

**RECOVERING THE MESOAMERICAN INDIGENOUS
COSMOCENTRIC VISION TO REORIENT
CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY**

A Synthesis Paper by

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presented to

The Faculty of the

Jesuit School of Theology

of Santa Clara University

in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Master of Theological Studies

Berkeley, California

January 2023

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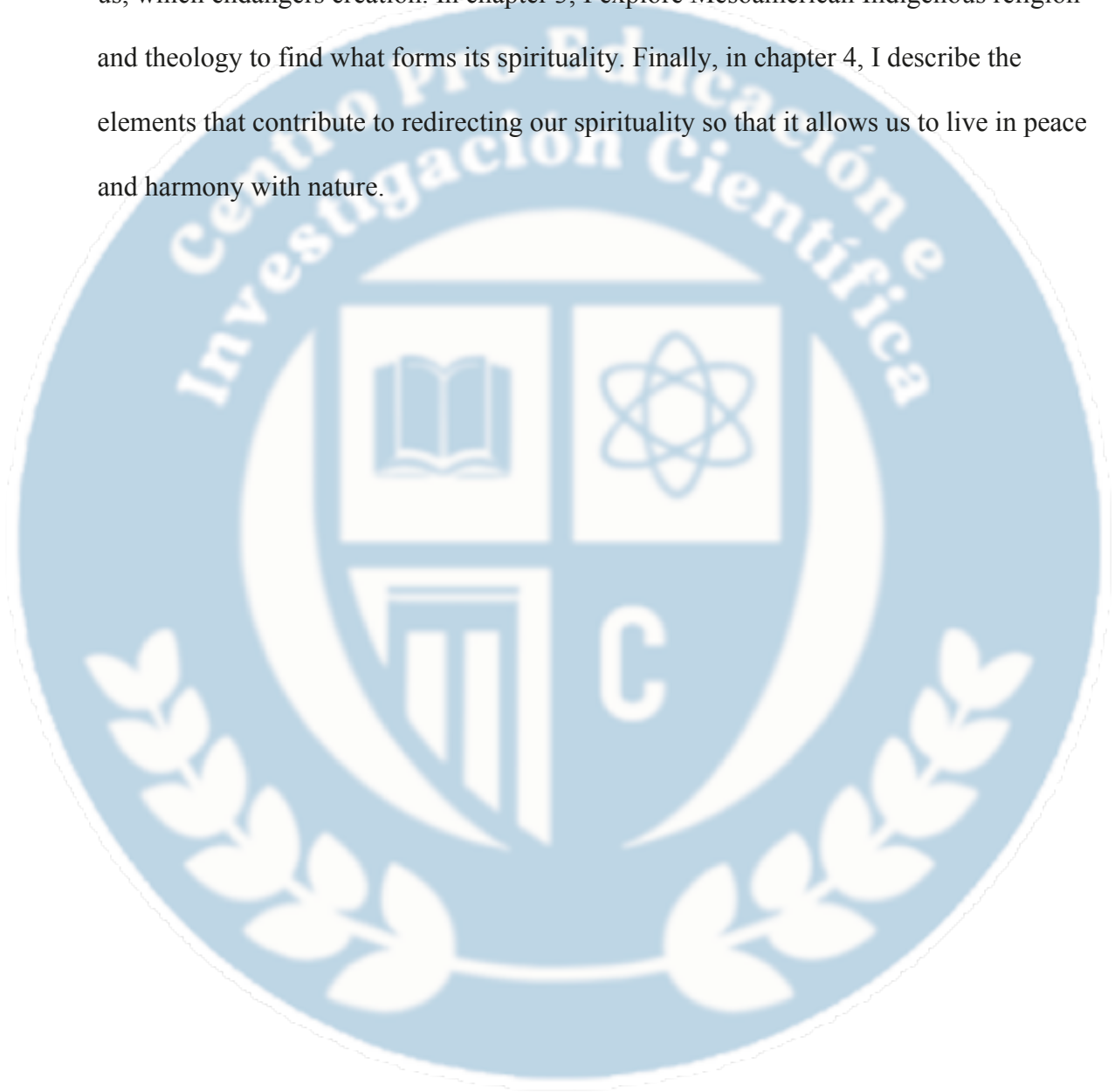
Introduction

Everywhere we look, we find signs of the environmental crisis in which we are immersed. Rivers contaminated with wastewater, plastic in the oceans, deforestation, destruction of hills by mining, car and industrial emissions into the air, and so on. It is undeniable the deterioration that nature has suffered in recent centuries. The human being is responsible for the decline of the environment because we see nature as a resource to be exploited, and we believe that we have the right to use it to our interests. This attitude towards nature has led us to endanger it. Those ideas are part of our beliefs and values fostered by our spirituality.

We live in a world dominated by Western capitalist thought (founded on dualism, hyper-individualism, consumption, separation, market, progress, growth, and so on) that dominates economic and cultural aspects. Its hegemony is such that it has become a religion that provides a spirituality. That is, the capitalist lifestyle gives meaning to the lives of billions of people on the planet. Capitalism is giving answers to people's existential questions. It does not offer a suitable solution, as we can see from the disaster it caused, but it is an answer that billions of people have accepted and internalized. This is the spirituality that has damaged the planet. We must ask ourselves how we can reorient our spirituality so that it will be good for the Earth.

I propose that recovering and revaluing Indigenous spirituality can nurture and reorient our spirituality to achieve harmony with the environment. To achieve this, I use history and anthropology to recover Mesoamerican indigenous religion and cosmovision,

then to dialogue with Christian theology, particularly spirituality. As a first step in chapter 1, I state the position from which I make this reflection. Next, in chapter 2, I describe how I understand spirituality and the characteristics of spirituality that govern us, which endangers creation. In chapter 3, I explore Mesoamerican Indigenous religion and theology to find what forms its spirituality. Finally, in chapter 4, I describe the elements that contribute to redirecting our spirituality so that it allows us to live in peace and harmony with nature.



Chapter 1

Who are We?

We have been Sent to Share Something Good

When something good happens to us, we need to tell it. At least, that's what I've experienced. Throughout my life, many good things have happened to me. Among them, one of the most important events happened during my first Spiritual Exercises. In that experience, I learned that God really loves me because he has always been by my side. I vividly remember how I wanted to shout it to the world. I wanted everyone to know that the slogan "God loves you" was not just true but real, and I wanted everyone to rejoice, just as I was. I wanted to share the good news I received. It seems to me that this is the experience of Jesus' disciples. Something valuable happened to them, which allowed them to see reality and God in a new way, which gave them life, liberated them, and gave them meaning. Therefore, they felt the urgent need to share that valuable thing they received because how can I not speak if your voice burns me inside?¹

Something good has happened to me, and I need to communicate it. To whom and how to do it? I want to share this good news with the people around me, and for them to listen to me and understand me, I must use their language. I must speak to them from their social, political, economic, cultural, and religious circumstances. In other words, I want to transmit the good and worthy one that has been revealed to me with people who are like me, to my people, and to do it, I must use our language, that is, our context.

¹ Phrase from the song "*El profeta*" (The Prophet) that speaks of the experience of Jeremiah. In particular, the phrase *¿cómo no hablar si tu voz me quema dentro?* (How not to speak if your voice burns me inside) refers to Jr 20:9.

Moreover, I am not the only one with something good to share. My people also have it. God spoke to my people. The Tlaxcalans also received something valuable that they must share. What has been revealed particularly to me is part of the revelation that God has made to my people throughout our existence as a people. However, before I describe the good news received by my people, I must explain who we are.

We are from Tlaxcala

I was born and raised in a town called Papalotla in the south of the state of Tlaxcala, the smallest state in the country.² The state is located in the center-south of the country. It is a high land, just over 2000 meters above sea level, surrounded by three large mountains. To the southwest are Popocatepetl and Iztaccíhuatl Mountains. To the east is the Malintzi Mountain (formerly known as Matlalcueyetl Mountain). Papalotla is located at the foot of this mountain, on its southwest side. The people who inhabit this region descend from the Tlaxcalans, who were a group of independent peoples who shared language and culture. These peoples formed a confederation to organize and avoid Mexica domination. Thus, the people of my town descend from these Tlaxcalans. These peoples were traditionally peasants and warriors. They planted corn, beans, fava beans, pumpkin, amaranth, and raised turkeys. As a peasant people, their relationship with nature was close. From the land, its food was born and from the mountain came the water that made it grow and mature.

² The territory of Tlaxcala state is around 4000 km² (1500 sq mi).

You are Mestizo

Since I was a child, I learned that Tlaxcala was a state that is part of a nation, the Mexican nation. This country is a mestizo people that emerged from the mixture of two cultures: the Spanish and the Indigenous. Therefore, Tlaxcala is a mestizo people, just like all the Mexican people. It is what I was always told in school and the media. For this reason, every Mexican and Tlaxcalan have naively assumed the mestizo identity. We have accepted the narrative of *mestizaje* (racial miscegenation and cultural fusion). We don't criticize or question it; we just assume it. However, we are a people who have suffered the violence of Western colonialism which is manifested through the narrative of *mestizaje*.

We have received a simplistic and naive version of our history about *mestizaje*. On the one hand, we reduce the events in the first half of the sixteenth century to the concept of "The Conquest." In this condensed version, the Spaniards arrived in these lands, allied themselves with some indigenous peoples, especially with my Tlaxcalan people. The Spaniards defeated, thanks to their superior technology and the help they received from the indigenous "traitors", that is, us, the Mexica, the dominant people of that time, and conquered the city of Tenochtitlan, the largest city of that time. As a result, this began the biological and cultural mixture from which the Mexican people emerged.

I am not Mestizo

Many historians disagree with this simplified version of the “Spanish conquest of Mexico”³ although this simplified version is present in the minds of most of the Mexican population. However, just as we have a simplified vision of conquest, we have a naive vision of *mestizaje*. This naive vision sees *mestizaje* as the natural consequence of meeting two cultures that, when mixed, produce a third that integrates the best of both.

Nevertheless, Fernando Navarrete, a Mexican historian, argues that *mestizaje*, more than a historical fact, is an ideology imposed on our country for just over a century and aims to make us believe that we belong to a single race: the *mestiza*.⁴ In other words, to be *mestizo* is an identity created to homogenize and unify the country. Under this narrative, the history of Mexico can and should be understood as the history of the triumph of *mestizaje* and the *mestizo* race.⁵ Therefore, *mestizos* are the sole owners of the bright future that awaits Mexico.⁶ According to this narrative, to be Mexican means to be

³ For many, “the conquest of Mexico” was not done by the Spanish, but by indigenous people antagonistic to the Mexica. For example, Matthew Restall, a professor at Pennsylvania State University, talks about the direct involvement of the Indigenous people in overthrowing the great prehispanic empires. (Matthew Restall, *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), chapter 3) and in *Indian Conquistadors: Indigenous Allies in the Conquest of Mesoamerica*, several essays describe indigenous participation in the conquest of America (Laura E. Matthew and Michel R. Oudijk, *Indian Conquistadors: Indigenous Allies in the Conquest of Mesoamerica* (University of Oklahoma Press, 2007). There are even some historians, such as the Spanish Esteban Mira Caballos, who claim that the “conquest” was actually a civil war, which is a rather debatable statement. (Manuel Llorente, “Hernán Cortés y los españoles fueron un pequeño grupo dentro de una guerra civil en México”, *El Mundo*, 17 abril 2021 <https://www.elmundo.es/cultura/literatura/2021/04/17/60797d9cfdddf46258b45f1.html> (accessed January 10, 2023)).

⁴ Federico Navarrete Linares, *México racista: una denuncia* [Racist Mexico: A Denunciation] (México, D.F: Grijalbo, 2016) Kindle version, 41. Translation mine.

⁵ Navarrete, 1159.

⁶ Navarrete, 1166.

mestizo, and to be mestizo means to be Mexican.⁷ The establishment of this ideology unified and homogenized most of the Mexican population under the label mestizo, however in reality, such *mestizaje* did not occur or, at least, not in the way that the same *mestizaje* narrative proclaims it.

No one would question the reality of biological mixing between indigenous people and Europeans. However, blending genes does not produce a new culture. Navarrete asserts that what determines a person's culture, identity and way of thinking is their social environment, education, friendships, and cultural references, not their 'racial' origin.⁸ In other words, identity is more strongly influenced by the culture into which a person was born and grew up than their race.

Mestizaje was not a cultural process either. It is usually stated that cultural *mestizaje* began with the Spanish conquest and, above all, with Catholic evangelization that united the ancient indigenous traditions and wisdom with the Spanish religion through, many times, syncretism. In reality, what has happened is the subjugation and imposition of Western European culture so much so that today most Mexicans have a way of life more similar to Western European culture than to the indigenous way of life. Of course, there are elements of the indigenous world that we have incorporated, however, in our resulting culture, the features of the Western way of life prevail more. The terrible thing is that "the idea of cultural *mestizaje* has privileged the mixture and unification as the end and engine of Mexican history and has denied the plurality of our

⁷ Navarrete, 1175.

⁸ Navarrete, 1242.

population and cultures. Just as racial *mestizaje* exalted the homogeneity of the mestizo race, the cultural one defines a distinct mestizo culture that becomes the only national or the dominant one.⁹ In practical terms, this dominant mestizo culture has always meant Europeanizing indigenous people, never *Indigenizing*¹⁰ the descendants of Europeans.

Even though we have always been told it began with the conquest, *mestizaje* started in the nineteenth century. *Mestizaje* was not the natural culmination of a process of 300 years (the time that lasted the Colony) but a radically new phenomenon produced by capitalist modernization and state consolidation, which implied the change of languages, culture, and political ideology of the majority of the population, as well as the definition of a new national identity.¹¹ It was a process of political, social, economic, and cultural confluence. The result of this confluence was a clear unification of Mexican society. In Navarrete's view, this unification meant that, as had never happened in pre-Hispanic or colonial history, between 1850 and 1950, most Mexicans began to speak the same language (Spanish), to share political values (liberalism), social values (the aspiration to economic modernity), cultural identities (nationalist culture) and to consider themselves participants in the same social group: defined in a deceptive way as the 'mestizo race.'¹² A dominant form of being Mexican was created. Navarrete comments that the 'ideal Mexican' had to speak Spanish and have liberal political convictions; he was to yearn for economic prosperity for himself and the whole nation, according to the

⁹ Navarrete, 1313.

¹⁰ To indigenize would mean that the descendants of the Europeans would be raised as indigenous.

¹¹ Navarrete, 1454.

¹² Navarrete, 1513,1516.

rules of the capitalist economy; therefore, he had to own and defend his individual property, both of the land and commerce or industries; moreover, he had to dress in clothes that followed the fashions defined in Europe and the United States, as well as practice modern customs and defend cosmopolitan and secular ideas copied from those places. However, he also had to be Catholic and Guadalupian in his private life and sexist and patriarchal in his family behavior.¹³

Navarrete concludes that the new Mexican mestizos, therefore, were not the product of a 'racial' and 'cultural' mixture, but of a political and social change that created a new identity.¹⁴ That identity was closer to the Western culture of the Creole elites than to any of the indigenous or African traditions that coexisted in the territory of our country.¹⁵ In sum, the European descendants then created mestizo identity as an ideological program to keep their power. Such a program has meant the denial, invisibility, and, finally, cultural extermination of peoples not identified as mestizos.

To be Tlaxcalan is to be a De-indigenized Indigenous

Therefore, if being mestizo is not an essential and defining part of our identity because it is only an ideological program to perpetuate colonialism and elite power, then

¹³ Navarrete, 1531.

¹⁴ Navarrete, 1545.

¹⁵ Navarrete, 1547.

who are we Tlaxcalans? Yásnaya Aguilar, a Mixe¹⁶ linguist and activist, can help us clarify our identity:

If we consider that in 1820 approximately 70% of the Mexican population spoke an indigenous language as their mother tongue and that now we are only about 6%, we can see that the vast majority that is enunciated mestizo, is a population that was de-indigenized during the last two hundred years; population to which the structural racism of the State needed to narrate as mestizo, rather than indigenous, for which it snatched language, cultural elements and belonging to ascribe it to a more whitened identity, called mestiza, a Mexican identity built with mixed components of different places, peoples and traditions. The objective of the Mexican State has been to *amestizar* (turn into mestizo) the entire indigenous population, or what is the same, to de-indigenize.¹⁷

Aguilar agrees with Navarrete that mestizo identity was a creation of the Mexican State. Also, they agree that mestizo identity was imposed on the indigenous population. In addition, she calls this process de-indigenization. That is who we are. That is who I am. We are a de-indigenized indigenous people. During these five hundred years, especially during the last 200, the ruling elites have taken it upon themselves to de-indigenize us. The process of de-indigenization has been long, but it has accelerated since the second half of the nineteenth century. At least in my town Nahuatl was no longer

¹⁶ Indigenous people who live in the northern part of Oaxaca and speak a language that has the same name.

¹⁷ Yásnaya Elena Aguilar Gil, “¿Un homenaje a nuestras raíces? La apropiación cultural indebida en México” [A Tribute to Our Roots? Cultural Misappropriation in Mexico], *Gatopardo*, Jun 3, 2020, <https://gatopardo.com/opinion/un-homenaje-a-nuestras-raices-la-apropiacion-cultural-indebida-en-mexico/> (access April 11, 2021). Translation mine.

spoken, our indigenous language, and work in the fields ceased to be the main activity of the people. My great-grandfather was a peasant whose primary language was Nahuatl although he also learned to speak Spanish. My grandfather worked as a laborer in a textile factory in addition to working in the fields. His primary language was Spanish although he also spoke Nahuatl. My father was no longer a farmer although he occasionally participated in these tasks. His mother tongue was Spanish, and even though he understood some of Nahuatl, he could never speak it. He had different jobs throughout his life, but being a taxi driver was his last job, and it was the one where he lasted the longest. I am not a farmer either, but I still had to help my family on the day of planting and harvesting corn. I went to college and got a degree in chemical engineering. Unfortunately, I only learned to speak Spanish. In fact, during my childhood, it was rare to hear someone speak Nahuatl. In four generations, the lives of my people were radically transformed. Now, only 10.5% of people work in the fields,¹⁸ which was the main activity at the beginning of the last century. At that time, 90% of the population was indigenous,¹⁹ with Nahuatl as their mother tongue. Now, only 2.13% speak Nahuatl.²⁰ In

¹⁸ Gobierno de México, "Distribución fuerza laboral total por ocupaciones en Tlaxcala" [Total Labor Force Distribution by Occupations in Tlaxcala], *Data México*, <https://datamexico.org/es/profile/geo/tlaxcala-tl?growthSelector1=indicatorOption#employment> (accessed December 3, 2022).

¹⁹ Hugo G. Nutini, "Tlaxcala" in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Mesoamerican Cultures*, ed. Dávid Carrasco (Oxford University Press, 2006), <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780195108156.001.0001/acref-9780195108156-e-648> (accessed December 12, 2022).

²⁰ Gobierno de México, "Principales lenguas indígenas habladas por la población de 3 años y más en Tlaxcala" [Main indigenous languages spoken by the population aged 3 years and over in Tlaxcala], *Data México*, <https://datamexico.org/es/profile/geo/tlaxcala-tl?growthSelector1=indicatorOption&populationType=totalPopulation#indigenous-dialect> (accessed December 3, 2022).

four generations, many peoples became de-indigenized by entering entirely into the dynamics of the narrative of *mestizaje* that privileges the Western way of life.

The idea of progress, a characteristic of Western life that the narrative of *mestizaje* imposes, was embedded in our understanding of the world: it is necessary to civilize ourselves and our environment. These notions of progress and civilization have been interpreted as the domination of nature. It has been separating us more and more from nature. We have created barriers to separate, distance, and 'protect' ourselves from nature. Dualism, another characteristic of Western culture, has become embedded in our way of seeing the world. We begin to think of ourselves as beings separate from nature. I can see this separation in some of our practices. A friend said something like this after asking him why he killed a spider we found in his living room: because it does not belong here. Inside is my house and that spider's house is outside. I do not hurt animals I find outside my house because that is their place, but it is not their place inside. From this way of conceiving the world, houses are the natural places for human beings while everything outside them belongs to nature. In our space, we are free to do whatever we want. In the space of nature, no. That's a wild place. Our space is civilized. This kind of thinking has shaped the way we build our homes. Appropriating a space means removing the wild, that is, eliminating insects, grass, and dust. It is to take nature out of our space or leave a 'domesticated' nature (potted plants and pets). Consequently, many people have preferred to cut down the trees in their garden and cover it with cement because progress dictates that nature should be outside our homes, not inside.

In our style of work, it is also evident that the notion of progress fostered by the *mestizaje* narrative was embedded. The people of my village changed their peasant

vocation dragged by the ideal of progress. People stopped planting the land and started to go to work in the factories because it was a safer way to “forge ahead.” Parents began to instill in their children the idea that studying was better than working in the fields. In this way, the relationship with the land, plants, animals, and even the climate was lost. Instead of planting their land, they built houses on them. When we stopped farming, we also stopped producing our food. When I was a child, I accompanied my grandmother to the *milpa* to collect pumpkin flowers, zucchini, corn, *huitlacoques*, *quelites*, *quintoniles*, and purslane to eat. Our table was always full of products we planted or grew naturally in the field or our gardens. Eating any ultra-processed products was a rarity. Nowadays, these foods are part of the regular diet because we stopped working the land to produce our food and went to the factories, which absorb all our energy and time and is also a reason for the disconnection with nature and even our traditions and families. According to The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), a Mexican worker works 2128 hrs a year, while an American works 1791 hrs and a German 1349 hrs.²¹ According to our laws, the workday lasts 8 hrs for six days a week, but the reality is different. Many workers work longer than the lawful 8 hours. They spend more than 10 hours on their jobs which, if added to the commuting time, can be about 12 hours. With those schedules, dedicating time to other activities is impossible. Rest has become a luxury. Going for a walk, walking through our fields, or hiking on our mountain is almost impossible. The hectic pace of Western capitalism that the narrative of *mestizaje* imposes on us disconnects us from nature, our culture, and our families. It leaves no room for

²¹ Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, “Hours worked (indicator),” (Paris: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2003), <https://data.oecd.org/emp/hours-worked.htm> (accessed on 17 January 2023).

introspection or cultivating a relationship with the Earth or others because we always live in a hurry.

In conclusion, I belong to a people who have suffered a colonization process that has materialized through the narrative of *mestizaje* in the last two centuries. Tlaxcala is a de-indigenized indigenous people.²² I want to share what God has revealed to me about him with my people, and they also have something valuable to share about God. We will not be able to do this if we continue using the *mestizaje* narrative to define ourselves. The narrative of de-indigenization opens the door for us to recover and reassess what was revealed to us and, later, taken away. This is our context.

²² Affirming that we are a de-indigenized indigenous people may be redundant since talking about a de-indigenization process implies that one is or was indigenous (depending on the progress of the de-indigenization process). However, to define ourselves as a de-indigenized indigenous people instead of just a de-indigenized people is to reclaim what was taken from us. It means beginning to recover and revalue what the racism of the *mestizaje* narrative discarded for "not being worthy and civilized."

Chapter 2

The Spirituality that has Endangered Us

What do you Understand by Spirituality?

Pope Francis calls us to ecological conversion to address the environmental crisis.²³ This ecological conversion is spiritual, therefore, it has to do with our spirituality. What is spirituality? This is difficult because there is no universal way to understand it.

Sandra Schneider and Rossano Zas Friz are Catholic theologians who see spirituality similarly. From an academic point of view, Sandra Schneider defines spirituality as “the experience of conscious involvement in the project of life integration through self-transcendence toward the ultimate value one perceives.”²⁴ Schneider’s definition emphasizes that spirituality is a conscious experience. That means that spirituality is neither an abstract idea, theory, nor ideology, and it is not an accidental experience or something that just happens. Also, this definition stresses that spirituality is holistic and has a positive direction. Equally, Rossano Zas Friz sees spirituality as the dynamic of the active and passive transformation of the person because of the relationship he has established with meaning, with that ‘something’ that he has sought,

²³ Pope Francis, *Encyclical Letter Laudato si' of the Holy Father Francis on Care for our Common Home* (Vatican City, 2015), 217.

²⁴ Sandra M. Schneiders, "Religion and Spirituality: Strangers, Rivals, or Partners?" *The Santa Clara Lectures* 6, no.2 (Feb. 6, 2000), 4.

chosen, and received.²⁵ Zas Friz's definition emphasizes the transformative aspect of spiritual experience. For him, spirituality is to quest for and reception of meaning, which entails a progressive transformation of the person that depends on their chosen meaning. Both theologians consider spirituality an utterly human characteristic not necessarily linked to religion. However, their academic activity focuses on Christian spirituality, and they think that spirituality implies a conscious relationship with the ultimate horizon (God or union with God), which gives meaning and guides life.

From a broader point of view, spirituality can be defined as an attitude of the human person in facing the finitude and radicality of human existence, referring to certain deep and vital values that lead us to think, feel, and act.²⁶ In this perspective, spirituality becomes an area that contains everything associated not only with religion or transcendence but also with the desire for well-being.²⁷ A person's spirituality would be the attitude based on what that person considers their ultimate horizon that shapes their way of perceiving and ordering their world from which their actions arise. In this broad sense of understanding spirituality, each person has a spirituality because, as Peter Feldmeier, a Professor of Catholic Studies at the University of Toledo, Ohio, states,

²⁵ Rossano Zas Friz de Col, "La búsqueda de sentido y de espiritualidad en tiempos post-cristianos" [In Search of Meaning and Spirituality in times Post-Christian] *Ignaziana*, Special Number (2018), 26. Translation mine.

²⁶ Jesús Manuel García Gutierrez, *Manual de teología espiritual. Epistemología e interdisciplinariedad* [Manual of Spiritual Theology. Epistemology and Interdisciplinarity] (Salamanca: Sígueme, 2015), quoted in Adelson Araújo dos Santos, "Amazonian Indigenous Spirituality and Care for the 'Common Home'" *The Civiltà Cattolica*, no. 1908, (August 2019), <https://www.laciviltacattolica.com/amazonian-indigenous-spirituality-and-care-for-the-common-home/> (Accessed July 12, 2022)

²⁷ Adelson Araújo dos Santos, "Amazonian Indigenous Spirituality and Care for the 'Common Home'" *The Civiltà Cattolica*, no. 1908, (August 2019), <https://www.laciviltacattolica.com/amazonian-indigenous-spirituality-and-care-for-the-common-home/> (Accessed July 12, 2022).

“everyone has ideas about what they think makes life meaningful or how they pursue the ultimate, even if they haven’t articulated what exactly that means.”²⁸ This view emphasizes that all of us have a spirituality because we give, consciously or unconsciously, meaning to our lives. Although each person has a different spirituality, that is, spirituality is personal. It has a community dimension because spirituality is also shared with others. There are groups of people who share ultimate horizons and ways of perceiving and ordering the world.

The Spirituality that has Endangered the Planet

Consequently, we all have a spirituality that can be shared with more people even if it is lived with a personal nuance. These ways of perceiving and ordering the world provide direction and meaning to people lives. That is, they lead people to their transformation or growth. However, not all spiritualities lead us to fulfillment, nor have they been good for others and the planet. In fact, the spiritualities that govern us have led us to the environmental crisis in which we find ourselves. From this perspective, the crisis is not due to a lack of spirituality but to the proliferation of incomplete or deliberately perverse spiritualities. This is why the Pope asks us for an ecological conversion, a spiritual conversion that means completing or correcting our spirituality.

Although we live in a world in which different spiritualities have developed, there is a spirituality that has become globalized. Such spirituality acquires a particular form

²⁸ Peter Feldmeier, "What is Spirituality?" *U.S. Catholic*, Vol. 81, No. 5 (May 2016), 20.

depending on where it sits, but it has elements that distinguish it. It is a capitalist spirituality. This spirituality that emerged in the West is the spirituality that has put our planet at risk.

One might think that capitalism is only an economic system. However, its ability to give a foundation and horizon, that is, a meaning to our existence by teaching us what the world is and our role in it also makes it a spirituality. Often, the obstacle that prevents us from seeing capitalism as a spirituality is our insistence on seeing it as a system wholly removed from the religious or spiritual realm. We naively see it as part of the secularity of our society without paying attention to the role it plays in shaping our spirituality and, consequently, our actions.

In simple and simplified words, Capitalism's goal is to accumulate capital. To achieve this, it commodifies everything, both work and needs, as well as the animate and inanimate beings of creation because it sees them as resources available to be sold and bought. David R. Loy, a professor at Bunkyo University, Japan, describes our economic system as our religion in which "the discipline of economics is less a science than the theology of that religion, and its god, the Market, has become a vicious circle of ever-increasing production and consumption by pretending to offer a secular salvation."²⁹ Loy argues that the Market is a true world religion because it works like a religion. That is, the beliefs and values that Capitalism fosters grounds us by teaching us what the world is and what our role in this world is. In this spirituality, the ultimate goal is happiness, and the way to achieve it is to accumulate as many assets. Shopping and getting another

²⁹ David R. Loy, "The Religion of the Market," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. 65, no. 2 (Summer 1997), 275.

product, even if not needed, provides the rewarding but momentary experience that indicates that you are going down the road to reaching that fulfillment. This secular spirituality generally promotes an illusion of individual well-being, liberty, happiness, progress, success, growth, and competitiveness as its fundamental and necessary values, making it an imperative to defend and pursue capitalism. However, promoting one spirituality with these values, especially individualism and competition, generates abuse, injustice, and inequality. That is why this spirituality could be considered perverse and is what has brought us to this socio-environmental crisis.

Where does that Spirituality come from?

Much of the Western world is based on Christianity spirituality, but this has been displaced or mixed with capitalist spirituality.³⁰ From the perspective of Rossano Zaslavsky, Christian spirituality has been displaced because the spiritual search as a real possibility of a transcendent and transforming personal relationship with the God revealed in Christianity has disappeared from the current social imaginary of Western societies.³¹ Zaslavsky observes that when people begin a spiritual search, they have stopped turning to the Christian tradition to guide it. In addition, Zaslavsky, following the work of Charles Taylor, describes the origin of this process in the Protestant Reformation with an important medieval antecedent, nominalism.³² Which, without questioning the divine

³⁰ O, perhaps, is precisely the Christian spirituality which has led to the emergence of capitalist spirituality.

³¹ Zaslavsky, 18.

³² Zaslavsky, 10.

realities, maintains, however, that ‘good’ is not what is good ‘in itself,’ but what is ‘good for God,’ and what is good for him is what he wants. God’s will is what makes something good, not the thing itself. In this way, the ‘final cause’ is diluted, and the relationship with creation changes. It ceases to be the place of contemplation of God’s work and becomes the raw material to be transformed according to the divine will.³³ The Protestant Reformation, with nominalism as its basis and using its formulation of salvation by faith alone, calls for a life of perfection that gives rise to a voluntarist spirituality, centered on the acquisition of personal and social virtue to achieve earthly prosperity, increasingly disconnected from a meta-historical realization. God is still considered the source of reason, and man is his image and likeness, but now the focus is on obeying his will by fulfilling individual and social perfection.³⁴

The Reformation, in contact with the Enlightenment, leads to deism in which God remains the creator and benefactor, but has left in the hands of humans the realization of God’s project, without God intervening especially, much less in a miraculous way. That is why we must trust in the forces that God has deposited in human nature to fulfill this divine plan without resorting to a provident and interventionist God.³⁵ This deism has a logical consequence: it is necessary to free oneself from the idea of religion that obscures its true meaning through the notion of ‘revelation’ since reason suffices to realize the divine plans.³⁶ In this way, a critique of religion arises, as well as of faith, deism, and

³³ Zas Friz, 11.

³⁴ Zas Friz, 12.

³⁵ Zas Friz, 12-13.

³⁶ Zas Friz, 13.

humanism.³⁷ At this point, Western spirituality detaches itself from its Christian roots because it begins to spread a self with a strong sense of self-power as a consequence of its ability to order itself and the world, linked to its scientific capacity. An inner mental space is created in which the self is assumed as a self-sufficient and self-confident pattern, without the need for an explicit or implicit reference to God.³⁸ In this way, we arrive at the current situation in which human beings can give meaning to themselves and nature without the need to appeal to religion or its spirituality but to their own interiority. Now everyone must seek 'his/her' meaning³⁹ and, by discarding the offered one by Christian spirituality, finds order and direction for their life in capitalism. However, although capitalism offers a desirable meaning for people, in the end, it cannot fulfill it for everyone but only for some. For the majority, it only brings inequality, injustice, and pain. Even so, hoping to achieve happiness through material wealth, most accept this perverse system, which is incomplete because it does not offer a meta-historical horizon. That is why, in many people, there is a feeling of disenchantment and anxiety or desire for transcendence.

Mixed Christian Spirituality

Christian religions and their spiritualities have been displaced by secular spirituality. Zas Friz's ideas have been used here to describe how it happened in the West,

³⁷ Zas Friz, 14.

³⁸ Zas Friz, 14.

³⁹ Zas Friz, 17.

especially in Europe. However, in societies that have remained Christian, such as Mexico, why do we find the same adverse effects that capitalist spirituality produces? Moreover, what about Christians in Western countries? Has their spiritual practice remained alien to the influence of capitalism? Although people still consider themselves Christians, what really directs their lives is capitalism. The Christian meta-historical horizon coexists (mixed or in competition) with the capitalist historical horizon.

Western Catholics practice a spirituality in which Christian elements coexist with capitalist ones. This spirituality, along with the overtly capitalist one, have adverse consequences that have endangered the continuity of all life on the planet. That is why it is necessary to convert, that is, to reorient our spirituality. To achieve this, some have tried to return to the sources, to the Scriptures, to recover their wisdom by rereading them under our current context.⁴⁰ Such an effort is laudable and useful. However, as descendants of a Mesoamerican people, we have another tradition, besides the Christian, to which we can also return to reorient our spirituality. The Tlaxcalan people, like the people of Israel, also developed a way of relating to divinity, nature, and others. The Christian and the secularized Western visions replaced that form. It is time to recover our wisdom, identity, and spirituality and offer it to Western Christianity.

⁴⁰ See *The Earth Story in Genesis* edited by Norman C. Speak & Shirley Wurst (England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000) and *The Earth Story in The New Testament* edited by Norman C. Speak & Vicky Balabanski (England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002) for a series of ecological rereadings of the Scriptures presented to change our relationship with God and with creation.

Chapter 3

Our Spiritual Tradition

Mesoamerican Indigenous Revelation

Revelations have occurred at different times and places. In fact, revelations occurred before the arrival of Christianity to the Mesoamerican people from God. Their understanding of divinity led them to create religious practices and thereby institutionalize a religion that, upon the arrival of the Spaniards, was destroyed. Still, the religiosity of these peoples was preserved and now manifests itself within the practices of the Catholic religion. What God revealed about Godself to the Mesoamerican peoples is still present. I will try to describe it.

Eleazar López Hernández, an Indigenous theologian, divides the process of knowledge of God before Christianity of Mesoamerican peoples into four stages. The first is the nomadic one, in which nature is God's most important mediation. It is the sacrament of his presence since God is everything, and everything has to do with God. God is seen as the provident mother who gives us what we need and nourishes us at the right time. Human beings and animals are children of this God-mother, but the human being is called to maintain the harmony of the cosmos with respect and a harmonious relationship within that mediation of the presence and the divine will, which is nature. When the human being does not fulfill that duty, then disaster occurs. Like the energy of

life, God is lavish in generosity but also unpredictable in his capacity for destruction.

This cosmocentric vision allows harmonious coexistence with the whole of creation.⁴¹

The second stage is sedentary. This is an anthropotheocentric perspective in which God and man build the world together. God is someone with whom to collaborate, and the human being is a brother/sister, a companion on the way, or a *cuate* (friend). This theological conception elevates the human being to the category of co-creator, and she or he conceives nature as the result of the creative work of God and human beings. The Casa Grande (Big House) must be built among all and for all. The consequence of this theological perspective is that the sacrament of God's presence is now the human being since they organize the world for life with their effort or work. The Quetzalcoatlí ideal has to do with the humanization of God and the deification of human beings. It involved a communal appropriation of the land, a productive technology that was adequate but not aggressive to nature, a use of political power as service, and a God-centered religious perspective that cares about the growth of people's lives.⁴²

The third stage consists of the theological empowerment of urban towns, both the person and the community. That is, it is the conquest of power for life because only by having power can the world be recreated or transformed. In that sense, little by little, power became the sacrament of the presence of God. The idea of God and man was more closely linked to the concept of conquering and of using power as the foundation of the divine and of the human being. To be a worthy representative of God, man must attain

⁴¹ Eleazar López Hernández, *Teología india: antología* [*Theology India: Anthology*] (Cochabamba, Bolivia: Editorial Verbo Divino, 2000) 33-35. Translation mine.

⁴² López Hernández, 35-39.

the same power of God through personal and collective effort. The essence of life is found in the conquest of power, so God is a warrior. He is Huitzilopochtli, and the children of God are those who help him in the creating and maintaining of nature. Knowing how to succeed in combat is fundamental because we can only conquer the human heart in this way. Sacrifices are also justified since if God dies daily to give us life, we must be willing to die with him to give life to the people. Hence the profound meaning of the principle that guides human behavior: we live to die, but we die to live.⁴³

The fourth stage is defined as the spirituality of the return of Quetzalcoatl. In the previous stage, power was an expression of God insofar as it made possible the struggle for the life of all, but by disassociating itself from the life of the poor and concentrating in the hands of a few (of the elite) without any control, it becomes a power for death, something totally opposed to God's designs. The solution to this was to return to the previous theological perspectives, to the return of Quetzalcoatl.⁴⁴

In these four stages Eleazar López describes the knowledge of God that the Mesoamerican peoples attained. However, it is perhaps more correct to say that it was a knowledge of divinity since they venerated many gods. These peoples were classified as polytheists although they did believe that there was a God who generated and conceived of all, Ometéotl. However, this God could be divided into distinct gods,⁴⁵ merge and take different names. Alfredo López Austin, a historian who was a specialist on Aztec

⁴³ López Hernandez, 39-42

⁴⁴ López Hernandez, 42-47

⁴⁵ From his first fission arose Ometecuhli and Omecíhuatl (Lord Two and Woman Two), the father and mother of all gods.

worldview and Mesoamerican religion, asserts that the Mesoamerican pantheon must be understood between the limits of the one God as the unity and origin of all the gods, and the extreme multiplication of the divine substance and its differentiated manifestation throughout the cosmic space.⁴⁶ The latter is because all creatures and things are the creator gods turned into worldly beings through sacrifice.⁴⁷ Each individual, for example, a star, stone, vegetable, animal, or man, is a god encapsulated in heavy, hard, perceptible, and degradable matter.⁴⁸ For this reason, the Mesoamerican peoples saw the world as a sacralized nature because God had created not only each being but God himself was in every being.

Mesoamerican people personalized what was described previously. My people built a relationship with the divinity through Camaxtli. He was the main god of the Tlaxcalan people, and he was the god of war and hunting, representing the vision of God of the urban stage. Camaxtli was the tutelary God of Tlaxcala and, therefore, the largest temple and the most important festival were dedicated to honor him. The second important deity was Matlalcueyetl, the goddess of water, represented by the mountain with the same name. It represents God's vision of the nomadic and sedentary stage. His feast was celebrated in a place called Tlalocan, in the western half of the mountain,

⁴⁶ Alfredo López Austin, "Características generales de la religión de los pueblos nahuas del centro de México en el posclásico tardío" [General Characteristics of the Religion of the Nahua Peoples of Central Mexico in the Late Postclassic] in *Religión de los Pueblos Nahuas* [Religion of the Nahua Peoples], ed. Silvia Limón Olvera (Madrid: Trotta, 2008) 46. Translation mine.

⁴⁷ Several myths show creation from the sacrifice of a god. An example is the myth of the Fifth Sun, in which Nanahuatzin, lord of skin diseases, jumped into a large bonfire to become Tonatiuh, the sun of our era.

⁴⁸ Alfredo López Austin, "Los Mexicas ante el cosmos" [The Mexicas in The Face of The Cosmos], *Arqueología Mexicana* 91 (May 2008): 32. Translation mine.

during the second half of May, when the rainy season was beginning.⁴⁹ Mountains had a special meaning in the Mesoamerican cosmovision. They were conceived as large vessels containing groundwater and were also considered ‘arms of the sea.’⁵⁰ That is, it was believed that the water contained in the mountains was connected underground with the oceans. This was believed because it is common to find springs on the slopes of the mountains and because clouds are formed over their summits to then precipitate in the form of rain over the valleys. They were also important because it was believed that all things came from them since all beings arise and feed from land and water. In addition to being an enormous container, the mountain was the place by which this world connected with the underworld (through the caves that often exist in the mountains) and the sky. Mountains were the portals between the world of human beings and supernatural beings (gods, forces, the dead, etc.). Supernatural beings could cross those doors because they could inhabit all worlds, but human beings could not go (alive) to the underworld or heaven.⁵¹ In addition, the mountains were the representations of some god related to water, and as in the Mesoamerican vision, the divinity was in its representation, then the mountain was that god so that people could start a relationship with them. Generally, people created a relationship with gods to ask for a good rainy season because the god of

⁴⁹ Roberto Suárez Ruiz, *Historia de Tlaxcala del Dr. Andrés Angulo Ramírez* [History of Tlaxcala of Dr. Andres Angulo Ramirez] (Tlaxcala, México: TRLS Ediciones, 2004), 88-89. Translation mine.

⁵⁰ Johanna Broda, “Simbolismo de los volcanes. Los volcanes en la cosmovisión mesoamericana” [Volcano Symbolism. Volcanoes in The Mesoamerican Worldview], *Arqueología Mexicana* 95 (January 2009): 47. Translation mine.

⁵¹ It was believed that the underworld had nine levels. One of them was Tlalocan, the place where Tlaloc resided, an evergreen place full of flowers and fruits, for which reason the first missionaries compared it to heaven. For the Mesoamericans, the underworld must have been a cold and humid place, very different from the Christian idea of hell. On other hand, the sky had 13 levels. Four of them, the lowest, were inhabited by birds, clouds, and stars.

the mountain was who granted rain for life occurred, but also gave death when he sent too much water. The mountain was the container of all goods but also of evils, which was why it was crucial to establish a good relationship with the mountain. Knowing how ancient Tlaxcalan lived their religion is essential to recognize those elements in our actual religious practices.

Mesoamerican Indigenous Revelation and Christianity

With the arrival of the Spaniards to these lands, their alliance with the peoples opposed to the Mexicas, especially with the Tlaxcalans, the fall of Tenochtitlan and the wars of conquest of northern and southern Mesoamerica, began a new process generally known as Evangelization or Spiritual Conquest. In this process, what God revealed about Godself to the Mesoamerican peoples clashed with what was revealed in the Judeo-Christian tradition.

According to López Hernández, during evangelization, Mesoamerican theologies experienced five processes. First, the struggle of gods where either the Christian God emerged victorious with the death of the Mesoamerican indigenous God or the Mesoamerican indigenous God emerged triumphant with the death of the Christian God. Second, a religious juxtaposition that means Mesoamerican peoples generally put the newest ways of understanding and living the experience of God next to the old traditions. Thus, when they received the Christian way of understanding God, they placed it next to their traditional way of understanding him, which produced the Mesoamerican indigenous peoples living a bi-religiosity, which, when they could not do it openly, they

practiced it secretly. Third, the religious superposition which consisted of the temples' baptism and indigenous religious manifestations. These 'baptisms' meant putting some markedly Christian above or in the first place, so what was performed there from now on was no longer directed to the Mesoamerican indigenous divinity but to the Christian God. Fourth, the substitution which meant replacing some indigenous symbols with Christian ones. Fifth, the theological synthesis which is the fusion or blending of both traditions. An example is the *Nican Mopohua*, the story of the apparitions of the Virgin of Guadalupe, *Tonantzin*, Our Mother, the maternal face of God for our peoples.⁵²

It is possible to consider that what God revealed about Godself to the Mesoamerican peoples has come to us through indigenous Catholicism and popular religion. If that knowledge of God survived the evangelization process, it is because it is basically not contrary to Christian tradition. If it had been contrary, the Church would have banned it. Moreover, not only for that reason can we consider what has survived as true revelation, since, if we did, we would be accepting Christian revelation as the criterion to validate what other religious traditions have received as a revelation from God. The Mesoamerican indigenous tradition, which has remained, is accepted as part of the knowledge of God simply because it has survived because if it had only been the human work, it would have been forgotten.⁵³ Using God's revelation in Scripture to validate revelation in other traditions could be understood as a downfall, but I disagree. Although this criterion for identifying what comes from God and what does not is linked

⁵² López Hernández, 48-57

⁵³ Acts 5:38-39: "...because if this plan or this undertaking is of human origin, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them."

to Christian revelation, it could be thought that it could have arisen in any religious tradition. What ancient religious traditions have understood about God through centuries and millennia must really be self-revelation from God; otherwise, how has it remained for so long?

Mesoamerican Indigenous Revelation in Our Actual Religious Practices

What God revealed to my people has survived through popular religiosity, especially through our feasts. One of them is the Atltepeihuitl, a celebration in which, originally, the goddess Matlalcueytl (the one with the blue skirt) was asked to send enough rain to irrigate our fields. The mountain was the material form of the goddess Matlalcueytl, and she granted or denied rainwater. This was believed because the rains invariably come from this mountain. At the top of this, clouds are formed that irrigate the valley when they move through it. It is not known precisely how this festival was carried out before the arrival of the Spaniards, but perhaps it is not so different from how we do it today. The festival consists of a procession from our Catholic temple at the middle of the mountain to a place known as *Siete Canoas* (Seven Canoas). This place is the same one where our ancestors went to deliver their offerings to the goddess Matlalcueye. The procession is accompanied by fireworks, flowers that are thrown along the way as a carpet, copal, or incense, and the music of the *chirimía* and the *teponaxtle*.⁵⁴ Once there, a Mass is held, one in which we ask God for a good rainy season. We offer flowers, local

⁵⁴ *Teponaxtle* is a kind of drum and *chirimía* is a kind of flute.

fruits, and food (*tamales* or *mole*), which are distributed among all attendees at the end. After the meal, the procession returns with fireworks, flowers, incense, and music.

The festival in honor of Matlalcueyetl survived Christian evangelization because it was a way to ask for rain; however, not all celebrations survived some disappeared like the festival in honor of Camaxtli. It is due to the cessation of the warrior activity of my people. Although during the first decades of the Colony, Tlaxcala continued to collaborate with the Spaniards to conquer the south and north of what is now Mexico, the military activity ended, so the worship of Camaxtli ceased to be relevant, while agricultural activity never stopped.

This has been the journey of Tlaxcala, a de-indigenized indigenous people, who developed a way of relating to divinity, but Western colonization almost took it away. This has caused it to endanger its environment and our very existence as a people, so it is necessary to resist the imposition of capitalist spirituality and recover our way of relating to creation, God, and our sisters and brothers. That will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 4:

Reorienting our Spirituality

Reorientation of Spirituality

The solution to our socio-environmental crisis lies in ecological conversion, that is, in spiritual transformation because our spirituality has disconnected us from nature, and with it, we have endangered the planet. Such is our degree of disconnection with nature that a friend told me of his surprise when, in his twenties, he realized that not all cows are white with black spots as they are depicted on television and on milk containers. In fact, there are black, white, grey, and brown cows. This shows how our style of life has created a gap between nature and us. Capitalism that has settled in much of the world has developed from an economic system becoming an ideology, and finally, a religion with its own spirituality. Thus, it has reached and displaced or mixed with local spiritualities. In such places, it has given people a new horizon and changed the way human beings see themselves and nature. Capitalism turns the human being into a consumer and nature into a resource available to be commercialized. This new relationship of the human person with nature has given rise to the privatization and depredation of nature, that is, to our environmental crisis.

Christianity has tried to extirpate capitalist spirituality by trying to recover the wisdom of its sources. The ecological readings of the Bible try to get rid of the vision that gives preponderance to the human being over creation, and at the same time that they try to explore "what it might mean to be human in an expansive cosmos where all creatures

have intrinsic value and are inescapably interrelated." ⁵⁵ These ecological re-readings truly offer an eco-friendly vision of the Scriptures. Nevertheless, it seems to me that this is not enough because they are only theological reflections without transforming people's spirituality and, therefore, without affecting their way of acting.

To reorient our spirituality, Christianity should prepare and encourage us to have a mystical experience, to experience God's direct presence. Christianity, at least the Catholic Church in Mexico, invites the faithful to encounter God through prayer and the sacraments, especially in the Eucharist, but in practice, prayer is reduced to repeating prayers, such as praying the rosary and the Eucharist seen as the obligation to go to Mass; that is, the Church invites us to meet God by following doctrines, complying with norms, and attending religious rites. By doing this, it is difficult to have the experience of being in the direct presence of the divinity. Consequently, it is almost impossible to create and deepen a personal relationship with God since the norms and rites have long ceased to fulfill their function of linking us with the mystery.

It is difficult to experience God's direct presence in the norms and rites because for some people these no longer have significance. Suppose it happens that some people manage to feel God's intimate presence in the rites. They then need to allow the spiritual experience to prompt them to establish a new relationship with nature, one in which nature ceases to be just a resource to be exploited for progress, and also, one in which nature ceases to be completely separated from the human being.

⁵⁵ Kathleen Fischer, "Christian Spirituality in a Time of Ecological Awareness," *Theology Today*, Volume 67 (2010): 170.

From this perspective, this point of conversion, capitalism, in addition to being perverse, is an incomplete spirituality because it does not offer a meta-historical horizon. Its ultimate horizon is historical; that is, each person must achieve happiness during their lifetime. Its god, the Market, is not transcendent, so the mystical experience is not encouraged and when someone comes to live it (because the mystical experience is a human experience), they have to look outside capitalist spirituality to channel this experience. Unfortunately, as already mentioned, the Catholic Church cannot offer a massive and effective means of directing spiritual pursuits.

In sum, Christian spirituality must change its anthropocentric view, one that places the human person above creation, to a view that recognizes that every animate and inanimate being is good and admirable in and of itself, one capable of serving as a means for us to become conscious of and respond directly to this presence of God in the universe. Creation brings us into the divine presence. To achieve this transformation, as heirs of the Mesoamerican tradition, we can recover what God revealed to us about Godself in order to reorient our Christian spirituality, in this way, reconnecting us to nature.

Recovering the Mesoamerican Cosmocentric Vision

The Mesoamerican experience of divinity led peoples to develop a cosmocentric view of the world. This vision emerged in the nomadic stage, according to Eleazar López, in which it considers all things, especially nature, as the most important mediation to find God and relate to him because a divinity created each being by putting a part of himself

in them, so if every creature, both animate and inanimate, has (a part of) God, the world becomes a sacred place. This view prevents nature from becoming a resource, private property, or a commodity because if the earth, corn, river, deer, etc., have the divine essence, how can humans possess God? In the case of Israel, for instance, the people, out of reverence, did not dare to pronounce the name of God because to do so would be to place themselves above this divine being. Similarly, the Mesoamerican peoples could not privatize the land because that would mean possessing God, and that is impossible.

This cosmocentric view sacralizes nature because it understands that God is everywhere and in everything including animate and inanimate beings that make up creation. This vision helps to reverse the demythologization that Jewish-Christian thought produced in the Western world; a thought that no longer saw nature as divine.⁵⁶ Although doctrinally taught that God is everywhere, even Ignatian spirituality inviting us to encounter God in all things, in practice, the Church discourages recognizing the world's sacredness. For the Church, the temples are sacred, especially the altars since the rites are performed there. Everything else is mundane. This vision does not encourage the divinity found in nature and prevents us from recognizing its value because it teaches us that the holy and sacred are beyond nature.

Christian evangelization made us demythologize nature. Matlalcueytl, our sacred mountain, is no longer the one that gives us water and feeds us. It ceased to be the mountain goddess who blessed us with her rain, and it began to be God, so we stopped relating to her. We stop seeing her as a protector, provider, and benefactor. Christian

⁵⁶ Pope Francis, 78.

evangelization taught us to see God as being only in his house, the temple, not in nature. Therefore, the mountain ceased to be a subject and became an object. In turn, modern positivism taught us to see the mountain and its rain as a scientifically explainable phenomenon. When the rain fell on their fields, my ancestors understood that the mountain goddess was blessing them. She was giving them her water to feed and give them life. Now, when I see rain, I think about the water cycle, temperature changes in the atmosphere, and the condensation of moisture in the air. Many of us have lost the ability to see the world with an animistic gaze, which is also characteristic of this worldview. Animistic thought is lost, which prevents me from relating to nature as if it were another being and from respecting and revering God's presence that reveals.

For the Mesoamerican peoples everything is sacred because God is in all things. God is in all animate and inanimate beings because God put part of Godself in them when they were created. This makes everything have an anima or soul; therefore, the Earth becomes an animate world. On the other hand, in the Western worldview, if someone were to imagine that everything is animated, meaning it has a soul or is alive, he/she would be considered a bit insane. Our Western and Christian way of thinking leads us to believe that animals and plants are alive, but they do not possess a soul (or at least one like that possessed by human beings). They have no sensitivity but are only physical matter. Only crazy, superstitious, or people with magical thinking have the thoughts that animal/plants or other alive animate objects have souls. However, the Mesoamerican peoples lived in a completely animated world, and such a view of the animated world persists. Many people, before starting to plant, ask the land for permission to do so. For

them, digging a hole to put a seed is like opening a womb, the womb of the Earth. That is why you are asked for permission to do so.

This way of seeing nature, which the Western world can classify as "magical or superstitious" thinking, is not so different from the "scientific" thinking that turns nature into a commodity. Water, for example, that is not manufactured by anyone, meaning no company joins hydrogen atoms with oxygen atoms to synthesize water but simply takes it from a river or a water-table, is turned into a commodity, does not this sound irrational? Magical thinking is turning water into a product for sale.⁵⁷ However, the opposite happens; the visions that give personhood to animals or inanimate beings, which can help us respect and care for nature, are branded as irrational.

Seeing the planet as an animate world in which mountains, clouds, rivers, and even human creations are animate beings, shows that we are not alone but only a part of a system. We are part of something much bigger than ourselves. All that is around us are others. The human being is a subject that coexists with other subjects (trees, animals, wind, etc.). All things are subjects because in each of them resides the divinity; in that sense, everything is sacred, which is why it must be respected and not abused.

Finally, recovering the Mesoamerican cosmocentric vision would make it easier for us to experience a direct encounter with divinity. Regular Catholic practice does not really encourage mystical experiences with God, and the Western capitalist vision does not offer a transcendent horizon. Yet, mystical experience, like any other human

⁵⁷ Yásnaya E. Aguilar Gil, "Nē'ējpy. La sangre de la tierra" [Nē'ējpy. The Blood of the Earth], *El País*, April 18, 2021, <https://elpais.com/mexico/2021-04-18/neejpy-la-sangre-de-la-tierra.html> (accessed March 28, 2022).

experience, continues to be present despite adversity. The Mesoamerican cosmocentric vision would foster the encounter with God, and the Christian tradition would direct it. The fact that the Mesoamerican view understands that God is really in every animate being as inanimate offers us a broader framework for finding Him, not just in the temple or its sacraments. Everything can trigger an encounter with him, especially when we are in space that we call "nature," since it can, more efficiently, open us to his presence. For its part, Christian tradition can channel such experiences by offering a route to deepen the relationship with God.

Recovering the Mesoamerican cosmocentric vision would allow us to understand the human being as part of a system, not as the protagonist or, worse still, as the dominator, of creation. In addition, it would allow us to see nature as something sacred and, therefore, would lead us to relate to it respectfully and, also, it would facilitate a direct encounter with divinity. This is what God revealed about Godself to the Mesoamerican peoples, and this way of understanding and relating to God can help us convert our spirituality and, therefore, our relationship with nature. God speaks to humans through nature. The good news is that God has already expressed Godself to Mesoamerican peoples through nature. My people experienced the Creator in that form and continue doing so despite of imposition of Western capitalist spirituality through the *mestizaje* narrative. That good news must be shared. Therefore, God invites us to go into the world and share this message with all creation.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Mk 16:15.

Conclusion

Each person chooses, with a greater or lesser degree of awareness, "something" that gives meaning and order to the world. This meaning helps us to understand our role and place, of the other (nature), and the Other (the ultimate horizon, God, transcendence, etc.). It shapes our relationship with them and our way of acting. This is what is called spirituality. Now, although each person chooses his/her meaning, it does not mean that they create it, but that she or he takes it from the traditions available in their culture. Unfortunately, a style of spirituality has been globalized that has endangered the planet. It is about capitalism, which is not just an economic system but a spirituality. Capitalism turned the human being into a consumer, nature into a resource available to be traded, and God into a non-transcendent. This warped relationship of the human person with nature has created a situation of predation, one which preys, not one which embraces and respects, thus resulting in our current environmental crisis.

The solution to our socio-environmental crisis lies in ecological conversion, that is, in spiritual transformation. This means changing our anthropocentric perspective, one which places the human person above creation, as opposed to within it, seeing every being as good in and of itself. In addition, it is necessary to recover a transcendent horizon, one which fosters a sacred relationship.

We humans can draw from our traditions to achieve this transformation. My people, Tlaxcalans, have embraced a Christian Mesoamerican tradition. We are Tlaxcalans, a de-indigenized indigenous people. We are heirs of the Mesoamerican tradition, one which the State tried to take away by imposing a mestizo identity that privileges the Western. We are capable of recovering, nonetheless, God's revelation to us

through our ancient traditions so as to reorient and renew our Christian spirituality, in this way establishing a new relationship with nature and with God.

We must recover a Mesoamerican cosmocentric vision. This vision sacralizes nature because it understands that God is everywhere and in everything, including animate and inanimate beings that make up creation. This vision is crucial because it de-centers the human being. Considering nature as sacred will not only lead us to relate to it respectfully but also grace us with a direct encounter with divinity.

This initial, brief survey of Mesoamerican Indigenous theology and religion shows us that recovering elements of its worldview can help us convert our spirituality towards one that is ultimately life giving for the planet. As this synthesis paper has argued, it is necessary to contemplate the Mesoamerican indigenous worldview to not only understand it better but also as a means of solidifying our relationships with God, nature, and others. Following this path will once again incorporate this ancient wisdom into our lives, gradually unfolding a new eco-spirituality.

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