

*Travel in the diocese of Mgr Ruiz besieged by the powerful of the "unique thought"  
Chiapas, where neutrality is impossible*

*The Pope arrives in Mexico as the dirty war against Native Americans (Zapatistas and not) continues and the government of President Zedillo is isolating the Catholic Chiapas communities. Objective: "normalize" Mexico of the outcasts with the massive support of the media*

(published in the catholic monthly newsmagazine "Mondo e Missione", 1999)

"Christ came for the poor, not for millionaires". A simple truth, that Pablo, Amparo Agua Tinta farmer, ascribes to the Catholic Church, "which does not tell us lies".

The indigenous community of this remote village in the Lacandona Jungle (the heart of the tropical Chiapas) lived on its skin all the hypocrisy of the official language, versions of a prostituted journalism, ambiguous international solidarity organizations, so little disposed to the complaint, a "placebo" to keep the status quo.

A case in point, that of Amparo Agua Tinta, one of many autonomous communities that had formed after the Zapatista insurrection in Chiapas in 1994. An experience of true democracy, which absolutely respected what one might call the "community obsession" of Indios: you discuss everything with everyone, because the first democratic instrument is listening.

"It was incredible the zeal with which the elected representatives in city council tried to follow the laws of the code", says Luisa Cremonesi, the High Commissioner for Refugees of Comitán. An authentic civil re-appropriation of the territory institutions, the true law.

In other words, an imitable and imitated example, potentially in the geometric expansion. Dangerous, much more than National Liberation Zapatista Army of Subcomandante Marcos, because it shows clearly that there is an alternative to the dominant model, to Mexico built around the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), in power since 1929. Chiapas was (and is) one of its electoral feud, an important reserve of votes that is useful to hide what is everything but a true democracy.

The autonomous municipalities (or "*rebeldes*", according to the official language), rejecting the rules of a distorted game, have pierced the black veil of hypocrisy, a veil that Mexican government tries to drop on the whole region, finding sometimes unexpected complicity.

In the case of Amparo Agua Tinta, that of the High Commissioner for Refugees, present here for thousands of Guatemalans who fled civil war in their country. One of them was arrested by the authorities of the autonomous municipality over a simple matter of deforestation in a prohibited area. The news reached the government agency for refugees Comar and UNHCR. The head of UNHCR in Mexico, Michel Gabaudan, French, bypassing the regional section of Comitán, expressed his concern for the refugee asking for government intervention.

Result: a massive army and police intervention, and the arrest of all the councilors and other members of indigenous communities, with beatings, threats, intimidation (including women and children). The order, namely the oppression, had been restored. Michel Gabaudan, pressing by criticism, spoke of "painful coincidence", then dismissing the whole affair as "a storm in a teacup". The official version is that in Amparo Agua Tinta, as in many other villages, the "institutional law" had been restored. The same "institutional law" that led to the sensational expulsion of the group of Italian observers, in charge to be perpetrators of international solidarity in Chiapas ( and in all Mexico) that it needs like oxygen.

"We've never seen a member of the opposition (Partido Revolucionario Democrático, PRD: all revolutionaries in one of the most conservative countries in the world , Author's note) here to Amparo. We do not see even a priest for more than a year", the farmers complain.

The harvest is so great and the laborers are few. And weak. And besieged. The saddest thing is that even many natives American (thanks to financial aid and small privileges) are on the side of the PRI. "*Los priistas* were to point the homes of members of indigenous communities to the army.

They are their laborers, they do the dirty work, counting on impunity", say some women of Amparo.

This is Mexican law, this is the law of the established order, unable to find the masterminds of the massacre of Acteal, unable to identify the perpetrators of money laundering (from drug) linked to former President Carlos Salinas de Gortari, fled to Dublin. A law which does not admit the presence of Amnesty International, which has reported 56 cases of violation of human rights in Mexico last year.

"No system in the world can handle the dissidents and swallow up opponents as Mexican one - says Régis Debray, French intellectual for "Le Monde"- whether the Soviet Communist Party had sent someone on an information mission to the PRI, the Soviet Union would surely still exist". One of the secrets of the regime longevity is in its strict alliance with the entrepreneurial class, especially in the media world.

Mexico, with Italy, is the only country in the world where a private group owns three national TV channels (and some forty radio stations): the monster is called Televisa and was born with the explicit presence of the ruling party. "The President Miguel Alemán Valdés gave concessions to television in the fifties - says Jesus Ramirez, 30, a freelance journalist working for Reuters and for "La Jornada", one of the few independent newspapers - his son Miguel Aleman Velasco is a PRI Senator and sits on the board of directors of Televisa".

In the scandal of money laundering of drug traffickers that is sweeping the former President Salinas de Gortari away, the father of ultraliberal reforms of the Eighties, the greatest Mexican entrepreneurs are involved, including the owner of the other national television ("Television Azteca" ), Ricardo Salinas Plieguand, and the tycoon of mobile communications Carlos Peralta. The "modernization" of Mexico meant the total acceptance of the U.S. model, ratified by the Mexico entrance in the North American free market ("NAFTA" with the U.S. and Canada) on January 1, 1994.

The agreement was strongly supported by "democratic" Clinton, who now supports in every way President Ernesto Zedillo, and allows the CIA to arm and train his army.

In the euphoria of being finally a developed country, the PRI government abandoned even the extreme secularism of the Constitution of 1917 to secure itself the support of the Catholic Church. But to spoil the party of winner capitalism the voice of the excluded as ever, tired of injustice now normalized, obscured in minds and in the information, came.

"Chiapas is the poorest state in Mexico - said Father Javier Inda, 62, pastor in Comitán - especially in the area of our diocese, San Cristobal de las Casas. Chiapas did not live land reform as the rest of Mexico, it remained cut off by the revolution of 1910: an alliance between landowners and the revolutionary government was established and it maintained the state of backwardness to this day. And if there is already a great difference with the rest of Mexico (except the states of Guerrero and Oaxaca), the difference is even greater between the population of rich cities and poor rural population".

Father Javier speaks gently, almost resigned, as an old country priest. But his concepts do not admit ambiguity, he can not imagine an impossible neutrality, an equidistance that would be scandalous. He knows perfectly well that the movement of Natives of Central America is much broader than Zapatistas one, that the real conflict is not between the army and guerrillas, but that between the privileged and the excluded.

The diocese of Bishop Samuel Ruiz made its choice, and it is compact in carrying it forward. This does not mean do politics in the strict sense of the word. It simply means, as father Javier says, "not be collaborators in this system".

A huge challenge, because the system is charming, it invites you to visit the beaches of Cancun and the Aztec pyramids, to appreciate the efficiency and quality of transport services, without asking too many questions.

In Mexico, a tourist is much freer than a journalist. The tourist asks only to feel good, and the consumer world seems to be a perfect world. They are creating apartheid of credit cards: the poor should not have neither voice nor visibility.

"Democracy can not suffer much misery - Carlos Fuentes says, one of the greatest Mexican writers, in an interview with the newspaper "La Jornada "- the true economic reform, which would mean access to a degree of prosperity for the majority of Mexicans, can never be achieved without democracy".

The problem is that in American version (the dominant one at all latitudes), democracy is already there, they should not listen to the calumnies of "communist" priests and bishops .

It is this Mexico that the Pope is going to visit. And if things stay that way, the words of the poet José Santos Choco, written in the last century, will play once more as a sad prophecy: "Poor Mexico, so far from God and so close to the United States".

**Cesare Sangalli**