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The Relationship Between Humans and Nature in the Popol Vuh: Mayan Cosmology Beyond Anthropocentrism

Dr Fortunato Moises Zurita Zafra

Universidad Autónoma Chapingo, Mexico

Abstract

The contemporary environmental crisis has been largely explained by the Judeo-Christian tradition, which postulates the domination of nature by human beings. However, alternative worldviews propose a relationship of coexistence and respect. This study analyzes the conception of the human-nature relationship in the Popol Vuh, the sacred book of the Mayan culture, aiming to contrast it with the Western anthropocentric paradigm. Through a hermeneutic analysis of the original text and its historical contextualization, three phases in the creation of human beings are identified: first from clay (fragility), then from wood (hardness, associated with monkeys), and finally from maize, which represents the harmonious synthesis between the human and the natural. It is argued that, in this worldview, maize is not merely food but the symbolic center of creation, and the milpa (a polyculture system) constitutes a concrete practice of ecological coexistence. In contrast to Judeo-Christian anthropocentrism, the Popol Vuh establishes that humanity is an integral part of nature, not its owner, and that abuse of the environment can trigger nature's own rebellion. This analysis contributes to making visible non-Western epistemic alternatives for rethinking the society-nature relationship in the face of the environmental crisis.

Keywords: Anthropocentrism; Environmental Crisis; Ecology; Judeo-Christian Tradition; Mayan Culture