

From Spirituality Everything is Connected: Revolutions for Living with Equity and Eco-justice

Feminist Theology
2019, Vol. 27(2) 195–210

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DOI: 10.1177/0966735018814671

journals.sagepub.com/home/ftb



Silvia Martinez Cano

Translated from the Spanish original by Montse Escribano

Abstract

Everything is connected, from galaxies to the smallest particles in our bodies. We need an interpretation of reality that allows us to see the whole as well as the Whole. This new view is a holistic spirituality that experiences God in the whole of life. It is necessary to make an effort to abandon elements that contaminate global life, because they originate in an anthropology of power-submission, man-woman, human-nature, consumption-participation, exploitation-cooperation... that justifies the exploitation of nature and of human beings. We need to move from the devouring anthropocentrism we live in to a life-centred worldview. This article reflects on reality as an organic whole, the body of God. Reality is a creative, collective, dynamic and diverse 'body' that we must care for with equity and eco-justice. Our actions must be oriented towards the practice of God's justice in the bodies and lives of women. Thus, we will recover the balance of this world.

Keywords

Spirituality, eco-justice, women's bodies, intergenerational justice, ecological body

Introduction: the Universe, Space for Coexistence

At night, when we look at the dark sky and the millions of stars in it, we often have a feeling of absolute smallness with respect to the universe. Thousands and thousands of miles of emptiness separate us from the stars and the galaxies where they exist. The first stars took 380 million years to form after the possible beginning of the universe. We do not know which ones are farther away, on the border of the universe, nor do we know how long they will be there. What we do know, thanks to particle physics and cosmology, is that because of an imbalance at the beginning of the universe, a slight asymmetry of

Corresponding author:

Silvia Martinez Cano

Email: korei.silviamc@gmail.com

matter and antimatter (from 1,000,000,000 antiprotons to 1,000,000,001 protons) prevented them from annihilating one another and began to form the first stable atoms necessary for a universe like ours (H, He, C, Ni, O...).

Could the asymmetry have been otherwise? Yes. Could materials and beings have been formed with different atomic combinations? Yes. But the truth is that we are here. So, we can say with certainty that 'We are star dust' (Jou, 2008: 68–74). We are atoms of oxygen, carbon and nitrogen that arose from the explosion of stars and that were combined to form a new planet, a first cell, a complex human.

We are matter, part of that 5% that forms the universe. The other 95% is made up of antimatter (25%) and dark energy (70%): we do not know what it is but we do know how it behaves. According to physicist David Jou, we know that this 95% is fundamental to the structure of this universe: dark energy would be a type of energy that does not interact with the gravitational constant, but rather works as a repulsion, which causes the universe to expand faster. Dark matter or antimatter, we cannot identify for certain, but we know that it interacts gravitationally and maintains the orbiting of galaxies. It accumulates in the lateral zones of the galaxy and in a kind of halo that surrounds them. Antimatter also participates in the formation of the galaxies because the first one began to accumulate and attract matter and thus, the galaxies were formed. Dark matter is a kind of invisible structure on which galaxies formed. We know how it behaves but not what it is made of.

The second thing we can say is that our presence is a physical causality of that dust of stars that, with a high presence of carbon, has made our presence here and now, possible. A causality that could have been this one or any other. However, it is ours. This reminds us that we are not necessary or essential for the universe, not even for its operation.

The third assertion we can make is that there is a close relationship between the macrocosm and our microcosm. Since, from the first generation of stars after the Big Bang to us, there is a chained process of atomic combinations and energy reactions that make possible the life of the first bacteria formed by carbon, nitrogen and oxygen and from this first life, an evolutionary chain of species including the human species. This process requires between 7000 and 6000 million years, in addition to the expansion of the universe over 13700 million light-years.

Our existence is defined by atomic combinations. And that evidence helps us to understand that reality is interconnected through precise and delicate relationships. Among them an unprotected being, like the human being, can exist in the midst of the ecological and cosmic chain of this world.

The fourth statement, then, is to be aware that we are not the centre of the universe. We have changed from imagining the world as a static and pre-determined cosmos to understanding it as an uncertain reality. We are not sure if we exist and if we are in the cosmos by chance or by a necessary universal mechanical process. We live in a multifaceted reality in which many possibilities of existences and beings could fit. If only one of the gravitational constants had slightly changed its value, we would not be here. The knowledge of our cosmos is relative and provisional, so we cannot focus only on our desire for answers. Nor should we expect it to answer any questions about this world.

Everything is connected. From galaxies to the smallest particles in our bodies. From the apple I eat at breakfast, to the trees cut down in the Amazon this month. Everything

is connected. Parents realize it when they see their children with their mobiles, tablets and online games. Everything is interconnected and we discover a world that suffers because of the fractures that arise from disconnection, and human and environmental imbalances. We realize that we have forgotten the really important things, the harmony of the universe, and instead focus on ourselves and our small concerns. But it is not possible to appreciate the movement, the dynamics of this expanding cosmos in ourselves.

Therefore, it is necessary to find an interpretation of reality that allows us to see the whole as well as the whole. To learn to make decisions in the relational context which we inhabit from the concrete but with the perspective of infinity of a cosmos whose constitution we do not understand.

This article seeks to propose a hermeneutic of reality that attempts to be integral and integrating, placing the ecological question as central for life, a life with a future. It requires not only a new worldview, but also a new *ethos*, a new way of living. From the modern, anthropocentric and androcentric, rationalist-positivist, bourgeois, industrial, and urban Western judgment we have to move on to a new vital paradigm (Boff, 1995: 19-23). It is about guiding lives towards a real and effective conversion.

The change is prophesied by those who claim themselves as victims of the consequences of hunger, poverty, desertification, or uncontrolled consumption. In short, those who denounce the interests of the few against the impoverished many. It is a cry that calls for a different spirituality (Sölle, 2001: 47-48) a new way of living that harmonizes the ethical, aesthetic, mystical, political, personal, erotic and social elements of our 'small being' with the immense life of the universe.

For the believer, it opens the possibility of believing in a different way, from a holistic spirituality that experiences God in the whole of life. To feel the presence of the Spirit of God, the *Ruah*, manifesting with wisdom from the giant red star millions and millions of miles to the smallest part of our history. All of them are places where the *Ruah* is unveiled. It manifests progressively, as revelation of God in the history of the universe. But life in *Ruah* is also an invitation to harmonize the paradoxes of life wisely: experience of strength/experience of weakness; silence/word; work/rest; giving/receiving; presence/absence; connect/disconnect; knowing how to walk accompanied/knowing how to be alone, and thus, to savour what enriches our inner world and strengthens our options for and commitments to what exists beyond it.

In a world at risk, contaminated, unfair, broken by concentrating on individual solutions and not common welfare, it is necessary to search for holistic solutions to the wounds that are the consequence of interconnection and globalization, and that impoverish us more and offer a short future. The proposal of Pope Francis in *Laudato Si* gathers this cry of the poor and invites us to an integral ecology united to the common good (Pope Francis, 2015: 139). Our small-scale environmental political consensus is not enough, a new vision is also necessary, to harmonize human structures with the structures of the universe. It is no longer useful to start from notions of sustainable development, but it is necessary to envisage an integral paradigm of life that encompasses the whole universe. There is no sustainability if there is no awareness of the pain of nature, as a consequence of the mismanagement of our own reality.

It is necessary to make an effort to abandon elements that contaminate global life, because they begin from the anthropology of power-submission, man-woman,

human-nature, consumption-participation, exploitation-cooperation... that justifies the exploitation of nature and of human beings. We need to move from the devouring anthropocentrism we live in to a life-centred worldview, as the Korean theologian Chung Hyun Kung proposes, which allows us to live ecological compassion as the founding principle of our human, spiritual nature, that is, in the image and likeness of God (Hyun Kun, 2004: 94,167). From it, respect for all forms of life in the universe will emerge, giving way to a praxis of struggle for eco-justice and an ecological body experience.

A Fractured World: Cracks and Fears

To begin the process of changes, we can apply the theological method of seeing/judging/acting (Celam, 1979: 29-30). That is why we will begin by opening our eyes to the reality in which we are today. We can switch our mobiles on and read the news in the newspapers and any issues that appear in different social media. All of them are related to the problematic nature of the globalizing paradigm. This means that the conquest of modernity, that is, the empowerment of the subject as a measure of reality, alerts us, in this plural and globalized time, to a series of problems that trigger a state of alert for the world we live in. They are fractures that have opened up in our worldview, but they also feed fears that prevent us from generating proposals that creatively address these issues. I will try to describe them.

Fractures that Separate Us: the Cracks

Self-centring, and Andro-centration. Modernity has led us to a greater self-centring. The human being placed in the centre of the universe, projects a deeply subjective vision on reality, which reduces events to the personal perception that you have of them. This presupposes narrow-mindedness, diminishing the capacity to understand reality from a wider perspective where other factors can be identified, not only those that affect us.

On the other hand, having a vision focused on my experiences and my needs, we absolutize what happens to us, unbalancing the relationships of equity with others, considering that what happens to us is the most important and a clear priority.

As a consequence, we become atrophied, because we are rendered incapable of making any active observation of reality, that is, actively observing the details that describe the reality of the other. It is more and more common to go through daily life without observing it, without extracting any learning, not letting ourselves soak up the circumstances and factors that constitute different situations and consequences. We lose consciousness of reality, of its passage through us.

Finally, the development individualistic politics and economical practices, reinforces masculine reality (Gebara, 1998: 96). When public and the private environments have become blurred with plurality and globalism, the masculine option imposes itself on the feminine one with violence, and global cultural categories are understood and executed in masculine ways, without taking into account the voices of women and the problems that affect them. We are, therefore, using and accepting androcentric practices that hinder female empowerment and the conquest of equity. Participation in this world, seen from

masculine needs and perspectives, depends on the degree of assimilation of masculine practices by women, as they abandon their own feminine forms of thought and also the diversity in the answers women give to their own problems and those of others.

Isolation from Others. The second great rift has to do with the inability to be in communication with the other. In a globalized society where we easily access technologies that allow us to communicate, we realize that the processes of reception and acceptance of the realities of others are blocked in many cases by the difficulty of going out of ourselves. Blocking occurs in two directions. On the one hand, my self-centring inhibits my ability to reciprocal self-expression, that is, my expression seeks a response from the other. Self-expression is the first step in the interaction. This is completed with the acceptance and response of the other to my self-expression. If my self-expression is intended only to show myself, the communication has not come to an end.

On the other hand, we do not usually constitute ourselves as receivers of an interaction, in active listening; but our situation and self-perception takes precedence over what we perceive of the other. Therefore, it is not just in our self-communication that we only seek to show ourselves, but also we do not intend to listen to what the other tells us because we do not recognize it as valuable. There is simply no active listening, that is, when listening to the other, I not only receive it but I accept it and make their own mine. This destroys the possibility of drawing human bonds, which are born from the interaction between us.

This situation increases when communication occurs between men and women. In a society perceived from a masculine point of view, any self-expression of the reality of women lacks importance. Masculine categories trivialize female problems and situations and thus, give them less importance and less prominence in everyday life. This way, men talk a lot and women very little when the dialogues are between genders. Because it seems logical to think that they have better opinions to share.

This situation hinders empathy between genders, the ability to put ourselves in the other's place and receive and accept those concerns and joys that they want or need to communicate. Bad empathy can lead to conflict, incomprehension, or even violence.

Violence as a Framework and as an Intermediary. When self-centring and the lack of communication increase progressively in daily practice, it is inevitable that conflict appears. Conflict installs violence as a framework of social relations. This violence changes in form and intensity, but it is constituted as a social language in which we all participate in some way.

There is a visible and evident level of violence that everyone, at least in theory, repudiates. This is direct violence, that is, visible and direct actions that cause physical, psychological, emotional, verbal and social harm. It is really easy to identify the protagonists of the conflict and the situation that generates violence. In this category of violence, we can place interpersonal violence (murder, rape, or aggression), visible violence between men and women, violence against certain social groups or between peoples, wars, etc.

There is another more invisible and less obvious violence that has to do with the mind-sets and narratives proper to social groups where all inter-relational activity is inserted. This is a violence framed in the cultural aspects of life, which legitimates social

behaviours and practices that harm people in particular or certain social groups. It is expressed through language, values, daily activities and the roles of men and women in their day-to-day relationships. These are beliefs, narratives of the legitimacy of violence with which we repudiate, discriminate, judge, depart from, weaken, ignore, or brush aside. This violence is a cultural violence (Galtung, 2003) against nature, against people and against communities, which curtails the capacity for dissent and fragments the links among the violated so that they cannot organize around any alternative cultural proposals.

This type of violence cannot be easily located, nor does it have obvious protagonists, but it is implicitly shown in daily life. We have it internalized in such a way that it takes root in the depths of our values, even our religious beliefs. They are configured as structures of evil (structural violence) that favour the power of some people over other people, establishing hierarchies of who is valuable and who is not in this world. Violence supports power, (Arendt 1989 [1969]: 52) as an instrument that multiplies the fracture between people, feeding and justifying socio-cultural systems, which are accepted as 'inevitable' (Fisas, 1998). The naturalization of evil as a measure of how people are and act, silences the suffering of the weakest, especially of women and devalues those suffering injustice, 'normalizing' their social effects.

Fears that Stop Us

The fractures of our world develop mechanisms that allow them to subsist and grow in our time. They do so through the fears in which we are educated and that fuel our inability to make decisions about our own lives.

Fear of Nudity. There is a fear inside us, sometimes huge, sometimes smaller, of exposing our emotions and experiences to others, because it makes us vulnerable and exposes us to others by showing our weaknesses. Insecurities, complexes, prejudices, fears, mixing our image of ourselves and the expectations we have, regarding our relationships with others. In a self-centred world, individuality favours communication by expressing ourselves in different ways, but we also need to protect those personal aspects in which the other can interact and, therefore, question us vitally.

Fear has an adaptive protective function. It unconsciously regulates the desire for conservation by alerting us to the potential harm we may suffer. Fractures of self-concentration, lack of communication and violence, convince us that we can be physically or emotionally damaged, materially dispossessed, or we could lose our personal or social dignity. We are not always aware that we are feeling fear. That is why it is common to feel paralyzed or blinded by our feelings, but also by our reason, which obeys that untraceable fear. It blocks decision-making abilities and proactivity in the face of conflict. Fear is a good companion to violence because it acts as a block to the person's response to injustice. And this way, it maintains and increases the fractures of this world.

Facing fear and managing it to benefit oneself and the community I inhabit is to recognize these fears and their causes, so that dialogues can be established with myself and with others that allow me to build an enriching reality and not to act to break it.

Consumption. Consumption is not only the act of buying and possessing objects, but also the deep fear of not having a social space. That social space is linked to our expectations of happiness and personal self-realization. We consume for fear of social rejection, for fear of affective rejection, for fear of failure, for fear of losing our desire and hope for a better future. It allows us to feel alive every day, when we consume, and thus, to feel secure in the idea that we grow as people or society.

Economic growth is, therefore, a source of good. Happiness is obtained through the continuous ascent and development of those things consumed and possessed. Consumption acts in us as a catalyst for justifications of our lives: if we continue to consume, the economic crisis will stop its recession and stabilize again; If we grow in energy, transportation and communication we will improve in sustainable and less polluting efficiency... and many other narratives that start from our fear of a system that we know is of limited capacity in resources and that navigates towards potential disappearance. We believe in these narratives in order not to accept that we need a profound change of cultural paradigms. We believe in bulimic consumption because we are deceived regarding what we are and can be, about happiness and how to obtain it.

The Problem of Limits. Consumption favours an exalted desire for happiness, as if it could provide us with a state of unlimited satisfaction within a limited universe. The action of fear lies beneath, and it blocks the awareness of the finite condition of nature, including the human, in which everything has a time, a place and an end.

There are those who defend geographical expansion: when the ecosystem does not have any more room for us, it broadens its horizons, its limits, even by the use of force. If we do not have oil we invade another territory, if we do not have paper we buy the forests from another country, if we need diamonds, we provoke a war to obtain them by force and bribery...

There are those who defend research for efficiency, intensifying production according to their needs and interests: we manipulate the climatology chemically, we also manipulate organisms genetically in a never-ending quest for improved productivity... and in doing the first or second of these, we produce a series of imbalances, which affect not only biodiversity, but also ecosystems and the beings that live in them, including humans. Poverty, lack of resources, violence though the poor distribution of the scarce resources that remain... are some of the consequences of not accepting this condition of finitude.

The inevitable conclusion is that in order to balance the world again we must stop consuming and we have to start to decrease our demands. But not only will we have to assume the maxim of the environmentalists of the 1970s 'Reduce, Reuse, Recycle,' but we also should propose to decrease demand, taking global measures to do so which allow a gradual and controlled reduction of consumption levels. In short, a shift of paradigm that opts for the salvation of the planet in the face of 'barbarism' (Cacciari, 2001).

Everything is Connected in the Spiritual: To Understand Ourselves as an Ecological Body

Religious experience shows us that when we connect from the inside with the experience of transcendence, the other aspects of our life reconnect, harmonizing our identity from

a more global whole that interrelates and learns the peace of sharing limited resources, instead of seeking disproportionate growth. From this observation, we can rethink the worldview and world experience as ‘a whole’ that welcomes me in my concrete ‘I’ and with which I establish relations of interdependence.

Becoming Aware of Our Interdependence. Constituting Ourselves in an Ecological Body

In this sense, the awareness of not being an isolated individuality, but of being part of a larger ‘whole’ that affects me and is affected by my decisions is the first step that leads me to other attitudes that promote a paradigmatic change in me. The first is my willingness to take action for that change with a different outlook. The second is freedom to transgress the norms of structural violence as a prophetic sign of a better time. The third is the responsibility to assume the life of other living beings as something unique and valuable. This triple attitude opens us to the transcendent experience of seeing that the totality of reality is intersected by the love of God that needs us for its fullness. Therefore, understanding ourselves as an organic whole brings us closer to a deeper experience of God, more intense because it is shared with other beings and fulfilled communally and not individually. It is then a sacred, ecological and collective body, which overflows into life that wishes to be multiplied and shared (Gebari, 1990: 127). Understanding reality as a whole, through the metaphor of a body, highlights a series of characteristics.

A Collective ‘Whole’. A collective ‘whole’ is where all I am as an individual identity is strongly linked to others by natural and not just social ties. It is time to reject the dichotomous vision of dualistic and androcentric anthropology, since it leads us to the danger of separating the experience of God in our day to day from the collective reflection; it separates concrete real life and its explicitness in the theological discourse; It separates the dimensions of interiority and exteriority; it opposes rationality to emotion and feeling, without allowing a global view of reality. It presupposes, therefore, a duality in which one end imposes itself on the other, making the collective ‘everything’ suffer: God above creation, man above woman, man above nature (Halkes, 1989: 425–35). A dualism that deforms the Revelation of God as Lover of his/her creation and imposes the tyranny of exploitation.

A Living, Dynamic and Participatory ‘Body’. A living, dynamic and participatory ‘body’ (Pope Francis, 2015: 143) is a body that continuously flows and transforms through time, its cycles and seasons, the human life that is born and dies. Holistic or multipolar anthropology considers that our personal identity is not defined by a bipolarity (body-mind) that must be unified (uniformity), but rather is shaped by relations of reciprocity and interdependence (Giblin, 1996: 74), welcoming and celebrating difference and biodiversity (Gebara, 1998: 120).

A Creative ‘Whole’. A creative ‘whole’ affects the structures of the world – also those of the human being – and its cultures, making them ecological (Pope Francis, 2015: 142). It

is a generative whole, in constant change and transformation that crosses all the borders of age, sex, race, nationality, creed or any other type of barriers and welcomes, matures, completes and multiplies. We can, from there, try to understand a relationship of Friendship with God in which we welcome, recreate, reach out, defend the poor or the earth with all their damaged creatures, as a sign of the overflowing power of the relationship with God (McFague, 1994: 272–73).

A Diverse 'Body'. A diverse 'body' is a treasure of reality. Diversity imposes itself as the only way for life to exist, because we are constituted by it. No hay como admirar las leyes de la genética para darse cuenta de ello (Oberhuber, 2010: 67–72). This is also the revelation of God. It is therefore a commitment to care for the earth in its fragility and its biodiversity as a way of loving life (Giaccardi and Magatti, 2015: 147). From everyday praxis, we have to engage in acts of love towards the global 'body'. This forms an ethic of caring, an ethic that roots us on Earth and makes us closer to God.

The experience of transcendence is constituted as beings as definitive as the sap system that travels through and feeds not only the life of each organism, but also those channels that link one organism with another in its relationships, dependencies and symbiosis. It uncovers the face of the mystery of reality in which we are immersed (Gebara, 1990: 134). And it enables us to follow a path to the transformation of the world through God, that is, through justice, compassion and love.

Revolutions to Live from Equity and Eco-justice

Changing the perspective to understand reality as an organic and interdependent whole needs the practice of the three dimensions of God mentioned above: justice, compassion and love, that is, eco-justice.

Revolution of Paradigms

Therefore, we must also speak of decrease as the inversion of the destructive process of the planet. It is not a question of reducing the accumulation of capital and its consequences in the unjust distribution of wealth and the unlimited destruction of nature. The decrease involves a questioning of the values that underlie our societies and a critique of the narratives that justify the destruction of the environment and human life. The questioning is concretized in eight actions that we must address as societies: re-evaluate, reconceptualize, restructure, re-localize, redistribute, reduce, reuse and recycle.

The first two, re-evaluate and re-conceptualize, have to do with the first classical principle of 'seeing, judging, acting'. The next two, restructure and relocate, with the second principle, 'to judge', with an important critical component based on the distribution of current wealth/resources. This restructuring, in particular, raises the question of overcoming capitalism, which involves the conversion of the productive system to adapt it to the new paradigm of eco-justice. A decrease is not possible without changing the foundations of capitalism. The last four – redistribute, reduce, reuse and recycle – have to do with the praxis of 'acting' that subvert the structures of violence to turn them into a structure of planetary justice.

Eco-justice, thus, places us in a position to perceive the interconnection between all forms of oppression and violence that affect women and men and nature, fragmenting reality. The interconnections and their problems can reach very different means such as violence in the family and ecological destruction. By establishing links between environmental issues and social justice, we are mapping this incipient irrigation system from a fertile sap for life. With this, we are designing a new world, a new society that is based on new eco-practices. Some of these practices are described in the following sections.

The Cry of Justice is the Seed of Everyday Humanization: the Cry of the Peripheries

Remembering the words of St. Gregory, the Great: ‘The earth is common to all men, and therefore the food it provides is produced for all in common. Thus, those who demand its private use are wrong to believe they are innocents; that was a gift that God made to all of us’ (San Gregorio Magno, 2001: 3, 21), we need a retributive justice (Pope Francis, 2015: 157) in line with the preferential option for the poor (Vatican II, 1965: 88; and, Pope Francis, 2015: 158) to return what the consumption and interests of certain countries have stolen to other peoples and lands. Social justice is universal because it accumulates wealth through the exploitation of people and nature: it dries the fountains, deforests the forests, poisons the soil, impedes the life in them and unbalances the eco-systems as we can see in global warming.

The Justice of the Bodies. But justice also has to be administered fairly. And this means rediscovering and redistributing that justice that has to do with power and wealth. Women are usually kept out of the spaces of decision and wealth. They inhabit the peripheries of societies and the power exercised in those societies. They are bodies found in ‘non-places’, Foucault’s (1967) expression of places that do not interest anybody, which are hidden: prisons, brothels, hospitals and cemeteries. Places such as homes broken by violence or in precarious conditions, work without a contract, impoverished neighbourhoods, unskilled jobs... etc. In all of them, the protagonists are women as subjects on the receiving end of a large number of problems that limit their situation and their capacity for decision and action. These places are hidden, because they are different from an ideally constructed reality, through patriarchal high-profile and aggressive politics, which represents a social imagery without pain, without conflict, without problems.

The ‘non-places’ do not exist in our globalization, they remain in the darkest and forgotten corners, and they are peripheries without capacity for leadership, without authority to intervene in social development. To leave these small circles and to want to decide for ourselves entails just a few sacrifices on one part and much suffering on the other. They are punished and ignored. Their bodies are brushed aside, insulted, even mistreated or violated. Subjected to the discipline of guilt. They are guilty of the violence that is exerted on them, and are stigmatized if they dare to leave this discipline. The peripheries of our planetary framework support injustices in a passive way, as the only possible way to exist. Those injustices weaken the female subjects of these peripheries, so that they do not develop the capacity to question the circumstances of their lives and the lives of others.

Structural violence manages subjects by marking them, defining them and discriminating against them. It fragments women because it weakens the relationships they establish between themselves and with men, and this contributes to keeping them as vulnerable and fragile individuals in areas of marginality and poverty.

Poor Women Subjects of Justice. To combat these situations, women have developed processes of resistance and empowerment that contribute to denouncing the strategies of oppression of women in our androcentric cultures. In certain contexts, poor women develop creative processes of appropriation of both personal (bodily/identity) and social spaces. These circumstances often have to do with their own needs and their families. They do so in conditions of violence, abandonment or violation of their rights. On some other occasions, sisterhood relationships are established where some women help others to become subjects of their own history and to lead collective reflection on the female and male stereotypes to which they are subjected, their criticism and their deconstruction.

Regardless of the way in which a person becomes aware of their own situation of injustice, the truth is that this exercise causes a change of language, a change in social ideas and roles in coexistence and social interrelation (Harcourt, 2011: 254). It is a step towards accepting feminine diversity and its sisterhood relations as an alternative to the dominant discourses (Fernández Guerrero, 2010: 45–60, 49). It is a language that articulates a new cultural worldview that will affect the environment. It transforms circumstances because new relationships are established. In them, women exercise ownership over their bodies, their psychology, their decisions and their lives in general. An autonomy from which an inner power emanates and impels them to take control of the reality that surrounds them and that leads towards a more equitable reality.

Processes of Empowerment for Women: That is Justice. The first step of empowerment is building self-esteem in everyday life. Without good self-esteem, it is not possible to be the owner of the reality that surrounds us. It is the main element that articulates the processes of empowerment. We can define it as the assessment we make of ourselves from the experiences we have lived throughout life. In the words of Marcela Lagarde, it is ‘an ethical experience of fidelity to one’s self: an experience that flows and transforms itself into permanence (...). To build self-esteem is to live, in fact, under the ethical guidelines of the feminist paradigm, to be free’ (Lagarde, 2000: 32). First, it is to accept ourselves as we are with our light and shadow, being aware that the limitations we have can be a step towards education to improve those areas; the virtues that we have must be developed and shown for the personal benefit of those around us. Second, learn to love with understanding, without self-commiseration, with joy, without resentment. This will allow us to make permanent changes that free us from this feeling of incapacity that leads to fear and frustration.

The second step towards empowerment is assertiveness, that is, acquiring the ability to voice our opinions or feelings without fear or guilt and to enunciate our own choices. Assertiveness profoundly influences social relations. Assertive people are more cheerful, more resolute, and interact in better ways with the people around them. They acquire a determination that makes them develop a more solid self-confidence. Assertiveness

gives women the right to be treated with respect and dignity. With it, they can express their feelings and emotions without fear of being crushed by the male belief that they must be corrected or influenced. Thus, they acquire independence and responsibility; that is, they take charge of their problems, without waiting for the approval of others or for someone who will come to 'rescue' them.

Finally, independence, freedom, self-determination, self-government and personal freedom are required (Bolen, 2014: 61). For women to become autonomous means that they will occupy a place in the world, as something proper, necessary, drawn from personal singularity and from the justice of God.

Towards a Community Conversion: Intergenerational Justice

Pope Francis refers in *Laudato Si* to an intergenerational justice (2015: 159–60), that is, to be able to look at our children and to dream a future for them and their children. In modern societies this element of transmission of the inheritance of the land, customs and life from generation to generation, has been lost. We focus on the here-and-now, without building for tomorrow or thinking about the consequences of a concrete and individual present. It is about recovering the dimension of solidarity between generations. Dreaming about a future beyond our own life.

Towards Sorority. It is not a coincidence that women make covenants when they are in the public sphere. The pacts protect them and draw, from criteria of reciprocity, common places of struggle. Reciprocity requires openness, dialogue, defends personal spaces and with it, re-elaborates the identities of those who negotiate, rearranging their interests and priorities as a collective wealth that respects and enhances the space itself (Gil, 2011: 220).

This sorority economy transgresses the patriarchal imaginary, because it dismantles the myth that women do not have the capacity for organization or leadership. They act on the needs and urgencies, rights and desires of women who claim social and cultural justice. This improves coexistence, strengthens the uniqueness and equality (of men and women), and gives rise to creative actions for everyday problems. Sorority is a melting pot of women's experiences that leads to the search for positive relationships of women's empowerment and leadership. Sorority and empowerment are directly related. They support the creation of links, of care for relationship and personal and group support among women for the pursuit of justice in the environment in which these women live.

Mentoring or Accompanying Release Processes. But sorority has one more component that makes you dream a future for other poor women, violated and deprived of their dignity. It is about building one's life, one's own life, that of my environment and that of others looking to the future. Inevitably, sorority leads us to analyse intergenerational relationships.

In very impoverished contexts it seems that there is no possibility of establishing bonds given the high likelihood of conflict. Helping women in these contexts to draw interpersonal relationships with other, more experienced women can foster an ethic of

intergenerational justice, which gives us responsibility for caring for and preparing future generations for a life to be transformed. The ethics of intergenerational justice can be defined as the development of the ability to look at our daughters and granddaughters and dream a future with them and for them, where they are active subjects of their own history.

Transmitting a multiform, diverse and potential-centred heritage can be the key to a less fractured and more just world. What the system of consumption of individualized life fragments and weakens, is again linked through the mentoring of other younger women. They participate together in a sort of sisterhood in the processes of empowerment of other women, sharing personal currents as a substrate of cultural construction, alternative to consumption and violence. It favours sister learning and at the same time differentiation as a personal key.

The links that are established in mentoring and mentoring accompaniment exert on young women an influence towards their healthy singularity, which allows them to analyse, criticize and demolish many of the barriers of the mercantile and patriarchal imaginary today. It helps young women to locate those elements of the fragmented system, which seek to convince them that inequality and violence are women's lot and 'unavoidable.' Mentoring or accompaniment of young women diminishes loneliness in the struggles of poor women and improves networks among women as appropriate paths for social transformation (Puleo, 2013: 299), not as a hierarchical relationship, but as a collective learning where everybody has something to contribute to the planetary challenges of today.

The Practice of Alternative Economies: the Austerity of Christianity

A new paradigm that intends to practise eco-justice needs to combat the exploiting economy in the face of the synergies that sell it to us as the only possible economic response. To articulate new cooperative economies at the local level (Pope Francis, 2015: 179) – which is enriching – and at the level of consensus at the global level, where international social policy and agreements should govern the economy and the interests of transnational corporations (Vatican II, 1965: 29, 66; and Pope Francis, 2015: 172–73).

Therefore, as previously noted, the exercise of decrease, not as control of excess, but as the axis of existence is the key to the generation of alternative economies. And so, settle on austerity as a way of life: learning to live from needs and not desires. This means that it is necessary to reduce consumption and to balance the recycling processes of nature (González Reyes, 2010: 127). Austerity in relation to others generates cooperation and equity. It balances resources and breaks the capitalist game.

Practising austerity encourages a change in individual vital priorities by focusing not on the repressed desires of not having, but on the awareness that happiness comes from somewhere other than consumption or accumulation. The moderation of consumption involves becoming aware that each of us is responsible for the social and ecological effects of what we buy and consume, and acting accordingly.

In this sense, we will have to address the different aspects of our lives that can decrease: energy use at home, water, recycling and reuse of garbage, food, cleaning and

hygiene, furniture and household goods, transportation, and travel, media, money, savings and taxes... In the background of this review the evangelical values of austerity, sobriety and transformative commitment must be taken into account.

The evangelical commitment focuses the ecological, political, social and economic commitments towards the conservation and care of the planet's biodiversity in order to make the world a fairer and more pleasant place to live. Only from within our day-to-day situation can reality be transformed. Consuming differently, doing something to relocate, redistribute, reduce, recycle, reuse, etc. To save in order to make savings, become a source of wealth for others. Buy, thinking what face is behind the label, what hands have made what we wear, what we eat. Consume, taking into account the cycles of nature, the local cycles, and the people who manufacture and produce.

In short, to take into account the unfortunate people in this world, those who do not win, and who suffer violence and exclusion. It is the Christological key that makes us put the other first in our priorities. We cannot forget that decrease promotes the recycling of material wastes, but also seeks to rehabilitate the excluded (Latouche, 2009). The best recycling is to dispose of less, and the best form of social rehabilitation is to avoid exclusion.

Creating an Eco-sustainable Culture: Education, Reconciliation and Conversion

Given the precariousness and violence of 80 per cent of the world's population, which increases environmental problems and climate change, a commitment to the future is to link Education, Peace and Ecology. Now, more than ever, we cannot educate if we do not consider the grand universe in need of harmony. We need a new type of education that addresses land use in a different way. An education where the cooperative option teaches ecological virtues (Pope Francis, 2015: 88) by reducing the violence of abuse and exploitation of bodies and nature and allowing a peaceful, and harmonious coexistence in solidarity (Boff, 2015: 5–30 here 13). To recover hospitality as a common value, being aware of our common habitation, is the aim.

A key to this recovery of hospitality is nonviolence. Active non-violence is a way of truly showing how unity, through dialogue and acceptance, is more important and fruitful than conflict. Conflict situations in the world can be tackled from understanding and compassion. The Encyclical *Laudato Si* says that tensions and opposites can 'reach a multi-unit entity that engenders new life' (LS 16 and 138). This does not mean that you renounce what you are, one's own identity or singularity, one's culture or values, but you can live together by preserving 'the valuable potentialities of conflicting polarities' (Pope Francis, 2013: 228) and, holding them in common, to grow in happiness and encounter.

In this sense, building the future that we want for our children and grandchildren in community is also to educate in a different model of life, more merciful and more inclusive. To educate in cooperation and not in rivalry, to educate in the ethics of caring and not in aggressiveness, to educate in the integral gaze and not in the small personal history, to educate in empathy and not in the culture that has to be always above the rest, to

educate in acceptance and intervention in conflict and not in refusal to acknowledge problems. All this means ‘to accept to suffer the conflict, to solve it and to transform it in the link of a new process.’ (Pope Francis, 2013: 227).

Endow the Bodies of Hope: Life in an Eschatological Key

In conclusion, experience of God leads us today to endow bodies with hope. The human bodies, of women and men, the bodies of living beings, all of them, that make up the ecological body, that is the universe, need the love of God for fullness of life. In this sense, our life is a river of hope, which permeates the substratum of life, that dust of stars that constitutes us and suffers if it is not fed. In the face of the deterioration of this ecological body, let us propose to feed it day by day as part of our daily routine. A series of principles can help us with this task:

- The principle of resistance: to endow people and nature with strategies of survival, cooperation and reciprocity to be able to face conflict and transform reality from resistance against the evil that comes to us.
- The principle of resilience: to develop learning based on rebuilding ourselves as living beings and connected with the rest, through hospitality and justice. To accompany others in liberation, in personal reconstruction, in the processes of conversion, in the processes of reconciliation.
- The principle of creativity: to opt for the exploration of opportunities and for the assumption of risks. If we want to change the world we must let ourselves be led by the Spirit that ‘blows where it wills’ (John 3, 8).

We are faced with a *kairos*, that is, a process of new self-understanding, where interdependent synergies of a vital ‘whole’ are built. A time where the powers and hierarchies move towards relational and cooperative aspects as a way of multiplying life. A time of regeneration of caring as mechanisms of growth and sustainability. In this, inevitably and by way of a sketch of another article, women have much to say (Gebara, 1998: 84–105). We have the opportunity to lay the foundations of a new network of societies and cultures willing to care for the world inherited from the Love of God. A Love of God that loves us from our own diversity and pushes us to continue with his/her creative and generative work of superabundant life.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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