

JOSÉ AFONSO MOURA NUNES

*Trilogy of the Path*

VOLUME  
III

THE REST IS

*Detail*

A Rereading of the Nicene Creed

2<sup>th</sup> edition

BELO HORIZONTE

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*This book was translated from Brazilian Portuguese to American English by Matheus Milagres with assistance of the free version of the translation tool DeepL*

*"I want to know how the "Old Man" thinks. The rest are details."*

Albert Einstein (1879-1955)  
or the *Nicene Creed*  
in the context of world autonomy

*"There is no longer either Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free man; there is no longer male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Gal.3:28)*

Paul of Tarsus (6-65 (67)

*"The coincidence of opposites: both the maximum and also the minimum, and thus exceeding minimum and maximum."*

Nicolaus of Cusa (1401-1464)

*"What would become of a God playing just on the outside. Passing his finger around the universe!  
It is up to you to move the world from within,  
Caring for nature, by it being cared for. Thus everything in it lives and exists  
It doesn't lose its strength, it doesn't lose its Spirit."*

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832)

*"Break, my God, by the boldness of Your revelation, the timid childish vision that cannot conceive of anything greater or more vital in the world than the petty perfection of our human organism."*

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955)



# TESTIMONIAL

This book is a testimonial. Testimony is an intentional act of a subject. This intentionality is directed toward a subject by which the subject assents to a subject or an object. This act of testifying can be an overt assent when the subject or object is directly present to me. This book is the testimony of a person who does not escape this first definition of a direction loaded with multiple experiences to a subject or object that lacks the evidence.

The book's content is the *Nicene Creed*, or, in the version better known as the *Creed*, that is, *I believe in God the Father, Creator of heaven and earth*. Because it lacks evidence in which the other is immediately present, it reminded me of a situation in Brazil in the 1970s, in the middle of the civil-military dictatorship regime. A theater group staged a show called *Lay Mass* for the public who packed the *Consolação* (consolation) Church in São Paulo. Going through the parts of the Catholic mass in whose content it was possible to denounce the oppression experienced by the opponents of the regime, when the *Creed* was prayed, an actor, turning around, said: *How easy it is to say: I believe! And how easy it is to say: I don't believe!*

The author of the work in question quotes one of Pascal's Thoughts: *the last step of reason is to recognize that there is an infinity of things that surpass it*. In taking up Pascal's thought, the author writes a passage that reminded me of *I Believe/Not Believe: both possibilities are uncertain. Reason, here, can do nothing to help us*.

This book is a testimony about *an act of faith* of the author, from a true reflective journey around the *Nicene Creed*, a Christian profession of faith adopted in the fourth century A.D. in the city of *Nicaea* (today Iznik - Turkey). It is a prayer that points out the orthodox principles of a belief, of a faith, of a religion, to be assented to by the respective faithful.

Now, in the act of faith, one does not have the other or the Other as integrally present before and sensed by me. There is, as it were, an absence. And it is this absence whose presence pervades the entire book. The reader, following the sequence of the book, understands the act of faith in the oscillation between *I believe* and *I don't believe*. Oscillation in the set of authors taken as reference of the reflective path. The author, dialoguing with the most diverse currents and tendencies, makes it clear that the *Nicene Creed* needs to be revised, for it *has much of Greek philosophy and little of Biblical tradition*. And, the author, instead of taking the *Creed* from the beginning, in an original way, starts it from back to front, that is, from the heavens and the earth

to the *Creed*. And he does this precisely to contrast Greek philosophy with the proclamation of the Christian message.

In effect, Greek epistemology had an accent on a cosmological-cosmocentric conception. Cosmos, beauty in English, was both the center of the universe and the explanatory link (lógos) of things. As opposed to chaos, cosmos postulated a hierarchical order of the universe, in which the whole determines that each thing occupies a corresponding place, a natural place. In symmetry to the universe of the stars, in the light of cosmological conceptions, society would also have hierarchically differentiated and unequal groups. And this conception has taken root, over the centuries, to the point of becoming a natural framework, for things and for human life. This cosmic naturalism is integrated in the *polis* that reproduces an order analogous to the cosmic order to the point of admitting slaves *by nature*.

Behold, the Christian message breaks with this cosmology by bringing something very different. On the one hand, the creative act by Someone who stands as Father/Mother deconstructs hierarchies by announcing the sons/daughters as equals and as equals they must behave among themselves. These sons/daughters have an inner subjectivity composing themselves with the notion of person within the *human family*. And this creative act is an act of love, bringing the Pauline phrase *where there is love, God is there*. In this sense, the structures that are based on inequality, on discrimination of any kind, are structures of unlove and, for this reason, the message postulates overcoming them. They do not correspond to the creative act by which God made man in his image and likeness. As the text says: *...coming from God, a conscious creature, capable of understanding himself and giving meaning to himself and to things, could only be the image and likeness of Love. The created reflects the Creator! It is the culmination we know of the evolving Cosmos.*

Finally, sons and daughters pass through an objective and provisional world and a historical time in which the present is mediated by a past and directed by a future that consumes the present.

The assumption of Christianity by power, the progressively rigid institutional structure, the limitations brought about by a naive cosmology of the universe (cosmos) from the classical age, ended up freezing the transforming meaning of the message of equality and fraternity. In this way, the cosmological-cosmocentric conception is succeeded by a theological-cosmocentric conception. A definition of orthodoxy is imposed on the Creator/Father/Mother with criteria that will distinguish and discriminate the so-called true believers from the non-believers. And with the restricted idea of *a chosen people*, the vertical commands take over the pace of the message, with the already known consequences of religious wars, inquisitorial movements of the belief by imposition, of power based on divine authority.

Modernity will erode that cosmology. The earth and the sky will be penetrated by scientific knowledge, the conquest of reason. The triad God (or Cosmos), basis of truth, Man and World, will be succeeded by the dyad Man and World. This anthropological-anthropocentric conception puts Man at the center of the World and God shelters in the realm of the private. This is what the author makes explicit: *accepting the autonomy of the universe and of the human being is not easy, even more difficult is to draw the consequences in terms of our beliefs and devotions.*

In a moment of the text, the author seems to approach this conception when he highlights that, on the seventh day, God rested. It is as if to say, henceforth it is up to the creature to organize the world, enjoying autonomy to build it according to equality and fraternity. In this sense, the production of inequality and discrimination becomes the antipode of the message brought by Jesus of Nazareth, the man who is *the best among us*. That is why the proposal of liberation from the chains that inferiorize the dignity of the person and marginalize human contingents will become the way to recover the message.

However, the Man-World dyad is not a reified entity. The trajectory of Modernity, at times emphasizing Man, the pioneer of the world and, not infrequently, the revealer of oppressive tendencies, at other times emphasizing the World, to be conquered and deciphered. The classical vision falls and new categories are imposed. The cosmos becomes geographical, physical. And *homo becomes an individual*, private, conflictive, and that, only through contract, becomes sociable within the historical field. The new order and power comes from man himself.

Even so, at a certain point in the 19th century, this human-centeredness and earthiness underwent a profound change. It was discovered that the world was not changing only because of man's actions. The world was changing before man. This *e pur si muove* was not only the negation of heliocentrism and affirmation of geocentrism. The cosmos ceases to be a fixed entity, object of contemplation or change, only after *homo sapiens*. That is to say, the species living in the world, evolve. The cosmos expands and moved before the human being. The question is straightforward: Is *homo* a finished product of matter? And what about the creative act? Subjects for many pages of the book.

And so, the book will dialogue with representatives of the scientific world, atheists, agnostics, or believers, whose production also becomes a matter for theologians. It is a frank, open dialogue with the most burning issues of the contrast between evolution and creation. As you leaf through the book, you will find the most current citations and bibliographical references from the leaders of scientific knowledge.

At the same time, the author does not give up the message of an emancipating Christianity. A message that points to and affirms a more just, more egalitarian, freer, and today, with good reason, more ecological society. This emancipating Christianity is an impulse toward

a human emancipation that abolishes discrimination, poverty, and marginalization, and challenges the gap that separates human beings into chasms of inequality.

Alongside this reiteration of the message with its social implications, the book does not leave aside the existential character of the human being who questions himself about the meaning of existence. This questioning, dubitative character does not avoid burning issues such as evil, the why of evil, being born, dying, and the anguish of knowing if we continue to be, that is, if after death, the time of existence turns into non-being, perhaps into nothingness. To quote a short passage from Luc Ferry in the book: *"Not only am I plunged, from the origin of my life, into a world that I neither wanted nor created, but, moreover, the meaning of my birth and death escapes me.*

It is not by chance that the theme of resurrection appears frequently throughout the text, in light of the *leitmotif* that *love never dies. He who has truly loved will live forever.*

And, as a subject that sees himself in the work he produces, the author interferes in the text, positioning himself. Gliding smoothly over the text, the author dialogues with his other-self, the plethora of authors who serve as his reference. He is a deponent of his faith, a witness who lends his own veracity to the arguments presented, without covering up the challenges that this adherence to Jesus of Nazareth entails in the recovery of his founding message. It is necessary to quote a passage, only one among many: *The construction of the Kingdom of God - a society where all are effectively brothers, children of the same God/Father/Mother - is a challenge, and I have to give my share of contribution.*

The deponent puts himself at the disposal of those who will listen to him in the pages of the book. That is why he is, all the time, a questioner. And this questioning, arising from the subjectivity of the deponent, is refashioned in each chapter of the book. And it invites to a reflective reading for each and every one of us, as an *ordinary citizen who lives in a Christian environment and, therefore, knows, even if only superficially, what we are talking about.* For this reason, he wants to dialogue *with those who have doubts, questions, and not just certainties and ready-made answers.* In this way, there is an innovation in the language and in the way of approaching the themes implied in the chapter titles.

So don't wait for ready answers. It is a book open to those who seek the meaning of our subjective existence and of our common existence, with questions in which the sense and the meaning of things take center stage.

Like the actor in the *Lay Mass* who turns to the audience, inviting them to be a subject of the plot, to the statement *How easy it is to say: I believe!* and *How easy it is to say: I don't believe!*



the author does not ask the reader for a ready-made answer. He asks for an outline of an answer to the question: *why do I believe, why don't I believe?*

Belo Horizonte, August 16, 2021

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# PREFACE

Today, March 12, 2021, Wanda Rohlf's and I complete one year of confinement inside an apartment, trapped by a pandemic never imagined.

Far away from our daughter Rachel, from our son-in-law/friend Fernando, from our granddaughters (Julia (14) and Luisa (11)), so soft, so intelligent, so promising, so mysterious... How blessed, vivified, spiritualized the flesh is. To them we dedicate this book!

In giving thanks, I recall Jesus of Nazareth, called by John the "Incarnate Word", that is, God humanized and, at the same time, the human species divinized.

Free, happy, I was thinking of a title for this book, the only one I actually planned to write. My Editor, with his marketing vision, did not like the proposed title: *"The Nicene Creed and the Autonomy of the World"*. The end of Einstein's sentence occurred to me: *"... the rest are mere details"*, with a picture of a galaxy in the background. *"I want to know how the Old Man thinks; the rest are mere details."*

In this pandemic period I spent most of my time sharing the housework and sharing the preparation of meals with reading and compiling what I found in a hundred books about the *Nicene Creed* statement repeated by Christians at all masses around the world:

*"I believe in one God, the Father, the almighty,*

*creator of heaven and earth.*

*I believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ*

*The only-begotten Son of God..."*

What is the meaning of the explicit expressions of the Creed - "incarnation", "remission", "glory", "I believe" - and other implicit ones: "creation", "salvation", "deliverance", "eternal life"?

We have highlighted terms that are key to understanding the substantive content of the Creed and the still prevalent catechesis:

- *creation*: actually what is being created, maintained, enlivened, since creation is not a past event, as I thought and many continue to imagine;
- *salvation*: to save oneself, to find meaning in our short existence; to build something, however small, that will last; to project one's life, freely and consciously, toward post-death fulfillment;
- *liberation*: to free oneself from inner and outer chains, to contribute to the building of Jesus of Nazareth's dream, the Kingdom of God, a world where all God's children are treated as they are: brothers and sisters;
- *eternal life*: to share, beyond all limits of time and space, the fullness of life with the Living One, with Love;
- *I believe*: to give one's heart, to trust, to commit oneself! To put one's life at the service of the kingdom of God.

Here is some of what you will find in this book.

So, on the eve of being 84 years old, grateful for my wife's support on this journey, I complete, without having planned it, a trilogy that begins and ends with the One I see as the best among us: Jesus of Nazareth.

We study Jesus - him and his circumstances - as a human figure, an exemplar of the species *homo sapiens*. We rediscovered his resurrection, which has nothing to do with the resurrection of a dead body, but rather with the ever-present presence of the One who is the Living One, or simply Love.

We follow the journey of the "followers of the Path" up to the moment in which the institution, Christianity - a social, historical, contingent construction - becomes the official religion of the empire, when, in Hinkelammert's words, the empire is Christianized and Christianity is imperialized.

The results of six years of research by three couples are found in the books **Jesus of Nazareth: the best among us** and **Christianism: from Jewish sect to official religion of the empire**, published in Belo Horizonte (2015), São Paulo (2016), and again in Belo Horizonte (2019), with one thousand copies each. Editora Ramalhete, responsible for the last edition, again welcomes us.

Since Christianity "is not" - as Harvey Cox said - "a history of creeds, but the history of a people of faith, who sometimes composed creeds", we have to review them - the creeds - and update them in accordance with what we believe today.

So I decided to complete the mentioned books with an updated rereading, immersed in modernity, in the scientific thought of the Nicene Creed, so often recited and so outdated. And here is the last book of this *Trilogy of the Path*: **The rest are mere details.**

The main criterion for the re-reading of the *Nicene Creed* was, of course, Jesus of Nazareth, his life and message, in the light of science and philosophy, opening a frank and unpretentious dialogue with the various schools of thought.

To return to Jesus of Nazareth - not as an individual, but as the embodiment of the "reign of God" - we have two paths to take:

- the first and most important: imitate him; take him as an example of life - "*I am the Path, the Truth and the Life.*" "*Walker!*" - warns the poet Antônio Machado - "*there is no road, you make your path by walking*";
- the second: to review our theories, doctrines, rituals, with which we want to represent him, honor him, always keeping in mind that his message was not about himself and not even about God, but about a new era of *shalom*.

We need not deny any of our deepest religious spiritual foundations:

- God continues to be for *homo sapiens*, throughout his thousands of years, what he always was: the greatest mystery, about which we can only speak in metaphors!
- Jesus of Nazareth is the clearest, most extraordinary image of God: "so human, one can only be divine" (Leonardo Boff).

The personal tone of this presentation wants to make it clear that, although the authors cited are admittedly competent in their respective fields, the compilation is entirely my responsibility: it is my vision of the *Nicene Creed*.

I invite the reader to take a loving and critical look. Everything you find here is relative, just like you and me. Only He is Absolute!

Enjoy!

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## **The Apostolic Profession of Faith**

*I believe in one God, Father Almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.*

*I believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ*

*Only begotten Son of God*

*who became incarnate through the Holy Spirit,*

*in the womb of the Virgin Mary,*

*was crucified under Pontius Pilate,*

*He suffered and was buried,*

*descended to hell,*

*rose again on the third day*

*and ascended into heaven,*

*where he is seated at the right hand of the Father.*

*He will come again in his glory,*

*to judge the living and the dead.*

*I believe in the Holy Spirit,*

*in the one, holy Church,*

*and in the communion of saints,*

*in the remission of sins,*

*in the resurrection*

*and in eternal life.*

*Amen.*





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# PART I



# CHAPTER 1

## CHALLENGES

*"In the last fifty years, Christianity has begun its most portentous transformation since its transition in the 4th century, of what started as a tiny Jewish sect For the religious ideology of the Roman Empire."*

*(Cox, 2015, p. 12, own translation)*

We intend to seek, in the best sources, answers to three challenges, namely:

- The first challenge can be found in our book "*Christianism: from Jewish sect to official religion of the Empire*".

We conclude the reading of this historical period with two quotes (NUNES, 2018, p. 99), which we made a point of highlighting, due to their relevance and the intellectual challenge these pose to us in relation to today:

*"As a result of the events of the fourth century, for the next thousand years and more, if one wanted to be a temporal king, it was necessary to accept Christ as eternal King." (RIGGER, 2009, p. 44, own translation)*

*"When, from the third and fourth centuries AD, orthodoxy - the terminator of Christianity - is imposed, the Pauline interpretation of the crucifixion and those responsible for it are marginalized; the leaders of this world, according to the wisdom of this world, in the name of the law. **When one Christianizes the empire, the empire imperializes Christianity** (emphasis added). One had to look for other crucifiers...aggressive anti-Judaism arose out of Christian orthodoxy." (HINKELAMMERT, 2012, p. 37, own translation)*

The **second challenge** is found at the end of the Appendix "*Who Found Christianity?*" It was formulated there in the following terms: since the best among us, Jesus of Nazareth, is alive, present in the history that is being written today, how can we speak of him and his message in language that is appropriate for the modern world?

*"Our language is the most important and most intrinsic structure of the human mode; it is a prism through which we see the world. The language of the past is mythical, mythological, while also being poetic. In recent centuries, our language has become predominantly scientific. Modern man, without losing his poetry, always wants more clear rational explanations, proven empirically."*

A great challenge for all religions, which, in the face of the problems that alienate modern man, intend to be part of the solution and not part of the problem.

*"The Hellenization of Christianity, which allowed the early Church to leave the rather narrow context of a single nation and enter the much wider cultural context of the then world, led, paradoxically, to a further "Judaization" of Christianity and the fixation, again, on a "single language." (HANK, 2012, p. 91, own translation)*

*"By virtue of the internal dynamics of an evolution that is also the creative work of God, the granite block of modernity has detached itself from the mountainous mass of human history, striking hard at the clay feet of the Church's medieval faith."*

*"The Church needs a radical reform, affecting all its domains. Both in its message and in the way it presents itself, it must adapt to modern reality." (LENAERS, 2010, p. 13, own translation)*

The educator Michel Morwood, an international lecturer, begins his book *"The Catholic of Tomorrow"* with the following observation:

*"We are going through what may well be the most important time of change in Christian history. In the Catholic Church there is an extraordinary collapse of the religious culture that has formed the Catholic identity for many adults. The reality is that for the Christian message to be relevant to people educated within a social and scientific worldview simply unimaginable in the early twentieth century, it is essential to have some understanding of these developments and to integrate them into the rudiments of the Christian message." (MORWOOD, 2013, p. 7, own translation)*

The author of these considerations presents an interesting graphic representation of the "Catholic package" of beliefs, attitudes and practices that has been transmitted by Catholic education over the past centuries:



How to face the above challenges?

How to approach the message of Jesus, He who is - according to Christianity - the bearer and revealer of God - in a secular, pluralist world, whose hegemonic language is dictated by Science?

In a reflection on Jesus and Christianity, the well-known theologian José M. Castillo asks:

*"Can the 'project' of Jesus, who accepted the lowest function to which a society can subject someone: that of an offender executed for blasphemy and subversion, be reconciled with the 'project of religion'? Does it somehow fit into the project of religion, which dignifies, grants prominence and position, and situates its representatives as notable in every religious society?"* (CASTILLO, 2015, p. 167, own translation)

John F. Haught, doctor in studies of religion at the Catholic University of America, concluded his book *"Jesus, Symbol of God"* - an extraordinary compendium of Christology - with a statement that seemed to me like a "confession of guilt", or a suggestion of an alternative approach to his own:

*"I have not developed a theology of God and his creation, reinterpreted in the context of the new scientific knowledge of the universe, the planet, life in its various forms, and human existence."* (HAIGHT, 2003, p. 561, own translation)

As the award-winning Brazilian physicist and astronomer Marcelo GLEISER observes:

*"We - imperfect accidents of creation - are how the universe reflects upon itself. In other words, we are the consciousness of the cosmos."* (GLEISER, 2010, p. 25, own translation)

Here I found the third challenge: **approaching** Jesus and his message from our common identity, members of a species - *homo sapiens* - recent, rare, and special. He, **Jesus of Nazareth**, and we, on a cosmological scale of space and time, are coetaneous and simultaneous. On this scale, human history is but an always "here and now". On a scale beyond, of eternity, only the present exists.

On a much smaller scale, of us "*descended from the same group of 10,000 ancestors who lived in East Africa approximately 100,000 years ago*" (COLLINS, 2010, p. 26, own translation), the **Jesus of Nazareth** event happened last week, or five hours ago, in terms relative to month or hours. **It is important to put it in context.**

If our life expectancy as a species is equal to that of Neanderthals, we still have 100,000 years ahead of us.

José Antônio Pagola - author of the renowned book "*Jesus: a historical approach*" - is right when he said in an interview on Spanish TV: "*after 2000 years, we have only begun to understand the event of Jesus of Nazareth.*"

*"The decisions we make in the coming decades will define the future of our species and that of our planetary home. Although the road is long, the first step is simple: understand that nothing is more important than the preservation of life."* (GLEISER, 2010, p.27, own translation)

Another relevant question, regarding the approach, is with whom we intend to dialogue. From what point of view? From the institution, the Magisterium, the experts, theologians/biblical scholars, Christians/convicts/practitioners, or ordinary citizens?

We have opted for the last alternative: the point of view of an ordinary citizen, of medium/higher education, who lives in a Christian environment and, therefore, knows, even if superficially, what we are talking about.

Two caveats:

As the subjects to be treated belong to specific, complex fields of knowledge that we do not master, our work will be of selection, compilation and organization of texts by specialists, in order to make them consistent and plausible as a whole, for the common reader. Some topics will be treated in a synthetic way, in the style of "just to remember".

Nothing or almost nothing of what follows will make sense to the "owners of the truth", to those who read the Bible and the documents of the Church(es) in a literal sense, without regard to context.

We want to dialogue with those who have doubts, questions, and not just certainties and ready-made answers.

We hope to innovate in approach and language, since all the subjects to be dealt with here have already been dealt with, with much competence and erudition, by specialists, unfortunately in a sometimes hermetic language.

The first followers of Jesus of Nazareth, in his homeland, called themselves "followers of the Path". We believe that the extraordinary phrase of philosopher and educator Herbert Marshall McLuhan



applies here: "the medium is the message" - Jesus is the medium and the message. What was and is said and who spoke and speaks through him?

Whoever thinks that on this journey we have strayed from Jesus and even from Christianity, we recommend reading the book *"Another Christianity is possible, faith in modern language"*, which, together with others by the author, Jesuit Roger Lenaers, will help to accompany us on this journey. Those with more courage should read the book by the Anglican Episcopal Bishop John Shelby Spong, *"A New Christianity for a New World: Faith Beyond Dogma"*.

Two good books for people who, like the authors of this text, Christians and the elderly, take advantage of the pandemic to recycle their thinking.



## CHAPTER 2

# HEAVEN AND EARTH

*"If I look at a forest from afar, I see a dark green velvet. When I get closer, the velvet crumbles into trunks, branches, and twigs. The bark of the trees, the moss, and the insects are full of complexity. In each ladybug's eye there is an elaborate structure of cells, connected to neurons that guide it to live. Each cell is a city, each protein is a castle of atoms; in the nucleus of each atom there is a hell of quantum dynamics, swirling quarks and gluons, excitations of quantum fields. And that's just one little grove of a tiny planet revolving around a little star, among 100 billion stars in one among trillions of constellated galaxies of dazzling cosmic events."*

(ROVELLI, 2021, p. 162, own translation)

*"In a distant corner of the universe scattered in the countless shimmering solar systems, once upon a time there was a star upon which shrewd animals invented knowledge. This was the most arrogant and lying moment in "universal history"; however it was but a minute. After a few sighs of nature, the star froze over and the wily animals perished."*

(NIETZSCHE in DRAWIN, 2015, p. 28, own translation)

*"One of the most serious mistakes we can make is to believe that the cosmos has plans for us, that somehow, we are important to the Universe. Humans! Save the life! There is nothing more precious and rare."*

Marcelo Gleiser (Own translation)

Probably the reader has heard and repeated, sometimes distractedly, *"I believe in God, the Father, all powerful, creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, his only son..."*.

This statement constitutes the solemn opening of the Christian's profession of faith, repeated at every Mass, in all 24 Catholic churches, consisting of one Western and 23 Eastern. All have different theological and liturgical traditions, their own structures and territorial organization - Alexandrian or Coptic, Byzantine Antiochian or West Syriac, Chaldean or East Syriac, Armenian and Maronite - but they profess the same and unique doctrine and faith, expressed by the Creed.

This is an abbreviated formula of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, which, in its first version, the Nicene *Creed* dates from the year 325.

Given its importance, let's look at some of the context:

Constantine, the Roman emperor, invited the 1800 bishops of the Christian church within the Roman Empire to a council, along the lines of the Roman senate, in the city of Nicaea, now Iznik, in the Marmara region of Turkey. Each was allowed to bring 2 presbyters and 3 deacons, with all travel expenses to and from the city, as well as lodging, paid for by the Empire. 318 bishops attended (the most accepted number) and Pope Sylvester, who was exercising his pontificate at the time, did not attend, but sent 2 presbyters as representatives, as well as Ósio, bishop of Cordoba. The Latin provinces sent 35 representatives, including only 4 from Europe (Calabria, Cordoba, Dijon, and the Danube region).

The total number of participants is estimated at 1800. According to Latourette, *"more than two thousand people attended the proceedings, which took place under the direction of the Emperor."* (RAMALHO, 2008, p. 53, own translation)

Among the participants were several bishops who bore on their bodies the marks of torture inflicted on them by the authorities of the Empire because of their faith.

The main theme was the Arian question, about the relationship between God the Father and God the son, not only in his incarnate form as Jesus, but also in the form before the creation of the world. The issue was the cause of much antagonism.

After a month of discussion, on June 19, 325, the Creed was proclaimed. Only two did not sign.

For the Emperor Constantine - who was baptized on the eve of his death, twelve years later, at the age of 65 (237), by an Arian bishop - the Council, as stated by Eduardo Hoornaert, theologian and historian, *"results in an important victory for the imperial policy, concerned with unifying the living forces of society, around a religion capable of uniting the imperial project that suffered from divisions, disputes, corruption and especially lack of ethics. Now, the emperor's advisors think, this is where the Christian movement can make a good contribution"* (HOONAERT, 2003, p. 136, own translation)

We conclude this digression with two observations from eminent theologians:

*"It is to be expected that the formula devised sixteen centuries ago, in a different cultural and intellectual environment, will in some respects appear alien to postmodern culture."* (HAIGHT, 2008, p. 324, own translation)

*"If our theology is to be taken seriously by scientists and other intellectuals, it is imperative that we conceive our theories of revelation in terms that reflect our life in the universe as described and understood by the best of contemporary science."* (HAUGHT, 1998, p. 22, own translation)

Returning to the Creed, as a **script for our reflections** let's modify the sequence:

Heaven and Earth;

God: creator, almighty

God the Father;

Jesus Christ, only son;

I believe.

### **Heaven and Earth<sup>1</sup>**

Heaven is a symbolic expression of everything that is above our heads or "outside the earth".

Earth is everything that is under our feet, "where we came from and where we will return to".

*"Intelligence, as we know it today, emerged less than a million years ago, being present for not even 0.02% of the earth's history. Planets like earth are rare. Complex life is also rare. Intelligent life, conscious and capable of reflecting on its own existence, is even rarer, perhaps even unique in our galaxy, how precarious is our existence on a planet floating in the midst of a hostile and indifferent universe."* (GLEISER, 2010, p. 322, 325, own translation)

When my daughter Rachel was about 8 years old, I liked to tease her to make her think/philosophize. I would tell her that everything that exists, that we see, is X distance from her. If it was possible to measure the distance from each thing (object, sun, star, etc.) to her, she was the center of everything.

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<sup>1</sup> This text is a simple framework for the questions to be seen below. Main sources: SWIMME, GLEISER, MORWOOD

The "everything," that is, the universe, was perceived, by me included, at that moment, as a fixed and huge space/place, a celestial receptacle that housed the stars, planets, and everything else.

"Finite space?" - we wondered, and then we wanted to know what was after it.

It is clear that neither she nor I at that time were aware and conscious of our place, the Earth, and everything that makes up the solar system is controlled by the Milky Way, which crawls across the night sky.

*"This milky white is pulling our entire solar system across the outer edge of the galaxy at the speed of 300 kilometers<sup>2</sup> per second. When you lie down and count to twenty, all the animals, forests, the whole Earth, Jupiter, the asteroids, and even the sun are hurled a distance equal to the length of the width of the North American continent." (SWIMME, 2004, p. 71, own translation).*

*"In every direction we look, we find the clusters of galaxies expanding away from us. The more separated they are from each other, the faster they travel away from each other. More precisely, galaxies twice as far apart are traveling twice as fast. Galaxies ten times more distant are sailing ten times faster." (p. 97-98)*

Given the magnitude of the distances when it comes to the universe, we resort to the concept of the light-year, which is the distance light will travel in the span of a year, about ten trillion kilometers.

*"And we are only thirty thousand light-years from the center of the Milky Way (p. 79), or a distance of 30,000 times ten trillion kilometers." (p. 86, 79)*

*"The Andromeda galaxy - the furthest horizon from human vision with the naked eye - slightly larger than our Milky Way, reaches our eyes from 2.5 million light years away." (p. 81)*

"Local Group, according to astronomers, is the ensemble of the Milky Way, Andromeda, and all its surrounding satellite galaxies, spread over several million light-years, which contains at least half a trillion stars".

"This Local Group of ours revolves around a central disk called the 'Virgo cluster'; it is a giant cluster, of a thousand galaxies, 53 million light-years apart" (p. 82)

In summary, Lucy, from the Horn of Africa (3.2 million years old), "Adam and Eve" (150 thousand years old), Luzia, from Lapa Vermelha - Lagoa Santa (11.5 thousand years old), Abraham (1800 B.C.), Tutankhamen (1332-1323 B.C.), Moses (1250 B.C.), Jesus of Nazareth (-5 B.C.-30), Galileo (1564 -1692), you and I, inhabit this grain of sand orbiting around a dwarf star, the Sun, one among trillions of others...

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<sup>2</sup> 1 kilometer = 0.6214 miles

All this is very recent in the body of human knowledge. The Polish canon Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543) was the first to develop the heliocentric theory of the solar system. Until the 15th century, with rare exceptions, the general belief was that the Earth, fixed in space, was at the center of the universe. Ptolemy (95 AD-168 AD) was the first astronomer to establish a geocentric model, describing quite accurately the movements of the planets. His model stood for 13 centuries. This model proved very favorable to the prevailing theology of Christianity during the Middle Ages.

Geocentrism only came to be effectively contested after the trial, by the Holy Office, of heliocentrism, proposed by Galileo Galilei (1564-1642).

Legend has it that when Galileo left the tribunal of the Holy Office, after his conviction, he said a famous phrase: "Eppur si muove", referring to the Earth.

It was also he who discovered that the Milky Way was composed of a myriad of stars, and not an "emanation" as was previously thought.

In 1615, Galileo wrote to the Grand Duchess Cristina:

*"I do not feel compelled to believe that the same God, who graced me with sense, reason, and intellect, intended us to renounce their use".*

Until the early 20th century, notes Jim Holt, *"our universe was thought to consist only of the Milky Way galaxy, planted alone in infinite space. Since then we have learned that the Milky Way is only one of approximately one hundred billion similar galaxies."* (HOLT, 2013, p. 93, own transla)

*"The expanding universe theory was accepted by most of the scientific community in the early 1930s. A major milestone was the expanding universe model proposed by Belgian Catholic priest, physicist, and mathematician George Lemaître in 1927."*<sup>3</sup>

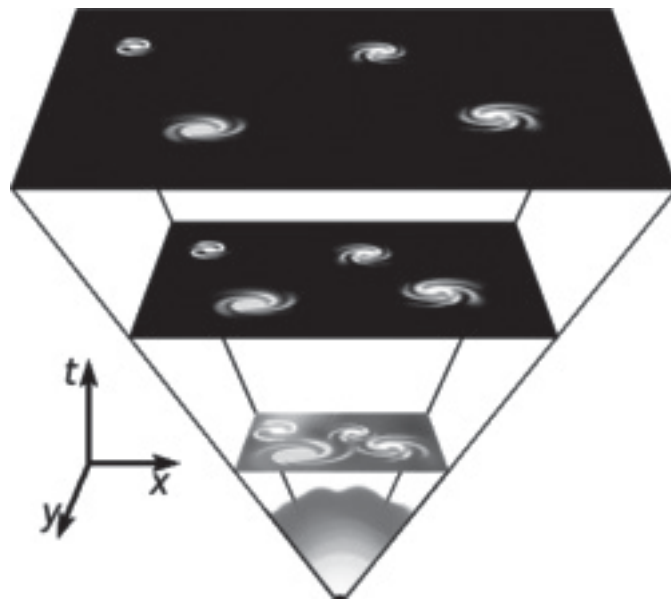
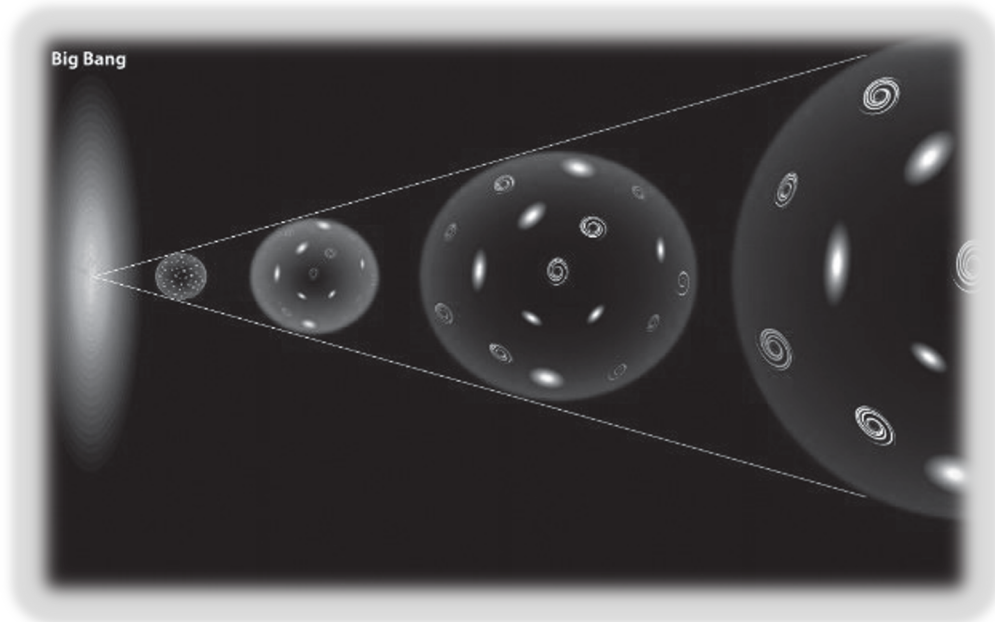
The universe was seen, until then, as immense and fixed. The *Big Bang* - a pejorative term used by Fred Hoyle, in 1949, in a radio program - *"the place of origin of the universe, the initial singularity of space-time, the center of the universe."*

It is not, as is often imagined, an explosion in space, but an expansion of space itself. Since the universe has a finite age - *13.8 billion years, with a margin of error of only 120 million years, which in Cosmology is not much: an error of less than 1%* - and light travels at a finite speed, there may be events in the past whose light did not have time to bring to us.

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<sup>3</sup> BAGDONAS and others. *Who discovered the expansion of the universe?* - Revista Brasileira de Ensino de Física, 26/01/2017.

In terms of expansion, argues Brian SWIMME, we are at the center of the universe:



*"Since the Earth is a planet in motion around a star (Sun), which is one of three hundred billion stars in the Milky Way, which in turn is one of a trillion galaxies in the great universe" (p. 103), rapidly expanding in all directions, it, the Earth, is paradoxically the center of the universe."*

When we observe somewhere, far from where we are, where exactly are we? How can we be outside the universe if, from its beginning, we were woven into it? (p. 105)



We are faced with a strange situation, a paradox: "simultaneously at the center of cosmic expansion and fifteen billion light-years away from the origin of the cosmic explosion" (p. 107). Even Einstein, according to Swimme, would have resisted the idea of *"our omicentric evolutionary cosmos"* (p. 100). *"To be in the universe and to be at its center"* (p. 111). *We exist right at the point of the universe, because in it all places are that place where the universe exploded and began to exist."* (p. 113)

Returning to the personal, familiar reference at the beginning of this text, I complete it by suggesting that my daughter can now better explain to my granddaughters - Julia (14) and Luisa (10) - how they are at the center of the universe.

Not to lose modesty, it is good to remember what the physicist Carlo Rovelli said: *"The only infinite thing in the universe is our ignorance"*.

Regarding the cosmos, we now have a dimension of our ignorance:

*"The current estimate of the ratio of light matter to dark matter is around 1:6. In other words, there is approximately six times as much dark matter as there is luminous matter in the universe! The problem is that no one knows what this matter is made of."* (GLEISER, 2010, p. 139, own translation)

*"...the expansion of the universe is accelerating, presumably due to a dark energy, which is contained not in particle motions and masses, but in space itself."* (WEINBERG, 2015, p. 329, own translation)

Imagining the history of the universe on the scale of a year, Michael Dowd presents this vision:

*"If we imagine that our 15 billion year history has been reduced to a single year:*

*The Milky Way galaxy organized itself in late February; our solar system emerged from the elementary nebula of a supernova in early September; planetary oceans formed in mid-September; the Earth awoke to life in late September; sex was invented in late November; dinosaurs lived for a few days in early December; flowering plants burst on the scene with a succession of colors in mid-December; and the universe began to reflect consciously on and through human beings, with choice and free will, less than ten minutes before midnight on December 31..."* (MORWOOD, 2013, p. 32, own translation)



On this 12-month scale, Jesus would have been born on December 31, at 11.59 pm. The greatest scientific discoveries of this century would be in the last second before the end of the year.

Scientists today find it increasingly plausible that our *Big Bang* universe is just one of many countless worlds.

We know that we are, in fact, the Earth thinking about itself for only the last few seconds. Or, as our scientist Miguel Nicolelis said in his recent book

*"...regardless of what is out there in this 13.8 billion year old universe (human estimate, I must emphasize), from our brain's own point of view the cosmos is a gigantic mass of potential information waiting for an observer intelligent enough to extract from this universe knowledge, and, in one breath of intuition, confer some meaning to all this cosmic vastness."* (NICOELIS, 2020, p.15, own translation)

*"The initial regulation of the components of the universe is so fine that a single micromanagement of these parameters would not have allowed the hatching of life on Earth and the development of the complexity that culminates in the appearance of an intelligent being."* (LENOIR, 2013, p.162, own translation)

### **A few brushstrokes on life!**

*"It was religion that first articulated the imperative to revere living things"* - Carl Sagan - Professor of Astronomy and Space Science.

Francis S. COLLINS, coordinator of the Human Genome Project, in his book *The Language of Life: DNA and the Revolution in Your Health*, provides us with the following information:

*"The simplest unit of life, the simplest thing capable of living, is the cell. A typical cell has a diameter of one-tenth of a thousandth of the thickness of a human hair."*

*"From 3.6 billion years ago, when life began, until 1, billion years ago, only single-celled beings existed. In other words, for approximately two billion years, or even longer than that, life on earth consisted only of single-celled beings, although some organized themselves into colonies."*

*"...Each individual is made up of approximately 400 trillion cells, but if we add up the number of microbe cells in our skin, mouth, nose, and intestinal system, the total rises to 1 quadrillion. It would be appropriate to start thinking of human beings as superorganisms in symbiotic coexistence with these microbes. For the most part, they contribute to our normal health and well-being because they have adapted to us, and we have adapted to them, over millions of years."* (COLLINS, 2010, p. 200, own translation)

*"Around one hundred thousand years ago, each human brain already had at its disposal around 86 billion neurons capable of establishing between 100 trillion and 1 quadrillion direct contacts, or synapses, with each other. From within this immeasurable neural workshop, the True Creator of All began his monumental work of sculpting the human universe we know today."* (NICOLELIS, 2020, p. 15, own translation)

Antônio Nobre - a renowned meteorologist and one of the most prestigious Brazilian scientists worldwide - coined the inspired expression: "The human being is a walking galaxy of cellular systems", with 37 trillion individual cells.

For him, "there is an unconditional love in nature: it is the master line of the functioning of the natural system: it is to care for your neighbor".

Frei BETTO, in his book "The Artist's Work: a holistic view of the Universe", provides us with information and reflections:

*"There are more electrons in the head of a pin than there are stars in the whole universe. We are breathing electrons of Ramses II and Buddha, of Caesar and Jesus, of Nero and Torquemada, of Gandhi and Hitler. For the last breath of every human being is evenly distributed in the atmosphere, between the ground and a height of 62 mi. So every time we breathe in, we ingest a few electrons that*

*have already traveled through the lungs of all other living and living beings. Like it or not, we are all in electronic communion." (BETTO, 2007, p. 149, own translation)*

Matthew Fox, in his *"Litany of wonders and blessings of human flesh,"* quotes scientist Arne Wyller:

*"Over 60% of the atoms in our material body were once inside the flaming inferno of cosmic fireball. Every hydrogen atom in our body was once part of the big bang itself. Forty percent of the atoms in our material body came from older stars. This cosmic interconnection is shared by all life forms on this planet, whether they are horses, flowers, fish, or insects. It is also shared by rocks, water, and air - by all inorganic matter." (FOX, 2004, p. 69, own translation)*

Journalist and philosopher Jim Holt adds a curious piece of information, to say the least:

*"It is estimated that some forty billion human beings have been born since the emergence of our species." (HOLT, 2013, p. 272, own translation)*

In order not to lose the focus of our reflection, let's look at some demographic data from the beginning of our era: **Jesus of Nazareth (-5 to 30)** lived 90% of his life in Nazareth, a small village in Galilee, with about 400 inhabitants. Galilee, one of the three Provinces of Palestine, had about 200,000. Of the 4 to 5 million Jews who lived scattered throughout the Roman Empire - mainly in Rome, Alexandria, Antioch and two hundred other cities - about 15% lived in Palestine. According to a 2015 UN report, the world population at the time of Jesus was 200 million, slightly smaller than that of Brazil today. By the end of the first century, Christians numbered only about 20,000, scattered throughout the Roman Empire.

After this brief tour of the vast dimensions of the universe, let us be guided by Prof. John F. Haught:

*"...toward the world of the unimaginably small. As it moves into the interior of this invisible realm, it figures the reverse image of worlds within worlds, now too small and subtle for us to represent pictorially in three insignificant dimensions. Whether in the direction of the large or the small, Science has now rendered obsolete our old maps of either. There are at least two "infinities" that catch our attention today, Teilhard observes: one is the immense; the other, the infinitesimal. But there is also a third infinity, less striking than the other two. It is the infinity of complexity. In the sphere of living and thinking beings, for example, the particles of physics and the elements of chemistry integrate themselves into emerging cells and organisms in which they intertwine in such intricate ways that all attempts to isolate and specify the individual roles of the component units are frustrated. We can also designate this intricate pattern as the infinity of relationality. In a cell or organism - especially those endowed with nervous systems and brains - every component is so inherent and so constitutive of the identity of every other that we cannot understand an organism by considering it in isolation. If we dissect it, we kill it.*

*An organism is a bundle of connections that intertwine, overlap, and feed back on each other in an endless dynamic interaction. To isolate any part of this network is to lose its sense of the whole.*

*"...the effective discoveries of science, such as the Big Bang, the evolutionary path of life, the genetic code, the Hubble Deep Field, and the chemical aspects of the mind, really make the world new to us."*

*"When you take the history of the universe as your basic reference, all your thoughts and actions are different."*

*In the immensity of the universe "who and what are we dealing with when we try to imagine the reality we call "God"?"*

Let's go back to John Haught's remarks:

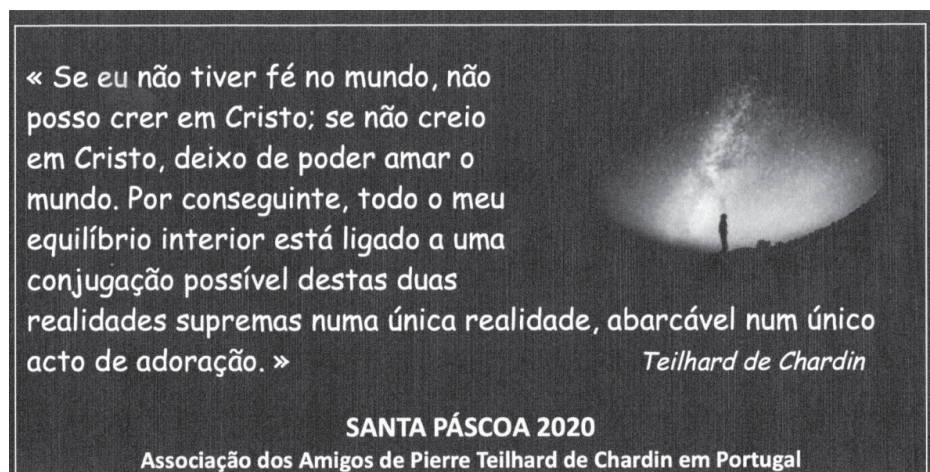
*"Now that we find ourselves entangled in an unimaginable cosmic tessitura and unfathomable temporal depth and spatial extent, what will this mean for the understanding of ourselves, God, creation, the Trinity, Christ, redemption, incarnation, faith, hope, and love?" (HAUGHT, 2009, p.10, own translation)*

I believe there are three general ways to answer this question:

First, we can continue pretending that Science never happened, or that it is talking about things that have no connection whatsoever with faith and theology. (In this case, the Creed does not refer us to heaven and earth, which we are talking about here).

A second answer is to dismiss faith and theology in their entirety, as parasitic competitors, of now obsolete cosmologies.

Third, it is possible to welcome the three infinities, or rather be welcomed by them, in such a way as to interpret them as invitations to an unprecedented amplification of the concept of God, creation, Christ, and redemption.





## CHAPTER 3

# *HOMO SAPIENS* AND HIS BELIEFS

*"Variations aside, God, one way or another,  
appears in all the major religions of the world.  
If we believe that everything comes from God, or from his  
transcendental essence, everything, then,  
Is part of that divine and unique reality."*

Marcelo Gleiser - physics and  
astronomy professor, agnostic

*"As Teilhard de Chardin notes, our own uncertainty  
is at all congruent with the fact that we and the religions that  
we profess are part of an unfinished universe."*

John E. Haught

*"The idea of God can become the ultimate  
obstacle on the road to God."*

Master Eckhart - catholic mystic (13th / 14th century)

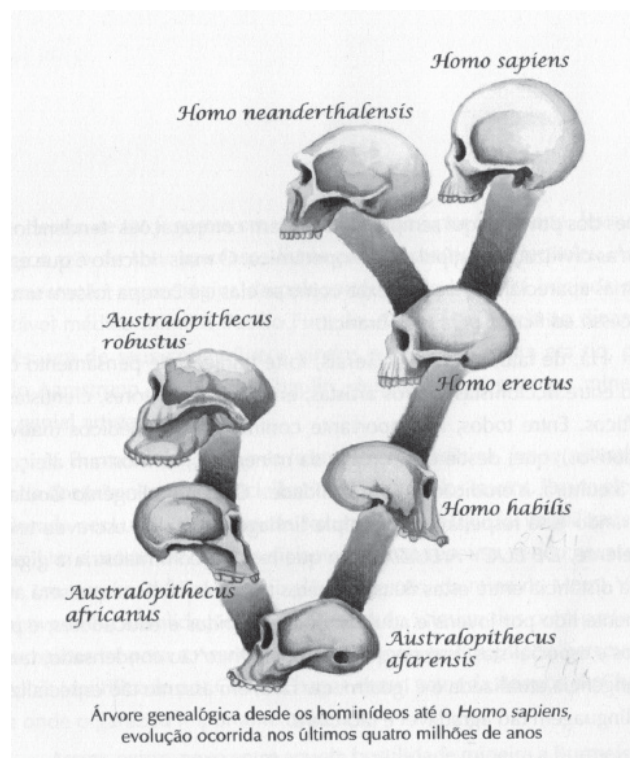
Before taking up the challenge posed by the third option at the end of the previous chapter - trying to understand the "three infinities": the immense, the infinitesimal, and complexity - it is worth reflecting on how we, as historical beings, have dealt, throughout history, with our beliefs and aspirations.

In respect to the relevance of these aspirations and in view of our main objective - Jesus of Nazareth and his message today - they are necessary:

- the contextualization of our species and how "*we - imperfect accidents of creation - are how the Universe reflects on itself*" (Marcelo Gleizer);
- the transition from beliefs, doctrines and dogmas, formulated in mythological language, to a modern language that can be understood, and eventually accepted, by modern man;
- the radical transition of the message in terms of content (e.g. incarnation/redemption, sacrifice, heaven, hell, etc.) and form (doctrine, dogma) to modern reality.

#### **A brief walk through human evolution<sup>4</sup>**

Eugênio Goulart illustrates his book *From Lucy to Luzia* with the drawing below of the "family tree from hominids to *Homo sapiens*, evolution that occurred in the last four million years". (GOULART, 2006, p. 12, own translation)



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<sup>4</sup> Text based on ASLAN - *God: a human story*.



*Homo Neanderthalensis* is said to have arrived in Europe about 200,000 years ago. It coexisted with *Homo sapiens* for a long time. They occupied the same geographical spaces in Europe and Asia between 50,000 and 30,000 years ago and the *Neanderthalensis* probably became extinct due to this interaction. (p. 38)

Recent molecular studies confirm that Neanderthals left no genetic remains in present-day humanity. *Homo sapiens* remained the only remnant of the genus *Homo* to remain on the face of our planet.

*"Genetic scientists who study populations are convinced that all humans descend from the same group of about 10,000 ancestors who lived in East Africa approximately 100,000 years ago."* (COLLINS, 2007, p. 26, own translation)

Their brains were as large and developed as ours. They were primitive only in their tools and technology.

*"The emergence of new ways of thinking and communicating between 70,000 and 30,000 years ago constitutes the Cognitive Revolution, when legends, myths, gods, and religious rites first appeared."* (ASLAN, 2018, p. 30, own translation). "It is in the Upper Paleolithic, between 40 and 10 thousand years ago, that they begin to see the flowering of full religious expression, including evidence of complex ritual behaviors." (p. 30)

"The ability to talk about fictions is the most unique feature of the language of *sapiens*. Fiction allows us not only to imagine but also to do so collectively...to cooperate, extremely flexibly, with countless numbers of strangers." (p. 33).

*"...homo sapiens, what we are for the moment, arises when at a certain moment it makes the leap to what, as Y. N. Harari, we can call the 'cognitive revolution'.*

*This leap of living by realizing unrealities shows itself as a viable way of living," comments Ángel González Pires in "O ato intelectualivo sensiente e a constituição da realidade pessoal" em Xavier ZUBIRI, 2020, p. 146.*

"Around 12,000 to 10,000 years ago we transformed from foragers into farmers: instead of foraging we began to produce food, instead of hunting animals we began to raise them. The birth of agriculture after about 90,000 years, for archaeologist Vere Gordon Childe, was the most significant development in human history after the dominance of fire." (p. 65).

"The agricultural revolution began at the end of the last gladiation, about 10,000 years ago, in the so-called Fertile Crescent, between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. This is the cradle of human civilization, whose irreplaceable relics stored in the Baghdad Museum were vandalized in 2003 during the chaos occasioned by the American invasion of Iraq." (DAWKINS, 2009, p. 46, own translation)

By 7000 BC, most of the common species of plants and animals, with the exception of horses and camels (domesticated around 1000 BC) had been domesticated in Mesopotamia.

Around 5,000 B.C. the world's first irrigation system was built, along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.

With the invention of Egyptian hieroglyphic writing, sometime around 3,300 BCE. - shortly after and probably under the influence of Sumerian cuneiform writing - came the need to make this abstract force more concrete (p. 81).

### **The Belief Systems<sup>5</sup>**

Adam (man) and Eve (mother of the living), our ancestors in Biblical mythology, inherited their belief system in the same way they inherited their hunting skill or their cognitive and linguistic ability: gradually, over hundreds of thousands of years of mental and spiritual evolution (p. 33).

Religious belief is so widespread that it must be considered an elementary part of human experience. We are *homo religiosus* by our existential striving toward transcendence: toward what lies beyond the visible world.

If the propensity for religious belief is inherent in our species, then - scholars argue - it must be a product of the human revolution and there must be a competitive advantage to it (p. 34).

Religion arose in human evolution to answer unanswerable questions and to help early humans manage a threatening and unpredictable world. This is one explanation for religious experience that remains popular today (p. 36).

For Durkheim, religion emerged as a kind of social binder and engenders two things: inclusion and exclusion. It spreads both conflict and cohesion in society (p. 39).

The belief in a *divine lawgiver who determines good and bad behavior* is only 5,000 years old. The belief in life after death - where the embryo of the belief in the resurrection of the dead was formed - appears only in the last books of the Greek Bible (around 200 BC) in the context of the account of the martyrdom of the seven brothers, in the second book of Maccabees (SCARDELAI, 2008, p. 93):

*"You, scoundrel, take us out of this present life. But the King of the world will raise us up to eternal life, we who died by his laws" (Mk 7:9).*

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<sup>5</sup> (SCARDELAI, 2008, p. 93, own translation)

The Indo-European pantheon of gods was constructed in the same way as in Mesopotamia and Egypt, deifying the forces of nature (p. 83). The first text on gods, the Rig Veda, India's oldest sacred text, was composed in Sanskrit around 1500 B.C.

The Mycenaean civilization, around 1,600 B.C. bequeathed us, with classical Greek, two deities remembered to this day: Poseidon (husband of the earth) and Gaia (goddess of the earth).

Homer (928 - 898 B.C.) and Hesiod (780 - 650 B.C.) bequeathed us the "twelve principal gods (the Olympians): members of a great family, whose patriarch was Zeus" (p. 85).

There is a complete misunderstanding of the expression "idol worship." The ancient peoples did not worship pieces of stone, they worshipped the spirits that resided in them...they were imbued with the God, who took form within the idol (p. 80).

### **Monotheism**

Pharaoh Amen-hotep IV, around 1,347 B.C., considering himself the son and prophet of the one god Aton, changed his name to Akhenaton (Aton's acting spirit). For him *"the Universe could only be created by a single superior mind, worthy of all honors, unlike the society addicted to stone gods that in reality use them as a bargaining element in their personal and petty everyday desires"*. He built the holy city of Akhetaton, where he preached the teachings of peace, love, equality and solidarity. He tried to impose his monotheistic vision over the entire Egyptian Empire. Although Akhenaton and his wife Nefertiti (Tutankhamen's parents) left an important spiritual legacy to humanity, with them was buried the first attempt at monotheism in history.

A little over 200 years later, around 1,100 B.C., monotheism appeared again, this time through the teachings of the Iranian prophet Zarathustra Spitama (p. 92).

The traditional view of the Israelite people is that they were strict monotheists, dedicated to the one God of the universe, surrounded on all sides by the polytheistic Canaanites and their false deities. This view does not hold up in the face of historical and archaeological examination. (p. 114)

The story of how monotheism - after centuries of failure and rejection - finally and permanently took root in human spirituality begins with the story of how the god of Abraham, **El**, and the god of Moses (1,250 B.C.), **Yahweh**, gradually came together to become the one, singular deity we now know as God (p. 116).

*The examination of this documentation - archaeological discoveries, inscriptions, iconographic documents, Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian annals, etc. - has made it possible to portray the path of the god, with his origin located somewhere in the "South," between Egypt and the Negeb, a god who is first of all connected to war and storms and who becomes, little by little, the God of Israel and of Jerusalem,*

*to become - after a major catastrophe, the destruction of Jerusalem and Judah - the only God, creator of heaven and earth. An invisible and transcendent God, but who claims to have a particular relationship with his people.*

*Indeed, contrary to what certain theologians continue to claim, there is no doubt that the God of the Bible has not been the 'one' since forever." (RÖMER, 2016, p. 14, own translation)*

*"...Asherah seems to have been the most significant presence alongside Yahweh as well as El, Anat, and even the Sun/Marduk" ( PEREIRA, 2014, p. 201, own translation)*

The formation of Israel dates from 1,250 - 1,000 B.C., when the first five books (Pentateuchs) of the Bible, which form the Jewish Torah, began to be written. When the nation of Israel became the kingdom of Israel, around 1060 B.C. the merger of **Yahweh** and **El** was reinforced. (p. 118)

*"...it is at the turn of the second to the first millennium before our era that Yhwh becomes a tutelary god to Saul and David introduces him to Jerusalem.*

*Little by little, Yhwh replaced the solar deity and became not only the supreme god of Jerusalem, but more importantly, of the entire territory of Judah.*

*...the goddess Asherah was associated with Yhwh as consort, but she was also worshipped independently of him, especially by women, as Queen of Heaven. It is only in the reign of Josiah that Yhwh finds himself alone, without his Asherah." (ROMER, 2019, p.94, 123, 168, own translation)*

The God that emerges from the Babylonian exile is not the abstract deity that Akhenaton worshiped. It is not the pure animating spirit that Zarathustra imagined. It is not the formless substance of the universe described by the Greek philosophers. This was a new kind of God, both singular and personal. A solitary God in human form who nevertheless made beings in his image. An eternal and indivisible God who displays the full range of human emotions and qualities, good and bad (p.121).

*"One cannot speak of a Jew, or of Judaism, before the Persian epoch, or the Hellenistic epoch, because it is only around the fourth century that a religious system is established that resembles what we today designate by the name of Judaism." (RÖMER, 2021, p. 19)*

*"The earliest biblical writings are from Northern Israel, between 800-750 BCE." (KAEFER, 2016, p. 119, own translation)*

The biblical description of the history of the Hebrew people from the beginning (Genesis) of the world and of mankind until the death of their charismatic leader, Moses - evidently a poetic, mythological narrative - is unfortunately, very poorly understood.

When Moses tries to establish a set of social reforms - weekly rest (on the Sabbath), the rest of the land (every 7 years), the return of his property in the 50th year - (Deut. 25, 4, 14) - the writers of Genesis find no better way than to create a narrative in which God himself works six days and rests on the seventh. A genius move, we would say today, rather than assigning the narrators the office of historians.

The narrative of the book Genesis comes from two sources - from the priests and another, more ancient, from popular wisdom - and deals with our origins, sexuality, death, freedom, violence and the end of the world. Intriguing, "mysterious" and relevant issues to this day.

At the beginning of our era, in the bosom of Judaism, a social movement of followers of Jesus of Nazareth arose - *the Nazarites*, or *followers of the path* - which came to become a new religion, around the year 125 - Christianity - which, in three centuries, strengthened Christian monotheism and supplanted the hegemony, at least in the West, of paganism/polytheism, whose first pictographic records, according to Reza ASLAN, date back to 40.000 (NUNES, 2019, p. 10).

Archeological discoveries from the late 19th century show many commonalities between the first pages of Genesis and lyrical and sapiential texts, notably from Mesopotamia (BIBLE, TB, p.26)

We conclude our walk through the past with an appeal from our scientist Marcelo Gleiser, in his book "The End of Heaven and Earth: The Apocalypse in Science and Religion":

*"By learning more about the world around us, about the various cycles of creation and destruction that continually take place in the heavens and on earth, let us be able to grow a little more, to see beyond our differences, and to work together for the preservation of our planet and our species. The first step is simple: just look around, with respect, curiosity, humanity and admiration. And we don't have even a minute to lose."* (GLEISER, 2011, p. 363, own translation)



Hunter-gatherers made these handprints about 9,000 years ago in the "Cova das Mãos" (Cave of Hands) in Argentina. It is as if these hands, long dead, were coming out of the rock and trying to reach us. It is one of the most touching relics of the ancient hunter-gatherer world - but no one knows what it means. (HARARI, 2014, p. 66, own translation)



THE LIFE OF LUZIA IN THE CAVES OF MINAS GERAIS  
ABOUT 11,500 YEARS AGO



GROUP OF DANCERS

Parietal painting. South Africa (about 7,000 years old)

(J. A. MAUDUIT, 1959, p. 230)





## PART II



## CHAPTER 4

# WHY IS THERE SOMETHING, AND NOT NOTHING?

*"Those who know a lot, also know that they don't know;  
at least if they are wise";  
"When you come too quickly to God,  
you run the risk of a very small god."*

Epicurus

Titus Lucretius Caro (99-55 B.C.), disciple of Epicurus (341-271 B.C.)<sup>6</sup>, intending to spread, in Rome, the thought of his master, published the poem *"On the Nature of Things"*, which reads:

*"Nature forms one thing from another again,  
and does not allow anything to be generated but  
with the help of the death of something else."*

This poem, curiously, was lost for over a millennium and was found by a snooping Renaissance man, among other scrolls, in a monastery in Germany in 1417.

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<sup>6</sup> On Epicurus, see: [www.tetrapharmakon.com.br](http://www.tetrapharmakon.com.br)

*"One thing comes from another and nothing comes from nothing"*. This question is taken up by the philosopher Leibniz (1646-1716), a central figure in the history of mathematics and philosophy. An optimist, he considered *"our universe the best of all possible worlds, which God could have created."*

A theoretical precursor of computation, Leibniz posed the question:

### **Why is there Something, and not Nothing?**

This question John Archibald Wheeler - who took quantum mechanics from Europe to the USA - converted to this original formula: *"It from bit"* - how can the world (it) arise from information (bit)? - Hans Küng comments: *"so far no process of creating information has been discovered. It seems that we are facing a "meta-physical" question"*. (KÜNG, 2011, p. 107, own translation)

So let's start with nothing, which is *"easier and simpler than something"*, according to the *"simplicity law of economy"*.

Jim Holt, journalist and philosopher, intrigued by the question *"Why is there Something, and not just Nothing?"* in the wake of Greek thinkers, Leibniz, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein, went out into the field to interview leading thinkers on this question.

If the Principle of Sufficient Reason is valid, Holt thought, there must be an explanation for the existence of the world, whether or not we are able to find it. *"Everything that exists has a reason,"* Leibniz (1646-1716) already said.

In search of the answer to this question, the American journalist interviewed in the United States, England and France *"philosophers, theologians, particle physicists, cosmologists, mystics and a great American novelist"*.

The record of these interviews can be found in the thought-provoking, humorous and enjoyable book *Why the World Exists: An Existential Mystery*.

The author classifies the thinkers, in relation to the question posed, into three groups:

- the optimists - "those who maintain that there must be a reason for the existence of the world;
- the pessimists - "who consider that there might be a reason for the existence of the world;
- the rejectionists - "who insist on believing that there can be no reason - the question itself is meaningless."

In this regard comments the mathematics and physics teacher, theoretician, also a theologian, Simone MORANDINI:

*"Here resonates only the fragility of a question, but certainly not a question that can be left quietly open. By the very fact of questioning, it makes evident the limitation of a purely scientific speech, when the issues at stake involve the totality of being and the subjectivity of the questioner. Positively, it also reveals, to science's view of the world, the need to rethink the value of notions such as purpose and meaning, which the progress of scientific research seemed to have eliminated from its own vocabulary."* (MORANDINI, 2011, p. 96, own translation)

Not wanting to impoverish Jim Holt's book, we register here some comments of our own and of interviewees: (HOLT, 2013)

There are two kinds of truth:

- logic - can explain nothing about reality;
- the empirical - depend on evidence provided by the senses - why the world exists - is beyond the reach of science.

"What makes man above other creatures is the fact that he is aware of his finitude; the prospect of death makes conceivable nothingness, the shock of non-being. Why does the world exist? It rhymes with why do I exist? - Those are the two great existential mysteries." - John Updike (p. 25)

- The universe encompasses everything that physically exists. A scientific explanation must include some kind of physical cause, but any physical cause is by definition part of the universe to be explained. (p. 12)

*"Science has no way of answering the deepest questions. From the moment we ask why there is something and not just nothingness, we have gone beyond science."* - Allan Sandage - the father of modern astronomy. (p. 151)

*"God is so perfect that he need not exist."* - comment from "a renowned professor of philosophical theology" (p. 17)

*"It is not the way the world presents itself that is mystical, but the fact that it exists."* - Wittgenstein. (p. 264)

- A God whose existence could be proven by Science - and who moreover left fingerprints all over the *Big Bang* - would not be God, at least not the totally unique God. (p. 261)

- Holt records a comment by Miguel Unamuno on the terrifying idea of nothingness (p. 286):

*"I must confess however painful this confession may be, that even at the time of the simple faith of my youth I did not tremble at the mentions of hellfire, no matter how terrible they were, for I always felt that the idea of nothingness was far more terrifying than hell."*

**"...it is extraordinary that anything exists..."**



## CHAPTER 5

# DOES GOD EXIST?

## PASCAL'S WAGER

*"...Christianism is only meaningful when reality is not, solely and above all, the world of things simply present; and the meaning of Christianism as a message of salvation is exactly, first and foremost, that of dissolving the peremptory claims of reality."*

*(Santiago Zabala in FERREIRA, 2015, p.109)*

*"The human being is no more than a reed, the most fragile of nature, but a thinking reed. Two exceptions: exclude Reason and admit nothing but Reason. If we submit everything to Reason, our Religion will not be anything mysterious or supernatural. But if we go against the Principles of Reason, our Religion will be absurd and ridiculous."*

(Blaise Pascal)

Blaise Pascal (1623-1662), one of humanity's great geniuses, mathematician and physicist, also dedicated himself, with depth and freedom, to Philosophy and Theology. Inventor of the first mechanical calculator, he is considered "the first example of an intellectual to rebel against censorship and lies." (JULIATO, 2012, p. 206)

Stimulated by the dice game he was playing, Pascal posed, as a wager, the following question:

**Does God exist - or doesn't exist?**

He, who helped create the calculation of odds, asks: How would you bet? Does it exist? Does it not exist? It is necessary to choose. Not choosing is also a choice. *"In this you are not free; you have entered the boat.*

Both possibilities are uncertain. Reason, here, can do nothing to help us.

*"With the wager he wanted to make it clear that in the question of the existence, or non-existence, of God, a judgment of pure reason is not required, but a decision of the whole man, which cannot be rationally justified, but can be accepted by reason. A calculated risk, therefore, is a serious matter. Nothing is lost, when one believes in God, but everything can be gained."* (KÜNG, 2011, p. 87, own translation)

### **So bet that it exists, without hesitation!**

The wager of Pascal, who died at the age of 39, in the early days of what was to be called the "scientific revolution," represents "the *most audaciously rationalistic*" approach.

*"The last step of reason is to recognize that there is an infinity of things that go beyond it."*

*"If there is a God, he is infinitely beyond our comprehension. Since he is invisible and boundless, he has no relation to us. We are therefore incapable of knowing what he is, and if he is." - (Pascal, "Thoughts")*

Pascal's wager shows that it is irrational not to believe in God, if one thinks carefully about the alternatives<sup>7</sup> :

- *God exists and I believe: I win infinity;*
- *God exists and I don't believe: I miss infinity;*
- *God does not exist and I believe; what I lose is not significant;*
- *God doesn't exist and I don't believe: what I earn is not significant.*

*"If we reflect well, from the nature of the alternative (happy and endless life, or nothingness) and the magnitudes of the wager (finite bet against infinity) the odds of unbelief and faith are to each other as "zero to infinity." In any case nothing is lost when one believes in God, but everything can be gained."* (KÜNG, 2011, p. 87, own translation)

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<sup>7</sup> MURCHO - *Pascal's Wager* in "Estado Arte" - Estado de S. Paulo, 12/12/2019



Pascal's assertion that there is no adequate proof that God exists, nor that he does not exist, was extremely bold at a time when the proofs for God's existence proposed by Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) and Anselm (1033-1109) were held to be irrefutable.

*"When I contemplate the small duration of my life absorbed in the preceding and following eternity, the small space that I fill and even that I see abysmal in the infinite immensity of spaces that I ignore and am ignored by, I am terrified and amazed to see myself here and not there, because now and not then. Who put me here? By the order and intervention of whom this place and this time were destined for me." (Pascal, "Thoughts")*

For Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) there are three forms of knowledge: **opinion**, which lacks both subjective and objective certainty; **faith** - has subjective conviction, but not objective conviction; **belief**, both subjectively and objectively sufficient, is called **knowledge** or **science**.

For science, objective evidence is a presupposition; for faith, an impossibility. Since science has no sufficient basis to say that nothing that is not sensible exists, it also has no claim to deny that God exists. In this way *"a scientist can make claims about God, but making it clear that his claims are not 'scientific' but philosophical-metaphysical."* (JULIATTO, 2012, p. 43, own translation)

Alvin Plantinga comments on the three types of arguments for the existence of God, according to Kant: (PLATINGA, 2012, p. 95)

- **cosmological argument** - if everything is contingent, that is, could exist or not, *"we cannot but admit the existence of a being that has by itself its own necessity, not receiving it from another, but rather causing in others its necessity. This is what men call God"* - Thomas Aquinas

*Interesting argument, but puzzling. Thomas' followers and commentators have tried to make amends by making various ingenious suggestions; none of them, I believe, are successful.* " (p.101)

- **teleological argument** - the classic version of this argument is by William Paley, archdeacon of Carlisle and eminent 18th century philosopher, complemented by David Hume: all the excellencies of the work - the world - lead us to attribute with justice to the craftsman:

*"The universe gives the appearance of having been designed with certain purposes in mind; thus, he asserts, we must conclude that the universe was actually designed by a very powerful and wise being."* (p. 104)

The conclusion... is that the teleological argument, like the cosmological one, is unsuccessful. (p. 107)

- **ontological argument** - first formulated by Anselm of Canterbury in the 11th century. This argument for the existence of God has fascinated philosophers ever since Anselm first formulated it.

*"There is no doubt that something such that nothing greater can be thought exists both in the understanding and in reality."* (Anselm, *Proslogion*)

The most famous and important objection to the ontological argument is in Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*.

*"...the ontological argument is precisely an attempt to make God exist by definition."* (p. 120)

*"We have to ask whether this argument is a successful case of natural theology, whether it **proves** the existence of God. And the answer has to be, I think, that it does not. After all, an argument for the existence of God can be **sound** without proving the existence of God in any relevant sense."* (p. 139)

We can group people according to their position regarding the belief that God exists:

- theist - yes, He exists; (there are post-theist, or anti-theist believers today)
- Atheist - no, he doesn't exist;
- agnostic - yes or no, I don't know.

Paul Tillich (1886-1965), in 1933 *had the honor* - as he claimed - of being the first professor dismissed from a German university for his opposition to Nazism. He went on to teach in New York, Harvard, and Chicago, becoming one of the greatest philosophers of our time.

In his book *The Courage of Being*, Tillich examines the problem of anxiety that dominates modern man and its reflections in philosophy, literature, and everyday life. In analyzing what he calls *Transcendent Theism*, the foundation of his concept of "*absolute faith*," he discusses theism in a way that says much also about the other two positions, atheism and agnosticism.

Ponders Tillich (TILLICH, 1976, p. 111, own translation):

*"**Theism** can mean a non-specific affirmation of God. Theism, in this sense, does not say what he means by using the name God."* (It is in this sense that we are rendering the term here).

Proceeding further, Tillich presents four senses of the term, on an ascending scale:

1. Rhetorical use, very proper to dictatorial politicians and other people who wish to impress audiences. It produces in his listeners the feeling that the speaker is serious and morally trustworthy... and stigmatizes his opponents as atheists;

2. Theists without purposes, but who cannot consider a world without God, whatever this God is.
3. Symbolic or practical, expressing a deep emotional state, or the highest ethical idea, still very undefined.

*"The concept of a "Personal God" interfering with natural facts, or being "a thing independent of natural facts," makes God a natural object next to others, a being among beings, perhaps the highest, but still a being. This is actually not only the destruction of the physical system, but more so the destruction of any meaningful idea of God." (ARMSTRONG, 1994, p. 382, own translation)*

The atheistic denial of these three types of theism is as vague as theism itself.

4. The divine-human encounter, which configures a theism with another meaning. In this case, it refers to those elements in the Judeo-Christian tradition that emphasize the *person-to-person* relationship *with God*, including in prayer and practical devotion.

Atheism, from the point of view of this theism, is the human attempt to escape the divine-human encounter. It is an existential problem - not a theoretical one.

"**Atheism**" is a term that designates very diverse phenomena; a gratuitous denial of God, indifference to God, the revolt against evil in the world; the conscious and philosophical denial of God; the rejection of the God fabricated by the atheists' own imagination, etc. (CRUZ, 2011, p. 119)

The best examples of the conscious and philosophical denial of God, according to Eduardo da Cruz, would be materialistic existentialism and Marxism.

*"Just as there are various religions," Silvia G. F. Rodrigues argues, "there are various types of atheism. Walters (2015) points out several subgroups of atheism. Among them, **positive atheism**, active disbelief in God, and **negative atheism**, the absence of belief in God. And among these are the neo atheists, who are characterized by militancy. This new atheism is an **evangelical atheism**, that is, a social political movement, which postulates that religion should not be tolerated but rather confronted and criticized. Dubbed by promoters of religion as the 'four horsemen of the apocalypse' - San Harris, Daniel Dennett, Richard Dawkins, and George Hitchens - they do not mind, on the other hand, being idolized as gurus, prophets, and the new clergy of atheism.*

*To declare that the ultimate worldview must be atheistic, based on Darwin's evolution, Dawkins had to make a 'leap of faith,' from agnosticism to atheism, as much as those who made the same leap in the opposite direction."*

Dawkins' leap would be an answer to Pascal's wager, with a special feature: a million-dollar business. His *Reason and Science Foundation* provides benefits to contributors, which vary depending on the financial contribution: \$85; \$210 per month; \$5,000 per year, or special gifts of \$500,000.

Notes atheist Noan Chomsky, "father of modern linguistics," Professor Emeritus at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology:

*"Although neoatheists proclaim themselves enlightened and free thinkers, they come across as narrow-minded and bigoted, uninformed, whose sole purpose is to antagonize religious people."* (VALLE, 2018, p. 61, own translation)

**Pascal's wager** - God exists; God does not exist - as he himself made clear, is a decision and/or intellectual-emotional stance of each individual.

Two scientists in the same field of knowledge, biology, are betting in the opposite direction:

- Richard Dawkins - brilliant Oxford professor, trained in the rigorous methods of the biological sciences, said no to the existence of God and became a *"missionary of atheism."*
- Francis Collins, director of the Human Genome Project, a convert, made his choice known through the book *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence that He Exists*.

As you can see, two conscious, reasonable choices - objective or subjective - antagonistic. There is no way out, as Pascal said: *you are in the game, you have to play*.

Assuming that He exists, He must smile at the dilemmas of His creatures.

Comte-Sponville, scientist, atheist, comments:

*"we should not expect scientific knowledge, however spectacular its victories, especially in the last three centuries, to prove anything against the existence of God."* (JULIATTO, 2012, p. 161, own translation)

**Conclusion: as Pascal thought:**

*"if God is outside nature and if Science is concerned with the questions of nature, Science can neither confirm nor deny his existence."* (JULIATTO, 2012, p. 163, own translation)

Or, as our brilliant economist José Carlos de Assis put it:

*"Attempts to prove that God does not exist have run into a semantic paradox. There is something called God that does not exist. So, for the atheist, God exists and does not exist... one cannot claim that*

*something does not exist, the non-existence of which one cannot prove.*" (ASSIS, 2012, p. 27, own translation)

The position of agnostics inspires much respect from those who believe. One of the Brazilian scientists who most inspires this feeling, because of his spirituality and openness to dialogue, is Marcelo Gleiser.

*"Minimizing the importance of faith in people's lives is a serious mistake. Of every ten Americans - a survey of a sample of 35,000 people - seven, on average, are absolutely certain that God exists."* (GLEISER, 2010, p. 39, own translation)

Statements like Jules Renard's can only inspire respect:

*"I am afraid I cannot find him, yet I will continue to search for him. If he exists, he will appreciate my effort."* (JULIATTO, 2012, p. 153, own translation)

The "wager of Pascal" is, above all, a call to dialogue, to search. In this sense, a space called the *Atrium of the Gentiles* was created in Paris, at the headquarters of UNESCO, in 2011, on the initiative of the Vatican, for dialogue between believers and non-believers.



## CHAPTER 6

# GOD: CREATOR

*"you love all that you have created,  
you don't get bored with anything you've done;  
If you had hated something, you would not have done it.  
And how could anything subsist,  
If you hadn't wanted it?  
How would it maintain its existence if you had not called it?  
But you spare them all, because they are yours:  
Lord friend of life!"*

(Wisdom Book, written around 100 B.C.  
- the most recent of the Old Testament books)

*"Science is, for me, a deeply  
Spiritual activity, which brings me closer to Nature and, as  
consequence, to my essence. I don't see any  
need to raise the existence of supernatural  
entities to plug holes in  
our knowledge."*

Marcelo Gleiser - Letters to a young scientist

*"The universe is like a sentence from God,  
whose ending we still don't know."*

John Paul II

*"The great American botanist Asa Gray insists on the fact that God must be conceived as timeless; and he says that every philosophical theist must adopt the idea that the creator's intervention is made or since all time, or through all time."*

(ÖSLE, 2020, p. 42)

*"...the Bible has no pretensions of being an eternal manual of science, but of consciousness. Its great revelation is not how the universe and reality works, but how the interaction between creature and Creator takes place."*

Rabbi Nilton Bonder

*"Give us today the faith of each day, but deliver us from belief."*

Aldoux Huyley (1894-1963)

Science has given us the age of the universe, 13.73 billion years, with a margin of error of less than 1%.

The *Big Bang* - the initial singularity - creates space and time, debunking our idea that the universe was created at a certain moment in time.

*"It all started with a gigantic cosmic explosion. It expanded and became colder. But after a hundredth of a second it still had a temperature of 100 billion degrees Celsius and a density of 4 billion times that of water. And at the same time it still continued to expand uniformly in all directions."*  
(KÜNG, 2011, p. 26, own translation)



In 1964, two American engineers casually discovered the cosmic microwave, or background, radiation... which is none other than what is left of that originally very hot radiation associated with the initial explosion.

*"Quantum mechanics elaborates the uncertainty principle (Heisenberg) and introduces element of flexibility. Objective reality appears as above our ability to write it. Every objective presentation recognizes itself as affected by the interpretive position of the subject, by its narrative form."* (LENOIR, 2013, p. 162, own translation)

As the theologian Hans Küng observes:

*"How much 'faith' is not placed by human reason in the cosmological model. Billions of galaxies emerging from a tiny unit after the initial explosion, wouldn't that be a kind of scientific 'faith' in the miracle?"*

*"...unbelievable, nothing in theology, or metaphysics, comes close to the Big Bang. If its description of the origin of the cosmos came from the Bible, or the Koran, rather than from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, it would certainly be treated as a fabulous myth."* (KÜNG, 2011, p. 70, own translation)

A dose of irony is good, but it cannot hide the problem at hand: ***is there a God who created the universe?***

Our knowledge about the universe changed radically in the 20th century.

*"The great novelty of our time is the evolutionary story in which we realize that we human beings are all immersed in a living, developing universe...to use theological language that emphasizes our separation, in relation to the universe, is to burden our intention with an unnecessary load."* (SWIMME, 2004, p. 125, own translation)

We cannot, therefore, talk about the relationship between God and the world without reviewing our concepts about God. Not that we have learned much about Him, but we have learned a lot, in the same period, about what He is not. Our concepts about God are always changing. As Augustine of Hippo (354-430) said:

*"If you understand, it's not Him."*

In this sense, systematic reflection on God and our human condition - theology - has changed a lot. Like all human knowledge, theology, as an attempt to contribute to knowing man and God, and their mutual relationship, is always historical and reflects a point of view. It is, we must not forget, something that will always be, as Augustine reminds us, beyond our knowledge.

We must also be aware of the current historical moment, which is not at all simple; "*with media globalization providing a religious invasion never before known in history,*" as João Batista Libânio reminds us.

There is much debate, antagonism, and perplexity about which paths to take.

According to Alfonso Rubio, doctor in Theology, three major discoveries of modernity have radically changed the traditional vision of the human being:

- the realization that the Earth is not the center of the universe;
- the discovery of the evolutionary character of life (We also add the accelerated expansion of the universe). The throne on which the human being places himself, proclaiming himself king of creation, is undermined by evolutionism;
- the decisive blow of psychoanalysis against human self-sufficiency... by showing us that we are commanded, at least in good part, by forces and instincts, which we do not control and of which we are not even aware.  
(RUBIO, 2008, p. 63)

We add to these, another discovery:

- the social conditioning, especially that of class and race (structural prejudices), that conform our ideology, making the dominant ideology, in many countries, the biggest barrier to social justice and to a compassionate and merciful look at one's neighbor, and, therefore, to real adherence to the message of Jesus of Nazareth.

## CHAPTER 7

# NO TO THE "POTHOLE-PUNCHING" GOD

*"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth....  
God said, 'Let there be light. And the light began to exist. God saw that the light was good.  
'Let there be the firmament!' And God called the firmament heaven..."*

Genesis, 1;1-8 - "priestly code",  
around 500 B.C.

*"An indefinable power existed from eternity.  
She was already before the birth of heaven and Earth.  
Indeterminate perfection, eternal energy, endless movement,  
immutable motion, unique force, omnipresent and imperishable.  
Nameless, but sensed by all, mother and creative principle  
of the universe, no one knows its real name,  
But we call it Tao."*

Tao Te Ching, poem 25 - written between 350 and 250 B.C.

*The Judeo-Christian world view, 'in the process of the origin of the first book of Moses, Genesis, spanned five hundred years. The first creation account (Gen.1;2-4) was called the "priestly code" and was written after the Babylonian exile, around 500 BC. A very different myth from the Babylonian myth. The characteristics of this first biblical account of creation are surprisingly unique: the transcendence of God, the dignity of man, the order and unity of creation. The structure of creation poetically organized, in "six days". The second creation account (Gen. 3; 4-25), predates the first by a few centuries, was written, or redacted, as early as around 900 B.C. The narrative here focuses on the creation of the first human couple - with their spirit and body "image of God." (KÜNG, 2011, p. 63)*

As Miranda observes: "Some centuries later Plato dealt at length with the theme of the creation of the universe, and Aristotle then discovered the paradox of the first motor that is necessarily immobile. This apparently simple solution to a complicated problem has a drawback: it transfers to God the weight of the motor-immobile contradiction, as the Book of Wisdom does (7:24): "More than all motion, Wisdom (immutable) is mobile. Like the center of the wheel's axle, which seems immovable as it turns."

*"For the Jewish tradition, not only is God the author of creation but he is also revealed by it. This theme recurs throughout the Tanak, both in the book of the prophets and in the Book of Psalms, Wisdom, Job, etc." (SOTER, 2009, p.159, own translation)*

The Bible, as the word of God, through the literal reading, supported the entire Christian doctrine of faith, which in turn supported the entire Christian worldview. *"Darwin's evolutionism constituted a coup de grace to the reliability of the biblical account of the creation of the world. It was, especially for the church leadership, a matter of survival. If the Bible collapsed, with it would collapse the power of the church and its financial security." (LENAERS, 2014, p. 139, own translation)*

To better understand, that is, according to the scientific, hegemonic mentality - the "man-God-man" relationship - Roger Lenaers proposes the concepts of *heteronomy* and *autonomy*. According to him, the pre-modern image of the world is founded on the idea of heteronomy, for which our world depends on the other. This is an axiom; it is real, but there is no way to prove it. It is this other world that guides us and produces prescriptions for our own.

*"The Old and New Testaments, the entire heritage of the Church Fathers, all scholasticism, the councils, including Vatican II, the entire liturgy, the dogmas and their theological elaboration start from the axiom of the two parallel worlds. Jesus himself and the "apostles and prophets," on which the Christian creed is founded, thought heteronomously." (LENAERS, 2014, p. 139, own translation)*

This pre-scientific, in many ways mythological/symbolic, world view has been crumbling with the advance of the various branches of science.

In scientific thought no free space was left to be occupied by heteronomy. The baton that directs the cosmic dance is not supraterrrestrial: the universe obeys its own (in Greek *autós*) melody, its own laws (in Greek *nomos*), it is **autonomous**. A new axiom, opposed to heteronomy, made its entrance and dislodged little by little, the old one. Heteronomy versus autonomy: two opposing views. The universe is autonomous. The "God of heaven" does not intervene in the world, on earth, in the human trajectory.

*"The Christian message is not inherent to heteronomy; it constituted only a mental scheme, a way of seeing, useful in a certain historical period. It is not easy to assimilate the consequences that the human being, as the apex of cosmic evolution, is autonomous, that is, he has absolute and untouchable rights: absolute right to be respected, to freedom of conscience and religion, to free speech, to participate in decision making, which concern him. In other words, democracy."* (LENAERS, 2010, p. 22, own translation)

To get an idea of the challenge ahead of us, let's look at the position of Miguel Nicolelis, professor of Neurobiology, Neurology, Neurosurgery, Biomedical Engineering, and Experimental Psychology:

*"In my view, without an intelligent life form playing the role of an avid observer and creative interpreter, nothing out there can cross the crucial threshold needed to be considered information. Thus, in the same manner as renowned American physicist John Archibal Wheeler<sup>8</sup>, I subscribe to the theory that the universe can only be defined or described by the accumulation of observations generated by all intelligent life forms capable of a coherent description of the Cosmos."* (NICOLELIS, 2020, p. 215, own translation)

Does the "true creator of everything" (TCE), in Nicolelis' expression, leave any place for God?

Werner Heisenberg, who won the 1932 Nobel Prize in Physics for the creation of quantum mechanics, takes a position on the cause of the universe's existence:

*"If from the undoubted fact of the existence of the world one wants to conclude to the cause of that existence, in no point does this assumption contradict our scientific knowledge. No scientist has a single fact or a single argument that contradicts this assumption. Even if we are clearly dealing here with a cause that - how could it be otherwise? - must be sought outside this three-dimensional world of ours."* (KÜNG, 2011, p.163, own translation)

Some other positions on the question of creation:

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<sup>8</sup> Check out Chapter 4: "It from bit"

- *"I believe that God exists and that everything precedes him. The order and harmony of the atomic particles must have been imposed by someone"* (Werner Heisenberg);
- *"scientific discoveries are little windows through which one can contemplate the Creator"* (Werner von Braun);
- *"man finds God behind every door that Science can open."* (Albert Einstein);
- *"for believing people, God is at the beginning; for scientists it is at the end of their reflections."* (Max Planck);
- *"God enters through a particular door into each individual. This door opens only from within, and the key is with each individual. He does not force anyone to accept it. He simply extends an invitation. And that invitation is extended to everyone."* (Emerson) (JULIATTO, 2012, p. 150, own translation)

Brian Swimme, PhD in mathematical cosmology, wrote:

*"I use the expression 'omnicreative abyss' as a means of pointing to this mystery at the base of being. The universe arises from the omnicreating abyss, not just fifteen billion years ago, but at all times...the root of any being is not the matter of which they are composed, but the matter together with the power that gives rise to the matter...the one who generated the universe is also generating it at this moment."* (SWIMME, 2004, p. 126, own translation)

*".... the problem of God is already posed in the constitutive reconnection of human existence, that dimension prior to all rational demonstration of the existence of God."* (ZUBIRI, 2020, p. 91, own translation)

*"Dios está patente en el ser mismo del hombre, como fundamentante. El hombre consiste en estar viviendo de Dios, y, portanto, siendo en El."* (ZUBIRI, 1978, p. 377)

Accepting the autonomy of the universe and the human being is not easy; it is even more difficult to draw the consequences in terms of our beliefs and devotions. We are still far from the necessary theoretical and practical revision. We are facing something like a *"cultural mutation"* that takes time and a lot of effort to assimilate.

As a matter of fact, a survey in the United States found that half of the population there still defends the historical credibility of the biblical accounts of creation, rejecting for that reason the Theory of Evolution. (LENARS, 2014, p. 140)

The notion of *"creation from nothing"* highlights the divine transcendence in relation to all that is created and sheds light on the question of the relationship between nature and creation. As the

philosopher/theologian Raimon Panikkar put it, "the nothing from which God creates everything is God." Creation by God and evolutionism are not opposed, as fundamentalist groups argue.

*"Creation from nothing in the Bible was developed much later, in Jewish communities that underwent Hellenistic influence. It first appears in the Second Book of Maccabees, written originally in Greek, around 175-135 BCE." (KÜNG, 2011, p. 163, own translation)*

Since 1929 in the United States, "**creationism**" - a term used as a synonym for the Christian doctrine of creation - has been closely associated with fundamentalist Christians, who continue to defend the literal reading of the Bible.

The so-called "**science of creationism**", (in contrast to the perfectly reasonable religious attitude that perceives the world as God's creation), is one of the most absurd errors in the history of religion.

More sophisticated is the "**intelligent project**" that merely weaves a web of possibilities without bothering to mention the obvious sectarian goals of its mission. Why assume that the only alternative to Darwin is Genesis? (SALOMON, 2003, p. 48)

This is a modern version of the traditional teleological argument for the existence of God made by a group of "**creationists**".

Fred Heeren, in his book *Show Me God*, proposes "*three broad lines of scientific evidence of a real creation event: the laws of thermodynamics, Einstein's theory of General Relativity, and the observations of Astronomy.*" (HEEREN, 2008, p. 173, own translation)

Despite the author's contribution to the dissemination of cosmology, his proposition adds no value to either science or theology.

Lenaers reports a more sophisticated variant, which is the "*smart sketch*":

*"This idea contains the thesis that the entire evolutionary process may very well obey its own laws and follow its course autonomously, i.e., without outside intrusions, but that the end result would be too complex and at the same time too well ordered to be explained solely by means of the random and essentially chaotic play of undirected mutations. Underlying evolution must be a plan that was given to it at the moment of the (hypothetical) big bang. Precisely by means of this plan inherent in it, a creative Omnipotence would be present at each step of the autonomous process, certainly without intervening from the outside in, but rather by having predetermined, in the original plan, the direction and paths. Thus both the autonomy of the cosmos and the reality of a creator-God would be guaranteed.*

Scientific research only reveals the chain of causes and effects, and does not provide arguments for or against the activity of a creative intelligence.

In any case the scientific world does not look kindly on this kind of theory that *"unconsciously continues to depart from the imagination of an extra cosmic God."*

If we can understand the relationship between God and the cosmos differently, the contradiction will automatically disappear, ponders Roger Lenaers suggesting seeing *"creation as a self-expression of the absolutely transcendent Spirit."* (LENAERS, 2014, p. 145, own translation)

*"God's creative activity would not have been in a singularity billions of years ago, but is intensely present to us and, though unavailable, is closer to us than we are to ourselves."* (KÜNG, 2011, 171, own translation)

Thomas Berry, a Catholic theologian, calls attention to the "maternal" aspect of this world that has shaped us for conscious existence:

*"The natural world is the larger community of which we are a part. To alienate ourselves from that community is to focus devoid of everything that makes us human. To harm our community is to diminish our existence. If this sense of the sacredness of the natural world as our primordial revelation of the divine is our first need, our second need is to lessen our emphasis on the experience of redemption in favor of a greater emphasis on the process of creation [...]. We need to see ourselves as integral to this emergent process, as that being in whom the universe reflects and celebrates itself. When we begin to experience ourselves in this way, we immediately realize how unfavorable any degradation of the planet is to our well-being psychically and spiritually and also economically."* (MORWOOD, 2013, p. 45, own translation)

This is what we will see in other chapters, especially when we talk about faith.

**Bottom line:**

1. If both an inductive and a deductive proof of God is impossible, it is not possible to prove that there is a creator.

John Hick, in his book *An Interpretation of Religion*, analyzes each of the ontological, cosmological, and design arguments, and concludes that none of them allows one to infer or conclude about the existence of a Creator God.

*"The fact that nature is explicable in its existence and diversity, by itself, in a certain horizon, still does not eliminate the existence of a creator who may be at its origin, even if it is not necessary."* (CRUZ, 2011, p.20, own translation);

2. The question arises at the level of practical reason:

*"...one can interpret without hesitation the cosmos as creation. 'Creating,' in this case, will no longer be equivalent to producing something from nothing... It will mean expressing oneself materially, making creation appear as the gradual autonomy, self-manifestation of a God, who is transcendent."*



3. It is possible to accept the autonomy of the universe, to construct a reasonable relationship, acceptable to the scientific world of God and the world. This would be the function of a new theology.

*"If faith were subject to scientific proof, it would not be faith. If science relied on faith, it would not be science."* (Eduardo Cruz, own translation);

4. There is already a Christian theology in the making that reconciles the believing experiences of Holy Scripture with the language of modernity and autonomy.

*"God (theos) as the deepest essence of all things is therefore also like the internal law (nomos) of the universe and humanity."* (LENARS, 2014, p. 271, own translation)

In this *"theonomy," "God is the deepest creative core of the whole cosmic process. He is never outside, but in the center, and always.*

In theonomic thinking there is only one world, ours. But this world is holy, because it is the self-revelation of that holy mystery, which we signify with the word "God".

For process theology: *"God and the universe are coeternal. God has always existed and will always exist. The Big Bang is only one episode in the infinite history of time."* (MESLE, 2013, p. 81, own translation)

5. The biggest challenge lies precisely in fundamentalism and the strong tendency toward relativism. (FERREIRA, 2017, p. 37)

*"There is undeniably a strong resistance by Christian fundamentalists to modernity and its achievements in the sciences."*

A clear example of this resistance is the Declaration of Principles of the National Association of Evangelical Jurists, an entity founded in 2012, in an official ceremony at the National Congress in Brasília:

*"We acknowledge that the Bible is the divinely inspired, inerrant, infallible, true Word of God, it being our only rule of faith and conduct.*

Hans Küng, emeritus professor of Ecumenical Theology and president of the Ethos World Foundation, ponders:

*"Believing in the creator of the world does not mean, therefore, believing in any myth... it does not mean deciding for this or that model of the world, elaborated by great sages. And this is because it is the presupposition of all models of the world, and of the world itself. Even an eternal world, as admitted by Aristotle, could be reconciled with faith in God, as Thomas Aquinas himself thought.*

*Believing in the creator God, leads me to realize my responsibility for my fellow human beings and the ambient world and to consider more seriously, with greater realism and greater hope, the tasks entrusted to me." (KÜNG, 2011, p. 174, own translation)*

*"Whether or not our universe is one of many, in any case it is equally wonderful that we note its existence and include ourselves as part of it. For, on any supposition, the probability against our own present existence is truly prodigious. Let us take just one link quite handy in the vast chain of improbabilities; in order for me to exist now, my parents had to meet and conceive me. That these two individuals in question, out of all their contemporaries in the same social environment, would have married is highly improbable statistically speaking. But when they conceived me, that improbability was then multiplied many millions of times over. This is because the male contribution to conception consists of somewhere between three and six hundred million spermatozoa - let's say an average of four million - each of which is unique in the genetic code it carries.*

*To say that I am lucky to be alive is a monumental understatement!*

*The awareness of our improbable and insecure place in the scheme of things can, however, induce a spiraling intellectual vertigo. It can also arouse a sense of gratitude and responsibility in view of the extraordinary fact of our existence." (HICK, 2018, p. 123, own translation)*

A little over 1900 years ago, John wrote his version of the Good News (Gospel) of Jesus of Nazareth: **"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.** In other words, the Creator became part of creation - all of it expanding, unfinished - and of conscious and free humanity under construction. If the earth is alive, is Gaia - in the expression coined by scientist James Lovelock in the 1970s - then it is also flesh. We eat and drink earth daily, from which we draw our nutrients." *It is truly the matrix through which our life is possible and all incarnations of God are possible."*

Matthew Fox, in his thought-provoking book *"Sins of the Spirit, Blessings of the Flesh,"* comments on **"dwelt among us."**

*"We know a lot more about the **flesh** today and we know a lot more about what **we** means. **We** means all the creatures in the universe - for we are all interconnected by gravity, by electromagnetic energy, by light, by energy. **We means** hundreds of billions of galaxies, each with hundreds of billions of stars. **We means** 15 billion years of life-generating and coming-to-be and coming-to-arrive time. **And flesh** is that which unites all visible beings...The universe, and we in it, is permeated with the spirit and presence of God, the Source of everything." (FOX, 2004, p.54, own translation)*

*"God's creative activity extends infinitely into the past and will continue into the infinite future. We and our world are here in this infinite only for a moment. God's love and plans do not begin and end with us."* (MESLE, 2013, p.100, own translation)

**God did not create heaven and Earth; God is creating, and we with Him.**

**What are we doing with the part that touches us in the creation process?**



## CHAPTER 8

# GOD: ALMIGHTY

*"The basic properties of God, which by themselves, guarantee veneration for Him, are his rationality and morality - in fact, he is the standard of all our claims to morality and reason. He is not outside of us, but must be found in our core".*

(HÖSLE, 2022, p. 9 and 13)

*"God can only be described through metaphorical language ... which is to recognize our way of describing God is both true and not true.  
Any metaphor that becomes absolute is idolatry.  
Religious language that feeds on absolutes  
Can not understand the complexity of human existence,  
nor the beauty and grace of living".*

Wanda Deifelt - doctor in Theology

*"Divine reality does not dwell in a parallel world. It allows itself to be found in everything that exists, since everything is a revelation of his being. Such a vision implies the naturalness of a reverent, respectful coexistence with nature and, above all, with the human being".*

Roger Lenaers - theologian and philologist

*"The divinity is precisely a Mystery because it is pure Freedom, and freedom does not allow itself to be comprised under no aspect. An imprisoned freedom, if not by com-prehension, it is not free."*

Raimon Panikkar - Doctor of Philosophy, Science and Theology

This, perhaps, is the subject of the greatest rupture between the concept of God of a scientist, or of an intellectual, in general, and that of more traditional Christians. Why is this so? The main reason seems to be the *language* of the two social groups in question. As we said in Chapter 1, quoting Halik:

*"Our language is the most important and most intrinsic structure of the human world; it is a prism through which we see the world. The language of the past is mythical, mythological, while also being poetic. In recent centuries our language has become predominantly scientific. Modern man, without losing the poetry, always wants more clear rational explanations, empirically proven."* (HALIK, 2012, p. 11, own translation)

Two episodes to introduce our theme "Almighty God" and other attributes:

**First episode:**

One day, a writing appeared on the wall of a subway station: **God is the answer.**

According to Mancuso it happened in New York (MANCUSO, 2014, p. 24); according to Halik (HALIK, 2012, p. 3), it happened in Prague.

The next day, someone had written underneath: **But what was the question?**

Mancuso's commentary revolves around the unexpected *"great return of religion in public discourse and political space, after seemingly being confined to a private dimension,"* in the words of Ezio Mauro, director of *La Repubblica*.

Halik and Mancuso, skeptical of the public display of such faith, ask themselves: which God is back?

Mancuso is convinced: *"the God of tradition can no longer return.* The God who guided armies, the God of the Te Deum for military victories, the God of Providence who chose kings and emperors, the God who dominates nature, who governs the little things of everyday life. And he concludes, *"how difficult it is to answer the question of what is the question, the answer to which would be God."* (MANCUSO, 2014, p. 26, own translation)

Halik endorses philosopher Eric Voegelin's observation: *"the biggest problem for Christians today is not that they don't have the right answers, but that they have forgotten what the question was, to which they themselves were answers.*

Halik resists *"believing that anyone could speak of God with such vulgar certainty and proclaim the Gospel as if from a trustworthy brand of automobile."* (HALIK, 2012, p. 41, own translation)

**Second episode:**

There is a scene in the TV show *The Last Kingdom* in which the palace chaplain is called to bless the king's troops, who are going out to kill his enemies, the Danes.

The priest blesses the troops, who go out to kill, or die, and says enthusiastically: **Courage! God is with us!** A clumsy soldier, whispering, asks: **Who is with them?**

Attributes of God: this is the most challenging item. On one side, we have the widely accepted statement of St. Augustine of Hippo: *"If you understand, it is not Him.* On the other side, how many beliefs, attitudes and practices are part of the "package" that we inherit.

Educator Michael Morwood lists what many think are *attributes of God* and didactically asks: (MORWOOD, 2013, p. 22)

***"What do you think you would be believing if you really believed in God?"***

1. **Almighty God:** can He do anything? Could he have prevented the holocaust, the new coronavirus, and didn't? Why didn't he? And where does that leave us?

*"God, as Absolute, needs nothing. If God creates, he cannot create himself: he has to create a finite world... But if the world is finite it necessarily carries evil... The creature is, constitutively, a needy being in search of wholeness... God is on the side of the creature... fighting in it and with it against all that oppresses it, wounds it, distorts it... God is on the side of the creature and against evil, in the individual and in society."* (QUEIRUGA, 1993, p. 137, own translation)

*"In the 16th/17th centuries the discussions around grace and freedom became famous. The conundrum posed was: how can God's prescience and omnipotence be harmonized with man's freedom? After endless litigation between Dominicans and Jesuits and more than 120 sessions in Rome, Pope Paul V forbade, in 1611, the two parties to condemn each other and promised a Declaration, to be published in due course, to settle the question...such a declaration has not yet come out...and nor does it need to, since there is consensus among theologians that it is an unsolved riddle, which lies in the unfathomable mystery of the action of God Himself."* (KÜNG, 2011, p. 216, own translation)

2. **God the Creator:** created, put to work, with his own laws, but can these be suspended, even if rarely, by miracle? Are the biblical accounts, for example in the context of Israel's deliverance from Egypt, miracles or metaphors? Are they violations by God of the natural laws, which He created?

For Hans Küng:

*"Miracles as violations of natural laws cannot be historically proven in the Bible...For the believer most miracles happen not in the cosmos, but in the heart of man, where the Spirit of God, the spirit of freedom and love, is at work."* (KÜNG, 2011, p. 209, own translation)

3. **God of the gaps:** *The One who explains what Science does not (yet) explain - He gets smaller with each advance of Science.*

*"The mystery of God will remain. He remains the infinite, the immeasurable, the inscrutable, uniting in Himself contrasts like eternity and time, nearness and distance, justice and mercy, wrath and grace. He is hidden in the cosmos as in my heart, decidedly more than a person, and yet always accessible to my word. Just as man cannot penetrate the sun, neither can he penetrate the Spirit of God"* (KÜNG, 2011, p. 176, own translation)

4. **The cosmic messenger:** The One who deals with the billions of calls, day and night, from sons asking to change the course of events, to satisfy them. Nor do they spare Him the contradictions... What to do with two children asking for the opposite?

5. **God who demands praise** A sensitive person, in need of recognition...

*"The one who prays intends to meet God, not so much to understand him. That is why the language of prayer is similar to that of lovers, where words embody relationships and feelings, without any other content, as is usual in everyday language."* (LENAERS, 2010, p. 92, own translation)

6. **God who demands sacrifices:** Does God have any interest, or satisfaction, in seeing us suffer?

Isn't it about time we looked at suffering and death as an essential part of the larger story of creation, in continuous evolution, where suffering and death is an essential part of the process? To what extent:

*"Our interpretation of evil and suffering underlies the "adamic myth." The theme of sacrifice must be radically dissociated from the ethical view's emphasis on suffering as punishment."* (HAUGHT, 2009, p. 146, own translation);

*For Armin Kreiner, "Laws and mechanisms of evolution that produce human beings also cause the countless natural evils, which fill life - and not only the human species - with suffering. If the evolutionary process were mechanically determined, step by step, living beings, with increasing autonomy, and finally human beings, with their free will, could never arise from this process."* (GRESHAKE, 2010, p. 54, own translation)

7. **God who is on our side:** who would have us kill for love of Him - (The one in the second episode). Traditionally, it has been a "tribal god", of my country, of my religion, who protects us in front of others, who revealed the truth to us, and so on:



*"To pretend to situate God on our side, against others, is simply blasphemy." (TILLICH, 1976, p. 144, own translation)*

8. **Uncertain God of the soldier's prayer:** please God, if there is a God, save my soul, if there is a soul; SOS: Save Our Souls. Paul Tillich reminds us of the paradoxical character of all prayer:

*"To speak to someone to whom you cannot speak because he is not 'someone'; to ask of someone from whom you cannot ask anything because he gives or does not give before you ask; to say "you" to someone who is closer to the Self than the Self itself; each of these paradoxes leads the religious consciousness toward a God above the God of theism." (TILLICH, 1976, p. 144, own translation)*

9. **God of judgment:** who rules by fear and hands out rewards and punishments. Renold Blank, in *The Innermost Face of God*, ponders:

*"That God of Laws and rules, frightening, who demands strict observance of his commandments and punishes with uncompromising harshness those who do not follow him - a God that many people of the old generation still internalize - today is rejected more and more by women and men. Or, on the other hand, they celebrate with doubled zeal the omnipotence of their God, an attitude that in reality reveals itself as an attempt to disguise their own unconscious fear before this overwhelming God." (BLANK, 2011, p. 10, own translation)*

For those who see God this way, the testimony of Juan Antônio Pagola, author of the extraordinary book *Jesus, a historical approach*, is opportune:

*Over the years I have met with people who have been drifting away from God because they could no longer stand to constantly hear that He is Almighty and Omnipotent. They felt bad before this God. They could not live in peace with Him. So they preferred to forget Him.*

*Perhaps, this is happening to you too. You don't dare to say it precisely, but deep down you feel God as a 'pre-powerful' being, who keeps us under his control and threatens us. God is not omnipotent...". God is love, and can only what love can." (PAGOLA, 2010, p. 114, own translation)*

Morwood concludes: *"All these theologies of God make it very easy for atheists. Not only do these atheists refuse to accept such attributes of the Absolute, the Living One, the Transcendent, Love - as Jesus of Nazareth preferred to express it - but theologians also refuse to accept such theism and call themselves post-theists, or anti-theists.*

Writes John Shelby Spong, an Anglican Episcopal bishop:

*"The evidence that God, understood theistically, is dying or perhaps already dead, is astonishing. I define the theistic God as "a being with supernatural powers, who dwells outside this*

*world and periodically invades it to accomplish the divine will. There is both rational and emotional data to support this presupposition."*

*"People who still occupy the pews of churches seem quietly oblivious to the debate going on in the academies and continue to use the language of the past in their hymns and liturgies. This is mainly due to a predisposition not to think about the real meaning of these celebrations; and, when the process of reflection begins, these concepts turn out to be meaningless, or lack credibility." (SPONG, 2006, p. 43, own translation)*

Marià Corbí, theologian, doctor of philosophy, *"who has dedicated his life to studying the ideological and religious consequences of the transformations generated by post-industrial society and innovation,"* he notes:

*"The vast majority of young people don't care about religion at all. For them religion is not even a problem. The churches are empty the clergy are old and have lost their cultural prestige and even religious prestige. This collapse is general in all European religious traditions: it is not only a matter for Catholics, it is also a phenomenon that affects Protestants and Jews. Islam is already beginning to feel it.*

*Axiological collapse affects not only religions and everything they presuppose, but also ideologies. The collapse of real socialism in the Soviet countries is paradigmatic. Nor has liberal ideology had a better outcome." (CORBI, 2010, p. 15, own translation)*

The book cited by Marià Corbí proposes to reflect on spirituality as a subtle dimension of existence...

*"...in the budding society of continuous innovation, and change, without heteronomies, autonomous, belief-free, and global. Societies do not necessarily have to be global and scientific-technical innovation, much less neoliberal, in which people and the environment are exploited." (CORBI, 2010, p. 19, own translation)*

Fundamental to understanding the question posed in this chapter are the concepts of heteronomy and autonomy, presented in the previous chapter.

Roger Lenaers presents *"a very simplified summary of traditional Christian representations:* (LENAERS, 2010, p. 22ff)

*"Two thousand years ago Jesus of Nazareth, clothed with divine power and wisdom, God in human form, descended from that world to our planet, to return to heaven after his death and resurrection. Before his ascension to heaven, he installed a vicar whom he made partaker of his full power. This power has been handed down from vicar to vicar..." (LENAERS, 2010, p. 90, own translation)*

*"This mental universe we call heteronomous, because our world is completely dependent on that other (in Greek heteros), which produces prescriptions (in Greek nomos), that is, a postulate as impossible to prove as to contradict. Humanity has been thinking heteronomously for millennia."* (LENAERS, 2010, p. 92ff)

My whole generation was educated philosophically, theologically and catechetically in this way of thinking. I have been reviewing my concepts as I write these texts. Even the scientists of the first generation continued to think in a heteronomous way. But, without realizing it, their discoveries about the regularities and internal laws of the universe actually excluded the interventions coming from that other world. In scientific thinking no free space was left to be occupied by heteronomy.

The universe is autonomous: it obeys its own (Greek *autós*) laws (Greek *nomos*). A new axiom, opposed to that of heteronomy, was slowly, and almost always unconsciously, penetrating the entire Western culture, beginning with the intellectual elite.

The modern human being, for whom there is no other world above or outside this one, considers it unthinkable that a power outside the world could intervene in cosmic processes.

*"God does not exist beyond the stars in a metaphysical sky! God is no interlocutor outside the world, existing, objectified, thingified, in the spiritual, or metaphysical sense, in a beyond, in a hidden world. The universe is the limited self-expression of God's inexhaustible being... a universe in continuous gestation, culminating in the human process... the spiritual depth of all reality. There is no path to God that does not pass through the universe."* (LENAERS, 2010, p. 93, own translation)

### **Is there still room for God in that thought?**

**Yes, He is the deepest creative core of the whole cosmic process. God is never outside, but always in the center.**

*"God's action in creatures and in every human being is incessant, but within them. God acts within intramundane causes, always transcendently, grounding and potentiating those causes, taking nothing away from the creature's autonomy or from the laws of nature."* (RUBIO, 2021, p. 127, own translation)

This reconciliation, continues Lenaers, between the autonomy of the human being and faith in God is called **theonomy**.

*"Whoever thinks in theonomic terms confesses God (in Greek *theós*) as the deepest essence of all things, and therefore also as the internal law (in Greek *nomos*) of the universe and humanity."*

*In theonomic thinking there is only one world, ours. But this world is holy, because it is self-revelation of that holy mystery, which we signify with the word 'God'."* (LENAERS, 2010, p. 28, own translation)

It is not easy to "**say goodbye to the world from above**" and to a way of thinking, pre-scientific, deeply mythological, as it could not be otherwise.

Myths are not information, but figurative representations of a deeper, vaguely experienced reality.

*"Rich God, poor man; God everything, man nothing. Such is the tremendous suspicion that, since Feuerbach and Nietzsche, poisons the relationship between modernity and Christianity,"* comments the theologian Andrés Queiruga.

For theologian John Haught, *"there is material in the last century and a half of science to ignite a whole new theology, but the ember is far from stoked."* (HAUGHT, 2009, p. 55, own translation)

*"A careful consideration of God's action on biophysical reality, finally, seems essential for a theology that wants to talk about Him in a sensible way. We need to understand how to imagine the action of God the Creator and Provider in that same reality that is described by physical laws,"* proposes John Polkinghorne, particle physicist and theologian. (MORANDINI, 2011, p. 137, own translation)

Continues the Jesuit Lenaers, philosopher, theologian, expert in classical philology, who published, at the age of 80, the book we are quoting:

*"For the believer of modernity there is no God who intervenes in our world, from beyond his world, to reveal truths, to listen to prayers, to reward the good and punish the bad, to come down to earth in human form, to live in the world of humans, to suspend their laws... For him, all this is outmoded mythical thinking, ancient Christian mythology, often poetic and endearing, sometimes irritating, and sometimes very strange."* (LENAERS, 2010, p. 44, own translation)

For Queiruga, *"concerned with our historical deformations in individual piety, official theology, and the bourgeois hijacking of the Gospel."*

*"It is not a problem of demythologization, but of a broader profound process of cultural paradigm change, which, affecting the whole of culture, profoundly modifies the function of language. It seems obvious that this brings with it the need for a remodeling, a new translation of the set of concepts and expressions in which faith is culturally embodied."* (COMBLIN, 2009, p. 136, own translation)

For Corbí: *"To attribute the crisis of religions to the degradation of culture is a dignified way of running away from the serious problem that has been thrown upon us...there are no remedies, no possible regression. It is not a calamity...we can arrive at a spirituality that is creative and heir to the rich and diverse spiritual tradition of all humanity."* (CORBI, 2010, p. 280, own translation)

As soon as someone needs to evoke an extra-worldly intervention to explain something, he is still moving in a pre-modern worldview.

Nothing of the enriching content of faith in God and Jesus, confessed by the early church, is lost when produced in a new language.

Modern humanism is after all a late fruit of Christian humanism.

Elsa Tamez, PhD and professor of Biblical Studies, in "Notes on God and Gender", notes:

*"Reading the feminist theologies of Africa, Asia, Latin America, the First World, one finds that there is a constant rejection of the concept, or the image of an all powerful, omnipresent, omniscient, eternal, perfect, immutable God. This is the classic Western way of perceiving God from the catechisms. Women see and feel, in this conception, the foundation of power and control of the divine over the human, of some beings over others, of men over women, of humanity over nature, of the rich over the poor, of whites over blacks and indigenous people."* (SUSIN, 2006, p. 279, own translation)

Since we have learned of God not exactly what He is, but what He is not, we have learned a lot, and have a lot to learn still, about what it does not mean and what we have attributed to Him with the expression "omnipotent".

Science, modernity, has taught us a lot about **what God is not and cannot do**: God respects what he has done/does, the way he is doing it, and does not manipulate things and people.

Commented José Comblin:

*"The God of the prophets and of Jesus is beyond any word. He is beyond any attribute or quality. Jesus says what the Father wants. He teaches a practice, but he does not teach a doctrine about God. The message is in his actions, and his words illustrate his actions. He taught a way, a manner of living."* (SOTER, 2009, p. 136, own translation)

If we understand that God is in all things and only works in and through a free environment, we have to accept what we see as disorder, conflict, catastrophe, evil. How does God allow evil?

As Richard Dawkins said, *"Nature is not cruel, but only barbarically indifferent to suffering."* A scientific observation, but hardly satisfying.

I might, who knows, not have allowed evil, making the world different, finished, without chance and freedom...

For physics professor and theologian Simone Morandini, *"our Cosmos and our history of men should be thought of as finite expressive signs, of a God who limits his own omnipotence to make room for the freedom of creatures, confident in their potentialities... who chooses to limit his own speech to their words, to limit his own expression to the meanings that they - through the laws and dynamics of the cosmos itself - can express."* (MORANDINI, 2011, p. 143, own translation)

*For geneticist Charles Birch, "The reason providence does not eliminate chance is because a world without chance is a world without freedom. Every natural entity, every atom must have some aspect of self-determination or spontaneity the intersection of even two, let alone myriad acts of self-determination is precisely chance. In fact, God completely controlling the world would be tantamount to annihilating it." (MORWOOD, 2013, p. 45, own translation)*

*For particle physicist and theologian John Polkinghorne, "God's relationship to the world must be imagined as continuous, not intermittent; it can be nothing capricious, but must be characterized by absolute coherence." (MORANDINI, 2011, p. 143, own translation)*

*"Aware of the prodigious theoretical improbability of our existence, we may feel privileged to be alive, but without interpreting this good fortune religiously. However, the mystery of the existence and nature of the universe can only evoke in a reflective mind a sense of awe and even reverence, which, if not taken in terms of religious faith, will find expression more naturally in mystical poetry. In this way, Soviet scientist I.D. Novikov of the Moscow Space Research Institute placed at the beginning of his landmark text, *Evolution of the Universe (1984)*, this poem by B. Komberg" (HICK, 2018, p. 125, own translation):*

*The universe was also once young  
And his heart was in the flame of creation  
Like a woman who has lost control of herself,  
She surrendered to the violent force of expansion.  
In his ardent dance of Space and Time  
The laws of the Unknown obeying like a blind man  
She gave birth in painful labor  
To the cradle of worlds, to the Sun, to the Earth - our home  
When the heat of the breath of the Greatest of Mysteries  
Breathing in your face the fluids of the quanta  
You'll probably catch it - amidst the dark skies -  
The miraculous smile of the vast and impassive stranger - the Cosmos  
And when you have noticed the brightness of that smile  
And startled, standing for a moment, completely shocked,  
in amazement  
You will never forget and you will carry with you your whole life  
In anxious search for another glimpse of that vision*

## CHAPTER 9

# SCIENCE AND THEOLOGY

*"Religion without Science is blind,  
Science without Religion is lame."*

Albert Einstein

*"Theology, is actually poetry, poetry concerning God,  
effective not because it proves anything, but because  
penetrates the heart."*

Francis Petrarch - poet, humanist (1304-1374)

*"Practical reason and, in the broadest sense, politics,  
should in the future be part of all  
critical reflections on theology."*

Johann Baptist Metz - theologian

*"Christians need to inquire of scientists whether they are aware of the criminal irresponsibility of many of their activities, and scientists inquire Christians whether they realize that their consciousness continues with a centuries behind modernity."*

von Weizsäcker (1912-2007), scientist, in a letter to the theologian Hans Küng, on 10/12/1974

*"If my concept of theology is correct, there is no reason to be confined within the narrow parish boundaries of a religion or for it to be seen as a esoteric or sub-rational discipline."*

Gordon Kaufman (1925-2011)

*"Religion es eso; la carne y sus variaciones, sus oscilaciones of pain and pleasure, the exchanges between the cuepos and sus líquidos vitales, de vicio y virtudes".*

Nancy Cardoso Pereira- theologian and philosopher

*"...the silence of philosophy about God seems to be today lacking philosophically relevant roots. For the most part, philosophers They do not talk about God, or rather, they explicitly consider themselves atheists or irreligious, by pure habit, almost a kind of inertia [...]. If the narrative of Hegelian historicism is no longer valid or Marxist, one cannot think that God does not exist because faith in it corresponds to an outdated stage in the history of human evolution, or is a functional ideological representation of domination. "*

(VATTIMO in FERREIRA, 2015, p. 117)



In the 5th century B.C., the philosopher Anaxagoras counterposes to the matter of the world the independent *spirit* (in Greek *noús*), which orders the world. From then on the divine begins to figure in Greek philosophy, as conceived by Plato in the 4th century as the idea of the good, and by Aristotle as the immovable motor in the cosmos and the ultimate goal of all the aseitias, which exist in reality. For the first Christian philosophers and theologians (the *apologetics* were also Greek) it was possible, without much effort of thought, to identify this divine, and this spirit, with the Creator God of the Bible.

*"Science, from its origins, has also been inspired by the heavens and their mysteries. From Plato to Einstein many of the greatest philosophers and scientists, of all times, have devoted themselves to the study of the heavens, not only for practical reasons, but in an attempt to elevate the human mind to bring it closer to that of the Creator, the Great Cosmic Organizer."* (GLEISER, 2011, p. 17, own translation)

The expansion of Christianity throughout history has greatly contributed to the emergence of the so-called Christian philosophy. It represents the attitude of openness and expansion of the dialogue between Christian faith and Greco-Roman culture.

Two moments marked the development of Christian philosophy:

- **The effort of patristic philosophy** - strongly influenced by Plato's philosophy, Augustine of Hippo made the most expressive synthesis between the biblical message and philosophical and rational thought, bringing patristics to its apogee;
- **The scholastic thought** - stands out in this phase, the thought of Thomas Aquinas, strongly influenced by Aristotle. For Thomas Aquinas "faith requires [...] the help of reason; reason in turn [...] admits as necessary what faith presents". (JULIATO, 2012, p. 66, own translation)
- *"Greek thought and theodicy could not have a notion of God above omnipotence and impassibility absolutely ethereal and deadly to man. One sought to go to God through the pride of mind, and in this way we can only find a proud God."* (GESCHÉ, 2006, p. 49, own translation). *The God of reason, of philosophical theology, would not account for such a fundamental dimension (Incarnation), of a spiritualized flesh. No wonder that a purely metaphysical reason has produced the most varied kinds of atheism.*" (FERREIRA, 2017, p. 33, own translation).
- Philosophy, as *"servant of theology,"* consolidated a way of seeing the sources of Christianity and its relation to the world. *"At least until the dawn of the 18th century, all the great names in science had been Christian believers, many of them truly pious. Think of Copernicus, Vesalio, Mercator, Van Helmont, Galileo, Torricelli, Kepler, Pascal, Descartes,*

*Newton - to name just a few of the best known. Even Darwin, in the 19th century, was a professed Anglican Christian, while Mendel was an Augustinian monk." (LENAERS, 2014, p. 135, own translation)*

The climate of understanding, which had lasted so long in "Western Christian civilization," begins to break down with the idea of the Enlightenment. The positions of the deists of Freemasonry and the Catholic hierarchy came into direct confrontation. The increasingly aggressive condemnations from the church only strengthened the ideas and ideals of the Enlightenment. The magic words of the French Revolution (1789-1799) - liberty, equality, fraternity - imposed themselves, transforming anticlericalism, throughout the 20th century, into aggressive anti-theism.

The cry of the French Revolution - neither God nor master - was turned against the Church, which until the 18th century endured social injustice with patience, as if this reality was God's will.

Some historical components that explain the emergence of the modern paradigm (JULIATO, 2012, p. 69):

- **The Protestant Reformation** - Father Martin Luther's protest against the world of indulgences, inquisition excesses and moral deviations had a great impact. Also his translation of the New Testament from Greek and Latin into German;
- **The end of feudalism and the rise of capitalism** - The end of the feudal mode of production, which practically dominated the entire Middle Ages, was a very important factor in the change of mentality;
- **New model of science and thought** - The most important feature of this period was the development of a new scientific and philosophical conception, based on the advances brought by research in the natural sciences and Renaissance humanism.

The results of Darwin's scientific research constituted, according to Jesuit Roger LENAERS, a "*coup de grâce to the reliability of the biblical account of the creation of the world,*" according to the current reading of the *Bible* at the time.

According to this decade's opinion poll, half of the U.S. population "*continues to defend the historical credibility of the biblical accounts of creation, rejecting, for this reason, the Theory of Evolution. With Bible in hand, there are not a few who consider that God created the Earth approximately 7000 years ago.*" These are entrenched ideas that create barriers to the inexorable march of scientific thought.

In the 17th century the Anglican Archbishop James Ussher, based on a thorough analysis of biblical cosmologies, had come to the conclusion that there were 4,036 years between the creation of the universe and the birth of Christ. *"Not satisfied with this the scholar John Lighfoot (1602-1675) took it upon himself to refine the calculations and concluded that the creation date was October 18, 4004 BC. Adam was created on October 23rd at 9 o'clock."* (HEEREN, 2008, p. 227, own translation)

The theory of evolution became, in the 19th century, a subject of great emotional potential and has remained so for many until today.

As the theologian and psychologist Edenio VALLE said:

*"The Catholic Church was most drastic in its reaction to the attacks to which religion was subjected after the French Revolution (1789-1792). It locked itself away from dialogue with all new philosophical, scientific, and political trends."*

*"The idea was spread that the incompatibility between Science and Religion/Faith was rooted in the very essence of one and the other."* (CRUZ, 2011, p. 26, own translation)

An example of the resistance to Enlightenment ideas is the *"anti-modernist oath"* to which all candidates for priest, bishop and teacher from 1910 to 1967 were subjected: *"I... embrace and firmly accept each and every one of the things that have been defined, affirmed and declared. Especially those points of doctrine which are directly opposed to the errors of the present time."*

*"The Protestant churches, too, have charged the blow. In them fundamentalist movements multiplied, but, especially in learned circles, the arguments of philosophical criticism found an echo in so-called liberal theology."*

*"Scientific Positivism was subjected in the 20th century to a critical revision that had the side effect of provoking Christian theologies out of the ghetto they had entered throughout the 18th and 19th centuries."*

John XXIII, with his call for *aggiornamento* and the convocation of Vatican II at the end of the 1950s, opened the doors for progressive understanding of the intellectual and religious world of the Catholic Church with scientific research.

On the other hand, science and scientists, challenged by epistemological questions and the search for meaning/meaning proper to the human being, have been led to recognize their own limits.

*"...no one is hiding from the supreme gravity of the God problem. By affirmations or by suppositions, or by positive abstentions, our epoch, willingly or unwillingly, or even wanting the opposite, is perhaps one of the epochs that most substantially lives the problem of God."* (ZUBIRI, 2020, p. 91, own translation)

*"There are many scientists today who recognize that scientific research has no way of getting at questions such as the following: what was there before the "big bang"? In what direction do certain phenomena detected by quantum physics point? How did the "cognitive fluidity" (expression by S. Mithen, 2002, p. 41), responsible for the qualitative leap between homo neanderthals and homo sapiens, come about? These are objective questions that go beyond the possibilities of the Sciences in their present stage of development."* (VALLE, 2020, p.64, own translation)

Physics teacher Simone Morandini comments:

*"Perhaps the most evident characteristics of 20th century epistemological reflection are the growing modesty, increasingly mindful of finitude, of the scientific description of the world and the partiality of scientific knowledge."*

*"For science, of course, the possibility of free and autonomous research is at stake, but theology is also challenged to perceive the distinction between what is of faith and what is not; to learn the difference between what is actually offered to the believer's assent and what, however, is the domain of scientific research."* (MORANDINI, 2011, p.72, own translation)

As Edenio Valle, himself a scientist, ponders, *"Science must relearn to value other perfectly human and meaningful ways of capturing the meaning of reality. Among them, as a millennial wisdom of the peoples teaches us, imagination, beauty, poetry and faith. Religion is a partner and not an adversary of science in its quest to find meaning and unity in the universe."* (CRUZ, 2011, p.26, own translation)

For the theologian and physics professor Simone Morandini (MORADINI, 2011, p.42), we find today theologians who are able, with all scientific rigor, to dialogue with the world of science, as well as scientists who dialogue with theology.

In the first case is the evangelist Wolfhart Pannenberg (1926), who works in the field of physics:

*"Theology must be able to situate itself consciously in the assembly of human knowledge, showing its own consistency, as a true 'science of God'."*

John Polkinghorne, before becoming an Anglican pastor and theologian, served until 1977 as a particle physicist. He ponders:

*"Today, we look to the physical world because we are looking for signs of God's existence, but we look to God's existence as for an aid in giving us an intelligible picture of the world as things have developed in the physical world."* (p. 99)

*"God's veiled presence is real, but it remains discreetly hidden to finite human eyes."* (p.154)

Among the theological movements most attentive to the interaction with scientific reflection is "*process theology*," - a theological movement that emerged in the mid-twentieth century in the United States - which establishes a dialogue with physics, but especially with biology and ecology. One of the representatives of this current, Arthur Peacocke (1924), an English biochemist, theologian and Anglican pastor, proposes a model in which divine action

*"He chose, in his sovereign omnipotence, to create a world with a high degree of unpredictability, openness, and flexibility, so that he could bring forth life and freedom in it."*

According to Robert Mesle *"process theists are proposing new ways of understanding God, to which the Bible bears witness..."* (MESLE, 2013, p. 230, own translation)

Comments Leonardo Boff:

"For Frederick Krause (1781-1832) God, known intuitively by consciousness, is not a personality, but an essence that contains the universe itself. This view of an immanent God, present in the universe, but also, transcendent, was called, by the philosopher Krause, panentheism, quite distinct from pantheism. Things are what they are: things. However, God is in things and things are in God, because of his creative act. The creature always depends on God and without Him it would return to the nothingness from which it was taken. God is present in the cosmos and the cosmos is present in God. in everything and everything is in God" .<sup>9</sup>

Frank J. Tipler, a professor of mathematical physics in New Orleans, said:

*"If we accept the consequences of the known physical laws we come to a fascinating conclusion, the universe has existed since a limited time, moreover the physical universe and the laws that govern it were called into being by a unit that is not subordinate to these laws and that is outside of space and time. In short: We live in a universe that was planned and created by God".* (KÜNG, 2011, p. 103, own translation)

The Catholic theologian Hans Küng was not enthusiastic about this statement and pondered, *"I do not venture a judgment on Tipler's various arguments in the field of physics, but outside of space-time experience, theoretical reason is no longer competent, and therefore cannot at all conclude from finite reality to a real infinite."* (p. 104)

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<sup>9</sup> BOFF, Leonardo. *Pantheism and panentheism: necessary distinction*, article published on 04/16/2012 on the website of the Center for the Defense of Human Rights

*"The axiom prevails among the most enlightened theologians, "If God is outside matter, and if science is concerned with questions of nature, Science can neither confirm nor deny his existence" (JULIATO, 2012, p. 163, own translation)*

Almost at the same time, in the middle of the 20th century, when process theology emerged in the USA, in dialogue with the natural sciences, liberation theology - "true liberation theology" - gained body, consistency, and international projection, in dialogue with the social sciences, in the effort of the Catholic and Protestant communities to meet, understand, and share the life of the poor. In the same sense, it is worth mentioning the efforts of the Latin American Episcopal Conference in the meetings of Medellín (1968), Puebla (1979) and Santo Domingo (1992).

José Comblin comments: *"The place of liberation theology was taken by contextual theologies: feminist theology, black theology, Indian theology. Now these theologies are situated in a cultural context, while liberation theology was situated in a socioeconomic context". (SOTER, 2009, p. 456, own translation)*

Ronildo Pacheco is a spokesperson for the call for "provincialization", or decolonization of theology:

*"The Gospel, the message of Jesus, will always be a disputed language. Can it save and free? Evidently, and I believe it came to do that. But isn't it true that it has already been used (and continues to be) to oppress, condemn, or sustain convenient apathy? That said, what I believe is that in today's world, in the context of real people's real lives, this message of the Gospel of Jesus is renewed and strengthened by the contributions of Black Theology, Feminist Theology, Indigenous Theology, Gay, Lesbian, and Queer Theology. The claim of a 'pure theology', 'original', faithful to the 'Fathers of the Church', to the 'Reformed Fathers', is a selfish and problematic nostalgia. Selfish because it is a construction that does not want to lose its hegemony. Those who defend it do not perceive themselves as defending a language, but an unquestionable truth that cannot lose its place. It is a 'golden calf' theology. Nothing can threaten its power and contradict its last word. Problematic because it does not recognize its limits. There is no other way for it to relate but by the totalitarianism of its assertions. It will not move forward without hurting people, excluding, marginalizing, hurting, isolating, offending, stigmatizing, condemning, silencing, invisibilizing. I am not saying that this is its nature, but its historical and cultural basis (because it arises at a moment in time and space) is totalitarian and under the premise of superiority. If it does not rethink itself, if it does not come out of itself, it will not coexist with other looks on the world and on the Gospel." (PACHECO, 2019, p. 26, own translation)*

Another highlight, in this sense, is the performance of the Society of Theology and Religion Sciences - SOTER, created in 1985. Today it congregates around 500 researchers, and held, in 2019, its 32nd National Congress, with a broad theme of dialogue with scientific thought, portrayed in its Annals,

available on the internet. The Association of Theologians of the Third World (based in Panama), by "crossing liberation theology with the theology of religious pluralism", provides a fruitful cultural exchange, which cannot be done without science.

This ongoing avant-garde turn is caudatory to the courageous "cosmic Christology" of the Jesuit paleontologist Pierre Theilhard de Chardin (1881-1955), whose writings, censored by the Church, only became public (his entire work) after his death in 1955.

*"In the work of the excavations, in the careful collection of fossil fragility in his rigorous and meticulous analysis, he perceived the Christ energy running through the evolutionary movement of the universe. This vision was designated christogenesis, which means the presence and action of Christ growing more and more in the cosmos until his second coming."* (VASCONCELOS, 2018, p. 13, own translation)

Theilhard de Chardin's vision makes it patent:

*"the full coherence between the Christian faith and its evolutionary way of thinking."*

*"cosmic and biological becoming is an essential component of a biology of creation in the time of science."* (MORANDINI, 2011, p. 115, 133, own translation)

As one can see *"the discovery of the worldly dimension of the Christian hope is a far-reaching gain; hardly, however, can it offer novel references to the science-and-theology dialogue. Contemporary research is recovering the cosmic Christology of Colossians and Ephesians (Col. 1:15-20; Eph. 1:3-4)."* (Letters written by Paul probably in the year 53; just 23 years after the death of Jesus of Nazareth. Paul inaugurates not only a universal but also a cosmic view of the mission of the one who, crucified by order and law, became the true Christ/Lord, the title of the Roman emperor).

The search for dialogue, on the part of the world of science, is not a rarity in today's world.

I cite two examples and recommend their books; mentioned here:

- Marcelo Gleiser - Professor of Natural Philosophy and of Physics and Astronomy, who is inserted in the philosophical and scientific tradition the search for what he calls the Hidden Code of Nature. His captivating book *"Imperfect Creation: Cosmos, Lives and the Hidden Code of Nature"* establishes a fruitful dialogue with other sciences. *"Even within the natural world, we know that science will never have all the answers, that our description of the world, based on empirical verification of hypotheses, will never be complete. For example, it is hard to see how the question of the origin of everything can be answered within a purely*

*scientific context, at least as that context is understood today.*" (GLEISER, 2010, p. 307, own translation)

- Francis S. Collins - one of today's most respected scientists, who coordinated the Human Genome Project. Having reluctantly traveled a long road from atheism to faith, he argues:

*"If God exists, he must be found outside the natural world, and therefore scientific instruments are not the right tools for learning about him...the ultimate decision should be based on faith, not evidence."* (COLLINS, 2007, p. 38, own translation)

Assuming his faith in God he gives a testimony, as a scientist of the fundamentals of his faith in the book *"The language of God: a scientist presents evidence that He exists"*.

Evidence in this case is proof? To the believer, everything that exists, the wonder of the universe and of life, makes it evident that God exists. But can we prove, empirically, that He exists?

The axiom prevails among the most enlightened theologians: *Science can neither confirm nor deny the existence of God.*

According to Kant (1724-1804) it is impossible to scientifically prove the existence of God. *God does not exist in space and time and therefore he is not an object of observation*, argues the theologian Hans Küng. (KÜNG, 2011, p. 73, 118)

*"Despite the fantastic progress of Science by no means has the mysterious character of the world disappeared - neither in the realm of the infinitely large nor the infinitely small."*

*"Even if we were to admit an infinite universe, this would not automatically "exclude" the infinite God from the cosmos, For an infinite God who **is not a stopper**, but a pure all-encompassing and all-pervading spirit, such a universe would represent no limitation, but rather a confirmation of his infinitude. In other words: **Faith in God can be reconciled with different world models.** For that matter, neither the beginning of time, nor the infinite duration of time, can be imagined, for one and the other are not within our experience."*

For Marcelo Gleiser, *"We know that science will never have all the answers, that our description of the world, based on empirical verification of hypotheses, will never be complete. For example, it is hard to see how the question of the origin of everything can ever be answered within a purely scientific context, at least as that context is understood today."* (GLEISER, 2010, p. 307, own translation)

Comments Simone Morandini, theologian and specialist in Theoretical Physics:

*"Scientific descriptions of the world is no alternative to theological reflection. It is not enough to say that Science and Theology describe different realities or different aspects of reality: it is necessary*



*to affirm that, if their descriptions refer to the same reality, the descriptions they offer may be more or less broad, more or less rich. The specific of theology is simply to confess the Creator.*" (MORANDINI, 2011, p. 43, own translation)

To Eduardo R. Cruz:

*"...Theology will be ready for dialogue with Science when it understands what Science says in the areas of quantum mechanics, Cosmology, evolution theory, Ecology, Mind Science, biotechnology, and cybernetic approaches (information and complexity theories: virtual reality). This not through "friendly scientists", but those effectively representative of their respective fields."* (CRUZ, 2011, p. 33, own translation)

There are also those who are critical of both fields of scientific and theological knowledge. This is the case of the distinguished Lancaster University sociologist Bronislaw Szerszynski. He questions secularization as a process of the emptying of religion, and the alleged role of technology in this process. For him, the modern secular world - including science and technology - has its own camouflaged theology.

*"One has to focus on and investigate "the cultural role of science and technology, and from the prestige of science, how it is used as a device to exclude any broader considerations of influential scientific and technological development: questions about values, ends and means; the epistemic value of lay knowledge and ethical reasoning; the increasing closeness of relationship between science, commerce, state, etc."* (CRUZ, 2011, p. 295, own translation)

Philosopher Robert Salomon comments in his book *Spirituality for Skeptics*:

*"Science is the organization of knowledge, but wisdom is the organization of life. And along these lines, we could observe that spirituality and wisdom are ultimately one and the same thing."* (SALOMON, 2003, p. 47, own translation)

Another critical thinker regarding the current positions of Cosmology and Theology is John F. Haught, whose quote, below, is directly related to the script of our narrative (HAUGHT, 2009, p. 180, own translation):

*"While the Nicene Creed refers to God the Father as the creator of the heavens and the earth, theology has remained so tied up with questions concerning human existence, its history, and its sufferings that it can no longer generally perceive the degree to which our being is intertwined with the natural world, with its own fascinating history and indeterminate future. Partly because of the influence of the philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), the universe has come to be conceived as a kind of construct of the human intellect, or as a backdrop for the human drama, rather than as a complex of*

*objects that deserves to be studied in its own right. As a consequence, the universe was practically lost to modern theology, which became increasingly anthropocentric.*

A new cosmology, however, is theologically significant because it has brought the universe back to the forefront. Catholic physicist and scholar Stanley Jaki notes that current cosmology, especially since Einstein, has "*restored to the universe (the) intellectual responsibility that Kant had denied it.* The new Einsteinian interpretation of gravity proposed that the cosmos is a finite set of interrelated objects, which claims a focal attention that Kant could not give it. By pushing back the universe, the Kantian obsession with human subjectivity had the effect of decosmologizing modern thought, including theology

However, after Darwin, Einstein and quantum physics, the human subject can no longer be easily separated from the universe. It has become evident that the universe is much more than an external setting for human adventure. In fact, the universe is itself the main creative adventure, and there is no basis for assuming that our species is the sole reason for its existence. Even on earth, we are not the only species of life, and for all we know, the two or three hundred billion galaxies in the observable universe may harbor numerous oases of intelligent life. Be that as it may, we cannot err, either religiously or scientifically, if our first response to the fact of our existence is one of gratitude that we have been invited to be at least a small part of an immense cosmic journey. We are a very important part of the universe, but we are not the whole story. More and more the questions that revolve around who we are, where we come from, what we should do and what we can expect can only be answered if theology takes into account what is going on in the universe at large. And it cannot do so without keeping in touch with science.

To finish the reflection, Edenio Valle proposes:

*"The human being is a thinking and conscious being. He has an enormous capacity to understand and think about the reality that surrounds him. The concept of reason is fundamental to discuss the modalities in levels of this capacity that is the starting point and the indispensable reference for all forms of levels of understanding of the world. Various levels and forms have to be distinguished. Some are more sophisticated and have their own requirements. Because of their complexity they are not accessible to everyone. They are of two types: **the speculative**, which brings together ordered knowledge that searches for and gives meaning to the world of nature, cultural realities, and the things and facts of life and history; **the scientific**, which has as its own purpose to arrive at objective data, rationally justified in each of the steps taken to arrive at them. But man does not live by these thoughts and senses alone. In everyday life, most of our steps are based on common sense, a reality that does not have the conceptual and methodological rigor of scientific knowledge (typical of the natural and social sciences) and speculative knowledge (such as philosophy and theology)".* (CRUZ, 2011, p.57, own translation)

American theologian Gordon Kaufman (1925-2011) comments:

*"If my concept of theology-as radically rooted in the shared concerns of human experience-is correct, theology has a cultural and universal significance, and there is no reason for it to be confined within the narrow parochial confines of a religion or to be seen as an esoteric or subrational discipline."* (VIGIL, 2011, p. 41, own translation).

Nancy Cardoso Pereira, at the end of her book/thesis for her doctorate in **theology**, offers us, "as if in conclusion," a panorama of her **scientific work**, from which we take the liberty of highlighting a few brushstrokes:

*"Studying the Bible with groups from the city and the countryside, pastoral and popular movements, feminist groups and from diverse churches and religions, the Elisha cycle - the object of her thesis: narratives of Elisha (2 Kings 2-13), cut short by seven years of famine, around the 9th century BC. C. - was proving to be a privileged place of re-enchantment and memory of anonymous rituals and practices capable of revealing the sacred in everyday life.*

*...with the women of the Workers Pastoral, at lunchtime at the Casa de Convivência da Luz (Light House) with prostitutes, in the sharing of experiences with the staff of the São Bernardo Street Boys and Girls Project, in the parish halls of the CEBI meetings, in the celebrations of the Camp Terras de Promissão, at the Gays and Lesbians Meeting in a Hotel in Arouche, in the breaks of the classes with the ITESP students...in these places... I wrote my doctoral text...more than a technical and historical work...this dissertation also wants to be a trajectory memorial."* (PEREIRA, 2014, p. 211-212,214, own translation)



## CHAPTER 10

# JESUS CHRIST, ONLY SON OF THE FATHER...

*"In the beginning was the Word ... and the Word became flesh  
and dwelt among us.  
It was the true light that came to illuminate  
every person who comes into this world".*

(Jn. 1:1-14,12)

*"In the beginning was Mercy ...  
And Mercy became an embrace."*

(Luis H. Ortiz Álvarez - Faculty of Theology of Granada - 2016)

*"The Logos of God had become man so that you  
could learn how a man, as a man, can become God."*

Clement of Alexandria (150 - 215(?))

*"I believe in God the Father". With these words it is announced  
the first article of our faith and opens access  
to the most genuine Christian prayer. To enunciate it is equivalent to  
to reach the apex of the mystery; only it is about  
a mystery sensed as warm,  
Open and welcoming: imposes respect, but not fear;  
appears immense, but not humiliating.  
For God as Father reveals to us that we are children...  
With equal reason we could speak of it as "mother".  
And, perhaps, we should do it, even if it was  
only as compensation for the long historical silence."*

(QUEIRUGA, 1993, p.74)

The roadmap for our reflections is the *Nicene Creed*. Since we decided to start from the back to the front, from the *"heavens and the earth"* to the *"I believe"*, that is, from the concrete to the abstract, we are exactly at the discussion topic of the Council of Nicaea: ***"the Arian question"***.

We have already seen that Emperor Constantine didn't give a damn about the theological question about the nature of Jesus and his relationship and/or identity with God. What he was interested in was a unified religion, which would serve as a support for the unity of the Empire. A question of doctrinal unity, of conflict control, of power. The emperor already sensed what was later much studied: the legitimating role of religion, or the *"symbolic, or ritual immune system,"* as Peter Sloterdijk calls it. (SLOTERDIJK, 2019, p. 273)

Arius, a brilliant Christian priest from Alexandria, preached that Jesus of Nazareth, although *"the most exalted of all creatures, is not God, the great eternal mystery*. As the historian H. M. Gwatkin said, *"Arius' God is an unknown God, whose being is hidden in eternal mystery*.

Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, defended the consubstantiality (*homoousios*) between Jesus and God the Father and opposed Arius' antitrinitarian Christological view.

We know the outcome of the Council, presided over by Ósio, Bishop of Cordoba, the Emperor's private advisor and appointed Pope's representative to the Council.

Arius was condemned and the *Nicene Creed* was then imposed on all the Churches of Christianity, which did not prevent, as we have seen, Emperor Constantine from being baptized, on the eve of his death, by a friendly Arian bishop.

Although only 2 of the 180 bishops present did not sign the Creed, we know that many continued to think and preach what they believed, whether the content of their faith was the same as the Creed formulation or not.

*"...Christian religious thought, in implying human beings' understanding of Jesus has developed and been subject to change like any other human thought."* (R.E. BROWN in ALONSO, 2022, p. 335, own translation)

At the end of the reign of Theodosius the Great (379-395), when it became the official religion, orthodox, Roman Christianity was imposed throughout the Empire.

*"At the councils of Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381) one said 'we believe' or 'we confess'. In Chalcedon (451) and in subsequent councils it was said: 'we teach that one must confess. With this, the historical-salvific confession becomes orthodox doctrine and the confessional formula, dogmatic form... the faith, in itself something alive, had been converted into a closed system of dogmas, of statements, all of them backed by the authority of God and of the Church itself."* (DOLORES/VELASCO, 2014, p. 50, own translation)

Modern theology has called attention to the fact that the doctrinal formulations of the Council, which affirmed the consubstantiality of Jesus and God, the exclusivity of the sonship of **Jesus, the only Son, from the Father**, have more to do with pagan Greek philosophy, than with biblical theology, for example of Paul.

For Felipe dos Anjos, a theologian with an acute political sensibility, *"...the decisive question in the history of Christian theology was the debate around the theology of the Trinity. When, in the course of the second century, discussions began about a possible plurality, or a trinity of divine figures, there was a reaction of resistance and denial from those monotheists (monarchists) who denied the idea of trinity, as if it were a kind of polytheism, or paganism, in the Christian faith. To dispute with these opponents, theologians such as Tertullian, Hippolytus, Irenaeus and many others found in the Greek term oikonomia the best way to explain the triune existence of God Himself. They said, in general terms: "God, as to his being and his substance, is certainly one; but as to his oikonomia, that is, the way in which he manages his house, his life and the world he created, he is, on the contrary, threefold.*

*This notion inserts in God, or in ontology, an economic division. Thus, in the persons of God, from then on, there is an economic fissure (between ontology and praxis) through which the Trinitarian*

*dogma and the idea of a divine providential government of the world were introduced into the Christian faith. According to these traditions the trinity god would have a device (an economy) installed in himself. This, besides splitting God himself, determines how other persons of the Trinity are given specific roles in the economy of redemption and salvation. God becomes the core of a managerial work: himself managed in three persons. This would be, for Agamben, the main schizophrenia that the theological doctrine of oikonomia would have left to Western culture.*

*The oikonomy of God becomes one of the central tenets of the Western Christian church, and in its name and by its modes of operation, the church comes to rule the then world. " (DOS ANJOS. 2019, p. 232, own translation).*

One example - on my own - is found in the Encyclical Letter "*Laudato Si*" (*Praise Be - on the care of the common home*) by Pope Francis (2015):

*"The Father is the ultimate source of everything, the loving and communicative foundation of all that exists. The Son, who reflects Him and through whom everything was created, united Himself to this earth when He was formed in the womb of Mary. The Spirit, infinite bond of love, is intimately present in the heart of the universe, animating and raising up new paths. The world was created by the three Persons as a single divine principle, but each of them carries out this common work according to his or her own personal identity. Therefore, "when, in wonder, we contemplate the universe in its greatness and beauty, we must praise the entire Trinity." (item 238)*

As Franz Hinkelammert said:

*"When, beginning in the third and fourth centuries AD, orthodoxy - the terminator of Christianity - was imposed, the Pauline interpretation of the crucifixion and those responsible for it were marginalized: the rulers of this world, in the name of the law. When you Christianize the Empire, the Empire imperializes Christianity." (HINKELAMMERT, 2012, p. 37, own translation)*

That Jesus is consubstantial with the Father, that is, of the same *substance* or *essence*, says little, if anything, to a modern believer. What is the substance of God? The theologian José M. Castillo, in his book *Jesus the Humanization of God* - whose title inverts the Nicene proposal - poses the following provocation: Do you believe that Jesus is God? Do we know what we are asking? If we don't know *who* God is, or *what* God is *like*. We do not know the term, or predicate, of the question.

Philosopher and theologian John Hick proposes: "Jesus is *totus Deus*, totally God, but not *totum Dei*, "the totality of God." (CASTILLO, 2015, p. 389, own translation)

Does it add anything significant to us?

*"Christianism, with its bimillennial history, appears covered with the solid garments of a rigid institutionalization. Jewish religious heritage, Roman-Hellenistic political mentality, medieval feudal*



*style, and still absolutist influence of the Ancien Régime: all left their mark. But this was, in some way, inevitable; and it is understandable, in any case. However, precisely because of that, it needs revision.*" (QUEIRUGA, 2003, p. 249, own translation)

Endorsing a comment by Evaristo de Miranda, that Christianity will no longer be sociological - maintained by the demographic increase of Christians and by family and cultural tradition - the theologian João Batista Libânio believes that such a situation requires **deep reform and renewal of the theology and the philosophy that underlies it.**

*"The last vestiges of a religion that organizes, defines and legitimizes the collective order have disappeared. The divorce between Caesar and God is given. The divine order and the idea of a realization of the divine in history dissipate. Christianity will find new vigor by returning to its original source. **Rethinking the status of faith means returning to the Jesus of history.**"* (SOTER, 2009, p. 190, own translation)

This historical Jesus, from Nazareth, probably died at the age of just over 35, on Friday, April 8 of the year 30, 3790 of the Jewish calendar, 783 of the founding of the City of Rome. (NUNES, 2019, p. 136)

He suffered what Cicero called *"the most cruel and abominable form of execution"*.

For his compatriots, one more among the thousands mercilessly executed in Jerusalem. In this case, executed for blasphemy, by the religious power, for subversion and rebellion by the military power, according to the laws in force.

*"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, becoming a curse for us...for it is written (Deut. 21, 23): Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree"* - Paul writes to the Galatians (Gal, 3, 13).

One among the 200 million inhabitants of the earth at the time. Earth, a small planet of a dwarf star, the Sun, one among the 400 billion others in the Milky Way, whose diameter, we know today, is 120,000 light years, or 120,000 trillion kilometers<sup>10</sup>, expanding, the whole of it, at increasing speed. In the context of the history of the universe, on a scale of 12 months, the event Jesus of Nazareth happened on December 31, at 23 hours and 59 minutes... From this point of view, as we said, Jesus is our fellow countryman and fellow citizen, speaking to us today about a way to live as brothers, children of the same Father.

As historian Mircea Eliade has said, *"...there is no doubt that the preaching of Jesus, and perhaps even his name, would have been lost in oblivion without a singular and incomprehensible*

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<sup>10</sup> 1 kilometer = 0.621371 miles

*episode, external to faith: the resurrection of the crucified one."* (ELIADE, 2011, p. 295, own translation)

Who was this man, who only came to be effectively known and to mark human history after his death?

Since Jesus lived in a universe without letters and his first disciples, poor and illiterate, expected his return "soon," the first writings about Jesus appeared around the year 50 - the Sayings of Jesus (the Q Gospel), the Gospel of Thomas and, perhaps, the Gospel of the Cross - and were lost. They have been partially recovered by biblical scholars, in their study of the Gospels, which we know.

*The earliest writings about Jesus that have come down to us are 4 letters of Paul, written in the 1950s: the first Letter to the Thessalonians (A.D. 49), the first Letter to the Corinthians (winter of A.D. 52 and 53), the Letter to the Galatians of A.D. 53- 54, and the Letter to the Romans in the winter of 54-55."* (HOORNAERT, 2016, p. 37)

Saul of Tarsus, with an exceptional Pharisaic background, witnessed, about 6 years after the death of Jesus of Nazareth, the execution, by stoning, of Stephen, a Hellenist, condemned by the Sanhedrin for spreading his faith in Jesus of Nazareth.

Saul, about 28 years old, a devout Pharisee, supported the death penalty and, clothed with *ad hoc* power of attorney, went out to persecute other disciples of Jesus in other cities, convinced that heresy should be outlawed in the name of the Law. (The Law will later be a stumbling block for him, Paul).

Little by little he becomes convinced that he is fighting uselessly against what is not a ghost, but a *way of life*, a highly agglutinating element. The disciples treat each other as brothers, sharing feelings and goods. Jesus was not dead, he was among the *Nazarenes, followers of the Path*. He had "resurrected". He is converted and goes to Damascus to find someone who can instruct him, he who had a solid background in *Torah*.

For three years and he takes refuge in Arabia (probably in present-day Jordan) where, at the time, there were few Jews.

It must have been years of study, reflection and prayer, which explains why Paul became a theologian, the first and greatest formulator of a theoretical framework about his new faith. Some fundamental and founding elements of his conception: Jesus is risen, he is alive, his resurrection is the certainty of our resurrection, that is, of our post-death life, "*shining with glory*" (1 Cor. 15:43). To become his disciples is to become the brother of all: Jew or Gentile, man or woman, master or slave, all are equal. Those who believe form a new kind of People's Assembly (Church), where He is the head and all brothers are its members. *Jesus is the Anointed by God (Christ) - a title used by Paul more than*

two hundred times in his Letters - and also Son of God and Lord (Kurios) - absolutely restrictive imperial attributions.

*"The ignominious death of Jesus condemned by the authorities according to the law, is portrait of the wisdom of the world: it is the rule of law. The law does not liberate, the law enslaves. What sets free is love (1 Cor. 13): We must believe, live in hope, practicing love."* (HOORNAERT, 2016, p. 140, own translation)

The ultimate foundation of love, of each and every love, is God, whose preferred image for Jesus is the Father. The experience of the Father constitutes the most intimate and original core of his personality. He puts himself at the service of building the *Kingdom of God*, a way of living together, where God "reigns" as a merciful Father. The Kingdom of God is shared bread.

*"A new notion of family rooted in fraternity, and not in the notion of paterfamilias, was the fruit of an experience glimpsed from the horizon of the Kingdom. A Kingdom that would definitely be the congregation of daughters and sons around a God who is not only Father, but also good and merciful."* (LUCIANI, 2017, p. 168, own translation)

As Paul Ricoeur notes, *"Jesus dares to address God as a son to his father: the reserve to which the whole Bible bears witness is broken at one precise point: audacity is possible, because a new time has begun."* (QUEIRUGA, 1993, p. 109, own translation)

Jesus was not one for many quotations from the Torah (the Law), nor for recitations of prayers other than the usual ones, but he taught a new prayer, whose version, with an Aramaic flavor, is very concrete and where the emphasis is on loving reciprocity:

***Father, hallowed be your name; your kingdom come; give us this day our daily bread; forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors, and do not put us to the test.*** (NUNES, 2019, p. 109)

The metaphor Father to speak of God is biblical and certainly expresses the relationship of love and trust that Jesus experienced with Joseph, his father. Jesus sees God as a merciful Father, so merciful, so loving, that he calls him with the diminutive little father.

*Already in the beginnings of religion, where it is possible to discover "the most primitive of primitives," the figure of God as Father appears as the key. This was demonstrated by the school of Vienna, founded by W. Schmidt, with unquestionable validity, however debatable its conception of primitive monotheism may be as a theory. Later, in later moments of religious evolution, this figure is lost or diluted, to be recovered later in the supreme gods of the "pantheon" and, above all, in monotheism. At the beginning of the Biblical world, in the Ancient East, already from the second or even third millennium before Christ, God is invoked as a father. Certainly Joachim Jeremiah indicates*

*that such invocation already implies, and very clearly, something of what for us supposes the word "mother."* (QUEIRUGA, 1993, p. 90)

Jesus calls God father 170 times in the New Testament. In Hebrew scripture God is described as father only 15 times.

There are two important observations to be made here:

1. New Testament scholars agree that Jesus never ascribed to himself the title Only Son. The distinction that appears in John's Gospel-"*my Father and your Father*" (20-17)-is a post-resurrection reading and was not expressed by Jesus, experts say. He saw God as father of all, with an emphasis on the neediest;
2. The number of times each gospel puts the metaphor Father in Jesus' speeches corresponds to the process of "de-feminization" and "patriarchalization" of Christianity in the late 1st century and throughout the 2nd century.

In this sense, the feminine look of Wanda Deifelt, a theology doctor, is very pertinent and shrewd:

*"The number of times this metaphor appears in each gospel shows the influence of the social context and how this metaphor was becoming absolutized. God is called Father only four times in the oldest gospel, that of Mark. In Luke he appears 15 times. In Matthew, 42 times. In the most recent gospel, that of John, he appears 109 times. What is at stake is not the legitimacy of this metaphor as one of the multiple ways of talking about God. What is questionable is, in the first place, its absoluteness. Secondly, one suspects the use of the metaphor to perpetuate patriarchy. We have reached the point that, today, the use of any feminine metaphor to refer to God causes furor. You can call God a rock, but it is considered offensive to call God a mother. Any metaphor that becomes absolute is idolatry.*

*The transition from an ecclesiastical model, where small groups met in homes (including women's homes), to one of approximation to Greco-Roman culture reveals how one metaphor adapted more easily than others. Jesus' Abba (father) is synonymous with a close, caring, loving deity. The Pater of Greco-Roman culture, on the other hand, is the absolute lord, with power of life and death over wife(s), sons and daughters, slaves. When, in the first centuries, the Jesus movement adopted a Greek way of thinking and a Roman way of administration, the language of the all-powerful father became normative. So to be suspicious of language is also to be suspicious of the reality that engenders it. Transforming language is a constitutive step in transforming that reality.*

Wanda Deifelt continues:

*"The use of the metaphor Father, like the use of all metaphors, carries in itself a dimension of partiality. It is urgent, using gender analytic tools, to deconstruct and reconstruct such a metaphor so*

*as to show aspects of divine fatherhood that approximate the experience of modern fathers. In other words, the divine father language insists on describing God as all-powerful, distant, authoritarian, judge, without taking into consideration the paternal dimension, as expressed by Jesus when employing the term Abba; loving father, full of affection, close."* (SUSIN, 2006, p. 266-267, own translation)

It is worth remembering the relevant female presence in the daily life and in the proclamation of the "good news", at the beginning of the movement of the followers of the Path and Paul's ministry; 62 women are mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles and in Paul's Letters. Also in the Johannine communities women had an active and directive role. (NUNES, 2019, p. 178)

No women are reported to have attended the Council of Nicaea.

The theologian and historian Eduardo Hoornaert, after having studied Wittgenstein and others, tried to read, with a Semitic eye, the first writings about Jesus that have come down to us. The result was a rare and excellent literary analysis of the **Letters of Paul**, which *presents Jesus with the Anointed One, the Letter to the Hebrews, which interprets Jesus from the biblical figure of Melchisedec, and Mark, who in the 70s, takes up all this and memorializes Jesus in a new literary genre that gives rise to the Gospels.* (HOORNAERT, 2016, p. 9, 49, 60, 65, 73, 75, 139)

*"Beginning in the third century A.D., when Christian intellectuals began to use Greek categories to interpret the texts of the New Testament, in such a predominant way, until today, that it is difficult for us to return to the original Semitic sense. In current readings, only Hellenized Paul, Hellenized Hebrews, Hellenized Mark pass. There is a lot of work to be done in order to recover the Semitic Paul, the Semitic Letter to the Hebrews, and the Semitic Mark.*

More than emphasizing the metaphors *Father* and *Kingdom of God*, so proper to Jesus of Nazareth, Paul radicalizes, in practice and in his preaching, the consequences of the two metaphors.

*"In his Letters, Paul transforms sparse information about Jesus of Nazareth into well-structured themes: **freedom, love, universalism**, etc. It is this last point that constitutes Paul's greatest contribution in articulating the legacy of Jesus."*

We highlight below, from Hoornaert's book, *"In Search of Jesus of Nazareth: A Literary Analysis,"* some of Paul's positions on the three themes.

**On love**, Paul writes to the Corinthians and to the Romans:

*"I can speak the language*

*of men and angels*

*But, without love,*

*I am nothing but the echo of bronze,  
the tinkling of a cymbal...*

*Without love, I am nothing." (1Cor. 13:13)*

*"If your enemy is hungry, feed him.*

*If it is thirsty, give it a drink.*

*In this way you accumulate burning embers over your head.*

*Don't let yourself be overcome by evil:*

*Overcome evil by good." (Rom. 12, 20-21)*

**On freedom, he writes to the Galatians and the Romans:**

*"You are children.*

*God sent into our hearts the Breath of His Son,*

*Who shouts "Abba, Father".*

*Therefore, you are no longer slaves, but sons.*

*And as sons, heirs of God." (Gal. 4:6-7)*

*All those who let themselves be led by the Breath of God*

*They are children of God.*

*You have not received a breath of slaves*

*To return to the ways of fear,*

*But the breath of a son,*

*The One who makes us cry out: "Abba, Father" (Rom. 8:14-15)*

**On universalism, an extra word from Hoornaert:**

*"It is ironic to note that it was not until 1997 that the idea of Pauline universalism reappears, in the book 'Saint Paul, La Fondation de l'Universalisme,' '... by atheist philosopher Alain Badiou, who considers Paul the founder of universalism."*

*"... universalism, in the words of the philosopher Zizek, is a "disordered" universalism, i.e., irreconcilable with the orderings of established society."*

To the Galatians, Paul takes a bold stand:

*"There is no Jew, or Greek*

*master or slave,*

*man or woman,*

*we are all united in Jesus, the Anointed One." (Gal 3:28)*

For Paul, Jesus' life and death reflect **God's wisdom:**

*"Let no one be deceived, if any of you believes himself to be wise according to this world, he must become foolish to become wise, for the wisdom of this world is foolishness in the sight of God." (1 Cor. 3:18-19)*

*"The commoners and the despised are God's chosen ones" (1 Cor. 1:27-28)*

As Hinkelammert notes (HINKELAMMERT, 2012, p. 63, 90):

*"A conviction of this kind subverts all, but really all institutions, including the Church. They all have to evaluate themselves by that criterion."*

*"Paul knows how to see the macrocosm in the microcosm, because in the small is the great and in the weak is the strength. This is what he calls the wisdom of God.*

*(...) we speak of a wisdom of God, mysterious, hidden, destined by God, from before the ages, for our glory." (1 Cor. 2, 7)*

The life and death of Jesus is God's own message, or revelation, to all men, his children, created over centuries of evolution and always loved. For the theologian Andrés T. Queiruga, the announcement of God, merciful Father, is the most original Christian contribution to the process of humanization:

*"...there is no man who is definitely a failure: even he who is in fact crushed by others, even he who dies without the slightest historical achievement, even he who is defeated in any way... is a worthy man, a subject deserving absolute respect, an object of unconditional love, a meaningful existence.*

*The hope in the 'beyond' used as opium of the claims of the 'here'; the religious 'consolation' of the poor, manipulated as a sedative for the conscience of the rich... is true blasphemy against the love of God." (QUEIRUGA, 1993, p. 70, own translation)*





## CHAPTER 11

# WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN JESUS AND GOD? <sup>11</sup>

*"Our world, that we may live in it, love it and sanctify ourselves, is not given by a neutral theory of being, but is given by the events of history or by the phenomena of nature, but is given by the existence of these unheard-of centers of otherness that are the faces, faces to be looked at, respected, caressed."*

*- Italo Mancini, quoted by Cardinal Carlo M. Martini*

(ECO, 2009, p. 41)

*"It is not at all necessary, to obtain your salvation, to know Christ, according to the flesh, but it is totally different about the eternal Son of God, that is, eternal wisdom of God, who manifested himself in all things, above all in human mind, and most particularly in Jesus Christ."*

(Baruch de ESPINOSA in LENOIR, 2019, p. 59)

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<sup>11</sup> Summary of the answer by Jose Maria Castillo, doctor in theology, to this question, in his book *"Jesus, the humanization of God"*. Reading complemented by the Jesuit Roger Haight in his book *Jesus, Symbol of God*. Pope Francis told the author in 2018, *"I read your books with pleasure, which do people a lot of good"*.

*"The surprising and bewildering of the god we know in Jesus is that this God, by becoming incarnate in the man Jesus of Nazareth, merged and blended with the human to the extreme of being present and identified with all that is truly human, with the sensitive, with what we see, hear, touch and feel (John 1:1). Therefore, God is in the one who is hungry, in the one who is thirsty, in the sick and the foreigner, in the prisoner, in the unfortunate and in the excluded (Mt 25:34-40). So when we Christians talk about God, We can rightly speak of the "weakness of God" (1 Cor 1:25). How do we say that God has evicted himself from his condition and made himself one among many (Phil 2:7)".*

(CASTILLO in LIBÂNIO, 2013, p. 89-90)

*"After it is claimed that God became flesh, it becomes obligatory also to find it in the body of another. Mistreat the body of the other is to mistreat the body of Christ. The authenticity of the Christian experience is found precisely in the good news that the human being is spiritual matter, whose body is the temple of a living Spirit, Who acts from the open wounds in search of forgiveness."*

(FERREIRA, 207, p. 34)

There is a simple and commonplace answer: Jesus is God! This answer, according to Castillo, is empty, without content. If we ask someone: *Do you believe that Jesus is God?* we don't know what we are asking, because we don't know *who God is*, or *what God is like*. We do not know the term or predicate of the question. Therefore, neither the question, nor the answer, is meaningful. They are empty of content.

We cannot take as our starting point the God of metaphysics to explain and know Jesus. The God of Aristotle, or of Plato, is pure theory, without any interest today.

As St. Augustine said, "*Whatever we say about God is not Himself; it is only our ideas about Him. If you know Him, He is not God...*".

As Van Rad said, "*There is no thing more alien to the etymology of YAHVÉ's name than an ontological definition of its essence.*

The question of the relationship between Jesus and God has to be put differently.

Historical studies - that is, scientific studies, within the framework of our possible, probable knowledge, supported by empirical evidence - have shown that the historical man, known as Jesus of Nazareth:

- actually existed, lived in Galilee, died in Jerusalem, a little over 35 years old, on Friday, April 7, of the year 30, 3,790 of the Jewish calendar, 783 of the foundation of the city of Rome (NUNES, 2019, p. 136);
- He did not declare himself to be God, nor the son of God; he did not give himself any exclusive title, of divine nature;
- Peter's exclamation "*My Lord and my God*", exegetes say, is surely a later text than the death of Jesus;
- no one, in his short life, recognized him as equal to YAHWEH, or himself; which, incidentally, in the deep-rooted Jewish belief, would be blasphemy. If YAHWEH, the absolute transcendent, was unnameable - in respect, the vagueness of his name was omitted - how could a man claim to be, or be recognized as, God?
- his day invariably began with the recitation "*Shema Israel - Hear, O Israel: Adonai, our God is One*" and that he invoked him by calling him Father when he taught his disciples the best known prayer: *Our Father, who art in heaven...*;
- whether Jesus of Nazareth, in his inner self, was aware of his absolute originality, of his transcendence of the human species, is something inscrutable. About his personal consciousness, how it would have evolved, how he saw himself, we can say nothing, absolutely nothing.

There are not a few theologians who claim to find no evidence in the Scriptures that Jesus of Nazareth considered himself to be God. In calling himself "*son of God*" he did not attribute any exclusivity to himself.

For the Gentiles, contemporaries of Jesus, there were many gods, and one more made no difference. Nor were Roman emperors taken seriously in this respect, proclaimed gods, usually after death, by the Roman Senate. Some, in life, even demanded from their subjects the recognition of their divinity.

The capital question, says Castillo, is not whether that first-century Jew was or was not the God, whom we already knew through earlier philosophies, or religious traditions.

*"The question is whether that Jew, Jesus, came to tell us, or reveal, something about God that we did not know, nor can we know for ourselves."* (p. 75)

First, *"it is necessary to keep in mind that Jesus profoundly changed the concept and experience of God, which was held in the Judaism of his time."* (p. 107)

Two traits in his personal experience: *trust and closeness* in relation to God, of whom and with whom he often speaks, addressing him as *Abba*, "little father," surprisingly and unusually changing the name of God from Judaism, although "abba" was a colloquial expression among adults. His relationship with God is not one of subjection, or slavery, but a way of freedom.

*"The father Jesus presents is always characterized by kindness, unconditional welcome, tolerance, respect, and love."* (p. 115)

*"He makes the sun shine on the good and the bad and sends rain on the just and the unjust."* (Mt. 5:45).

The first "revelation" of Jesus about God is found in his words and in his dealings with Him and his brothers. For Him, love for the Father is manifested in love for our neighbor, especially those most in need. The value judgment of our lives will be our affection and care for our neighbor.

He makes it very clear that the "neighbor" is not an abstract category, the object of a universal, "Platonic love", but each concrete, suffering, abandoned, exploited, subjugated man, hungry for food, recognition, justice, and love, whom we often encounter without seeing them.

*"From his own way of living, Jesus made known to us what God is like and who God is"* (p. 130).

Jesus was born and lived in a society deeply marked and shaped by religion. However, as a Galilean, he was not subject to such intense religious influence as his countrymen from Judea, and even more so those from Jerusalem. *"The presence of the rabbis was not as active, as in the capital, the city of the Temple and officiating worship,"* as Pagola notes. (p. 135)

In historical Jesus studies the distinction between "sayings" and "deeds" of Jesus is common. Many agree with Sanders when he says: *"Our study is based primarily on the "facts" about Jesus, and only secondarily on the study of the material part of the "sayings"*.

Another author, E. Fuchs, *"proposed to foreground the behavior of Jesus, using it as a framework where the "sayings" should be inserted.* (p. 134)

It is a fact that Jesus lived and carried out his project in Galilee, the poorest and most ill-regarded region. In this poor region, and in a process of increasing poverty, due to the policy adopted by the Empire, with the support of the local authorities, Jesus wanted to live with "the last of the last".

As Joachim Jeremiah observes:

*"The followers of Jesus consisted predominantly of slandered people, people who enjoyed low reputation and esteem: the "amme haarets," the uneducated and ignorant, to whom their religious ignorance and moral behavior closed, according to the conviction of the time, the door to salvation."* (p. 137)

There is an interpretation principle, "the hermeneutic principle", that impregnates our academic education today. According to him: "the place *from which one sees* things determines and/or conditions *how one sees* things. From a palace, or a mansion, one sees life and the world in a very different way from how one sees it from a shack, a slum, or a suburb.

Jesus, like every real human being, did not, could not, deprive himself of this hermeneutical conditioning.

Hence, only from where Jesus is situated can we encounter the God that Jesus reveals to us.

*"In Jesus, man was revealed in his maximum radicality and with that also, who the human God is. It is not, therefore, from an abstract analysis of humanity and divinity that one can clarify the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, who fascinated the Apostles to the point that they had to call him God."* (BOFF, 1972, p. 210)

Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (HAIGHT, 2003, p. 105) highlights three particular classes of people with whom Jesus lived:

- the poor;
- the sick and the limp - the object of his healing ministry;
- the tax collectors, sinners and prostitutes.
- Among these poor people Jesus visualizes and realizes the kingdom of God, that is, a way of life, of fraternal coexistence, joy and happiness, as the Father wishes for all his children.
- Jesus' praxis - life and preaching - is the dignity and happiness of people, the truly sacred before God:
- *"I have come that all may have life, and have it abundantly";*
- *"the day will come when the true worshipers of God, will worship Him in spirit and in truth".*

The One whom Jesus called Father is personal and loving.

The parable of the prodigal son reveals God as merciful, welcoming, forgiving, understanding, absolutely concerned with the wholeness, the integrity, and the fulfillment of human beings, who are his children.

It is undeniable that *"Jesus displaced the sacred, as he took it out of the Temple with its priests, out of religion with its norms and threats, and put it in the human being and in the relationships that each one has and maintains with others."* (p. 152)

"In the Gospels it is never said that Jesus went to the Temple to pray, or to participate in liturgical acts, offerings, or sacred ceremonies. It is true that Jesus, according to the Gospel of John, appears with some frequency in the Temple. But it is always to speak to the people and explain his message, since that is where people used to gather."

Jesus is presented in the Gospels as *"a healing agent, an exorcizer, a miracle worker. The particular historicity of the events behind the miracle accounts is simply not known (...) they are undoubtedly embellished and in some cases created to illustrate how Jesus was perceived by faith. This, however, is not really important."*

*In principle, miracle accounts alone can tell us nothing about Jesus' divine origin (...) the divine power in Jesus' life is a mystery. We cannot know its mechanism and its mode of operation."* (HAIGHT, 2003, p. 106, own translation)

*"The most important thing that Jesus of Nazareth brought was that he radically changed our idea and experience of God."* (HAIGHT, 2003, p. 168, own translation)

*"...his project is not the project of religion. The Kingdom of God, proclaimed and increased by him, is not identified with any religion; it is universal, which makes possible and necessary another form of dialogue relationship between religions."* (HAIGHT, 2003, p. 168, own translation)

Jesus represents the strongest and most decisive contribution ever made in the history of mankind's religious traditions. (HAIGHT, 2003, p. 169)

*"Not the confessional party member is truly Christian, but the one who has become human by his own Christian living"* (theologian Joseph Ratzinger in BOFF, 1992, p. 271, own translation)

*"Whoever does not know how to separate God from religion is bound to lose the charm for God himself."* (COSTA, 2018, p. 26, own translation)

Ponders philosopher, theologian, poet, and social critic Soeren Kierkegaard (1813-1855):

*"When you love the beloved, you are not like God, for to God there is no predilection(...) While you love your friend you are not like God, for to God there are no differences. But when you love your neighbor, then you are like God". (KIERKENGAARD in VALLS, 2012, p. 77, own translation)*





## CHAPTER 12

# CREATION, SALVATION, LIBERATION, REDEMPTION, KINGDOM OF GOD

*"The understanding of **creation** as a mere explosion of a material vastness, cast at random, would be totally absurd if there were no hope that everything has been done to make appear an interlocutor, free and responsible, a partner of God himself.*

*The conception of a world creation is plausible as man's environment and a possible **salvation history**.*

*In this sense, on the one hand, it is good to ask oneself for the creation of the world as a place of preparation*

*for the creation of man as **self-revelation** of God's love, to the fullness of man who is Christ, according to Rahner."*

(FERREIRA, 2017, p. 95)

*"In Israel, it is difficult to separate the issue of salvation of the idea of Yahweh's manifestation. What is manifested does not do it purely and simply to make itself known. He appears to the chosen people to save and deliver."*

(PINAS, 2018, p. 13)

*"Christianism burst into history as a movement of the Spirit, animated by faith - by hope and trust in a era of shalom demonstrated and announced by Jesus. For almost three centuries the Age of Faith thrived."*

(COX, 2015, p. 103)

Over centuries and millennia the conditions of human life remained essentially the same, and generation after generation lived and died within the same known mental horizons. But in the imperceptibly slow evolution of human life over long periods of time, the conditions gradually gave way to the emergence of individuality.

In what Karl Jaspers identified as "*axial time*," from about 800 BC to about 200 BC, significant human individuals emerged, by whose teachings - though always within the context of their own cultures - human consciousness was broadened and developed immensely, and a movement began from archaic religion to religions of salvation or liberation.

During this period lived in China Confucius and Lao Tse; in India lived and taught Guatama the Buddha and Mahavira, the founder of Jainism; in Persia, Zoroaster; in Israel, the great Hebrew prophets: Amos, Hosea, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Ezekiel - and in them most of the scriptures were written. Greece produced Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. Individuals who were emerging to self-awareness from the narrow communal mindsets of their societies. (HICK, 2018, p. 69)

*"In the course of its history the Hebrew people experienced several natural or political threats, coming from other peoples... This context of threats contributes to develop with the people a deep ideal of liberation... The two experiences of slavery of the people in Egypt and, later, in the Babylonian exile, fortified the notion of liberation and of trust in Yahweh as the saving and liberating God."* (PINAS, 2018, p. 136, own translation)

The God of Israel is a God of relationship. His history is the history of the relationship of the people and their leaders with God. A covenant was built between God and the people. The initiative came from God: He called a man, Abraham (1850 B.C.), from a distant land - Ur of Chaldea (today Iraq) - and made him travel long distances, tested him and promised that he would be the father of a numerous people. He rescued these people when enslaved in Egypt, gave them a great deliverer, Moses (1300 B.C.), and, through him, the Ten Commandments.

Through Moses, God summons the Hebrews and they become aware that they are a special people, a "church" (*ekklesia*, in Greek: assembly of the called) and they collectively commit themselves to this covenant.

After making the people wander in the desert, he gave them a land of their own. These people became a nation and had good and bad leaders, depending on their behavior. They were warned many times by the prophets, men with great courage and sense of justice.

This whole odyssey was told orally and then recorded in writing over the centuries. Folk tales, stories, laws, philosophy of life (proverbs), poems, exhortations, and visions were compiled. The last of the books that came to form the Bible (plural of "*biblos*", book) was Wisdom, written in the year 50 BC.

*"Tomorrow, when your son asks you, 'What are these testimonies and statutes and regulations that Yahweh our God has commanded you?' you will say to your son, 'We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, but Yahweh brought us out of Egypt with a strong hand. In our eyes Yahweh performed great and terrible signs and wonders against Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his house. But as for us, he brought us out of Egypt to bring us in and give us the land which he had sworn to our fathers. Then Yahweh commanded us to fulfill all these statutes, fearing Yahweh our God, so that everything may go well for us every day; to give us life, as it is this day. This shall be our righteousness: that we take care to put all these commandments into practice before Yahweh our God, as he has commanded us." (Deut. 6:20-25)*

It is through his saving action that the people understand the revelation and glory of Yahweh. Through Israel's salvation history, He makes Himself known. In the wonders performed by Yahweh, the people can know him; and in knowing him, they know his salvation together.

As historian Reza Aslan notes:

*"God is the Lord who commands: that is the fundamental statement; in Old Testament theology (...) Everything derives from that. Everything else is based on that. Everything else can be understood with reference to that and that alone." (ASLAN, 2018, p. 186, own translation)*

*"Christianism speaks of redemption and eternal life; Judaism, of the coming of the Kingdom of God; Islam, of judgment and paradise; Hinduism, of moksa; Buddhism, of enlightenment and nirvana."*

Underlying, and giving substance to these varied conceptions of an unlimitedly better state, is the consciousness of an ultimate unity of reality and value.

For Judaism, this is the "God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob," and of their descendants throughout time; for Christianity, the triune God of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; for Islam, Allah, the merciful, the maximally compassionate; for Hinduism, the infinite being, consciousness, delight (*satchitananda*), which is Brahma; for Theravada Buddhism, the ineffable and imperishable reality of Nirvana; for Mahayana, Emptiness, (*sunyata*), which is being as it is (Suchness) or completeness of "admirable being".

In all these forms the ultimate reality, the divine, the Real, is what makes possible the transformation of our present existence... and for the secular faith of Marxism, the saving reality, which transcends the alienated individual, is the dialectical process of history... Thus, all these post-axial faiths are soteriologically oriented, that is, oriented toward salvation, or liberation, as human transformation. (HICK, 2018, p. 69)

The philosopher and theologian W. Pannenberg - one of the greatest theologians of the 20th century - shows that in salvation history there is no way to separate **revelation** and **salvation**. He says:

"God's revelation means, for the human person - to whom it is determined to open up to God - salvation, fulfillment and realization of his determination, and thus of his essence." (PINAS, 2018, p. 137, own translation)

For the historian John Hick, who we have been quoting so far:

"...the full weight of Jesus' message was in his call for his hearers to open their hearts now to **the Kingdom or government of God** and to live consciously in God's presence as instruments of divine purpose on earth. The call was to turn away from a life centered on self and its desires for possession, wealth, status and power, to a new life centered on God, and lived as an agent of divine love. The experience of **salvation** is the experience of being the object of God's free forgiveness and love, freeing the believer to love his neighbor." (HICK, 2018, p. 83, own translation)

"In the person of Jesus, the **kingdom of God** is fully realized. The message brought by him (**revelation**) of God's love is seen as an expression of the present arrival of the kingdom...in Jesus the human being already participates in salvation...Now the story of salvation is extended to all humanity." (PINAS, 2018, p. 139, own translation)

As we have seen, the ideas of **salvation, liberation, redemption, Kingdom of God**, present in many cultures, express the hope for better days for the individual and for the collectivity, resulting from promises (revelations) coming from outside, from above, from God. All these terms are more assumed than explained.

Interestingly none of these entries are listed:

- a. from the recent *Historical Dictionary of the Gospels* (BASLEZ, 2018), where the entry "twelve" appears, but not "Kingdom of God," for which Jesus of Nazareth lived and died;
- b. from the even more recent 24-page glossary in the book *Jesus of Nazareth, His Words and Ours* (ALONSO, 2022, p. 417-436);
- c. not even from the Glossary of the excellent and voluminous (957 p.) book *Historical-Cultural Commentary of the Bible, New Testament* (KEENER, 2017), where entries such as "Kingdom of God," "salvation," "deliverance," "redemption" do not appear, but "satan," "rhetoric," "papyri."

**How does God reveal Himself?** How do we know how and when He reveals Himself? What is revelation concretely? Has God revealed something we didn't know, or wouldn't be able to know?

**What is salvation?** From what are we saved and how are we saved?

**What does salvation history mean?** The history of the Jews and Christians? And what about the history of other peoples?

In the following chapters we will seek answers to Aristotle's "*seven circumstances*" (*quis, quid, ubi, cur, quem da modum e quibus adminiculis - who? what? where? why? how? and by what means?* ), or the 5WH of American didactics (Who, What, Where, When, Why, How).

We will be attentive to the recent warning of the theologian and historian Eduardo Hoornaert: *"At this moment several tsunamis are forming on the high seas of historical trends that will strongly shake the beaches of biblical reading in a future not yet defined. They already pose a threat to the traditional reading of the Bible as it is practiced in countless Christian communities around the world.*

As an example, let's see what he said about the theme of this chapter:

*"...with the new archaeology, the myth of the 'chosen people,' of a 'people of God' different from the others, guided by Iahwh, falls. The myth of Abraham and the patriarchs, the story of the conquest of Canaan by the Israelites, falls. An ordinary Hebrew people appears, whose history is the same as that of the other peoples of the region and of the time. The Israelites did not come from outside, they have always lived in Palestine, they are not an immigrant people, led by Yahweh. Like the other peoples, their history is made of the ground of each day, of the struggle for survival. With this we are outside the 'great story', which begins with the story of Adam and Eve and only ends with the 'consummation of the ages', outside the universe and the 'great truths'."*

Here is how an unsuspecting scholar, the French Jesuit Joseph Moingt, expresses himself:

*"Many recent works call into question the whole of biblical historiography and many serious authors speak openly of the invention of the Bible, even of the Jewish people."*

But one cannot help but admire the consistent faith that runs through biblical literature... and the spiritual creativity of the Hebrew people, who managed to express through original narratives issues and challenges that affect us today, and to give them an unmistakable ethical stamp, different from the dynastic, warlike and violent literature endemic in so many cultures. No literature speaks of the poor as the Bible does. That in itself is enough to "believe in spite of everything." (HOONAERT, 2017)

Ponders philosopher Gianni Vattimo:

*"...we are heirs of a tradition that has been nurtured by "Christian" values, such as fraternity, charity, the refusal of violence, all founded on a doctrine that has at its center the idea of revelation and the idea of incarnation, or, as St. Paul calls it, God's kenosis."* (FERREIRA, 2015, p. 106, own translation)

For English theologian John Hick (1922-2012):

*"Religious pluralism is theologically "Copernican", "heliocentric", a model with God in the center and Christianity revolving around God, like one more planet. There is a need to adapt our*

*theological thinking to the theocentric reality, through a Copernican revolution. We need to move from ecclesiocentrism, and even Christocentrism, to theocentrism."* (HICK, 2018, p. 86, own translation)

## CHAPTER 13

# REVELATION

*"We should begin by remembering the immense difficulty which itself implies the very concept of revelation, that is, of the possibility that the infinite God, the "other" of the world, can be perceived and somehow understood by our finite and mundane subjectivity...which in fact frightens is not so much the difficulty of revelation, but more its very possibility."*

(QUEIRUGA, 2010, p. 226)

*"Old Testament religion is characterized by the affirmation of **God's intervention** in history, intervention due solely to his free decision. This intervention is conceived as an encounter from someone to someone: from someone talking to someone, who listens and responds. God addresses man as a master to his servant, questions him, and the man who hears God responds by faith and obedience. The fact and content of this communication we call **revelation**. "*

Latourelle, Theologian

*"The **revelation** - whatever it is in its innermost essence - did not appear as a made word, as the oracle of a divinity heard by a seer or diviner, but rather as a **living human experience**, as a "realization" from the suggestions and needs of the context itself and supported in the mysterious contact with the sacred."*

Andrés T. Queiruga - theologian

*"What is education to the individual,  
that is the revelation for the human race."*

G. E. Lessing

The First Vatican Council (1869) asserts that there are three levels of truth:

- **natural truths**, which fall under the domain of reason;
- **revealed natural truths**; although reason has the capacity to know them, God comes to his aid and reveals them;
- **supernatural truths**, which can only be known by revelation. *"If God not manifest them to us, we will never know them."* (LIBÂNIO, 2014, p. 75, own translation)

The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) expands the concept of Revelation to events and words and **abandons the access to God by the supernatural way**, leaving only one kind of truth: the simply natural or revealed truth.

This suppression makes a dialogue with modern reason possible, since "the subject's profound consciousness of freedom and autonomy moves toward statuing his or her own experience as the interpretative source of all reality."

The absolute autonomy of human reason, which does not accept any instance outside of it that dictates any truth to it - which would be characteristic of modernity - conflicts on two fundamental



points of revelation, as it has been transmitted: (a) the authority of the transcendent word of God, which (b) communicates truths that go beyond the empirical and demonstrative knowledge of reason.

For the theologian Joao Batista Libânio, Fundamental Theology has to face the questions raised by the five bulwarks of Western culture, so well studied by Henrique Vaz: the illustrated reason, the scientific mentality, the subject's autonomy, the historical consciousness, the valorization of praxis, both in the sense of democracy, and the transforming action of reality.

An even greater challenge is the current moment of postmodernity, which rejects the totalizing pretension of scientific, ideological, systemic reason, in the name of the plurality of rationalities, of aesthetics, of playfulness, of the "anything goes". (LIBÂNIO, 2014, p. 165)

What would these natural truths be, that reason would be able to know them, but that God would have come *"to their aid and revealed them by events and words closely related to each other"*? (*Verbum Dei*)

Such truths, for the Christian faith, seem to be concretized, purely and simply, in an exemplar of the human species - Jesus of Nazareth - who, living poorly with the poor, announced (revealed) the arrival of the Kingdom of God, that is, of the human society under construction, in which love for one's neighbor and for God is a concrete, palpable, evident reality for any person.

Says the dogmatic constitution *Dei Verbum*:

*"The deep content of truth, whether about God or about man's salvation is made manifest to us through this revelation in **Christ**, who is both the mediator and the fullness of all revelation."*

For the theologian, German/Costarrican Franz Hinkelammert:

*"All are equal in the Messiah, and this equality is expressed precisely in the fact that God's chosen ones are the commoners and the despised. This is also true the other way around: without this election, there is no such equality among all. The equality that Paul has in mind implies a division. It requires preferring some (to argue in Orwell's language: not those who "are more equal", but those who are less)." (HINKELAMMERT, 2012, p. 230, own translation)*

He, who has a doctorate in economics, tries to clarify that he is not talking about freedom before the law and the market, which has oppression and exploitation as its opposite.

As M. Camdessus, managing director of the IMF, said in 1996: *"... one cannot ignore the potential crushing of the weak and underserved that results from market competence in the circumstances of the world today."*

**Revelation, that** is, unveiling, displacing the veil that prevented us from seeing something; a displacement that, of course, is attributed to someone outside of us.

Or, as stated in the voluminous *De Revelacione*, by the theologian Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange:

*Revelation is supernatural action by means of speech*". The often quoted biblical basis is found in the Letter to the Hebrews (Heb1:1), this strange text that is neither a letter, nor was it addressed to the Hebrews:

*"Many times and in different ways did God once speak to the Fathers through the prophets; now, in these days, which are the last, He has spoken to us through His Son."*

Observes the American theologian John Haught: *And it was in this sense that most post-Tridentine Catholic theologians, before the Second Vatican Council (400 years), understood the concept of revelation.* (HAUGHT, 1998, p. 44)

Adds Michel Morwood:

*"This concept of revelation is founded on an antiquated cosmology, which assumes that God is up there and sends his Son down here on this planet. This cosmology does not take seriously the reality that every universe is permeated with God's presence; it assumes that the sacred, the divine, is basically out there and visits us or deigns to burst into our world, degreed, in unusual ways."* (MORWOOD, 2013, p. 57, own translation)

José Maria Vigil, Latin American theologian, summarizes the "old concept of Revelation" (A) and proposes a new vision (B): (VIGIL, 2006, p. 98-105)

**A. The old concept of Christian Revelation:**

- revelation is above all word. The Bible is the word of God;
- primarily doctrine: revealed truths, "deposit of truths", which must be observed and preserved intact;
- literal biblicism - naive, uncritical reading;
- uniqueness of the Bible, believing that there is nothing equal or similar in the world;
- uniqueness evidenced by the very word of the Bible - a circular argument, which blocks adult and critical thinking;
- resistance, especially from religious institutions, to proven findings and hypotheses proposed as plausible.

The Spanish theologian Andrés Torres Queiruga summarizes the common preaching, in the outreach books, with the following traits:

- a. God reveals Himself through appearances, visions, and words heard, or dictated to be written, to certain people, such as the prophets, or apostles;
- b. These people pass them on to others, orally or in writing, sometimes confirming them with signs and miracles;
- c. the rest believe them and, supported by their testimony, believe that God said, or revealed, what they say.

Definitely, to believe in revelation in this way would be "to accept something as the word of God because someone said that God said it so that he would say it to others." ("Revelation" in *Diez palabras clave en Religión*, pp.179-180).

## **B. Current view of the Revelation:**

- Revelation takes place in a human process and within history; it does not fall ready-made from heaven:

*"...it is not that He "comes from outside," with his inspiration, to a separate and distant recipient. It is exactly the opposite; for God is always already within, sustaining, promoting, and illuminating his own subjectivity, which **therefore** seeks him and can discover him. In the end, **revelation consists in "perceiving" God who, as the founding origin, "already within", is inhabiting our being and seeking to manifest Himself to us. 'Do not search outside; it is within man that truth is found', as Augustine of Hippo (354-434) said. All authentic knowledge of God is always, in some way, a revealed knowledge (the others are secondary elaborations and abstractions, which presuppose it)."*** (QUEIRUGA, 2003, p. 102, own translation)

- Revelation is the vital, existential process of a people, who had a religious experience, an experience that finally materialized in a written expression. Revelation is not the text, it is not the words, it is not a book. The word of God is the word of men who speak about God.

*"The Bible, from simple scripture, or "'letter that kills', becomes God's word or life-giving spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:6), only to the extent that we, guided by its grammar, read this history, here and now, in the light of the divine, that is, of beauty, justice, love." (Vito Mancuso, theologian, layman, Italian, own translation)*

The theologian Andrés Queiruga draws on Socrates' pedagogy to represent/suggest the meaning of revelation:

*"Socrates-who became famous for the adage 'know thyself'-the son of a midwife (Mayan), claims to practice the same art as his mother: maieutics. By means of his words, he brings forth-helps to bring forth-what was within the interlocutor."*

*"Thanks to Moses the Israelites discover in the Exodus a presence of Yahweh, which without his word had remained hidden to them; yet they discover it because it is already there, with them, animating and impelling their lives." (QUEIRUGA, 2010, p. 119, own translation)*

For Marcel Légaut: *"The Bible, the Gospel, is the sacred history of a concrete people who saw God acting in the events of their lives. The true thing that they must do for us is to help us see God acting in the events of our life. Our own history is also a sacred history". (QUEIRUGA, 2010, p. 142, own translation)*

***"The God of all men has manifested in Jesus who he is, namely, universal love for men. For Christians, Jesus is the definition of God... a definition in non-divine terms, namely, in and through the contingent and historical human being of Jesus.***

*It is about the image of God in him, which we did not produce. We only decipher the image of God that is given to us, coming, according to the Christian faith, from God, in Jesus Christ." - Schillebeeckx, Belgian theologian (SCHILLEBEECKX, 1994, p. 230, own translation)*

- Revelation is a universal process, which takes place in all peoples. It belongs to the self-understanding of every religion, which always considers itself as a divine, and not merely human, creation.

*"Scientists in the region, as well as anthropologists, archaeologists, theologians, biblical scholars, are in agreement that the internal process experienced by the people of God and reflected in the Bible is a process structurally similar to the religious processes of other peoples, on the margin of and prior to the process of the people of Israel. " (VIGIL, 2006, p. 102, own translation)*

- all religions are revealed. The distinction by historians of *"natural and revealed religions"* has been abandoned.

*"The plurality of religions is not only a historical fact with which we should be content, but also a fact of principle. Genuine religious experiences exist in other religions that in Christianity have never been discussed or put into practice, and I might add, perhaps not even possible, without taking away the peculiarity of Jesus' identification with God." (SCHILLEBEECKX, 1994, p. 231, own translation)*

*"To think about the revelation of God, to think about the encounter of all religious traditions and to think about interreligious dialogue is to understand the self-communication of God to every heart and every human culture." - Panasiewicz, Brazilian theologian. (PANASIEWICZ, 1999, p. 609, own translation)*

For the Christian faith, **Jesus** is, in the expression of the *Verbum Dei*, "**mediator and fullness of all revelation**". Two fundamental axioms of traditional Christian faith: the universality of the salvific will of God and the necessity of the mediation of Jesus Christ. How can the tension between these two axioms be kept fruitful?

*"Revealed decisively in Jesus Christ, God (and the **mystery of salvation**), is no less present and active in other religious traditions. "*

*"... all religions - whatever their characteristic idiom - have the potential to stimulate people to come out of themselves in search of the divine Reality that nurtures love and compassion" - Dupuis, Belgian/Indian theologian (SOARES, 2008, p. 51, own translation)*

*"The theme of the unique universality of Jesus has two essentially interconnected poles: on the one hand, the **revelation of the true face of God**; on the other hand, the **unveiling of the true essence of the human being**, and in such a way that the second serves as a mediation for the first.*

*What Jesus was as a concrete human person we are to learn through his life, death, and resurrection; and the content of this will correct, perhaps, my earlier concept of 'human person'. It is Jesus who will teach us, perhaps, what 'being a human person' ultimately means. So our concept of 'humanity' will not be the measure by which we judge Jesus, but **his** humanity will be the measure by which we judge ourselves. Perhaps he is the revelation, on God's part, of what it means, after all, to 'be human,' revealing also, in just that, what it means to 'be God.'" (SCHILLEBEECKX, 2008, p. 609, own translation)*

- this new understanding leads to an awareness of the expansion of the revelatory field.

*"It is up to us to discover all reality as a manifestation of God. It is the place of the revealing pressure of the Lord on the spirit of the human being. So that even within radical and constitutive obscurity, there is evidence of revelation in all reality. To the extent that something is, it is being manifestation of God." (VIGIL, 2006, p. 103, own translation)*

- In a certain sense, the word "revelation" seems inadequate. What we have classically called revelation **could advantageously be called the human process of conscientization, the process of religious deepening...**

*"The true path passes through a more radical change: the rediscovery of the true meaning of contingency and creation... its action is realized as **continuous creation**, as perennial activity that endlessly sustains the creature and continually promotes it." (QUEIRUGA, 2003, p. 249, own translation)*

*For the American philosopher Robert Mesle, "God's creative activity extends infinitely into the past and will continue into an infinite future. God's love and plans do not begin and end with us. We*

*and our world are here in this infinite only for a brief moment. God's love and plans do not begin and end with us.*

*Since God cannot control the evolutionary process, there is no reason even to assume that God would have this process as an objective specifically for us.*

*For better or worse, every decision of every creature plays some part in the world's **coming-to-be** process.*

*God's creative work is not limited to our small species in this huge cosmos. We are certainly not the center, or the end of God's universe and God's creativity.*

*God has no supernatural power to coerce the world. But God does work the world for health and healing. Given the difference between cancer cells and human minds, God's best way to bring health to the world is to call people to learn how to heal themselves.*

*We are God's hands in much of the work that God desires to do.*

*Whatever melody God may have in mind, playing it is up to the creatures." (MESLE, 2003, p. 96, own translation)*

*For the German/Brazilian theologian Paulo Sues, "the experience of a God who creates the world, calls people, frees peoples and assumes them and guarantees them a definitive justice, can guide the reading of the historical project of all peoples. From this perspective, Christianity does not represent a cultural rift, but rather a project of integral liberation.*

*Peoples and social groups have a historical project of life. The project is an expression of their will to live.*

*Outside the cultural context, there is no Good News. It is light in the historical darkness of a social group." (CAPELLO, 2017, p. 88, own translation)*

*For the American historian John Hick, "for approximately 15 billion years the universe existed without any human or human-like mind to observe it or ponder over it. The collective interval of mental life may prove to be a mere instant of time within the total history of the universe. For if humanoid life manages not to destroy itself in a nuclear holocaust, it will still be doomed to extinction in the end, just as Earth and comparable planets in other solar systems will become uninhabitable due to heat or cold. Doesn't it then have to be a fallacy on our part to suppose that the entire history of the universe, and its unimaginable vastness and complexity, exists for the purpose of producing us human beings?*

*Consciousness, though fleeting and fragile, is qualitatively unique.*

*The image of the universe as a system of consciousness production does not seem at all impossible. But once then the universe retains its bewildering ambiguity." (HICK, 2018, p. 154, own translation)*





## CHAPTER 14

# REVELATION – PERSONAL THOUGHTS –

*"...the presence of God before human freedom is always obscure and ambiguous; not by divine will, by the silence of God", who made it so that it could do them otherwise than by structural necessity, inherent in the Creator-creature relationship".*

(QUEIRUGA, 2010, p. 227)

*"...central emphasis must be given to the most basic notion of 'revelation' which is inseparable from the conception of the world as God's loving creation..."*

*"Revelation always says something to what man is, before receiving it... it is essentially anchored and turned to the voice of conscience "*

(Xavier ZUBIRI, 1898 - 1983)

The idea of **revelation** is very much rooted in the Judeo-Christian culture. We know that the "*Jesus movement*" was seen by his disciples and his contemporaries, until the middle of the second century A.D., as a Jewish sect. Christianity, as an autonomous religion, was affirmed around 125.

In Judaism, as the new "*Movement*", the centrality of revelation is well expressed in one of the oldest documents of the "*followers of the way*", the *Christians*, the so-called Letter to the Hebrews, which begins with these words:

*"Many times and in different ways did God once speak to the Fathers by the prophets; now, in these days which are the last, he has spoken to us through his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the ages."*

How did the author of the letter - wrongly attributed to Paul - know that:

- a. *"Has God spoken?"*
- b. *spoke many, many times, in different ways?*
- c. *spoke for the Fathers and the prophets?*
- d. *in these days, which are the last?*
- e. *has now spoken through his Son?*
- f. *whom God has appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the ages?"*

If the author of the Letter was asked, how would he answer each of the questions? He would have no doubts: he would answer, promptly, the questions:

**a); b) and c):** *first*, by the Torah, i.e. the scriptures; second, by my parents, my grandparents, etc., i.e. "the community conviction," we would say today.

And how he would explain the statement:

**e) in these days which are the last** - he would speak of the conviction of his community, which believed that a new manifestation of God was near. A mistaken perception, influenced by an "apocalyptic social environment";

**d) he spoke now through his Son** - how would you explain this statement, since this Son was not accepted by his parents and relatives? [The author was writing an original, unexpected document, arguing, against Jewish and pagan tradition, that sacrifices and priests were no longer necessary - Jesus was the great Priest, "*after the order of Melchisedec*" (both were not priests); a document so challenging that it was difficult for it to be accepted as canonical by a community that was reintroducing priestly worship and structure, which Jews and pagans had abandoned].

He would answer that he and his new community believed, that is, understood or "unveiled" (**revelation**) that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, the Son of God, **announced in** the Holy Scriptures and **revealed** by God Himself.

How could they "*realize*" that Jesus of Nazareth had been God's **revelation**?

We return to the previous answer, to items a); b) and c) - the **Holy Scriptures**, read/read by him and his new community.

To sum up: what did **we see in the whole statement**? A community that reads facts and events of its history and grasps, understands, believes that God has revealed such meaning, and may even be mistaken in reading the meaning (*"in these days which are the last"*).

"It seems clear that Jesus (Mk 9:1; 13:28-31; 14:25; Mt 10:23; 16:28; Lk 22:16) and then the community of disciples, including Paul and other authors (1Th 4:15, 17; Rom 13:11; 1Cor 7:29-31; 15:51-52; Phil 4:5; 1 Pet 4:7; 1 Jn 2:18; Jas 5:8; Heb 10:25, 37; Rev 22:20) expected the near consummation of the messianic time." (ESTRADA, 2016, p. 104, own translation)

Simply: God **revealed**, showed, made clear the meaning so important that literates (about 3% of the population) wrote, described, flowered, etc.: the books of the Torah, or the Bible (plural of books). Because they recorded important, significant facts for the community... the Torah and the Bible became "Holy Scripture".

**Genesis**: facts/events - perception of meaning (by special individuals and/or the community) - written record.

For scientist Miguel Nicolelis (author of the book *The True Creator of Everything* -TCE), perhaps the genesis is:

- human intellect (TCE) - scrutinizes/understands/constructs acts/events/processes - creates meaning - realizes what they say/their historical significance - we say: God reveals! (I don't know if God is on the horizon of the book's author).

*"In the religion of Israel, prophecy is a gift from God...it is a kind of 'sixth sense'...a free gift from God. It is up to the human being to take the initiative to exercise it as a latent faculty of the gift of the Word."* (SCARDELAI, 2008, p. 40, own translation)

Progressively, the idea of **revelation** became associated with the idea of **salvation**, which, later, after the resurrection of Jesus - mediator and fullness of all revelation - the idea of **Redeemer**.

As Roberlei Panasiewicz put it, *"The articulation between creation, revelation, and salvation needed a longer time to be evidenced."* (PANASIEWICZ, 1999, p. 97, own translation)

The traditional notion of **Redeemer** in the popular imagination has been discredited. It has lost all meaning. In the biblical narrative, God *created man in his image and likeness*, and this man, who lived happily in paradise, by disobeying God (sin), comes to know suffering, sickness and death. A beautiful myth to try to explain the inexplicable!

The idea that Jesus, God's Son, died to pay for our sins contradicts everything He said about the Father's love, mercy, and forgiveness. A horrible distortion.

The first and most brilliant theologian of Christianity, Paul of Tarsus, a Jew, in one of his readings (**revelation**) of the life, message and nature (**meaning**) of Jesus, the Christ, interprets him as the new Adam. With the first Adam came suffering and death; with the second, Jesus, with his life and death and resurrection, came **salvation, redemption and eternal life**.

**Redemption** became, in popular catechesis, the surrender of Jesus to an ignominious death to pay for our sins. Certainly Paul, a brilliant intellectual, would have been scandalized by this "blasphemy": turning God into a vengeful being, torturing his own Son.

Personally, I prefer the Paul of universalism and of the theoretical and practical option for the poor and abandoned, an option rediscovered by Liberation Theology, practiced and theorized by my unforgettable friend, the Peruvian theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez.

Since **redemption** didn't turn out well (at least for me), let's get to **salvation. Save from what? From what are we threatened?**

Really, it has always bothered me, and today even more, at the age of 83, to think that "*I, thrown into this world, with few choices,*" in the end definitely end up, leaving memories that last for nothing, on a human and planetary scale.

I don't want certainty; I want hope. **Faith**, a wonderful and incomprehensible gift, a **grace from God**, comforts me and gives me hope, in the potency and creativity of Love, the origin, middle, and end of everything. So be it!

I have just finished reading the book *The God-Man or the meaning of life* by the philosopher Luc Ferry, former Minister of Education in France, and found in it much of what I believe. I sign below what he said:

*"I believe that we live today a moment in which two processes - the humanization of the divine and the divinization of the human - are intersecting.*

*Love is, par excellence, the feeling that animates, gives breath and soul to the "personal structure of meaning. God is Love and, fortunately, is infinite: He could not die, nor, consequently, stop giving signs. Non-meaning is banished forever. The divinized humanity has taken the place of the absolute subject."* (FERRY, 2010, p. 207, own translation)

I think this is the greatest contribution of Christianity to the human species. Of Christianity, yes, but above all of the **Kingdom of God**, which is not identified with any religious denomination.

Jesus of Nazareth's revelation, in word and deed, of the God of Love - Father, merciful Father - who loves everyone, without preconditions; the beatitudes; the lifestyle and preaching of the **Kingdom of God** ("*you cannot serve two masters; either you serve money or you serve God*"), and the consequent death for "subversion and blasphemy".

I highlight in Paul:

- the praise of love in Chap. 13 in the *Letter to the Corinthians*, as well as his conviction: "*the commoners and the despised are God's chosen ones*" (1 Cor. 1:27-28);
- Paul's universalism in the Letter to the Galatians: "*There is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female, since you are all one in Messiah Jesus*" (Gal. 3:28).

And James: "*Faith without works is dead. Do you believe? The devil believes too!*"

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**Pause:** *I was making these personal considerations when my Editor and friend, Álvaro Gentil, called me to tell me that tomorrow (11/28/2020) he, 59 years old, will make his First Communion, in St. Matthew Church, which Wanda and I attended as soon as we got married. Communion, in essence, he had been receiving Communion for a long time, but he was excited about the symbol, which infected us.*

*He said he would need a theoretical revision of what he had learned about the Christian faith. I told him that I was critically reviewing the Creed, that the text could help him, and that I would need it to publish. Coincidence? I don't know! I don't know how He - or She? - who creates, directs his human creature, in the midst of our autonomy and freedom. "There is more to the air than airplanes," as a wise street poet once said.*

*I talked about faith, about what I have been believing throughout my life. I was a fighter in my childhood, and in my youth I replace fighting with resisting, marching against the current, and trying to create something new.*

*While still in the seminary I would attend every cultural event in São Paulo; especially movies. I never missed a Biennial.*

*As a JUC assistant, I got involved in all the social struggles, accompanying friends, fighting on various fronts, throughout most of Latin America. I had news of friends killed by military regimes in Chile, Uruguay, Argentina, Brazil and other countries I knew. Sad and disastrous history. Democracy is a great value. It is essential to the construction of the Kingdom of God - the greatest of utopias - salvation in process.*

*"Utopia is there on the horizon. I approach two steps, it moves two steps away. I walk ten steps and the horizon runs ten steps away. No matter how far I walk, I will never reach it. What is utopia good for? It serves for this: so that I don't stop walking." Eduardo Galeano*

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I make a point of not forgetting Father Henrique, from Recife, who was barbarously killed "in place of Dom Helder Câmara". Father Henrique was one of the most simple, dispossessed and loving people I have ever met.

About a month earlier, he had told me that a local policeman "was out to get him, since he couldn't get the Bishop.

A few days after interviewing a leader of the National Union of Bolivian Students in **La Paz**, I learned that he and several companions were killed while traveling to do adult literacy work.

I didn't give up anything I believed in, on an individual and collective level. Wanda and I share the same ideals. On the social-political level I abandoned the theory. Today, perhaps, I am more radical: there is no Christian faith without the fight against inequality, without food for all.

Talk about there being no resources for social programs! The resources are "going out by the thief", leftover in the hands of a few, of a very few. A fair government, effectively democratic, could take 30% more from my monthly income and from my patrimony, which is not much, but enough to share. How many are in this condition! How much money is left over for luxury, while brothers and sisters go hungry! There is a lack of food, health care, education - which is unacceptable. How much waste of human capital, how many untapped *potential geniuses*. I am impressed by the lack of sensitivity of the middle and upper classes.

Wanda and I visited the Scandinavian countries to see in *loco the* results of effective social policies. What a difference... Another Brazil is possible!

I dream of a more humane world for Rachel and Fernando, daughter and son-in-law, and for my granddaughters Julia and Luisa, to whom Wanda and I try to hand the flame of faith, along with hope and love.

I put "faith in Francis' economy. Fight for the formulation and management of an economy for all. Without that radical love for those who need it most, faith is empty - I think.

Back to the topic:

**Election, revelation, salvation, redemption** articulate each other.

Since about God we have to use images, allegories - theology, as Petrarch (1304-1374) said "*is poetry concerning God*" - let's look at a simple one:

*"Two brothers dispute the love of their mother (**religions**). The younger one hears(?) his mother speak his name, tells his older brother that she likes him better (**election**) and asks her to repeat his name. She repeats it and he, proud, says to his brother: see how she likes me better (**revelation/election**). The older one, annoyed, asks his mother: 'do you like me? She answers: 'of course I like you (**revelation**) and I always will (**promise**); you are my offspring (**creation**), you came out of my gut.*

*The older one gets sick. The mother and the younger son go to care for the sick brother. They realize that they are a family, they are at peace, united, free from disputes (**redemption**)."*

This is the **Kingdom of God**, for which Jesus of Nazareth lived, died and is alive in us and in our fellow men (**resurrection**). On earth as it is in heaven (**creed**). Whoever shares His life does not die: **life is eternal**: it is transformed.

**Creation: a foundational concept**, which has been much misunderstood:

God did not create, He is creating, sustaining the whole "creature", in an evolutionary way, with its own rules, autonomous, that, in this process of rigidity and flexibility, generated the human consciousness. Ever since it existed, it has evolved individually and collectively.

Why would the process of evolution of individual human consciousness end with our bodily death? Would continuing its evolution be more spectacular than being born from a sperm and an egg?

An unanswered question, reminiscent of the Hungarian writer's (?) fable about the dialogue of two babies in their mother's womb about possible life after birth.

### **Dialog between two babies**

A Hungarian writer explained the existence of the invisible God with a great analogy:

In the womb of a mother there were two babies. One asked the other, "Do you believe in life after birth?"

The other replied, "Of course. There has to be something after the birth. Maybe we are here to prepare for what will come later."

"Nonsense," said the first, "There is no life after birth. What kind of life would that be?" The second said, "I don't know, but it will see more light than here. Maybe we will be able to walk with our

own legs and eat with our own mouths. Maybe we will have other senses that we cannot understand now."

The first one answered: That's absurd. Walking is impossible. And eating with the mouth? Ridiculous! The umbilical cord provides us with nutrition and everything we need. But the umbilical cord is too short. Life after birth is logically out of the question.

The second one insisted, "Well, I think it's something, that maybe it's different than what it is here. Maybe we won't need this physical tube anymore."

The first replied, "Nonsense. And besides, if there really is life after birth, then why has no one ever come back from it? Childbirth is the end of life, and in the afterbirth there is nothing but darkness and silence is oblivion. It leads me nowhere."

"Well I don't know," said the second, "but surely we will find Mother and she will take care of us." The first replied; "Mother? Do you really believe in Mother? That's ridiculous. If Mother exists, then where is she now?"

The second said, "She is all around us. We are surrounded by her. We are hers. It is in her that we live. Without her this world would not and could not exist."

Said the first one, "Well, I can't see her, so it stands to reason that she doesn't exist."

To which the second replied, "Sometimes when you are silent, if you concentrate and really listen, you can perceive her presence, and you can hear her loving voice from above.

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I hope to see in the cocoon of my existence, here and now, the butterfly that is about to be born when He calls me to Himself.

The best picture I have of this relationship was given to me, as a grace, in the comment of a young girl, about 10-12 years old, at her grandmother's seventh day mass. She said more or less as follows: *We are rays of one Sun: God. We can be closer, or farther away; my grandmother is happy there with Him.*

I continued with the image, thinking: a center (where there is no space) radiating love, happiness, peace - everything good that can be thought of and experienced here and more. All His creatures sharing with Him, with a coetaneous gaze, where everything, past and future, **is present.**

With Pascal, I **answer yes to your bet.** I hope I'm right, and this decision makes me live better...



## CHAPTER 15

### REVELATION - SCRIPTURES: – WORD OF GOD –

*"Many times and in different ways did God once speak,  
to the Fathers by the prophets; now, in these days which are the last,  
He spoke to us through his Son, whom he appointed heir  
Of all things, and by whom he made the ages."*

(Opening of the Letter to the Hebrews, around the year 65)

*"If the content of the revelation can also be  
known by reason, why then the revelation?"*

(Hinkelammert, economist and theologian)

*"Christians have no monopoly on God's revelation,  
and divinity should be understood in terms of multiplicity".*

Kwok Pui-lan - Chinese theologian, feminist

*"The cradle of the text is the life of the people."*

Milton Schwantes (1946-2012), pastor of the Evangelical Church of Lutheran Confession in Brazil

*"Where does this incredible arrogance of wanting to spiritualize the things that Christ saw and did in a way well palatable? It's time to put a stop to it in this shameless and hypocritical spiritualization of the Gospel. Take it as it is, or sincerely hate it."*

(Dietrich Bonhoefer, Lutheran pastor, Ph. theology, hanged with a brother and two brothers-in-law, in 1945, by the Nazi regime)

*"What really interests us in ancient texts is not what the author originally meant: it is what the text can tell us today."*

ROVELLI, 2021, p. 134

**Revelation** and **salvation** are two themes that strongly characterize the entire Judeo-Christian religious tradition.

Both themes gain their greatest expression in the Holy Books, in the Bible. God reveals himself to free us, to save us, and expresses himself in the facts and events narrated in the Bible.

For Alfonso Garcia Rubio, *"there are, in the Old Testament, two hermeneutical traditions concerning faith in a creator-savior God:*

- *the **manifestation tradition** stresses the importance of the communion of the human being with other creatures, with the cosmos. The encounter with God the savior is experienced in insertion and wise participation in the cosmos;*
- *the **proclamation tradition** places the salvation of the human being in history, in historical commitment, in ethical commitment to justice and effective love."* (RUBIO, 2021, p. 83-84, own translation)

Historian and theologian John Hick, seeking to identify when and how God revealed in the Judeo-Christian tradition, points to two ways:

- a. public events shared by several people;

b. private experiences of religious encounter and enlightenment.

*"When Jews today speak of "remembering," "experiencing," "participating," about the **exodus** as a great act of divine deliverance, they are not experiencing the actual historical events of some thirty centuries ago. They are participating in something contemporary-a living religious tradition, of which one strand is the founding myth of a deliverance that revealed God's providential care for his race."*

In Christianity, the **resurrection of Jesus** has a comparable place to the exodus in Judaism. It was a public event in the sense that some of the encounters with the risen Lord were group experiences. The resurrection *"figures in the Christian tradition with an event within publicly observable history and with an indelibly miraculous character of God raising his son from the dead."* (HICK, 2018, p. 130 ff)

In the second case - private experiences of encountering God - the **Hebrew prophets** thought of God as being in a special covenant relationship with the people of Israel;

- Mohammed, based on his own experience, thought God as the Revealer of the Quran;
- Christian mystics, Hindu mystics, Buddhists, based on their own distinctive forms of religious experience, thought of God as Trinity, as the transpersonal Brahma, or the "wonderful being".

Hick asks: if religious experience constitutes an authentic window into the Real, why does this reality look so different when viewed through different windows?

He answers: the different accounts of religious experience, which abound in all the great traditions, can in principle have naturalistic as well as religious interpretations, so that the universe even in this respect remains stubbornly ambiguous.

Another question raised by the author is the origin of the **commandments**. He sees two possibilities:

- The commandments would have an external, divine origin: they were revealed;
- God would have *"created us as moral beings capable of sensing for ourselves the intrinsic authority of moral values and responding to them."*

The author considers this possibility more attractive, as a function of human nature.

*"We are gregarious creatures and it is our inherently social nature that gave rise to both law and morality."* (HICK, 2018, p. 135, own translation)

The history of Israel is the history of the relationship of a people with the One God: Yahweh

- **He elected** the people and brought them out of slavery in Egypt (**exodus/liberation**);

- has established a **covenant** with him, by which he promises (**promise**) *prosperity* and asks for *fidelity*. (These are always linked premises);
- **He revealed**, through Moses, His will (**commandments**);
- He warns the people through the **prophets** and punishes them when unfaithful (**exile/destruction of the Temple**), but...;
- does not abandon him (**salvation/liberation will come again**);
- the people will return to the **Promised Land**.

When Jesus of Nazareth began his public life, it was said that no prophet had appeared in Israel for four hundred years. No significant fact, worthy to be considered a new revelation from God. The last of the Old Testament writings, the book Wisdom, written in Greek, probably by a Jew in the last decades of the first century B.C., was what the name says: a compendium of human, religious wisdom.

As we can see, there was a huge void of relevant, significant facts, understood as God's revelation, until Jesus of Nazareth arrived, when the **story of salvation** changes for a group, initially just Jews.

In the absence of new facts and events worthy of being perceived/understood as God's revelation, the emphasis was concentrated on the past, on the consolidated, on the written: for the Jews, mainly the Torah. **Revelation** came to be considered, effectively, that which is written: **the Bible is the word of God**.

*"The Bible is a heteroclite library-a mixture of myths, more or less proven historical narratives, poems, prayers, wisdom texts, prophetic texts. Modern historical criticism has made it possible to claim that the Bible began to be written around the 7th century before our era, from oral traditions. This makes problematic the validity of historical characters and events that would have occurred, according to biblical chronologies, six centuries (the story of Moses) or even 12 centuries (Abraham) earlier. Which does not diminish the spiritual and symbolic force of these narratives."* (LENOIR, 2013, p. 29, own translation)

*"...the biblical word informs and illuminates, but it does not refer to itself or to the one who pronounces it, but it acts as a "midwife" so that the listener perceives for himself the reality that it uncovers."* (QUEIRUGA, 2010, p. 106, own translation)

The first generation of Jesus' disciples, and a large part of the second, only knew the Jewish **Scriptures** as the **word of God**. Progressively they came into contact with other writings authored by "followers of the Path", "Nazarenes", "Christians", which came to constitute the New Testament.

The first writings about Jesus that have come down to us are the Letters of Paul, written eighteen to thirty years after the death of Jesus: Galatians (48?), Corinthians (55/56) and Romans (57). Of the previous period, what remains is a little information, which is found in the Acts of the Apostles and other information that has been "mined" in other texts of the New Testament.

The writings of the 35/40s - creedal formulas, liturgical hymns, the sentences, the letters from 49 to 54, and the Gospels from 65/70 onwards were not to constitute, in the eyes of the first Christian generations, new Scriptures, or even complements to Scripture. Until the beginning of the second century A.D. the Scriptures remained for Christians what they had been for Jesus of Nazareth and the first disciples and would later be called the Old Testament

However, the oral tradition began to be written down during the first generation of disciples of Jesus of Nazareth. If Theissen is right, the hypothetical *Quelle* (source, in German) document, probably from the year 39, would have ordered and compiled *Sayings of Jesus* 10/15 years after his death.

The relatively late date of the writing of the gospels, for Pierre Gibert, is explained "*by the state of thoughts of the entire first generation of the Christian community: a community whose future was not on earth and which would therefore have no history to write about precisely because of the imminent coming of the Lord.*" (GIBERT, 1999, p. 134, own translation)

Other reasons would explain this late appearance of Gospels. Writings are demands of literates and it certainly took some expansion of Christian communities to create a significant mass of literates.

*"At the same time, a first version of the Gospel of Thomas circulated, which in its definitive version contains 114 aphorisms attributed to Jesus. The American biblical scholar Crossan also mentions the existence of a Gospel of the Cross, now inserted in the Gospel of Peter, which recounts Jesus' condemnation to death, his crucifixion and burial in a tomb. This gospel forms the basis of the narratives about Jesus' passion and death that we find in the four Canonical Gospels."* (NUNES, 2019, p. 46-47, own translation)

According to Eduardo Hoornaert, *"The first Gospel, by Mark, appeared in the year 70, after the Roman troops of General Titus razed the city of Jerusalem in the month of September, as chapter 13 of the Gospel evokes the horror of people facing the complete destruction of the Temple and the fire that turns the Holy City into rubble."* (HOONAERT, 2016, p. 37, own translation)

The last of the writings, of the set of 27 declared authentic (canonical), at the African Synod of 399, and which came to be recognized as the New Testament, was the Second Letter of Peter, written in cultic Greek around the year 130, probably in Ephesus, about 70 years after the death of the apostle Peter.

The **Acts of the Apostles**, written between 80 and 90 AD, periodizes **salvation history** into three times:

- the time of promise - to Jesus of Nazareth, Old Testament;
- the time of the fulfillment of the promise - the performance of Jesus;
- the time of life of Christians in the world, gathered in the Church and animated by the Holy Spirit.

The culmination of God's revelation to Christians - qualitative, but not quantitative, according to some theologians - closes with the Jesus of Nazareth event and its glorification by the resurrection of the Son by the same God, now personified as God the Father.

The sayings and deeds are expressed/consolidated in the New Testament. Translated into text by historical characters (people and communities), the sayings and facts are placed in a historical context. They become literature: narratives loaded with personal and social contingencies, no matter how sacred their content may be, or may be intended to be.

Reading Sacred Scripture "literally" is either ignorance/ignorance, or disrespect, because it prevents it from fulfilling its mission: to say something substantive for us today.

For religious institutions to have Sacred Books - and they all have them - that refer to the expressed will of God, is all good. It is an extremely valuable cultural patrimony, but, at the same time, a risk/ temptation: to appeal to "God said", "God commanded", "God forbade" - it is written, and being the **word of God**, there can be no mistake. Content and form, medium and message, become sacred, divine, irrefutable.

About the Bible, I know of no better commentary than that of Johan Konings:

*"In the utilitarian sense of the term, the Bible is useless. It is like a friend: instrumentalized, it loses its appeal. Usefulness is no criterion. In the case of the Bible, exactly as in the case of a friend, the grace consists in discovering the richness of its personality, with its contradictions, with the marks of its history, its aspirations and utopias - which reflect God in the face of not just one, but of countless people, during the two thousand years of tradition that the Bible represents. Those who have experience of true friendship or love know how long it takes to penetrate the spirit of a friend, and even longer to live in his spirit. So too does the Bible. A popular term expresses very well the right way to approach the Bible: you have to enjoy it! Or, better perhaps, let yourself enjoy it. Let your life soak in the Bible, so that it penetrates, to the core, our way of being and acting, as individuals and as a community."* (KONINGS, 2011, p. 220, own translation)

Unfortunately, the Bible has not always been read in this way, as Máximo Flores, an Indian from the Kollasuyo Indian Movement, made clear when Pope John Paul II visited Peru in 1985:

*"We, the Indians of the Andes and America, have decided to take advantage of John Paul II's visit to give you back your Bible, because in five centuries it has given us neither love, nor peace, nor justice. Please take back your Bible and give it to our oppressors, because they need its moral precepts more than we do. Because since the arrival of Christopher Columbus, a European culture, language, religion and values have been imposed on America by force. The Bible came to us as part of the imposed colonial project. It was the ideological weapon of this colonialist assault. The Spanish sword that by day attacked and murdered the body of the Indians, by night became the cross that bound the Indian soul." (VIGIL, 2006, p. 46)*





## CHAPTER 16

# REVELATION: – DIALOGUING WITH MIGUEL NICOLELIS –

*"Around a hundred thousand years ago, every human brain already had at its disposal around 86 billion neurons capable of establishing between 100 billion and 1 quadrillion of direct contacts, or synapses, between each other. From within this immeasurable neuronal workshop, the True Creator of All began his monumental work of sculpt the human universe we know today."*

(NICOLELIS, 2020, p. 75)

*"We saw that there is an organizing power at all levels  
And this organizing power has the character of mind.  
The mind, they have said, reveals itself as a 'pattern of  
self-organization and set of dynamic relationships'.  
In this sense, one can say that the mind is present  
in matter from the beginning [...] the mind is present in  
matter and in plants and animals and this mind becomes  
conscious in us. And so, in a more exact sense,  
one can say that matter becomes conscious in human beings..."*

(Bede GRIFFITHS in MORWOOD, 2013, p. 42)

*"Every revelation of God to man has for its first cause the nature of the human mind and, natural knowledge is not inferior in anything to prophetic knowledge. The prophets were endowed not with more perfect thinking, but with a more vivid power of imagination".*

(SPINOZA in LENOIR, 2019, p. 46-47)

*"The invisible perfections of God... can be contemplated Through intelligence, in the works that he performed."*

(Rom. 1:20)

For Nicolelis, there are three foundations of modern science: the existence of an objective reality, the concept of causality, and the interference introduced by the brain during the process of describing the universe. The first two foundations are classical, the third is unique, but not exclusive, to Nicolelis.

*"The cerebrocentric cosmology I propose challenges the classical notion that allows us to refer to an objective reality without taking into account the interference introduced by the brain during the process of describing the universe." (p. 281)*

In the book cited, the author illustrates three cosmological views: the first - a painting from 15,000 B.C., which is found in the "Hall of the Bulls" in the Lascaux cave; the second - a fresco detail from Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel from 1512 (which can be described as the transmission of life from God to man); the third, from 2016, *"the most recent description of the origins of the universe according to NASA."* (p. 23)

The scientist comments on the three symbolic representations of reality:

*"There is no avoiding feeling temporarily almost breathless; teary-eyed with pure ecstasy; humbled and overwhelmed by the thrill of noticing the magnificence and splendor of all that our True Creator of All has accomplished in such a short time." (p. 23)*

What occurred to me, when I read this wonderful text (I wrote it down and am transcribing it now), was God thinking:

*"These boys of mine are good to work with! I live in ecstasy and apprehension about the future of all that I have been sustaining. I don't like the term 'creation,' as an act; it sounds like I was doing nothing 'before' I created. The notion of time and space is up to you: 15 billion years, or 15,000 years before Christ, for me (for us, as Christians believe, that we are Three in One) makes no difference. For me everything is instantaneous, here and now - it is eternal and infinite.*

*I create in the sense that I give life, I maintain, I sustain, I am there, in the depths of everything, maintaining the autonomy of what I have been creating. They walk by themselves.*

*Let's go, together, on this! We have a lot to do and I agree with you, Nicolelis: be careful with the machines and with what you are doing with religions. They don't help me, but they can help you.*

*I really like the last illustration: you begin to see how my 'things' work. Be careful not to get in their way!*

*This is what the theologians (how they like to praise me!) call **revelation**; although many of them only know two: that of the Jews and that of Jesus, also a Jew. Among the Jews, my revelations were in installments; among the Catholics I revealed everything in Jesus of Nazareth, and from time to time, so that they don't forget me, I send signs (wounds, sudden healings... my Mother loves to appear... As a matter of fact, she has been missing...".*

(Serious, or irreverent, is what I thought, when I read Nicolelis' text).

The **Creedal** statement has been treated here backwards: from heaven and earth to the I believe. Nicolelis' book poses a challenge: why not think the creedal statement starting from the True Creator of Everything?

This is what I intend to do next, briefly, with a minimum of quotes, expressing what I think about each of the main themes of the Creed's statement. It will be a legacy for my daughter Rachel, my son-in-law Fernando, and my granddaughters Julia and Luisa, who, maybe one day, will have the curiosity to know what their father and grandfather thought about life and about what/who we call God, about which the best metaphor for me is **Love**. I live this, intensely, with Wanda. By the way, someone I quoted somewhere said that "*you can only get to God with two of you*".

I will try to meet the challenge. It is not about facing the threat of the Sphinx of Thebes: *decipher me, or I will devour you!* It is about diving deep inside myself and expressing, as much as possible, and as far as my competence allows, what I think, what I really believe, what I doubt; what does believing really means to me and what is the role of Jesus of Nazareth in my faith.

I agree with Nicolelis: the Cosmos, as we know it, is the creation of our brain. Not that there isn't something outside our head. This the Greek philosophers have already solved. Even myself: *Cogito, ergo sum*. As the hawker translated it, "*I think, therefore I give up!*"

The universe, it seems, comes from the *Big Bang*; from it comes time and space. I understand that the question "what was there before it", before time and space, does not apply. But a question remains in the air: the *Big Bang* is an explosion of something, precisely described; a minimum mass, of unimaginable density, explodes... so was there something before the *Big Bang*? This something (eternal?), the result of other expansion/concentration processes - Big Crunch/ Big Bang/ Big Crunch - resulting in multi-universes and not just **universe**? That's where Science works, **revealing to us the words of God**.

For me there is a question, the answer to which is not up to science: why and how did matter come into being, the universe that, even if it is eternal, cannot explain itself? As Lucretius, Descartes, Wittgenstein asked (*it is extraordinary that anything exists; why does something exist instead of nothing?*)

The classic answer: *God created heaven and earth begs* repair: He-who, or whatever He/She is- has not created; He is creating. His work is **expanding** and **improving**. The reasons that presuppose a Creator, lead one to think of creation not as an act, but as a process. The created thing, not being justified by itself, requires the creating, sustaining "presence", something like the "soul" of matter, or "life" in the human being.

Science says that the universe is expanding not in space, but creating space. I like an image of the scientist Swamme: the galaxies are like raisins in a cake that, when placed in the oven, as the cake grows, it makes the raisins grow apart from each other.

Our mind - True Creator of All (TCE), says, by one branch of knowledge, Science - *that the universe, "with its share of indeterminacy and destructive action,"* evolves. Pretentiously the human brain, by the theory of evolutionism, says that it evolves, improves, perfects from the simplest to the most complex, from the least conscious to the most conscious. In the case of the brain that **creates** or **interprets** everything, or, as a theologian would say, interprets God's **revelation to** a community.

As Raimon Panikkar, Ph:

"Divinity has repeatedly erupted in human beings, as history testifies. Yet all this is not without human witness. Therefore, instead of trying to describe these descents of the divine, we confine ourselves to mentioning the ascensions of the human spirit to the mystery of divinity...The revelation is in the one who receives it." (PANIKKAR, 2007, p. 67,81, own translation )

This term, along with salvation, are perhaps the most widely used concepts in Christian literature. What percentage of Christians would be able to say what their respective Christian denomination understands by revelation and salvation? I think that percentage would be low, and worse, with little agreement among themselves.

Reflecting on the concept of **Revelation**, for the theologian there would be three elements to consider: God, who reveals (the Messenger); the signs, facts, events through which he speaks (carriers of the message); and the Message, that is, the meaning of the message.

The greatest and most extraordinary revelation of God, the Father (the messenger), Jesus of Nazareth (the bearer of the message) and the Message. What is most extraordinary in this case is that the bearer of the message is identified with the meaning of the Message. It is not He who is called the Message: the man (TCE), inspired (theologically: Holy Spirit) understood the meaning, the **revelation of the Father**. The "unveiling" results from the interaction of the community with sensitive people, able to "see beyond".

The Covid-19 pandemic made clear the gulf - abyssal or infernal? - between the rich and the miserable. The country's highest authorities confessed that they were unaware of (ignorant of) 30 million very poor people. What is God revealing? The structural racism, the violence against women, the different forms of love and union?

Are we insensitive to **new revelations**? Pope Francis, in calling on stakeholders to formulate an economy for all, sensitive to the perception of spiritual significance (I don't think he needs to adjectivize; the world is sacred) for the world, seems to feel he is facing a new (by urgency and force) **revelation**.

How does the Father see 6 Brazilians, in Brazil, accumulate, in one year, the equivalent of the earnings of 100 million of his other children? [*Until when will you continue to suck the blood of your brothers, my children, as much as you do?!*]

For me, following Nicolelis' line of thought (without his participation): men (TCE) have seen Jesus of Nazareth as the splendid manifestation of creation. We men, historical beings, over the last two thousand years have seen in Jesus of Nazareth the most perfect realization of the ongoing process of humanization. Didactically, I invert the order: the universe has, in an insignificant point (is it?), in its extension of time and space, a being - creature of the universe - capable of giving meaning to everything. He, the TCE, reads the facts and reads them historically, that is, he reads and re-reads all the facts, events, symbols, metaphors that he considers important, significant. The criteria change, they are historical, and so does the reader, because he is also historical. Is everything, then, relative? Yes and no! Yes - because there is only one Absolute: God. No - because, throughout time, man manages to preserve what is important to him, as a species, despite all his stupidity. The (non-exclusive) calendar,

before and after Christ, has managed to maintain itself despite the pretensions, on the right and on the left, of imposing another and unique vision of human history.

It is up to the man, conscious and free, to read, interpret and act according to his interpretation, always remembering that "*no man is an island*".

Assumptions:

1. I believe that everything that exists has an origin, a source, a sustenance (life, energy?), the Absolute (symbolized as the Father, by Jesus of Nazareth; as Love, by the disciples Paul and John).
2. From the perspective of what we can **understand** (the TCE), the Absolute is not subject to time and space; therefore, He lives what we metaphorically, symbolically, call "eternity". So He, I repeat, does not create; He is creating, and little by little we understand how the universe, His work of art, works. Little by little scientists are describing how this Work of Art works, and how far man's power to change goes. I remember the prayer of someone very lucid:

*"Give me, Lord, the courage to change what must be changed;  
the patience to accept what cannot be changed  
and the clairvoyance to discern one thing from another".*

Man is the culmination of a long process of evolution (is this a correct term to refer to the changes in the Cosmos, where "chaos" sometimes seems to predominate?). The result of this ongoing process is an intelligent, conscious and free being, the TCE. Here is a turning point: now the Absolute, Love, has a partner. It does not and cannot act alone. So the Absolute is not omnipotent? I abandoned this concept, regarding the Absolute, some time ago. Since there is something that is not Him, this something, created, can only be relative.

The divine decision (metaphor) to create implies "*self-emptying*," accepting to live with the relative. I can imagine that He has all the conditions to say (**Verb, Word**), how His creature will function - with what degree of vagueness, chance, chaos - but has to deal with something that is not Him and that is relative. I even accept that He could have created a finished, almost perfect universe (perfect is He), although I don't know what that would be. But if He didn't create it perfect, finished, He has to live with the imperfect and unfinished.

Ever since *homo sapiens* existed, the Absolute "*imposed*" itself a partnership with him, the TCE. What has been happening, throughout this period, seems clear to the TCE: the work of art, in its case, would be **humanization itself**. This would be the "*joint project*" of the Creator and the creature: a work for two creators. To us, the creature, would be the task of perfecting ourselves, improving ourselves,

saving ourselves, as individuals and species, and avoiding any cadastre. To build what Jesus of Nazareth called the *Kingdom of God*.

The TCE is a collective, a historical one, which, we know, cannot be perfected in isolation, without improving the society it creates, which cannot be for the few. The strategy was given by Jesus of Nazareth: focus on the most needy. An economy geared toward guaranteeing the (ever-expanding) minimum for all - a great challenge - has everything to succeed. An economy focused on accumulating capital has everything to go wrong for the human species.

The meaning of the message, of the **Revelation** - or what is being revealed - is given. All that remains is for us, as a collectivity, to better understand what is up to us, leaving to Him only what is up to Him. Creation: things, facts and processes would be the "*locus*", the place, the stage where the *revelation* takes place. God has not revealed Himself (He is not something past), He is *always revealing Himself* (something always present) and if what is being revealed is revealed in creation, which, for the TCE, is historical, it has to be read and interpreted continuously. It is up to Him to decipher what is revealed, that is, what God wants to say, here and now.

The UN, the IMF, the WHO periodically publish reports showing great social injustices in the world: **what is God revealing to us in the midst of the pandemic?** *"men of little faith...whatever you do to the least of my brothers, you have done to me, or for me."*

Let's go back to the two historical events in which Christian theologians - in their perspective - see God's revelation:

- a. the promise made to Abraham and the utopia of a people, Israel;
- b. Jesus of Nazareth, the greatest and most complete revelation of God and his universal proposal of the Kingdom of God.

Of all that has happened in the sphere of Western Christian society, the TCE has elected, highlighted, prioritized two events:

1. **Abraham's call and response** - From a historical process of displacement of great masses from Mesopotamia to Palestine, the true creator of everything highlighted, made sense of, and **revealed** Abraham's courage to abandon the certain and seek the doubtful, the improbable, confident that, with God's blessing, he could fulfill a dream. Little by little a family becomes a clan, and finally a people in search of a land of their own and of plenty.

*"Tradition places the story of Abraham between the end of the 3rd and the beginning of the 2nd millennium B.C. This is a transitional period, during which a strong wave of nomadic migrations in Palestine puts an end to the Ancient Bronze civilization and causes the eclipse of urban life (2200-*

1900th C.E.). This covers not only Syria and Palestine, but also Egypt and Mesopotamia." (PEREGO, 2001, p. 18, own translation)

The origin of all the utopias of the West, in this case, is always read and reread as a partnership with God. He is unique - *do not pronounce his name in vain* - He gives us everything, if we are faithful to Him. He endorses the laws. He gave us, He revealed to us the **Tablets of the Law**. Abraham inspired, besides Judaism, the two largest religions in the world: Christianity, with 2.2 billion followers, and Islam, with 1.6 billion followers, respectively.

- Selection/reading of historical facts: the revealer, the one who scrutinizes the meaning of the revelation, always read and reread by the true creator of everything (TCE/ a collectivity, a people);
- The historical facts: the facts that support **Revelation**, or the revelation by God, in his creation process;
- The ultimate meaning of **Revelation**: God, the creator of events and co-interpreter of their meaning;
- Gray area: co-interpreter - how does God act, inducing, suggesting the reading, or the meaning of the revelation? Or does he simply trust the TCE's sensitivity for its own sake, or not?

2. **The Jesus of Nazareth event**, which has been seen by the TCE (billions of people, for centuries) as something extraordinary. What could have been just another human failure, became the Message, himself, his life, his death and resurrection - the Best among us, the best that the long process of humanization has created best of. The prototype of the human being. His **Kingdom of God** - the greatest and most perfect utopia of human society: one goal, one way of being and living (men living as brothers) and the rest left to the freedom of the TCE -- *"the path is made by walking"*.

The Christian theologian sees in the Father the origin of **revelation**; in the Son, Jesus of Nazareth, the Messenger and the Message: his life, death, resurrection. **The perception of the meaning** (given by the Holy Spirit), **is subject to the understanding of** what is being revealed and its implications. Which means that there can be misunderstandings. For the best biblical scholars, Jesus of Nazareth, Paul Tarsus and the whole first generation of Jesus' disciples, living "an apocalyptic time", imagined an extraordinary manifestation of God imminent (in the case of Jesus) and the second coming of Jesus (*parusia*), in the case of Paul and Jesus' disciples, who prayed: **Marana tá!**, Aramaic formula for *Come, Lord Jesus!*

Paul realized his misunderstanding and reformulated his preaching (the role of the TCE).



According to the historian Mircea Eliade, the delay of the *parousia* has been read in three ways:

- a. reaffirming, in a stronger way, the imminence of the *parousia* (Peter's Epistle);
- b. setting it back to a more distant future and justifying it, theologically, to give time for missionary activity (Gospels of Matthew and Luke);
- c. *the parousia has already taken place, since the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus constitutes in fact the true "final event" (eschaton) and the new life is already accessible to Christians (Gospel of John)*".

*"The epiphany of the sacred in a profane object - a dialectical process - constitutes at the same time a camouflage, because the sacred is not evident to all those who approach the object in which it has manifested itself."* (ELIADE, 2011, p. 312, own translation)

As a Christian, I agree and accept the metaphors, as I can't find better ones, and in accordance with Nicolelis' approach, which I understand as plausible, I would reverse the sequence of the **revelation process**, starting from the TCE.

I see Jesus of Nazareth - his life, death and resurrection - as the Messenger and the Message itself. The meaning of the Message, the consequences for my personal and social life, is a matter of faith. A gift, a grace - *everything is grace* - but, above all, a commitment. To believe is to assume a way of being and acting (often new, overcoming the dominant ideology, which is not at all easy).

The **search for meaning** is associated with questions such as: What is the meaning of life? What to do with it? Do we survive our death? Is there life after death?

Let's imagine a human being who lost consciousness and when he suddenly recovered he couldn't remember anything he had learned: a *clean slate*. What would be his reaction when someone says that he comes from the meeting of one among millions of sperms, that he joined an egg, that he appears, from month to month, in a woman, etc. etc. Would you believe it?

If he were to find someone dead and begin to wonder what is going to happen to him. He might think that everything ends there for the individual, with his death. But it is also a very plausible hypothesis that the consciousness, which was born and continued to evolve in the individual, subsists after bodily death and continues to evolve, since everything in the universe evolves. The human consciousness is the most complex, most perfect thing in the universe. He is the True Creator of All (TCE). Why would the Creator have created the TCE to evolve only as a collectivity, not as an individual?

How will we subsist? How will we be after bodily death? It is unimaginable, just as our origin would be unimaginable if we ignored sexual reproduction. Would human survival after death be more spectacular than the reproduction of any living being?

If God exists, if He gives us another kind of life after this one, the challenge proposed by Pascal's Wager is worth it. I bet, I believe! I trust and hope I am not wrong. Would it make a difference? Would I live the same way, with the same ethical principles? It might not sometimes. Sacrificing oneself, giving one's life for a person, a cause, would be doubtful.

Let's do it!

PS: I don't know if Miguel Nicolelis believes in God. His extraordinary spirituality is patent when he reproduces "*one of the greatest intellectual duels of the 20th century*" between the Indian poet and philosopher Rabindranath Tagore and the scientist Albert Einstein, on July 14, 1930, in Berlin. In Nicolelis' evaluation, "*the poet won by a landslide...*". (NICOLELIS, 2020, p. 281-285).

I take the liberty of reproducing it here.

### **Dialogue between Rabindranath Tagore and Albert Einstein**

**Einstein:** *There are two distinct conceptions about the nature of the universe: 1) the world as an entity dependent on humanity and 2) the world as a reality independent of the human factor.*

**Tagore;** *when the universe is in harmony with man, the eternal, referred to by us as Truth we experience it as beauty.*

**Einstein:** *That is the purely human conception of the universe.*

**Tagore:** *There can be no other kind of conception. This is a human world - the scientific view of it is also that of the scientific man. There is a pattern of reason and pleasure which gives us Truth, the pattern of the Eternal Man whose experiences are experienced by our experiences.*

**Einstein:** *That is the realization of the human entity.*

**Tagore:** *Yes, an eternal entity. We must perceive it through our emotions and activities. We perceive the Supreme Man who has no individual limitations like our own limitations. Science is concerned with that which is not restricted to individuals; the impersonal world of truths. Religion perceives these truths and connects them with our deepest needs; our individual awareness of Truth*

*gains universal significance. Religion applies values to Truth, and we know this Truth to be good through our harmony with it.*

**Einstein** *":Is Truth, then - or Beauty - not independent of man?*

**Tagore**: *No.*

**Einstein**: *If there were no more human beings, the Apollo at Belvedere would be no more beautiful.*

**Tagore**: *No.*

**Einstein**: *I agree when it comes to the concept of beauty, but not when it comes to Truth*

**Tagore**: *why not? truth is perceived by man*

**Einstein**: *I cannot prove that my conception is true - but that is my religion.*

**Tagore**: *Beauty is the ideal of perfect harmony that is present in the Universal Being; Truth as the perfect understanding of the Universal Mind. We, as individuals, have abandoned it through mistakes and deceit, through accumulated experience, through enlightened awareness - how else would we recognize Truth?*

**Einstein**: *I cannot prove scientifically that Truth must be conceived as a valid Truth independent of mankind; but I firmly believe it. I accept, for example, that the Pythagorean theorem in geometrical states is approximately true independent of the existence of man. In any case, if there is a reality independent of man, there must also be a Truth concerning that reality-and likewise, the denial of the former would lead to the denial of the existence of the latter.*

**Tagore**: *Truth, which is one as a Universal Being, must essentially be human, otherwise anything which we individuals perceive as true cannot be called Truth - at least it is Truth which is described as scientific and which can only be reached by the process of logic; in other words, by the organ of thought (brain), which is also part of the human being. According to Indian philosophy, there is the Brahama, the absolute Truth, which cannot be conceived by the isolation of the individual mind, nor described by words, but can only be experienced by the complete immersion of the individual in its infinity. And this Truth cannot belong to Science. The nature of the Truth we are discussing is only an appearance - that is, that which appears to be true to the human mind and is therefore human, and can be called *maya*, or illusion.*

**Einstein**: *So according to your conception, which can be considered the Indian conception, this illusion is not something individual, but of humanity as a whole.*

**Tagore**: *The species also belongs to a unity, humanity. Therefore, the collective human mind perceives Truth; the Indian mind or the European mind are in a common perception.*

**Einstein:** The word "species" is used in German to describe all human beings; in reality, apes, and frogs would belong to it as well.

**Tagore:** In Science we use the process of eliminating the limitations of our individual mind to then reach the understanding of the Truth that is the mind of the Universal Man.

**Einstein:** *The problem begins when Truth is independent of our consciousness.*

**Tagore:** *What we call "truth" is found in the rational harmony between the subjective and objective aspects of reality, and both belong to the superpersonal man.*

**Einstein:** *Even in everyday life, we feel compelled to attribute a reality independent of man to the objects we use. We do this in order to connect the experiences of our senses in a reasonable way. For example, if nobody is in the house, the table remains where it is.*

**Tagore:** *Yes it remains outside the individual mind, but not the Universal mind. The table I perceive is perceptible by the same kind of consciousness that I possess.*

**Einstein:** *However, if nobody were in the house, the table would still exist in the same way - and this is already illegitimate from your point of view - because we cannot explain what it means that the table is there, independent of us. Our natural point of view regarding the existence of a Truth independent of mankind cannot be explained or proved, but it is a belief that no one can stop having - not even primate beings. We attribute Truth to a superhuman objectivity; it is indispensable to us, this reality independent of our existence and our experience and our mind - although we cannot say what it means.*

**Tagore:** *Science has proved that the table as a solid object is an appearance, and therefore something that the human mind perceives as a table would not exist if all minds did not exist. At the same time, it must be admitted that the fact that physical reality is nothing but a wide variety of rotating centers of electrical force also belongs to the human mind. In the understanding of Truth, there is an eternal conflict between the universal mind and the mind confined within an individual. The perpetual process of reconciliation is being carried out by our science, our philosophy, and our ethics. In any case, if there existed any Truth absolutely disassociated from humanity, for us it would be totally non-existent. It is not difficult to imagine a mind in which the sequence of things happens not in space, but only in time, like the sequence of notes in a song. To such a mind, this conception of reality is similar to musical reality in which Pythagorean geometry has no meaning at all. There is the reality of paper, which is infinitely different from the reality of literature. For to the mind of a moth eating paper, the literature contained in a sheet of paper is totally non-existent, while to the human mind literature has a much higher value of Truth than the paper it is written on. Similarly, if there existed a Truth that bore no rational or sensual relation to the human mind, it would remain an unrecognizable nothingness as long as we are human beings.*

**Einstein:** *So I am more religious than you are.*

**Tagore:** *My religion is the reconciliation of the Superpersonal Man, the universal human spirit, in his own being.*

In a **second meeting**, on August 19, 1930, the extraordinary dialogue continued;

**Tagore:** *I was discussing... Today, the mathematical discoveries, which tell us that in the world of infinitesimal atoms, chance has its role, the drama of existence is not predestined in an absolute way.*

**Einstein:** *The facts that make science move in this direction do not say goodbye to causality.*

**Tagore:** *Maybe not, but it seems that the idea of causality is not in the elements, but that another force builds with them the organized universe.*

**Einstein:** *We try to understand how order is established on the higher plane. The order is there, where the big elements combine and guide existence, in the small elements; however, this order is not perceptible.*

**Tagore:** *This duality lies in the depths of existence - the contradictions of the free impulse and the directed desire that impose themselves upon it and create an ordered scheme of things.*

**Einstein:** *Modern physics doesn't say that they are contradictory. Clouds look one way from a distance, but when you look at them up close, they appear as disordered drops of water.*

**Tagore:** *I identify a parallel in human psychology. Our passions and our desires are unruly, but our character subdues these elements into a harmonious whole. Are the elements rebellious, dynamic, with the individual drive? Is there some principle in the physical world that dominates them and places them in a structured organization?*

**Einstein:** *Even the elements do not exist without statistical order; the elements of radium always maintain their specific order, just as they did before. There is, then, a statistical order of the elements*

**Tagore:** *Otherwise the drama of existence would be too disorderly. It is the constant harmony of chance and determinism that makes it eternally new and livable.*

**Einstein:** *I believe that everything we have done or experienced has a cause behind it; it is better, however, that we can look through it.*



## CHAPTER 17

# SALVATION / DELIVERANCE / FULFILLMENT

*"The three dimensions of philosophy:  
the intelligence of what is (theory), the seat of justice  
(ethics) and the search for salvation (wisdom)...  
That is, to live wisely, happily and freely, as much as possible,  
Having finally conquered the fears that finitude has awakened in us."*

(FERRY, 2010, p. 25, 27)

*"Human life is, in reality, more than the hard  
experience that has always been the burden of so many;  
it offers a hope of salvation or deliverance or  
realization that can, even now, flood our life  
with a positive meaning and value."*

(HICK, 2018, p. 105)

*"Outside the Church there is no salvation."*

Saint Cyprian of Carthage + 258

*"Outside the world there is no salvation. Salvation cannot  
be linked exclusively to religions and Churches,  
but refers to the world and history, which are  
the basis of all salvific reality."*

Edward Schillebeeckx - in TEIXEIRA, 1995, p. 113

*"...the whole history is also the history of salvation.  
The different religions are precisely the ways in which  
these stories become thematic as they express themselves  
in faith, in creed or in living, in intimate prayer  
or in the public rite, in individual piety and in community life."*

(QUEIRUGA, 2010, p. 375)

*"Salvation fundamentally means  
liberation and rescue and can be understood as  
In relation to the present life or the afterlife."*

(Irene Martins CAPELLO)

*"Christ has set us free so that we may be  
truly free."*

Paul of Tarsus' Letter to the Galatians, 5:1

Today is Christmas. Confused by the pandemic, I was getting ready to write this text when I received from an unknown person, by e-mail, this quote from Dom Helder Câmara, Archbishop of Olinda and Recife:

*"I like to think of Christmas as an act of subversion... A poor boy, a single mother, an adoptive father... Who attends his birth is the rabble of society, the shepherds. He is presented by people from "other religions" (magicians, astrologers). The family has to flee, and so they become political refugees. Then they go back to live in the periphery. The rest we celebrate at Easter... but with the same subversion... Yes! The revolution will come from the poor! Only from them can salvation come! Merry Christmas! Happy subversion!"*



I have a special bond with Dom Helder: Father Henry, his advisor, who, in the early hours of May 26-27, 1969, was arrested and tortured to death. I received, anonymously, perhaps the first photo of his body, all marked by torture, lying in the bush. A month earlier I had been with him. On that occasion he told me that a policeman was crazy to get him, since he couldn't get the bishop, Dom Helder. Father Henrique was a very simple person, popular, highly esteemed by the people.

Reason for his arrest and cruel death? To fight for the promotion of the poor and abandoned; a crime similar to the one Jesus of Nazareth believed in. He admired and defended his master in the Church, Dom Helder.

*"After it is affirmed that God became flesh, it becomes obligatory to also meet Him in the body of the other. To mistreat the body of the other is to mistreat the body of Christ. Is not the authenticity of the Christian experience found precisely in the good news that the human being is spiritual matter, whose body is the temple of a living Spirit, who acts from open wounds, in search of forgiveness?"* (FERREIRA, 2017, p. 34, own translation)

#### **Script of your salvation process:**

creation - revelation - conversion - building the Kingdom of God - death - resurrection.

The process of salvation - an established religious term - has an individual dimension and a social one; the latter concerning human collectivity - the Kingdom of God, in the expression of Jesus of Nazareth.

*"In each particular human history the long history of humanity is repeated. In this sense, **salvation history** is **unique** and at the same time **universal** because, in some way, in it are the most important discoveries and dramas of every human relationship with God and neighbor."* (FERREIRA, 2017, p. 107, own translation)

I start from the individual case - **the story of Father Henry's salvation** - to then deal with the collective, the universal:

**Creation:** Father Henry, born and raised in a poor family, studied hard and dedicated himself to share his gifts with others - a man of faith and action:

**Revelation** - at some point you felt **called** and agreed to give your life to the poorest (conversion). Who perceived the call? The TCE, enlightened by God; what does not come from this Light?

**Building the Kingdom:** he transformed his faith into action; he was on the side of the poor in their struggles and for this reason was **arrested, tortured and killed**.

**Resurrection:** for the Christian, as the text of the Seventh Day Mass says, "*life is not taken away; it is transformed*" - he has passed, like Jesus of Nazareth and all the saved, through the sieve of Love, to *another way of life*...

"*Creation, salvation, glorification, form in this way the continuum of divine love, which, in creating us sons and daughters, accompanies us in the hard struggle of historical growth, until it succeeds in welcoming us into fully realized sonship, when "we shall know as we are known". (1 Cor. 13,12) (QUEIRUGA, 2007, p. 90, own translation)*

Five characters are involved in this salvation story: four individuals and one collective. Let's look at the situation of each of the four individuals:

1. The first is also the last: he is the One who confers/judges/judges the drama of salvation, in which all the others are inserted: God/Love. We know his criteria for judgment, amply revealed: the Love that creates, that judges, that gives meaning. It is He, and He alone, who can "say" who has been saved, because He, Love, is the **criterion of salvation**. God consists in loving (*Ho Theós agápe estín*; 1 Jn.4,8,16);
2. Father Henry: a modest human being, whose life and death is clearly a salvation story. Someone who knew how to give positive meaning to his life: he is saved! Saved by the criterion that was proper to him: the love for his neighbor and for God, since he lived trying to be a Christian. "*Whoever remains in love remains in God, and God remains in him*" (1 Jn 4:16);
3. Dom Helder Camara - as he was no ordinary individual, his story is socially more complex. For his performance - the intrinsic and manifest faith - he was the object of admiration and rejection, love and hate ("*When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why they are poor, they call me a communist.*") Four times he was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.

The President at the time, General Geisel, according to what the story tells, activated our Ambassador in Norway so that Dom Helder would not be decorated. The story also tells that the economic group that controls our(?) media established a fixed rule, which prevailed for several years: none of its(?) press agencies could mention the name of Dom Helder. Delete the character! That was the order.

In the eyes of God and of believers who try to evaluate through the eyes of God/Love, Dom Helder gave positive meaning to his life; he saved himself!

4. The author, or authors, of the torture - does anyone know their names? Who are they in front of the public? Who were they in front of themselves? What meaning

did they give to their lives? Did they continue to believe - if they believed - that they were doing good when they tortured someone? Do they consider that they left a good legacy to their sons and daughters and to the collectivity in general? Can you describe to your granddaughters what you did? A story of salvation or damnation? It is up to God alone to judge!

As Jürgen Moltmann said:

*"Human beings are either artisans of their own destiny of happiness, or they are tormentors of themselves. Both reduce God's role to that of a helper in the realization of human free choice. Heaven and hell are reduced to figures, with which human free will is confirmed."* (MOLTMANN, 2003, p. 174, own translation)

**The collective character** in this drama is what Miguel Nicolelis calls the True Creator of All, the human brain.

We who have heard, or who have been and are involved, directly or indirectly, in this drama and give it meaning. The perceptions of meaning are conflicting, they are ideological. In general, they reflect the interests of the power/money association. (I think that overcoming the dominant ideology is the greatest challenge to Christian adherence).

**What story are we creating? Will we be saved?** Only History - so partial, so "fluctuating", so contingent - will tell us! God waits for the "whole of History" to judge us, that is, He has already judged, since His "look" on human history is independent of time.

One drama and several salvation stories. What, then, is it all about when we talk about salvation?  
**Saving from what? What is "not saving?"**

We are creatures; therefore, by definition, we are imperfect. We don't need today the *"biblical myth of paradise"* to explain our weaknesses, our mistakes, our offenses, our wickedness, our impiety, our desire to torture and kill. The impetus, the inclination, the temptation are there; they are inherent to the pretentious *homo sapiens*, who someday could be a loving and merciful man, as Jesus of Nazareth was and proposed.

We are free, so we can practice good or evil; we have choices, we have even established, throughout history, criteria of good and evil.

As autonomous and free subjects, we are urged to **give meaning not only to our personal lives, but to our history.**

**Who gets saved or not?** Only we, by the meaning we give to our short existence. We are saved here, in our short earthly life - probationary stage? - and saved for the *other way of life*, eternal, from the point of view of Christians, for whom "*life is not taken away, but transformed*".

Moltmann, one of today's most renowned theologians, writes:

*"I recall the lives of those who could not live and were not allowed to live: the beloved son who died at birth; the boy who at 4 was hit by a car; the friend who at 16 was blown to bits beside me by a bomb that spared me-and so many people raped, murdered, and annihilated. Certainly their fate may acquire great meaning for others, but how and where will their life reach 'fullness'. Where and how will they reach rest?"*

*The idea that with the death of these people 'everything is over' would throw the whole world into absolute meaninglessness, for if their life was meaningless, can our life be meaningful? The modern conception of 'natural death' is suitable for bourgeois people with life insurance in the welfare society, who can afford death in old age. Most people in third world countries die a premature, violent death, not an accepted death, as also happened to millions of young people of my generation during World War II. The idea that death is the 'eternalization of the life lived' does not apply at all to those who have neither managed to live nor had the opportunity to live.*

*That is why I believe that God's story with our life continues after our death, until that fullness is reached in which the soul finds rest, justice, and happiness." (MOLTMANN, 2003, p. 175)*

### **Pointing out some issues:**

#### **Only Jesus saves!**

- Jesus of Nazareth, the human being, who had choices, by his life and death, showed us **the way of salvation**: how to be and to do in order to be fully human. He made Himself the prototype of the human being. To the extent that we resemble Him, we are saved!
- *"To believe in Jesus Christ is to believe that I am saved through him, not that he is the Savior of the world. Jesus is the way for Christians, but the existence of other ways makes him not necessary for others as well."* (SOARES, 2018, p. 45, own translation).
- Jesus Christ, the one whom generations over 20 centuries have recognized as God, He is the criterion of salvation and ultimately salvation itself.

He who is saved, is saved by God's grace - everything is grace! Every relationship of man with God is grace, is a free gift. He is Life, and life is a gift, it is gratuity!

### **Who is saved?**

- Who can be good or not, love or not; who is free. God is not free to love, or not to love, since He is Love. His essence is to love; He cannot stop loving.
- **Does Jesus save?** Yes and no! If one assumes the way of being and acting of Jesus and contributes to the building of the Kingdom of God, one is saved! Declaring oneself a believer, "*confessing the name of the Lord Jesus*", being baptized - rites and promises - by themselves do not save anyone. As the apostle James said, "*the devil also believes.*" "*Do not call on his holy name in vain*" - Second Commandment.

*"In salvation are those who follow the way of Jesus: to love their neighbor, which is the concrete way of loving God. Those who love are saved. The only rule is love."*

To create is to give up "all power", omnipotence. God creating - a continuous process - gives up his omnipotence.

I see Wanda, my wife, drawing, which she has done a lot during this pandemic. Her work, the drawn figure, gains autonomy; she has to submit to her creature. She can retouch, improve, but she can't "touch too much", otherwise the image, which came out of her head and her sensibility, falls apart. It reminds one of what is found in the Bible: *God made man in his own likeness!*

Wanda's design also has a lot of it. There is an "*identity compromise*" between the creator and the creature. It's as if the creator says, "You're mine, I like you!", and the creature replies, "That's okay! You are good to serve! But respect me! I am me and you are you. Each to his own!".

When she shows me her design - project in execution - she and He accept proposals (apostles, messengers, evangelists, missionaries), even criticisms and admonitions (prophets), but do not admit interference, "forcing the bar". She and He are jealous of their work. She is free to spoil and even to erase his design. He, no, can only give it away as saved, or lost (*Heaven and Hell*, which we will talk about in the Chapter on the "Catholic Package", at the end).

Faith - concrete adherence to God's project for us: the Kingdom of God, in the expression of Jesus of Nazareth - has a complex dimension, because it is essentially collective, human - autonomous

and free - and historical. It depends on how the TCE designs its project of society and builds it. It can build societies that are democratic, egalitarian, or profoundly unjust.

As the Doctor of Philosophy, Science and Theology, Raimon Panikkar, said, *"Every man forges his own destiny - his salvation - in the field of the political, when he discovers the metapolitical meaning of his human activity."* (PANIKKAR, 2005, p. 14, own translation)

**The following assumptions must be clear:**

1. The project is in our hands (autonomy) to do and undo, get it right and get it wrong, correct it and redo it;
2. God is the origin and the Life. His "decision" to create is a "decision" of self-limitation, of respect and commitment to the created. Everything will work out, we hope, because He knows what He is creating, the way He is creating it, and He knows the end result (eternity = absence of time);
3. Since God does not abandon his work and acts from within it - in the cosmos and in human society - his way of acting is subtle and we will probably never know how.

We have already built many fantasies about it: we have attributed to Him catastrophes, calamities, diseases and miracles and other spectacular feats such as stopping the sun, according to the biblical narrative (Jos 10:12-13).

Things like that, good and bad, He doesn't do: He respects the rules of operation of what He creates/maintains.

The collective dimension of salvation is the liberation from all that limits the human being, all that is unjust, all that oppresses, all that prevents man from realizing his full potential. This is a Christian way of looking at human history. Like everything human, it is historical, provisional.

Theology - religious reflection including on the theme of man's salvation - has abandoned the categories of analysis of the Greco-Roman world, such as metaphysics, on which the *Nicene Creed* rests, and turned to its origins: the Jewish and proto-Christian culture.

*"They tried to invent a Christian philosophy to take the place of the pagan one, and Christianity gradually moved from Faith to ideas...The composition of Creeds quickly became a habit - some would say a vice - ever since, laying the foundations of all later Christian fundamentalisms."* (PANIKKAR, 2005, p. 14, own translation)

The Bible plays a very relevant role. Rereading the sense of revelation and liberation reported in the biblical texts and compelled by social pressures, in different social contexts, theology has directed the sense of liberation to regional themes - Liberation Theology, in Latin America; Black Theology, in the USA and Africa; feminist theologies of liberation and sexuality - LGBTQIA+. (SUSIN, 2006, p. 464), Planetary Theology, Lay Theology, etc.

*"Our Christology focused on the revolutionary Black Christ who "preached good news to the poor," "proclaimed liberty to the captives," and "set the oppressed free" - (Lk 4:18) (CONE, 2020, p. 30, own translation)*

*"The salvation of the human person, in African theology, is the salvation of the universe; it is in the mystery of the Incarnation that Christ assumes the totality of the human and the totality of the cosmos.*

*The struggles for the transformation of the socio-economic system, the struggles against racism, sexism and other forms of economic, political, social and cultural oppression must always be taken seriously as sources of Theology" - Declaration of Accra, Ghana, 1977. (JOHN, 2020, p. 116, own translation)*

*"South American liberation theology is characterized by its emphasis on the poor and the precarious economic conditions of the people. Black theology is characterized by its predominance of the racial issue and social inequality, while feminist theology is primarily concerned with sexism and gender inequality." (JOHN, 2019, p. 58, own translation)*

*"Lay theology, simply human, centered in one's own religiosity, in spirituality, freed from service to a "religion" as a hierarchically sacred institution with its system of beliefs and rites and canons." (VIGIL, 2011, p. 37, own translation)*

An instigating example of theology, which seeks to read the revelation stamped on the *"scandalous scenario of violence in which Brazilian society is immersed"* is the book *Biopolitics of sacrifice*, by pastor Fellipe dos Santos. The book, published in 2020, was based on his master's thesis, defended the year before. A challenging approach, since reality is *institutionalized and legalized*, as Slavoj Zizek said:

*The illegitimate violence by which the law that sustains itself must be hidden at all costs, for this concealment is the positive condition of the law's functioning: it functions to the extent that its subjects are deceived, to the extent that they experience the law's authority as "authentic and eternal," with the "truth about usurpation" going unnoticed.*

Pastor Ronilso Pacheco comments on the book: *"This context marked by violence operated by the State, this criminalizing look. The power games. The discourses behind the logic of the war on drugs*

*and the imposition of law and order. Along with the governor's outbursts of divinity are not alien discussions, not even optional to theology. They are above all theological and operate theologically as force, as language, and as symbol."*

Pastor Ed René Kivitz highlights in the introduction: "*... the book boldly responds to the challenge of unmasking the 'myth-theological logics that sustain, legitimize, and purify' such violence, analyzing the 'government of deaths triggered within the militarization of life,' and unveils the cruelty of the rationales that elaborate 'monstrous stereotypes/alterities for the invention of a scapegoat marked by the racial device,' who come to be categorized as 'changeable lives' in the name of order.*" (DOS ANJOS, 2019, p. 15, own translation)

**Let's look at some comments from renowned theologians:**

*"Five basic principles of an eschatology that liberates:*

- 1. Salvation is an eschatological concept, implying the totality of the world in God;*
- 2. **the process of salvation necessarily implies liberation from all situations of death;**  
(emphasis added);*
- 3. liberation from all situations of death must begin now. But it will end only at the time of the fullness of the Kingdom;*
- 4. The process of salvation-liberation is a dialectical-conflictive process;*
- 5. authentic growth of the world is also growth of the Kingdom of God." (BLANK, 2001, p. 141, own translation)*

*"Four points could serve as a foundation for understanding salvation, or provide a basis for interpreting more fully how Jesus Christ saves:*

- 1. Faith in God, mediated by Jesus, is at the same time an opening of the imagination in a way that allows Jesus to be a parable of God;*
- 2. In existential terms, this means that Christians meet God in Jesus;*
- 3. Jesus reveals God, that is, mediates God and makes God present in a more conscious, intense and personal way.*
- 4. Christian salvation consists in an encounter with the saving God, in and through Jesus, so that Jesus saves by revealing and making God present." (HAIGHT, 2008, p. 45, own translation)*

The renowned theologian Hans Küng, in his book *Credo: The Apostolic Profession of Faith explained to modern man*, says that the theologian and expert on Teilhard de Chardin, Karl Schimitz-Moormn, is right when he states the following:



*"The classical theory of salvation is stuck in a static worldliving. In the beginning all was good and the bad only came into the world through man. The idea of this traditional view of salvation as reconciliation and redemption from the consequences of Adam's original sin is nothing but nonsense to one who knows the evolving context of human existence in today's world." (KUNG, 1992, p. 232, own translation)*

*"I am convinced that the story of salvation announced by the Bible is realized in the events of worldly history.*

*It is true that the proclamation of salvation is given definitively - in outline, in Jesus - but it is also true that this giving of salvation needs interpretations that receive, update, and enrich it. The history of salvation proceeds as the history of interpretation, in the strong sense in which Jesus himself was the living and incarnate interpretation of Scripture". (VATTIMO, 2004, p. 55, own translation)*

*"Even one who has scientific information can always, in a metaphorical way, speak of 'soul': negatively (a house 'without soul'), archaically (a parish of 500 'souls'), poetically (the 'soul of Europe'), liturgically ('exult my soul in the Lord'), or abbreviatedly in **SOS (Save Our Souls)**. As long as this is thought of metaphorically, rather than objectively, misunderstandings can be avoided." (KÜNG, 2011, p. 232, own translation)*

*"...if religions define themselves as 'doctrines of salvation' **by an Other, by the grace of God**, the great philosophies could define themselves as doctrines of salvation **by themselves**, without the help of God." (FERRY, 2010, p. 19, own translation)*

*"Behold, I stand at the door and knock," says the book of Revelation (3:20): God is on the threshold and knocks at the door, but if we do not open it freely, he will not enter. Out of respect for our freedom, he refuses to force his way into our hearts and into our free will. It remains, however, present, forgiving and saving, it does not go away and continues to knock. Let it be said once again: "This limit is not God's limit, but our limit: the limit of our finitude and above all the limit of our free sinfulness. But God is salvifically present also on this limit and, in cases of necessity, as a definitive judge. But in the meantime he is in fact disarmed." (SCHILLEBEECKY, 1994, p. 123, own translation)*

*The history that we modern people live is a history of progress and progressive freedom. History has called us to arms against our oppressors, even against the oppressive superego that dwells within us. It is a call to free the individual's conscience and inquisitive mind from the oppressive authority of inherited institutions, dogmas, and prejudices-to see the world as it is, fresh and clean and full of opportunities for human flourishing.*

*I grew up in a small, fundamentalist, racist southern town, and I am happy to say that I lived through some of that history of liberation. I am deeply grateful for what the Reformation, the*

*Enlightenment, and Science did for me, and I am not willing to throw it all away."* (MEEKS, 2007, p. 33, own translation)

*"Recognizing that it is not only man who seeks God, but that the first initiative is from God himself, marks the passage from purely philosophical considerations to Christian theology."* (FERREIRA, 2007, p. 98, own translation)

*"I believe that God's story with our life will continue after our death, until that fullness is reached in which the soul finds rest, justice, and happiness."* (MOLTMANN, 2003, p. 145, own translation)

*"By calling God the CREATOR, Christians express their confidence that all things and all facts must be meaningful because they flow from the deepest source of meaning we call God. The notion of divine creativity evokes associations of wise planning, of complete and detailed conception, of careful zeal. The driving force behind all creativity is love. Whatever it is, it is a freely given gift, and this makes the whole full of meaning. We have to be very careful, however, to avoid the mistaken idea that creation implies some external impetus, a kick from the CREATOR. Divine creativity works from within. It is one thing only stemming from the impulse of each creature to become itself. The CREATOR's own energy flows through us."* (STEINDL-RAST, 2014, p. 45-47, own translation)

*"Paul doesn't just say that Christ has set us free: he also says that he did it so that we might be free. According to a classical distinction, we must consider a freedom **from** and a freedom **for**. The first points to sin, selfishness, oppression, injustice, necessity, all of which are conditions requiring liberation. The second indicates the **for what of** this freedom: love, communion; it is the final stage of liberation. The freedom **for** gives its deep meaning to the freedom **from**. Freedom is a central element of the Christian message."* (GUTIERREZ, 2003, p. 45, own translation)

*"The people's two experiences of slavery in Egypt and later of exile in Babylon fortified the notion of liberation and trust in Yahweh as the saving and liberating God. The story of Israel is told as a story of faith and hope in God. In its historical consciousness, one understands the action of Yahweh who reveals himself as an ever-acting God, present in the life of the people. It is in the happening of history as a process that God makes an alliance, **electing and saving the people**. In the wonders performed by Yahweh, the people can know him and, in knowing him, know his salvation. The psalmist goes so far as to say, 'Proclaim his salvation day by day: proclaim his glory among the nations, his wonders among all peoples!'" (Ps. 96:2) (PINAS, 2018, p. 136, own translation)*

Francois-Xavier Nguyen Van Thuam, Vietnamese, bishop of Nhatrang in central Vietnam, who was imprisoned for 13 years (1975-1988), wrote:

*"I have spent half my life waiting. It's very true: all prisoners, myself included, wait every minute for their release. But then I decided: I won't wait. I live the present moment, filling it with love. I heard*

*Dom Helder Camara say: life is for learning to love. Mother Teresa of Calcutta once wrote to me: 'What is important is not the number of actions we do, but the intensity of love we put into every action'". (THUAN, 2000, p. 15, own translation)*

*"When the emphasis is on Jesus' divinity as someone different from us, we miss the whole message of his life.... He tried to "save" us by freeing us from thoughts and images of God that imprisoned us. He tried to be a light in the darkness. He tried to convince that the sacred is found in everyday life - especially in our love." (MORWOOD, 2013, p. 89, own translation)*

*"Understanding creation as a mere explosion of a material vastness, thrown out at random, would be totally absurd if there were no hope that everything was done so that an interlocutor, free, responsible, partner of God Himself, could emerge. The conception of a creation of the world as man's environment and of a possible **salvation history** is plausible. In this sense, on the one hand, it is good to ask oneself about the creation of the world as a place of preparation for the creation of man as the self-revelation of God's love, until the fullness of man, which is Christ. The human being is structured historically with a view to a savior, who, in Jesus, reveals what and who man is." (FERREIRA, 2017, p. 95, own translation)*

*"It became impossible to offer to a world devoid of salvation a salvation devoid of world, and to a reality without God, a God devoid of reality." (MORANDINI, 2011, p. 35, own translation)*

*"Human life is, in fact, more than the hard experience that has always been a burden to so many; and it offers a hope of salvation or liberation or fulfillment that can even now flood our lives with positive meaning and value" (HICK, 2018, p. 105, own translation)*

By way of conclusion:

As far as we know, we are the only species that is concerned, pre-occupied, with salvation.

Salvation, liberation, fulfillment, only have meaning for the man, conscious and free, who asks himself what to do with his life, why and how, and thus can give it meaning.

Salvation, for other animals, is simply to postpone death. If it dies, it has fulfilled its mission, which is beyond comprehension.

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While revising this book, I came across the text below - provided by the author - which gives the subject of **salvation** a timely and appropriate lightness.

## About hide-and-seek and salvation

(Fabiano Veliq, Protestant, PhD in Psychology,  
in Philosophy and specialist in Theology)

*“Talking yesterday with two friends, we were talking about the games we used to play as children. The various games that were often meaningless, but full of joy that only those times had.*

*Several games were common and some others varied from region to region. One that we all played was hide-and-seek. We all played that when we were little and we all enjoyed it.*

*The game was very simple: one person counted with his eyes closed up to 50 or 100, while the others hid themselves. At the end of the count, the one who counted went out looking for the hidden ones, and if he saw any of them, he had to run to the pike (the place where the counting was done) and knock and say the name of the person he found.*

*A disagreement arose about the "save all" rule. Some people thought it was very strange to play with the "save all" rule (for those who don't know, the "save all" rule said that when only one person was missing, he could save everyone who had been found before him, so that whoever was counting could keep counting). The first one to be found would hope that the last one was not, so that he could "save everyone" in the end.*

*The hope of redemption was manifest in all those who were caught. The apprehension, the cheering for the last one was very present at the end, when only one was missing. Everyone put their trust in that one man who could save everyone and make sure that no one was punished and had to be the one to count and search.*

*The joke very much glosses the hope of salvation proposed by the gospels. All waiting for the redemption that comes through a man. From the point of view of a Christology, Christ is the redemption of God coming to men and effected on the cross. From an eschatological point of view, the question of the final redemption takes on various positions.*

*The "save all" rule even has a theological name and is the result of numerous debates in this area of knowledge. Will God save everyone in the end? Is there salvation forever? Is there "once saved, forever saved?" Is the one who was caught first doomed to be the next to count and seek out the others? Or is there hope for redemption, of the "save all"? Could the latter just "choose" who he would save, or in his action of saving everyone is there no place for "chosen ones" or "predestined ones"? Is salvation by merit? Can I save myself, or do I always ultimately depend on the one who will "save everyone in the*

*end"? Is the "save all" only for those who don't have the merit to save themselves, or is it valid for all as "possible-people-found"?*

*Central theological issues are witnessed in the game of hide-and-peek, but as children we didn't think much about it, and maybe that's why we could enjoy the game in a lighter way, without unnecessary worries. Play needs no explanation, it is simply there to be played.*

*Something to be learned from the pique concealment: both to ponder these theological-existential matters, and also to think about the lightness with which life should be lived. If in the end God decides to "save everyone" (or not), this will make no difference to our experience. It will only make a difference if we base our lives on this, an eternal "hypothetical imperative", a "do to be saved in the end" that, we should know, is far from the kingdom's proposal.*

*Perhaps the pleasure of play lies in the fact that we don't have to rule play by its ending, but simply play, knowing that we can change play at any time. And why not change the "save everyone" rule?*

*And hope would not only manifest itself in the salvation of the last, but would manifest itself in mere play, trying to make it moments of eternal joy while the day shines and the night does not come..."*  
(VELIQ, 2019, p. 193-194, own translation)



## CHAPTER 18

### HOPE: – DIALOGUING WITH ANDRÉS TORRES QUEIRUGA –

*"Hope has two beautiful and dear daughters:  
indignation and courage; indignation to refuse  
things as they are there; and the courage, to change them."*

(Augustine of Hippo - 364 - 430)

*"Religion, like myths, besides constituting a first attempt  
of explaining the inexplicable, highlights the capacity and desire of human beings  
of transcending the immediate, looking beyond themselves, or going deeper  
within in the search for a meaning that allows to appease or accept  
the anguish of finite existence."*

(Victoria Camps in PANOTTO, 2020, p.11)

*"Expectation, hope, and intention aimed at the possibility  
which has not yet come to be; this is not only a basic feature  
of human consciousness, but rectified and correctly understood,  
a fundamental determination amidst objective reality as a whole."*

(Ernest Bloch in QUEIRUGA, 2007, p.17)

*"A hope disconnected from the contradictions of History,  
of the carnality of its individuals and the realistic hardness  
of the institutions through which human beings express themselves  
and mediate their interests is, for Metz, meaningless."*

(COCCOLINI, 2011, p. 85)

*"History: place of memory, of hope,  
of authentic meaning, of human living."*

(J. Moltmann in VALLE, 2020, p.310)

*"...Because my three virtues, God said, my creatures, my daughters, my little girls, are like my other creatures of the race of men: Faith is a faithful wife, charity is a mother... And hope a little girl of nothing... But, without a doubt, this little girl, hope, is the one who will traverse the worlds, the little girl of nothing, she alone, and taking with her the other virtues, she is the one who will traverse the worlds full of obstacles... But, in reality, she is the one who makes the other two go and the one who drags them along, and the one who makes the whole world go and the one who drags it along."*

(Charles Péguy in Diez, 2019, p. 155)

### **God's epic in human history**

I take as a starting point the human brain, which Nicolelis called the True Creator of Everything  
- TCE: (NICOLELIS, 2020)

*"There has existed for thousands of years a certain cultural universality of images,  
interpretations of concepts, and also of religious orientations that characterize human religiosity.*

*Archaeological and cognitive studies show that the emergence of homo religiosus results from  
the slow adaptation of the human brain to the conceptions, beliefs, rituals, symbols, and language that  
homo sapiens has been intuitively constructing - over the course of ten thousand years or more - and  
that eventually gave rise to a growing "cognitive fluidity" and "turn of direction. It is this - "extended*



*consciousness" - that seeps into every aspect of our thinking and forms the core of art, religion, and science. Without it, archaic humans had no access to metaphor. (VALLE, 2020, p. 59-118)*

For Frederico Lenoir, *this change takes place in the Middle East approximately 15,000 years ago, when agriculture and breeding replace hunting and gathering. The new means of subsistence lead men to group together in villages, which will become cities.*

*The nomadic hunter of the Paleolithic worshipped the spirits of the animals that were necessary for his survival. The farmer, the sedentary farmer of the Neolithic, venerates the symbol of fecundity and fertility: the woman. But this will not last long, because the male gods will soon supplant the cult of the mother, the God-Mother*

*Human beings began to worship the souls of those who preceded them - from the evidence found in Anatolia and near Jericho - approximately 7,000 years before our era.*

*Some authors claim that the cult of the Mother Goddess, which dominated the entire Mediterranean, European and Indian world for several millennia before the development of the great ancient civilizations, is the expression of a monotheistic belief.*

*In the present state of our knowledge, we had better situate monotheism in Akhenaton's brief experience-a brutal revolution-which lasted only the space of this monarch's reign." (LENOIR, 2013, p. 17-19, own translation)*

Monotheism was consolidated among the Jews around 1060 B.C., as we saw in Chapter 3.

This brief tour through the evolution of the human brain and the brain's creations in social coexistence are only intended to better situate, in time, Something/Someone that transcends everything we know and will come to know.

Before talking about God, it would be good to read **An Insignificant Animal**, the opening chapter of the book "**Sapiens**" by historian Harari (HARARI, 2017). It is important to situate ourselves in time, since we are historical beings: **billions of years**: cosmos: 13.7; earth: 4.5; **thousand years**: *homo sapiens*: 150; cognitive revolution/beginning of history: 70-30; extinction of Neanderthals: 30; *homo religiosus*: 15(?); agricultural revolution: 12; writing and money: 5; Jesus of Nazareth event: 2; **hundred years**: scientific revolution: 5; industrial revolution: 2; cybernetic revolution: 0.78.

*"For over 13 billion years the universe has existed without any human or human-like mind to observe it or ponder over it. The collective interval of mental life may prove to be a mere instant within the total history of the universe." (HICK, 2018, p. 154, own translation)*

From the East African group of *homo sapiens*, from which we are descended, to *homo religiosus*, more than 130,000 years have passed. As *homo religiosus*, we are something like 20,000 years old.

Monotheism, with all its diversity of representation, is about 5,000 years old, which is less than 1% of the existence of *homo sapiens*.

God, in various ways, throughout our short history, has always been imagined as the **Creator, the One, That**, who gave us life. Over time, we have come to understand that the concept of **creation** implies some essential predicates, which have not always been present:

- To create is not omnipotence, but sharing: to give life to something outside oneself;
- To create is not an act, it is a process: what exists is bound, as long as it lasts, to the Creator. The creature has no life in itself, although autonomous and independent;
- The created is always finite, limited, imperfect - otherwise it would be God himself;
- all creation is evolutionary - time is relative and space is expanding;
- Evolution takes place in a combination of rigidity and flexibility in matter and in the human condition, historical, of conditionings, freedom and choices;
- consciousness - *without which we would not have been able to create art, religion, science, thought, nor the fascinating world of fantasy* - seems to be the culmination of the evolution of creation. It may be a pretense of the human being to think that he is the purpose of creation, the "icing on the cake".

The historical narrative is a construction of the TCE, which selects facts, events, processes, and assigns meaning to them. This meaning seems to be linked to his need to survive and to surpass himself. He learns from the past, but he is not satisfied with the present, he needs to imagine the future. **Hope is vital to him.** And, as the Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch said, "*where there is hope there is indeed religion.*"

The construction of meaning is always historical, like man himself, and therefore relative, always possible to update and revise.

One of the most necessary re-readings is of the Christian narratives, present in the popular imagination for centuries. The religious reading of **salvation history** has obeyed the following sequence:

**Paradise - fall - punishment - redemption - church time - glory** (QUEIRUGA, 2007, p. 74)

The well-known theologian, professor at the University of Santiago de Compostela, **Andrés Torres Queiruga**, has published the small and precious book *Hope in spite of evil: the resurrection as a horizon*. In it, the author gathers the content of his three presentations at the Congress organized by the Episcopal Conference of Colombia in 2004.

In the first chapter, he discusses hope, which inhabits the innermost guts of all men and women. He also deals with the rootedness of hope in the very guts of all reality, mentioned in the Ernest Bloch quote that introduced the text of this chapter.

In the second chapter he deals with the fundamental structure of biblical hope and what will provide our dialogue with the author:

- a. the carelessness of theology with the theme, represented mainly by the millennial catechetical scheme embedded in the collective imagination. The author criticizes this scheme and proposes;
- b. to recover, in all its strength and consequence, the religious value of creation for love - with which we fully agree.

The third and last chapter deals with the realization of hope: evil from the cross and the resurrection. We intend to dialogue with Queiruga about evil, starting also from creation, that is, from the intrinsic limitation of the created.

According to **André Torres Queiruga**, the above sequence has to be replaced by another, namely: (QUEIRUGA, 2007, p. 78)

**creation - historical growth - culmination in Christ - church time - glory**

This proposal is very close to the line of reasoning we have been developing. It seems more convincing to us to replace **creation** with **cosmos** and to intersperse, in this sequence, the person of **Jesus of Nazareth** as an exemplar of the human species, since his life choices, the announcement of the Good News - the Kingdom of God - his death and resurrection, have the character of **universal revelation**. For the same reason we prefer "**building the Kingdom of God**" to "**Church time**", since the building of the Kingdom takes place in the world and is not restricted to one religion.

*"The universality of Jesus of Nazareth, the only universality that is possible **within history**: that of suffering, that of having nothing, that of giving absolutely everything one possesses. Jesus, in fact, is certainly the total, the universal, the absolute "proletarian," and so he could identify with all men and save us all."* (HINKELAMERT, 2012, p. 34, own translation)

We would have the following sequence of the **revelation process**:

**cosmos - life - historical consciousness - Jesus of Nazareth - building the Kingdom of God**  
- (glory) **transition of the "modus vivendi"**:

*("Life will not be taken away, but transformed" - text from the 7th Day Mass).*

The event of Jesus of Nazareth, his experience and proposal of the Kingdom of God and, consequently, his death and resurrection, led his disciples to the firm conviction (**faith**) that **God revealed, in Jesus of Nazareth**, some simple, practical and universal truths, radically important for the **overcoming/release** from the surmountable limitations of the human being:

1. God is Love - this is not a pious statement; it is a statement, the best possible symbolic statement, of God's nature: **God is Love;**
2. the clearest expression/human representation of God is Jesus of Nazareth - the *universal prototype of man*, as God wills it, the One we have come to call Jesus Christ;
3. we are - all human beings, without preconditions - brothers and sisters, children of the same Father (another symbol). The concrete expression of the love for God that is unseen is the love for one's neighbor, who is always near;
4. God's mercy and forgiveness precede the acknowledgment of sin and the request for forgiveness. Weakness, God knows this well, is inherent in the created;
5. God made it clear, in the praxis of Jesus of Nazareth, that:
  - a. strength is in weakness;
  - b. God's elect are the commoners, the despicable;

*"We need to look at the poor and see them as a theological place, that is, a place of God's manifestation. It requires an exercise in conversion, change, and transformation."* (LANCELLOTTI, 2021, p. 51, own translation)

*"Apprehend, understand, and learn what "these social bodies of class have to tell us...this working-class misery that is read in the physiognomy of the houses, in the background, in the interiors, in the bodies themselves," in the expression of philosopher and writer Didier Eribon (ERIBON, 2020, p. 22, own translation)*

- c. what is not, reveals what is. This is the wisdom of God, present in the Good News (Gospel), the norm of conduct in building the Kingdom of God:

*"What is foolishness in the world, God has chosen it to confound the wise; what is weak in the world, God has chosen it to confound what is strong; what is vile and despised in the world, what is not, God has chosen it to reduce to nothing what is, so that no creature may boast before God."* (1Cor.1-27-28)

6. God transformed Jesus' unjust and ignominious death into resurrection, that is, an affirmation (**revelation**) that He/Love, "made man", will always be with and in each man - regardless of his faith - as Love, a driving force for **overcoming/salvation /liberation**, to be built by man himself, consciously and freely;
7. The Kingdom of God, the core of the message of Jesus of Nazareth, is his legacy as a human being, for the construction of a society in which the children of God live as brothers and sisters. It is a utopia, with no prediction of time, nor prescription of "how", being up to man, conscious and free, to transform the dream into reality, to build what is possible.

Concerned to highlight the depth and universality of hope, Queiruga proposes an "*Elpidology*" (*elpis*: hope), hope as a human existential, to begin and remake the above sequence he proposed.

*"The first thing that must be affirmed about hope is the depth and universality of its implantation in the heart of man."* (Lain Entralgo). *"We are hope."* (P. Landsberg). *"In its very essence, organic life is futurologically determined and determinate."* (Karl Rahner).

I propose, again, a previous step: Love.

If Love is the best available definition of God's nature, if his Being is Love, if the Living One is Love, all his creation is "impregnated" with his substance. The work of art reflects, portrays author: He is in it.

The sequence, then, of the **three theological virtues** would be:

**Love (*libido/eros - filia*) - Hope (*evolution*) - faith - Love (*agape*)**

A more adequate representation of the sequence would not be linear, but circular to visualize the process feeding back on itself: agape inspiring and vivifying eros.

### **Is there a future for God?**

Despite Queiruga's undeniable theological competence and his emphasis on hope, which looks not to the past but to the future, I missed in his book a look to the future.

Frederic Lenoir ends his book "**God: His History in the Human Epic**" by asking: **is there a future for God?**

Before proposing any answers, the author presents a projection of faith in the world in 2050, whose population, projected by the UN, would be 9.7 billion people:

Christians: 3 billion

Muslims: 2.2 billion

Hindus :1.2 billion

Buddhists: 430 million

Jews: 17 million

The trend - ignoring profound changes that may occur - is increasing secularization, with no loss of faith in God and more and more individuals declaring themselves to be without religion.

Queiruga, I dare opine, would have to contemplate some historical trends - brought about by the three great vectors of modernity: individualization, critical thinking, and globalization - namely:

### **the relative loss of adherents and social relevance of religions**

According to a survey conducted in France in 2007, three out of four French Catholics who declared themselves believers no longer believe in the revealed God of the Bible... they no longer adhere to the reductive images that have been made of him in the Bible and in Christian preaching over the centuries.

In Brazil, unexpectedly and paradoxically, Christianity has been revitalizing itself in the form of evangelical Protestantism and "functions as an informal welfare state occupying spaces abandoned by the Public Power". "It is, according to Juliano Spyer, doctor in Anthropology, the most important mass phenomenon of the last decades"; for the North American historian Mike Davis, "the most important cultural response to the explosive and traumatic urbanization", in Latin America. (SPYER, 2020, p. 21, 73)

*"One of the most important phenomena in Brazilian popular culture of the last decades: the revolution of the religious field, in particular the mass adherence to evangelical churches. I risk a synthetic interpretative hypothesis: the worker, especially the female worker, who takes over the family leadership, burdened by the multiplicity of obligations, domestic and professional, needs to count on a narrative that attributes positive, affirmative meaning to the real world and to life as it is, in such a way that eventual achievements are perceived as accessible in his/her lifetime. He needs to tell himself a story in which he does not figure as a victim, in which the objects of his desire are not belittled, in which he acts as a protagonist and deserves recognition. It needs a belief that propels it into the world and reassures it. She needs life as it appears to her not to be reduced to a crude indignity of the powerful or an arbitrary and malevolent divine curse.*

*... salvation in this world, the possibility of personal fulfillment still in his lifetime, the chance to exchange happiness, everything is provided to him by the prosperity theology spread in the Pentecostal evangelical world. "* (SOARES, 2019, p. 139-140, own translation)

*"In the 1970s, evangelicals represented only 5% of Brazilians; today, they are one-third of the country's adult population, and in the next decade, according to statistics, the number of Protestants*

will surpass that of Catholics by 2032. Each year 14,000 new evangelical churches are opened in Brazil." (SPYER, 2020, p. 21, 73, own translation)

**the excessive masculinization of God and the necessary overcoming of misogyny in religions.**

*"The current face of God, to which most believers adhere, is that of a totally loving, enveloping, good, protective being, in short, maternal. The traditional figure of the "father God," who dictates the law and punishes sinners, has progressively transferred to the figure of a mother God, who gives love and comforts... The cult of the Virgin Mary, long ago, came to compensate, in Catholicism, for the masculine excess."*

**the "religious bricolage"**, where everyone builds their own religion, or spirituality, taking a bit from each religion, DIY (do it yourself).

*"This is a Copernican revolution of religious consciousness," as Marcelo Gauchet observed. It is no longer the group that transmits and imposes religion on the individual; it is the individual who exercises his free choice according to his desire to blossom that arises from it." (LENOIR, 2013, p. 201, own translation)*

*"In other words, if religions define themselves as 'doctrines of salvation' by an Other, by God's grace the great philosophies could be defined as doctrines of salvation by themselves, without help from God" (FERRY, 2014, p. 19)*

**the struggle against all forms of discrimination, oppression and slavery**

We have much to learn from theologians, such as Fellipe dos Anjos, who, in his master's thesis in theology *"Doing Theology is Reading Revelation"*: *"delve into the depths of the religious and spiritual logics that promote, sustain, and perpetuate sin in its most hateful face, namely, the denial of the right to life, including and especially of the poor."* (DOS ANJOS, 2019, p. 201, own translation)

*"A hope that is not the hope of the oppressed today is not a hope for which I could give a theological account. A symbol of resurrection that is not the symbol of the resurrection of crucified does not touch me. If the theologians and philosophers of the future do not put their feet on the ground and turn to a theology of the cross and the dialectic of the negative, they will disappear in a cloud of liberal optimism and look like a mockery of the current misfortune of suffering." (MOLTMANN, in CONE, 2020, p. 188)*

*There is no revelation of God without a condition of oppression that evolves into a situation of liberation. Revelation is only for the oppressed of the earth. God goes to those who have been enslaved and abused and declares total identification with the situation, revealing to them the legitimacy of emancipation on their terms. God not only reveals to the oppressed the divine right to end the chains by*

*whatever means necessary, but also assures them that their action for their own liberation is God's own action.*" (CONE, TN, 2020, p. 109, own translation)

*"Mbembe, Agambem, and Butler theoretically explore these processes of transformation of biopolitics into necropolitics: they associate capitalism, government, militarization, racism, precarization of life, killability of certain subjects, emergence of the exception as a paradigm of government, and destruction of the rights structure, which radically changes the survival framework of certain populations, which will come to be governed by death."* (DOS ANJOS, 2019, p. 43, own translation)

As Pope Francis said in the Encyclical *Fraternity and Friendship* (Fratelli Tutti):

*"While one part of humanity lives in opulence, another part sees its dignity unrecognized, scorned or trampled upon, and its fundamental rights ignored or violated*

*"In this world (which we believe has become a "global village"), about 25,000 human beings die of hunger every day, 9,000 of them, children. Isn't it incredible that we can not only eat, but feast peacefully, without being bitten, if not by hunger, at least by the desperation of those mothers who cannot calm their children's hunger?"* (GUIMARÃES, 2022, p. 383, own translation)

For the first time in its history, the human species has all the conditions necessary to guarantee the bare minimum for all its members - and this is what God expects from his offspring and our first and foremost devotion. May the species preservation instinct, or religious faith, help us to fulfill the dream of Jesus of Nazareth: the Kingdom of God.

*"Precarious work and reduced income are already a reality for the 60% of the world's population who live on less than \$5 a day."* (CEPAL, ILO, 2020, own translation)

*"The power imbalances between races, countries, rich and poor, and other groups are extensions of the power imbalances between colonizers and colonized. The most troubling feature is the links between algorithmic discrimination and structural racism."* (Yarden KATZ in GUIMARÃES, 2022, p. 289, own translation)

*"How can one fail to see that a society cannot be and remain humane without finding the means to behave benevolently and come to the rescue of all these outcasts and "excluded" people, and that the community of people must truly step outside the concerns of economic profitability if it is to avoid total disaster for diverse populations and, in the end, total defeat for the entire planet?"* (DORÉ, 2019, p. 99, own translation)



**Evil: "the touchstone of atheism"** (Georg Büchner)

*"The reality and extent of evil seems to demand an atheistic conclusion for many. This is indeed the most serious challenge to theistic faith. When we remember the afflictions that beset millions of human beings every day - bodily sufferings due to physical pain, disease, hunger and thirst, blindness, deafness, dumbness, senility, brain damage, and other kinds of disability; along with distinctively human agonies such as fear and anxiety, both for oneself and for others and grief, loneliness, envy, remorse, jealousy, resentment, hatred, humiliation, contempt, unrequited love; this all in addition to the pain that occurs all the time in the animal kingdom-we really have to wonder if it is possible to think that this world is the work of an omnipotent creator who was motivated by unlimited love."* (HICK, 2018, p. 151, own translation)

How should we face our ignorance about evil? To use the distinction proposed by Noam Chomsky, are we facing a **problem** or a **mystery**?

As S. Pinker observes:

*"When we are faced with a problem we may not know the solution, but we have insights, we have accumulated a growing knowledge about it, and we have a vague idea of what we are looking for. However, when we are faced with the mystery we are torn between wonder and bewilderment, without at least an idea of what the explanation might look like."* (VALLE, 2020, p. 134, own translation)

We know how much has been said and tried to answer Epicurus' famous dilemma:

*"Either God can and will not prevent evil, and then he is not good; or he wills, and cannot, and then he is not omnipotent."*

Falling into the trap of Epicurus' dilemma, many theologians, throughout the history of Christianity, when faced with evil have preferred to appeal to the statement that the reality and extent of evil constitute a **mystery**, which leaves us, in fact, perplexed, without any explanation.

We have already seen that Epicurus' dilemma rests on a mistaken attribute of God: omnipotent - a Greek concept, which has nothing biblical (Chapter 3) -, as well as on a misunderstanding of the relationship: Creator/creature; Love/human consciousness and freedom.

"Suffering is not a theoretical problem that must be understood. Suffering can never be understood. Nor is there any point in understanding suffering" (Erich Zenger). A universally valuable theoretical answer to a deeply existential question would only be, as Hans Küng puts it, "a cunning cerebral argument that offers the sufferer the same as a lecture on hygiene and food chemistry offers a hungry and thirsty person." (GRESHAKE, 2010, p. 21, own translation)

After the Holocaust, "a process of dehumanization and systematic massacre of six million Jews, a third of the Jewish people at the time" (RIBEIRO, 2020, p. 69, own translation), many theologians wondered

if it was pertinent to talk about God. It was then that *"a Jewish and Christian theological current emerged, born from voices such as those of Simone Weil, Etty Hillesum or Dietrich Bonhoeffer, which tries to return to the conception of an erased God, not powerful, hidden and ineffable, which, over the centuries, the deviations of the church led to forget.*

*"We must go back to the vision that Jesus of Nazareth offers of God: a God who speaks in the depths of man's heart but remains silent in the hubbub of the world, a God who quenches himself and refuses to exercise his power lest he force men to believe in him." (LENOIR, 2013, p. 6, own translation)*

**In the physical world** - catastrophes are inevitable, like the volcanic eruption that buried Pompeii, in 19 B.C., the earthquake in Lisbon in 1755, and so many other catastrophes; **on the level of life** - plants live at the expense of minerals, animals at the expense of all; **on the human level** - finitude is an inexhaustible source of pain provoked and endured, like the epidemic of the coronavirus, this year; **on the moral level - finite** freedom, dark shadows of faults, very human, and of selfishness.

Evil is a painful but inevitable factibility: the *"sadness of the finite,"* in Paul Ricoeu's expression. It is a necessary manifestation of the internal limitation of the finite.

There seems to be a certain "mystery" in finite being, Queiruga observes.

Every created being is forged by the dramatic tension between what is and what tends to be. Finite being consists in privation. Only God is: "I am He who is". (QUEIRUGA, 1999, p. 74)

*"In elementary theological rigor, it makes no sense that we 'ask', or try to 'convince' God to free us from our ills. What else does the commandment of love - to ourselves and to our neighbor - mean but a call to join us to his saving action, to his being always at work (Jn 5:17) to overcome evil and establish the Kingdom." (QUEIRUGA, 1999, p. 74, own translation)*

The position of the English historian John Hick regarding the question of evil complements and enriches our dialogue with the Galician Andrés Torres Queiruga:

*"The only line of response to what seems to me at any rate adequate the depth of the challenge sees our human existence on this planet as part of a much longer process by which personal spiritual life is gradually being brought to a perfection that will retrospectively justify **the evils that have been part of its slow creation.**" (HICK, 2018, p. 151, own translation)*

**He took upon himself our sorrows...** (Isaiah, 53, 4 ff)

*"One day the Gestapo hanged a child. Even the SS were disturbed by the prospect of hanging a boy in front of thousands of spectators. The child, who, Wiesel recalled, had the face of 'a sad-eyed angel,' was silent, lividly pale, and almost calm as he ascended the gallows. Behind Wiesel, one of the prisoners asked: Where is God? Where is He? The child took an hour to die, and the prisoners were*

*forced to look at his face. The same man asked again: Where is God now? And Wiesel heard a voice within him give the answer: Where is He? There He is - hanging there on that scaffold".* (ARMSTRONG, 1994, p. 376, own translation)

Ramon Panikkar in his unpretentious and extraordinary book "Icons of Mystery: The Experience of God", comments:

*"The problem of evil breaks the aprioristic schemes we make about God, breaks our categories, makes us understand that we don't have an answer for everything. It makes us humble, it makes us human and more realistic; it makes us understand that there is not only the community of saints, but also the community of sinners; it makes us understand that the Passion of Christ is also the passion of God..."* (PANIKKAR, 2007, p. 21, 22, own translation)

As I conclude this chapter - completing 286 days of confinement by the pandemic, on the eve of Christmas - blessing Life and its Author, a reflection by González de Caderdal about the One who is to come and who has always been here:

*"That God lets Jesus go to his death, and that he apparently dies in the desolation of a total abandonment, means the supreme affirmation that God makes of how the world and death are a land of truth for the human being; not a theater of farce, but a dwelling place that is to be built up in truth, and a world that is to be humanized, to the point of making it worthy of God. God does not tolerate the earth, time and history as degrading situations for the human being, or as simple waiting in the desert until the return.*

*The resurrection of Jesus and the resurrection of the human being only take place when one has crossed the sea of living and when one has crossed the torrent of death. But the former is the living sign that the human being is not exhausted in a bare waiting, but can instead live in hope, because someone has already crossed these waters, and this someone is not only the first, but rather the cause, and that he, being the pioneers of our journey, advances toward consummation not only leaving footprints in the desert sand, footprints that the wind erases, but instead, as a perennially open path".* (QUEIRUGA, 1999, p. 131)

Leaving the last word to our interlocutor in this dialog - Andrés Torres Queiruga:

"Salvation, Redemption, deliverance, reconciliation, justification, forgiveness...: these are all expressions that attempt to suggest, with certain variations of perspective, the primary and fundamental aspect of every authentic encounter with God.

To be a Christian is to know oneself redeemed, to feel saved; it is to recognize God in the only legitimate and true way: as the one who saves, as "Emmanuel" (God with us), as Abba (Father)." (QUEIRUGA, 1999, p. 167, own translation)

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With Andrés Torres Queiruga's permission, I reproduce in this second edition an excerpt from his kind e-mail, in Galician, his native language, commenting on the book and this chapter:

*Caro amigo;*

*Puiden ler com muito gosto os pdf que me mandou. Admiro a cantidade de leituras que você fez e a capacidade de encontrar citas e referencias, sempre axeitadas. É um tesouro panorámico. E nótase a experiencia e a sensibilidade do sociólogo, que tanto pode axudar ao realismo da teoloxía.*

*O que di da esperanza paréceme muito acertado e penso que estamos na mesma orientación.”*

(Andrés TQ, Santiago de Compostela, 11/25/2021)

# PART III



## CHAPTER 19

# I BELIEVE

*"Our ideas about God usually  
tell us more  
About ourselves than about God."*

(Thomas Merton)

*"Our favorite image of God does not reveal much  
about Him; it denounces much about us, about how  
we see ourselves and how we see God and the world."*

(AMALADOSS, 2001, p. 15)

*"Belief is a rational process without existential depth.  
Belief in someone is a dynamic process that emerges  
from our depths, supposes involvement and includes  
commitment, surrender, and adherence. When next we speak of faith in God,  
or in Jesus Christ, the living one, we will always have this attitude in mind.  
The faith that saves and liberates is just that dynamic faith that radiates and changes life."*

(Roger Lenars in NUNES, 2019, p. 197)

*" Crer (Believe) comes from the Latin credere, constituted  
by cor + dare - to give (dar) your (seu) heart (coração) to someone.  
And the heart, in traditional anthropologies translates  
the totality of the person in the affective gesture of giving oneself.  
There would be the core of faith."*

(LIBÂNIO, 2004, p. 10)

*"The condition of man's relationship with God is,  
first of all, not to have and not to understand.  
It's not easy this 'not having God', this 'waiting for God'."*

(Paul Tillich in HAUGHT, 1998, p. 240)

*"The motives of credibility are legitimized  
by themselves, how the work of art is legitimized,  
a beautiful landscape and a loving face."*

(Pilar Sanches ALVAREZ)

*"Every human being has faith, cultivated or uncultivated,  
whether reflexively conscious or not. The division between believers  
and non-believers does not stand up to the most elementary logic.  
It is a toned down translation of the insulting distinction between believers and infidels.  
And this explains the logical slide. In effect, those who believe in "A"  
to what we call God) call themselves believers,  
while those who do not believe in "A" are called non-believers.  
It is a one-sided division that calls those who believe in "B" non-believers.  
It's just a power distinction. Why should A be a criterion for division, and not B?"*

(PANIKKAR, 2007, p. 62)

First day of 2021, 295 days of confinement, 2 months before my 84th birthday. I am coming to the last item of my rereading of the *Nicene Creed*. Convinced that *"when you come too quickly to God, it is likely that you are seeing Him too small,"* I tried to reflect on the *Nicene Creed* from back to front, from "heaven and earth" to "I believe."

In the previous chapters I have tried to present opinions from experts on each subject. It was a work of "mining", evidently not totally exempt, because nobody "mines" without some notion of what they are looking for. I come to the final point: the beginning of the *Credo*.

I think this has to be an essentially personal chapter. I cannot evade a personal position and make explicit what I mean by *"I believe!"* The first thing that comes to mind is: believing is a grace! A



free gift from God. It was He who came to me; only then did I go after Him. Coming to the end of this journey, I can repeat with Augustine of Hippo: *I know nothing about Him!* I learned a lot about what He "is not". And I have images, allegories, about Him; these are now clear and well-founded in the New Testament - they will be explained below.

When I say that *"faith is a grace"*, I immediately remember Professor Darcy Ribeiro. I had the luck/grace (*everything is grace*) of living with him for more than a year. Throughout my life I have known several very intelligent people, some with prodigious memories, such as Joao Edênio Reis Valle, a priest and brilliant scientist, a friend/brother for 72 years. Darcy was a genius. He impressed me mainly by his ethics; his commitment to the people, to the struggle for a country of which we could be proud, with education for all, was unconditional. He said he was an atheist, but that he would like to have the faith his mother had: *"I didn't have this grace"*, he said. That was the expression; he saw faith as a grace - like a musical ear - some have it, others don't.

Many years after this acquaintance, I had the opportunity to check with Professor Leonardo Boff the current version of his dialogue with Professor Darcy, when the latter, aware that death was approaching, asked Boff: *"convince me that something of me, something that identifies me, survives my death"*. Boff told him something like this *God is like a mother; He awaits you with open arms. God is waiting for you and He has a lot to talk to you about; you are going to get along well*.

Boff confirmed to me that Darcy complained that he was never told that God is Mother. The two embraced and, moved, cried.

I think that in this friendly dialogue, Darcy received the grace of faith, which he so admired and cherished in his mother.

I like Juvenal Savian Filho's description of faith as a psychosocial phenomenon:

*"'God' is the attribute of an experience: the name with which we designate the perception of a Transcendent Presence, by a personal experience, in a widening of the limits of reason, and generally in continuity with a religious tradition. Its fruits make themselves known: inner peace, joy, love, inner unity. This experience, in which God acts and the human person is realized, will never cease to be a challenge for philosophy and the sciences."* (CRUZ, 2011, p. 121, own translation)

I inherited this kind of faith, where dogmas and liturgy played a very important role. In a short time, participating in the JUC (Catholic University Youth) and ULAJE (Latin American Union of Evangelical Youth), and in regional meetings, I was able to follow the struggles for social justice in several Latin American countries. Accompanying these young people in their struggles for social justice provoked in me a true conversion. This conversion to the social dimension of the Christian faith - political, cultural, religious, dominant anti-ideology - has led me, in the last ten years, to the study and deeper adherence: Jesus of Nazareth. (NUNES, JN, 2019)

Today, my spirituality is centered on Him. I try to mold my behavior to His life and message and I am convinced that Christianity, in practice, has moved too far away from Him and needs to return firmly to Him. The world and Christian churches need Him. It needs to move away, in large part, from "*Christ, the object of worship*" and back to "*Jesus of Nazareth, the object of imitation*".

I agree with philosopher Luc Ferry, former Minister of Education of France (2002-2004): "*we live today a moment in which two processes - the humanization of the divine and the divinization of the human - intersect.*" A great opportunity.

Certainly this text predates Brexit and all that followed it, in regression to authoritarian regimes, in a climate of division and hatred. I think Leonardo Boff, in a recent extraordinary text, is right:

*"We have a Brazil deeply divided between the few rich and the great poor majorities; one of the most unequal countries in the world; which means a violent country full of social injustices... It is necessary to have love, solidarity, compassion and a universal compassion of 'Fratelli tutti'. Love will be the most effective motor because it, at bottom, 'is the ultimate reality'...*

*Behind the destructive chaos that has been implanted here and in several other countries lie constructive dimensions of a new order."*<sup>12</sup>

Back to the *Nicene Creed* and "I Believe!"

The *Nicene Creed* is a formulation about the *nature of God* and normative conclusions about human behavior. As we saw earlier, it has much of Greek philosophy and little of biblical tradition: history and writing. It says more about the spirit of the times, power games, life of the Catholic Church, than it does about God and the Kingdom of God, proposed by Jesus of Nazareth. It reveals much about men and little about God.

*"Metaphor is an attempt to say something about what is unfamiliar in terms of what is familiar. The trinity is a metaphor of dialogue, of openness, of community, of interrelationships: therefore, it is a metaphor of plurality in unity, of multiplicity in singularity, of different and equal."* (GONÇALVES, 2020, p. 174, own translation)

Some biblical statements are revelations - the clearest and most unequivocal - about God's nature and His expectations of man.

They are allegories, images, representations of the human imagination; representations of how I imagine God - to Whom, or to What, I refer when I say: I believe! Schematically:

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<sup>12</sup> BOFF. *Why we got to Jair Bolsonaro* - [www.brasil247.com/authors/leoboff](http://www.brasil247.com/authors/leoboff);

**God is Love! He is Love!** - All love is a sharing of God's nature. *"He who loves abides in me, and I in him."* Chapter 13 of St. Paul's Letter to the Corinthians is a hymn to love, there called charity: *"where there is love, God is there."*

*"Love, threefold in human relations - eros - filia and agape - is the very being of God ...which makes the Trinity a metaphor.*

Xavier Zubiri states that *"the Greeks saw in love the very ecstasy of being...which leads one to lose oneself in the immensity of the other."* (COSTA, 2019, p 26, own translation)

**Corollary 1. The entire Cosmos is a permanent, continuous expression of Love;** it is **donation** It is transferring a portion of Itself, of its loving nature to the created, limited, and imperfect being - by the Creator's will, written in the nature of the created - progressive, evolving, with universal rules, that little by little the TCE (true creator of everything/human intellect) is discovering.

**Corollary 2 - God made man "in his own image and likeness".**

Again this is not a pious, self-edifying statement. It is a statement about the necessary nature of man. Necessary: coming from God, a conscious creature, capable of understanding himself and giving meaning to himself and to things, he could only be the image and likeness of Love. The created reflects the Creator! It is the culmination, as we know it, of the evolving Cosmos. It is the culmination of God's "shared Love" in everything that exists. In this case, the sharing is special because the created has made itself special, consciously and freely creative. He generates others, and usually, instinctively, also shares love.

Love in generation - with all the limitations and distortions of homo *sapiens et demens*; Love in **gestation** - how much faith, how much hope, how much love; in creation/maintenance/helping to **develop** - love in **nursing** - giving of oneself, emptying oneself, transmitting life/love; **becoming/saving oneself** - the born makes the man and the woman, anonymous to him, father and mother. They have the opportunity to discover/re-discover the relationship, reciprocal, limited, sometimes terribly limiting, with their child, a unique individual; like us, before God (**salvation/redemption**).

Like everything human, it is limited and subject to human freedom: the wonderful and terrible right to choose: to save what is best in you (the love/root), or to lose yourself. As Edgard Morin said, *"let us be brothers, not because we will be saved, but because we are lost."*

**Corollary 3 - Jesus of Nazareth is the clearest revelation of God**

He is the most perfect presentation/representation of God: in him, in human flesh, of the human species, God became flesh! He is the prototype of "being human", that is, what it **is** (to be) and **how to act**, when Love/God becomes man, or *homo sapiens*, in its full dimension.

**Corollary 4. The "resurrection of Jesus"**

It is God's affirmation/revelation that:

- a. Jesus of Nazareth is the prototypical, unique, permanent - the ever-present God with us (*Immanuel*);
- b. he **did not die; his life changed. So it is, so it will be with us too** - as Paul said, "*If Christ has not been raised, neither have we; and vain is our faith!* What can we expect if everything ends with our death, whether we are good or bad, whether we love or not?"

The resurrection is God's confirmation - a simple message: love never dies! He who has truly loved will live forever! If we know little, or nothing, about our past - egg, sperm, embryo, etc. - what a pretension to want to know what we will be like after death! I think that each one, individualized, conscious love, will continue to evolve... Cogitation, dream, fantasy? Our experience, the source of knowledge, is carnal; as Aristotle said, "*nothing reaches the intellect that does not pass through the senses*".

Xavier Zubiri goes further: "*Feeling and intellection are not dissociated, for, since feeling is a sentient process, it is strictly speaking two moments of a single act of apprehension ... it is sentient intelligence*". (ZUBIRI, 2020, p. 76, own translation)

Panikkar comments, "*It is to Xavier Zubiri's credit that he emphasized the unitary character of human intelligence that is both sensitive and intelligent.*"

**Corollary 5. Christianity is the institution that made it possible for the message of Jesus of Nazareth to reach us.** I have dedicated myself to studying how the Jewish sect of the *followers of the Path*, the *Nazarites*, the Christians, brothers, gathered in *churches*, over a hundred years after Jesus' death, was transformed into a new religion: Christianity (NUNES, CR, 2019). Since Jesus' message is universal and any religion is particular - however Catholic/universal it may be, - it always experiences a paradox. It is up to her to build the Kingdom of God, but she is not the Kingdom of God. As João Décio Passos observes:

*"The tense game between preservers and renovators is inherent to Christianity. The religious nature of Christianity, organized in institutions that carry forward an original charism, carries this tension that ends up being constitutive of its own history. The institutionalizations - of the founding texts, of the truths of faith, of rituals, of rules and functions - are ways of guaranteeing the continuity of the charism of salvation, a vigorous force that flows beyond the institutionalizations and calls for new forms of expression, especially when these institutionalizations crystallize, or for some reason enter into crisis.*

*The prophet is the bearer of the charism who wants to return to the first sources in the name of fidelity that has been lost, forgotten, misrepresented, or worn out; he is the renewer from the ground up*".<sup>13</sup>

Son of a Christian father, not religious, and a mother of much faith and religiosity, I was very religious and today I am a man of faith, not very religious, deeply grateful for life and for the companion, Wanda Rohlf, that God gave me. Feeling, because of my age, that death is approaching, I am grateful for the grace of faith and I know that I will return to the ultimate Source of my life, to the Love that, here and now, sustains me. I hope that my daughter, my son-in-law and my granddaughters will always be people of faith, committed to building the Kingdom of God, and that this will be our greatest legacy.

I have great admiration for the religious institution in which I was raised, the Catholic Church, an exceptional religious and cultural heritage; but I think it needs a profound renewal and this revision of the Creed aims to contribute to this.

We have to go **back to Jesus of Nazareth**, to his example of life and the building of the Kingdom of God. The cultural and "theological" reasons were proposed in the quotations from Lenaers and Halik, which are found in the Chapter "Challenges".

We have in Pope Francis an extraordinary example of the "necessary return to Jesus of Nazareth". Many others can be found in both Catholic and Evangelical churches. On the other hand, we have, on the other hand, an extraordinary expansion of churches functioning as "franchises", or examples of "neoliberal entrepreneurship", thirsty for power and wealth.

According to Marco Grillo, *"from January 2010 to February 2017, 67,951 entities registered with the IRS under the rubric of religious or philosophical organizations; an average of 20 per day, if we only consider new groups, which are not branches of those existing ones."* (NUNES, CR, 2019, p. 11, own translation)

### **Behavioral Corollaries:**

#### **1. Love your neighbor as yourself.**

The meaning of human life is to realize oneself; therefore, to love. In other words, to translate feelings, positive emotions, into acts - according to what we naturally have best.

Be attentive to the *call to hospitality* of Louis Massignon (1883-1962; "a Catholic Muslim," in Pius XI's expression):

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<sup>13</sup> PASSOS. *Cybertheology: a great prophet has arisen among us* - salutation in honor of Pedro Casaldáliga

"to welcome the other in his specificity, as "*proprium*", as "*alter*" (and not "*aliud*"), as someone who is an impenetrable and unrepeatable mystery, by means of the gesture of approach disarmed of prejudice. This requires more than simple goodwill, but the bold gesture of "penetrating through the 'logos' into the 'mythos' of the other, lodging oneself within." (TEIXEIRA, 2012, p. 99, own translation)

## **2. He who does not love his neighbor whom he sees, how can he love God, whom he does not see?**

To treat the other as other - different, unique - and as brother. We are brothers, by close origin - as *homo sapiens* -, and by ultimate and first origin: God. By reinforcement of revelation, also brothers in Jesus Christ.

## **3. To believe in God and in Jesus of Nazareth, is to conform to Him, to act like Him.**

It is not to adhere to dogmas, norms, rituals, which are social, historical, changeable, provisional creations that, if they do not adapt to the times, expire and lose the richness of their original formulation.

I understand that to be conformed to Jesus of Nazareth is to be conformed to his life, values, and attitudes, summarized in the Beatitudes and the Kingdom of God. Option for the most needy, abandoned, rejected, decriminalized... for the poorest of the poor, mercy, willingness to serve, justice, feelings and attitudes - it is a program for a lifetime. A goal to be pursued for a lifetime. Three *theological* virtues: faith, hope and love.

"The fundamental options from which Jesus lives his life and in which we find the fundamental options of God himself are the following:

- the preferential option for the poor as a concretization of the option for the unjust;

I agree with the Sri Lankan theologian Aloysius Pieris that "there is something in Jesus' message that is unique: the irrevocable covenant between God and the poor, regardless of what religion they may belong to; outside of God's covenant with the poor there is no salvation.

In other words: to turn, with-passion, to the poor is to humanize/divine oneself, individually and collectively.

- the option for mercy and against all legalism;
- the option for service and against power;
- the option for justice and against all oppression;
- the option for life." (BLANK, 2001, p.84, own translation)

*"I remember a conversation I had with the top leader of an evangelical denomination. I was telling him about what I was seeing in Rio de Janeiro underground, about my perplexity in face of the misery, the abuse of power and the indifference of the public power to the cause of the socially excluded. That was when he told me: 'Nothing you have said has touched me. None of it moves me. It was clear to me that he saw the misfortune of the poor as the responsibility of the poor, and as romantic, naive, and unbiblical my concern for social justice.'" (COSTA, 2018, p. 67-68, own translation)*

#### **4. Commit to building the Kingdom of God.**

It is not about the Church, nor religion; it is about creating a more human world, the utopia of Jesus of Nazareth, the pride, one day, of men and of God. For the Christian situated at the social base, his adherence to the options of Jesus of Nazareth is facilitated and naturalized by his own social insertion: solidarity among the poor is a matter of survival, even if conforming to Jesus goes beyond class identifications and aspirations.

Conforming to Jesus encounters a barrier that is difficult to overcome for all those who have money and power - ideology. I use the term here in a very simple sense. Every social group elaborates, or unconsciously incorporates, social explanations that serve to explain and justify their social insertion, their socially privileged situation. Those who have money and power (values that are almost always associated), the more they have, the more they need to explain and justify their accumulation, in contrast with the proportional reduction of the same values in the power of others. We all know that this relationship, in its entirety, is proportional: when few have much, many have little. (In 2019, 6 Brazilians appropriated value equivalent to the gain of 100 million other Brazilians). From a Christian point of view, it is not easy to explain and justify this fact and the social framework that supports it.

*"A fully textualized reading of the New Testament must approach 'the reality of Empire' as 'an omnipresent, inevitable, and overwhelming sociopolitical reality.... '... a compact system of exploitation of the vast majority by the ruling classes.'" (ELLIOTT, 2010, p. 29, own translation)*

**"Empire crosses all borders, distorts identities, subverts cultures, subordinates nation-states, and marginalizes or co-opts religious communities"** (World Alliance of Reformed Churches - WARC -Accra, Ghana, 2004, own translation)

Judaism and Christianity, by origin and historical sensitivity to the marginalized and exploited "people of God" - the root of their Scriptures - should have radical dislike for any empire; an anti-imperialism bias!

As a Christian, the unfair, oppressive social situation that leaves many of my brothers, children of the same Father, hungry, bothers me deeply. (None of this has to do with depression and unhappiness - they are shadows in my happiness, or *thorns in my flesh*, like Paul of Tarsus).

I don't have the courage to follow the advice of Jesus of Nazareth: "*Go, sell all you have, give to the poor; come and follow me.*" I know, perfectly well, that He was not advising this to everyone, but His "provocation" bothers me.

The building of the Kingdom of God - a society where all are effectively brothers, children of the same God/Father/Mother/Love - is a challenge, and I have to give my share of contribution. And one cannot forget what Paul said, in his First Letter to the Corinthians (13:30): "*even if I distribute all my goods to the hungry ... if I lack love I profit nothing by it.*"

Just to clarify: my "sins" only bother me as failures with my relatives, friends, call center operators... With respect to God, I know that my sins are already forgiven, before I see them as such, because He knows what nature He made me: precarious, limited, growing, where error, sin, is part of learning.

A sin bothers me when I practice it: judging others, which is not easy; when one diverges, ideologically, the divergence is radical. I try to avoid judgment, but I feel the coexistence is thorny.

Being the first chapter of the *Nicene Creed*, in which I have to "confess" what I believe, I could not avoid talking about someone, with whom I identify and who recognizes that he does not have life in himself, but in the source of Life, of being, of Love.

**5. We have to rescue our flesh, elevated, in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, to the sacredness of the Absolute, of the Transcendent, of Love.**

To value *eros*, the vital impulse, whose radicality and depth was revealed through psychoanalysis, or the psycho-auto-analysis of the true creator of everything (TCE), in the expression of Miguel Nicolelis. Rediscover joy, good humor, the need for pleasure. (I recommend Matthew Fox's book: "Sins of the Spirit, Blessings of the Flesh").

*"Julius Wilson shows us what is at stake when one neglects the flesh. To deny a person decent work and pay, clean water and medical care, shelter and security, is to curse his existence. 'Curses on flesh,' could well be the name of the new system, which uses new technologies but maintains the old imperial slave/manager relationship to destroy flesh - human and more-than-human - in the name of global profitability. It is in our flesh that we bear the curses of spiritual sins - the poor suffer from more disease and live less time than the well-off."* (FOX, 2004 p. 21)

**6. Those who don't know God, or "don't recognize Him", can perfectly well save themselves.**



I lived some years of my life with a "missionary spirit", concerned with the salvation of atheists. Today I see the fact as a "problem" for them and for God. To conform to one's own nature is to comply with God's will; it is to save oneself. I have great admiration for agnostics, like scientist Marcelo Gleiser. The meaning one gives to one's life, regardless of motivation, takes precedence over knowing/recognizing God. I think that Schillebeeckx and Lenaers, quoted in the introduction of this chapter, are absolutely right; after all, thousands of generations lived before Jesus of Nazareth and even before monotheism. Religious plurality is an asset. Christianity was an important social, religious and cultural construction, but it has "lost validity". It is over.

Christianism and the Catholic Church, where I am situated, have to reinvent themselves. Its whole language, as we showed before, has to be revised. We believe that a contribution can be found here, by revising the *Nicene Creed*.

As the theologian Jürgen Moltmann said: *"History is the place of memory, of hope, of the authentic meaning of human living"*.

Like Luc Ferry, I feel the loneliness of being human, *homo sapiens et demens*:

*"Not only am I immersed, from the origin of my life, in a world that I neither wanted nor created, but, in addition, the meaning of my birth and death escapes me. No doubt I can learn the scientific conditions, analyze the process of reproduction or the aging of cells. But nothing in the biological approach, however pertinent and interesting it may be, will allow me to control the miracle of life, nor the meaning of my finitude.*

I also share with the French philosopher the conviction that we are participating in a *"slow process of humanization of the divine and, in parallel, a slow and inexorable divinization of the human that we are witnessing, that birth of modern love, whose specificities the historians of mentalities have recently taught us to decipher."* (FERRY, 2010, p. 49 ff, own translation)



## CHAPTER 20

### **IBELIEVE: I COMMIT MYSELF!**

*"God, the name by which we call upon you  
It is as dead, empty, and lapsed,  
as any human word.  
We ask you to regain strength  
as a name full of promise,  
as a living word."*

Huub Oosterhuis - poet and writer (1933)

*"God's chosen ones are the commoners and the despicable.  
They can be Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Atheists, or whatever.  
If they are plebeian and despicable, they are God's chosen ones.  
That's faith now."*

(HINKELAMMERT, 2012, p. 101)

*"My candles were consumed by the crucifix.  
In the street there was a poor  
with their shattered boots.  
And I turned to pray to the wooden Christ.  
I did not know how to pray, Lord, To your Love, in the flesh!"*

Caryll Houselander, English writer (1901-1954)

*"It is clearly perceived, in theology and in the Church,  
the predominance of being over acting. Which is nothing other  
but to defend the determining importance of the  
speculative thinking over historical thinking.  
To put it differently, means to convince ourselves that the  
important in life is theory, not praxis,  
what you 'think', not what you 'do'."*

(CASTILLO, 2017, p. 122)

*"Christ has no hands. He has only our hands  
to build a new world where justice dwells  
Christ has no lips to proclaim to the poor  
the good news of freedom."*

Unknown

***Umbutu:** "a person is a person through other people" and is,  
in this relationship of dependence, that we truly become human beings,  
That is, I do not exist because I think; however, I exist because I belong; and because I belong, I love."*

(GULONDA, 2018)

139 years ago, the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), analyzing the culture of his time, denounced the prevailing nihilism, putting into the mouth of a madman his perhaps most famous phrase: **God is dead!**

*"The mad man launched himself into their midst and pierced them with his gaze. "Where has God gone?" he shouted. "I'll tell you in a minute! We killed him - you and I. We are all his murderers! But how did we do that? How did we manage to drink the sea entirely? Who gave us the sponge to blot out the horizon? What have we done, by untying the earth from its sun? Where does it move now? Where do we move?" (Nietzsche: The Gaia Science p. 125 -1882, own translation)*

We know that the philosopher had in mind the belief in a God that alienates man from his reality, projecting the real into another life. For Frédéric Lenoir, *"borrowing the shocking expression "death of God" from the German poet Johan Paul Friedrich Richter, Nietzsche wants to show the extent of the "catastrophe" that means the end of a whole system of values inherited from the Christian faith and, even further, from Judaism and Platonism."* (LENOIR, 2013, p. 151, own translation)

Our reflections thus far on the **Nicene Creed** make it clear that faith is by no means incompatible with all the achievements of modernity. They also make clear that religious formulations require updating, since many of them were formulated in the context of pre-scientific knowledge.

This "God", thus expressed, was dead for Nietzsche, as indeed it is for the intellectual world, in general, of many religious denominations.

*"The rain of the gods falls from the heavens on the tomb of God who has survived his own death. Atheists have their saints and blasphemers build temples"* (L. Kolakowski). Several authors have been characterizing and studying this resurgence of the religious phenomenon. "Rumor of the angels" (P. Berger); "the party of the revelers" (H. Cox); "The revenge of the Sacred" (L. Kolakowski); "The enigma of religion" (R. Alves) and many other expressions translate this noisy awakening of the religious, to the point of occupying the TV screens in front of millions or even billions of viewers (electronic church)". (LIBÂNIO, 1990, p. 33, own translation)

For historian Karen Armstrong: *"We cannot be religious like our ancestors in the pre-modern conservative world, when the myths and rituals of faith helped the devout to accept the limitations inherent in agrarian civilization. We are forward-looking, and the rationalism of the modern world makes it difficult for us to understand the old forms of spirituality."* (ARMSTRONG, 2009, p. 485, own translation)

May these reflections, as Vito Mancuso intended when he wrote the book "God and I: a guide for the perplexed", *"...contribute to enabling the contemporary mind to think of God and the world, God and I, **together** as a single supreme mystery, that of the generation of life, intelligence, freedom, goodness, love. For me, this is the only authentic way to be faithful to both God and the world, and to achieve that inner serenity which is a true treasure in heaven, 'where neither moth nor rust corrodes, where thieves neither break in nor steal'". Because, the master continued, 'where your treasure is, there your heart will be also'".* (MANCUSO, 2014, p. 17, own translation)

To delineate the experience of God that we try to approach, Raimon Panikkar, doctor of philosophy, science and theology, suggested the following formula:

**E = e.m.i.r**

*"What we call experience (E) is a combination of personal, ineffable, each time unique. therefore unrepeatable experience (e) conveyed by our memory (m), shaped by our interpretation (i) and conditioned by our reception (r) in the cultural ensemble of our time." (PANIKKAR, 2007, p. 58, own translation)*

The ecotheologist Michael Dowd believes that *"...today, the Christian movement is still in the elementary stages of trying to sort out for itself and for the world the consequences of the Gospel. There is little doubt that the greatest and boldest confessions of faith are in the future, not the past."* (MORWOOD, 2013, p. 130, own translation)

In recent years, theologians, philosophers, sociologists and historians have been surprised by the emergence of an unexpected phenomenon: **God is back!**

### **That God is back? And who are His devotees?**

We saw in the previous chapter how numerous, somewhat predictable "religious experiments" have emerged in post-modernity, in which, as Marshall Berman put it, *"all that is solid crumbles in space,"* or, as Gianni Vattimo described it, paraphrasing Karl Marx:

*"Finished with the idea of a central rationality of history, the world of generalized communication explodes as a multiplicity of local rationalities-ethnic, sexual, religious, cultural, and aesthetic minorities-take the floor, finally no longer silenced and repressed by the idea that there was only one form of true humanity to be realized." (FERREIRA, 2017, p. 19, own translation)*

*"In post-modernity, with the culture of choice, of the plurality of offers, beliefs participate in the same game and, with this, Christianity has lost that situation of cultural privilege. Today there is a dispute for the faithful through persuasion or even seduction". In this "supermarket of faith "individuals develop a true strategy of choice from subjective criteria of economy, status, pleasure and self-recognition." (FERREIRA, 2017, p. 19 ff, own translation)*

**"Fundamentalism,"** Armstrong comments, *"is just one of those modern religious experiments that has had some success in putting faith back on the international agenda," but has converted "its complex mythology into a compact ideology." "All have cast aside teachings of tolerance and compassion and cultivated theologies of anger, resentment, and revenge...." "These theologies and ideologies are based on fear....". "This campaign for the resacralization of society has become aggressive and distorted." (ARMSTRONG, 2009, p. 485ff, own translation)*

For historian and theologian John Eagleton, *"Christian fundamentalism seeks to restore order, chastity, frugality, hard work, self-discipline, and responsibility, all of which are values that godless consumerism threatens to banish. In some respects, its critique of the status quo is quite correct, which many liberals will refuse to accept. Fundamentalism offers a cure even worse than the disease.*

*Fundamentalists, for the most part, are those whom capitalism has left behind, the one whose trust capitalism has betrayed, as it will betray that of anyone and anything that no longer generates profit.*" (EAGLETON, 2011, p. 47, own translation)

For the Slovenian philosopher and psychoanalyst Slavoj Žižek, one should not allow the enemy to define the terrain of the struggle:

"...what we should do is reverse the strategy, fully defending what we are accused of: yes, there is the direct lineage between Christianity and Marxism: yes, Christianity and Marxism should fight on the same side of the barricade against the furious onslaught of the new spiritualisms - the authentic Christian legacy is too precious to be left to fundamentalist fanatics." (ŽIZEK, 2015, p. 26, own translation)

Comments the theologian Paulo Süss:

*"A world without borders generates identity crises, insecurity and solution [...]. Fundamentalism proposes the reconstruction of shattered identities and the return of lost security. The return to 'great discipline,' the desire for 'doctrinal manuals,' and the request for a 'normative catechism' all point in the same direction of the security and identity of the 'religious home. The violence that fundamentalist groups are capable of generating is proportional to the anguish, insecurity, and fear of which they are victims.*

*"In a sense all closed pastoral projects that function as islands of salvation in the sea of the lost world, as 'reductions' or laboratory of evangelization, disconnected from the macro structural and micro structurally disjointed context, can be considered fundamentalist projects."* (CATELLO, 2005, p. 43, own translation)

The English historian, Karen Armstrong, ends her compelling book "A History of God: Four Millennia of Searching in Judaism, Christianity and Islam" with the following observation and reflection:

*"In the United States we have seen that 99% of the population say they believe in God, but the prevalence of fundamentalism, apocalypticism and 'instant' charismatic forms of religiosity in the country is not at all reassuring. The escalating crime rate, drug addiction, and the resurrection of the death penalty are not signs of a spiritually healthy society. In Europe, there is a growing void where once there was God in human consciousness.*

*Human beings cannot endure emptiness and desolation; they fill the vacuum by creating new foci of meaning. The idols of fundamentalism are not good substitutes for God; if we want to create a vibrant new faith for the twenty-first century, we must perhaps study the history of God for some cautionary lessons."* (ARMSTRONG, 1994, p. 398, own translation)

These new devotees, paradoxically "deniers," are present and militant in the major religions. "Outside the Church, no salvation"; "only Jesus saves"; "Islam is the only true religion" (61:9); *the "party of God"* that will be victorious in the end (5:56); "jihad is our way, martyrdom is our desire."

Surely, on this path, *homo sapiens* will not be happier, which is certainly the will of the One who brought us Life.

Fundamentalism, as a social phenomenon, raises a radical question: what is **faith and what is it for?**

I share the thought of the theologian José M. Castillo:

*"Jesus' answer is very clear: you will find God to the extent (and only to the extent) that you devote yourself to making that life more bearable for all who suffer, for whatever reason. That is why Jesus solemnly affirms that the Kingdom of God is for the poor (Lk 6:20) and for those who are persecuted, mistreated and offended (Mt 5:10-11). For we know all too well that the poor, the persecuted, the defamed and deprived of their rights, are the ones who, in general, suffer most in this world.*

*I dream of the religion of those who make people smile, even if those who do it are crying inside. I dream of a more bearable world and a more tolerable life. The world and the life that are built by those who, in any situation, manage to make others feel better every day.*

*Happiness is **not imposed** by decree, **nor is it taught** as a doctrine. Happiness is **contagious**, that is, the person who is happy makes those around him happy. The ability to spread happiness is crucial for those who want to talk about God".* (CASTILLO, 2011, p. 124, own translation)

*[Amen! - said my wife, drawing to the side, as I finished dictating this quote to the computer. ]*

I am a man of faith: I believe. I think the following quote from Roger Lenaers comes very close to what I think and feel:

*"We are a spark of the way God expresses himself, that is, God belongs to the definition of our being and that we must look at each other from God. We exist only according to the measure of his presence in our depth, therefore, according to the measure of our love.*

*Believing, as Roger Lenaers said, is a rational process without existential depth. Believing in someone is a dynamic process that emerges from our depths, supposes involvement, and **includes commitment, surrender, and adherence.**"* (NUNES, 2019, Jesus of Nazareth, p. 201, own translation)

"Crer" (believe) comes from the Latin "*credere*", consisting of cor+dare = give (dar) your heart (coração) to someone. This someone, for me, is **Jesus of Nazareth**. He is my major reference: I see him as "The best among us", that is, the best that the human species has generated; the prototype of man,



where we can aspire one day to reach, proud of the species. *"So human that divine."* I am not given to speculations about his divine nature, other than to think him, imagine him, symbolize him as Love and Mae/Father (I keep the images of Father and Mae, in rotation). Chapter 09 summarizes some of my certainties and uncertainties. Jesus of Nazareth makes God closer to us. His legacy is universal, immeasurable.

The Indian Jesuit theologian, Michael Amaladoss, selected nine images of Jesus, in accordance with Christian, Hindu and Buddhist culture: Jesus the Sage, the Way, the Guru, the Satyagrahi, the Avatar, the Servant, the Compassionate, the Dancer, the Pilgrim. (AMALADOSS, 2009, p. 42)

John F. Haught, in his book *What is God: how to think about the divine*, proposes five ways of contemplating the idea of God: Depth; the Future; Freedom; Beauty and Truth. Each of the themes is treated by the presence/absence of God and religion as a search for the attribute. (HAUGHT, 2004, p. 26)

Leonardo Boff, in his book, written for Christians and non-Christians - *Christianism: The Least of the Least* - that inspired me so much - synthesizes in a very didactic and clear way six legacies of Jesus: 1) a dream - the Kingdom of God; 2) a practice - liberation/option for the most oppressed; 3) a message - the Our Father and Our Bread; 4) an ethic - unlimited love and mercy; 5) a destination (I would say a warning) - the execution of the liberator; 6) an anticipation - the resurrection just begun. (BOFF, 2011, p. 88)

The parable of the useless servant (Lk 17:5-10), for Schillebeeckx, is perhaps the most shocking, in the context of Jewish spirituality in Jesus' time. Graig Keener concludes his commentary on this passage from Luke: "faith grows as we use it as servants: the purpose of faith is to serve-it is never an end in itself." (KEENER, 2017, p. 265, own translation)

For the theologian José Comblin, *"The novelty of Christianity is not a desire for the infinite, it is the love of finite things, the love of things that pass... Man was made to live the eternal in the succession and in the instant that passes. It is not by distancing himself from things that pass that he is reunited with God. On the contrary, it is by plunging into them, grasping them, embracing them fully. Salvation does not come to transform our vocation, it comes to save it. The newness consists in continuing to struggle on behalf of the poor and the marginalized, despite knowing that there is no "final solution", because in this struggle God's presence in history is revealed. This consists in affirming that the crucified one, defeated by the empire that proclaimed itself absolute, is the Messiah."* (HOORNAERT, 2012, p. 153, own translation)

The challenges that today's world poses for Christians and other humanists are enormous. Journalist Naomi Klein (\*1970) states that the current situation in the United States *"is the product of powerful systems of thought that classify human life based on race, religion, gender, sexual orientation,*

*appearance, and physical abilities, and that have systematically used race as a weapon to advance inhumane economic policies since the earliest days of colonization in North America and the transatlantic slave trade." (KLEIN, 2017, p. 20, own translation)*

Brazil's situation, in this particular regard, would be nothing better, considering that *"the most terrible of our heritages is that of always carrying with us the scar of a torturer, imprinted in the soul ready to explode in racist and classist brutality.*

"...at the end of the twentieth century, Brazil remains, in E. Hobsbawm's words, *"a monument to social neglect."* (RUBIO, 2021, p. 18, own translation)

Or, as our sociologist Jessé de Souza said:

*"...Brazilian history can be analyzed not only as an incomplete process of universal recognition, but also as a deliberate political project to prevent the social recognition of the class/race of the excluded and marginalized.*

*Every time a government intends to socially and politically include the marginalized black and poor class/race, we invariably have a coup d'état to prevent this from happening. This is the real Brazilian social, moral, and political backwardness. Everything else is secondary..." (SOUZA, 2021, p. 111-112, own translation)*

For our scientist Miguel Nicolelis, we are on the edge of an abyss: *"a widely accepted and dominating worldview that can only be described as a new religious cult, which aims to control every aspect of life.*

It docks:

- a **financial vision of the human universe** - the "Church of the Market," with its god money, and "the great casino of world finance," which proposes to monetize all aspects of life. "The ethical values of the new deity sanctified by man can be summarized as unlimited greed translated by the unrelenting and unrelenting search for infinite profits."
- the **Cult of Machines** - *"The hidden logic behind the adoption of "smart" technologies can be described as follows: if a company demonstrates that a piece of software, or a "smart" robot, is capable of doing the work of an experienced worker, the advantage the company gains in negotiating wages and benefits with its workforce becomes enormous and almost impossible to counterbalance the workers. Demeaning the human being and his mental and physical capabilities by pronouncing-and supposedly demonstrating-that a piece of metal or a few lines of*

*programming are capable of performing tasks more efficiently than those responsible for them in the past is a very well thought-out strategy of the world capital elite and large corporations to raise their profits to infinity." (NICOLELIS, 2020, p. 352, own translation)*

It is reassuring to see Pope Francis focusing on the **care of the common home** (Laudato Si'), **fraternal coexistence** (Fratelli Tutti), and the call, especially of young economists, to formulate a socially just and economically viable economy.

Speaking at the Third Meeting with Popular Social Movements in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia in 2015), Pope Francis said:

*"...I want to call them social poets, and list some indispensable tasks to walk towards a human alternative in the face of the globalization of indifference:*

- a) put the economy at the service of the people;*
- b) to build social justice, the basis of peace;*
- c) to care for the Common House, the earth." (BOFF, 2018, p. 150, own translation)*

*"According to economist Ladislau Dowbor, at the current stage of capitalism, 'there is no reason to have misery on the planet. If we divide the 85 trillion dollars that we have in world GDP by the population, this is equivalent to 15 thousand Reals per month, per family of four. This is more than enough for everyone to live in a dignified and 'comfortable' way. Today, according to FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations), 851 million people go hungry. The world population is 7.6 billion people, and the planet produces enough food for 11 billion mouths. So there is no lack of resources, there is a lack of justice. Just as there is no lack of money, there is a lack of sharing."<sup>14</sup>*

Hugo Assmann and Jung Mo Sung comment:

"All available financial resources today revolve on themselves, in a kind of self-centeredness in the pure world of finance, without any direct link to the plan of production and distribution of utilities required by human needs." (ASSMANN 2010, p. 29, own translation)

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<sup>14</sup> Frei BETTO. *Pope Proposes New Economy* - 20/02/2020 - Brasil de Fato

"...neoliberalism is not just an economic scheme, it is an epistemology, that is, a way of organizing thought." (LANCELLOTTI, 2021, p. 148, own translation)

For Dr. Maria Lucia Santaella, "we are not living in the *Anthropocene*, properly speaking, but in the *Capitalocene* ." ( USIMINOS, Newsletter IHU, 20/07/22, own translation)

### **What are my evaluation criteria?**

"Every time you did it to one of these least of my brothers-the hungry, the thirsty, the imprisoned, and the naked-you did it to me." (Mt 25:40).

As Terry Eagleton, professor of cultural theory, put it:

"We are not saved by a special apparatus known as religion, but by the qualities of our everyday relationships with one another. It was Christianity, not the French intelligentsia, that invented the concept of everyday life." (EAGLETON, 2011, p. 28, own translation)

*Is a society that accumulates wealth in the hands of a few, reducing jobs, a humane society? Can we condone this? As Prof. Darcy Ribeiro used to say: 'There are only two options in life: resign or be indignant. And I will never resign.'*

"Logics of domination tend to consider their victims as guilty and the sacrificing dominators as innocent. it is what we can call"- says Jung Mo Sung-"sacrificial inversion"

For the theologian Hugo Assmann, "the essential novelty of the Christian message, precisely because it (Christianism) seeks to introduce into history brotherly love for all, consists in the brotherly affirmation: the victims are innocent and no excuse or pretext justifies their victimization." (SUN, 2002, p. 16, own translation)

As Pastor Ronilso Pacheco put it, "*we need the insurgent prophets, who see no possibility of a palace benefit... Let us go on stirring up the world, like Silas and Paul in the book of Acts... Confronting the real demons operating from the state, the market, the law, and religion, of which racism and violence seem to be the main ones.*" (PACHECO, 2019, p. 31, own translation)

*The legacy "resurrection just begun", or a life trying to follow Jesus of Nazareth, knowing that, like Him, we can even feel abandoned by God, leads us to the question: **What then? What will come? What is waiting for me?***

One of the things I learned most in this Creed study script was the addition of a promising question: If everything that is created, is created in an evolutionary way, why won't each *homo sapiens* - with so many unique "fingerprints" by body and soul - continue to evolve after physical

death? I don't know how, but I am convinced that my evolution will continue after my death, which is coming soon...

*"If the mind is not considered identical with its physical substrate, there is also a reasonable possibility that this process of moral and mental growth can be continued after the death of the body."* (HÖSLE, 2022, p. 14, own translation)

The following is a reflection by Prof. Leonardo Boff, in his book *"The Common House, Spirituality, Love"*:

***Dying is like being born*** (BOFF, 2017, p. 56 ff)

*"Death is similar to birth. At birth, the child abandons the nurturing matrix that after nine months had become suffocating and exhausted the possibilities of intrauterine life.*

*The child goes through a violent crisis: it is squeezed from all sides, pushed and ejected into the world. He barely knows what awaits him: a reality vaster than his mother's womb, full of broad horizons and unlimited possibilities for communication.*

*When dying, the human being goes through a similar crisis: he weakens, gradually loses his breath, agonizes, and is, as it were, torn away from this world. Little does he know that he will burst into a much wider world than the one he has just left.*

*Since its nature is made of relations, its capacity for communication will extend infinitely. The placenta of the newborn baby, at death, is no longer constituted by the narrow limits of the man-body, nor by space-time, but by the globality of the entire universe. At death we penetrate into the heart of the universe where all links and nexuses meet. We will be one with the All, where God has his permanent presence.*

*By dying, we have just been fully born. And as the Cuban poet would say, "To die is to close our eyes in order to see better," to grasp all reality and contemplate God himself."*



## CHAPTER 21

# THE "CATHOLIC PACKAGE"

*"Don't dwell on past things,  
don't fixate on old events.  
Behold, I am doing something new,  
right now it's sprouting, don't you notice it?"*

(Prophet Isaiah 43:18-19)

*"Religions are necessarily cultural constructs and,  
therefore historical, relative, and provisional. What often paralyzes us  
is that, with the intention of exalting the Gospel,  
we degrade it. It is quite common, in religious environments,  
to identify the Good News of Jesus with cultural construction  
which is the Christian religion. Man was made to live the eternal  
in the succession and in the passing instant. It is not moving away  
From the things that pass that he is reunited with God."*

(Sebastião Gameleira Soares, in *HOONAERT*, 2012, p. 99)

*"Amazingly, we are not saved by an special apparatus  
known as religion, but by the quality  
of our daily relationships with each other.  
God, whom Jesus calls Father, 'is not a judge, nor a patriarch,  
neither accuser, nor superego, but lover, friend,  
'companion of the accused and defense counsel. '"*

(Eagleton, 2011, p. 31)

*"'Paradise' is to be understood as the goal of happiness of creation, for God did not want to put perfection at the beginning, but at the end."*

(GRESHAKE, 2010, p. 31)

*"So that the world exists, and exists for itself, God has denied his own being; he has stripped himself of his divinity to welcome him back from the odyssey of time. God cannot call back your renunciation and your stripping, neither systematically nor eventually."*

(GRESHAKE, 2010, p. 43).

*"...the Christian tradition has not been properly aware that Jesus was the one who brought the greatest happiness to human beings. Jesus spoke so that eschatological happiness (Is 35 and 61) is realized 'now' and 'already', (Mt 11:5; Lk 7:22). The Beatitudes, as a catalog of virtues, 'one of the most brilliant texts and liberators of Christianity, became one of the heavier and more inexplicable burdens than us, Christians, we have to endure.'"*

(CASTILLO, 2011, p. 75)

*"Christianism now has a second chance. A combination of circumstances makes possible a new perspective, which may be more like the first three centuries and less with that of the last fifteen."*

(FOX, 2004, p. 79)



*"Oh, if black people would draw mists from their Ethiopia,  
and spent in Brazil, he knew well how much he owed to God,  
and his most holy Mother for what may seem like a banishment,  
captivity and disgrace, and it is but a miracle, and a great miracle."*

(Father Antônio Vieira (1608 -1697))

*"The more a Church is able to integrate  
the element of critical and intelligent reflection  
in its own institutional framework, greater  
its chance to survive the conditions of modernity."*

(HÖSLE, 2022, p. 22)

Andrés Torres Queiruga, "one of the main European theologians, professor of Philosophy of Religion at the University of Santiago de Compostela" comments:

*"The entire current structure of Christian theology is designed to orient our attention, our interests and our concerns upward, toward the divine and the heavenly; while the human, that which lives and is generated in our surroundings, on this earth, is always conditioned to a project that ends in heaven. That is why ecclesiology, the doctrine of the sacraments, theological anthropology and eschatology are, in short, pieces of an ideological construction designed to confront and solve problems that, in the final analysis, are not problems of this world, but of the beyond design; designs and wills of a reality of a higher life that we never know for sure what it is. It is humanization always as a function of divinization, so that the human is all the better the more divine it becomes, the more it is oriented toward the divine; which is to say that the natural is always in tension toward the Supernatural. "*

Educator Michael Morwood, in his book *The Catholic of Tomorrow*, presents an interesting chart of the "Catholic package", which we presented in Chapter 1. Since the graph speaks for itself, we present it again here:



We saw in Chapter 17 how the Catholic narrative, predominant for centuries, rests on a very simple scheme that is easy to translate into popular catechesis:

**creation - paradise (happiness) - sin (evil/suffering) - promise of salvation -Messiah (salvation) - death of Messiah (Son of God) - redemption from sin (Redemption) - church (salvation on earth) - paradise (eternal salvation)**

It is a set of values, beliefs, doctrines, and rituals that make up the social phenomenon known as religion.

According to theologian John Bowker, "...religions are, at best, information processing systems. They are living structures with boundaries built up, sometimes over the course of many centuries, for the purpose of encoding, storing, retrieving, and transmitting to the next generation some kind of very important information.

Such information is usually explicitly linked with some notion of revelation. It answers questions about the ultimate meaning of life and, in so doing, shapes the identity of individuals. It answers decisively the need to be loved or forgiven and the longing to discover the purpose of the universe. Religions attend to the most irremovable limits of life: fate, guilt, meaninglessness, and death." (HAUGHT, 1998, p. 83, own translation)

The information, in this case:

- a. It has to be sorted and processed if it is to have any meaning;
- b. requires a certain degree of stability;
- c. doctrinal, ritualistic, and scriptural boundaries are needed to protect information about ultimate issues that each considers important enough to be passed on to the next generation of believers... Some religions treat their boundaries more categorically than others;
- d. contains some elements of unpredictability, as predicted by the information theory;
- e. have a tendency for repetitiveness/redundancy.

Too much novelty would lead to chaos, but without an opening for surprise, a religious system ends up suffocating the traditional information it seeks to convey.

The "Catholic package", like the other "packages" of other Christian churches, rest, roughly speaking, on **some assumptions**:

- **a heteronomous world view** - which supposes the existence of another world (the "sky"), which produces *prescriptions* for ours and on which we are dependent - not recognizing the autonomy of the universe, with its own laws (see Chapter 1);
- **a literal reading of the Bible** (see Chapters 14 and 15):
- *"The texts of Holy Scripture are not literally the words of God, nor are they infallible. They represent the earliest collection of texts by which the early Church accomplished the crystallization of its own faith."* (LENAERS, 2010, p. 53, own translation)
- **the catechism's treatment of Jesus and his role in history.**

In Him we find: Jesus of Nazareth takes upon himself the sin of all men and offers himself in sacrifice for all.

"By his most holy passion on the wood of the Cross he merited justification for us," the Council of Trent teaches us, stressing the unique character of Christ's sacrifice as the principle of eternal salvation.

- **the mistaken claim of exclusivity of revelation** (see chapter 11 and following);
- **the disregard of the historical character of the human being and his reading of events.**

Before talking about the **components** of the "Catholic package", let's see how the **Catholic theologian José Castillo**, in his book *The Humanity of God*, quoted below, analyzes this **way of thinking**, its **origin, consequences** and **how to overcome it**. (CASTILLO, 2011, p. 36)

"The fundamental conviction that runs through these practices and ideas is summed up in an underlying criterion that is the key to everything else; it is the idea according to which **God is not found in the relationship with the human, but in the 'submission to the divine' through the domination and even the mortification of everything that expresses our clumsy humanity**. This idea ultimately expresses and infects an organizing criterion for life, coexistence, and society. This criterion is based on the conviction **that the human being is vitiated by sin, the major cause of our confrontation with God**. In this way, as we subdue the human, limit and renounce it, then, and only then, can we encounter God, relate to Him, and receive His benefits, which will finally lead us to salvation". (p. 36)

#### **Where does this way of thinking come from?**

From Jesus Nazareth and the Gospels it certainly is not! Then, where does it come from?

For Castilho, there are two characters that marked the original movement of Christianity: Jesus and Paul. Who really occupies the center of the Church? Jesus and his Gospel, or Paul and his theology? (p. 125). The author has no doubts:

*"...the original movement of Christianity, in which the center was Jesus and his message, has shifted to a Christianity in which the center has turned out to be the risen Christ, Redeemer, Messiah, and Lord, of whom the Apostle Paul speaks continually."* (p. 40)

The **decisive influence that the Apostle Paul had on** fundamental issues is well known:

1. the inculturation of Christianity into the world of Hellenistic culture;
2. the universalization of Christianity which, through Paul's fruitful activity, ceased to be a small sect of the Judaism of Palestine and became a universal religion.

It is worth remembering other facts:

- a. Paul's first letters began to be spread throughout the empire twenty or thirty years before the Gospels;
- b. It is important to remember that Paul did not know the earthly Jesus, the Jesus of history;
- c. Christianity spread throughout the Roman Empire without having, in the great majority of its communities, any idea of the life and history of Jesus. At most, loose "sayings" and "fragments" of the accounts that were later ordered and written down in the Gospels were known. This means that most of the early Christians were

formed and organized as Christians without being able to know the humanity of Jesus.

It is thus evident that Christianity can survive and spread as one more religion, a religion of redemption, centered on the "other life". **Not as a way of living** (the way of life, lived and explained by Jesus), centered "in this life," with the hope in the fullness of the future resurrection obviously, but always beginning with the humanization of this world." (p. 42)

*"Paul's God hates sin, whereas Jesus' God loves the sinner. It is therefore possible to say that the center of Paul's God's concerns is sin, which breaks our relationship with the 'divine,' whereas the center of Jesus' God's concerns is 'suffering,' which breaks our (rewarding and positive) relationship with the 'human.'"* (p. 71)

Paul showed no particular interest in finding out what Jesus' earthly life was like, or what it was like. There is no mention in his letters of who crucified Jesus and why he was crucified.

*"The Apostle Paul is the clearest and most solid example of a man who started doing Christian theology without knowing the life and story of Jesus."* (p. 81)

The impact of the heavenly vision that Paul received made him aware that right there he had received the heavenly charge and appointment to be an apostle and, indeed, "apostle to the Gentiles. Logically, Paul did not see this election as a decision of the earthly Jesus, but of the resurrected, glorious, heavenly Christ." (p. 43)

**From these facts**, among others, it **follows** that in nascent Christianity, in its early years, **two ways of understanding Jesus** and all that Jesus represents for Christians and for the Church emerged.

- On one side are the Gospels, which, as we know, focused on the life and teachings of Jesus: earthly, historical, human, and therefore an immanent being, for this very reason linked (and inseparably linked) to what is proper to our earthly, mortal, human condition.
- On the other side, Paul's letters were also known, which centered on the risen Christ and, therefore, did not locate the center of Christianity in this world, in our earth and our immanence, but in the transcendence of the "*other life*", that is, in the life after this life, where is Jesus, the Lord, the Messiah, the Son of God. (p. 45)

Another reason: Paul, for some time, as well as the first generation of Christians, believed that the second coming of Jesus was imminent.

**Conclusion: the church "lives fractured, disoriented,** because in it coexist *images of God* that do not fit together, that cannot coincide, from which it inevitably follows that, if in Christian beliefs we have "**two representations of God**", inevitably "**two life projects**" also coexist.

- **A project that can be deduced from Paul's theology** is that which springs from a God who wants to save us from the miseries and sins of this life in order to take us to heaven. It is a project that is attainable through the acceptance and observance of the saving event par excellence: the death of Christ on the cross, actualized in the *ritual of the sacrifice*, with all that this supposes and demands of obedience, submission, and death.
- **Another project** springs from the life and story of a humble peasant in first century Galilee. It is the project **deducible from the way of life, *the life project, that led Jesus of Nazareth, "anointed by God with the power of the Holy Spirit, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil"* (Acts 10:38).**

In this case, the saving event par excellence is not focused on a *religious and sacred ritual*, but on a **life project centered on ethical integrity.**" (p. 72)

Sociologist and thinker Frédéric Lenoir comments:

*"The great paradox, the supreme irony of history, is that the modern emergence of secularism, of human rights, of freedom of conscience, and everything that emerged in the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries against the will of the clergy, was produced through the implicit and explicit recourse to the original message of the Gospels. In other words, what I call here "the philosophy of Christ", his most fundamental ethical teachings, did not reach men through the door of the church, but through the window of the humanism of the Renaissance and the Illustration. During these three centuries, while the ecclesiastical institution crucified Christ's teaching on human dignity and freedom of conscience through inquisitorial practice, Jesus was resurrected through humanisms."* (CASTILLO, 2017, p. 63, own translation)

As you can see, **revelation** can come from where you least expect it! (Cf. previous chapters)

José M. Castillo concludes his book *The Humanity of Jesus* with the following statement: "*We can only find the fullness of the divine in the fullness of the human. This, according to my convictions, was the direction indicated and the path taken by Jesus*". (p. 130)

**Overcoming these conditioning factors** is complex and demands commitment, since the roots are centuries old:

- the "basic truths" are firmly rooted;

- the changes require a process of re-education for which adequate instruments are lacking - like the catechumenate in the early church. Sunday homilies are insufficient and the texts of the readings inadequate;
- resistance from conservatives, ultra-conservatives, and fundamentalists, for religious, economic, and political reasons (defense of privileges);
- the official teaching of the Church has ignored - as in the Catechism - the scholarship of the Church and reflects a fundamentalist and literalist approach in the way it quotes Scripture.

For Christians, who are estranged from Christianity, or former Christians, for doctrinal reasons, it is good to remember that Mary, the mother of Jesus, the Apostles, and certainly the first two generations of Christians, believed basically nothing of what is in the Nicene Creed.

Christian theologians have reviewed each of the concepts in the "package". One of the historians (?), quoted in the bibliography, goes so far as to say: "*when the Church still spoke of 'novissimus'*", referring to the general silence on heaven, hell and purgatory.

Let's see how theologians, especially Roger Lenaers (LENAERS, 2010), talk about some of the concepts in the "package":

## 1. Sin

*"The concept of sin occupies a central place in the Christian doctrine of faith. From it derive important concepts such as those of redemption, forgiveness, justification, hereditary sin, and everything else that is linked to sin, as well as other less important concepts such as punishment of sin, penance, mortification, indulgence, purgatory, and hell. Confession falls within this context. The fundamentally heteronomous character of these concepts makes them obsolete. (p. 219)*

*Due to its very ancient past, the concept of sin was configured in a completely heteronomous environment, as an expression of the awareness of a distressing disturbance of the most important relationship for the human being: the relationship with the origin and foundation of his existence, God.*

*Like everything we say about God, this expression too has been fashioned in figurative language, and implies the contravention by human beings of the prescriptions of an omniscient one. In doing so, the human being arouses the righteous wrath of the potentate, bears a guilt and can count on a punishment. This image comes from experience with earthly potentates. Experience teaches that, as the refrain goes, 'it is not good to sit at the table with great lords' (for they give the rules of the game; disobeying them provokes their wrath, and they cannot be met with impunity). The same is believed to be true of God. As long as he is not forgiven by God, the sinner feels like a threat hanging over his life.*

*Thus, the concept of sin is immersed in an unfriendly atmosphere, characterized by threat and danger, due to the context of aroused anger and coming punishment. Human beings desire to be free from this threat, and therefore seek to make peace with God. He knows how to appease the wrath of the earthly potentates: he must humble himself, confess his guilt, show repentance or contrition, beg for forgiveness, offer gifts, all with the aim of eliminating the bad mood and recovering, partially or completely, the lost good will, so as to get rid of the pending punishment. Now, what succeeds among humans must also succeed with this anthropomorphic God. In religion, **the** sacrifice of atonement corresponds to the offering of gifts. (p. 220)*

*This analysis reveals not only the heteronomous character of the concept of sin but also of the other concepts in the semantic field of sin, such as guilt, punishment, atonement, repentance, contrition, forgiveness, remission of guilt or debt, good intention. The whole arsenal finds sustenance only within the heteronomous image of God as the worldly master." (p. 221)*

*"...notes A. Gerché, in the Christian West there seems to predominate a tendency toward excessive culpability. We blame others and institutions, and we also seek the culprit within ourselves. Prisoners that we are of a moralism of culpability. Is it necessary to always feel guilty in order to combat evil and violence?" (RUBIO 2021, p. 149-150, own translation)*

## **2. Contrition/Pardon**

*A careful analysis of the human process that we call **forgiveness** shows that we cannot simply extend the concept to correspond to what happens between God, with the name of creative love, and the human being.*

*To forgive is not to consent to this inclination, not to take revenge, not to repay the other with the same coin, to act as if nothing happened. This is magnanimity, but it presupposes a previous pettiness, the feeling of offense, the impression that my being so precarious is in some kind of danger. Now, how is it possible to attribute such a reaction to God? He is not offended by what we do, often in a situation of lack of freedom. He is pure radiance, always inclined toward our good, not toward himself. Theonomically speaking, with regard to God one cannot speak of forgiveness. Add the fact that God has no way to pretend that nothing happened. He is the absolute reality. What happened, happened and cannot be denied. To erase the past is a human gesture, which cannot be attributed to God.*

*The word "**contrition**" comes from the Latin verb *contero*, which means to tear, to shred, a word that can evoke pain in the soul. It is something quite different from the acknowledgement of a fault with the request for forgiveness and remission of the penalty.*



*Contrition means pain, not so much in that superficial layer of our being where we experience material greed, prestige, or health, but in the deeper layers, where we suffer because of the end of a human relationship, or because we have lost a loved one that, rightly or wrongly, we held to be absolutely necessary for our own happiness. Contrition is lived there where we grieve, where we mourn for someone.*

*Originally, it has nothing to do with fear of sanctions, punishments, or other unpleasant things, although this meaning is gradually replacing the original one. The primary meaning is the painful awareness of being separated from our indispensable fundamental origin, and therefore from our wholeness, by giving ourselves over to the inverse of our own affirmation. Thus, constriction comes to be a call of the desire for conversion. We mourn and feel the desire to turn back." (p. 225)*

### **3. Confession**

*"The very name of the sacrament, confession, betrays its heteronomous origin. It is about confessing one's guilt and, therefore, belongs to the juridical domain. Let us add that the word is concatenated with a negative sphere of feelings and submerged in an aura of fear, aversion, shame, and not in the beneficent and luminous aura of healing, of renewal, of wholeness on God's part, which attracts us and which we need as the dry field needs the rain. So the sacrament needs both another name and another form." (p. 226)*

### **4. Asceticism / penance**

*For the theologian José María Castillo, "Christian spirituality has been characterized by detachment and renunciation of the goods of this world and by an austere system of life; however, it has not used to question the causes of oppression and exploitation suffered by the poor, the immigrants, the marginalized, and the socially excluded. Thus, for centuries, we have had a spirituality more concerned with the virtue of poverty than with the sufferings of the poor, that is, a spirituality more interested in the holiness of the "spiritual" than in the hunger of the "needy", a real disaster.*

*It is not about substituting asceticism for social struggle. It is about being truly free and being willing to alleviate and, if possible, suppress the pain and humiliation of the victims of this world." (CASTILLO, 2011, p. 27, own translation)*

*For José Comblin, "what is new in Christianity is not the desire for the infinite, it is the love of finite things, the love of things that pass. Man was created, precisely, to live the eternal, to love God, in the dimension of time, passing and letting himself pass, and forcing the passage. Man was made to live the eternal in the succession and in the passing instant. It is not by turning away from things that pass that he is reunited with God." (HOONAERT, 2010, p. 153, own translation)*

## 5. Prayer /petition

Returning to the considerations of the theologian Roger Lenaers in his book *Another Christianity is Possible*:

*"We must preserve, from a theonomic perspective, the rich experiences made by humanity through petition prayer, as well as the phenomenon of heard prayer.*

*The theonomic perspective or representation will first cut out the childish exessions of the prayer of petition (and they are not few), such as invoking Saint Anthony when losing the key, or the magical idea that there are prayers of guaranteed effectiveness, either because of their form - the strong prayers - or because they are repeated according to a certain pattern - as in the case of novenas and trezenas. (p. 241-242)*

*There is no Other living somewhere up there whom we can motivate to do something for us. It makes more sense to say that this Other is attracting us and moving us towards him since forever. This attraction is the counterpart of our desire, and the two fit together perfectly.*

*This means that we are heard whenever we ask for this meeting, because such a petition is already the beginning of the realization of this meeting. Such an idea coincides with Jesus' words in Luke 11:13, that without a doubt God will give his spirit to whoever asks for it. On the other hand, union with God is the only reality that can really be the object of our desire and therefore deserves to be the object of our petition, for we are destined for this encounter.*

*We have reached it so far in a very insufficient way, which explains our dissatisfaction. And the experience of becoming conscious by the way of petition opens up the fullness for us." (242-243)*

Luc Ferry comments:

*"To respond to the anguish inherent in the loneliness of the human being one must admit the 'postulate' of a personal God, who loves us, cares for us and gives us immortality... It confirms in a worrying way for 'traditional' Christians Voltaire's sentence: 'by wanting too much to make God an answer to man's expectations, one runs the risk of reducing him to a simple subjective projection of our needs.'*

*We produced the idea that we needed and, forgetting the process of production, we gave in to the illusion of the objective existence of the product." (FERRY, 1998, p. 83, own translation)*

## 6. Miracles

*" 'The miracle of birth' is a wise phrase, pointing us to a healthy theology of miracles.*

*Miracles become problems when we think of them as demonstrating divine power by intervening in the world in whatever way God wishes. The problems are not merely scientific, but also theological and moral. Nothing challenges the goodness of God or the justice of the universe more than the complete randomness of these so-called miracles.*

*Nothing makes God seem more cruel and unjust than the idea that He miraculously saved a passenger from a plane crash that killed hundreds. A negligent theology of miracles can be cruelly rude."*

An example of mistaken theology is from the science journalist - this is how he introduces himself in the "ear" of the book - Fred Heeren, who wrote:

*"Once we accept the idea that the universe had a first cause we must also accept the fact that all the miracles in the bible (from the opening of the Red Sea to the resurrection of Jesus Christ) are perfectly plausible and easily explainable. What could be so difficult for the God who created the whole universe?" (HEEREN, 2008, p. 123, own translation)*

Ponder Robert Mesle, professor of philosophy and religion:

*"Morally we can portray a divine love so great that in every event and at every moment, God is doing everything within his power to bring about something good, eagerly calling us to the cooperation of all who will respond. But God works with a world in which the ability to act is both fundamental and irrevocable, for God cannot force the decisions of the world. Scientifically, we can see here a God acting in everything, so that there are no **isolated** events that are 'acts of God' that fall outside the course of nature. The crucial view here is that of divine power as always present and active, but as always, inevitably Inter-related to the causal forces of the world." (MESLE, 2013, p. 194)*

## **7. Immortality**

Hope in **immortality** is not a condition for believing in God joyfully and living according to a high ethic thanks to this reunion with God. Israel did so for almost a thousand years, while all the cultures around them cultivated some form of faith in immortality.

"We should be willing to build here an experience full of meaning and significance, even without eternal life, and to lay aside all expectations and pretensions concerning such a future. Having done so, there is nothing to prevent us from receiving this eternal life into ourselves as a surprising and undeserved gift, in whatever form it is offered to us." (p. 159)

One can draw on the reflections of philosophers such as Lévinas and Whitehead. In its modern formulation, this certainty, full of confidence, teaches that God's love - another name for the essence of

God - does not pass unnoticed by us, but rather takes on a specific form and figure in us. Our love is, at the same time, a mark of his being in the depth of ours. And this mark participates in his eternity.

Nothing that happens to us, which is therefore temporal and conditioned, is able to separate us from it, that is, to dampen or drown the growth of love in us. Not even death. Nor does it change anything in the reality of our small or great union with the divine mystery. (p. 163)

*"Dios esta patente en el ser mismo del hombre - como fundamentante. El hombre consiste en estar viviendo de Dios, y, portanto, siendo en El."* (Xavier ZUBIRI)

Modernity is certainly right when it states that biochemically determined consciousness ends with biochemical death. However, it does not follow from this that it is meaningless to speak of peace, light, consolation, bliss, to go beyond this boundary. (p. 164)

*"Ludwig Feuerbach, in his chapter on the belief in immortality, presented a correct interpretation when he considers God the unrevealed heaven and the true heaven the revealed God. Indeed, God and heaven are identical: 'In the present God is the kingdom of heaven, in the future heaven is God'"* (KÜNG, 1992, p. 186)

If union with the love that is God is not exactly the same as what we call **heaven or eternal joy**, then there simply is no heaven at all.

## **8. Heaven / purgatory / hell ("novissimos")**

Back to Roger Lenaers:

No part of Christian doctrine has been shaken up and thrown around like the doctrine on the "newnesses". If, regrettably, there is no alternative but to renounce the trip to the other world because that other world has disappeared, what then remains of the reliability of Holy Scripture and the rest of the tradition in this field?

It all happens because of modernity. Leaving aside Epicureanism, all antiquity and even more so the Middle Ages considered the continuation of life after death obvious, no matter how. Death was regarded as a frontier, but never the final station. (p. 157)

Modern Western culture represents a real mutation in human evolution, and not only at the level of technique. It is the only culture that has broken through the shell of a pre-scientific, and therefore mythological, view of the world. It became aware of the autonomy of the universe and of the human being, and understood the consequences of all this. It said goodbye to a world outside our own and to the God who lived in it.

Without biochemistry there is no life, and without a brain there is no consciousness. And death is the irrevocable end of all biochemical processes. To speak of an eternal life with bliss or torments, with reward or punishment, makes no sense when there is no longer consciousness.

The Christian of old had no idea how indebted he was, in his own believing representations, to the philosophical ideas of the pagan Greeks. The Greek thinkers convinced Christians that soul and body belonged to two different worlds, and that at death each went its own way: the body returns to the earth, from which it was taken, while the immortal soul goes to the other world, in which it originated and where everything is eternal. (p. 158)

**How, then, can one believe in Jesus Christ as a living, conscious being? Are we facing a dead end?**

It is possible to reconcile both things and still remain in the line of tradition, despite the disappearance of the other world and the finalization of the chemical substrate of consciousness. However, it will be necessary to reformulate the theme (p. 159).

*"Heaven - eternal reward - this concept, too, is a diluted expression of something else, namely love, the quintessence of goodness, the only thing profitable and worth coveting. But it becomes pure mythology when we take the words 'heaven' or 'paradise' as descriptive language, and uncritically transplant it into what will come to us if we let ourselves be gripped by love. **Heaven is not a place, it is a way of being.***

*Thus is dissolved that pole opposite to heaven called **hell**. Its status became difficult long ago in the modern faith-consciousness. For half a century it has been marginalized.*

*What is true for hell in a way is also true for **purgatory**, which has no basis in Scripture.*

*In a theonomic way of thinking, not only hell must disappear, but also purgatory, with its spurious derivations. For when, in this mentality, one speaks of God, the word punishment is absolutely meaningless. Punishment is a human work, born in its turn from the need to direct things in this world in some way to the right paths, and from the impossibility of achieving it in any other way than by means of sanctions. Because punishment is so primitive, it is also completely inappropriate to describe God's relationship with human beings*

*So there is no place in theonomic thinking either for hell as punishment or for heaven as reward." (p. 168)*

The theologian Hans Küng (KÜNG, 1992, p. 198, own translation) asks:

***"Is it possible to overcome that hell story?"***

*"The answer can only be given, if we go back to the origin and if we take as reference the one in whose name all this was staged, Jesus of Nazareth. If we look at Jesus, we find that he **did not preach hell**, although he talked about hell and shared the apocalyptic ideas of his contemporaries. Nowhere does Jesus show a direct interest in hell. His message is not a threatening message, but a message of joy. Man must trust in this message, in God himself, who does not deceive." (p. 188)*

*"Regardless of the interpretation of Holy Scripture, the 'eternity' of the punishment of hell can in no way be understood as absolute. It is a contradiction to believe in divine love and mercy and simultaneously accept the existence of a place of eternal suffering. No, the 'punishment of hell' like everything else in God, is subordinate to the will and magnanimity of God.*

*Will all men - even the great criminals of universal history, such as Hitler and Stalin - be saved? A double delimitation becomes necessary, namely:*

- *we cannot assume that all men are destined for beatitude, which does not do justice to the seriousness of life, to the significance of ethical decisions, nor to the weight of one's responsibility;*
- *Nor can we start from the opposite presupposition, of a positive predestination of a part of humanity to damnation. Some would be predestined to divine salvation, others to damnation.*

*To be honest this question has to be left open, as there are no uniform statements in the New Testament. We should take seriously two trends - the **personal responsibility of each Man and the divine grace, which falls on all Men.**" (205)*

The Creed does not end with the mention of death, the devil, or hell, but with the mention of the resurrection of the dead and eternal life.

*"I believe with a sensible confidence, with an enlightened faith, or a proven hope that the kingdom of perfection is not a human kingdom, but the kingdom of God, the kingdom of ultimate salvation, of justice fulfilled, of total freedom, of one truth, of universal peace, of infinite love and overflowing joy, yes, of eternal life." (p. 210)*

## **9. Eternal life**

*"...death is not to be feared, it is only a passage, for we are an eternal fragment of the cosmos." (FERRY, 2010, p. 42, own translation)*

With the word of two feminist theologians (LA DUC, 2007, p. 214 ff):

Rosemary Radford Ruether (\*1936) says that women are less concerned about personal

immortality, but she ponders: *"Isn't our calling to be interested in the eternal meaning of our life? And shouldn't religion make this the focus of its message? Our responsibility is to use our life time to create a just and good community for our generation and our children. It is in the hands of Holy Wisdom to create, from our finite struggle, truth and being for eternal life."*

Elizabeth A. Johnson (\*1941), while considering it *"extremely difficult to say anything concrete about our destiny after death ... we simply do not know what is in store for us"* argues: *"What occurs during a person's history does not disappear into nothingness as if the person had become extinct, but neither does he continue to exist in another temporal state. Instead, as an intrinsic moment in death itself, people recapitulate themselves in a free self-affirmation, in a radical endorsement of the fundamental choice of their life, and thus complete themselves in God[...]. Perhaps our final purification is realized in the moment after our death by a kind of cauterizing encounter with Divinity."*

Brother David Steindl-Rast, a Benedictine monk, has written the book *Beyond Words: Living the Apostolic Creed, with a preface by His Holiness the Dalai Lama*. A learned and poetic book, written from the heart. The following quote is from the monk:

*"Faith in ETERNAL LIFE still belongs to that part of the Creed which begins with BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT. Spirit is LIFE, and faith in life is the culmination of faith in the Spirit.*

*ETERNAL is a mistaken construction of this phrase in the original text of the Creed. It suggests endless time, whereas the Latin 'vitam aeternam' could be more accurately translated as 'beyond time', that is, life free from the limitations of time.*

*This article of faith does not bind us to any particular image, or theory of 'life after death'. It is not tied to the 'after', but expresses a commitment to life [...] in abundance (John 10:10). The life to which we joyfully commit in this final phase of the Creed is not tied to any 'before' or 'after', but is life that is free from bondage to the past and the future. Let us celebrate that LIFE here - wherever we are - and in the great*

*NOW that dissolves time."* (STEINDL-RAST, 2014, p. 191)

*"In all our expressions concerning eternal life, we must not lose sight of the fact that we are awkwardly pointing to the good - completely unknowable, but indispensable and unlimited - of becoming one with God, and therefore to the fullness that love can attain in us.*

*Eternal life begins right away. Sometimes the well-being and richness of eternal life ascend into our psyche in the form of inner peace, meaning, liberation, joy, and all of this has no source other than detachment. "* (p. 165)

Believing in **eternal life** is the same as believing in God, in other words. Believing in God is the same as becoming one with the original mystery, for believing is an attitude of praise and love, a dynamic process of surrender, loss of self and unification. Whoever confesses, together with the Christian tradition, that the best way to point to the essence of the original mystery is the concept of love, should also confess that the more love grows, the greater the union with God, and the greater the participation in his reality, despite biological death. Here ceases our ability to describe reality more accurately. (p. 163)

*"What we have just said started from the fact that we are, not a spirit soul inhabiting a body, but a spark of the way God expresses himself...God belongs to the definition of our being and we must look at each other from God. We are this expression of God not as self (ego) but as humanity.*

*Just as a tree constantly produces new leaves to reach its full form, so God's full universe produces ever more human beings to be ever more divine, ever more love. We belong forever and eternally to the whole, and each of us participates in our own way in the richness of the whole."* (p. 166)

For philosopher Luc Ferry:

*"One must no longer look for the divine in some grandiose term, situated radically outside humanity, but in the love that is found in the heart of each of us. 'Only love,' Drewermann wrote, 'believes in immortality. We can only discover this next to a person who loves us, in the same way that we love. One can only reach the heavens with two...'"* (FERRY, 2010, p.76)

For physicist and Alternative Nobel Peace Prize winner Hans-Peter Dürr:

*"What the theologian calls the 'breath of God' is a fundamental structure that occurs also in the description of the natural sciences. There is not the immaterial as opposed to the material. Everything is, so to speak, 'breath of God. The essential thing behind everything is therefore the spirit, which is concretizing ever anew in the process of evolution."* (LIMBECK, 2016, p. 109)

*"We should be happy that not everyone is Christian, or Jewish, or Buddhist, because these different religions have enabled us to explore and preserve a wider range of values and traditions than any one religion alone could."* (MESLE, 2013, p. 206)

*"Globalization means: cultures civilize each other."* (SLOTERDIJK, 2019, p. 200, own translation)

"I am convinced" - writes the philosopher Gianni Vattimo - "that the history of salvation announced by the Bible takes place in the events of human history... it passes through us through the events of modernity and eventually its crisis. A history of salvation that occurs today as the spiritualization of Christianity." (VATTIMO, 2004, p. 55, own translation)



"As in the case of other world religions, Christianity has split into a variety of sectarian subsystems, whose doctrinal boundaries in many cases have become so hardened as to make dialogue extremely difficult." (HAUGHT, 1998, p. 181, own translation)

"...a very large number of Christians have fallen into the trap of blatantly ideological versions of the Gospel, that is, versions that in one way or another are manipulated by what St. John darkly calls the 'powers of the world.'" (EAGLETON, 2011, p. 60, own translation)

The Catholic Church in recent years, especially since John XXIII, with ups and downs, has been trying to modernize itself and review its theology. The process is slow, not very daring, and its consequences in practice - in the revision of doctrinal texts and in the liturgy - are practically imperceptible. It is rare to hear a sermon, in a mass, that is even remotely compatible with the knowledge one already has about Jesus of Nazareth and the New Testament.

There is agreement among the most lucid Christians that salvation is to **return to Jesus of Nazareth.**

**As there is no way to peace - peace is the way - so there is no way to the kingdom of God - the kingdom of God is the way. "And our end," as St. Augustine put it, "is no more than to arrive at the kingdom that has no end."**

Pope Francis strategically, in my assessment, avoids theoretical debate and turns to action, calling on Christianity and humanity in general to turn to the **common home** and **universal brotherhood.**

His project for a human-oriented and self-sustaining economy, which has received the support of internationally renowned economists, is only just beginning. An extremely necessary, timely, and urgent project.

"The accumulation of power and wealth in the hand of a few, leaving 820 million people hungry, 1.2 billion with moderate forms of food insecurity, alongside 830 million obese people." (FAO Report, from 18/08/2019)

*"The current face of the God to whom most believers adhere is that of a totally loving, enveloping, good, protective being, in short, maternal! The traditional figure of the 'father God,' who dictates the law and punishes sinners, has progressively transferred to the figure of a 'mother God' who gives love and comforts... The cult of the Virgin Mary long ago came to compensate in Catholicism for the masculine excess."* (LENOIR, 2013, p. 210, own translation)

*"Faith, hope, love - this is the expression of the meaning of life for Christians, 'but most important is love' (1 Cor 13:13). Being a Christian can mean a widening, a deepening, a rooting, yes, a*

*radicalization of the quality of human existence, justifying human existence in faith in God and following the model of life of Jesus of Nazareth." (KÜNG, 1992, p. 216, own translation)*

Comments José Antonio Pagola:

*"Leading experts in the human sciences assure us that, generally speaking, most people only live ten percent or even less than they could live and enjoy.*

*We see only a small part of the beauty that surrounds us. We hear only a few fragments of the music, poetry, and life that resonate around us.*

*We are only open to a very limited field of emotions, feelings and thoughts. Our heart knows only a part of the possible experiences of tenderness and love.*

*I am convinced that this is so. Many people have died without having really lived with a certain intensity. Something similar happens to many believers. They died without having known, through personal experience, what could have been for them a life animated by faith." (PAGOLA, 2010, p. 124, own translation)*

And why not think that life, in death, as in birth, assumes another way of being in order to realize all the potential that each one had and did not realize?

The first word of the Creed is "I"; the last, "Amen" reverberates with the "we" of the community. Jews and Muslims also summarize their faith in the same word: AMEN. In this way, the three Amen traditions of the West together form a wider circle of shared faith. Moreover, AMEN is linked to *Aum* or *Om*, the sacred syllable of an even wider community. Among Hindus, Jains, and Buddhists, *Om* also expresses approval and blessing and unites us with the one who utters it with faith at the ultimate horizon of human experience, as AMEN does.

*"In Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, we hear the famous melody of Schiller's "Ode to Joy," at first softly, almost inaudibly, in the bass part, but gradually each instrument comes in and even the chorus of human voices joins in and repeats it triumphantly. In a similar way, each spiritual tradition takes the theme of faith and gives it expression in its own voice, through its own specific beliefs.*

*Only the entire orchestra of the world's spiritual traditions can adequately produce the HONEY sound of human faith in response to God's faithfulness." (STEINDL-RAST, 2014, p. 195, own translation)*

Catholic theologian Stephen C. Rowan, in his book on the Nicene Creed<sup>15</sup>, states that creeds can only serve any useful purpose today if they are appreciated as metaphor and poetry. Poetry, he says,

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<sup>15</sup> *Nicene Creed: poetic words for a prosaic world*

is not a less exact form of language, but more, and we need to learn to 'simply read symbolic language. The time has come to reclaim the term 'Path' for Christianity and 'followers of the path' for Christians. (COX, 2015, p. 106)

*"...Tradition as such is not an argument, but there is a wealth of arguments belonging to tradition that deserves to be taken as seriously as those circulating today."* (ÖSLE, 2022, p. 162, own translation).

*"New dogmas, renewed formulations, real evolutions and progress are constant features of Christianity, as of all religions. No one knows how Christianity will appear when the waters of faith will unite with those of other religions to form a more flowing river where the peoples of the future will quench their thirst for truth, goodness, and salvation."* (PANIKKAR **in** TEIXEIRA, 2012, p. 83, own translation)



# POST SCRIPTUM

*"Should the Church remain stagnant in the rigid posture of defensor of dogmas, it tends not to respond to the present time. So that "to save Christianity, in what is essential and valuable about it, Gianni Vattimo advocates the stripping of Christianity of all its institutional coatings and power apparatuses. Converted into a community that lives charity and solidarity, in respect for differences, Christianity will be able to effectively realize the utopia of its vocation as a universal religion."*

*(John Mac Dowell in FERREIRA, 2015, p. 115)*

I have just reviewed this book - following the other two: *Jesus of Nazareth* and *Christianism: from Jewish sect to official religion of the empire*, - on Holy Thursday and was ready to contemplatively attend the Good Friday ceremonies.

I was surprised by Cardinal Raniero Cantalamessa's preaching in St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican.

I believe that the preaching of the despoiled monk/cardinal was an exceptional reading of the **Christian creed** for today. For this reason, I take the liberty of publishing it as **Post Scriptum**, which shows Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, messenger and message of the Father - "the rest are mere details".

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## **Good Friday sermon**

*(Friar Raniero Cantalamessa, OFM Cap, 04/15/2022, own translation)*

*"Of the Passion narrative, the evangelist John gives particular importance to Jesus' dialogue with Pilate, and it is on this that we want to reflect for a few minutes before continuing with our liturgy.*

*It all begins with Pilate's question, 'Are you the King of the Jews?' (John 18:33) Jesus wants to make Pilate understand that the question is more serious than he thinks, but that it has a meaning only*

*if it does not simply repeat an accusation by others. So he asks in turn, 'Do you say this for yourself, or have others told you this about me? '*

*He seeks to lead Pilate to a higher vision. He speaks of his kingdom: a kingdom which is 'not of this world'. The prosecutor understands only one thing: that it is not a political kingdom. If one wants to talk about religion, he doesn't want to get into that kind of question. So he asks with obvious irony: 'So you are a king? Jesus answered, 'You say that I am king.' (Jn 18:37)*

*Declaring himself king, Jesus exposes himself to death; but, instead of apologizing by denying it, he strongly affirms it. He lets his superior origin flow: 'I have come into the world.... ': therefore, he mysteriously existed before earthly life, he comes from another world. He came to earth to be a witness to the truth. He treats Pilate as a soul in need of light and truth, not as a judge. He is interested in the fate of the man Pilate, more than in his own. With his appeal to receive the truth, he wants to induce him to return to himself, to look at things with a different eye, to place himself above the momentary contention with the Jews.*

*The Roman Procurator grasps the invitation Jesus addresses to him, but is skeptical and indifferent about this kind of speculation. The mystery he glimpses in Jesus' words causes him fear and he prefers to end the dialogue. So he mutters to himself, shrugging his shoulders, 'What is truth? ', and leaves the Praetorium.*

*How current is this page of the Gospel! Today too, as in the past, man does not fail to ask himself: 'What is truth? ' But, like Pilate, he distractedly turns his back on the One who said: 'I have come into the world to bear witness to the truth,' 'I am the truth!' (Jn 14; 6)*

*On the internet I have been following countless debates about religion and science, about faith and atheism. One thing caught my attention: hours and hours of dialogue without ever mentioning the name of Jesus. And if the believing party dared to mention him and claim the fact of his resurrection from the dead, they immediately tried to end the discourse as not belonging to the topic. Everything happens "etsi Christus non daretur": as if a man named Jesus Christ had never existed in the world.*

*What is the result of this? The word "God" becomes an empty vessel that everyone can fill at will. But precisely because of this, God took care to give some content to his name himself: "The Word became flesh. Truth became flesh! Hence the strenuous effort to leave Jesus out of the discourse about God: he takes away from human pride every pretext for deciding for oneself what God is!*

*Ah, right: Jesus of Nazareth! 'But some people doubt even that he existed! ' A well-known English writer of the last century - known to the general public for being the author of the 'Lord of the Rings' cycle of novels and films, John Ronald Tolkien - in a letter, gave this answer to his son, who presented him with the same objection: It takes an extraordinary will of non-belief to suppose that Jesus never existed or that he didn't utter the words attributed to him, so much so that they are impossible to*

be invented by any other being in the world: 'Before Abraham existed, I am. (Jn 8:58); and "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn 14:9).<sup>16</sup>

*The only alternative to the truth of the Christ, the writer added, is that it is 'a case of demented megalomania and gigantic fraud'. Could such a case, however, stand for twenty centuries of relentless historical and philosophical criticism and produce the fruit it has produced?*

*Today one goes beyond Pilate's skepticism. There are those who think that one should not even ask the question 'What is truth?', because truth simply does not exist! 'Everything is relative, nothing is certain! To think otherwise is intolerable presumption. There is no more room for 'the grand narratives about the world and about reality,' including about God and about Christ.*

*Brothers and sisters who are atheists, agnostics, or still searching (in case there is anyone listening): it is not a poor preacher like me who uttered the words I am about to say. It is someone whom many among you admire, of whom you write, and of whom, perhaps, you also consider yourselves disciples and continuers: Soeren Kierkegaard, the initiator of the philosophical current of Existentialism:*

*"There is so much talk," he says, "of human misery; there is so much talk of wasted lives. But wasted is only the life of that man who has never realized, because he has never had, in the deepest sense, the impression that there is a God and that he - just him, his ego - is before this God"<sup>17</sup>.*

*It is said that there is too much injustice and suffering in the world to believe in God! True, but let's think about how much more absurd and cause for despair the evil that surrounds us becomes, without faith in a final triumph of the truth of good. The Resurrection of Jesus from the dead, which we will celebrate in two days, is the promise is the guarantee that there will be that triumph, because it has already begun with him.*

*If I had the courage of the apostle Paul, I too would cry out: "I am going to plead with you to be reconciled to God" (2 Cor 5:20). Don't "waste" your life too! Do not leave this world as Pilate left the Praetorium, with that question in the air: 'What is truth? It is very important. It is about knowing whether we have lived for something, or in vain.*

*Jesus' dialogue with Pilate, however, offers the occasion for another reflection, aimed this time at us, the faithful and men of the Church, not at outsiders. "Your people and the chief priests have handed you over to me! Gens tua et pontifices tradiderunt te mihi" (Jn 18:35). The men of your Church, your priests have abandoned you; they have disqualified your name as horrendous perversities! And*

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. *From the Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, ed. Humphret Carpenter, with Christopher Tolkien, Houghton Mifflin 1981 (trad. Ital. , Rusconi, Milano 1990).

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Soeren Kierkegaard, *La malattia mortale*, II, in *Opere*, a cura di C.fabro, Firenze 1972, p. 633.

*should we still believe in you? Also to this terrible objection, I would like to answer with the words that the same writer mentioned he wrote to his son.*

*"Our love may be cooled and our will injured by the spectacle of the shortcomings, folly, and sins of the church and its ministers, but I do not believe that anyone who once truly believed will abandon the faith for these reasons, least of all those who have some knowledge of history ...*

*This is comfortable because it leads us to look away from ourselves and our faults and find a scapegoat... I think that I am sensitive to scandals, just as you are and any other Christian. I have suffered a lot in my life because of uneducated, tired, weak and sometimes also bad priests."*

*Such an outcome was to be expected. It started before Easter, with Judas' betrayal, Simon Peter's denial, the apostles' flight ... Weeping, then? Yes, recommended Tolkien not son - but for Jesus - for what he must endure -, rather than for us. Weep, - we add today - , with the victims and for the victims of our sins.*

*A conclusion for all, believers and non-believers alike. This year, we celebrate Easter not to the sound of bells, but with noise in our ears from bombs and explosions not far from here. Let us remember what Jesus answered one day to the news of the blood of the Galileans which Pilate had mixed with that of the sacrifices, and of the fall of the tower of Siloam: 'But if you do not repent, you will all likewise perish' (Lk 13:5). If you do not change your spears into sickles, your swords into plowshares (Is 2:4), and your missiles into factories and houses, you will all perish in the same way!*

*The events improbably reminded us of one thing. The dispositions of the world change from one day to the next. Everything passes, everything grows old: everything - not only 'happy youth' - fades away. There is only one major way to subtract from the current of time, which drags everything behind it: to pass to what does not pass! Put your feet on solid ground! Easter means 'passage': this year, let us all make a true Easter, Venerable Fathers, brothers and sisters: let us pass to that which does not pass. Let us pass it now with the heart, before passing it one day with the body! "*



# POST POST SCRIPTUM

## *Profession of Divine Faith*

*"Theology is actually poetry, poetry concerning God,  
effective not because it proves anything,  
but because it penetrates the heart".*

(Francis Petraca - poet, humanist (1304-1374))

*I believe in my Son,  
True Creator of All,<sup>18</sup>  
conceived by my Loving Spirit  
Generated in the bosom of the Cosmos,  
patiently careful  
over centuries and centuries.  
Incarnate by my Spirit,  
consubstantial to us,  
born in the bosom of the fecund Gaia.  
I believe in him, unique, free,  
master of his own destiny.*

*I hope you take care of yourself,  
taking care of each other,  
to live with me  
for all eternity!  
May you not fall into temptation  
of getting lost in its paths  
not enjoying the Good, the Beautiful, and the  
Truth.  
Tortured by hunger, cold, and violence,  
He suffered, ignored, despised and hated.  
He was crucified under a lie,*

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<sup>18</sup> Miguel Nicolelis - cf. Chap. 16

*buried by indifference and lovelessness.*

*It rises hopefully with each generation.*

*It rose to the heavens of shared love,*

*and is on my right and left.*

*May he trust in me, as I trust in him.*

*When I come back, without ever having gone,*

*to review ourselves, the living and the dead,*

*we will enjoy the fullness of Love!*

*I believe in the Holy Spirit,*

*in communion with men,*

*in the remission of sins,*

*in the resurrection of the flesh,*

*in eternal life.*

*Amen!*

# ANNEXES



# APPENDIX 1

## **Re-reading the Nicene Creed**

by Roger Lenars

*"I believe in God, infinite love  
that sovereignly expresses its deepest being  
in the evolution of the cosmos and of humanity.  
And in Jesus, our Messiah,  
unique image of God,  
born of human parents  
without being the work of man,  
entirely the fruit of God's saving grace.  
He walked the path of suffering and death,  
was crucified by order of Pontius Pilate,  
died and was buried,  
but lives in fullness  
because he opened himself and was entirely absorbed in God,  
thus becoming a healing force,  
and thus can guide the whole of humanity to its fullness.  
I believe in the inspiring action of God's breath of life  
and in the universal community of the Church  
in which Jesus, the Christ, continues to live with a human face.  
I believe in God's gift,*

*who heals us and makes us a new creation  
to become, finally, human beings.  
And I believe in the divine future of humanity,  
a future that means life without limits.  
Amen."*

## APPENDIX 2

### Poem by St. Augustine<sup>19</sup>

*"Death is nothing,  
I just passed  
to the other side of the Path..  
I am me, you are you.  
What I was to you  
I will remain  
Give me the name  
that you have always given me.  
Talk to me  
as you have always done.  
You continue living  
in the creature world,  
I am living  
in the world of the Creator.  
Pray, smile, think of me.  
Pray for me.  
Let my name be pronounced*

*as it has always been,  
without emphasis of any kind.  
Without any shadow trace  
or sadness.  
Life means everything  
it has always meant.  
The wire was not cut.  
Because I was away  
of your thoughts,  
now that I'm just out  
of your views?  
I am not far away;  
I am only  
on the other side of the Path.  
You who stayed there, move on.  
Life goes on, beautiful and beautiful  
as it always has been."*

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<sup>19</sup> Philosopher and theologian - (DOS SANTOS, Gomes, p. 112-113, 204, own translation)





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