

*(Draft—not for publication or citation)*

## **Theology and Ecology in Dialogue**

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Initially, I want to thank for this opportunity and highlight the importance of this seminar; for its context, the restlessness and reflections that this moment puts together and for the future implications. Many things can happen from this meeting! It is for initiatives like this and the fight of each one of us here and of so many other people, that the institutions are renewed; that the faith is meant as a political practice of liberation; that culture opens for a dialogue; that the hope is redone in the daily routine of each person and of each people.

I also want to highlight the theological, political, and social point of view from which I reflect. In my pastoral practice I always seek to diminish strict limits and borders between church and society; cultured and routine life; prayer and work; secular and spiritual spheres, assuming a perspective less disassociate and more associative, as well as considering Lutheran theology, through the notions as general priesthood, vocation, an always reforming church and other theological ideas.

In recent years this walk has taken me to the clamor of the environment. It is the shout of the oppressed ones, of the victims of war, of drug trafficking and of raped women that echo in the universe, in the heart of each of us, and in the heart of God, but also the trees when cut and burned, the polluted and contaminated waters, the poisoned soil, the animals when killed, and the whole environment. This is the challenge that requires an answer from the humanity, including the church, for Christians and theology. It is necessary to develop a systemic approach of the dilemmas of our time and find out how faith and ecclesiastical praxis are articulated in this context.

This meeting is meant to collect the practical and theological work developed in the Lutheran communities and analyze it lovingly, sensitively, and critically, in order to update theology and ecclesiastical praxis. Lutheran theology is not a set of a timeless truths, nor a past treatise, but an embodied and alive reflection, in dialogue, that provokes passion and compassion, that generates learning and that also provokes questionings and changes. This gathering is a moment of listening, of dialogue and of walking towards this process.<sup>1</sup>

I intend to share, some preliminary reflections, worries, ideas of people from the Lutheran communities that act in the area of the environment, with whom I have been in contact in the last years. These ideas come from dialogues in meetings; of readings; of information, of personal and group reports, of professional partnerships, and of pedagogical listening and seeing. They are, therefore, impressions taken from the ground of the Lutheran communities, of people who take up ecological concerns as an expression of their faith.

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<sup>1</sup>DREHER, Martin N. Entre a Idade Média e a Idade Moderna. A Localização de Lutero e a sua Reforma, p.29-42. In: DREHER, Martin N. Reflexões em Torno de Lutero. São Leopoldo, Série: Lutero – Estudos 4, 1984.

In matters like global warming, disposing of trash, climate change, floods, etc we are all still apprentices, needing to find out together how to organize our lives, our houses, how we will dress, how we will produce, etc.

Among those who act in relation to the environment, either in the environmental education, in the forest engineering, or in pastoral work, there is an agreement that we are living a crisis of civilization. What is occurring are not only individual and local crises, but like revelations of a broad and deep crisis facing humanity. It is, therefore, a crisis of civilization. And perceiving this moment and acting upon it is deeply Lutheran. It is characteristic of Lutheranism to perceive the conflicts and to yearn for reform, conversion and transformation of each time.

In the center of this crisis is the fact that the present society model is not sustainable. The way our society thinks, feels, relates, produces and consume does not guarantee the continuity of life. Among the people with whom I think and work, present studies are assumed that indicate life is deeply threatened and that it is time for us to act quickly. Life itself, as well as life as we know, is facing extinction. And who has the answer? No one institution, country or person. No one alone has the key to open the passage of humanity towards a sustainable future.

But there are initiatives that indicate the sea is being opened and there is a passage for a new start. The sea that is permitting the crossing questions the foundations of modernity; its rationality based on technology, economy and materialism that provoke the world delusion and the objectification of life. We assume today that the time of lights discovered barely everything, allowed us to get into the heaven and the land, but neither in spite of that the poverty, the violence against the women, the pollution of the air, the rivers and the land were eradicated. What comes to mind in this context is Mt 6:26: "What therefore will the human being take advantage if he/she get the entire world and lose his/her life"? Or like Chief Seattle taught: "When the last tree be cut down, when the last river be poisoned, when the last fish be captured, only then we will notice that money cannot be eaten."<sup>2</sup> And I would add, neither computers, nor cars and war tanks.

For those who act with regard to these environmental questions, it is fundamental to always affirm and reaffirm these aspects, in all times and places. It is the task of preaching, of education, of prophecy. And we ask about the silence of the churches in this area and we long for more ecclesial action. The church should assume the account of the environment in a more positive way, should point out the human sin that kills the biodiversity and the life in the planet and should guide for new choices. We understand that the Christian church will have to find a new option this time, helping humanity to develop ways of sustainable life, with all the economic and political implications that this represents.

The empty promises of the modernity, the experience of the limits make us rethink our option of life. The fight on behalf of environmental care intends to modify how we understand the meaning of life. It is intended to introduce a new rationality, and still, a new cosmology, even though it had always existed, in the human cultures, even

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<sup>2</sup> In BOFF, Leonardo. *Ecologia: Grito da Terra, Grito dos Pobres*. Rio de Janeiro: Sextante, 2004, p.191.

inside the hegemonic paradigm of the modernity -- an other kind of relation with nature, and between men and women, adults and children.

People are tired of being lost among machines, fascinated by industrial structures, and are returning to the big planetary and cosmic community, fascinated by the majesty of the mountains and by the starry heavens. Tired of reducing land to a set of natural resources, now we are seeing the big Mother Land, in the perspective of Gaia, that feeds and carries us. For those who shares these feelings and reflections this is a unique moment for the church and for the theology. They must help in comprehending this moment through which humanity is passing: life on this planet may end, future generations are not guaranteed the right to the life. These are political but also theological questions. The images of an all-powerful God who acts miraculously does not answer these questions. The present time requires another comprehension of God. The apparent silence of God in this crisis does not represent the absence of the divine in the history.

Personally, I understand that the Babylonian Captivity and of the desert are analogies to the present moment. They are biblical categories that indicate not the end, but a theological and philosophical “stop” and the birth of a new time, the choice of a new pathway, including for the church and theology.

This new paradigm and this new cosmology in gestation mean that life is not barely about the Land and who occupies it, but that the Land itself, as a whole, is a living microorganism, with the necessary elements for generating life, as well as a permanent evolutionary process of auto-organization and auto-transcendence . "This vision states that the universe is constituted by an immense net of relations so that each one lives for another, to another and with another: that the human being is a knot of relations pointed towards all directions; and that the Divinity itself is revealed like a pan relational Reality. If everything is relation and nothing exists outside the relation, then the most universal law is the synergy, the *sinthropia*, the inter-retro-relationship, the collaboration, the cosmic solidarity and the communion and universal fraternity."<sup>3</sup>

In the theological and philosophical formulation of this vision of the world, God is inside the cosmogenic process of the universe, or, the global process of the world in evolution and in expansion. Not as a force extra-us, of placing God and the world face to face, but of placing God inside the process of the world and of considering the world inside the God process, while always keeping the otherness and distinctions. God comes mixed with all of the processes, without getting lost inside them. Better, God directs the arrow of the time for the emergence of more and more complex, dynamics carried on with purpose.

Theology should help in the elaboration of a modern ecological Cosmo-vision, but not a simple repetition of the past, nor medieval, nor of biblical times, nor representative of the interests of a specific religion or institution. But a vision of world that includes the past experience, the needs of the present and the demands of the future. And for that, we will have to think also about the theology of the creation, in present, contextual and procedural ways.

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<sup>3</sup> In BOFF, Leonardo. *Ecologia: Grito da Terra, Grito dos Pobres*. Rio de Janeiro : Sextante, 2004, p. 38.

There is the hope that theology can help people to be transformed from being enemies into friends of the trees, that they are not seen as obstacles to development; that people can love the animals as creatures that are also sacred, without seeing them as gods; that theology can help understand the time in which we live; that for some the world is already in a rhythm of self-destruction, while for others it is still time to revert the destructive process; that the complicated notion of being human can be questioned, seeing and accepting also the naughty face, the human being as a sinner.

The one who acts on environmental questions out of a new, emerging Cosmology is deeply spiritual. This vision conceives of life as a grace; sees the immanence of God; conceives the inter-connection of all the things. It is said, inclusively, that this century will be spiritual, or there will no further century. If we will leave aside materialism as the foundation, what kind of society can we imagine? What is its structure? It is a theological task to contribute to this construction. And considering spirituality as a fundamental factor for safeguarding the Planet, it is our responsibility to think about how church is related with the environmental activity, with people who act on environmental questions. Which space is there for them? Where are they? What do they think, speak and do? How can they actively participate in the church? How can the church be in the places and spaces where they act, live and work? How can we develop solidarity, lovingness, respect and admiration for all the creatures, all the living and not only living beings? These questions are raised for me by Mário Quintana, a Brazilian writer, in "Das Utopias":

"If things are unachievable. ..Great!

It is not a reason not to want them...

How sad the ways if not

The magical presence of the stars!"