

# A CRY OF HOPE IN THE ECCLESIAL ASSEMBLY



## Communities in re-existence to extractivism

*What we have seen and heard; we proclaim to you so that you also may be in communion with us. (1 Jn 1:3)*

Those who have seen, heard, and want to announce it are part of various networks, organizations, platforms, congregations, and denominational and ecumenical entities. As such, some of us recognize ourselves as People of God, Church on the way out, in a synodal process.

The event of the Ecclesial Assembly of Latin America and the Caribbean has brought us together in a common concern in the process of listening: "to feel with the victims the reality of extractivism." To this end, we organized a virtual meeting with the same title as this document on August 21 of this year. Seventy-eight people took part in the event<sup>1</sup>, and their participation was systematized in the format of thematic forums and uploaded to the platform of the Ecclesial Assembly.<sup>2</sup>

Those of us who share this concern have been walking together with impoverished peasant and peri-urban communities, native peoples, ancestral populations and Afro-descendants, in the different territories that make up our continent. In this journey, "the suffering faces of Christ that question and challenge us"<sup>3</sup> bear witness to the martyrial character of their lives; they give an account of the deep and structural causes that generate poverty, inequity, injustice; they reveal the perversity of a system of death that has money as its god and influential sectors of our societies and states as its priests. Yet, at the same time, these "suffering faces," martyr victims of plunder, oppression, repression, and death, are those who weave territorialities; they make diverse life possible; they revere the sacredness of the Common House as Mother giver of life; they practice a system of organization that can be certain way out of the planetary crisis that we are living as Humanity.

### **What they denounce: poverty and oppression are caused by the hegemonic system.**

It is undeniable that the capitalist, colonial and patriarchal system, developed since the so-called "discovery of America," is the structural cause of the injustice installed on a global level. In Puebla, the generation of perverse "gaps" between "the rich getting richer and richer at the expense of the poor getting poorer and poorer"<sup>4</sup> was recognized. Countless texts of the Church's magisterium - based on actual data - point to this irrefutable truth. And Pope Francis, in *Evangelii Gaudium*, urges us: "we must say 'no to an economy of exclusion and inequality.' That economy kills." (N° 53)

The victims bear the stigmata - in their bodies and their spirits - of this slavery system: the wounds caused by the multiple oppressions of dispossession, subjugation, and sexual and racial

<sup>1</sup> Participants from Guatemala, Honduras, Panama, Chile, Argentina, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru and Brazil.

<sup>2</sup> The contributions recorded in the event "Voices in defense of the Common Home in Colombia", held on August 13, 2021, organized by the Colombia Node of the Churches and Mining Network, where 61 people participated, were also systematized.

<sup>3</sup> DP 31-39

<sup>4</sup> DP 30

inferiorization hurt with blood and fire. They recognize the historical continuity of imperial coloniality that has taken various forms and strategies over more than five centuries of exploiting peoples and territories. Finally, from a biocentric worldview, they unmask the fallacious discourses and practices of the last decades of neoliberalism:



*This extractivist model is the continuity of this death policy that began with colonization and continues to usurp us. The continuity of racism and classism is used to enrich a few in the face of the destruction of the majority. Extractivism deepens the global planetary crisis in our countries, and those who are living the consequences have historically lived the oppressions, exclusions, and structural violence.*

*They break us from the inside, break the social fabric, confront communities and families, hurt relationships, and deeply wound the community dynamics. Under the banner of progress, they enter our territories offering lies, talking about a development that never comes and only enriches the capital that subjugates us and damages our bodies and territories. Under the banner of progress, they have undermined our desires, our project for the present and future, and our dignity.*

### **"The Open Veins of Latin America"<sup>5</sup> or the "Planetary Inequity" pointed out by Pope Francis<sup>6</sup>**

Extractivism not only devastates and annihilates bodies and territories - the *"body-territories"* according to the ancestral cosmivision. It also damages and degrades the institutional buildings of modernity: the State, the courts that administer the law, the legislative parliaments, the various ministerial administrations of the executive branch at all levels of government, born under the aegis and logic of colonialism, respond almost absolutely to the empire of transnational capital.

As a result, the primitive mines and plantations - which were the slave factory of indigenous and black populations - today modernized with the latest technology, are spread throughout the continent as true enclaves of absolute property of transnational corporations. They are the owners who decide life and death. And there is no declaration of rights, constitutional principles, or international conventions that stop the repression against those who reject the "flag of progress."

*It hurts us that mining extractivism and other megaprojects are considered of national interest, ignoring, invisibilizing, and relegating our demands, struggle, and rights.*

*Not only do we have to fight against megaprojects and their severe impacts, but we also have to confront an entire state system in our countries that, instead of protecting us, violate us.*

*They persecute and intimidate, intimidate and criminalize us so that we stop our struggle. They collude with the structures of the states that should guarantee our rights. We cannot access justice because we cannot pay for it.*

<sup>5</sup> Title of the research book written by Eduardo Galeano - Uruguayan writer - in 1971.

<sup>6</sup> We refer specifically to section V of Chapter 1° of Laudato Si', numbers 48 to 52.

*The institutions do not work; they do not serve the poor; they do not work for those of us who cannot afford to pay for access to justice.*

### Where capital rules: sowing extractivism and reaping profits stained with innocent blood

The Communities affected by extractivism in Latin America - Abya Yala Territory - reveal a hegemonic system's cruelest and most degrading face that evidences its unfeasibility and its technocratic fallacy of 'sustainability.'

Together with them, those of us who speak out in this document try to accompany and commune with our sisters and brothers who make up the Ecclesial Assembly of Latin America and the Caribbean, in the crucial challenge of discerning the 'evil,' the 'satanic' masked in a promising discourse of prosperity and necessary progress.



We allude to the pro-extractivist advertising of governments and companies. It saturates the semiotic spaces of our cities and towns, of urban and rural places. There, in the 'deep interior' of our latitudes, in the extreme points of the existential peripheries, where communities weave their lives without access to the basic rights globally recognized as "human," the companies disembark with their machinery of persuasive conquest. With all the means at their disposal, they wave the "flag of progress" and climb on every public work in progress, from schools to temples, passing through community gardens, hospitals and roads: there they leave the logo that identifies them as "companies with social responsibility."

Meanwhile, in the cities - the counterparts of the rural areas - the publicity aims at estimating the transnational disembarkation as "direct foreign investments" that will provide the indispensable foreign currency for the longed-for first-world deployment. But, at the same time, it spreads all kinds of lies about the communities and organizations that defend their territories: they are those who 'oppose progress,' or 'terrorists,' as well as ignorant and insignificant, or 'non-existent' when they describe as 'inhospitable' the 'sacrifice zones' that are part of the extractivist enclaves.

In both discursive approaches, both in the cities and peasant communities, consumption becomes the common sense that affirms the correct course on the road to progress. The vertigo of progress generates confusion and bewilderment, perforating the collective sensibility and provoking the clamor that is worth reiterating: *They break us from the inside, break the social fabric, confront communities, families, hurt relationships, and deeply wound the community dynamics.*

In the light of our Faith in Jesus of Nazareth, we maintain that the Covid pandemic has exposed the structural injustices caused by this system of death. Both in the high mortality rate among these impoverished populations of our peripheries and in the notable lack of access to vaccines, as well as in the etiology of the disease itself, effectively originated in the extractivist depredation that exterminates the natural habitats of so many species, changing and mutating all kinds of viruses and microorganisms lethal to Humanity uncontrollably.

In the light of the Faith that animates us, and in the light of incontrovertible scientific reports<sup>7</sup>, we conclude the unsustainability of this system that maintains, with sickness and death, the suicidal

<sup>7</sup> We refer mainly to the reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

obscurity of capitalist, colonial, and patriarchal accumulation. Therefore, with St. Romero of America, together with our sisters and sisters of Faith and in the face of extractivism, we pronounce: "I beg you; I beg you; I command you in the name of God: stop the repression!" Because:

*The death of so many human beings and also of our Mother Nature hurts us. How the life of human beings, plants, and rivers is slaughtered hurts us so much. The mining projects have stripped us of our land, our hills and mountains, and our rivers.*

*Extractivism fuels armed conflict in Colombia and other countries in the region; it exacerbates violence, corruption, and forced migration.*

### And yet, this is a Cry of Hope.

In the diffuse and complex scenario of horror and martyrdom, which shapes the reality of peoples' life, we recognize the ineffable Presence of the Spirit of God rooted in the vision and the feeling, in action and in the practices of defense of life that the People carry out, "hoping against all hope."

Contemplating this Sacred Presence, with trembling and Easter joy, we proclaim: "We bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for you have hidden the mysteries of the Kingdom from the wise and intelligent, and revealed them to little ones. Yes, Father, such has been your good pleasure."<sup>8</sup>



We confess that this Presence sustains the struggle of our peoples. The Strength, the force of Faith, allows the victims to weave life with an unconditional willingness to martyrdom. It nourishes the spirituality of those who feel, like Yolanda Flores, from Peru, or like Berta Cáceres - who from Honduras - acquired Latin American citizenship:

*The river, the lake are beings with whom we coexist. In them dwell the spirits that heal and protect us. In it resides the life*

*that is suffocated by so much exploitation and mistreatment.*

*Let's wake up, let's wake up Humanity, there is no more time! Our consciences will be shaken because we are only contemplating self-destruction based on capitalist, racist and patriarchal predation.*

In the crucial times in which we are living. When the Anthropocene -or rather the Capitalocene- has come to stay and urges us to make a courageous and prophetic decision. Those of us who accompany this diversity of manifestations - true Epiphanies - of the Divine give thanks for the unfathomable Mystery of the Incarnation and the Mystery of the Resurrection.

Thanks to these Mysteries, we recognize the Church = Community of Jesus that walks at the base: an innumerable number of lay and consecrated people, of our Catholic confession and sister churches, in the most diverse ministries, sowing the Gospel, bringing about Life in Abundance, being reborn in pain, recognizing our own "shadows"<sup>9</sup> of the past and the present.

<sup>8</sup> Adoption and adaptation of Lk. 10, 21.

<sup>9</sup> We allude to the shadows of evangelization analyzed by Puebla (DP 6 and 10).

Regarding these shadows, the words of Francia Márquez, an Afro-descendant woman from Colombia, resound in our consciences: *"My people were brought in slavery to work in mining promoted by colonization and extractivism, and it must be said, the Church was part of this policy of death that has damaged us. That is why I celebrate with joy that now the Church is taking care of the big house. For us, this is an act of historical reparation in the face of structural and systematic violence.*

With Maribel Montalvo, from Mexico, we assumed the commitment to *continue working on decolonization with the indigenous, peasant, and Afro communities that share their worldview; a worldview rooted in the feeling of close relationships between human beings and with Mother Earth, where other living beings are people, not objects. To revert within our Churches a colonization that has not ended continues in a hidden way, present in many aspects.*

With the BECs of the diocese of Catamarca, Argentina, we pray that the Ecclesial Assembly will help us to be the Church we want: *May it wash away its sins of colonialism and patriarchy, may it recognize and correct the misappropriations of the Word of God into which it has fallen throughout history in our continent. May it be converted. Let it become synodal. May it allow itself to be permeated by the Gospel of Jesus. May it be sensitive to the cry of Mother Earth and the oppressed peoples. May it be prophetic and Samaritan. More merciful than law-abiding. May she be coherent: may she live the principles expressed in the documents she writes. May she depend more on Providence than on finances. May she renounce the arrogance of clerical offices and ritual pomp. Let him become poor in the service of impoverished communities."*

With Bruna Monalisa, a survivor of the crime of Brumadhino, Minas Gerais, Brazil, we say:

*I was a mother, and when the mud came, my little boy who was here holding my hand, only four years old, was buried.*

*We, women, cry out for justice. We will never forget: mining kills. Following Mary's example, women are a symbol of care, wisdom, and courage. In front of all that we observe, live, and dream, the feminine protagonism is predominant.*

*Our cry is for Mother Earth, that reality of environmental crimes and collective homicides makes us remember the Gospel according to St. Matthew in chapter 1, verse 18: - You heard a cry, weeping and great mourning leaves the one who mourns his children and does not want to be consoled because they no longer exist.*

This is our option and our commitment. We greet the Ecclesial Assembly of Latin America and the Caribbean with fraternal and sisterly love with the impoverished of the continent who suffer and dream.

***November 2021, Year of the Lord***

