

The Grandmother in the Attic: Interpreting an Aymara- Navajo Conversation

Gretchen Abernathy

Introduction

The following account took place on a Monday in October, 2008, in La Paz, Bolivia. Reflection about it is ongoing. In this paper I hope to capture on the printed page an event worth preserving, not just for the sake of recording it but to come to better understand the shades and dynamics of the in-breaking of the kingdom of God in this transcendent moment. Furthermore, I write to invite others to participate in the transformation that it began to work in my life.

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51

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Below I attempt to reconstruct with integrity the conversation as best as I can recall it. To contextualize the interactions, I interweave cultural and historical background information about the main actors' people groups. At the same time I analyze my role as the interpreter. My desire to interpret faithfully went beyond a sense of professionalism and became a response of obedience to the movement of the Holy Spirit.

The conversation I witnessed was a multicultural encounter between a handful of Christians separated by various barriers: language, culture, age, gender, and centuries of oppression. The exchange turned into a foretaste of the holistic reconciliation described in Revelation 7, where a "great multitude... from every nation, tribe, people and language" was gathered in praise before the throne of God. Our attempts to get to know one another were swept up in the purposes of God until our present gave a glimmer of the future of God, as the Sri Lankan theologian Vinoth Ramachandra puts it:

God's future embraces human actions in the present. Our hope is not that we will be whisked off to another world when we die but that this present world will be transformed into all that God intended it to be... And that vision is given to us not to encourage idle speculation and curiosity about the future, but to motivate us to live in the present in such a way that we give people around us a glimpse into God's future. So the church is that missionary community, drawn from all the nations and cultures of the world, which seeks to live God's future in the present... In some way that we cannot fully imagine, God takes our faithful actions in the world, and he weaves