

The Spirituality of the Blood: Our Mission in Defense of the Earth Community

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Introduction

This symposium developed from and is a continuation of the symposium that was held in Lima on February 1–5, 1999, entitled *Reconciled in the Blood of Christ: In Times of Violence, in a Multi-Cultural World*. Its objective is to contribute to the dialogue about care for our earth, in defense of our common house, the earth community where we all live.

We hope to sound a wake-up call that we are all responsible for the promotion and defense of life, life that is being threatened and violated in so many ways. To aid us in this struggle for survival we have a formidable and powerful resource, which is the Spirituality of the Precious Blood of Christ, a source of life, of communion, of a new covenant, of reconciliation. The cross and the Eucharist draw us together and strengthen us.

I hope to offer an overview of the topics that will be presented at this symposium. Other speakers will speak more specifically on the themes that have gathered us here.

To bring us together on this topic, we must begin by looking at the current condition of our common house, the earth. We must ask ourselves, at this moment, what are the pains of childbirth, the suffering, the clamors of creation (cf. Rm 8: 22)? Then, we will examine and illuminate our current situation from the perspective of Precious Blood spirituality. We hope to contrast the ecological reality with the gospel of the Blood. This contrast will then help us make a commitment to a common course of action.

The Spirituality of the Blood of Christ calls us and sends us forth to care for creation. How do we spread this message, that we are responsible for the care of all creation? How do we educate ourselves and others to use the gifts of creation responsibly? How do we deepen our respect for the diverse forms of life that God has created for all?

These are only some of the questions and challenges to which we are called upon to respond. The central question is this: are we taking seriously our responsibility to care for our environment? Our troubled earth is a sign of the times, a call of the blood to which we must respond. It demands from us a new sensibility, a new way to deepen our relationship with God, with others, with ourselves and with creation.

I. What is Happening with Our Common House?

Our world, which we now see as a global village, is marked by many ecological and environmental crises. Our earth is sick, and many of its maladies are caused by humans.

One sign of this sickness is a contamination of the environment. We are experiencing pollution of our air, as evidenced by the earth's warming, acid rain and other signs; and chemical contamination of the water supply by industrial waste and raw sewage. We already know that the struggle for a safe water supply can lead to conflict and even wars; a third of the world's population does not have access to a safe and reliable source of drinking water. Water is seen by business interests as just another area of merchandise; powerful government forces too are attempting to control the flow of water. An important example of this is the Amazon region. (Aparecida, 84)

One very serious problem is the abusive exploitation of the ecosystem by humans, bringing on climate change. As an example, we can look to the deforestation that benefits big industrial projects but ends up altering the climatic balance in savage and uncontrolled ways, contaminating the atmosphere with all kinds of organic and chemical waste. Also, we are aware of industries that extract resources without any control or concern for the harmful effects to the surrounding areas. The result is the disappearance of forests, the contamination of the water supply, and the emergence of immense deserts (cf. Aparecida, 473).

Another complex question that meets with a lot of resistance is overpopulation. At the moment there are more than six trillion human beings inhabiting our common house. The index of growth is high and worrisome; our natural resources are limited, and they are not equally shared. As more and more formerly productive land turns to desert, there are fewer acres for the cultivation of food, which increases the need to use chemical products to encourage the plant growth we need to satisfy the hunger of the human masses.

Just as serious is the problem of bio-fuels. It is a clean energy when in use but not in its production. Manufacturing bio-fuel results in nine times more contamination than traditional fuels. It may also lead to the sole production of certain limited crops, therefore putting an end to biodiversity. What will happen to those Latin American countries that are now rich in biodiversity? The production of bio-fuels also requires water, bringing with it an almost inevitable threat of more conflict over the water supply. To restore the health of our world, it would be more effective to support reforestation efforts than to pursue increased production of bio-fuels. Many governments and companies want to change how we produce energy, but they don't want to change the way we consume energy. This creates a great challenge: to produce calories of petroleum and gasoline or to produce calories of potatoes, vegetables and meats? If we want to live as humans, we need to choose wisely.

However, in a populous environment, the biggest problem is the global injustice that keeps people from their basic rights: the right to food and drinkable water, the right to a life with dignity. As a consequence, the ecological problems we see are always related with the poverty of most of the world's population. We have to see the destruction of nature not from the perspective of the arrogant and avaricious rich, or from companies that gain from the contamination of the earth and its environment, but from the eyes of the poor, for they are the first and most affected and the least responsible for the degradation of the earth.

The irreversible deterioration of our planet is due to a model of devastating economic development, carried out by transnational companies, financial institutions and governments. It is an economic model that awards privileges to those with a limitless desire for wealth, with no regard for the people, their towns, and a rational respect for nature (Aparecida, 473). Consequently, they are accused—and with good reason—of the sins of biocide and geocide.

It is the use of an evil logic that manipulates the social classes and subjects the people to the interests of a few rich and powerful countries that despoil the wealth of other nations, without any sense of solidarity toward the rest of humanity or to coming generations. The alarming thing is that “in the decisions about the wealth of biodiversity and nature, the traditional populations have been practically excluded” (Aparecida, 84). It is for this reason that the devastation of forests and of biodiversity by means of pillaging calls out the moral responsibility of those who promote it because they endanger the lives of millions of people, along with the habitat of the farmers and indigenous, “who are left to live on the hillsides or in the big cities, in misery” (Aparecida, 473).

We have seen little evidence of a conscience at work in the contamination of our environment and the pillaging of our natural resources. Because of the actions of human beings, many other species have disappeared from our planet. We live in a society of consumerism and consumption. We lack an ecological culture. And now our world itself is afraid it will lose its own life: our water is scarce, and what remains is often sick. The contamination of the water, the earth, the air, and, therefore, the people, constitutes a serious threat to all life. The prophet Hosea says, “Therefore the land mourns, and everything that dwells in it languishes: the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and even the fish of the sea perish” (Hosea 4: 3).

The current state of creation impels us to demand answers. The spirituality of the Blood is a great resource that we have in our search for solutions.

II. An Answer to the Clamors of our Common House: The Spirituality of the Blood

We can respond to our earth’s needs with the four dimensions of the spirituality of Christ’s Blood:

1. The blood of life
2. The Blood of the covenant
3. The Blood of the cross
4. The Blood of reconciliation
5. The Blood present in the Eucharist

1. The Blood of Life

It is important to remember that in Scripture, “the life of every living body is its blood” (Lev 17: 14), and it belongs exclusively to God. In this sense, blood is a sign of a liberator God (Ex 12: 21–23), creator and giver of life (Psalm 104). In the new testament, Jesus is the Gospel of life: “I

came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly” (John 10: 10; cf 1 Jn 1: 2). Christ’s Blood is the offering of his life (Heb 10: 5–10) for the salvation of all people and all creation.

The Blood of life is completely inclusive, global and universal. It is not only an expression of human life, but also of all forms of life that are part of God’s creation. The Blood is bio-diversity, an expression of the diverse manifestations of life. Human beings are not the only creatures of the creative plan of God. We are not the only living beings on earth. We are, however, the ones who cause the most damage to God’s creation.

Let us remember that we are invited by the Blood of life to be aware that life—our own as well as the life that is present in all creation—is given to us as a gift and does not belong to us. We are called to live in solidarity with all that has been created. Life is a gift from God; it is sacred and untouchable and has a non-negotiable value.

According to Genesis 1: 26–27, man and woman are created in the image of God. God wants to reveal himself to human beings as one who created everything for love and wisdom, continuing his creative action through people. As he created us, God gave us a great dignity, but that also carries with it a great responsibility. We are not the owners of creation; we are not the owners of the life that God created. Creation does not serve our will so that we can do with it whatever we want or desire. It is not at our disposition like a heap of waste spread at random, but as the Creator’s gift and expression of his love. We are called then to administer all creation with responsibility before God and before other creatures. We are responsible to care for and promote life in all its forms. We must learn how to live alongside other creatures, sharing our space of common life with all. Human beings are a very small part of creation. We are not superior to it, but rather are a part of it.

We are called to be gardeners of creation, just as Genesis tells us: “The Lord then took the man and settled him in the garden of Eden, to cultivate and care for it” (Gn 2: 15). The word abbot, in Hebrew, means to work the earth and to serve. The word shamar means to take care, to protect and to completely conserve all that is given to us. This biblical passage clearly expresses the human being’s bond with the earth when affirming that the human being, Adam, is formed from the earth (Adamah, Gn 2: 7). We are part of this great connection of life that is nature. From nature, our vocation is derived “to cultivate and care for the garden of Eden” (Gn 2: 15), that is to say, all of God’s creation.

2. The Blood of the Covenant

In the Old Testament, the blood of the covenant contains and expresses God’s solidarity, communion, inclusion and true connection (cf. Ex 24: 4–7; cf Heb 9: 18–21) to the earth and to all forms of life that were created by God (cf. Gn 9: 11–17), as well as God’s hope for a better future (cf. Jr 31: 17). God makes a covenant with all humanity: the men and women of the present and of the future, but also with all creation and all forms of life that exist on the earth: “I set my bow in the clouds to serve as a sign of the covenant between me and the earth . . . As

the bow appears in the clouds, I will see it and recall the everlasting covenant that I have established between God and all living beings—all mortal creatures that are on earth” (Gn 9: 16). This covenant foresees and anticipates the promise (cf. Jr 31: 31–34) of a new and eternal covenant, sealed with the Precious Blood of Jesus Christ (cf. Lk 22: 20; cf. Hb 9: 24–28). The new and eternal covenant constitutes God’s project of universal fraternity, where no form of life is excluded. Our motivation, then, is the Covenant, new and eternal, in which we are introduced to Christ’s Blood, poured out on the cross.

3. The Blood of Christ on the Cross

The Gospels tell the historical story of Christ’s bloody death on the cross. Jesus didn’t die a natural death; he didn’t die in bed or of old age. His death was violent. Jesus died because of a conspiracy by the authorities; the people were manipulated by the Sanhedrin and the intervention of Pilate (representing the power of Rome). Judas betrayed Jesus and surrendered him to Pilate (cf. Mk 14: 10; cf. 15: 15). If we fail to recognize the historical causes of Jesus’ death, and the people who were directly responsible for it, we then put the blame for Jesus’ death on God, and in this way defile Jesus’ image of God.

The Blood of the cross is an expression of persecution, of violence, of pain and of Jesus’ death. The Son of God was an innocent victim, unjustly crucified. In this way, the Blood of the cross clamors to us; it denounces and unmasks violence and injustice.

However, the Blood of the cross is also a consequence of the way in which Jesus took on life freely and for love (cf. Phil 2: 6-11). “No one takes life from me, but I lay it down on my own. I have the power to lay it down, and the power to take it up again” (Jn 10: 18). It is this commitment that he takes all the way to the final moment of his life on earth. The blood of the cross is witness to Jesus’ fidelity and love that he takes on with all its consequences. “He loved his own in the world and he loved them to the end” (Jn 13: 1b). “No one has greater love than this, the lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (Jn 15: 13).

The Blood of the cross is the transfer of God’s love, to give life to the world. God the Father was present at his Son’s death. Giving us to his beloved Son, the Father demonstrates how important all creation and all human beings are to him. God not only gives us his Son, but through his Son, he is given to us. In this way, the pain of humanity and creation were taken on by Christ through his passion and death of the cross. The pain of God is identified with the pain of the world in order to redeem it. It is the eloquent expression of God’s solidarity with all victims and those crucified through history.

The Blood of the cross raises a clamor that should be heard by the Church and by every one of us. To listen to it means to leave behind our own desires and to find the crucified Jesus in the outskirts of the city (cf. Hb 13: 10–13). Thus, the Blood of the cross places us in the limits that exist between life and death (cf. Ex 13: 7, 13). It places us on the side of life. In the Eucharist, we are in communion with the Blood of the cross, which clamors even more loudly through us.

The Blood of the cross, the symbol of violence and death, also contains the life of God, and it is a source of strength, courage and resistance to face all that would keep us from following Jesus. It gives us the capacity to be tolerant in the face of frustrations and to be faithful and creative in difficult situations. It means responsibility and authentic freedom. It is hope that springs from faith and trust in God. It is social commitment; it fights for justice and loves people for who they are. It moves us by the love of God, and pushes all fear aside (cf 1Jn 4: 16–18).

The blood of the Cross also exposes and makes evident the sufferings that we cause or inflict on others, as well as on all of God's creation. Being caretakers of all creation, we are called upon to endure pain and suffering, to renounce that which is not strictly necessary, to give up that which is dispensable.

4. The Blood of Reconciliation

When we speak of reconciliation we are speaking of relationships (cf. Eph 2: 11–20). The human being in the Bible is seen as a being of relationships: a filial relationship with God; a relationship of equality and fraternity with other people; a relationship with one's self (in a climate of freedom and inner peace); and a just and respectful relationship with creation. This is God's dream for humanity. When people live out these four relationships in harmony, life is a paradise.

In the original sin, man and woman broke the four relationships. Man and woman severed their relationship with God as they rejected their position as children of God in the desire to become gods. God was no longer the father, but was transformed into a rival.

Man and woman severed their relationship with others. The desire to be as God leads the human being to break his relationship as an equal to his brothers and sisters. Instead, they are replaced with inequality and dominance, rivalry and competition. As man subjects other human beings to do his will, he imposes on them, rejects and excludes them. He acts in superiority and arrogance.

The relationship with all of God's creation was also severed. In their desire to be like God, man and woman do with nature whatever gives them immediate pleasure. From being the lord of creation, man became a tyrant and despot, pillaging creation. Thus, the just, respectful and reciprocal relationship with creation becomes an unjust, disrespectful, tyrannical, exploitative, enslaving, irresponsible and destructive relationship with creation. Man and woman forget that they are part of creation. Humans were created by God in his image and likeness, but they are also similar to other creatures with whom they share their genetic patrimony. There is not one single chemical element in humans that cannot be found elsewhere in the cosmos.

In original sin, man and woman severed their relationships with themselves. In their desire to be god-like, they lost their freedom and identity. Their desire to be God led them to want to be what they are not, becoming slaves to themselves, losing their inner harmony and order, their

innocence and identity. A life that was once paradise becomes chaos and disorder, leading to violence and death.

Creation and the environment must be reconciled because they are being attacked, mistreated, wounded, damaged and enslaved by us, the human race. We are returning to chaos, disorder, darkness and death because of our sin (Gn 1: 2). The words of St. Paul are very true today: "Creation was made subject to futility, not of its own accord but because of the one who subjected it, in hope that creation itself would be set free from slavery to corruption and share in the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that all creation is groaning in labor pains even until now." (Rm 8: 20–22).

In conflicts there is an aggressor who inflicts suffering and a victim, who is attacked and mistreated. If we can transfer this binomial to humanity's relationship with God's creation, the aggressor is the human being and the victims are creation and the environment, both created by God.

The Blood of reconciliation is the work of God in Christ. "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation" (2 Cor 5: 19). Reconciliation is a new creation (cf. 2 Cor 5:17) and implies the construction of a new, authentic and just relationship with creation. We must pass from using and abusing to the rational and just use of the good things that God created for us.

We must establish a balanced relationship with creation, conserving all species of life. For that it is necessary to create a healthy relationship between humans and creation, the environment and natural resources. From the Blood of reconciliation we can work to make all creation a new creation; we can contribute to the new order that the Son of Man came to establish through his Precious Blood. It is not any order, because there are forms of order that repress and threaten life; they are darkness and death. Rather, it is the order that God desires; it is a space where life in all its forms can be generated and regenerated with freedom.

5. The Blood of the Eucharist: a Cosmic and Ecological Sacrament

In what sense is the Eucharist a cosmic and ecological sacrament? In the Eucharist, the bread is not only bread, nor is the wine only wine, but rather they are fruit of a series of social relationships. The bread and wine put us in communion with all creation, with humanity and its history. The bread and wine become a sacrament of the presence of the resurrected Jesus in the world, all incorporated within him. It is not creation that incorporates the Resurrected One, but the Resurrected One who incorporates creation with his presence. The Acts of the Apostles tells us: "in him we live, move and have our being" (Acts 17: 28). Our personal and social history as well as all of creation is taken on by the Resurrected One. "Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of creation. For in him were created all things in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible...all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together." (Col 1:15–17).

The Blood of the Eucharist is an expression and transformation of the world. We hear in the offertory prayer: "Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation. Through your goodness we have this bread and wine to offer, which earth has given and human hands have made. It will become for us the bread of life and our spiritual drink." From where do we get this Eucharistic bread and wine? Bread and wine are fruit of the earth. They come from the cosmos, from God's creation. The Eucharistic has its earthly origins in the cosmic elements that are the earth, the seeds, the fruits, the water, the air, the sun. Without these cosmic elements there is no Eucharist. If we pillage creation and contaminate the environment, there will be no Eucharist.

On the other hand, the bread and wine are the fruit of the work of men and women of the field and of the city. The Eucharistic blood has to do with the life, happiness and hope but also the sweat and suffering of the workers; it has to do with the accumulation of resources and the injustices that are committed against them and against creation itself. The wine that becomes Christ's Blood is sometimes an expression of the pain and suffering of workers; but it is also an expression of the pain and suffering we find in the destruction of creation. According to the spirituality of the Blood, it is sometimes more of a cup of suffering than a cup of blessing.

We affirm that the bread and wine are the primary matter of the Eucharist that is the sacrament of God's creation, and of communion with it. The Eucharist is also a sacrament of the life and work of so many men, women and children who give their lives, their sweat, their sufferings, their happiness and hope, so that the world can have the body and Blood of Christ, which is for all the food and drink of salvation. The Eucharist is related to ecology, to the care of the earth and water, from which comes forth bread and wine for the life of all human beings.

In the Eucharist, Jesus wants to change the world when we offer it to him, but he also wants to change us when we offer and commit ourselves to him. In the Eucharist we are transformed and changed in order to transform the world for all, according to the design of the creative God of life. Without earth and without work there is no Eucharist.

III. The Blood Calls and Sends Us to Care for Creation

In our introduction we stated that the troubling state of our environment is a new and imperative sign of the times that we have to recognize, listen for and respond to, and therefore, it constitutes a new mission environment for us, the Church. We should be dedicated, body and soul, to care for creation. It should be the heart of the mission of our Congregations and communities. We need to make a preferential option for creation. The primary need that exists in the world is to ensure that life is possible on the planet not only for us but for the next generations, and especially for the poorest, who suffer the most consequences from environmental deterioration.

We urgently need a paradigm shift. We have to pass from exacerbated anthropocentrism to cosmic centrism. Anthropocentrism is the paradigm of our modern world and is the cause of the current ecological disaster. With it, humans become convinced that they are at the center

of the universe; the earth is under the dominion of humanity, and that gives man the right to do with creation whatever he desires. Anthropocentrism affirms that the earth and its abundance is a resource to be dominated and exploited in favor of human beings. This way of thinking needs a total revision. We must start thinking of the earth as the common house of all living beings and of God himself, and we all have some responsibility to care for it. We are called to change our arrogant outlook to a loving outlook; to commit to an ecological conversion in our attitudes and behavior toward the earth. The spirituality of the Blood will lead us to provide for a greener creation. It brings the Good News of liberation and abundance for all of creation. To find the spirituality of green we need to erase centuries of anthropocentric thought that places the human being—and not God—at the center of the universe and that made our Church an accomplice in the indiscriminate exploitation and contamination of the earth. Our Church is in part responsible not only because it misinterpreted God's command in Genesis 1: 28, but also because it put forward a dualistic spirituality, saving the spiritual dimension of the world but rejecting the material dimension.

We need to create a conscience and an ecological culture to ensure a habitable world for ourselves and for future generations. Our spirituality, our evangelization, our education, our pastoral work: the whole practice and mission of the Church, must be guided toward this urgent goal. We must change individual and domestic behaviors. We must not out of our ignorance or neglect contribute to the deterioration of creation and the environment.

It is also important that as citizens and communities we support those programs and actions that defend the environment, human rights and fair trade. This position must go hand-in-hand with the formation of a serious intention to denounce that which is contrary to the good of our earth. In education, we are challenged to teach children and adolescents a lifestyle that is anti-consumerism. We must teach them to respect creation, and encourage in them a lifestyle that is sober, just, honest and religious, that loves creation and feels a part of it.

Our environment demands that we be in right relationship with each other. This relationship leads to cleanliness, order, respect, justice, communion with others, with creation and the environment. We should educate and evangelize in order to reestablish the order and harmony that God desires. We should worry not only about human ecology, but also about cosmic and social ecology. Our ecology leads us to be concerned for others, especially the poor and excluded. The clamor of the earth is related to the clamor of the poor and oppressed. A spirituality of the Blood, in order to be ecological, should take into account the daily lives of the poor, excluded and outcast; it should promote their effective integration into our common house and all its possible relationships. The spirituality of the Blood is covenant: inclusion, reconciliation, truth, justice, equality, solidarity and communion.

To defend the planet, from the perspective of the spirituality of the Blood, implies responsibility and relationship with creation and with the present and coming generations. We must leave them an inhabitable world that can sustain life. It is not fair or just to leave them a dirty, degraded, polluted and depredated creation. It is our responsibility to leave them a world that is clean and healthy so that those in the future can live well. Our mission is to sow life for future

generations. “To look for a alternative model of development that is integral and shared in common, based on an ethic that includes the responsibility for an authentic natural and human ecology that is based on the gospel of justice, solidarity and the universal destination of goods, and that transcends the utilitarian and individualistic logic that doesn't subject the economic and technological powers to ethical approaches” (Aparecida, 474c).

It is evident that we cannot allow life to disappear. We cannot allow diverse species to become extinct. We must look for a balance in the use of the resources of creation, living a life that is sober and just, giving witness to the creed of anti-consumption. Thus, for example, the anchovy, a Peruvian fish, should be consumed in balanced measure; if we over-consume it, it will become extinct and disappear forever. In the same way, if we eat up all the guinea pigs, which are an important part of a traditional Peruvian diet, and don't maintain an ecological balance, they too will become extinct. It is fundamental and urgent, therefore, that we respect the inherent ecological balance of creation. We must alert the world to this new way of living.

IV. Conclusion

In conclusion, the spirituality of the Blood obliges us to rethink God: what image of God do we have, and what do we proclaim? It obliges us to rethink man: what image of human beings do we project? It invites us to rethink the world and nature: are they simply objects of manipulation? We have to rethink society: what type of society does God want for us? We need to rethink the Church: what does it mean to have a committed Church, and for whom? Lastly, we need to rethink the mission of our congregations.

We conclude that the planet earth, life in its diverse forms, and the poor and excluded all need to be rescued by Christ's Blood, the Blood of the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (cf. Jn 1: 29–35). To answer the clamor of the earth and the clamor of the poor is fundamental for missionary disciples of Jesus Christ. With the Blood of the sacrificed and resurrected Lamb, a new heaven and a new earth has begun (Rev. 21: 1); in other words, it is the new creation and the new social order that begins with the Precious Blood of Jesus Christ.

A sustainable ecology implies a sustainable society. Ecological change requires social change. We cannot disconnect ecology and humanity.

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The former heaven and the former earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. I also saw the holy city, a new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God... Behold, God's dwelling is with the human race. He will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will always be with them (as their God). He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, (for) the old order has passed away” (Rev 21: 1–4).