



Curriculum Theologiae

# Epistemic Concerns in the Global South

## Latinamerican Insights

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50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of MWI, Aachen, 2021/11/17-19

## **Epistemic Concerns in the Global South Latinamerican Insights**

**Diego Irarrazaval**

*“...understand hope...  
tomorrow is another day,  
we will not lack rice...”<sup>1</sup>*  
(Pedro Casaldaliga, 1971)

In the midst of pandemic stress, basics such as rice and health are shaping daily tasks and plans for an unpredictable future. People feel called, in many ways, to spiritual solidarity. What might happen in MWI and its intercontinental role?

In 2007, Aparecida’s emphasis has been on discipleship and mission.<sup>2</sup> The focus today is to listen to each others suffering, and as God’s people respond to wholistic human needs. Latinamerican traditions intertwine as we enjoy fiestas and also confront injustice. What are the epistemic concerns?<sup>3</sup>

Unfortunately, the spiritual is often limited to feeling good. Solidarity is seen as donations to others (without mutual care). Such simplistic attitudes require re-examination and discernment.<sup>4</sup> How is life understood in southern regions?

### **1) Art and Prophecy From Below**

Public standards measure mental capacity, promote self-satisfaction, gauge monetary results of any activity, and bask in a pseudo culture of ‘happy-ism’. However, common people value relationships, economic stability, and shared capacities. Identity means a

<sup>1</sup> Pedro Casaldaliga, *Clamor elemental*, Salamanca: Sígueme, 1971 (poem “Saber esperar”).

<sup>2</sup> V<sup>th</sup> General Episcopal Conference of Latin America and the Caribbean ([www.celam.org/aparecida](http://www.celam.org/aparecida))

<sup>3</sup> This input only outlines an interpretation of some issues. The ‘Eclesial Assembly of Latin America and the Caribbean’ (2021) is a proposal for the future in all its dimensions (see [www.asambleaecclesial.lat](http://www.asambleaecclesial.lat)).

<sup>4</sup> See “Relational wisdom and care, that confront dichotomies”, *Voices* (EATWOT’s journal), 2020/2, 73-79.

'we' (interacting individuals) drawn by collaboration, and by conflict. Instead of *cogito ergo sum* there is a *celebramus ergo sumus*.<sup>5</sup> Any entity is primarily relational, within society and the universe. This is a framework for creative communication and social movements; people draw insights with art, and with political new horizons.

A marvelous example of art - and its wisdom from below - is the work of the Presbyterian theologian and poet Julia Esquivel of Guatemala. She writes "I am simply a woman with a human heart. I am a rebel when faced with the cold and calculated correctness of a bureaucrat... I must admit to those obsessed with such criteria, I am a red-hot coal lighted by the fire of a great love".<sup>6</sup> As a poet and human rights activist, she portrays the wisdom of the oppressed multitude in the Americas.

In terms of education and political alternative (in Brazil and other parts of the world) Paulo Freire's prophetic 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed' enlightened evangelical work linked to empowerment of marginalized people. "It is necessary that the weakness of the powerless be transformed into a force capable of announcing justice. We are transformative beings and not beings for accommodation".<sup>7</sup> Another insight: "the teacher is, of course, an artist, but being an artist does not mean that he or she can or should shape students. The educator makes it possible for the students to become themselves".<sup>8</sup>

The values of art and political responsibility disagree with discriminatory standards; they are subversive and arouse alternatives, due to 'a fire of great love' (Julia Esquivel). They arise from below and should reach everyone.

## 2) Spiritual Bodies of the Earth

Sickness and suffering throughout our planet signal a historical shift, and almost everyone in the churches is changing routines, programs, and rational and emotional

<sup>5</sup> See Josef Estermann, *Filosofia Andina*, La Paz: ISEAT, 2006, pg. 218-219.

<sup>6</sup> Julia Esquivel, *The certainty of spring*, USA, EPICA Task Force, 1992, poem: "I am not possessed".

<sup>7</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, NY: Bloomsbury, 2001.

<sup>8</sup> Myles Horton and Paulo Freire, *We make the road by walking*, Philadelphia: Temple University, 1990.

standards. The urgent question today is if our actions and way of thinking are faithful to the Incarnation and Pentecost. A pragmatic shift is short-sighted.

Body and earth are major concerns in Afroamerica, feminist, indigenous, and mestizo theologies and spiritualities. It is neither fashionable, nor a populist, strategy. Voices and wisdom produced by all sections of humanity are moving church leaders to rediscover problems of hidden idolatry. Global violence has its absolutes: in economic 'solutions' of growth, in publicity and the media, in neo-magical technologies, in ahistorical and self-centered spiritual renewal.

Since we are bodies of the earth, salvation means immanent transcendence. Mauro Mamani tells us that in the región of the Andes "human beings, deities, and communities practice reciprocity so as to have a better world. As each part of a body contributes to the whole, likewise people interact for the sake of a community, and communities are connected so as to have life on the planet".<sup>9</sup> This healthy and wholistic vision may help to avoid fundamentalism.

Moreover, inter-faith and inter-cultural concerns deal with biblical metaphors and embodied rituals. Some prefer a dichotomy of flesh and spirit. Taking into account Paul's doctrine in 1 Corinthians 15,35-57, Irene Foulkes is accurate: earthly body and heavenly body is not a contradiction, rather we "carry the image of the risen Christ as we live in the world today".<sup>10</sup> Salvation is happening in our historical journey.

### **3) Fragility in Christian Leadership**

On one side there are local/global chains of deep pain and systemic injustice, and on the other side, we are called to enjoy spiritual solidarity. Humanists, ecologists, human rights activists, and church spokespersons all underline today's uncertainty, and the fragility of all institutions in times of crisis. These contexts move us to rethink ministries, theologies, financial issues, dialogues for the sake of life, training lay

<sup>9</sup> Mauro Mamani, "Yanantin: relación, complementariedad y cooperación en el mundo andino", *Revista Digital, Estudios de Teoría Literaria*, 8/16, 2019, 191-203.

<sup>10</sup> Irene Foulkes, *Problemas pastorales en Corinto*, San José: Universidad Bíblica Latinoamericana, 1996, pgs. 406-411.

leaderships with earthly spirituality, and Catholic missionary work. All of this may sharpen priorities in MWI and similar forms of partnership.

A global phase of uncertainty and fragility not only indicates less neo-liberal hegemony but also opens questions and new possibilities. It may be retroactive and conservative. But it may also mean strength of the weak, and potentials of freedom and shared joy. To go in this direction, the beatitudes (Lc 6,20-26) may continue as guidelines. The paradoxes of subject-subjugator, unfed-well fed, sadness-laughter, victims-self-realized, happen today as witnessed by Julia Esquivel when she writes: crucified people experience resurrection, or fire of great love.

Christian leadership may grow due to fragility and to polygonal mystique (*Evangelii Gaudium* n° 236<sup>11</sup>). Thus, global leaders in the south are not unilateral nor omnipotent. Content and methodology of training for the mission are inter-faith and inter-cultural, it is polygonal wisdom.

### **Concluding Insights**

In the global south, there are tiny and fruitful epistemic concerns about spiritual solidarity. They witness the resurrection of bodies of the earth, and leadership amid uncertainty and fragility.

In Guatemala, Julia Esquivel makes an invitation: “Join us in this vigil and you will know what it is to dream... die a thousand times, and rise a thousand times... Love and hope nourish my People”.<sup>12</sup>

In uncertain times, stagnant institutions and communities are being nourished by art and prophecy. Earthly bodies stricken by pandemics are demanding paradigms such as mutual care, celebrations in a common home, social-economic and political solidarity (as outlined in *Laudato Si'* and *Fratelli Tutti*).

<sup>11</sup> Francis, 2013, *Evangelii Gaudium* n° 236: polyhedron reflects the convergence of all its parts, each of which preserves its distinctiveness... There is a place for the poor and their culture, their aspirations and their potential... Convergence of peoples who, within the universal order, maintain their own individuality; it is the sum total of persons within a society which pursues the common good...”

<sup>12</sup> Julia Esquivel, poems “we are threatened with resurrection” and “I do not fear death”, *El Padre Nuestro desde Guatemala y otros poemas*, San José: DEI, 1981, 41.

As men and women in public roles, as academicians, as church leaders, as leaders of social movements we may ask ourselves does fire burn within? Do lights open paths? Few words may be needed. Much courage and silence are indispensable.

In Chile, Pablo Neruda warns: “we all arrive, by different streets, by unequal languages, at Silence”.<sup>13</sup> Epistemic inquiries in the global south may abandon monuments of certainty and may embrace small empowerments throughout the world.

My gratitude to each of you for listening, dreaming, and developing your concerns in collaboration with others.

<sup>13</sup> Pablo Neruda, *Todavía un día, Still another day*, XVII, 1969. See also Luis Gustavo Meléndez Guerrero “El silencio como morada. Mística y poesía en relación”, *Revista Iberoamericana de Teología*, n° 30, 2020, pg. 12: it is impossible to have the right word that accurately contains the meaning of revelation, and, at the same time, the necessity to say what has been experienced; this is the role of paradox, of eroticism and of symbolic reality that help us configure the experience of Mystery.

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