

ADVENT ESCHATOLOGY – Brian Rude, December 4, 2019

Advent has arrived.

The word for the season, it seems, is "escatología".

In mid-November, in the midst of the 30th annual commemoration of the Jesuit priests' martyrdom here at the UCA in San Salvador, today's Jesuits were reflecting on the theme chosen for this year: "El Sentido Escatológico de la Iglesia"--"The Eschatological Sense of the Church". They drew on San Romero's reflections on escatología: on the Exodus, leading to liberation; on the Babylonian exile, leading to the homecoming of God's people to the promised land of Israel; and on contemporary times, God's people still longing for, struggling toward, and sometimes celebrating, liberation.

I have yet to hear a debate here on how early in the season Christmas music is admissible, or when Christmas decorations should go up. Worship continues throughout Advent, as regularly and as enthusiastically as ever. The focus is on other crucial issues.

This first week of Advent is an intense one for this theme of eschatology--hope-filled longing for peace, justice, and respect for human rights in El Salvador. Monday morning saw us gathered at the "Lady of Justice" monument just a few blocks from my home, launching a "Coordinadora" (coordination committee) drawing together a number of social movements and churches, including Lutheran leaders. We heard from the youth. We heard from the women. We heard from the pensioners. We heard from the war veterans. We heard from the union members. We heard from several representing sexual diversity, the LGBTQ+ community.

We didn't hear from those living with HIV / AIDS, but December 1 was the global day to recognize this sector of humanity and their struggle, which we will highlight with the Rosales Public Hospital support group on Thursday, celebrating a mass and an all-day swim outing. The ombudsman is inviting the public to a major HIV-support event Friday morning.

We didn't hear from prison inmates, but the Anglican-originated organization Cristosal placed a lawsuit on Tuesday to bring an end to the harsh and abusive "extraordinary measures"--anti-constitutional torture, as one analyst from the Lutheran University argues--put in place for six months, five years ago, but regularly extended and never lifted. This is a grim reality which has blocked our prison ministry of twenty years over these past five years.

Another sector not heard from at this event, the network of organizations and churches with which I have been most involved this past year--the Table for Victims of Forced Internal Displacement--has been putting most of its energy into preparing for an audience with the CIDH (see below), including a preparatory audience in Ecuador a couple weeks ago.

On Tuesday I attended a forum hosted by FESPAD, a network of lawyers, sponsored by the Lutheran World Federation, evaluating the human rights situation in El Salvador in 2018 and 2019.

Another two-day multi-sector forum on human rights is scheduled for Thursday and Friday.

This week the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (CIDH) has come to El Salvador for an intensive three-day investigation into the human rights situation, the first time since 1987, the first time since I moved to El Salvador--long overdue, with too much to consider in three short but intense days.

This wrapped up today. We await the commission's report, and hope it will be taken seriously, and implemented, by those responsible for human rights in this country with such a questionable record.

Nobody is talking about "Advent." In fact, I believe nobody has mentioned the word "Advent." But I believe they know what living Advent is all about, in their dedicated hearts, as they prepare the way for God and God's reign to come to God's creation. Together we are living Advent in all its intensity this week.

"Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

What does this mean? As Martin Luther instructed the faithful: "The kingdom of God certainly comes by itself without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may come to us also.

"How does God's kingdom come? God's kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead godly lives here in time and there in eternity.

One would assume that "escatología" in Spanish would translate readily to eschatology in English. Well, it does. But it's not that simple. It also translates readily and precisely to another word, a very different word, in English. It translates to scatology in English. Hmmm.

While scatology might not be such an agreeable or appealing subject for many, the Jesuits in El Salvador are not squeamish about addressing it. Ignacio Ellacuría, SJ, one of those martyred on 16 November, 1989, followed by Jon Sobrino, SJ, a contemporary prophetic voice, spoke of the importance of scatology--the study of excrement, feces, poop, droppings, dung. They related it to the study of society. For an individual to undergo a thorough medical check-up or physical examination, a stool sample is unavoidable. Study of the client's "poop" will reveal the state of health of the individual. That sample is put through numerous tests, in order to diagnose any ailments that might exist, perhaps requiring treatment. The same is true for society, or for a family, or for a congregation, or for a church body.

"Escatología" --eschatology--refers to the end times, in theological language.

"Escatología" --scatology--refers to the end times of the digestive cycle.

"End times," of course, is relative. Beyond death come resurrection and new life. Beyond defecation, comes fertilizer, generating new life.

Dung makes itself useful in other ways: energy from the methane gas emitted; fine paper products when recycled.

All of the human rights energy described above is really an exercise in "escatología" (scatology), probing into the various ailments suffered by this society, with a vision toward "escatología" (eschatology), a hope-filled Advent, looking toward, longing for, bringing the reign of God to God's creation.

On a lighter note, the two "escatologías" come together in unexpected manners, at unexpected moments. That very week of Jesuit commemoration, I was awaiting reception of Jesus's eschatological gift, standing in line with the faithful, when I was anointed "escatologicamente"--scatologically--from above, by a dove, one of the feathered, flying, faithful in our new, high-vaulted-ceiling, open-windowed Lutheran cathedral. The splotchy floor design provides ample warning of this phenomenon. This blessing

felt almost sacramental--a physical element linked with some "holy" words which I may have uttered. Jesus's bidding for this rite was missing, of course, so it was merely a serendipity.

Eschatology

Scatology

Escatología

We have much to ponder this season of Advent--

a time of waiting,

a time of preparation,

a time of penitence,

a time of receiving,

a time of reflection,

a time of relating,

a time of vision,

a time of solidarity,

a time of protest,

a time of struggle,

a time of collective reconstruction,

inspired by, guided by, and in the name of the One coming to our world,

the Christ child.

An awe-filled Advent to you.

Paz,

Brian

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