Guided by Light: A Reflective Advent Journey - Fourth week of Advent

Reflection by Martha Inés Romero, Secretary General, Pax Christi International

Fire in Latin America's Indigenous Ancestry

The Second Vatican Council and the Conference of Bishops of Medellín (1968) signified for the Church in Latin America and the Caribbean the affirmation of a process of evangelical commitment in favor of justice and the *poor*, promoting social awareness and recognition of the socio-cultural, religious and theological diversity of peoples.

Recognizing the knowledge, customs, and traditions of the different indigenous peoples of Abya Yala has not been an easy task for the Catholic Church in the region for the past 400 years. However, such is the spiritual richness of the peoples, that they managed to resist, and it is now Pope Francis himself who recognizes Indigenous Theology or Amerindian Theology, although the challenge still continues among those who insist on a clerical and sacramental Church, as opposed to an ecclesial, synodal, inclusive Church.

Indigenous or Amerindian theologies touch the deep root of the worldview of the original peoples – Mesoamerican, Andean, Amazonian and southern Patagonian. It resists and is a collective path that prays and acclaims in its connection with the Pacha Mama, Mother Earth, who sows in the soil, but also in the water, in the mountains, in the fire that illuminates the celebrations. It is a transformative theology that a visionary pastor like ǰTatik Samuel Ruiz, Bishop of San Cristóbal de las Casas in Chiapas, Mexico, promoted from six pillars: autochthonous, liberating, evangelizing, servant, in communion with God and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. That is to say, it does not clash with the Catholic faith but roots it in indigenous spirituality.

In the Mayan Altar there is harmony with all creation, integrality; there is time and space, divinity and humanity, man and woman, heaven and earth, seeds, air and light, as complements of life. ***And it is this light, that of the creative fire, the fire of life, present in all the peoples of Abya Yala who, in a contemplative attitude, honor the sacredness of Creation, in which human beings are one more... Everything is inhabited!!***

Indigenous theologies represent an integral theology, which harmonizes the relationship that believers have with God, but also harmonizes the relationships between fellow human beings, and their relationship with Mother Earth. And this same spirituality, which manifests itself in an integral way, is what animates from hope, struggles and resistances for the defense of the land in the face of megaprojects, mainly by mining. That is why it is liberating, because it frees us from sins and from any superficial bondage, in order to reach the Good Living.

Indigenous theologies are taking shape today as a way of doing theology in this synodal Church, based on social and cultural convergence and respect for the traditions of the native peoples, dialoguing constructively with other Christian theological modalities and other confessions. They recognize that not only God, but also Jesus Christ, have come to sow the Seed of the Word, to illuminate every man and woman with the sacred Light, like a Kairos of grace that imprints its mark on believing peoples.

Indigenous people resist a world that devalues their neighbors and their culture. Their relationship with the Creator 'Father-Mother' is joyful, respectful, familiar. For God we sing, we dance, we offer Him permission, forgiveness and thanks for material and spiritual goods. God is the light that illuminates his people, like the sun that rejoices with his joyful people. Around the fire, corn (a symbol of strength and unity) and other foods, music, and dance are shared. The ancestors who care for them from other spaces are invoked, with thought, offering, ritual; They live strongly in memory.

"To talk about Creation, you need poetry and beauty. Along with beauty goes the sense of harmony, which we put aside when we make partial considerations and forget other realities. Existence loses harmony when we focus on the technical and the abstract and lose our roots in the natural world. When we neglect Mother Earth, we lose not only what we need to survive, but also the wisdom of good coexistence." Pope Francis in ***Let's Dream Together***

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