

## **What Does Our Spirituality Say In Light of This Reality?**

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Let us take the time to think about the cries, sighs and challenges that come to us as we collaborate in preserving our Common House. We all want our house to be inhabitable; we all want to foster conditions that help life blossom out and grow in strength.

We believe that spirituality is one of the fundamental elements necessary to preserve our Common House. In this context, spirituality is part of the subsistence of the human race and of all creation. Spirituality—a life according to the Spirit—is crucial to the wellbeing of humanity and for the safety of the planet because it indicates, illuminates and finds the heart of the matter: that all life is sustained in God and that God is present in everything.

As the psalmist writes:

All of these look to you  
to give them their food in due time.  
When you give to them, they gather;  
when you open your hand, they are well-filled.

When you hide your face, they are lost.  
When you take away their breath, they perish  
and return to the dust from which they came.

When you send forth your breath,  
they are created,  
and you renew the face of the earth.

(Psalm 104: 27–30)

To live according to the Spirit—spirituality—means that one is open to the possibility of a change in lifestyle: to stop living motivated by the logic of domination, of accumulation of goods, of exploitation, of dissipation. One seeks an end to violence and follows the logic of God. God's love is a gift to all humankind. The Spirit, who renews all things, creates relationships, establishes communion, creates unity in diversity, cares for and helps all life thrive, and puts it in our hands. Taking care of the Common House as a defense and promotion of life implies a movement of decentralization and of centralization. There is the need to decentralize ourselves from the human urge to dominate the earth and make use of her to satisfy our own needs. Then we need to center ourselves on the Persons of the Trinity, in doing so we grow into a network of reciprocity and inclusion.

Until recently, it was thought that ethics alone would enforce the principles and rules of behavior to care for the Common House, but we are now convinced that ethics alone is not capable of feeding humankind's hope. A more profound motivation is needed, strong enough

to build up a new culture in with spirituality at its center, illuminating our ethical principles. Ethics are the content of a culture that spirituality should contemplate and promote. The formation of ethics becomes significant if, reliant on a cosmic spirituality, it creates and *ethos*. (*Ethos* is a Greek word meaning a place to live, which can be translated to mean the beginning of disposition, character and temperament. The word *ethikos* has the same root and means theory of living. It is the root of the word ethics.)

We need a more profound and existential motivation that is able to touch the entire person and not only reason or behavior. Reason and knowledge alone are not enough. There are more forces in existence which, working together with the human intellect, can significantly decide the direction and destination of the world. Taking care of the Common House, beginning with the defense and promotion of life, as part of the Trinitarian mission, means to recognize that we our creatures and not the creator. Therefore, we have to grow close to the image of God revealed to us by Jesus. This will help us be aware of the processes going on all through history that have disfigured and are still disfiguring the image of God, which have justified the practice of exclusion and have determined spirituality.

### **The Image of God**

In this reflection we hope we can conceive of an image of God as relationship. This can lead us to just and inclusive relations. But the image of God can also be used to justify relations that are exclusive, dominant and rely on force. This happened with the image of God presented during times of colonization, rationalization, the enlightenment, and anthropocentrism. How many lives were mowed down in the name of God! How many persons were marginalized: we have only to think of the indigenous people, the slaves, women and nature! Spirituality founded in the Trinity and in history can't ignore the temptation to occupy the place of God. Spirituality should contribute that God might be God.

### **Colonization**

We can't deny that the process of colonization in Latin America has influenced (and not only a little) our concept of the image of God. This is true not only in the past, but still today, especially as it relates to the topic of the care of the earth.

The image of God that was transmitted forward from the time of colonization has a great deal to do with how we take care of the Common House today. For that very reason, one of the cries we hear now—from some of the people or maybe from the entire planet—is a result of actions that were based on a distorted, manipulated image of God and by a spirituality that created dysfunctional relationships.

The context of colonialism is characterized by the union of faith and political power; in this, the practice of catechesis was part of a compilation of resources influenced by the economic interests of a dominating society. The content of catechesis followed the Christian doctrine, based on its dogmas, moral principles and spirituality. All were working in order to allow the

grace of God to reign in the world. There was the belief that the world was form and of God; the pope and all kings had as their first mission the evangelization to advance the reign of God. In this sense it was necessary to announce the word of salvation to all who had no knowledge of God, to free them from the control of Satan. The Christian vision of man and woman and society and the cosmos was not questioned because the balanced was based in union of faith. It was necessary to announce the word of God to all who had not heard it. This was a social exigency to free people from the bad spirit. Conversion by submission was the formula that was practiced, which brought faith and the interest of the empire to the colonized land. The relationship with indigenous people was defined by the necessities of the colonists and faith served as a social amalgam. For them it was necessary to convert the natural world of the indigenous people into a world of rationalism.

The colonists (with the exception of some, notably Bartholome de las Casas, Antonio de Montesinos, Pedro Córdoba, Padre Vieira and some others) were not able to perceive the presence of the living God within the indigenous people and the slaves, because they encountered the new continent with a vision of production and prejudice. They weren't able to understand the profundity of indigenous wisdom as a theological dimension of their faith; they could not appreciate their relationship with nature or the advanced civilization of tribal communities. Nature was seen as a complex of resources (an instrument to advance their own objectives). Beyond that, man and woman were seen as the center of the world. The counterpart of God becomes the almighty.

At the beginning of the occupation, exploration and colonization of Brazil by the Portuguese, this was the perspective that permitted the destruction of nature and the indigenous people, because they didn't have a soul. Latin America as a whole always was marked as a geography of cultural and physical domination. With the rise of capitalism, the tendency of exploration and submission of the land was brought to its natural consequence. Natural goods became objects of conflict and humans were treated as objects

In consequence, the process of colonization, which deeply marked the states of Latin America in the period of colonization, continues to present itself with a new wardrobe but with the same actions: colonization of the land, the rivers, the forests, the human persons (primarily the female body). It seems to be a colonization of life by a model of social development, politics, economy and science that was consecrated as the only valid way by the occidental society.

The document *Aparecida*, beyond alerting us to this danger, calls us to be responsible and indicates a spiritual way, a prophetic way:

“Latin America and the Caribbean are becoming more and more conscious that nature is a free heritage, which we got to protect it as a precious space of human coexistence and for a provident responsibility of human domination for common wealth. This heritage often shows its fragility and defenseless in front of economic power and technology. For that we want to insist that the interventions on natural resources may not predominate

by interests of economic groups, who raze to the ground the fonts of life and harm entire nations and the own humanity.” (Document of Aparecida 471)

And more:

The natural abundance of Latin America and the Caribbean is passing for an irrational exploration, which leaves behind the marks of dissipation and includes the death of our whole region. In the entire process the actual model of economy has a big responsibility privileging the excessive alacrity for richness more than the life of persons and people and the rational respect of nature ... (DA 473)

As prophets of life we believe that to take care of the Common House we must draw near once again to the God of abundant life. “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10: 10). This is about living a prophetic spirituality, which permits one to walk with Jesus on a path that is dangerous and uncertain, in order to promote life, life in abundance.

### **Rationalized and Anthropocentered**

Beyond the process of colonization there are other factors, in some ways aligned with each other, that contribute to the occult image of God revealed by Jesus Christ that justify a practice of exclusion, discrimination and alienation of God. We speak here of the enormous rationalism, the enlightenment and anthropocentrism, which put humans in a superior position and isolate them from other creatures.

For many years we were influenced by the ethics of Aristotle, who taught that reason is the way to happiness. Descartes, following the Augustinian tradition, put the thinking subject into the center of all (I think, therefore I am!). The enlightenment additionally fortified the vision that the rational, thinking human being is of chief importance in this existent world. Step by step, this vision strengthened the idea that the image of God present in every person could be identified only in his or her rationality and from there the world would be united with God. The way of prayer and celebration was to be determined by rationality, setting aside all corporal dimensions and natural elements. As an example, the Eucharist became simply a memory of the sacrifice of Christ and an instrument of grace to sustain the soul. The cosmic dimension as well as the corporal dimension would disappear.

We can't forget that it is through our bodies that we as humans realize we are integrated with other bodies and energies, with all forms of life. Spirituality is reflected in this process of cosmic integration.

With the technical progress of the modern age, throughout the centuries we see a change from cosmocentrism or theocentrism to a deep anthropocentrism. The view of anthropocentrism breaks with the intuition of a cosmic community, which leads to a life in harmony and solidarity between man/woman and all other beings in order to weave a complete relationship among all things: all beings have the same roots and the same destination.

To put humans into the center of all global happenings, to make man the master and dominator of nature, means to interpret the care with which he is entrusted (Gen. 1: 28) in the wrong way and puts God into second place. The logic of an anthropocentric rationalism leads man/women to assume a position of power and exploitation in his/her relationship with nature. Nature exists exclusively to the benefit of human beings. That culture is constructed on a paradigm of power and domination given by rationality. It is a form of domination of all nature, when all men and women are considered to be a part of nature. This was the case in the process of submission of the traditional indigenous societies. This view has transformed the identity of man/woman because instead of considering humans as part of creation and subject to the mission of taking care and shelter from creation, giving them a point of reference that connects them with creation and the creator, it puts them in a position of superiority.

But we have to note that this “superiority” of the human in relation to other creations does not consist in the rationality that he owns, but in his capacity to relate himself and creation moments of communion, which lead the individual beings to free themselves from the temptation of auto-centrism and be in relationship with God.

### **Weaving the Threads . . .**

#### **. . . Of Faith, Hope and Love**

For Christians, faith walks side by side with hope and love. We believe that God created the world through love, and did not abandon it while creating it. For that reason, there is hope for its subsistence.

Proclaiming that we are not owners of creation and that instead it is part of God, we accept that creation, when it is in relationship with God, belongs to God and passes through a process in which it liberates itself from all limits in order to be a carrier of life as well as hope.

We believe that man/woman, realizing their mission of unifying creation with the creator, will collaborate in the creative mission of Jesus through the actions of the Holy Spirit. With that, creation acquires somehow a sacred status that is not part of her own nature but is acquired by exercising the image of God in the life of every man or woman. This is a factor of faith which we believe contains an *ethos* that is so necessary for the world. It is an *ethos*, not only an ethic. It is not a program but an attitude, a spirituality and not a mentality.

A spiritual way based on faith, hope and love helps us to understand our mission of taking care and preserving our Common House as we participate in the mission of the Creator. At the same time this sustains man/woman as part of the world but also as a point of union between the world and God, who may be transfigured and regenerated.

This spirituality can help us eliminate the dichotomy between the natural and supernatural, considering nature and creation as the only existing reality that comes from God and is offered

to him. It is a process in which God no longer is considered distant from nature and lets him become a part of our reality” (John 1: 14). The person of Jesus is the hope of the world: hope that man/woman and the entire cosmos will find their integrity in communion with the God of the Trinity.

### **. . . Of Peace**

A spiritual way that can be significant for taking care of the Common House is that which has its roots in peace: Shalom in the Old Testament or Eirene in the New Testament. Both are references to the personal and social wellness of every person. The Old Testament uses the expression Shalom to indicate a reality that is a gift from God; it means integrated and abundant life. It is an expression of mercy, justice and fidelity of God in his bond or alliance. It is an integral part of the blessing of God. It is a gift that transforms into blessing all who receive it. Anyone who receives Shalom has to be a blessing for other persons, establishing relationships of dignity and justice between people and between people and God. It is a dynamic gift, a gift that transforms and that can be inserted in the process of transformation or construction of a culture of peace.

In the New Testament Eirene is connected to the global and definitive gift given by God to humanity in his Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus is the Lord of peace, the one who grants peace: “Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering” (Mark 5: 34). “Your faith has saved you; go in peace” (Luke 7: 50).

Peace is the big theme that surrounds the whole life of Jesus, from the annunciation of the angels in Bethlehem (Luke 2: 14) until the final entrance into Jerusalem (Luke 19: 38). Peace is the gift that Jesus offers sick people (Mark 5: 24), fisherman (Luke 7: 50), to the disciples after the resurrection (Luke 24: 36). Peace is full salvation and reconciliation with God (Romans 5: 10; Cor 5 18; Col 1: 20–22) and between persons (Eph 2: 14–16). It is “His peace, not like the peace the world gives” (John 14: 27); it is peace in him (John 16: 33). It is a cordial invitation to receive the person of Jesus “and may reign inside of your hearts the peace of Christ” (Col 3: 15); “And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil 4: 7).

The way indicated by Jesus to reach peace means an absolute rejection of violence (Mt 5: 21–22; 38–41, 44; 26: 51–52; Lk 23: 24), for the transformation of the stance of power and dominance to assume the attitude of the servant (Luke 22: 24–27) and to wash the feet of one’s brothers and sisters (John 13: 13). It is the logic of the crucified Christ (1 Cor 1: 23–24).

Peace—Shalom, Eirene—is the opposite of all proposals that create and sustain mechanisms of death, created in the context of domination, exploration and exclusion. For this reason a spirituality that has its roots in the experience of peace is able to promote and sustain a culture of peace. Beyond illuminating the causes of conflicts (which divide and separate), it constructs cultural processes that help reestablish that beautiful order of all things that the Son of God has come to establish with His Blood.

### **. . . Of Relationship**

An ecological/cosmic spirituality assumes more and more an important place in our lives. It helps us to think and live our lives in an expanding network of relationships, in a universal ecosystem where God is present as the font of life and communion.

It is the Spirit Creator who makes the diversity turn itself into communion and awakes our consciousness for the responsible care of the Common House, not only of the human species but of all living beings. For that the sighs of creations (Rom 8: 18–23) will find room in our hearts, appointing us to our responsibility as God's creatures.

The fecundity of the Spirit blossoms out in new life and a new style of dynamic life, which is inclusive and relational and helps us go beyond partial relations to establish reciprocal relationships of interdependence where in the center is the Creator bonded with all His creatures.

### **Conclusion**

I would like to conclude with the words of Leonardo Boff, who affirms, "If God is communion and relation then everything in the universe lives in relation with everything and all are in communion with all in all aspects and at all moments . . . Everything has its foundation in the sacrament of the Holy Trinity. In a direct way of speaking, which has its source in a practical life of faith and not in doctrines, we can say the Holy Trinity is like this: God is above us and we call our source of origin Father. God is at our side and lives as our brother. We call him Son. God is inside of us and reveals himself through enthusiasm. We call him Holy Spirit. He is one God-communion-love."

### **Bibliography**

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