistic protectionism. They decided to give the Church the thankless task of Christianising/civilising the indigenous peoples in their countries and they feigned ignorance of the fate of these peoples when they were brought under control in the missions.

In this manner the mechanism of the “spiritual conquest” continued in full force after the colonial era and the missions basically retained their classical tasks, which were readapted to the new needs of the national society. This had two effects. On the one hand it was consistent with a policy of cushioning the clash of indigenous peoples with “civilisation”, by gradually measuring out the deculturising devices so that indigenous peoples, relatively isolated in the mission stations, could slowly absorb patterns of western life. On the other hand, missionisation facilitated the neo-colonial project of integration into the evolving society (an integration which assumed the prior disintegration of their own culture).

Thus, torn out of their territories, hitched on as the last waggons in an alien system, emptied of their beliefs, filled with a foreign religion and clothed in the rags of Christians, the indigenous peoples were ready for the meeting with White society, which peacefully assigned them a place within its system.

The Catholic colonial mission model has remained intact into the 20th century. If we look at the concept of conversion which the Salesian order uses in the Chaco, we find, even now, the full force of the “spiritual conquest”. The missions constitute, according to the Salesians, “a divine enterprise...towards the light of the faith,...an enterprise of souls” which attempts “to tear away the infernal claws from those many savages, who submit to ignorance and barbarous behaviour, in order to bring them to the light of the faith, of civilization, of Christianity” (Alacrón and Pittini, 1926:85/6).

On the basis of this general situation in Latin America, the anthropological symposium which took place at Barbados in 1971, organised by the University of Bern and the World Council of Churches, strongly denounced the retrogressive character of traditional missions, which they accused of reproducing colonialist relations of domination:

The missionary presence has always implied the imposition of criteria and patterns of thought and behaviour alien to the colonised Indian societies. A religious pretext has too often justified the economic and human exploitation of the aboriginal population.

The Declaration of Barbados goes on to explain the ethnocentric aspect of evangelising activity and its affinity to colonialist ideology, based upon its following characteristics:

- Its discriminatory character which is hostile towards the indigenous cultures, considering them pagan and heretical;
- Its vicarial nature which considers indigenous people as things and justifies their subjection with promises of supernatural compensations;
- Its spurious character which hides personal interests (material and spiritual) of the missionaries, and the fact that the missions have been converted into

great enterprises of recolonisation and domination, into a concurrence with dominant interests.

Based upon these characteristics of the missions, the Declaration of Barbados arrives at the conclusion that the best direction for indigenous peoples, and also for the preservation of the moral integrity of the churches themselves, is to put an end to all missionary activity. But, until this objective is achieved, the missions can support the liberation of indigenous peoples in the following ways:

1. Overcome their methods of colonisation and alienation of indigenous cultures.
2. Assume a position of respect for indigenous cultures and put an end to “the long and shameful history of despotism and intolerance characteristic of missionary work”.
3. Put an end to the theft of indigenous property by religious missions which appropriate their labour, lands and the rest of their natural resources.
4. Extinguish the lavish spirit of the missions based upon the exploitation of indigenous peoples.
5. Put an end to the competition between religious denominations for the souls of the indigenous peoples which leads to “the buying and selling of believers” and to internal divisions and conflicts.
6. Suppress the secular practices of breaking up the indigenous family by inculcating children with values opposite to those of their own culture within an educative system which impedes them in living in the national society as well as in their own communities.
7. Break with the pseudo-moralist isolation which imposes a false ethic and which incapacitates indigenous peoples for coping with the national society.
8. Abandon the procedures of blackmail which consist of offering goods and favours to the indigenous peoples in exchange for their total submission.
9. Suspend the practices of displacement or concentration of indigenous populations for the purpose of proselytising or assimilation, practices which aggravate morbidity, mortality and family decomposition among the different peoples.
10. Abandon the criminal practice of serving as intermediaries for the exploitation of indigenous labour.

“To the degree that the religious missions do not assume these minimum obligations”, continues the document, “they, too, must be held responsible by default for crimes of ethnocide and connivance with genocide.”

From the beginning of the 1970s, the Catholic missionary model was deeply questioned from the very bosom of the Church itself. This was blown by the new winds which came from the Second Vatican Council, the Latin American Epis-

copal conferences at Medellín (Colombia) and Puebla (México), and later from liberation theology. The rarefied and suffocating climate of religious intolerance began to disappear and there appeared missionaries who were disposed to respect the religious choices of indigenous peoples, support their demands and even commit themselves actively to their liberation struggle.

In this way, a new wave surged forward within the missions which oppose their ethnocidal approach. But this came into conflict with the traditional orientation of the Church, which was still deeply rooted and understood evangelisation as the redemptive imposition of foreign dogma.

The new liberation theology expressed its principles in the Document of Asunción. It arose from a conference, held in the Paraguayan capital and sponsored by the World Council of Churches, in which members of the Catholic and Evangelical (Protestant) churches, indigenists and anthropologists participated among whom were three signatories of the Declaration of Barbados (Georg Grunberg, Miguel Chase-Sardi and Gonzolo Castillo Cárdenas).

The Document of Asunción recognises that: “our Churches more than once have been in solidarity with, or instrumental in supporting, ideologies and practices which are oppressing mankind”, and that “they have not been capable of imbuing Latin American societies with a liberating Christian love, without racial, religious or cultural discrimination”. And they have not been free from “those (discriminatory) practices in which racist criteria have supplanted the messages of the Gospel”.

However the Document considers that, in spite of these faults, missionary activity does not have to terminate, as the Declaration of Barbados demands, but, rather, it should correct its course and assume the following tasks:

1. Abandon all ideological or practical connivance with any form of oppression.
2. Denounce the causes of exploitation by the national society and the churches themselves.
3. Proclaim the Gospel of Christ, “which is essential for the full liberation of indigenous peoples, and which will liberate the Church once more to provide an authentic testimony”.

Therefore, the Document of Asunción proposes:

Because of our obedience to Christ we should become Jews with the Jews, without law with those without law (I Corinthians 9:20-21), and therefore indigenous people with the indigenous people. At times this means we should remain silent when, because of historical circumstances, Christianity is identified with structures of oppression and has led to the blaspheming of Christ’s name. In other cases we are impelled to proclaim, with the voice of denunciation, with words and with deeds, that Christ is justice and love for all, without discrimination.

On the other hand, the declaration asserts the need for the Churches to establish an open dialogue about the situation of the indigenous peoples in which they should be present, and in which specialists and technicians should participate. In addition, they should definitely be advised to support the formation of organisations by the indigenous peoples themselves.

Father Bartomeu Meliá, pioneer of the new theology, was expelled from Paraguay. This act is a clear expression that these new liberating winds don't suit an official policy which is based on a model for integration and submissive acceptance by indigenous peoples of second-class citizenship. The state offers them this in exchange for the renunciation of their right to be different (though this is not always apparent).

Within the new position, led by the most progressive sectors of the Catholic Church, are also to be found the Protestant missions associated with the World Council of Churches. Today, some of these missions try to carry out the work of assisting indigenous communities in a process of self-management. Some institutions, such as the National Staff of the Missions of the Paraguayan Episcopal Conference (ENMCEP), carry out an efficient struggle to make effective certain ethnic rights, especially those concerning indigenous peoples' rights to land, an essential requirement for their autonomy.

Of course this task cannot be easy, weighed down as it is by centuries of authoritarian paternalism. It also confronts the most conservative sectors of those institutions which develop paternalist programmes as well as official developmentism, sectors which consider indigenous peoples as an obstacle to progress.

Two of the missionaries interviewed by the author for this study are representatives of the new Catholic liberation theology (Father Pytel and Zanardini). For several reasons they are not, for the present at least, missionising, but are working in Asunción.

This sudden change of orientation in missionary work has limitations, particularly in the communities which have already been submitted to the long process of ethnocide. When the Indian leader, Bruno Barrás, was asked if the new missionary trend could constitute an alternative way whereby indigenous people could retain their own religion, he replied that, in principle, it could, but only "when there is some of our own religion left" (see Ortiz, 1988:71).

This means that when someone speaks of "respecting indigenous culture", in the majority of cases, we have to think of a culture which has already made an enormous effort not to contradict basic Christian principles. Therefore, when referring to the modern liberation theology approach to missions, Von Bremen writes:

Behind this point of view one cannot fail to perceive the danger that the dialogue which is attempting to establish will continue in a unilateral direction, due to the fact that it assumes that there exists a Christian ethical base in traditional indigenous cultures. From this the missionary can begin his work in a way whereby “non-Christian” (pagan) elements are not mentioned in the dialogue. Thus, even though the importance of the positive aspects of indigenous culture are underlined, this concept of the “positive” is understood according to the universal plan of God for salvation – to conduct the indigenous people to the same goal as the missionaries are working towards. So while (liberation theologians) insist that evangelisation should be based on indigenous elements, the final goal of the spread of God’s word is that indigenous listeners perceive the real message: the renovation of the life form of indigenous peoples and the transformation of their cultures (Von Bremen, 1987:42).

Even so, it is unquestionable that liberation theology, to the extent that it consolidates itself in opposition to the forces of reaction, can become a vigorous support of the demands for indigenous peoples’ rights to land. It can also provide a valid choice for the ethnic groups who wish to develop a syncretic form of religion based upon their own histories.

The Holy Evangelical Alliance

Brought together by neo-colonial needs, another style of missionary work is appearing on the scene; one which tries to respond with greater efficiency to the ideologies of the developed industrialised states in opposition to the dependent capitalism of Latin America.

The different missionary institutions which make up this phenomenon are lumped together by some authors under the name “New Missions”. These bodies represent with great cohesiveness the needs of capitalist expansion. They use a particular North American individualist Protestantism which is both reactionary and Puritan. According to W. César, this “is the fruit of a foreign invasion as Catholicism was before, and it has nothing to do with our real origins and our historic processes” (see Cano, 1981:120).

Though they are not institutionally integrated, a confused group of missionary institutions which does not assume the same responsibilities as religious orders, acts fanatically, co-ordinates their actions and complements and assists them in an aggressive evangelisation policy. According to Margina, this is based on the divine predestination of the USA as the people chosen to evangelise/civilise the world (1981:108). They seek to impose the American Way of Life and its values upon the most “savage” peoples by means of relentless pursuits, the systematic study of their languages, the disruption of their communities, compulsive evangelisation and technological seduction. Therefore, different, apparently autonomous North American protestant sects are, in reality, “different faces of a common ideology”.

According to Pereira, this conspiracy between SIM (South American Indian Mission), SAM (South American Mission), SIL (Summer Institute of Linguistics) and NTM (Mission to the New Tribes), becomes clear when we see that all of these organisations share the same premises in Cochabamba, Bolivia where the offices are inter-connected (Pereira, 1981:109).

Commenting upon the specific ideology of SIL, an ideology which it shares with its neighbours in Cochabamba, Hvalkof and Aaby analyse the manichaean dichotomy which purveys the preaching of “The Word” as the only way to eternal salvation. This assumes the triumph of Good over Evil, of the Divine Light over Satan. But, according to these authors, within this thinking, Satan is not an abstract concept, but rather a social incarnation – its clearest manifestation is Communism. In contrast, the expression of God would be the North American people (Hvalkof and Aaby, 1981:11).

With the appearance of the New Missions, the contours of the present missionary spectrum in Latin America have been defined. They extend from the position of the missionaries who have renounced their traditional destiny as colonisers and have gone over to the forces which support the cause of indigenous peoples. At the other extreme are the new evangelical sects with their intransigent position as heirs of the old colonial project, and continue, at the end of the 20th century, with the war-like religious strategies of spiritual conquest used by Colonial Spain.

Of course the parameters which separate the opposing extremes can never be very sharply defined due to the fact that they both display a varied gradation of intermediary positions which lie at different distances to the risks of ethnocide and paternalistic manipulation. These are the risks which always surround projects which White people create for the indigenous peoples.

We should state here that we have had to simplify these positions somewhat and consider them only in their extreme form. For this reason we are using the Mission to the New Tribes as a paradigmatic example of compulsive evangelisation. Nevertheless we should emphasise that, regrettably, this method is not utilised only by the NTM.

ARE THE HEATHEN REALLY HAPPY?



FEAR • SUPERSTITION • WITCHCRAFT • INFANTICIDE • MURDER

Some tribes bury their twin babies alive, believing them to be a bad omen.

"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature."

NEW TRIBES MISSION

The image conveyed by the New Tribes Mission of indigenous culture. A drawing used for propaganda.

Chapter III: The New Soldiers of the Faith

Rejuvenated with new conceptions of integration and with the trappings of technology, the New Tribes Mission is currently the most illustrative example of religious catechisation at the service of colonial domination over indigenous peoples. Many of the characteristics and objectives of the NTM, as with the other 'classical' missions, are clearly similar to those used since the beginning of the evangelical conquest.

The Characteristics of the New Tribes Mission

In several Latin American countries, criticisms of the new evangelical enclaves (a complex composed of SIL, NTM, NIM, etc.) have led to serious accusations such as scientific and political infiltration and espionage, control of foreign territory, violation of national sovereignty, constitution of religious transnational corporations) at the service of imperial interests, conspiracy with the CIA, offences against national security, detection and extraction of strategic materials, construction of clandestine landing strips, intrigue with information not known to the state, carrying out massive sterilisation without the consent of those affected and other atrocities.

There is a large bibliography which refers to accusations against the New Tribes Mission. Those mentioned here come from Cano et al., 1981:25; Marquina, 1981:36.ff.; Hvalkof and Aaby, 1981: 182-4, 111-2; and Mosonyi et al., 1981. The NTM has been denounced before several international fora, such as the IV Russell Tribunal in 1980, the First Meeting of Pastoral Indigenists held in Manaus, Brazil, the Indigenous World Congress in Peru, 1980 and the 2nd Declaration of Barbados in 1977.

This document, on the other hand, is only concerned with evangelical action as it affects indigenous cultural autonomy. Nevertheless, it is impossible to ignore the repercussions of evangelisation on socio-ethnic aspects of life, and so we will refer to these tangentially. However, we are primarily interested in those factors which concern the ethnocidal work of the NTM.

A Theology of Salvation and Martyrs

As is well known, the theological principles of the NTM are not very complicated. They are based upon a messianic salvationism which is convinced that its truth is the only truth. Therefore, this truth should be imposed on everyone else

in order to redeem them from a pagan state. The new North American fundamentalism is based upon the infallibility of the Bible, the literal acceptance of its words, reading it uncritically and acknowledging the universal validity of its principles which are ahistorical and applicable to whatever reality.

According to the report of the Commission of Private Indigenist Organisations (CEIP), the NTM claims that “what the Bible says is what should be believed, without adding any interpretation to the words of Jesus”. The interviews conducted for this study with Luke Holland and Padre Godoy (Escobar, 1988) point out that the NTM missionaries have no qualms about manipulating such words according to ideological convenience.

The Gospel is thus considered as an absolute entity, the beginning and the end of human action: in its name everything is permitted and before it, all cultures, purged of their diabolical elements which made them different, should bow down. As the above mentioned report says, “the word of God knows no frontiers, it is valid for all and does not falter before differences in race or nationality, whether we are Americans, Germans or Totobiegosome”.

According to a manichaistic dichotomy which though we reject, we have to recognise is effective for missionary purposes, human beings are divided into two irreconcilable groups. There are those who know the Word of God (their God, of course) and those who do not; the first will be saved (and in a strict sense these are the only real human beings), the others will be condemned. The CEIP report says the NTM describe this as follows:

When a person believes there is no room for doubt, he who believes in the Son of God is not condemned, but he who does not believe is condemned for not believing in the only Son of God.

The task of the missionaries is to present or impose this word. Their objective is:

...to search for those who do not know God with the purpose of saving them, because Jesus Christ is the only saviour; those who know God are saved and shall enter for ever into the glory of the Lord (CEIP Report).

The biblical arguments invoked, from versions written by their translators, to justify this are the following:

All authority has been given to me in heaven and earth. Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen. (Matthew 28:18-20)

The corollary of such an apocalypse is the altar of sacrifice; a redeeming holocaust which announces, joy and eternal glory. According to the CEIP report,

Dejabi and Cadui, the two Guidaigosode who were assaulted by the Totobiegosode in December, 1986, saw their wounds as symbols of salvation: “sufferings for the glory of the Lord”.

An official report of the NTM which was transmitted by radio says:

For those who have given their lives for the love of Jesus Christ, we raise our prayers... children and parents are left with pain but with a tremendous happiness by which they gain a step towards the victory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Glory to God.

For those who believe that the only thing which is really important is the soul and that the souls of Pagans are condemned, it is logical that a dead new Christian is preferable to a live heretic. This even extends to a celebration of the perverse joy of spilt blood – particularly with the added advantage that it is the blood of others. For this reason, the NTM understands the five dead Guidaigosode as, “five new seeds” of the faith.

An article entitled “Five more Seeds” finishes with these words:

Before the men left their homes to go and search for their fellow Ayoreode in the forest, they had sized up the risks. From the beginning they supposed that some of them might not return alive. Was it worth it? Yes! Excited with the idea that they could participate in reaching others the Bible, they went forward with an anticipatory joy. Are you willing to do they same as they did for the cause of the Bible and do so in full joy? (Ketchamp, 1981).

On the other hand, this text demonstrates in writing a question which, though it is rather obvious and has been pointed out a thousand times, is worth bringing up again in this context: the Ayoreode are continually incited by the NTM to go out and search for unconverted forest dwellers.

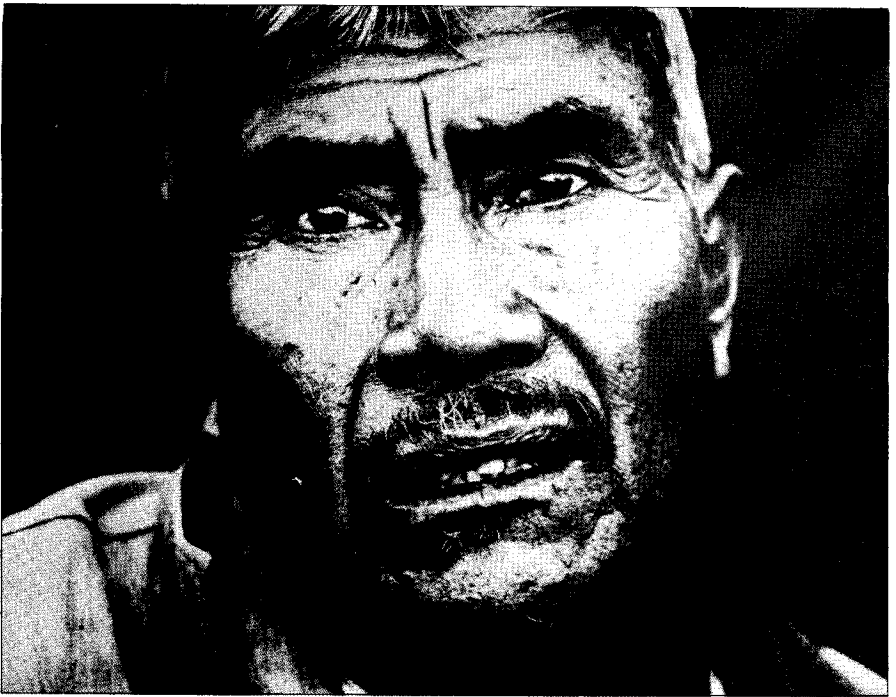
Ethnocentrism and Intolerance

This total incapacity to understand the position of others explains the blind intolerance which considers different opinions as deviations and thinks that:

Whatever attitude or approach tries to prevent or frustrate the teaching of the Testament to anyone, by any means, is a Satanic attempt to interfere with the building of the Church of God and should be handled without any contemplation (cf. Survival International, 1987).

Therefore any positive cultural exchange is impossible with the NTM, even less any dialogue with them. Any attempt which the indigenous cultures are able to make for their own development, will be made **in spite of** and not **by means of** missionary intervention.

The depreciation of indigenous culture is a consequence of the assumption that this culture is an object of condemnation. For this reason the missionaries encourage indigenous peoples to develop a negative self-perception of their



Indigenous man from the Paraguayan Chaco: the face of a hunter converted into a labourer, 1979 (photo: Luke Holland/RP Ediciones).

beliefs and rituals; the Indian cannot be permitted to value the very cause of his perdition. However the depreciation is also derived from a systematic disqualification of his culture, presented as inferior and backward in contrast to the culture of the Whites who have development, power and control the only truth. Cano says that the supposed superiority of the God of the Whites reinforces the idea that the White man is better and has more knowledge than the aboriginal (Cano et al, 1981:233).

This contempt of everything different is well expressed in the total lack of interest on the part of the missionaries towards the culture of the indigenous people and their profound ignorance of their institutions and symbols. In order to know another people, the point of departure should be the recognition of a difference, if not respected at least accepted. Holland in his interview for this document says that the NTM missionaries do not respect the indigenous religion because they cannot respect that which they consider non-existent.

Marquina maintains that the NTM does not attempt to bring the individual to fulfillment but rather to incorporate the proselyte into the system (1981:106). The only aspect of indigenous culture which the NTM considers relevant is the language. However, following the old Jesuit lesson, this interest does not stem from the need to understand the indigenous people better and to communicate with them with the aim of establishing a dialogue with their culture, but rather as a means for manipulation. Language is the unavoidable channel through which light can be filtered into heads which are considered dark both within and without.

The Training of the Missionaries and their Ideological Affinities

As these missionaries only seek to redeem “savages”, to humanise them and make them worthy of a civilised heaven, they do not need much specialised technical knowledge or scientific professionalism. It is sufficient to know a few passages from the Bible (translated and packed in the USA and Bolivia) and learn those languages which are considered as adequate conduits to attract indigenous peoples and cram them full of relevant verses.

Therefore, the missionaries of the NTM are not anthropologists, ethnographers or medical doctors, neither are they experts in education nor religion; in reality, they are not even Pastors. According to the CEIP report, among the missionaries of Campo Loro there is one mechanical engineer (the head of the mission), two nurses, four high school graduate preachers and/or translators, two ordained preachers and a lay preacher. The same report says that there are three levels of training: the “Bible School”, which in two years teaches the Old and New Testament; the “missionary course”, which teaches the preaching of the Gospel to the native populations, and the “trans-cultural communication course”, which studies communications “with these specific cultures”. As the NTM is not itself a Church, an Order or a religious congregation, any person from a religious organisation can work for it, in so far as his or her institution has “ideological and doctrinal affinities”.

On what are these affinities based? We have referred to how the style of the new Protestant Latin American missions relates to the needs of large and small scale capitalism expanding out from a few capital cities. We have also portrayed the missionaries of the NTM as apostles of an evangelisation, identified with the modern ideology of progress. Progress is an evolutionary ideology which understands societies as fixed points on a straight line which departs from a pre-capitalist stage and advances from the inferior to the superior, according to a golden and unique trajectory which measures accumulation and “development”.

We have already referred to the effects which the imposition of the liberal Christian model causes when imposed upon indigenous communities. These people are forced to assume, without question, the only option offered...that of coupling themselves to the last link of the chain, while struggling to shake off their traditions which, they are told, weigh them down in a “pre-capitalist” condition and prevent them from ascending to the paradise of civilisation and/or heaven.

One significant quotation from Cano expresses this:

The equating of the American Way of Life with Christianity hides the true motive of North American ‘development’ and prevents the indigenous people from coming forward with any form of criticism against it... These Protestants, in accordance with their ideology, attempt to convince indigenous people that by hard work and savings they can achieve personal riches. The visible proof of their goodness is to be an incentive for others to follow their example. They say nothing, however, about the futility of such efforts (Cano et al., 1981:84).

As regards the other institutions with which the NTM maintains connections, the Mennonites are evidently the most important. They share celestial promises, hellish threats and efficient work. But apart from the missions they also cultivate other connections; especially with the dictatorships of the countries in which they work.

Concerned with spiritual expeditions of conquest, the NTM declares total political neutrality and a disdainful disinterest for the things of this world. However this dualism has a tendency to vary according to circumstances. The missionaries juggle the conflicts of prosaic historical situations and conceal, in the end, a mortal and worldly oppression, which takes the form of defending the régime of Stroessner and singing praises to the North American system.

The Methods of the New Tribes Mission

To be fair, the methods of the NTM do not differ essentially from the traditional missionary strategy used by the Catholics throughout centuries, and in many cases up until the present time. During the course of the 20th century the North American missionaries have only continued the tactics and procedures, which have been used since the 16th century and which are periodically reactivated. We will refer here briefly to the principle methods:

Actions against Indigenous Identity

One of the successes of the missionary actions has been based on their skillful use of certain elements in indigenous cultures. While the contents of the catechism are formulated in an abstract form and are not specified in accordance with the concrete ethnic characteristics of each group, the methods of conversion

take account of their temperament and history, but only with the intention of manipulating them more efficiently. The NTM speculates with the historical situation of these distraught cultures which are hemmed in by an implacable civilisation, ready to advance into the last corner of the national territory.

The speciality of the NTM is those groups located exactly at the critical point of the dramatic choice between survival or submission. Father Robins says that the NTM preys upon vulnerable societies; it enters into their open wounds and attempts to corrupt the social body from within (Escobar, 1988).

Possessing a meticulous interest, which lacks comprehension of other aspects of the cultures which they intend to destroy, the missionaries press against selected elements, foment others, distort here, change or conserve there. For example, in his interview, Miguel Bartolome speaks of the missionary exploitation of the nomadic cycles of the Ayoreode (ibid.). Von Bremen also indicates that the hunts for the forest Ayoreode are related to the war traditions of the same people (1988, 25/27). Pytel believes that the missionaries started among the Aché by using the important meaning attached to fire to inculcate new terrors into them and by repeating Aché songs in order to convert them into imitations of foreign psalms (Escobar, 1988).

The missionaries emphasise certain procedures characteristic of various modern institutions: they exploit generational conflicts, which are especially serious in these threatened societies and pit the future against tradition. This process changes what can sometimes can be a fertile dialectical opposition between old and young into an irreconcilable clash – an abstract disjunction. The missionaries demand a choice between traditional culture, which “holds people back and condemns them”, and foreign culture, which “redeems and makes progress”. The missionaries start from the greater disposition of youth to accept novelties and aggravate their disagreements with their elders, who are obviously more oriented towards traditional customs.

But perhaps the clearest example of this strategy is that of the systematic utilisation of indigenous languages to distort the destiny of the people, to construct symbols and history and to transform them into a mere vehicle of colonisation.

Curses and Mirages

The stigmatisation of indigenous cultures, the demonisation of their beliefs and the ridiculing of their rites and symbols are mechanisms appropriate to evangelical ethnocide which is complemented by the missionaries’ glorification of their own world.

Hoffman says that the stigmatisation of indigenous (cultures) has three stages:

1. Stress the differences between the coloniser and the colonised.
2. Appraise these differences to the benefit of the coloniser and the detriment of the colonised.
3. Translate them into the realm of the absolute asserting that they are definitive (in Colombres, 1977:32).

Thus the devaluation of indigenous culture is the corollary of exalting one's own. This mechanism is well exemplified in that didactic manual of ethnocide, the book, *The Defeat of the Bird-God*, in which, by means of a triumphal discourse conducted midway between cynicism and ingenuousness, the missionaries describe their tactics of destruction (or intended destruction) of the cult of *Asojné*, one of the central elements of Ayoreode culture. Bill, the hero of the book, who is charged with the "difficult task...of erasing from their minds the old customs and beliefs", describes his ruses: he begins by ridiculing what the missionaries call with blatant ignorance the "Bird-God". But later, he notices that this attitude is counter-productive because it angers the Ayoreode and chooses to change tactics. On the one hand he appears more sympathetic, while on the other, he pities them for having such a "deity".

Let us look at the text itself:

Comai was the first Ayoreode to lose fear of *Asojné* and the first to see that its spell could be broken. One morning he mentioned to Bill a talk he had had with an old Ayoreode woman. He had suggested to her that she give up fearing *Asonjá* and receive the Son of God as her Saviour. The old Ayoreode became infuriated and took him by the shirt and said: 'Comai, you should be careful, something terrible will happen to you because you have cast off the customs of our people and *Asojné* will punish you'. 'Do you believe this, Comai?', Bill asked the boy. 'Of course not,' he replied and asked Bill to lend him a rifle to hunt with. Bill saw him leave towards the river with the weapon on his back, he prayed silently for this person who had the courage to break old customs and fears. Certainly, Satan, the son of *Asojné*, could not be satisfied with him, thought Bill to himself. Soon Comai was at the door again pale and trembling. Bill asked him what had happened as he looked as if he had seen a ghost. The voice of Comai trembled emotionally and asked if Bill knew a certain place on the path to the river, to which Bill answered yes. Then Comai said that in that place he had heard a noise and saw near his feet a snake as thick as his arm; it was ready to strike but when he jumped the serpent remained in its place. 'I do not know why it did not bite me', he said. 'I know why', said Bill putting his arms affectionately on the shoulders of the boy; '*Asonjá* is furious about what you said to the old woman; but God has shown that He is stronger than *Asonjá*'. Comai sighed, relieved and said; 'It's good to know that I belong to God' (Wagner, 1975:141-2).

This text needs little comment. It clearly illustrates the ways of the NTM: the Satanisation of any culture which is different; the simplistic vocabulary with

which missionaries explain away complicated symbolic constructions; the astute manoeuvres of the missionary who knows when to threaten and when to smile; and the incoherence of a system which is scandalised by what it considers superstitions or spells of a backward religion and which has no embarrassment in interpreting the behaviour of a serpent as a divine sign.

The final consequence of so much malice from the outside culture is moral terrorism. This is one of the specialities of the spiritual conquerors, which, backed up with infernal threats and bloody imagery, manage to inculcate guilt (or at least its idea) into indigenous peoples, who until then were unpreoccupied with original sin and its terrible consequences. This has been noted with missionaries other than the NTM. Hoffman refers to imagery which the Jesuits used when representing infernal torture and punishment. It was so ferocious that he compares it to the theatre of cruelty “in Artaud’s sense” (1973:19).

Commenting upon the sermons of Yapuguay, Cadogan writes:

The Indian is condemned to flee as a thief; to eat on the day of fast; to love in sin; to be disobedient. The sermon...demonstrates the difficulty for any normal Indian to free himself from the eternal fire, *Tata quasu apyre*. This is described in vivid terms by the missionaries (1968/69).

These threats are used today by the NTM and by other missions.

The mission’s tactic, say Cano and others, is based on the principles of a psychological war of terror. “This expression is regrettably exact”, and he gives the following example:

The New Tribes Mission managed, according to their own magazine **Brown Gold**, to make a terrorised woman confess under the threat of eternal torments (1981:124).

“Gods anger”, “mortal sin”, “the end of the world”, “the eternal fires of hell”, “the reign of darkness”, etc. constitute the appalling repertoire of images which the missionaries use to intimidate and press their proselytes into accepting “the light” and exorcising the demon which they see in every face different from their own.

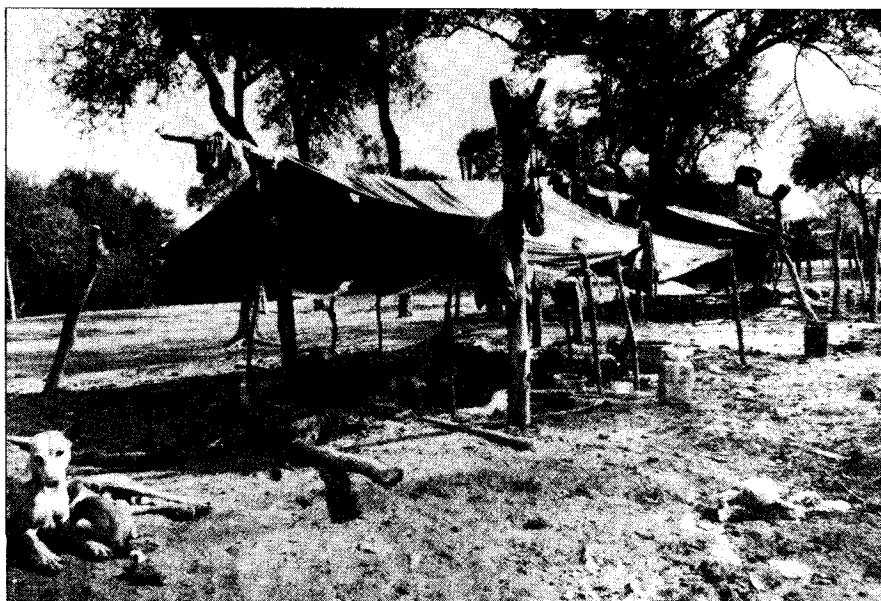
As a counterpart to the wrongs done to the “customs and ancient beliefs”, the missionaries present their own culture as extolled and blessed, as the only worthy path open to indigenous people. Here they begin to sing the promises of civilisation and redemption, the seduction of technology and other civilising goods in general, as well as a eulogy of “progress”. From here, baits and enticements are used to catch the convert in a trap which manipulates illusions and adulterates desires. The Jesuits used “donations”, a paternalistic euphemism which they called “the bait with which to fish for indigenous people”.

In this respect Padre Sepp provides useful instructions:

We should proceed with these beings or savage animals using as bait meat, herb tea, tobacco needles and pins, glass beads, or similar things to bring them out of their hills and cave (Sepp, 1973:99).

Until very recently the Salesian priests spread out clothing, pieces of iron sweets and other “fruits of civilisation” to tempt the Ayoreode and permit them to glimpse a world filled with seductive objects. Riester recorded a report by a certain missionary from the NTM who described without much humility the procedures applied to the Yuquí (Mbiá) of Bolivia:

We made paths in the jungle and we hung shiny things, paper or rags on two metre high poles so that they could be seen from far away. At the foot of the poles we left gifts such as pots, machetes and rope. The Yuquí people are glad when they find these things and in this way become accustomed to them, and one day they come out. Then we first give them clothes (Riester, 1987:6).



Ayoreode workers' camp near Filadelfía. The Ayoreode live there in inhuman conditions while they wait to be contracted by the Mennonites. “It is not the Táj Mahal, but at least it is better than the jungle”, commented a missionary from the New Tribes Mission when asked about conditions by Survival International.

(photo: Luke Holland/RP Ediciones).

The decoys, or human bait, fulfill a similar function; they are the emissaries who make publicity – directly and in the indigenous peoples’ own language – announcing the goodness of this world. The world is so threatening and mysterious; it frightens and fascinates, repels and attracts the forest people and the missionaries know that sooner or later these people will either succumb to the pressure of their efforts and their temptations or they themselves must approach the Indians to try to decode their keys and secrets.

Paternalism and Dependency: The New Reductions

If the Bible is the door to maturity and reason, and the missionaries have the key, then the humanisation of the indigenous peoples depends upon them. Before passing the threshold which separates civilisation from barbarity, the indigenous people are considered as a species of semi-humans, ignorant of the “real truth”. The missionaries are the only people who are able to change them into real human beings, “when this is possible”, as Gines de Sepúlveda says.

Once again the Jesuits are the pioneers of this method: they claimed that indigenous people do not have developed reason; they are like children or like mad people. “Their understanding and capacity was, and is, small, like children, their talking ability is weak and defective” (in Furlong, 1963:73). Also “their mental capacity, at times, with their words and deeds, appears like the lucid periods which mad people have” in Hernandez (in Hernandez, 1913, V. I:65).

Schvartzman writes that this state of childhood is convenient because it needs tutelage and that is why the Priests are there (1987:183). He also refers to Susnik who says that indigenous peoples’ supposed state of childhood, in the eyes of the missionaries, tends to annul the social projection of biological paternity and transforms the youth – a privileged object of mission education – into controllers of their own parents (Susnik, 1966:12).

The missionaries of today repeat these methods. When the forest cultures, *oppressed* by the inextricable logic of the internal colonialism, come out from their “hills and caves”, they immediately encounter a missionary who offers them security and survival, the right to be considered as human beings, and as if this were not enough, heaven too. The mission is the first frontier post of civilisation; there the indigenous people surrender their weapons, their feathers and (it is said) their souls, and receive, as symbols of safe conduct, clothing, Christian names and the guarantee of tutelage and protection after certain evangelical procedures.

Thereafter, they lose the protection of their own system, and become dependent upon the medical attention, education, work and subsistence which the missionaries give them. The missionaries are thus established as the only administrators,

mediators and interpreters in the indigenous peoples' relations with the national society. In this manner, the missions assume a role which, according to the laws in force, compete with the state.

The state, for its part, need no longer take charge of its obligations to protect the indigenous peoples against pressures and harassments and to prevent acts of ethnocide. Furthermore it never controls or intervenes to regulate the missionary systems of teaching and health, and does nothing to enforce labour laws and certain basic constitutional guarantees.

It is clear, on the contrary, that the state considers the missions to have removed its burden of responsibility, while receiving support from the missions for the national official model of integration, based upon the negation of that which is different.

Therefore, it does not sound strange that INDI's report on the activities of the NTM in December 1986 ends by saying:

We should recognise, over and above and independently of the omissions, deficiencies and debatable points of view about the mission, that it (NTM) has provided, and continues to provide, positive services for the security, the promotion, the health and the self-management of the indigenous people under its influence.

The old system of the reductions (settlements of converted Indians), even the best ones, tears the indigenous people away from their own territories, and installs them in, what Miguel Bartolomé calls, "evangelical concentration camps" (in Escobar, 1988). When they leave these camps it is to earn their subsistence, according to the new rules which the NTM mission has made. The indigenous people are isolated from the outside world, which the missionaries paint in threatening terms in order to better control and guard "their" indigenous people.

Referring to the activities of the NTM against the Ayoreode, Von Bremen describes well this mechanism by which the missionaries interpose themselves between indigenous people and the surrounding society:

With this negative position towards an outside world, filled with sinners and people ignorant of the true salvation of Christ, they (the missionaries) prevent the possibilities of outside contacts for the Ayoreode, strengthening at the same time their own power and internal control. When the Ayoreode have relations with people whom they consider as friends and in whom they have confidence - as occurred in our case - the missionaries grossly insult these friends and command the Ayoreode to cut off the contacts, and threaten them that if they do not, God will not accept them as saved children, which for the Ayoreode would bring very destructive consequences and threaten their survival. In this way, the missionaries continue to maintain a certain monopoly in their role as leaders and guides, which the Ayoreode do not wish nor are able - yet - to destroy because the insecurity of maintaining themselves without the missionaries in the new environment determines their behaviour (Von Bremen, 1988:17).

This client paternalism is a continuous generator of dependency; the missionary always keeps the keys in his hand and delays the status of adulthood for the indigenous people; his power over them lies just there. So the NTM only abandons a mission when its attempts to evangelise fail or when it is expelled from a country, which is certainly frequently. Yet the NTM would never leave a mission because it considered that the community could manage its relations with the national society in an adult manner as it never gives them the possibility to do so.

Education for Alienation

This dependency is not generated only by circumstances. It is formally and systematically inculcated by means of an educational model especially designed to institutionalise it. But the education has another objective: to reinforce colonialist relationships and to prepare the indigenous people for “integration” into the national society; that is to say into the specific place which is reserved for them among the oppressed and marginalised.

According to this alienating function of education, indigenous people become objects which have to be readjusted to work smoothly within the gears of the new system. Therefore the missionary education has contradictory objectives: on the one hand, it should preserve the status of the indigenous peoples as minors, which guarantees mission domination over them. On the other hand, it should prepare them so that they do not obstruct the project of national development.

The NTM resolves this contradiction by proposing a pedagogic model which we call “half education”. This provides the rudiments of Western culture but without going deeply into any question. Above all, mission education does not connect the inconsequent bits of information taught with either the indigenous peoples’ own experience, or with their needs. The satisfaction of these needs are essential to enable indigenous peoples to confront positively the national society and to defend themselves from its attacks, or even, to benefit from its opportunities.

Mission education is thus an illusory trick by means of which the indigenous people are simultaneously offered and denied a mythological world. This consistently foments the feeling of inferiority and dependency.

What do these missionaries teach indigenous people? Do they teach them their rights as declared in Paraguay’s indigenous Law 904? Do they teach them how the dominant culture functions or what their possibilities are to consolidate their indigenous autonomy? Do they begin teaching from a collective imagery within which the indigenous people can recognise themselves? Do they use a

common reference point from which concrete and useful knowledge can come and help indigenous peoples to confront their new fate which is being imposed by another history?

Nothing of the sort! They teach the Bible: “abundant biblical literature translated into Ayoreo, such as the New Testament and selected Bible stories” says the CEIP report which adds that the material utilised for teaching by the NTM is *Mi Manual* and some texts from Bolivia, such as the History of Bolívar.

According to the same report, the school offers four years of primary classes and follows a system in which Spanish is progressively introduced. Nevertheless, only four indigenous persons (under the NTM’s care) speak this language; one had learned it at Maria Auxiliadora, the other three, from Paraguayan employers.



A recently captured Totobiegosode woman is flown by Dean Littin from the Loma Plata Mennonite Hospital to the Faro Moro Mission. Of the eight women who were relocated by the New Tribes Mission in 1979, four had miscarriages due to the trauma of contact (photo: Luke Holland/RP Ediciones).

Therefore, either the missionaries are lying, or their teaching programme, after 20 years of practice, is absolutely useless. Without discarding the first possibility, the second alternative is quite possible if we keep in mind that the gentlemen of the NTM do not have the least idea about pedagogic principles or theories, or about contemporary methods of teaching, nor do they have the least intention of using or applying them.

We have seen that the sect lacks experts in education and obviously in the specialised education of indigenous peoples. According to the report, the NTM teaching system is co-ordinated by a high school graduate, Bruce Higham, "...while the teachers are family members of the missionaries...The school is not recognised by the Ministry of Education and Culture, nor is there supervision and evaluation of the teaching which is provided".

Riester has made a resumé of the NTM programme from Bolivia:

...after 17 years of work among the Mbiá, the missionaries have taught them absolutely nothing about the new life which they have to face. They live isolated in a mission, where the missionary does some things and then undoes them, where he is the absolute boss who decides everything and makes the indigenous people totally dependent. The only motive which the missionary has is to deliver the word of the Bible... (1987:6).

The NTM only strives to graft together unilaterally selected passages from the Gospel; texts which have no relation at all to the memory, the experiences and the expectations of the community who consequently cannot swallow them. Obviously an educational method which does not originate in the world of the recipients, and which is not able to include their history and their dreams, is destined to fail. In reality it is not even a method of education, but rather a mechanical device for deculturation and indoctrination.

If we look at the education imparted by the NTM, not from the point of view of what indigenous education should be – a system at the service of the development of the self-management of the community – but rather from the real objectives of the mission and the broader consequences beyond formal teaching, then we must recognise that it is a very efficient education.

NTM education succeeds, at least partially, to impose passivity and submission, conformism and resignation – those fundamental Christian values used to support the expansion of internal colonialism and the acceptance of exploitation. It manages, many times, to cover up misery with the ancient myth of the congenital laziness of indigenous people and to conceal worldly injustice with promises of a remote celestial justice. In addition, NTM education can, though not always, impose a spurious individualism on indigenous society, which weakens community ties.

The Effects

As we have referred to the objectives and the methods of the mission we cannot fail to mention, even though very briefly, some of the consequences which they create in the subjugated indigenous communities: exacerbation of generational conflicts, introduction of disintegrating rules, promotion of a negative self-perception on the part of the indigenous people.

Now let us analyse two basic effects: the destruction of the community and the application of new models of integration into the national society.

The Socio-cultural Dismemberment

The first consequence sought (but not always obtained) by the action of the NTM is the dislocation of the community. Symbolic systems structure and organise the relationship between human beings and their environment. They sustain the socio-political organisation and the subsistence while they provide the great framework of meaning; the matrix of the myths and the collective images.

In the cases where the missionaries succeed in uprooting this central basis of self-identity by accusing it of being the source of heresies and sins, the entire indigenous society crumbles, and loses its communal reference. Ethnic identity becomes erased, and the secret ties which made these indigenous peoples brothers and sisters with their environment are broken. The individuals feel lost and disoriented.

Obviously this does not always happen. Cultures resist and readjust their forms to new conditions in a desperate effort to continue generating symbols that explain the world and enable them to survive against the dangerous current. However, we have here referred to some extreme examples which, regrettably, are not so few: to communities disintegrated by fanaticism and intolerance, their men wandering like shadows of themselves in workshops, farms, or in various colonies, offering their labour at any price, and their women, vanquished, coming to the towns to turn themselves over as semi-slaves or prostitutes.

This is the most tragic effect of the missionary ethnocide which breaks the back of a people, trying to convert their members into caricatures of Westerners. Later, as the missionaries have no reasonable prospects to offer to them, they are pushed into the trade of feline skins, into surrendering their forests and their symbols, and into direct exploitation. Indeed, the missionaries deliver them, without even intending to, into the marginal sub-world of begging, prostitution, alcoholism and petty delinquency, where they end up people who have no place in their own culture or any other.

At the same time, once the community is dissolved, the bond which ties in-

digenous peoples to nature within one common design is also dissolved. Suddenly indigenous people find themselves confronted with a view of the world which is completely different to that with which they have identified throughout their past. Now their relations with their ecological environment become separated and adulterated. In the end they themselves turn into predators.

Indigenous collective tradition is also dissolved in the ethnocidal process. The enmity directed against their ancient beliefs from the missionaries creates an artificial wall of oblivion which interferes with transmission of the life of their culture. There emerges a phobic negation of the past and a schizophrenic fracture of time which invents a pure present, with neither ghosts nor memories. The dissolution of the past tries to eliminate the creation of the world in indigenous cosmology and the development of its multiple layers of meaning which unfold throughout the history of each people.

Today, many indigenous people cannot return to the wealth of their own reasoning; they cannot appeal to their memory to conserve, challenge or recover the desires left at some point on the path of their history. All of their world of beliefs and myths have been buried together, denied completely, without passing through the necessary mechanism of dialectical subjugation of mutual respect which assures a cultural flow and enriches the process of interaction with the fertile subsoil of times passed.

With common endeavours broken up, the past condemned as evil, the natural environment alienated and with values profaned and humiliated, indigenous aesthetic expression becomes weakened. The artistic objects, the ceremonies, the body painting and the feathered attire, all lose the truth in which they are based. They become converted into degraded signs, caricatures of themselves which are made to satisfy the whims of outside markets rather than to express the intimate experience of the group or its own desires.

The NTM obviously prohibits the practice of ritual cults and collective expression, which, it considers, could harbour Satanic powers and unmentionable sins. However in pursuit of noble gain, the mission encourages certain types of handicraft production which, unconnected to their original purposes, domesticated and antiseptic, have lost the force of their primary conviction. The styles have become opaque signs, uninhabited by dreams and incapable of expressing a history which no longer exists.

Thus, in their headquarters in Asunción, the NTM missionaries sell imitations of feathered staffs which they do not understand and which the Ayoreode no longer use. The missionaries buy the *mak'a* from indigenous people settled in the outskirts of Asunción, who use colourful feathers of loros (small parrots), which they never used previously, to represent a parody of ceremonial dances before tourists, overwhelmed by the exoticism.

The Evangelical Alternative

After destroying indigenous cultures (or at least trying to) the NTM generously offers its own in exchange. We remember that the indigenous forest people were promised civilisation and progress, welfare, education and technology. A dignified access to the national society was recommended by the missionaries in the form of the famous “integration” into its ranks as any other citizens. Let us see what NTM gives them in reality.

Basically the missions undermine the traditional “precapitalist” economic base, considered as we have said, backwards, primitive and inferior, in order to integrate the indigenous people into the money economy. But they do so without any concern and without anticipating the consequences. They make no responsible planning for the practical implementation of new production processes nor do they look at the capacity for the group to assimilate them.

The missions attract the indigenous people happily (filled with joy, they say), they subdue them but then they do not know what to do with the more than 500 hunter-collectors suddenly settled outside of their traditional territories. Referring to Campo Loro, a document from the Indigenist Association of Paraguay says:

The mission can find no dignified alternative life for the Ayoreode after they leave the forest, neither can it find sufficient good land for them; this constitutes one of the gravest problems (A.I.P., 1983:6).

In fact, the introduction of the Ayoreode to civilisation has been brutally carried out using two means: indiscriminate hunting the forest people and then their subsequent exploitation.

In the beginning, the missionaries had a brilliant idea based on the hunting ethos of the Ayoreode. Even though the meaning of the hunting was obviously distorted, they gave the Indians a significant quantity of fire arms and traps and let them loose in the jungle to win their living “as God commands”. They practically extinguished the jaguars and ocelots which were hunted for the value of their skins and were then cleverly sold by the missionaries.

When a recent, and by then nearly unnecessary, law was decreed to regulate this hunting, the missionaries began to think about other professions for their proselytes. The solution was not long in coming. During the mid-1970s, the NTM, using the Ayoreode’s continuous mobility advanced slyly towards the territories of the Mennonites to create favourable conditions for the proletarianisation of the Ayoreode in their colonies. Today, nearly all the Campolorogosome work as day labourers in these colonies.

This example concerns the Ayoreode, but the model is the same for other

ethnic groups. Certain groups of Ebytosochamacoco, for instance, from communities which have been destroyed by missionaries, have actively pursued the forbidden hunting of *caiman* and lizards and at the same time they are being exploited by neighbouring settler colonies. As the hunting of felines is restricted, the Ayoreode have also moved into the business of selling reptile skins, encouraged by avaricious intermediaries from the area, who obtain large profits from the abysmal differences in prices of the skins between the Chaco, Asunción and abroad.

The motives for the NTM's great civilising plan now becomes apparent. It tries to eliminate cultures which obstruct certain development models and to adapt the indigenous people to the national society as unskilled labour. The missionaries introduce Western labour standards ("we want to teach them that in civilisation work is paid in relation to work...and they can work eight hours without stopping" - see Cano, 1981:313). Yet the missionaries never promote specialisation of Ayoreode workers:

Little is done to train the Ayoreode for more responsible work in Faro Moro. Training programmes for foremen, tractor drivers or teachers do not exist... (idem).

In the same way Fischermann writes that:

The missionaries work on a large field with a tractor while the Ayoreode continue to work their fields leaving the trees and roots on the ground. With the technical possibilities available, it would be natural to develop larger communal agricultural schemes which would relate to the traditional customs of the Ayoreode. They would be interested in this (Fischermann, 1976:112).

In order to ensure the submission and dependency of the Ayoreode, upon which the success of their enterprise depends, the system which the missions create is, in the end, divided between two goals: an assimilation which suppresses cultural differences and an isolation in settlements which separates them from all possible contamination originating in the national society.

This "half-education" leaves the indigenous people mid-way between the loss of their culture and the impossibility of effectively acquiring competence in *the national culture*. The "half-integration", to which this leads, separates them from their traditional sources of subsistence but does not permit them to enter the new economic systems with dignity. They wait outside back doors for a chance to offer their labour in exchange for vouchers or a wage which, in most cases, amounts to only 60,000 Guarani a month (approximately US\$70).

The dual standard on which "semi-integration" is based, as well as the mistaken law which promotes it, is manifest in different dimensions of the indigenous ethical life. Thus, for example in the field of health, the indigenous people lose their own complicated system of shamanic cures and medicines and go over to depend on Western medicine which is deplorably administrated and always unpredictable.

Regarding nutrition after contact, the Ayoreode balanced diet, is substituted by a caricature of “Christian” nutrition and they must clothe themselves in order to enter the White world. Yet at the same time, they do not have the possibility to buy the kind of things that White people use, and must be content with the rags which are given to them in charity.

These different situations have repercussions on the Ayoreode’s self-perception and feed their feelings of inferiority and predetermined failure. Colombres says in this regard:

We see therefore, that the colonised people are pushed towards assimilation, but on the other hand they are denied entry into this culture in order to maintain an ethnic distance and to generate neurotic tensions and frustrations in them (1977:219).

Therefore, finding themselves with no past and a forbidden future, the converted Ayoreode end up with a two-fold disadvantage. They participate in an integration process according to the prearranged role of losers, and in an assimilation which prevents them from fully exercising the rights and guarantees reserved for Whites.

This ambiguous situation of assimilation and marginalisation is expressed in the discontinuity which exists between the indigenous people and the settlers in the rural world which surrounds them, even though both parties share a heavy burden of oppression and neglect. Apart from the fact that in the development of this situation other factors intervene (see Von Bremen, 1987:6-7), it becomes more complicated when the missionaries interpose themselves, with their foreign repertoire of values, myths, images and rules, between the daily world of the indigenous people and the mestizo peasants.

For a mission system which proclaims a homogeneous and compact nationalism, which amounts to an archetype of “Paraguayism” formed by the eradication of difference, this divisive situation is serious. It generates new forms of discrimination and exclusion which are added to those already existing. Indigenous people end up with the national society presented to them as a block, without divisions or contradictions, where they seem to be the only ones oppressed and marginalised. Colombres describes this as follows:

Ethnic distinctions neutralise social differences which places cultural distance into clearer relief. Thus, in Puerto Casado, we see that the Paraguayan peasants are opposed to indigenous workers entering their union. This union, on the other hand, has never protested at the fact that indigenous workers are paid half the wage of a Paraguayan, and sometimes less (Colombres, 1977:42).

Naturally we are not making the NTM responsible for the entire system which takes up indigenous people when convenient and leaves them outside



Akesui, an Ayoreode captured in 1979 and taken to Faro Moro Mission. According to information from Survival International this man died in the mission but the missionaries have declined to comment. The photo is from an album belonging to the New Tribes Mission (courtesy of Luke Holland/RP Ediciones).

when it is not; but it is evident that the sect functions very well within this framework. Indeed, the missions themselves are some of the main supports of the system.

To summarise the effects which a foreign civilisation, imposed like a punishment, produces in a community, we should reproduce the words of an Ayoreode leader to Riestler:

I have lived here in the mission for 15 years. They give us clothes and they make us ill. They give us flour and sugar and our teeth fall out. They tell us about God and our children die. They drive away the wild game, weaken our bones; our dogs die. They give us remedies without effects; the cough and venereal diseases kill our women and children. They treat us as children who do not know what they want and they tell us what to do. They promise us land to farm. Still, we listened to the missionary, Don G., when we met him in the forest, when we still knew nothing of these things. 'Come with us, the time of suffering in the forest is over'. Where is the land? Where do we suffer the most? There in the forest or here? Our girls went to the railroad line and live there as prostitutes. Who said to us: 'earn money?' (Cano et.al., 1981:309-10).



Ojoide, Totobiegosode leader, whose group was captured in 1979 and taken to the Faro Moro Mission. He died shortly afterwards. The photograph is from an album belonging to the New Tribes Mission (courtesy of Luke Holland/RP Ediciones).

Chapter IV: Indigenous People Facing the Outside World

Up until now we have analysed missionary actions – specifically those of the NTM – and their effects upon indigenous cultures. Obviously, the indigenous peoples are not docile beings who can be manipulated at the will of the colonisers. They either submit and are defeated or they resist. When they resist, they either confront the goals of the invaders directly or else they adulterate them in order to adapt them to their own needs and purposes.

In the first place we intend to analyse the missionary régime from the other side of the question – from the point of view of the indigenous people themselves. We will seek to find the reasons for their acceptance of the missionaries. Later, we will see what are the future possibilities for those cultures which are subjugated under this rigid and inflexible missionary model of civilisation.

The Message of Chiri

We shall start with the words of Chiri, a Totobiegosode. When the Commission of the EIP, which was investigating the events of December 1986, was denied access to the Totobiegosode in Campo Loro, the members decided to send a tape with questions which could be answered by them. The message of Chiri is one of these replies:

In the hills there were days with shortages of food; it was necessary to go far to search for honey and animals, also water was scarce...There are many bites (snakes and insects) in the hills and we are afraid of the hunters and of the whites; our area of the forest was reduced more each time...At Campo Loro I saw many new things which I did not know the names of; the dogs and the bicycles; I thought that the dogs knew how to ride bicycles, but it is not so...The clothes of the civilised people are beautiful: I have no problems living among many people...In the hills we only make small fires due to the fear of being discovered...If a trip is organised to look for other Totobiegosode I am going to join it because I have relatives there, a brother, a daughter and others.

The responses of Chiri sum up well the perspective of the Ayoreode who decides to accept the contract offered by the missions. From these words we see little dissatisfaction with his own culture, and even less, the desire to learn from the Whites the “real truth” or to seek in another religion redeeming solace. The Totobiegosode are moved by quite different motives when they agree to follow the Guidaigosode to Campo Loro. They can be categorised by the following points.

Our Territory was Reduced...

The Ayoreode are fully aware that over the last few decades everything has changed. Their territories are being occupied, their eco-system pillaged. Now there is no place for hunter-gatherers in this new history which ploughs roads and paths through the palm groves and fills the last refuges of condemned species with traps.

The separation which assigns opposing destinies to nature and to the symbolic, that crossroads which painfully divides the memory of the West splitting it into separate routes, does not exist for indigenous people. Thus, the breaking up of indigenous territories brings in its wake the closing up of indigenous cultural spaces.

If the forests are reduced, if the wild boar and the turtles decrease, if men stop hunting and women gathering, what will happen to the myths which are the foundation of their transhumant life? What will happen to the ceremonies which, with the myths, order and explain the universe, give meaning to the deeds of mankind and which relate them to all other beings within one holistic understanding?

With the disappearance of the last jaguars and free territories, a whole system of life and thought is being extinguished, a way of imagining and understanding nature. The indigenous people are afraid to share the fate of the palms and the wildlife, the fate of other indigenous peoples eliminated by the Whites. They fear "the hunters and the whites"; they put out their camp fires, they withdraw, they hide. They lack food, they have to travel a long way through the forest in order to obtain good skins and hunt game.

Nature recedes along with the spirits which were formed and given refuge within its embrace. In the face of this now disappearing world, people feel that they are losing their powers; they lose confidence in their capacity to renew the continuous harmony of their own cosmos.

How long can they continue fleeing, eating, living? How long can they invent images which mend their damaged universe and exorcise dangers of unknown spirits and forces. The Ayoreode feel that they have to deal with this situation and look for an escape from a world which is closing in on them. They know that contact with Whites made through their own companions could be the lesser of the evils on the dark horizon of an uncertain future.

When the Dogs Ride Bicycles

Apart from the search for a defence and a channel of mediation, the fearful respect for an unknown technology, the seduction of a world populated by

strange objects and the attempt to take possession of its powers to face the new situations, there are other important factors which motivate forest dwelling indigenous people to accept the solution offered by the missionaries.

The most convincing arguments for missionisation are not the promises of salvation, the redeeming words or the announcement of a shining and foreign light. On the contrary, the attraction comes from material incentives: the promise of tangible objects left as bait in the form of “gifts”, the remote and turbulent images of airplanes and cars, the astonishing presents of tape-recorders which circulate from group to group carrying and bringing messages as efficient secret emissaries, and the always mythologised or exaggerated descriptions of radios, watches, refrigerators and bicycles.

Christianity is interesting to the Ayoreode, not as a religious alternative but rather as a means of access to other objects and powers which are necessary to confront the new world. In this sense, Von Bremen says that in the thinking of the hunting-gathering peoples, which is based on direct access to natural resources produced by the dominion of the forces and powers which reign in the forest, the appropriation of the “goods of civilisation” presupposes the control of its wisdom and the previous knowledge of its specific powers.

For this reason, the interest which the indigenous people show for the Christian religion, is not based upon a desire to convert to the “real truth”, but rather to learn the magic key which can permit them to hunt and gather the new goods they want. Von Bremen says:

As the experiences obtained from life in general indicate that the Whites know how to influence the new phenomena, the indigenous people suppose that the Whites also know the qualities and wisdom which are inherent in the said phenomena. So the interest of the indigenous people in this context depends on the White people communicating to them the wisdom which is encompassed within the new phenomena. These motives serve as an explanation for the fact that, on occasions, whole groups are observed in an intense collective eagerness to be baptised, to take part in school courses etc.... In this manner they open ways which make possible communication with the spirits of the, until now, unknown objects, and help them find a way to win over the spirit and use it for their own benefit. As is the case with the shamans and the traditional warriors, the missionaries and the collaborators in these projects always have to legitimise themselves by demonstrating that they still have the capacity to assume this protecting function. If this is not so, or if someone else demonstrates a greater capacity to perform this role, the group reacts and abandons the location where the mission is established and moves to another (1987:19 & 23).

This indigenous attitude also explains the successive baptisms into different religions which some indigenous persons accumulate as a way of fixing evangelical civilising steps to protect them and assure the operation of magical powers enabling them to move within the world of White people.

The phenomena just mentioned reveal the mechanism of the indigenous-

missionary contract by which they accept settlement in the missions in exchange for the protection and teaching from the missionaries. Such an agreement says little for the convincing powers of "The Word".

In many cases, the ethnocidal mission is neutralised by the indigenous people's non-compliance with it because the new power which they tried to control cannot be controlled by people such as them. The "wisdom" of the new things escapes from their hands and turns against them: in pursuit of new knowledge they are left without it and without their own.

We have spoken of the disastrous effects which the breaking of communal cultural axioms produces. Tearing to pieces their universe of meaning, many indigenous people are left without hope. They then grasp after the new signs taking them as substitutes for their lost past. It is, therefore, common that the indigenous people seek a strategy of survival which strives to replace a certain order in their devastated world and become swept along by fanaticism.

This is the most coveted moment for missionaries. Regretfully, it is an all too common moment in the acculturative process of those people which we call "hunters". (I avoid the commonly used term "palaeolithic", which is a simplification based on a lineal teaching of history.)

The itinerant indigenous communities are then suddenly confronted by a powerful society, and even though they have a great flexibility to evade or assume the shock, they are, nevertheless, more exposed to the danger of being subjugated by it. Their own indigenous dynamism, which offers them so many possibilities of accommodation and survival, at times plays them a mean trick by laying them open to assault from such powerful sources that they are not able to assimilate them into their society, threatening their functioning and even their unity.

In this sense, these communities can be more vulnerable to cultural destruction than sedentary societies, which, because they appear more stable and conservative, risk less from contact and have better possibilities to make use of outside impacts over time.

Historical conditions of change, such as sudden sedentarisation or having nothing specific to do at the mission station, have an impact which can break the communal cohesion of indigenous society, particularly that of nomadic people such as the Ayoreode who do not have a fixed settlement pattern and are both adaptable and mobile.

These factors, therefore, frequently make cultural destruction sudden and devastating. This can be seen in certain Guarani villages of the Eastern Region of Paraguay. Even after centuries of contact, they maintain, in a readapted form, their symbolic structures, their images and their rites. In contrast, some Chaqueña communities have lost their ethnic identity in less than three decades. In the face of cultural annihilation, human beings have no means to rescue ele-

ments of culture in order to conserve or transform them. Without the right to free expression and to a memory, without the right to be one person who can face another *with dignity*, an indigenous person ends up forgetting the past or else converting it into a scrap of foreign memory.

Colombres has looked at the case of some Aché who when captured and subjugated saw themselves as dead people and had no other choice than to accept this role and face those Aché left in the forest:

They felt condemned to a great nothingness with no other vision than that offered by the Whites. They thought that, to subsist, they should imitate the White world blindly, putting a seal on the case and accepting what fate had in store for them (Colombres, 1977:169).

Visiting the Poor Relatives

The final reason invoked by Chiri for accepting the proposition of the missionaries to capture his relatives is used by the raiders to justify their supposed neutrality in the incursions and to explain the invasion of the Guidaigosode as a mere visit to relatives.

Evidently the family relations between individuals of different Ayoreode groups, as well as the traditional use of what Susnik calls “inter-clan messengers” who communicate between these groups, could constitute an important motivation for searching for the Totobiegosode. But this searching is encouraged, in turn, by other factors.

One reason is that the Ayoreode war tradition has been active in recent times in the form of inter-ethnic conflicts during which the Totobiegosode have been continuously attacked by hostile groups. Another reason is that many of the converted Ayoreode have adopted with their conversion the new religious principles. They want to carry the word to their brothers as the missionaries did to them.

The Campolorogosode managed to exchange their warlike impetuosity for evangelical fervour. It is certain that they were disarmed in order to attract the Totobiegosode. A similar incident happened with the Aché, when the “tamed” Aché went to search for the “wild” ones. Munzel says that the hunters were converted into jaguars, the traditional trackers of humans, and as such they had to assume a new destiny – to hunt their fellow Aché. The Campolorogosode nowadays proudly claim that they do not carry arms on their raids but rather Bibles. But in the long run, there is not much difference between one method and the other.

While there must have been some ethnic motivation which impelled the unwelcome incursion of 1986, it is definite that the Ayoreode from Campo Loro

were manipulated by the missionaries, who after years of observing how good their proselytes were at hunting, knew the ways to exploit their fears and desires. The missionaries found the indigenous Achilles' heel and also knew how to exploit it.

The Right to Difference

We have already emphasised the devastating effects of the missionary ethnocide. We will now attempt to consider what possibilities indigenous people have to elude or twist this cultural aggression and to maintain, in spite of it, or by means of it, a space of their own which can assure their cultural continuity and the right to be different.



Totobiegosode in Campo Loro shortly after their capture on the 29.12.86. The man has already had his hair cut (photo: Juan Carlos Meza/RP Ediciones).

Once reduced in missions and having completely abandoned their active resistance, a people has the following basic alternative: either they surrender, accept being conquered and renounce all means of resistance or they can replant their own cultural forms in the face of the outside influences and reaccommodate themselves to the new times, seeking to change in order to conserve.

The first case has been analysed; it refers to the communities which did not have time, space or strength to oppose the invading missionaries. These people were crushed. They capitulated and resigned themselves to being culturally diluted into other groups. They had to avoid looking both back in time, which would reveal their traditional culture, and forward, which would only show them a future under foreign domination.

The new conditions are usually so crushing that they leave no room for the community members to reinterpret their world. This reinterpretation is the soil in which they can replant their social imagery which provides them with an identity. Without this, indigenous people lose control of their symbols, forget their own experience and have difficulty in creating a new understanding of their own lives.

The second alternative of resistance, refers to the cultures which can maintain the mastery of the matrix behind their symbolic codes, and continue elaborating their own cultural forms from it and adapting them to meet the challenges from an epoch dominated by a foreign world. Meanwhile, such a community can maintain its internal cohesion and control over an area of conceptual space in which to construct its symbols. Even though situated in a foreign culture and pressured by projects which are not their own, indigenous peoples can continue to feel like the owners of their past and of their aspirations, while refusing the dark destiny which the alien culture assigns to them and which the projects impose on them.

However, this alternative is subject to risks. Leaving aside the NTM position which openly denies any alternative to its own culture, we should look at two other forms of non-indigenous approaches to the future of indigenous peoples. These are examples of fatalist thinking, which though they say that they permit alternative forms of culture, end up contradicting themselves.

In the first place there is a certain romantic view, which is nearly always steeped in nationalism and indigenism. This view nurtures the thought that indigenous people should remain untouched by change and concludes with the idea that the only solution that remains for a "good savage" is to take refuge in his original pure past. This past was long before himself, frozen at the limits of history and uncontaminated by future events.

This position is paternalistic. It claims, in the name of indigenous peoples, to dictate from outside what is suitable for them and what is not. This amounts to keeping them as eternal minors, moreover the idea of preserving indigenous peoples is also discriminatory because it considers that only modern Western culture has the right and duty to change its course in response to the demands of an insatiable movement of development. It ignores the right of the dominated cultures to elaborate, as a strategy of survival, syncretic complexes, or to conceal their true face behind a White and Christian mask. It does not recognise that communities themselves should choose what to conserve and what to change, and that they should be able to select from the dominant culture what can be useful to them, even though the result might contradict the one-way direction of development indicated by the West.

The myth of the pure cultures, a myth of ancient origin and fascist resonance, drinks, in turn, from other wells and feeds other streams. Behind the thought which maintains that the ethnic cultures depend upon static systems and cannot change is the assumption that indigenous peoples have no future other than to imitate their past; the culture can be buried with anticipated nostalgia if necessary. This is the old idealistic illusion which attempts to compensate wrongs and dispossession which are embedded in our culture and have formed archetypes at different times in our history.

At times this approach rejuvenates its arguments. The strong bond existing between the socio-economic conditions and the world of beliefs is often invoked, explicitly or not, to decree the death of certain symbolic systems when the structures which support them founder. The reasoning, simplistic but effective, which, with good reason, is frequently condemned is the following: indigenous communities originate from a certain social system and create rites, myths and images which permit them to comprehend this system and act within it. If the system becomes obsolete and changes substantially, all of the collective imagery which sustains it collapses.

This argument looks for examples in “pre-capitalist” cultures which are treated as being subjugated inextricably to static modes of production. The systems which this approach sees the most anachronistic are those it terms “palaeolithic”. The symbolic structures of the Ayoreode, for example, would fit the definition of this argument because they are organised out of challenges from the practical circumstances to which cultural and religious forms respond. The results are the symbols, rituals and ceremonies of hunters and gatherers. When these hunters and gatherers are supposedly threatened, their lives automatically change to agriculture, wage labour or the looking for skins to sell.

This position assumes that processes of change are automatically identified with the fate of the material conditions which they express. But this approach

denies the fertile incongruities between the symbolic and the material which provide the means to construct new indigenous discourses and practices. These new formations are the means of smothering the conceptual order imposed by the missions.

According to this position, only pure cultures can survive as different; if they are contaminated, they are irremediably destined to disappear and, as contact with White society is unavoidable, those societies which abandon the jungle have no option but to surrender. The peoples who have lost their original conditions are condemned to live without their symbols and their cultural systems, and become converted into empty frames which can be filled with the saving contents of a new religion: Christianity.

In the long run, these two positions, the one preserving indigenous peoples, the other condemning them to destruction, push the future of indigenous peoples into a blind alley.

Both positions make a false disjunction which Line Bareiro calls “integration or apartheid”. According to this the indigenous peoples of the forests can only melt into the national society or live without communication in remote and exotic jungles, apart from any pernicious contact with civilisation.

In view of this argument, it is important to underline the right which indigenous peoples have to reformulate their universe of images and beliefs when they have changed the forms of life which sustain them. It is very probable that many aspects of their hunting culture may lose their force and might be replaced in the future, but it up to them to decide what.

However, if the culture maintains the means to construct alternative solutions and to continue plotting its course, then it could reinterpret the new “civilised” conditions of existence on the basis of its own codes to its own readapted cosmovision.

An indigenous community has the right to assume new positions along with historical changes. This is the only way that indigenous peoples have the opportunity to survive as an alternative ethnic group in a homogenising world, ever less tolerant of particularities.

Therefore, the question is not one of passing judgement upon an abstract alternative (assimilation or isolation) because both terms lead to discrimination and take up a tutelary position which chooses from the outside between leaving the indigenous people in the hills or integrating them. The only thing that can be done for indigenous peoples from the outside is to support their right to be protagonists of their own history and their demands for the physical and symbolic space they need to fulfill this aim. But only they should decide where and how they should live. This is particularly the case when they are being dragged around by the flow of a foreign history which foresees no place for different



Eode, seated on the ground, probably died in a flu epidemic in Camp Loro in 1983; behind is the nurse, Linda Keefe, from the New Tribes Mission who admitted to Luke Holland that she had no nursing training, Faro Moro Mission, 1979 (photo: Luke Holland/RP Ediciones).

dreams and considers that they should abandon the forest and approach the White world.

In fact, peoples which were thought to have been destroyed, are today establishing a communal reconstitution. They are using inter-group gatherings aimed at encouraging the cohesion of their members. For example, Aché and Ayoreode communities are seeking the means to reconstruct themselves in their own manner so that they can understand and control the new circumstances in which they

find themselves. Their aim, even though it is difficult, is to use their alternative discourse to take more control in the dramatic plot which, until now, has always assigned them to the role of objects.

However, though indispensable, the internal reorganisation of the community is not sufficient for the full exercise of the long-delayed rights of indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples are always placed in subordinate positions in society. Without outside contacts to support their aspirations and without a national society disposed to offer, on an equal footing with others, a place in its system without demanding in exchange their detribalisation, indigenous peoples will always be threatened by the plunder of their lands and their symbolic systems. Since the first contact, this dispossession has marked the relationship between indigenous and White people.

Only a tolerant and pluralistic society is capable of recognising its multi-ethnic composition and of promoting the general participation of the majority and many minorities in the process of taking decisions. Such a society would ensure for indigenous peoples the effective recognition of their rights and constitutional guarantees, as well as the means for them to conserve and develop their way of life and their own beliefs.

And only in a democratic Paraguay, some time in the future, will respect for cultural differences bring an end to the many ethnocidal missions. We hope that the fulfillment of this ancient dream will not be delayed too long.



A group of Ayoreode (Garaigosode) in traditional dress (photo: Don Bosco Film/RP Ediciones).

Postscript

This article, by Ticio Escaboar, was published as a commentary in the Paraguayan newspaper, Hoy, on Wednesday, 26th April, 1989. It refers to the incident described in the Introduction where he, as a member of the joint investigatory commission was denied access to Ayoreode by the New Tribes Mission. In the article he comments on this in the light of the fall of the dictator Stroessner.

When will the indigenous people have their 3rd of February?

On the 3rd of February 1989, Paraguay woke up to find itself a different country. A new climate of hope blossomed and dreams returned which had been robbed one by one during a night that had seemed endless. Although we cannot believe that we have the best result from what has happened, we can begin to believe in the possibility of another destiny. We can also begin to realise that, in spite of the dictatorship and its legacy which still casts its long shadows, our country has preserved not just the vocation but the pure instinct of freedom. We know this freedom only as a secret reserve of tolerance that nourishes this new confidence in a future democracy.

But it seems that this hope is not equally distributed among the people who share our country: enclaves of authoritarianism still survive in Paraguay where intolerance and ascendancy thrive. Those afflicted by this are the indigenous people: communities that have not even secured their right to freedom of religion, their right to be accepted as different people, to practise, in accordance with their rights, their own customs, rituals and traditions.

The New Tribes Mission is hardly a special case. Nevertheless, through the fanaticism of its missionaries and its aggressive methods it forms a paradigmatic example of a disrespectful and closed mission. It is the carrier of an hierarchical model inclined towards imperial desires. So let us take this case as an example of the many pro-dictatorial enclaves which remain among us and which work in the opposite direction of the one marking history today.

Naturally the NTM missionaries had a good relationship with the dictatorship: there were large photographs of Stroessner on the walls of the central offices in Asunción and even in the Churches (in Cerro Morotí, for example, the portrait of the dictator presided on the wall in the central chapel, although I presume he has been de-canonised by now). They had carte-blanche to use aeroplanes, landing strips and radio transmitters and to obtain unconditional

permissions and various kinds of backing from INDI. The worst thing of all is that the NTM enjoys official protection and is exempt from any kind of control.

On Sunday 16th April, a joint commission, consisting of members from four national institutions (Miguel Chase Sardi, José Zanardini, Oleg Vysokolán and Ticio Escobar) went to Campo Loro, an NTM mission station in the Ayoreode area, in order to investigate the situation of the Totobiegosode who have been in captivity since December 1986. We were unceremoniously forced to leave the mission by the actions of the missionaries who turned the Indigenous Council against us.

Is this “the message of salvation” for which the missionaries risk their lives and destroy the cultures of the indigenous people of our country? Why do they spur the indigenous people to violence and raise a barrier between “their” Ayoreode and members of the national society who are interested in the problems facing indigenous peoples? What are they trying to conceal, since they hide so desperately in these inaccessible evangelic concentration camps? Why do they fear dialogue and confrontation?

At least we know the fatal results of the last man-hunts they carried out in 1986, and we know that in these missions the indigenous people are systematically crushed and destroyed. They brutally lose their symbolic ritual universe and thus the golden land which the missionaries promise turn out to be squalid “labour camps” where the Ayoreode offer their work force at a cheap price to the Mennonites of Filadelfia or Loma Plata.

The indigenous people of Paraguay today constitute a marginalised and silenced minority, trying hard to hold on to their identity and the course of their own history. If we really want to leave behind the dictatorship we must adopt the multi-ethnicity and pluri-culture of our country and recognise the right of these minorities to decide for themselves how to elaborate their past and how to face an unknown world which is relentlessly destroying the jungle and standardising dreams.

Today we are able to breathe new air and nourish hopes that seemed unattainable before, but as long as we are not capable of respecting differences, we do not have the right to call ourselves democratic.

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This document describes the cultural genocide of the indigenous peoples of Paraguay by the New Tribes Mission. The fundamentalists missionaries of the NTM have been particularly destructive among the Ayoreode of the Chaco, and the document looks at how the destruction has increased over the last thirty years. The author places the work of the NTM in a historical context stretching back to the time of the Jesuits. He charts meticulously the process by which uncontacted hunting people are converted into Christian fodder for the labour market of the national society. The document has been produced to coincide with a British Yorkshire Television film about the cultural genocide committed by the New Tribes Mission.



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