



Seven Weeks for Water 2015: Week 5

Prophetic voices coming from the Pachamama

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***“...But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise;
God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong...”***

1 Corinthians 1:27

Pachamama is more than an expression used by the Andean people to describe their lands, their environment. It expresses a particular cosmo-vision which involves *all*, an entire world where everything is interconnected and interrelated.

The Chilean theologian Juan Jacobo Tancara, tells us that Pachamama comes from two Quechan vocables: Pacha, which means “a living interlace; time and space where life and history take place. Pacha is everything that exists in the universe, where all is connected, linked: it is the reality without bifurcations”. While Mama means Mother, a very rich word with an enormous semantic weight: is who gives life, cares, protects and feeds. Therefore, Pachamama, for the Andean world is the principle of origin and preservation of life.

Josef Estermann, in the book *Andean Theology and Ecology*, affirms that for the Andean human being, the Pacha is a relationship network, the unique divine-not divine reality, material and spiritual, created and creator at the same time. Under this perspective, all its elements have sacred dignity. The divinity, in the Andean perspective, does not transcend the universe but is the key part of it because it is the “cosmic bridge” par excellence, the bridge, the mediator, the relationality itself that enables life and order that indispensably includes justice, balance, harmony and equity among the sacred elements that constitute it, where reciprocity and complementarity are vital.

It is important to remember that the Cordillera of the Andes is a range of mountains in South America that, beginning from the south, runs through Argentina, Chile, Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, Colombia and Venezuela. Water supply for this big area comes mainly from these mountains, reaching and watering the entire territory of this Indian continent, including even the forest and the Latin-American Amazonia.

Interpreting reality

South American nations were subjugated by European conquerors after the discovery of America in 1492. Indeed, most of these people suffered genocide, ethnocide, looting. After ages of brutal colonization, these Latin American countries have declared their independence. However, right now we are facing new and more sophisticated means of colonialism expressed by the irruption of an unjust economic system where asymmetries of forces are more than evident. The empire characteristics are still present, and ambition for dominance and desire to establish hegemony remain present as well.

As we know, there is no analysis that doesn't start from a presumption, from which in turn emerges a key of interpretation. Now, in trying to analyze the crisis through which we are living, with both causes and effects leading us to "death", certainly, we are tempted to choose mercantilist categories that are inscribed in the perverse logic of the "free market" in order to establish the framework of our diagnostics. Yes, we can choose to interpret reality based only on economics or functionalist theories; in that case, we will talk about numbers, show alarming statistics which mobilize us because of the terror arising from a belief that we and our descendants inevitably will face the future with no water.

This may undoubtedly be useful, for some purposes. But the issue of a lack of water demands from us another kind of analysis as well. So, what if we apply other categories in order to approach the problem? Why don't we dare to think about our crisis and its solution within the framework of an ethics of linkage, love, respect, compassion and mercy to one another as a fitting response to the grace, the life of abundance, the gratuitousness of the love of God which is expressed in the wholeness of the Creation? Of course, this involves understanding the "other" as each and every being in the Pachamama.

Nestor Miguez, the Argentinian theologian, invites us to think of the diverse crisis we are facing as we adopt the ethical key. Ethics become the base of the strategy, the practical ideology that is understood as the proper way to interpret the world).

To make an analysis built from the quality, the ethics of linkage allows us to undertake a critical reading of the asymmetries of power as the economic, political, social asymmetries that exist in a world where the empires that subjugate and dominate are still powerful, breaking order, the balance that should rule existence between human beings and between us and our habitat. Certainly, we need to accept that we are very far removed from developing a model of horizontal relationship.

The water crisis we currently experience has been determined by the ambition of certain powerful groups, by certain powerful corporations that formulate the rules in a world that is regulated by the logic of the consumer market, where not only water is a commodity, but so is the entirety of nature and so, too, are we as human beings. Everything has its price: not its value, only its price. Economic systems have been established amid hierarchies constructed between human beings; therefore, in the pyramid of power there will be eternal dominators and the dominated. In this frame, nature becomes only the “big market” where all those who hold power are able to use it, or even to destroy with it.

The ecological crisis and the water crisis are the result of the crisis of social relationships. Only by re-ordering the quality of the relationships in the frame of ethics and justice, can we dream of the re-ordering our Pachamama. So, the challenge is how to restore the required balance, the order.

What does the Bible have to tell us in these circumstances?

Fortunately, we know that biblical texts have power to overcome the Bible’s historical captivity. The Word of God demands from us a permanent and contextualized rereading in the key of equity, freedom and Christian ethics. The Word of God stands apart from scenarios mired in the past, becoming a relevant guide, a light of justice and the source of rules of liberation for all.

We can find in the Pauline epistles the necessary understanding of how to face adverse socio-political conditions. Paul was the organic intellectual, the builder and organizer of Christian communities that emerged right in the midst of imperial power. Those countercultural communities marched, just as Jesus did at this time, sharing a strong message that challenged the Pax Augusta and acting in accord with his countercultural message. Paul is recognized today as the creator of a community which made a difference through practices and ways of life coherent with his ideology, the best attempt at interpretation of Jesus’ life. Those anti-hegemonic practices were and are still today the principal part of Christian ethics. The Pauline proposal for Christian living implies an organized presence of people ready to challenge imperial structures, but not based in the same imperial logic that pulverized differences, that excluded and subjugated others. His proposal envisions life in dignity, freedom and co-responsibility. It involves a new way of life, of relationships, of linkage between members of communities in which everyone is accepted unconditionally. Paul’s proposal, therefore, includes the strategy, the ethics, the message and the praxis, or the set of symbols that empowered him to confront the Roman Empire, not from an economic and military standpoint but based on the distribution of the symbolic goods that give support to well-organized communities, where reciprocity, faith and love will always have a place, finding also, in the scandalous

message of the crucified, the ethic sense of life in community and in freedom, hope and resurrection, its eschatological projection.

The Good News

In the midst of this scenario, the prophetic voices of the Latin American indigenous peoples rise, denouncing their situation with a courage that is pregnant with the strength of their hope. As prophets, they are announcing new ways of life, they are proposing changes, new strategies that are fortunately adopted –step by step- by some Latin American governments. Yes, these prophetic voices rise from the people of the margins, and we celebrate this because *“the Father, the Lord of heaven and earth, has hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children” (Mathew 11:25)*

The Good News is that people of the Pachamama are on our way to find the manner to change the structure of our societies, confronting the new faces of colonialism. Indeed, the governments of Ecuador and Bolivia have adopted the indigenous Philosophy of the “Sumak Kawsay” in Quechan, “Good Living” in English or “Buen Vivir” in Spanish, as the organizing principle of their Constitutions.

Alberto Acosta, one of the best Ecuadorian ideologists affirms:

Essentially, these proposals recapture key issues that spring from the knowledge of the ancient peoples... Good Living appears, then, as a category in permanent construction and reproduction. In terms of a holistic approach, one must understand the diversity of elements that condition humans’ thoughts and actions and contribute to the search for Good Living, such as knowledge, codes of ethical and spiritual conduct in relation to our surroundings, human values, and the vision of the future, among others. Good Living, definitively, occupies a central position in indigenous societies’ philosophy of life.... Good Living is based on overcoming two dichotomies that have been perversely exacerbated by modernity: human dominance over Nature on the one hand, and exploitation between humans on the other.

In coherence with these premises, Ecuador is the first country of the world to recognize and express formally in the National Constitution the “Rights of Nature”.

The Good News is that now we are all together in ONE pilgrimage toward justice and peace... this pilgrimage didn’t begin a few years ago; these communities have been walking toward justice for more than five hundred years and nothing, no one, will stop us.

Let us join Noam Chomsky, the North American academic, linguist and anti-war activist, in saying: *“the most developed countries are driving the world into a disaster, while the peoples that are considered primitive are trying to save the whole planet. Unless the rich countries learn from the indigenous, all will be condemned to destruction”*.

Now is our chance to decide if we, as Church, will keep a conspiratorial and irritating silence or join them in a unity of act and faith, honouring the Pachamama, honouring our Christian identity of followers of Jesus, which means to walk with the crucified ones, looking for resurrection, looking all together for the Reign of God and its justice.

This is a call to abandon our zone of comfort and to challenge the powers of this world, as the *ekklesia* challenged the order instituted by the Roman Empire during the first ages of Christianity.

If through Christ we were reconciled, so are we called to seek reconciliation with our neighbour and with all of the Creation.

Thoughts for reflection

1. Are we considering water as our partner, as a friend who runs beside us, carrying life?
2. Is water the sister for whom we are called to care, to protect?
3. Is water for us a divine gift to honour?

Questions for discussion

1. Are we ready to get out of ourselves, abandoning our certainties, to empty ourselves as Jesus, the Christ, emptied himself for love?
2. Are we ready to be His witnesses, defending life in all its dimensions?

Ideas for action

1. Now that we are going to celebrate the World Water Day (22 March), be sure to invite *water* to be part of your service and liturgy, considering her as the indispensable “other” to share life with.
2. Honour her presence among you; treat her at the service as you are treated... as one divine gift of our Loving Father.

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