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THEOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN MADAGASCAR

I. INTRODUCTION: AN APOLOGY

There is a deeply rooted custom in Madagascar: at the beginning of any form of discourse, the speaker apologizes to his audience for the very fact that he is speaking. According to this cultural pattern the right to speak is not a natural one; it is always a favour received from higher and vague authorities, it is a favour being able to address the public. Realizing that there will be Malagasy readers among my audience I feel the need to apologize to them in particular. Certainly Malagasy theologians would be better interpreters of Malagasy theology since they know it from the inside. Consequently the text below cannot pretend to discover the deep intentions of Malagasy theologians and must be taken with many reservations. The problem, however, is not only a matter of interpretation with the inevitable risks of misunderstanding. It is more complicated than that. Two more questions could be raised here.

First of all, is it appropriate that a foreigner tries to discover and to interpret Malagasy theology? Theological developments in Madagascar could be considered as a private property, as internal affairs, which ought to be respected and withheld from outsiders as much as possible. The curiosity of foreigners can sometimes be deeply resented by these islanders. At the moment Madagascar is really an island in the full sense of the word. The credibility of a so-called scientific inquiry in the way of western academic institutions is not a matter of course. Therefore this survey might be considered by Malagasy theologians as a piece of theological espionage, and the price to be paid for that too high.

Secondly, Malagasy theologians have become extremely touchy and suspicious of the western theological entreprise, of which Exchange is a part indeed. The scope of this article is to discover theological developments in Madagascar and to interpret them to the - mainly western - readers. This can be called a typical example of the more general relationships between the Third World and the West: Madagascar has to provide the raw materials and the Netherlands will transform them into more elaborate products to be
distributed on the international market and possibly even resold to the country of origin. The benefits of the operation will be on this side of the seas; it is doubtful whether any benefit will eventually return to the Malagasy producer of theology. Are we busy with a kind of theological pillage of the Third world, like the economic pillage denounced by Pierre Jalée 1) among others? I am afraid that not a few Malagasy theologians will feel that way. At the same time I should like to affirm the legitimacy of doing (missiological) research on existing theological literature and of publishing the results thereof. If by doing so I happen to hurt the pride and feelings of Malagasy theologians I really do apologize. My deep intention, however, is to further mutual communication and fellowship (fihavanana) in Christian hope and love.

Izay iray vatsy irayaina -
olaholana

Leux qui ont les mêmes provisions de voyage sont vus dans la vie -
Proverbe malgache

Ac 4,32