

Christmas Eve  
Church of the Good Shepherd, Silver City, NM

December 24, 2016  
Rev. Paul Moore

## **Light in the Darkness**

In the 1960's the Ecuadorian government sought to address the problems confronting agriculture in the nation. The agricultural system was really rather medieval. Large landholders employed land-bound peasants, and kept them in a kind of slavery through endless cycles of debt. Productivity was low, and adoption of emerging modern agricultural technology was slow. During that time the Government also set aside land to be deeded to Indigenous tribes. Each tribe was to apply for title to lands they felt they required to live on in their traditional fashion.

There was established a limited autonomy of rule by which tribes would govern these lands internally. However, the structure of the internal government had to be something the Ecuadorian government officials understood, and so the system of government as imposed from without, with Indigenous people filling the roles so determined. It met with limited success. It often required a kind of proficiency in the legal process of the government, and a knowledge of Spanish that was quite beyond the run-of-the-mill indigenous person. The system of government set up internally to the "Comunas," as they were called, was often foreign to the native governmental system of the tribes. I wrote a short piece once on an annual election meeting held in one of the Comunas of the Tsachi. It was an interesting study of the interface between the traditional customs of rule and the imposed ones, and how the Native Americans managed that difference.

Always the servant, my father set aside his central calling of translating the New Testament into the Tsafiqui language for a time, and threw himself into the role of advocate and intermediary. He hiked many miles with the government surveyors, and he consulted with Indian and Latino extensively. He could see just how essential this was going to become. The fact was, the land around them was quickly being cleared and reduced to agriculture by Latinos. Unscrupulous ones would not hesitate to appropriate Indian lands and then lay legal claim to them, by whatever means they found useful. If the Indians did not have clear title and a clear understanding of what was at stake it could have been a disaster. Due to my father's efforts disaster was largely averted, thanks be to God.

Many years later I was in a community meeting of the Tsachi in that comuna. They were discussing what to do about the Methodists. They had recruited a family that lived on the edge of the Comuna. That family had offered part of their own landholdings for the Methodists to build a chapel and do medical outreach among the Tsachis. The land is not deeded to the family, but to the Comuna as a whole. The question was, is this legitimate use of Indian lands? I asked for the floor. I was kindly recognized. They knew me because they knew my father, and the older ones remembered me as a toddler. I reminded them that 50 years prior something had happened. A Gringo man and wife had appealed to the tribe for a place to live, while they did their Bible translation work. It had been granted—as long as they provided a store so that the Indians didn't have to walk 12

miles into town for staples they couldn't supply themselves. My father and mother then moved in and began their work, plus a store and essential medical attention. The gathered community quickly voted to allow the Methodists under the same conditions.

My father had set a precedent. He had taught them the value of their land, and a way to fight for it as a community. He had been a light in the darkness, and had shown the way into the future for them.

The human race, indeed the whole of the cosmos is in need of reform. The good in the hearts of our first parents came at a price. If it were to be free the option of evil would also have to be allowed. Sure enough, we did not choose always to do good. Evil entered the world not just in possibility but in experience, and it has borne its fruit. Quickly the thorns of division, strife, alienation and suffering emerged in the human experience. The briars of selfish behavior on the part of individuals and communities and nations raised its ugly head.

That ancient story is our story. We have chosen self-centered and alienating ways of being. We have set up societies that favor those that have over those that have not. We have broken our word, run roughshod over peoples who differ from us. There is no moral high ground on which any of us can stand. We need another way of being, one not predicated on our selfishness, but on something more profoundly true about the human condition, something that springs from far deeper than the ego, something that knows the whole world to be one, in which diversity is shown, and not a multitude of isolated, competing and mutually exclusive parts. That is Spirit, and the child born is born, as the Scripture says, of Spirit. In this child we have the precedent of another way of living. In this child we gain the perspective to truly value our souls—both individually and collectively. In this child we see another way of being, one where lion and lamb lie down together.

Through the life, death and resurrection of this child light has come into the darkness of the human condition. There is a way forward.

You, dear worshipper, are caught up in this great dawning of light. You have been placed on the stage of the great work of God in the world. This child's birth is your rebirth. This child spirit calls to your spirit, calling you back into the community of God. The world we live in is the world in which God is working out the vision that alone God sees, another world, one we begin to glimpse in the life, death and resurrection of this child.

Carry, dear worshipper, carry this child in your heart and in your mind. Let him be born in your life, and let the light of heaven shine in your world.