

THE FUTURE OF TRIBAL PEOPLE IN SOUTH COTABATO

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As announced in the last issue of INTER-RELIGIO, we are publishing here an extended report based on two years of work with the T'boli, a tribal group in Mindanao, Philippines. Its author, a Columban missionary born in Ireland, did higher studies in anthropology in the United States before being assigned as chaplain at the Mindanao State University in 1975, where he came to know Peter Gowing and the work of the Dansalan Research Center. At the time of the Hong Kong Conference the T'boli Study Centre was celebrating a major local fiesta, preventing Rev. McDonagh from joining us at Tao Fong Shan.

TOWARDS THE YEAR 2000

As we approach the end of the second millennium international bodies, national government, and private organizations are attempting in a systematic and scientific way to look into the future and ask themselves how the groups they serve will look in the year 2000 and beyond. *Global 2000: A Report to the President*, which was commissioned by President Jimmy Carter and completed just before he left office in 1980, is probably the most successful effort to date to collate an extensive range of data on the Earth's resources and—given present trends—predict how things will look by the at the turn to the twenty— first century.

The Commission on the Tribal Filipino in the Diocese of Marbel sets itself a similar task with the question: "What will the situation of Tribal Filipinos be like in South Cotabato by the year 2000 and beyond?" Although, unfortunately, the Commission does not have the access to the vast array of information and networks which the authors of *Global 2000* could avail itself of—and therefore feels that ongoing intensive research into the actual condition of Tribal Filipinos in the area is a top priority—it is composed of both Tribal Filipinos and people who have been working in the field for over twenty years. Thus, while at the moment quantifiable data might be scarce, there is a rich reservoir of experience within the Commission itself from which to draw. Moreover, the Commission is aware that the problems facing Tribal Filipinos in South Cotabato are not unique. In fact, in one way or another they are shared

by Tribal Peoples throughout the Philippines, and for that matter around the world, and a common prognosis regarding their probable fate—unless urgent steps are taken to reverse present trends— lends a note of urgency to the work of the Commission, particularly to any comprehensive plan which the Commission hopes to draw up and implement as the Church of South Cotabato's response to this mammoth problem.

PERSPECTIVE ON THE PROBLEM

It is important from the outset to situate the Commission's work within the proper framework so that the various facets of the apostolate are seen and understood both by those engaged in the work directly and those who, though not dealing with Tribal Peoples, are living in South Cotabato and therefore in one way or another involved in the wider dimensions of the problem. An article by Erick Eckholm entitled, "The Global Underclass" in his book, *Down to Earth*, gives a panoramic view of both the wide range of socio-economic-ecological problems facing the "absolutely poor" and the special unique problems which various segments of that 800 million people (according to World Bank statistics) must wrestle with. According to Eckholm one fifth of humanity are so deprived of income, goods and even hope as to put them in a special class. This old statistic hides the appalling reality of pain, suffering, squalor and misery which degrades these people, destroys their human potential and undermines their human dignity. It also tend to lump all these people together when, in fact, distinct groups of people with their own unique range of problems actually compose the global underclass. It is vital that people who work with and attempt to alleviate the sufferings of the global underclass understand that programs which are appropriate to the needs of one group need not be helpful for another. Eckholm identifies four groups in the Global Underclass:

1. The Hungry and Malnourished.
2. The Rural Landless.
3. Urban Squatters and Slum Dwellers.
4. Tribal Peoples.

The focus of the Commission is naturally on Tribal Filipinos. We feel, however, that it is important to locate our work in the broader context for two reasons.

First, as already stated, the problems of various segments within the global underclass are unique. Difficulties and problems which are experienced in one area may not be found in another. For that reason people working, for example, in urban apostolates may extrapolate from their own experience and feel that their approaches and programs may also be successful among Tribal Filipinos. While on the surface they may appear to be responding to a similar need, in fact they may exacerbate rather than solve concrete problems.

Second, unless we locate the problem within the wider context we feel that

insufficient attention will be paid to it for the simple reason that the Tribal Peoples in South Cotabato at present live on the margins of the dominant lowland society. They are at the bottom of the social pyramid and all the institutions of Society conspire to keep them there. Very few Tribal People have positions of influence in either the government or Church structures and thus lack "insiders" to advocate their cause. Almost 100% of Church personnel are either expatriate missionaries or lowland Filipinos, so that, naturally, there is a tendency on their part to concentrate most of the Church's resources—personnel and funds—in lowland areas, even though the need among Tribal Peoples may be much more pressing. Furthermore, the institutions of both Church and State—Education, Justice, Financial and Religious—reflect and promote the values of lowlanders. Tribal Peoples are thus constantly pushed to the margins: *literally* in the sense that they lose their ancestral lands and sources of livelihood, and *metaphorically* in the sense that their problems and concerns are never given proper attention. If they are present at all, they are pushed to the edge of lowland consciousness.

EXTINCTION/SURVIVAL

What is the central problem facing Tribal Filipinos as we look towards the year 2000? The Commission's response—Extinction. This is the dreaded possibility that faces tribal Filipinos in South Cotabato in common with their 200 million tribal brothers and sisters spread around the globe. Unless a major effort is launched to reverse the present trends which are destroying indigenous cultures at an increasing pace, it is feared that Tribal Peoples will not survive as integral cultures in the 21st century. This grim prognosis is not confined to the members of the Commission. It is shared by such groups as Survival International, an organization set up in 1969 to help indigenous peoples to survive both physically and culturally. It is also shared by the authors of the cover story for *Newsweek*, September 21, 1981 entitled, "The Vanishing Tribals."

PRESSURES ON THE TRIBAL PEOPLES

In normal times any one of the pressures now confronting tribal societies would be enough to cause a major dislocation for the culture. Today tribal societies have to face not a single problem but a manifold attack from various quarters. These pressures are working together to push tribal societies over a precipice. What are some of these problems?

1. LAND

The most serious problem facing Tribal People everywhere is the loss of their ancestral lands. Once their lands go, they are really doomed as they have no source of livelihood. In fact Tribal Filipinos are losing their land at an alarming rate. A booklet prepared by the Episcopal Commission on Tribal Filipinos asks the poignant question: *What Has Happened to Our Lands, Brothers?* The story of how they have lost and continue to lose their lands throughout the Philippines, and especially in Mindanao, is strikingly similar.

Settlers. For the past 40 years or more, settlers from Visayas and Luzon have migrated to Mindanao in search of a better future owing to severe land pressures and a growing population in their own region. Initially, the newcomers settled in coastal areas and gradually set about clearing the forest to make way for agriculture—rice, corn, and coconuts. From the very beginning the settlers came in contact with the Tribal Filipinos as their territories often stretched down to the coast. The fate of the Tribal Filipinos was in sense sealed from the beginning mainly due to different settlement and land ownership patterns between the newcomer, or "Visayans" as they were called, and the indigenous people. The settlers moved into an area, acquired a particular piece of land, and began to cultivate it intensively. Tribal people, on the other hand, were mainly hunters, gatherers, and slash-and-burn farmers. They tended to move from one area to another, though it must be emphasized that their movement patterns were generally within a well defined area and were determined by the rhythms of *kaingin* or swidden farming. The initial reaction of Tribal Filipinos to the arrival of settlers was to move further back into the mountain or forest. Gradually, however, as the number of settlers increased they also moved inland in search of new land and thus came into more constant contact and, at times, conflict with Tribal Filipinos. In many cases, the Tribal Filipinos lost the lands occupied by their ancestors since time immemorial through unjust and deceptive means. These include, terror tactics, enforced mortgage, and the procurement of fraudulent titles.

Terror Tactics. On many occasions groups of armed men hired by lowlanders enter the ancestral lands of the Tribal Filipinos to burn and loot their houses and kill the work animals. Simply to avoid trouble, and because they have no adequate protection from the civil authorities, the Tribal People flee further into the mountain or forest.

Mortgage. Many lowlanders such as owners of *sari-sari* stores, encourage Tribal Filipinos to run up debts in their store. To pay the debt the tribal person is forced to mortgage his land for a fraction of its proper value, the Tribal People having little former little experience of the lowland economic system.

Land Titles. Each tribal group has its own saga of how difficult it is to get titles to their land, how fraudulent titles were issued, and how often the very people who were supposed to help them in getting titles for their lands duped them.

Another important factor is that Tribal People—with a semi-nomadic tra-

dition of hunting and gathering—do not place the same value on a particular piece of land as do peasant people. For this reason, Tribal People were and still are willing to mortgage or even sell their land in order to meet a debt or support a relative in trouble. They are not always fully conscious of the finality of selling land to others, and find it difficult to comprehend how something as basic and natural as land can be sold.

2. **TIMBER RESOURCES**

Another factor encouraging the encroachment of outsiders on the ancestral lands of Tribal Peoples is logging. In many areas the logging company acts as the precursor of the Visayan settlers. The logging permit is normally issued without prior consultation with the Tribal People in the area, nor is there any thought of just compensation for the use of resources on their ancestral lands. Invariably, the logging adversely affects the environment of the Tribal Filipinos, as many of them are hunters and gatherers, dependent on edible fruits, nuts, plants, and root crops from the forest, and swidden (*kain gin*) farmers. As the forest is cleared, the traditional source of food—wild animals, and edible plants—is exhausted, forcing them to abandon their nomadic ways, settle in one place, and adopt the agricultural practices of the lowlanders. Here the tribals are immediately at a disadvantage, as traditionally they are subsistence farmers with little experience in a cash economy that includes buying seeds, fertilizer, and insecticide and selling their produce in the market. One major failure in the above cycle can lead to the moneylender. The next step is to mortgage the land and eventually lose it when payments cannot be met.

3. **WATER PROJECTS**

Many dams for hydro-electric irrigation projects are located in the ancestral areas of Tribal Filipinos. These dams, like the one on Lake Lanao, hardly benefit the indigenous population at all. Government institutions, foreign banks and corporations, and many lowlanders expect Tribal Peoples to vacate their lands to facilitate projects which are erroneously termed "development" without a thought for the adverse effects of these projects on the Tribal Peoples. They are, it would seem, dispensable. Everyone benefits but they. Plans for more dams are continually on the drawing boards despite the fact that in recent years serious questions have been raised about the adverse environmental impact on many dam projects.

4. **MINING**

In "The Vanishing Tribals," the Brazilian anthropologist Darcy Rebeiro notes that "the discovery of anything which can be exploited is tantamount to the crack of doom." With the growing scarcity of many important metals predicted in *Global 2000*, foreign and local mining corporations around the world

are investing billions of dollars in mining. The impact of such an operation on a tribal society is particularly severe. Even in financial terms the tribal society seldom benefits since profits go to the National Government or the Company involved. Tribal peoples are normally given menial jobs; the men work as laborers and the women often drift into prostitution. The final result when a mining company moves on to exploit another area is a destroyed environment, and a displaced and dispirited people. The experience to date of mining operations in Mindanao is not encouraging. A major, though little publicized, tragedy took place at a mining site in North Davao in October 1981. The company involved was so negligent that it built the miners' bunk houses in the dry Masara river bed. After a few days rain in the area, a wall of water came crashing down on the shacks in the middle of the night killing over 200 men, women, and children. The Davao del Norte Fiscal Isagani Fuentes maintained that the North Davao Mining Corporations was "liable for damages and for multiple homicide."

5. PANAMIN (PRESIDENTIAL ARM FOR NATIONAL ASSISTANCE TO MINORITIES)

Unfortunately, even government agencies set up with the stated purpose of helping Tribal People can undermine their culture. The *Newsweek* article links government-sponsored agencies to the legalized theft of tribal lands:

Generally subordinated to development-minded national interior or defense ministries, most "indigenous" agencies have become a bitter joke to Tribal People. Brazil's FUNAI, for example, is sardonically and all too accurately referred to as "The National Indian Funeral Parlor."

Few tribal Filipinos in Mindanao or elsewhere in the Philippines have anything good to say about PANANIM. In fact, one constantly hears bitter complaints about the destructive nature of PANAMIN's presence. Many of these are contained in a *Report on Tribal Minorities in Mindanao* prepared by the ICL Research team. The researchers examined PANAMIN's record in four areas in Mindanao: Bukidnon, Davao, Misamis Oriental, and South Cotabato. They concluded that "whatever its avowed aims, PANAMIN's tactics are aimed at the repression of Tribal Filipinos." PANAMIN is accused of encouraging and facilitating the recent expansion of both multinational and locally owned agri-business corporations in Mindanao. Many of these large holdings encroach on tribal lands so that the land area of tribal groups is rapidly shrinking and their ability to feed themselves now and in the future is jeopardized. PANAMIN has also been involved in the very divisive business of arming and training Tribal People for so called anti-insurgency work. The tragic consequences of this type of operation is seen all over Mindanao, and especially among the Suban-ons of Zamboanga del Sur, where scores of people were murdered in a PANAMIN controlled area by an armed fanatical group

called Rock-Christ. Finally, PANAMIN has also engaged in the traditional imperial tactics of "divide and conquer" by bribing selected leaders among different tribal groups with money, gifts, and trips to Manila in order to encourage them to support government programs, even those which are inimical to the long term welfare of their own communities.

6. MILITARIZATION

The growing militarization—the presence of insurgents and counter-insurgents—is, according to *Newsweek*, the greatest threat to Tribal Peoples in Africa and much of Asia. This threat is also present in Mindanao with the growing presence of the Philippine Army, the Philippine Constabulary, the Marines, the local police, and insurgents in tribal areas. Often, as in Vietnam, Tribal Peoples are virtually the playthings of government and guerrilla movements alike. Because of the somewhat inaccessible nature of their territory it is often used as safe haven by insurgents, leading to search and destroy operations by government forces which spread havoc and terror and often end up in wholesale evacuations. No matter who wins the conflict, be it the incumbent government or, as in Vietnam, the guerrillas, the Tribal People always lose.

7. REIGION

One would expect at least religion to be a positive force working for the integral development and survival of Tribal Peoples. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. Tribal People are grateful for the educational, social, and medical service provided by religious groups and also for the concern and dedication of individual missionaries. However, unless the religious group is concerned for the integral development of the tribal community and, particularly, the preservation of its cultural heritage, the programs which the missionary introduces and the presentation of the Christian faith itself can, unwittingly, be a powerful instrument of assimilation, and thus sound the death knell of the Tribal Filipino culture.

Many of the mainline Christian Churches have in recent years become more aware of this, at least in theory. They enjoin missionaries and the Church itself to respect and preserve in every way the culture of the people and not to present the Gospel in a way that will destroy the cultural matrix. Statements to this effect can be found in the documents of Vatican II, and more recently in the Synod of Bishops on Evangelization and the document to emerge from it, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1976). The World Council of Churches has expressed similar sentiments in a series of meetings held in Bangkok, (1972-73), Nairobi (1975), and Melbourne (1980). The more conservative Evangelical Churches have also been concerned with the issue, as is clear from *The Willowbank Consultation on the Gospel and Culture* (1978).

From the above, one might expect that a good deal of ecumenical cooperation

tion might now be possible in responding to the present crisis. Unfortunately, this is not so in many areas of South Cotabato. The Commission was particularly critical of fundamentalist sects working among Tribal Peoples. Some are so hostile to Catholics and Catholic missionaries that they will not even speak to them. This is the experience of Fr. Carl Schmitz working among the Bilaan communities. Far more disturbing than their opposition to Catholics is the fact that many of these fundamentalist religious preach a spiritual gospel totally divorced from the socio-political-economic-ecological context of Tribal Peoples. From the perspective of their preaching all that matters is individual conversion and the rigid adherence to some rule of faith which has no relevance to the life-situation of the people, and certainly does not provide Tribal Peoples with the spiritual motivation needed to face the enormous problems which press in on them from every side. Most of the problems enumerated in the previous pages demand solutions which go far beyond the individual conversion of Tribal Peoples, inasmuch as the roots and causes of the problems are actually located in First World societies. Instead of liberating people and equipping them to face the problems of the real world, fundamentalism, especially the form which emerges from the southern part of the United States, richly deserves the Marxist stricture of "opium of the people." It certainly does not enliven Tribal Peoples or imbue them with confidence to face the challenges of the world in which they are now forced to live. In fact, it induces a passivity that leaves them open to total ruin. Though this faith is often presented as a biblical faith, it is a far cry from Yahweh's challenge to Moses to oppose the tyranny of the Pharaoh and lead his people to freedom. Finally, many of the sects consciously work to undermine the traditional culture of Tribal Peoples. Their fundamentalist interpretation of the bible demands a clean break with the past. The "clean broom" approach demands that everything be swept away to make way for the Christian life. Consciously or unconsciously, what this amounts to is imposing, in the name of Christ, a conglomeration of lowland Filipino values and the culture of the expatriate missionary.

While we are happy that a new day has dawned in the history of Catholic mission in terms of promoting respect for individual cultures, it is well to remember that until very recently we imposed foreign symbols and values in the name of a universality that was quite destructive of indigenous cultures. This point is made very forcefully by Fr. Karl Rahner in an insightful article, "Toward a Fundamental Theological Interpretation of Vatican II:"

This showed in the different rites controversies; in the export of Latin as liturgical language to countries in which Latin was never a historical reality; in the naive, unquestioning way that Western, Roman Law was exported through Canon Law; in the naive, unquestioning way that an effort was made to impose the bourgeois morality in all its details on people of different cultures; in the rejection of religious experiences of other cultures and so forth.

A document like *Inestimable Donum* from the Sacred Congregation of the Liturgy in 1980 reminds us that those days are not completely over. This document presumes that, with slight adjustments here and there, a common liturgy in terms of texts and symbols is still possible for the worldwide Catholic community. What it fails to realize is that in the name of so-called universalism the authors of the document are, in fact, sponsoring and propagating a particular cultural form of worship which, while it reflects the ethos of one culture, destroys the creativity of all others. Rather than issue stern warnings for everyone to fall in line with a highly centralized, rather lifeless, and official practice, the Church should actively encourage research and experimentation.

This is one area where I think the words of Pope John II at Cologne Cathedral on November 1980 are particularly apt. The Pope was stressing the need for continual cooperation between empirical science and religion so that both "contribute to the humanization of the world." He then goes on to utter what for many is a remarkable phrase, given the conservative and jaundiced view of science found in much Church thinking in recent centuries: "In this situation the Church does not advocate prudence and restraint, but courage and decision." This courage and decision is called for in three areas which are vital for a vibrant Church life in the present and the future.

A. THEOLOGY

Each culture needs to express the Gospel message in both verbal and non-verbal forms which pulsate with the life of that people. Otherwise, no matter how orthodox the statement of the Faith may appear to be, it will not touch the hearts of the people but remain something foreign and lifeless in their midst.

B. LITURGY

While some progress has been made in recent years here with the introduction of local languages, this is really only a beginning. One cannot simply translate texts and prayers from one language to another and presume that they will have a similar meaning. For example, the formal, abstract, unadorned petitions of the prayers of the Roman Missal finds little resonance in the hearts of lowland Christian Filipinos, even when these prayers are translated into the vernacular, for the simple reason that the language of petition within lowland culture is almost always highly specific and also lends itself to a variety of linguistic embellishment. The abstract prayers simply fall on deaf ears. What are called for are indigenous cultural forms, both words and symbols that will capture the religious ethos of the people, encourage and challenge their vital aspirations at the same time as they express the central message of the Gospel of Jesus.

C. MINISTRY

There is a pressing need to develop indigenous forms of Church ministry among Tribal People. At the moment the only models of ministry being offered are those practiced by lowlanders or expatriate missionaries. Both are alien to tribal religious values, and can actually lead to a kind of cultural and religious schizophrenia. At present a young tribal Filipino person has to submit himself to the acculturation pressures of the lowland situation before he can serve as minister of the Eucharist for his own people. The tragedy of such training is that it often alienates the young tribal person both from his own society and also from the dominant society in which he works. Much thought and reflection is necessary if we are to develop appropriate forms of leadership that will be readily understood in the tribal society and will at the same time be at the service of the Gospel of Jesus. That this is by no means impossible is the clear lesson of history. In fact, this is how ministry developed in the European context until, in a sense, it was frozen in recent centuries and presented as a sort of universal demand transcending cultural differences.

The above three areas emphasize the need for autonomy in this apostolate so that those involved can search for new ways to express and celebrate the Christian faith, and new forms of ministry that will quicken rather than stultify the organic growth of the Christian community. Without freedom, creativity, and genuine trust, none of this is possible and all the beautiful statements in official Church documents will never be realized in practice. This, according to Fr. Karl Rahner in the article already quoted, is the real challenge of Vatican II:

This, then is the issue: either the Church sees and recognizes these essential differences of other cultures for which she should become a world Church and with a Pauline boldness draws the necessary consequences from this recognition, or she remains a Western Church and so in the final analysis betrays the meaning of Vatican II.

LOSS OF IDENTITY, ASSIMILATION, EXTINCTION

The combination of the above pressures on Tribal Peoples tends to lead to the final turn to a downhill loss of identity, assimilation, and extinction. A priest working among Tribal Peoples in Brazil is reported in "The Vanishing Tribals" to have said: "They are ashamed—they know they are Indians but their despair leads them to deny it. That is the greatest tragedy."

The impact of the above pressures on tribal cultures is enormous. Many of these cultures have until recently lived in virtual isolation and so are ill-prepared for the powerful impact of aggressive dominant culture which continually impinge on the tribal culture in every area of life—from education to

the market place. In the face of such overpowering and often exploitative influences from the outside, it is little wonder that the Tribal People feel defenseless and exploited. Though many possess a rich culture with a fund of epic poetry, beautiful dances, and exquisite crafts, they are made to feel inferior by members of the dominant culture, whose own indigenous cultural heritage was stunted over the centuries by the dominant Western culture. Gradually an acute feeling of inferiority is seen in a wide range of behavioral patterns and attitudes and in a willingness to adopt lowland ways uncritically. The members of the tribal society, especially the younger ones, are exposed to the full onslaught of the lowland culture through the education system—particularly if they go to school in lowlands, where they begin to adopt the ways of lowlanders. They are ashamed to wear their traditional dress and adopt Western dress. They tend to belittle their own music, dance, art, and culture and to adopt the lowland "ways," even when lowland "ways" are intrinsically inferior to the tribal ones. Here formal education can be a two-edged sword.

On the one hand, relevant education can help Tribal Peoples protect themselves in the face of lowland encroachment. It can help them develop the full potential of their lands and natural resources. It can spread a knowledge of sanitation and, by combining both modern and traditional medicine, can ensure a more healthy society. On the other hand, it can have the opposite effect by unlocking the door to lowland culture in a way that spells doom for the tribal culture.

The present educational system in the Philippines, a legacy of the American period, tends to undermine the values and norms of Tribal Filipinos. It presents a vision of the good life which is urban oriented and at variance with the traditions of tribal societies. It can often foster a competitive, individualistic, dog-eat-dog, get-ahead-at-all-costs spirit inimical to the sense of teamwork essential if all the members of the society are going to work for the betterment of all.

Little wonder that some educated Tribal Filipinos who benefit from the sacrifices of their kit and kin never in fact, return to help their society, but are lured away by the bright lights of the city. Even conscientious people who would like to return to their tribes find the experience traumatic and frustrating. Their formal training has not really prepared them to be of service to their group. In fact, it distances them from their society so that they end up being marginalized in both the lowland and tribal society. The tragic reality is that, no matter how hard they try, Tribal Filipinos are seldom accepted within the dominant culture except as hewers of wood and drawers of water.

Other professionally trained Tribal Filipinos use their position to exploit their own people. Some tribal Filipino lawyers are more rapacious and unscrupulous in falsifying titles and grabbing land than their lowland colleagues. To sum up, modern relevant education is absolutely necessary if Tribal Filipinos are to survive. However, every effort must be made to make the education relevant to the actual needs of the Tribal People, and it should reflect in its various subjects the values and aspirations of the tribal society, not the

Hispanic-American, lowland value system which at present underpins the centrally-controlled curricula of the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Sport. A truly responsive education program must somehow try to combine traditional elements of the culture with modern insights to evolve a new and creative synthesis which will capture the genius of that particular culture, and yet be responsive to the demands of living in a multi-ethnic society.

THE AGE OF SLAUGHTER

What, we might ask, if many tribal societies are lost in the next few decades? Is that not part of the necessary price of so-called progress? We need to realize that the destruction of tribal societies and their natural habitat not only constitutes the ultimate tragedy for the societies involved, but is also a major impoverishment for both the Earth and the human community. Probably the greatest tragedy of our age, a direct result of our exploitative industrial society, is that in the next 20 to 30 years millions of life-forms—plants, insects, and animals—will become extinct. The accelerated destruction of tropical forest areas, often inhabited by Tribal Peoples, will destroy the habitat for most of the 2 to 3 millions species. *Global 200* predicts that the pace of extinction will, in fact, increase in the next three decades so that by the end of the century 15–20% of all living species could well be extinct. The scale is so horrendous that one naturalist rightly calls the present age "The Age of Slaughter." The loss to the Earth and human community of such genetic diversity is incalculable, as many of these plants are essential for our food and medicinal needs. Whether the biosphere will, in the long run, be able to adapt to such massive destabilization is by no means clear, since our knowledge of the tolerance of natural systems is still rudimentary. What is clear, however, is that after extinguishing thousands of species, humans themselves become an endangered species—if not immediately in terms of physical survival, at least, in terms of possessing a beautiful and bountiful earth.

The destruction of the natural world goes hand in hand with the destruction of indigenous societies. Like the Earth community which thrives and displays its full vigor through the diversity of its myriad of life-forms, the human community also needs a rich diversity of cultures, language, settlement patterns, political and economic systems, and even religions if its full potential is to be realized. As "The Vanishing Tribals" points out, we are all impoverished by the disappearance of tribal societies, for they have much to share with our modern world

from insights into the origin of species to immense knowledge of local wildlife, ecology, and medical plants. The demise of an Indian tribe, says Survival International's Bently, is like "destroying a library of information." A range of cultures enriches us all. If we get rid of these people we are effectively destroying a part of

ourselves.

FILIPINO IDENTITY

This is particularly true of a multi-ethnic society like the Philippines. The true Filipino is not found in a single cultural complex, especially not in what is known as the lowland Filipino Society. Rather Filipino identity emerges from a mutual enrichment of all the traditions. While in no way static entities, Tribal Filipino societies are particularly precious, pointing as they do to the more ancient Malay strands in the Filipino psyche which predate the Spanish and more recent Western experience. If these societies are destroyed, a very vital part of the Philippine soul is irretrievably lost. For this reason, it is incumbent on all who wish to promote a true national identity to work to create a society where the various cultures of the Philippines will thrive and mutually enrich each other instead of working to create a single monster which will effectively swallow all other cultures.

DIMINISHMENT OF THE BODY OF CHRIST

For the Christian, the disappearance of specific cultures takes on an added significance as it involves a diminishment of the Body of Christ. Though the Son of God became man within a particular cultural and historical context, the prologue of St. John's Gospel makes it abundantly clear that the fullness of the incarnation demands the inculturation of the Gospel in every culture (John 1:14). The mystery of God's presence in our world is so rich that no single cultural tradition, no matter how insightful we might feel that tradition is, can adequately capture and express that mystery. Rather, the Spirit demands that to reach its full significance the Word be inculturated in every culture. Each culture has its particular ethos and sensibilities which, when impregnated with the Gospel message, highlights a new facet of that Mystery. Every culture—be it a major civilization or a tribal society—has something to offer. In the communion of Churches which reaches its highest expression in the Eucharist, the gifts of each Church can be shared to the enhancement of the total Christian experience.

This is actually what happened during the first millennium of the Christian era. The Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Gallic, Germanic, and Celtic culture shared their gifts to enrich the total body of Christ. However, as Fr. Congar points out in a talk on "Evangelization and Culture" given at an International Missionary Congress in 1975, during the second millennium a single cultural expression of the faith—the Catholic Latin culture—became such an impenetrable second skin that it made it impossible for the Church to assimilate insights from and enrich the Latin American and Asian cultures. However, the true catholicity of the Church resides not in monotonous similarities or stamp-

ing out of all cultural diversity under a single Latin juggernaut, but rather in the creative ability to gather up, celebrate, and share the gifts of all cultures. Only in this way will we truly build up the Body of Christ.

CONCLUSION

From the foregoing it should be clear that the pressures on Tribal Filipino societies today are enormous. It should also be clear that since most of the pressures stem from outside factors, these societies will not be able to resist the pressures and survive as vibrant cultures unless there is considerable help from the outside. Eckholm maintains that

because of the particular cultural and ecological vulnerabilities, tribal peoples require special forms of assistance and protection if interactions with outsiders are not to have catastrophic effects on personal and group well-being.

The second part of the report attempts to specify the kind of assistance which are deemed necessary in South Cotabato if the various Tribal Peoples here are to survive into the twenty-first century as integral cultures.

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