

Our Interconnection in Christ: Why the Church Needs the Voice of its Indigenous Members

Andrew Jennings-Grisham

Introduction

In this brief reflection we are going to explore the implications of our interconnection in the body of Christ with a special focus on our relationship with our indigenous brothers and sisters in Latin America. Combining an anthropological focus with biblical reflection on the body of Christ and the kingdom of God, we will examine how as a church we are not fulfilling our mandate to unite and function as one body. Despite there being quite a lot of contact between both churches and individual Christians from the centers

Drew and his wife, Ann, lived in Bolivia for four years before moving home to Chattanooga, TN. He is the administrator of Memoria Indigena, a website dedicated to sharing indigenous theology and historical perspective in Latin America (<http://www.memoriaindigena.org>).



159

Vol. 9, No. 2

of power (especially in the West) and their peers on the margins, these exchanges have been almost exclusively one-directional, and the church is suffering as a result. But if the church in the center¹ can learn to see the indigenous² church as an equal or even superior member of the very same body (Phil 2:3, 1 Cor 12:22–24), doing so can revolutionize our relationship with our neighbor; it can help us better understand our own culture as well as God and God’s Word; and it can help the church to more effectively carry out its mission through unity and a passion for justice.

Throughout my childhood and youth I participated in church events every time the doors were open, and I attended a private evangelical school. My parents were church leaders, and my grandparents were also Christians. I was completely immersed in the evangelical world. I absorbed the teaching from my pastors and teachers, and, since it was the only world I had ever known, I assumed that was how all Christians believed and spoke. When my mother took me to Honduras when I was twelve years old, it ignited in me a passion to know other worlds. Later, after spending time in

We deny our interconnectedness, even our interdependence, with all of humanity and the natural world that surrounds us.

many other places, I began to realize that the way of believing and speaking about the Scriptures that I had received was only one way among many. The history, geography, and culture of a community all influence our interpretation of the Bible.

As I became acquainted with these other worlds, I realized that, in a bigger sense, they were not really other worlds at all—rather that we are all part of just one world. It may be that we understand and see our

1. In this article, “church in the center” refers to the church found in the centers of power and wealth—whether that be Western Europe, the United States, or the urban centers of “underdeveloped” countries—which has historically lent religious legitimacy to those centers.

2. In this paper the term “indigenous” refers to the first peoples existing in the Americas before colonization by Europeans.