

Discriminated, discriminating

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Translation into English

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The arrival of Christianity on the continent is plagued by pain, blood and suffering for the native peoples. On the other hand, the arrival of evangelical Protestantism in Chile is mediated by the presence of missionaries, be they from what are called missionary or transplant churches, and can have at least a few interpretations.

The first relates to the arrival of the transplant or missionary churches, which met with fierce opposition from the Roman Catholic Church, which already had a presence in the country and was the official religion. With the air of freedom and liberal thinking, these ideas were welcomed and supported by the leaders and social leaders of the time. Respect for and attachment to freedom of thought are central elements in understanding the arrival or entry of Evangelical-Protestants into the country.

1. One reading has to do with the arrival of European migrants (mainly Germans and English, at first, and their eventual link to diplomatic tasks), Lutherans and Anglicans. Protestants arrived in a land sown and cultivated by the Catholic Church, so initially and until late in the 20th century, one characteristic of the Protestant presence was proselytism (Catholic and other religious or spiritual expressions). This process was accompanied by the so-called secular laws (1880-1890), which benefited the presence and work of the Protestant-Evangelical churches in the country. Until the 1833 constitution, Chile was a country whose official religion was Catholic, but from then on, basic schools were set up for the education of the different sectors of the country; the Law on Secular Cemeteries 1883; the Law on Civil Marriage 1884; the Law on Civil Registration 1884; Other laws, interpretative, such as the interpretation of article 5 of the constitutional charter of 1833, which shed light on a certain degree of freedom of worship (1865) and also the right to set up public schools where they could transmit or teach their faith; law allowing non-Catholics to preach their worship in private places (1870); decree of secular cemeteries 1871, establishing burial without distinction of creed in a separate space for dissidents and the creation of secular cemeteries; 1874, Penal Code and abolition of ecclesiastical jurisdiction (priests could only be tried in ecclesiastical courts or under canon law); separation of Church and State in the

1925 constitution; in 1934, women's suffrage was approved for municipal elections and in 1949 for presidential and parliamentary elections; in 1952, women voted for the first time;

in 1999, the law on freedom of worship was approved, i.e. being recognised as public law entities. 31 October 2008 is the national day of the evangelical churches.

The so-called secular laws, in a way, sought to diminish the strong Catholic influence in the Chilean state. Some of these laws also sought to correct discrimination between creeds (Catholics and Protestants) and individuals (equality before the civil law, marriage, cemeteries, schools).

1.1. The arrival of dissidents took place in the context of diplomatic representations by the countries of origin, such as England where part of their diplomatic representatives were also clergymen or people linked to the Anglican church. Something similar happened with the Lutheran, Presbyterian and Methodist churches. Even though some of them found in the liberators support and facilities to develop their missionary work.

1.2. There are currently more than 3 500 evangelical Protestant organisations in Chile, whether they are governed by private or public law. Several of them are present in the Araucanía region with churches, schools or activities to support local initiatives (agriculture, or survival economy projects). According to the 2017¹ Population Census, there are 2,185,792 people belonging to indigenous peop² in Chile. A total of 12.8% of the population; 1,745,147 belong to the Mapuche people; 156,147 to the Aymara people and 88,474 to the Diagüita people³, just to mention a few.

2. Another reading is related to the arrival of this sector of Christianity⁴, especially for its missionary work, which began its work in various sectors, one of them being the Araucanía region⁵ where the Mapuche people are located.

2.1. In this area, the Christian churches - Catholic and Evangelical-Protestant - developed a long, arduous and fruitful work in the educational field. However, their missionary work also led them to ignore the Mapuche religion, its practices and customs as well as its rites. The local religious experience, their spirituality, was ignored and the process of evangelisation began, and with it the advance of a new way of believing, as well as new liturgical and ritual forms and the undermining of what the Mapuche people lived and preserved.

The clearest expression to define this task is religious proselytism, anchored in a conservative biblical reading, an external ecclesial model (hierarchical organisation) and the pastor or curacentrism as a figure and authority in the community.

¹ Data taken from the National Institute of Statistics.

² Extinct peoples; Picunche people; Chiquillan people; Puelche people; Cunco people; Poya people; Chono people; Caucahué people; Aónikenk people; Selk'nam people;

³ Officially recognised peoples: Aymara people; Quechua people; Atacameño people; Kolla people; Diaguita people; Rapa Nui people; Mapuche people; Yagán people; Kawésqar people; Chango people.

⁴ The Anglican church was the first to celebrate a liturgy in the country, which took place in 1855, in Cerro Alegre de Valparaíso, but it was Allen Gardiner in 1830 who began his work of evangelisation and founded the South American Missionary Society in 1844. He did important work in the Araucanía area, where they founded a school and later a church (1918).

⁵ It is located in the southern part of the country, bordered to the north by the Bio-Bio region and to the south by the Los Rios region, to the east by Argentina and to the west by the Pacific Ocean, 720 km from Santiago.

2.2. In this process, encounters and misunderstandings, there is a radical rupture between local religious practices and the new religion, the new god, the sacred book (Bible) and the qualified pastoral agent (priest/pastor). "Conversion" is sought as the only response to the necessary change of life (lifestyle) of the Mapuche people.

This practice is at odds with the Mapuche vision, with the model of good living, and the link with the sacred now comes from external elements and not with nature or the land and its environment.

"This has been a complicated and confrontational encounter and has been described as one of the most aggressive stories in the history of our country, which has had traumatic consequences for the Mapuche people."⁶ To this we must add the consequences of evangelisation, which produces, within the communities, division and separation between groups.

Even so, according to Foerster, in the face of common situations or problems, they come together again⁷. On the other hand, Riveros assumes that the process of evangelisation has caused a rupture in this relationship, which forces a rearticulation,⁸ all within the framework of the attempts to evangelise and win this people to the Christian faith. This result obeys, in a way, a traditional line of work with the Mapuche, which seeks to convert them, for which they must leave their culture, language, religious practices and abandon their worldview.

There is a desire and a search in some sectors to distance themselves from the white Christ and to open a line of pastoral missionary action that considers the values of indigenous religiosity and does not detract from it; to accompany the rescue of indigenous identity and to develop ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue. This, however, must include the question of what the Mapuche people want or need in terms of religion, mission or evangelisation.

Riveros states: "I believe that the Mapuche are a people with an extremely rich legacy of tradition, strength and wisdom, and that we, with our rationalist bias inherited from contact with the European continent and the admiration we profess for their culture, have not been able to know and value them"⁹. Despite this, at first, as in much of the continent, they were decimated, subjugated, exploited and today are marginalised.

2.4. In this process, they have been discriminated against by Christianity in its attempt to settle or establish itself in Chile, and on another level, they have been discriminated against by ignoring the validity and relevance of religion, imposing it by force. That is to say, imposing Christianity via evangelisation: "they have given unequal treatment to people, collectivities, whether for racial, religious, political, sexual, age or mental or physical reasons".

Another aspect that remains to be addressed relates to the identity of the people and the principle of identity. We make it explicit that in the case of the Mapuche, this is closely linked to the land and nature, where there is an extraordinary connection that results in the sacred. The

⁶ Revista Evangelio y Sociedad, pp. 26-32.

⁷ Ibid., p.32

⁸ María Elena Riveros E. Religión e identidad en el pueblo mapuche. Seminar Problemas de la cultura latinoamericana.

⁹ Op. cit., p. 1

Mapuche people are brought together by ritual and religious symbols, and the producers of religious meaning make up their identity or Mapuche ethos. That is why the Nguillatún is still their major and central expression of their religion, offered to Chao Ngenechen - Mapuche God - who establishes the healthy balance broken by external actions.