

The Meeting of Two Worlds: Searching for and Affirming Our Christian and Indigenous Identity

Jocabed Solano

Who are we, the Guna people? The question is complex and cannot be answered with a precise definition. We are the sum of many experiences, stories, relationships, cultures, languages, geographies, encounters with other people groups, and encounters with ourselves. The Guna are one of many people groups in *Abya Yala*¹ whose way of life is built upon our spirituality, worldview, and story of origin; who have been transformed step by step in

1. *Abya Yala* is the term utilized by the Guna people and which has been adopted by many indigenous peoples to refer to the American continents. It means “fully mature land” or “the land of life’s blood.”

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coming to know other peoples and ourselves. The bridge between internal and external dialogue allows us to create new ways of seeing life and recognize that the answer to who we are will never be static but rather dynamic.

Among the Canoes: Passing through Strange Lands, the Guna Experience

If the sea could speak, it would tell our story; if canoes could record memories, they would reveal the secret of the people who have lived surrounded by the sea; they would tell a story that has never been heard of a people who found their freedom through struggling and always meeting themselves and others rowing on the high seas.

The Guna way of life went through a process of transformation as time passed and we encountered other people groups. Every day we became a stronger nation, valuing our identity. Communal life intensified; every person sought the well-being of others and harmony with nature, believing that others' lives mattered and that God cared for the well-being of everything that exists.

Ibeorgun, a Guna prophet, taught our grandparents many things, including, for example, how to build a better hut:

We are going to improve our huts. We need a really big one here. A house for everyone. A house for the women, for the men, for the children. In this big hut we will speak of *Baba* (God), of our illnesses, of our work, of our big things and our small things. Like all huts, this one must be built with our own hands.... Choose

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the best trees: *baglawala*, *naggiwala*, *wasawala*. Let us place each log in its place with its proper name. The central log (the number of logs depends on the size of the hut) we will call *buwar*. This *buwar* cannot be left alone; it needs to be supported by another log, smaller but still strong, which we will call *dior*.... The hut or the house itself names the things that help give it structure. This is our way; this is our community. Our community names us.²

The Guna worldview largely arises from this image of the common house for the Guna assembly. According to Guna traditions, the prophet Ibeogun and his sister Giggardiryai organized the Guna community there in the *onmaggednega*, the house or meeting place where people gather.³

Symbolizing the sense of community and interdependence, the physical logs, each with its own unique name, represent the organized structure of the community. The *buwar* is the central or primary log and represents the community leader. The Guna look for leaders with a strong intellectual and spiritual background who will not give in to temptations of corruption and who are oriented around the well-being of the people as a whole and of Mother Earth. The other logs take their cues from the *buwar*. As physical wood fits together to

As physical wood fits together to make a safe, strong house, everyone else in the community falls into place for the sake of the community's organized structure.

2. Aiban Wagua, ed. and trans., *En defensa de la vida y su armonía: Elementos de la espiritualidad guna. Textos del Babigala* (Panama City: Emisky/Pastoral Social-Cáritas Panamá, 2000, 2011), 118–19, <http://www.gunayala.org.pa/En%20defensa%20de%20la%20vida%20y%20su%20armonia.OK.pdf>.

3. The following material is drawn from Nicolás Iglesias Schneider, “Costa Rica – Proyecto alternativo desde los pueblos originarios, pueblo Kuna,” Federación Universal de Movimientos Estudiantiles Cristianos, mayo 2008, <http://www.fumec-alc.org/noticias/costa-rica-proyecto-alternativo-desde-los-pueblos-originaarios-pueblo-kuna/>.

make a safe, strong house, everyone else in the community falls into place according to the *buwar* for the sake of the community's organized structure.⁴

Within the strong, carefully constructed *onmaggednega*, the people discuss politics and religion as two sides of the same coin. As Nicolás Iglesias Schneider observes, by politics they mean “the steps that must be followed to achieve the Guna people's well-being, and their understanding of religion is within an all-encompassing, holistic framework of the world and the search for well-being.”⁵

Community makes joy possible. If we fail to serve the community as we should, the special name we each received from the *inaduled* (traditional botanical healer) and from the *ied* (women who specialize in puberty rituals and ceremonies) will fail to bear fruit. We will have wasted our time on this earth.

In the pre-Colombian Guna nation, life was lived with much joy and celebration, with feasts, dances, and music; women, men, and children enjoyed living in complete harmony with each other and with Mother Earth.

Death came suddenly. The colonizers from Spain, claiming God's name, held a sword in one hand and a Bible in the other. That day there was great lament. The Guna people chose to flee. Some went to other areas of the Darién province, and some settled in the northeast by the Caribbean Sea in a paradisiacal spot. Since then, we have lived in this region where for hundreds of years our people have made a life for themselves near the sea.

Wind, water, salt, sun, waves, rain, animals—these are the elements that surround us. The sea is a mystery. Calm, it reminds us of God's kindness; when it rages, it is the school of adversity that teaches us how to endure crisis. It makes us strong. Only a high

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

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tide can draw out who we really are: sons and daughters who struggle for our land, our culture, our people, our identity.

What is Your Name?

Names have always been important in the life of the Guna people. They represent identity, who we are. When we think about what to name our sons or daughters, we consider their personalities and what we hope for them or believe they will become. The people as a whole see themselves a certain way because this self-definition strengthens their roots, desires, dreams, struggles, stories, and experiences. Our name allows us to be unique and individualized, despite similarities in lifestyle; distinctions are what make a people group unique.

As described by UNICEF, “Indigenous peoples demonstrate cultural similarities and differences regarding systems of familial, social, political, and economic organization, as well as in their systems of belief in the spiritual realm.”⁶ They are diverse, yet their love for Mother Earth and their strong sense of community unite them.

When those who are unfamiliar with our identity take upon themselves the task that does not belong to them of naming that which is hidden or mysterious to them, they bring about an irreparable loss of the true sense of identity of a people and of a land.

That is why we must raise our voices and state who we were and who we are, based on our knowledge of our history; we must continue building the foundation

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6. UNICEF, “La niña indígena y adolescente urbano: Entre riesgos y oportunidades” (Panama: UNICEF, 2011), 39, <http://www.unicef.org/panama/spanish/Sitan2011-web.pdf>.

on which Abya Yala exists. The renaming that has characterized colonialism has resulted in a true loss of memory for many people groups; this provokes a crisis not only for those of our own but also for all who call themselves sons and daughters of this land. Self-definition is a fundamental task that can only be expressed by those who truly know their reality.

Native peoples bear within their identity the struggle for the land, and that is why our ancestors chose not to silence their voices; because it is through our spirituality, our worldview, and our origin story that our grandparents sought to be heard, so that younger generations could enjoy the memory of who we truly were and are.

History tells us that the name *America* was given in honor of Amerigo Vespucci, the Italian explorer and mapmaker who traveled to the newly discovered territories. Vespucci was from Florence, and he dedicated much of his life to commerce. When his profession took him to Spain, his interest in exploring was piqued when he helped equip Columbus' third voyage to the lands that had been discovered just a few years earlier. Later he made his own voyage and, upon returning to Europe, published the maps of that previously unknown region. He was among the first to realize it was an entirely new landmass.

The native peoples were unhappy with that name and, in a meeting of several indigenous leaders, many decided to adopt the name proposed by the Guna people.⁷ They called the Americas *Abya Yala*. Through this term they could identify with the true name that gives meaning to who they are and all that being and doing represent.

7. See, for example, the use of the term in the name of the 2004 gathering of indigenous peoples in Quito, "La II Cumbre Continental de los Pueblos y Nacionalidades Indígenas de Abya Yala." For a summary of this continental summit, see Ángel Bonilla, "La II Cumbre Continental de los Pueblos y Nacionalidades Indígenas de Abya Yala," *Observatorio Social de América Latina* 5, no. 5 (Sept-Dec 2004), <http://biblioteca.clacso.edu.ar/clacso/osal/20110309122731/30bonilla15.pdf>.

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We, the Guna, affirm that “the Earth has undergone four historical periods, and in each period the continent that later came to be known as America was called by a different name: *Kualagun Yala*, *Tagargun Yala*, *Tinga Yala*, *Abia Yala*. The latter means a land that is saved, preferred, loved by *Baba* and *Nana* [God]; and, in a larger sense, it can also mean mature land, land of blood.”⁸ And as Luis Javier Caicedo explains, “this land is called *Abya Yala*, composed of *Abe*, which means ‘blood,’ and *Ala*, which is like a space, a territory...that comes forth from the Great Mother.”⁹

Our native peoples have taken hold of this name in their struggle for the land and their customs. Presently, many different indigenous communities, organizations, and institutions across the continent have adopted the name *Abya Yala* instead of *America*. They use the name in both their written and spoken documents as “a symbol of their identity and respect for the land” in which they live.¹⁰

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From Our Land to the Cities

A teacher in a classroom of about thirty children asked, “Children, tell me, what do we call juice if it has no sugar?”

An intelligent, restless, eager little girl raised her hand. “Teacher, teacher, I know! It is called ‘saye.’”

8. Alberto Croce, “Un nuevo marco regional: Un documento para discutir y completar,” Fundación SES (Buenos Aires: May 2008), 1, note 1, http://www.observatorylatinamerica.org/pdf/articulos/marco_regional_ACC-may08.pdf.

9. Luis Javier Caicedo, “Validez de ‘Abia Yala’ como nombre del continente americano,” Albicentenario.com, February 11, 2009, http://albicentenario.com/index_archivos/celebracion_continental_49.html.

10. Quoted by José Javier Rodas, “Abya Yala, el verdadero nombre de este continente,” Crónicas de la Tierra sin Mal, March 2, 2013, <http://cronicasinmal.blogspot.com/2013/03/abya-yala-el-verdadero-nombre-de-este.html>.

The teacher and the other children laughed, but the girl did not understand why they were laughing; she knew she was right. However, the teacher told her she was mistaken. When she got home she told her mother what had happened, and her mother said, “Sweetie, you were right, but you said it in Guna.”

The anecdote may sound amusing, but many members of native peoples who for one reason or another have migrated to the cities over the years have faced this reality.

The International Labour Organization states in a 2006 report that the lack of income-generating opportunities within their communities has forced indigenous peoples to emigrate from their original homes, moving from an economy based primarily on family farming, and to become industrialized, selling their labor in the worst of working conditions with a high incidence of child labor.¹¹

In our Abya Yala, our native peoples are unknown, as if they inhabited foreign territory, living the irony of not belonging to their own land. Both from a geopolitical framework and also from an existential point of view, they are strangers in their own land, with no rights, despite the United Nations’ Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples that was approved by the General Assembly on September 13, 2007.¹²

Others, and indeed they themselves, do not recognize them for who they are. Apparently it is too easy to misunderstand indigenous peoples, even when they speak Spanish and dress like city people. They are still seen and treated as different.¹³

11. International Labour Organization, “Trabajo infantil y pueblos indígenas: El caso de Panamá” (San José: ILO, 2006), 3, http://www.ilo.org/ipec/Informationresources/WCMS_IPEC_PUB_7091/lang-es/index.htm.

12. United Nations General Assembly, “United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples,” September 13, 2007, <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N06/512/07/PDF/N0651207.pdf?OpenElement>.

13. See Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe, “Los pueblos indígenas en América Latina. Avances en el último decenio y retos pendientes para la garantía de sus derechos,” November 2014, <http://www.cepal.org/es/publicaciones/37050-los-pueblos-indigenas-en-america-latina-avances-en-el-ultimo-decenio-y-retos>.

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The Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe [Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean] observes that “Indigenous peoples belong to the most disadvantaged sectors as a result of complex social and historical processes that began more than five hundred years ago and which established discriminatory practices that persist today and which have systematically deprived them of their lands, with grave consequences for their well-being.”¹⁴

There are scarce opportunities for indigenous peoples to participate in decisions made by the state. If even the leaders of the people recognize this, how much more keenly do young indigenous women feel it.

Still today, the educational system of native peoples is not formally accepted in educational curricula, which leads to a diminished emphasis on caring for the earth, a subject in which elderly indigenous men and women are experts, as well as a decreased sense of community life, which could lead to a better and fairer economic system.

In the same way, the dominant Western educational system is imposed upon many native peoples with no expectation or desire to understand others through an intercultural, pluralistic, and contextual vision. This means that children in our indigenous communities often do not understand their scholastic subjects, whether because of the limitations of their Spanish language abilities or because their lifestyles are different from those found in globalized, capitalist cities in terms of ideas and life purpose. This topic and others such as health, security, the environment, civic participation, and democratic forms of government were addressed in the Organization of American States’ Seventh Summit of the Americas, held in Panama in April of 2015. Yet there was no official invitation to

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14. Ibid., 5.

listen to the voices of the some 826 native people groups living in Latin America.¹⁵

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Throughout the continent, the greatest inequalities in terms of levels of economic poverty, illiteracy in the dominant language (Spanish), access to clean water, employment, education, and health are seen in indigenous communities. Of constant concern as well are the countless unresolved issues of land rights, which are threatened by mining and ranching activities that have been carried out with state approval and have displaced native peoples from their ancestral lands, traditions, and agricultural way of life.

Generally, the members of native peoples who have managed to access better opportunities are those who grew up in the cities, though oftentimes attaining these opportunities was no easy task. Our region is still a long way off from understanding the richness of the values of native peoples, of which we are all a part; without such recognition, people deny their identity as humans formed by the meeting of different worlds.

The lack of participation among and platforms for indigenous communities to express their art, education, politics, and health provokes the loss of a valuable contribution that could greatly enrich society.

Roads Chosen: Woman, Young Person, Guna, and Christian

My parents emigrated to the city when they were children since my respective grandparents sent them to live with aunts and uncles so

15. Ibid., 44.

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they could go to school. That was normal for those who wanted to continue studying.

For the vast majority of migrating Guna, it was painful to leave their families and live in a city where everything was different. To go from traveling by canoe to maneuvering the noisy city streets surrounded by cars, “red devils” (buses), and trains was, no doubt, challenging.

Some Guna decided to move to the city when they were young, since the armed forces of the United States of North America was hiring young workers who were trustworthy and could cook and work in maintenance. And so, just like that, they accepted a job offer and settled in the cities of Panama, continuing the rhythms of life there with their wives and children. Because of the strength of their community-based culture, they began to create Guna communities throughout Panama, thus preserving their identity and sociopolitical organization as in their homeland in the region of Guna Yala.

As previously mentioned, the goal of pursuing further education led many Guna children and youth to live in Panama City with relatives or even with people outside their community. Thus several generations of Guna grew up in the city, as did the young people of other native people groups from all over Abya Yala. I am one such youth.

Youth Between Two Worlds

I grew up in a Guna community, but my first language was Spanish, because my parents did not speak Guna; however, because my grandmother spoke only Guna, I was able to learn it.

When we would go to community meetings in the assembly house, I was not very interested in the rituals. I did not understand

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why we did them, and they seemed terribly boring and hard to follow. I preferred other types of gatherings, like sporting events.

All my friends in the community were also Guna, and though at home we cooked food from our homeland such as *tule masi* (coconut broth with plantains and parboiled fish) and *madum* (a beverage made from ripe plantains), at times we could not tell the difference between one culture and another.

Some children preferred to blend in when we were at school because the city kids made fun of us for being Guna. We spoke good Spanish and acted pretty much the same as they did; however, many Guna children denied their identity despite their obviously indigenous appearance. Personally, I was deeply offended by this situation, because I never could understand why other boys and girls often treated us as “different.”

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In spite of my indignation, at times I, too, felt ashamed of who I was. My parents were professionals, and even though I was a very good student by Western educational standards, I felt ashamed of my ethnicity. It was an internal, existential struggle. Fortunately, my grandparents held gatherings in which the entire family came together to discuss our identity, our origins, who we were, and what was expected of us. In her role as guide, my grandmother said the following:

We are children of the struggle. We have fought for centuries and centuries so that you could be present today. We will not give up. God gave us the land to care for it, love it, and defend it. We also belong to the land. Let us not live like those who do not remember their mission to live in harmony with the earth. You are a courageous daughter who holds onto her identity, who struggles without growing weary, who swims in the ocean like a fish, who celebrates who she is with

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her food and her festivals, who never denies her origins
because she lives in freedom.

Afterward, my grandfather, who was a healer, would give us an herbal drink to make us strong.

This scene stuck in my mind, and every day, in spite of my external and internal struggles, this commitment to live and hold onto who I am stayed alive like a carefully-tended flame.

The dialogue between two worlds gave me an internal curiosity, but it often went un nourished because I felt like a lone ranger in my pilgrimage. Perhaps I myself did not even understand it. What *was* clear to me was that part of my identity as a young Guna woman lay in the facts: I grew up in Panama City, my first language was Spanish, I like fast food, I wear jeans and T-shirts, I take the bus, I use computers, and I have profiles on various social media outlets. In spite of not being like those who grew up in the region of Guna Yala, I am still Guna, because I carry inside me the meeting of these two worlds. I have inherited many things from my parents and grandparents: the ways I make decisions, see the world, relate to others, love the earth, get passionate about life's beauty, laugh, write, and struggle. All of this is intimately related to my people, and I have learned to live it in freedom. All I needed was to awaken to my roots and my present reality.

Waking up in the Hammock

When you travel to the region of Guna Yala, time seems to slow down. People smile a lot, because hospitality is a highly prized value. In the houses you can hear the songs of mothers singing the poems of their hearts to their babies. You can also hear the elderly singing for the sick to get well. You will often find someone called

the *suar ibed* calling everyone in the community together for an assembly. Children play next to the women sewing *molos* (the traditional Guna dress). When night falls, people gather together to talk on the dock, and when it is time to sleep, they show you to a hammock. For our people, the hammock is a holy place where the wise have special moments, discover their gifts, and share their treasures with others.

The hammock is a holy place where the wise have special moments, discover their gifts, and share their treasures with others.

I thought I was dreaming. I had fallen asleep in a hammock, that space made holy by the great Guna heroes who have sung and told their dreams therein. I slept deeply, and I saw how people from all the indigenous tribes were gathered in a great assembly talking about the current situation of our Abya Yala. The women were very passionate, and the men talked a lot. I was there among them, asking myself, "What am I doing here?" As I listened to the stories of how they saw themselves, I witnessed great love, hard work, passion, hope, and faith. Yet also I saw sorrow, disappointment, suffering. One woman, around seventy years old, was near tears. She said, "I have a great lament against the colonizers. They came to take away our lands, our clothing, our food." At first it seemed like one more of many similar speeches I had already heard; it was nothing new to me, and I was unmoved. However, as she went on, the message reached my mind and my heart. She continued, "One of the groups that has caused us the most pain are the evangelicals. They have caused us pain, great pain." My eyes popped. I felt terribly embarrassed and wanted to hide. I was perplexed and could not say a word.

That night I could hardly sleep. I was confused. I felt like I had betrayed my people, but how could my faith in Jesus have provoked so much grief? In my mind I still saw the expression of sorrow and heard the voice of that grandmother, who could have been my grandmother. Weeping, I told God that I wanted to strive to be a messenger of reconciliation to my people and to other

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indigenous communities. I had thought it was a dream, but it was not. It was real. This difficult experience happened at a conference of native peoples held in Venezuela in 2008. It awoke in me the passion of a calling to be a daughter of Baba and Nana (God) in my Abya Yala land.

Life in the Church

When I was five years old, my mother and father decided to move us to a Guna community called Kuna Nega to start a mission there. It was certainly a new land for us. It was a beautiful place, surrounded by mountains, rivers, vegetation, and animals; but there was no running water, electricity, telephone, transportation, or plumbing. I loved all the adventures, running, climbing trees, going to the river, and playing with my sisters.

Our missionary work began. My job was to invite my little friends to Sunday school. The church that met in our house was soon filled with children and teenagers who, Sunday after Sunday, came to listen to Bible stories and to get a good meal. My mother, my father, and my sisters were faithful to God. We joyfully served through offering classes to our friends. Since no one else there knew about the Bible, my mom taught us the stories and we, in turn, taught the other kids. There we learned to get to know Jesus and his love for us more deeply every day. We found a refuge in the God who loves us all as children, who loves our Guna nation and the other nations. The teenagers became young adults, and we started learning stories about missionaries who had lived in Africa, India, and China. The lives of those people so passionate about Jesus astonished us.

We sang hymns in the Guna language, and the teaching was bilingual; it was a community church in which, after the worship

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service was over, we prepared food to share with each other. We also had time to talk and play. Belonging to this family of faith and walking together with Jesus was such a rich experience.

Even so, as a church we failed to integrate our faith in Jesus with our identity; there was a breach between faith and culture. There was no intentional weaving together of our Bible teachings with our people's dances, stories, struggles with the government, heroes who have worked so hard to keep our culture and identity alive, or rich metaphors that speak of our values and unite us with other indigenous peoples. Some of these teachings include *mer gagansa-eye* (Do not be a liar), *mer atursaeye* (Do not steal), *mer gegegua* (Do not be lazy). These commandments, which we see in the teachings of various indigenous peoples, give us glimpses of God's presence in our daily walk.

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Walking with a Sense of Mission: Jesus, the Walker who Makes His Path by Walking

When I think of Jesus, I am reminded of the line by poet Antonio Machado: "Walker, there is no path. The path is made by walking."¹⁶

The church must continue to reflect and keep on walking as Jesus walked. The transformation of his life was fleshed out in daily realities with the most disadvantaged members of his society. As a young thirty-something Galilean man whom the powerful wrote off as provincial, he assumed the task of believing that his life had an important purpose. Though he came from a small town with a population of scarcely five hundred people, he dreamed of seeing a

16. Antonio Machado, "Proverbios y Cantares XXIX" in *Antonio Machado para niños*, ed. Francisco Caudet (Madrid: de la Torre, 2007), 91.

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better world. His road was not easy. It forced him to go against the prevailing social, political, and economic systems. Challenged by the clash of his worldview with the ways his society saw life, he was strong enough to confront the ideas of others and learn from them (Heb 5:8). He also grew in the understanding of the God of justice who loves those who are poor, marginalized, and rejected, as Jesus was.

In Mark 7:24–30, we read the story of Jesus' encounter with a Syrophenician woman, in which these jarring words are spoken: "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs" (v. 27). The statement puzzles us, especially given who said it.

Unfortunately, the church has often personified the statement above when we cannot make out the kingdom of God in spheres unfamiliar to us. It seems we wish to silence the voices of the marginalized, and, when they speak up, we say things are not well. We could also say that the church has its own priorities and frequently—and contemptuously—pits these agendas against all others, as if to imitate Jesus' perplexing statement, "First let the children eat all they want" (v. 27).

The *no* of the faith community, or the postponement of missional agendas we see in our contexts, can be a symptom of a lack of renewal, the kind of renewal God's Spirit brings when the path is made by walking.

Returning to the story, the Syrophenician woman challenges the Master: "Even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs" (v. 28). This response is creative, innovative, original, "outside the box." She realizes that Jesus is able to hear her voice and do something that no one else can do. Jesus hears in her response a reply that transforms his missional purpose.

It seems that here—in contrast to many passages in which Jesus replies in so many words, "Your faith has made you well"

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(cf. Lk 17:19)—Jesus responds not to the woman’s faith but to her challenge: “For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter” (v. 29). Her faith is implicit.

The Syrophenician woman represents the voice of women in general, of marginalized ethnic groups, of those with “unclean spirits,” of those who are the butt of discrimination.

The Syrophenician’s proposal was Jesus’s own proposal: in the kingdom of God there is room at the table for all to feast.

This passage suggests ways for us to rethink the discourses we use within our own contexts. Yet to push further, the question becomes, where and with whom should we join ourselves? Because, just as for the Syrophenician woman, there are many proposals being forcibly made in the face of these realities, experiences, contexts, and identities.

Finally, this woman’s discourse resulted in Jesus’ joining in her struggle. Her statement, the way she spoke, provoked his surrender, for she was speaking from the viewpoint of her language, her struggle, her dream of a life that includes all people and leaves no one outside; the Syrophenician’s proposal was Jesus’s own proposal: in the kingdom of God there is room at the table for all to feast.

The fact is that native peoples also have their own discourses, their own struggles, and it is absolutely necessary that they be heard. All human beings have the right to live life with dignity and to have an intercultural education in their own language, based on their contexts and reality. This discourse should be heard attentively, and in some areas of our continent it is already being loudly proclaimed.

How is our Mission Being Transformed?

An excellent way to kick-start transformation is to encounter others who have a different vision of mission, in diversity and plurality.

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In relationships with others—with nations very different from our own, with divergent perspectives of the world—we can find other ways to keep doing mission among, for instance, those of indigenous and African descent. The concept of opening the path by walking leads us to realize that it is from within the most difficult struggles that we can best comprehend our sense of mission and the mystery of the kingdom of God.

We must give ourselves fully to the task of being like Jesus, who broke through the paradigms of his culture and its understanding of the kingdom, coming face to face with his own reality: a Jesus who lived in a particular social context but who continued to redefine his mission in his encounters with others.

A church that is open to dialogue with other faiths and other cultures is a church with a table broad enough for all.

Dreaming with Others

Christ's church should be a community of reconciliation in which those who participate can encounter God and also themselves and others; a church in which young men and women from native people groups have the opportunity to think deeply from their own roots, recognizing that God is the creator of all peoples and is deeply interested in each person. If we skim over those aspects of God, we are complicit in the loss of languages, dances, and rituals that express the greatness and the mystery of the God we know—but whom we also do not know. We must humbly recognize that on many occasions we have staunchly defended our absolute truth and thus lost the opportunity to build bridges through dialogue with others. We must be a church whose family portrait includes the profiles of native people groups and affirms the presence of God

Jocabed Solano

from within these roots, a church that can learn how to do missions based on the life experiences of these communities.

The dream is to see indigenous churches in which the values God has sprinkled throughout culture are expressed and enrich us in our walk together.

The *Fraternidad Teológica Latinoamericana* (Latin American Theological Fellowship) is one of the spaces in which, on a personal level, I have been able to start expressing my faith in Jesus and dialoguing with my identity as a young indigenous Guna woman. Today we need more people helping the indigenous youth of this generation to keep discovering the path that is made by walking from the starting point of our faith and identity. The church that loves and follows Jesus is one that allows others to be as God dreamed them to be.

We must be a church whose family portrait includes the profiles of native people groups and affirms the presence of God from within these roots.

One day I dreamed that I could dance and celebrate God from my identity. I was so happy that I seemed insane. I laughed loudly, drunk with joy, and, looking up to heaven, I heard the voice that said to me: Dance, eat, celebrate, for your dream has come true.