

RELIGION
IN DER
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RIM

Carlos Miguel
Gómez
Interculturality,
Rationality
and Dialogue

In Search for
Intercultural Argumentative
Criteria
for Latin America

echter

Carlos Miguel Gómez
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von Matthias Lutz-Bachmann,
Thomas M. Schmidt
und Michael Sievernich

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A los pueblos originarios de Abya Yala, nuestra América.
Como el maíz menospreciados, rechazados como la quinua,
fuente de vida para el mundo.

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Note on the Quotation of Sources in Spanish

The author has translated all quotations from documents in Spanish for which there is no English translation available. To avoid repetition, this is only indicated in the footnotes by “cf.,” before the bibliographical information.

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Introduction

This work is committed to a single question: What are the conditions for the possibility of intercultural dialogue in Latin America? This is a question that takes priority over the many issues raised in Latin America by the polyphony of voices, the conflict between different pictures of the world and the rivalry among life projects that struggle to reach social articulation in the midst of awfully asymmetric socio-political and cultural-epistemological conditions. Indeed, the need for intercultural dialogue is currently emphasized in almost every sphere from political philosophy to missiology and pedagogy; it is recommended as the appropriate means for conflict resolution, democratic deliberation and peaceful coexistence in our multicultural and pluriethnic societies; it is sometimes even regarded as the inescapable method for the social sciences as well as for the transformation of Latin American philosophy. However, even though this urgency for intercultural dialogue expresses a new awareness of the demands of interculturality, it is accompanied by a certain obscurity regarding the practice of dialogue. We need to enter into dialogue, but what does that mean?

Appealing to intercultural dialogue does not provide by itself the solution to the challenges of cultural and religious diversity. It may represent a gesture of good will and certainly points in the right direction, but such an appeal does not yet indicate how to make communication possible between members of heterogenic traditions, or what such communication means. Think for example of one of the following typical cases in which dialogue is suggested as the proper alternative: a legal dispute over the rights to territory between a multinational company that wants ‘to exploit natural resources for the sake of national progress’ and an indigenous community that opposes such attempt as ‘a sacrilege to Mother Earth and a threat to cosmic balance’; the conflict between a local court that sees lashing people as a violation of fundamental human rights and the indigenous authorities that order such traditional measure as a purifying thunder able to reestablish harmony in the community; the quarrel between an officer of the Education Ministry that claims there are fundamental and universal pieces of knowledge that all secondary students, regardless of their cultural affiliation, should learn, and the

elders of an indigenous community that demand the right to educate their children according to their own cultural patterns and forms of knowledge; a Christian missionary that condemns the use of certain plant as demoniac, and a traditional indigenous healer that claims that such sacred plant is the book of knowledge given to his people by God. In such cases, how can the parties in dialogue consider, evaluate and (when necessary) make a decision on their claims, each of which *makes sense* according to a particular worldview and is *appropriately justified* according to the standards of its own reasoning pattern?

In our view, this question summarizes the problem of the conditions for the possibility of intercultural dialogue in Latin America. In such cases there is no common standard to proffer rational judgments and evaluate positions. The criteria of one system of argumentation cannot be imposed on the other without wronging those who argue according to it, that is, without depriving them of their own voice and way of seeing the world. That which counts as a good reason differs for each party and thus opting for one standard of evaluation and one type of argumentation implies already choosing a particular tradition. How can we then determine in dialogue which of the reasons presented to support the claim of each side is “better”, “more reasonable”, “preferable”, and the like? Intercultural dialogue has to face the challenge of granting every party the possibility to express itself in its own terms, but it also has to offer a procedure for the evaluation, coordination and mutual transformation of different projects of life in order to serve as a means for the construction of pluralistic societies. This implies that one of the major tasks of intercultural dialogue is mediating between rival positions by offering a way to resolve conflicts and to make decisions about incompatible claims. Which are the communicative criteria for such mediation, that is, for making a judgment over rival incommensurable claims?

This work attempts to offer an answer to this question. Succinctly presented, our argument runs as follows: In Chapter 1, based both on an initial approach to Latin American diversity and on a discussion of certain descriptive models of intercultural (and in particular interreligious) dialogue, we will suggest that intercultural dialogue implies an *argumentative dimension*. This means that a communicative practice, in order to be properly called dialogue, should involve a *collaborative and reciprocal exchange of reasons by means of which the parties pursue a communicative goal*. Such an exchange of

reasons, in contrast with some other forms of non-binding intercultural communication (e.g. shared ritual and prayer, aesthetic forms of communication, informal conversation, academic symposiums, etc.), requires a set of normative criteria in order to be possible. These criteria should offer a way to consider, evaluate and judge rival positions, each of which is presented and justified according to *heterogeneous forms of rationality*. In the second part of the chapter, we will respond to two main objections against the possibility of finding appropriate intercultural criteria: the position that equates incommensurability with radical relativism and impossibility of communication; and the position that sees every attempt to establish normative criteria as suspicious of neo-colonialism.

In Chapter 2 we will then offer a consideration of the hypothesis that there are different types of rationality. After discussing two possible interpretations of the hypothesis (that it means logical relativism, and that it refers to different paradigms for representing the world and organizing reality) we will show that the best manner of understanding this heterogeneity is in terms of a *diversity of patterns of explanation and justification of beliefs and actions*; that is, as different methods to account for why things are as they are, as well as alternative ways of supporting claims, which evolve in the history of each tradition and are integral to their worldviews. Each pattern generates the conditions under which a proposition is a candidate for truth or falsehood,¹ and produces its own standards to evaluate what counts as a good reason. In order to explore this hypothesis, we will present some patterns of explanation and justification that are frequently used in current indigenous discourses and which represent part of the cultural legacy and life project of indigenous peoples. We will maintain that the diversity of forms of rationality does not imply that rationalities are self-enclosed systems, but rather that they are in a process of mutual interaction through which they are affected and transformed. Such interaction cannot be identified with intercultural dialogue, since, on the one hand, it does not occur by means of pluralistic argumentative exchanges, and on the other, it often implies the marginalization of certain traditions.

¹ Ian Hacking, "Language, Truth and Reason", in *Rationality and Relativism*, ed. Martin Hollis and Steven Lukes (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982), 48-66.

Nonetheless, the state of mutual affectation between rival claims allows for developing normative argumentative criteria for dialogue that neither belong to only one tradition, nor are imposed on all. Moreover, this state of mutual interaction in which traditions are already immersed permits developing normative criteria that, contrary to what other theories of intercultural dialogue propose, do not rest on any supposedly common element shared by all (e.g. a universal form of rationality, some common moral values or principles, a notion of humanity, a common referent or reality, etc.). Rather they can be conceived as *contextual and dialogical criteria*. This means that they can be *created to face particular contexts and problems* to which dialogue has to respond; and that they may be *derived from the very characteristics of dialogue* as a particular form of communication suitable for the needs of a context.

In Chapter 3 we will develop an initial set of intercultural argumentative criteria based on the notion of *intercultural reasonableness*. These criteria allow us to identify some common argumentative moves (*intercultural fallacies*) that should be avoided and corrected, since they neither allow for the *recognition of heterogenic positions in their own terms*, nor grant them the *opportunity to participate* in dialogue. Accordingly, the criteria of intercultural reasonableness allow for a judgment over the way in which heterogenic reasons *are used* in dialogue and represent the conditions for a pluralistic model of argumentation; that is, an exchange of reasons in which it is both possible to use heterogenic forms of argumentation and to decide between them. However, even though these criteria represent a necessary condition for dialogue in Latin America, they are not yet sufficient.

In order to supplement them, Chapter 4 offers an analysis of the structure of the conflict between claims in Latin America. This analysis shows that on account of their conflicting claims, traditions are interconnected and interconnecting forces. The claims of one tradition are not neutral, unimportant to or unrelated with those of others, even if the ways in which the connections are established depend on the inner characteristics of each form of rationality and life project. Conflicting claims appeal to each other. This leads us to the notion of *interpellation*, which we develop in Chapter 5: when making their claims, traditions affect each other. This affectation, that is, what is done to others through what is claimed, can be analyzed at three clearly defined levels: in intercultural contexts rival claims (1) *challenge* each other, (2) *de-*

mand something from the others, and (3) *offer* something to them. The way in which participants in dialogue respond to these three levels of interpellation can be evaluated by means of criteria that derive from the very state of conflictive interaction between traditions and make it possible to coordinate heterogenic reasons and actions. We will call these criteria *openness, intercultural resonance, creative fidelity to a tradition, respect, solidarity, intercultural coherence* and *contextual relevance*.

Finally, in the Conclusion, we will offer some reflections on how to justify our intercultural argumentative criteria and a few indications of their possible application. This will allow us to make some suggestions regarding the structure and process of intercultural dialogue as a poly-logical argumentative practice, as well as concerning its possible outcomes and limits. We hope this work can contribute to the clarification of some central theoretical problems of intercultural dialogue, and offer concrete insights for its practice in Latin America.

PART I
DIVERSITY AND THE CHALLENGES TO DIALOGUE

1. The Argumentative Dimension of Intercultural Dialogue

1.1. Introduction

The first difficulty one finds when asking about the conditions for the possibility of intercultural dialogue is that the word ‘dialogue’ is used in so many different senses that it is not always easy to know what is meant by it. The fact that this ambiguity was already noticed thirty years ago,¹ and it has not been yet resolved after decades of work on the subject, indicates that the use of the word ‘dialogue’ responds to quite diverse practices, interests and cultural-theoretical backgrounds, which in turn aim to face the complexities and challenges that religious and cultural diversity raises in the contemporary world. The problem is, of course, that the diversity of models and projects of dialogue renders the term indiscernible from some much more general and imprecise notions such as ‘encounter’, ‘sharing’, ‘meeting’, ‘conversation’, ‘mutual transformation’, ‘interaction’ and so on. But even if dialogue entails some of these features, it cannot be simply identified with them. What are the defining characteristics of intercultural dialogue, those which differentiate it from other forms of communicative encounter?

In this chapter we will attempt a characterization of dialogue based both on a first approach to the Latin American context of diversity and on the analysis of some models of intercultural dialogue proposed, especially, in the literature about interreligious dialogue. While, it is the characteristics of concrete contexts of religious and cultural diversity that can offer the best point of departure in the search for the structure, principles and goals of dialogue; a close look into what can be considered the most prominent instance of intercultural dialogue, the dialogue between religious traditions, should make us aware of the thorniest difficulties and fundamental issues that must be considered in its definition. Accordingly, our approach will be both con-

¹ See Eric Sharpe, “The Goals of Inter-Religious Dialogue”, in *Truth and Dialogue in World Religions*, ed. John Hick (London: Sheldon Press, and Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), 77-78, and Arvind Sharma, “The Meaning and Goals of Interreligious Dialogue”, in *Journal of Dharma* 8, (1983), 227.

textual and analytical. The main assumption of this chapter, which will have to wait until the next chapter for a detailed exploration and justification, is that no common standard of rationality can be presupposed as the normative basis for intercultural dialogue in Latin America. Here the partners in dialogue belong to heterogeneous cultural traditions, which involve not only rival life projects that struggle to reach historical articulation in the midst of strong epistemological, social and political asymmetries; but also diverse forms of rationality. That is, different forms of structuring reality as a meaningful world and (often) incompatible methods of explanation and justification of beliefs and actions. The participants in dialogue in Latin America have diverse worldviews and rely on heterogeneous principles to determine what counts as a good reason. Since the idea of heterogenic rationalities will only be developed in the next chapter, we should take it in this initial part of our work as a working hypothesis. Presupposing it, we shall suggest that if intercultural dialogue is to respond to the challenges raised by religious and cultural diversity, it has to offer a way of dealing with positions made according to heterogenic rationalities. This means that it has to offer a way to consider, analyze and evaluate rival (and sometimes incompatible) reasons and thus that it implies a fundamental argumentative dimension. This, on the one hand, situates intercultural dialogue in a very specific field of action: the exchange of reasons by means of which the participants pursue certain communicative goals; and on the other, indicates that dialogue has an essentially normative core: a set of criteria to determine what may count as a good reason when no common standard of rationality is available.

We shall proceed as follows. In the first section, an initial approach to Latin American religious and cultural diversity should throw light on the specific problems and challenges that intercultural dialogue should expect to face. This will help us to determine the tasks and goals of dialogue in this context, and also will provide a first sign of the need to understand intercultural dialogue as a normativity-based practice. This insight shall be reinforced in the second section, where we will tackle the issue of the delimitation of the notion of intercultural dialogue. A short exploration of some descriptive approaches to interreligious dialogue will show us why the normative point of view is necessary. From it intercultural dialogue is constructed as an argumentative practice. This consideration of dialogue as a reciprocal and collaborative exchange of heterogenic reasons directed towards a communica-

tive goal will offer a first indication regarding the sort of normative criteria dialogue needs in order to accomplish its aims, but also will make clear the problems involved in finding such criteria. Accordingly, in the last section we will consider the main objections to the possibility of establishing intercultural argumentative criteria. On the one hand, we shall engage with the position that renders intercultural dialogue impossible, arguing that the incommensurability of heterogenic forms of rationality is insurmountable; and on the other, we shall face the charge that the search for intercultural normative criteria conceals a neo-colonialist agenda. We will conclude the chapter with some preliminary remarks about the shape and function of the normative argumentative criteria intercultural dialogue needs in order to become possible in Latin America.

1.2. The Context of Dialogue

We have suggested that the characteristics of concrete contexts of religious and cultural diversity offer the best point of departure in the search for the principles and models of dialogue. They determine both the problems it has to respond to and the tasks it should perform. These contexts of diversity however are not simply social facts but imply certain ways of understanding diversity, which in turn generate normative attitudes towards the other's beliefs and life projects.² Thus when we talk about a context of diversity we refer to a constellation of interpretations and historical tensions that tries to determine how we should understand and deal with the worldviews and life projects of different cultural and religious traditions. What are the defining characteristics of the Latin American context of diversity?

Unlike other latitudes, in Latin America diversity emerges today *from inside* of mainly Roman Catholic and European colonial contexts, product of a 500 years history of colonialism, evangelization and resistance. This has very especial connotations for the interpretative construction of Latin American diversity and the definition of the tasks of intercultural dialogue. Firstly, the encounter with the others has not taken on the character of a neutral in-

² Thomas M. Schmidt, "Reasonable Pluralism – Justified Beliefs. Religious Faith in a Pluralistic Society", (manuscript).

tellectual contemplation of their heterogenic claims, made possible for example through the development of academic disciplines such as the History of Religions, which may have played an important role in the relativization of the Christian norm in the North Atlantic world.³ Neither is it a result of the massive migratory processes that formed the multicultural and cosmopolitan environment of the main cities in rich Western countries.⁴ The other in Latin America does not come from outside, but has been oppressed, neglected, in many cases eradicated and always has been repulsed beyond the borders of visibility and speech; and it is from those borders that today emerges as a difficult alterity. In this sense, what becomes evident in the contemporary situation is not a conflict between theoretical truth claims, already formulated in clear religious doctrines, but a complex series of struggles to have the right even to formulate any claim.

Secondly, the subjects of these struggles are the original peoples of the continent which afterwards came arbitrarily to be called America, as well as the descendants of the Africans brought as slaves, whose religious traditions, on the one hand, are not even considered part of the so-called ‘world religions’ (on which most authors committed to the study of diversity focus their attention) and whose forms of life were even thought of as lacking culture and existing outside of history.⁵ On the other hand, these religious traditions have either constituted “syncretic” Christian forms or are still regarded as objects of evangelization. Indeed the rule has been to consider the cultures and life projects of indigenous peoples as objects of enterprises such as “civilization” and “modernization”, when not of massive eradication. Thus, a great deal of what is seen as diversity here is a sort of internal heterogeneity

³ According to John Hick, for example, the knowledge of other religions available through translations of the main texts to western languages, as well as the development of disciplines such as the History of Religions and Phenomenology of Religions helped to replace the “ill-informed and hostile Western stereotypes of the other faith communities...by more accurate knowledge and sympathetic understanding”. John Hick, “The Non-Absoluteness of Christianity”, in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, ed. John Hick and Paul Knitter (Maryknoll: Orbis, and London: SCM Press, 1987), 17.

⁴ See Joaquín García Roca, “Multiculturalidad e inmigraciones” in *El discurso intercultural. Prolegómenos a una filosofía intercultural*, ed. Graciano González R. Arnaiz (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 2002), 163-187.

⁵ See Enrique Dussel, *1492: El encubrimiento del otro. Hacia el origen del “mito de la modernidad”* (La Paz: Plural Editores and Facultad de Humanidades y Ciencias de la Educación, Universidad Mayor de San Andrés, 1994), 13-22.

within Christianity in non European settings and within the colonialist modern project; both of which in many senses conflict with indigenous life projects at the same time that they are appropriated and transformed by them. Or in other words, Latin American diversity represents the “underside of modernity”, arises from the “reverse of history” (as liberation theologians would say) and has produced its own form of Christianity, not always approved by the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

Thirdly, this internal heterogeneity is not a simple accepted fact, but a conflictive process characterized by the struggle for recognition of the religious, cultural and political rights of ethnic minorities. Indeed, the last decades have witnessed a renewal and reconstruction of indigenous life projects that through the struggle of different indigenous movements in Latin America have managed to transform the understanding of diversity in most countries. Some important results of this nascent process can be seen in the movements of constitutional reform in many Latin American States since the 1990’s. These movements have lead some to speak of an “emerging multicultural regional model”,⁶ characterized by the recognition of the pluricultural and multiethnic character of Latin American countries and the commitment to the acknowledgement and protection of the collective rights of indigenous peoples as fundamental rights. This implies the recognition of the right to territory, but also of the rights of indigenous peoples “to <<traditional authorities>> and to jurisdiction and the administration of justice according to <<their own norms and procedures>>”.⁷ In practice, however, these rights are hardly respected and the acknowledgment of diversity generates a series of tensions and conflicts between the normative systems of indigenous peoples and those of the states not easily resolvable by legal means. On the one hand, the conditions for the participation in the construction of plural societies are not equally granted to all social actors. On the other, there is nothing like a neutral common ground on which differences can be negotiated. Economic, political and epistemological asymmetries, counting for different

⁶ The expression is suggested by Van Cott. Quoted by W. Assies, G. van der Haar and A. Hoekema, “Diversity as a Challenge: a note of the dilemmas of diversity”, in *The Challenge of Diversity. Indigenous peoples and the reform of the State in Latin America*, ed., idem (Amsterdam: Thela Thesis, n.d.), 295.

⁷ Willem Assies, “Indigenous Peoples and Reform of the State in Latin America”, in *ibid.*, 3.

forms of what we could call intercultural injustice, constitute the actual ground on which the diverse traditions of Latin America stand.⁸

In order to see how these three characteristics determine the constellation of problems and challenges that intercultural dialogue is supposed to face, it is necessary to analyze in greater detail the ways in which diversity is constructed. A satisfactory analysis of this sort would of course demand a study on its own. Here we are able only to present schematically some of the main interpretative threads of the current fabric of Latin American diversity, focusing in particular on the way in which they determine the tasks of intercultural dialogue. We will study the way in which diversity and dialogue are understood in two discursive fields: on the one hand, the discourse of the Latin American Catholic Church, and on the other the normative context generated by the recognition of indigenous claims and its articulation in multicultural constitutions and legal pluralism. Even though these may seem to be two very different fields, a common tension between the acknowledgment of diversity and the claim to the universality of certain values and principles generates conflicts to which intercultural dialogue is expected to respond. In both cases, dialogue appears as a communicative praxis that should allow for the equal participation of diverse traditions in the construction of pluralistic societies, offering a way to resolve conflicts and to mediate between heterogeneous claims. Also in both cases the normative criteria for such tasks remains a contested issue still to be clarified.

1.2.1. Between Inculturation and Dialogue: The Challenges of the Latin American Catholic Church

The current task and self-understanding of the Catholic Church in Latin America is marked by a tension between two paradigms: the model of *Inculturation* and the model of *interreligious and intercultural dialogue*. While the former has aimed since the end of 1960's to transform the colonial paradigm of mission, linked with "European expansion and the political and

⁸ "80% of the people who in Latin America live from one dollar per day belong to native peoples, have brown or black skin and live in the land or in the marginal neighborhoods of the cities." This makes evident the ethnic character ("*etnicidad*") of poverty. Cf., Josef Estermann, *Filosofía Andina. Estudio intercultural de la sabiduría autóctona andina* (Quito: Abya Yala, 1998), 6.

cultural subjection of Latin American peoples”,⁹ it is regarded as insufficient by the sectors of the Church which are most seriously committed to the cause of the poor and the defense and promotion of indigenous peoples. They call for a paradigm shift towards dialogue.¹⁰ The understanding of dialogue, however, is itself problematic. In the documents of the Latin American Bishops Conferences¹¹ the awareness of the need for dialogue appears occasionally and is marked by the tension between the claim to universality of Catholicism and the commitment of the Church with the protection and promotion of cultural difference. On the one hand, it is regarded as an opportunity to generate a “shared commitment to the defense and promotion of fundamental rights (...) especially those of the needy, in order to build a new society, more just and free” (cf., DP 1119, SD 138), which also implies the coordination of actions towards the defense of nature (SD 138). In this connection, Aparecida offers some enlightening ideas regarding the aims and relevance of dialogue:

Interreligious dialogue, besides its theological character, has an especial significance in the construction of the new humanity: it opens unprecedented paths for Christian testimony, promotes the freedom and dignity of peoples, stimulates collaboration for common good, overcomes violence motivated by fundamentalist religious attitudes, [and] educates people for peace and coexistence (cf., DA 239).

On the other hand, this emerging model of interreligious dialogue, based on values such as humility and self-criticism on the part of the Church (DP 1118), and which demands a change in the attitude towards the non-Christian traditions in pursue of a shared work towards the common good (SD 138, DA 235), is obscured by the weight of the claim to universality of Roman Catholic values and principles, generating the tendency to turn dia-

⁹ Juan José Tamayo-Acosta, *Nuevo Paradigma Teológico* (Madrid: Trotta, 2003), 33.

¹⁰ See e.g. Raúl Fornet-Betancourt, *Interculturalidad y Religión: Para una lectura de la crisis actual del cristianismo* (Quito: Abya-Yala, 2007).

¹¹ We are going to consider the conclusive documents of the General Conferences of Medellín, Colombia, 1968 (henceforth MD); Puebla, Mexico, 1979 (henceforth DP); Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, 1992 (henceforth SD); and Aparecida, Brazil, 2007 (henceforth DA). For full bibliographical information see the Bibliography.

logue into a means of evangelization (DP 457, 1097, DA 238), and thus into a form of acculturation. Let us briefly explore the two poles of this tension.

1.2.1.1. *The Commitment of the Church with Indigenous Peoples*

In Latin America the other emerges *firstly*¹² as the poor. In Church's documents this emergence adopts two forms: the optimistic corroboration of the irruption of the poor as new social actors in history (DP 234, DA 75), and the prophetic denunciation of the marginalized position into which these actors, particularly indigenous and Afro-American groups, are forced. Here we find one of the most significant insights of the Church regarding the possibilities of interreligious and intercultural dialogue in the continent: minorities and folk cultures coexist in unequal conditions with respect to globalized culture (DA 57), and thus, "although there is no other region with so many factors for unity as Latin America (...), it is a broken unity, crossed by deep dominations and contradictions, yet unable to incorporate in itself <<all the bloods>> and overcome the division of strident inequalities and many forms of marginalization" (cf., DA 527). The other has been placed in the *margins* of humanity just because she is different.

This means that marginalization is not a single process. On the economic level, it implies that ethnic groups live in conditions of inhuman poverty.

¹² Though "firstly" does not mean here "the first historical moment", but the "fundamental form of appearance", it is significant to remember that since the first encounter between the Europeans and the people of *Abya Yala* (one of the names given to the continent before the conquest), the poverty of the other appeared in the European mind as one of her fundamental characteristics. In fact, it should rather be said that the other was constructed as poor and in this way, from the beginning, was not allowed to show herself in her own terms. The narrative of the event appears in the logbook of Colon's first expedition, in the page of Thursday the 11th of October 1492. In his description of the other, the Admiral reads alterity as a series of lacks: (a) Economical: "they are people very poor of everything", which means for that time's mentality that they did not have money as the means of commerce; indeed "they will take and give everything what they have freely". (b) Cultural: "they go naked as when their mothers gave birth to them". In fact, being naked was simultaneously seen as one sign of the savage state of nature from which man raised as different from animals with the invention of culture, and the sign of life in Paradise, before the fall. (c) Political: "they do not have weapons, nor even know them, because I showed them a sword and they took it by the blade and got hurt ignorantly", which makes it easy to conquer them; more when they "must be good servants and with good capacities, since they respond without delay to everything I said to them". And (d) religious: "they will become Christians rapidly, for it seems to me that they have no sect". Cf., Cristobal Colón, *Textos y documentos completos* (Madrid: Alianza, 1995), 109-111.

Indeed the indigenous peoples are regarded as “the poorest of the poor” (cf., DP 34). But their misery, far from being a natural fact, is the product of unjust social and political structures (DP 30), and therefore constitutes, in the Church’s eyes, a social sin (DP 28). On the cultural level, ethnic identity becomes a factor for social subordination through a process of “systematic concealing of the values, history, culture and religious expressions” (cf., DA 96) of those who are different. On the social level, natives and Afro-Americans are the “voiceless” (cf., DP 24), forgotten and ignored (SD 137). They suffer from racial and cultural discrimination (SD 168, 179, 251), their dignity is permanently violated (SD 179) and their customs and traditions are treated disrespectfully (SD 5).¹³ On the political level, these communities lack the full acknowledgement of their citizenship, and thus their civil rights are not easily granted. In concrete, they are not guaranteed the “rights to the land, to their own organizations and cultural experiences, which assure that they can live according to their identity, with their own language and ancestral costumes, and can meet in full equality all the peoples of the Earth” (cf., SD 251). This many-sided picture of the link between alterity and marginalization is summarized in this perturbing diagnosis that challenges the possibility of dialogue in this continent: “today the indigenous peoples and the Afro-Americans are threatened in their physical, cultural and spiritual existence; in their forms of life; in their identities; in their diversity; in their territory and projects” (cf., DA 90). Accordingly, the very possibility of having a partner in dialogue is at stake.

Responding to this situation, the Church has made a commitment to the defense and promotion of indigenous cultures. In this commitment, which implies four elements, intercultural dialogue is supposed to play an important role. The first element is the support of the Church in the struggle for the acknowledgement and respect of indigenous peoples’ collective rights. This derives indeed from fidelity to the Gospel, leading towards solidarity with those who are the object of injustice in the form of ethnic and cultural discrimination (SD 5),¹⁴ and implies the battle against marginalization at different levels: (a) the defense of the right to their territories (SD 175-177), from which they are constantly expelled and to which their cultures and

¹³ “Mensaje a los pueblos indígenas”.

¹⁴ “Discurso a los pueblos indígenas”.

forms of life are inseparably linked (SD 4). (b) The fight against racial and cultural discrimination (SD 168), which involves the commitment to treat ethnic minorities in equality of terms with respect to the other members of society, and the recognition of their right to have their own culture, identity, language and forms of social organization (SD 251). (c) The consequent strengthening of indigenous forms of identity (DA 530), as a requisite for the granting of their full citizenship, which implies a process of de-colonizing the mentality of the majority society, the recuperation of historical memory and the creation of spaces for intercultural exchange (DA 96). (d) The promotion and support of the initiatives of a proper education for indigenous peoples, both bilingual and designed according to their own interest and values (SD 251); which also includes the education of indigenous priests and members of religious orders (DA 325). And (e) the opposition against the notion and praxis of “development” based on alien terms and models as well as against the politics that attempt to suppress, isolate or violently assimilate aboriginal cultures (SD 251).

This leads towards the second element, the defense and promotion of indigenous values and forms of life. Indeed, the documents of Santo Domingo and Aparecida abound in explicit acknowledgments of the richness of indigenous traditions, particularly with regards to the three following aspects: (a) the indigenous respectful form of relationship with Nature (SD 22, 172, DA 56, 472), characterized by a deep knowledge of it (SD 169), from which a change of mentality regarding the use and tenancy of the land can be promoted (176). (b) The indigenous communitarian form of life, characterized by values like “humility, modesty and solidarity” (cf., SD 22), as well as “the sacred character of human life, a high estimation of family and the co-responsibility in shared work” (cf., SD 17, DA 93). And (c) the spiritual dimension of indigenous life that “opens them to the action of God” (cf., DA 92), and prepares them to receive the Gospel (SD 17, DA 4).

Now the commitment of the Church in this area extends from the defense of “the cultural values of all peoples, especially those of the oppressed, helpless and marginalized, due to the devastating force of the structures of sin present in modern society” (cf., SD 243), to the promotion of those values as alternatives and answers to the anti-values of globalized culture (DA 57). This implies that the Church must contribute to the establishment of a dialogue both between indigenous traditions and the majority society that al-

lows them to participate in the construction of alternative social projects, and between these traditions and that of the Church, in whose life indigenous peoples should be allowed to participate in accordance with their own worldviews (DA 94).

Striving to make this intercultural re-construction of the life of the Church and of Latin American societies possible constitutes the third element of the commitment of the Church. It is seen as a “kairós” to go deeper into the meaning of the meeting between Christianity and the indigenous worlds, to include them into Catholicity with their particular modes of being, and to “live a new Pentecost” (cf., DA 91). It is very significant that Aparecida, for the first time, acknowledges that indigenous peoples are, above all, “different others” (cf., DA 89), and in some sections the document seems to make its own some fundamental meanings and elements of indigenous worldviews, such as the notion of the land as “mother earth, source of aliment, shared home and altar for human sharing” (cf., DA 125, 472). In fact, this aspect of the commitment of the Church to indigenous peoples may really lead it to “enrich itself with new expressions and values, in such a way that it can manifest and celebrate in ever deepening fashion the mystery of Christ, as well as facilitate the unity between faith and life, and contribute to a not merely geographically but also culturally fuller catholicity” (cf., DA 479).

However, the commitment of the Church to indigenous peoples becomes ambiguous, as a result of the final element of its commitment: the Church’s missionary enterprise compelling it to uphold its norm as the universal principle to judge and “purify” indigenous cultures, in a way that controls and, as it were, administers their heterogeneity. Thus, “the acknowledgement of their values does not exempt us from announcing that <<Christ is the only Savior of humanity, the only one who can reveal God and lead to God>>” (cf., SD 22).¹⁵ In this connection, indigenous values are interpreted as “seeds of the Word” which can only reach plenitude through the explicit acceptance of Christian faith (SD 2, DA),¹⁶ and thus their force to really enrich Catholicism and offer alternatives for the construction of society as “different others” becomes weakened. In order to better understand this ambiguity and the

¹⁵ “Discurso inaugural”.

¹⁶ SD: “Mensaje a los Pueblos Indígenas” and DA: “Discurso inaugural”.

effects it has on the possibility of intercultural and interreligious dialogue it is necessary to consider with some detail the model of Inculturation, which continues determining the current self-understanding of the task of the Church in Latin America.

1.2.1.2. The Gospel and the Cultures

Finding an appropriate way of understanding the relationship between the Christian claim to universal truth and the analogous claims of other traditions represents one of the main challenges religious diversity raises for Christian theology and pastoral action. The major current interpretation of this relationship, which plays an important role in the Documents of the Latin American Bishops' Conferences, affirms that the Gospel does not oppose any culture but rather enlivens and purifies them (SD 20, 230). It means that when the Gospel, in the evangelization process, meets other cultures, it does not deprive them of their essential elements, nor forces them to adopt alien forms. On the contrary, "it can incarnate itself in all of them to introduce into their history the Kingdom of God" (cf., DP 237). This is the very definition of the project of Inculturation that guides the missionary task of the Church.

What does this incarnation of the Gospel in other cultures mean and how is it possible according to the documents of the Latin American Church? The idea of the incarnation of the Gospel in the cultures has diverse meanings and is not easy to summarize. It implies both the active task of the church as historical institution in the world –i.e. evangelization as its central mission (SD 30, 230, VA 3)– and the autonomous and mysterious action of God in the history of different peoples. On the one hand, as affirmed by the II Vatican Council, "God, revealing Himself to His people to the extent of a full manifestation of Himself in His Incarnate Son, has spoken according to the culture proper to each epoch" (*Gaudium et Spes* 58). On the other, the Church, in accordance to that divine action, "when it proclaims the Gospel and the peoples accept the faith, incarnates itself in them and assumes their cultures. In this way, it does not identify itself with them, but establishes an intimate connection with them" (cf., DP 400). Thus it appears a rather problematic relationship between the Church and the many cultures. Its main characteristic is the tension between the universality of Christianity and the particularity of every culture, which leads to the subordination of every tradition to the Christian norm, and at the same time to the concealment of the

cultural commitments of Roman Catholicism. This tension can be presented as follows. While full revelation of God implies the incarnation of Christ in a particular historical and cultural setting, and therefore the Gospel is just possible in and through the language, symbols and mentality of that setting; the Church claims that it “is not bound exclusively and indissolubly to any race or nation, any particular way of life or any customary way of life recent or ancient” (*Gaudium et Spes* 58). The apparent contradiction is resolved appealing to a universal core, a center of eternal truth, which does not belong itself exclusively to any particular culture, but makes all of them possible. This universal truth is Jesus Christ himself, who at the same time that offers an inexhaustible richness that cannot be exhausted by any culture (SD 24), constitutes the content of evangelization (SD 27).

But this solution only reinforces the tension: While it is accepted that due to the “creative, providential and saving presence of God that accompanied the life of these peoples” (cf., SD 16), the message of the Gospel was already present in every Culture before evangelization; the fullness of revelation is given only through the Church as a total and communicable truth (DP 202). As a consequence, on the one hand, all that in other cultures differs from the Christian norm is false and wrong; and on the other, what they may have of valuable and good is so just inasmuch as it is a “seed of the Word” (cf., DP 401); that is, an imperfect, unconscious and often corrupted form of Christian divine truth, in need of the historical process of evangelization in order to be purified and to reach its full realization (DP 407). In this way, the trans-cultural core claimed by Christianity simultaneously penetrates into cultures from outside (the missionary enterprise) and pushes up from within (the seeds of the Word already acting in them). It establishes the norm for the appreciation and evaluation of the differences and similarities between cultures and, in one word, it provides the principle to judge diversity (DA 95). As a consequence, it is hard to see how “overcoming differences, faith does not damage but respect them” (cf., SD 3).¹⁷ In fact, the evident result of this understanding of Christian universality is that the others become, to use Rahner’s famous expression, anonymous Christians.¹⁸ It implies affirming something along the lines of the following: non Christian traditions suffer a

¹⁷ “Mensaje a los pueblos indígenas”.

¹⁸ See Karl Rahner, “Anonymous Christians”, in *Theological Investigations*, Vol. VI, trans. Karl & Boniface Kruger (London: Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd, 1969), 390-439.

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