

Eco-Spirituality
A path to integration
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Rio de Janeiro, RJ, BRAZIL

Translation by William Reinhard

Eco-Spirituality is a way of integration which leads us to an eco

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logical consciousness. Such a consciousness is more than an intellectual knowledge; it is an understanding of the heart, a wisdom which arises from within; an awareness that we are part of the planet; that we are part of one another and that together with all living beings we form the great

Community of Life

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An ecological spirituality is the beginning of a very long journey.

Just a huge tree is born from a tiny seed, the seminal experience of con

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templating my interior world and the exterior world begins to diminish to the degree that we plunge deeper into Eco-spirituality, using the path of contemplation, recognizing ourselves, in as much as living beings, as humus

, part of a whole. In other words, the duality “contemplator” and “contemplated” disappears in the unity of an integrating flux of the aware

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ness of “being a part” of a greater reality. The themes of Ecology and Eco-

spirituality are already known and there are well elaborated studies on the subject. I do not intend to bring anything new in this article but sim

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ply share what I have reflected and worked on in the area of Spirituality.

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1) In the beginning everything was good and beautiful
The creation narrative in the book of Genesis describes how God concludes each phase of the process with the words, “and everything was good” (Gn. 1,10.12.18.21.25). The text describes the beauty of the creati

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ve act. Today we understand that we are dealing here with a wondrous hymn of praise of God’s grandeur. We perceive a creating God who aban

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dons his silence and pours out his very existence, his beauty and good

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ness as a gift. Various psalms chant the deep meaning of the goodness of God which began with creation and which is prolonged throughout the history of the universe. For example, Psalm 136 (135) proclaims this marvelous beauty and goodness: “He made the heavens with wisdom because his love is eternal”.

Are we “in the beginning” where everything is good and beautiful, or “at the end” with nostalgia for everything that was good and beautiful?

Or maybe in a “crisis” where we have to recreate the beautiful, the love, the ethics, new relationships of belonging, the capacity to be captivated, to contemplate, to share, to be humanized, to belong and to be a “com-

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munity of life”.

Some symptoms of the ecological crisis which affect all living beings are: air pollution, poisoning of the oceans, all the problems resulting from various types of waste, poisoning of the soil and various challenges arising from the “green revolution”, such as transgenic plants, deforestation and desertification. And what shall we say of the degrada-

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tion of human life? Is this not a responsibility of Christians? And of other religions?

The debate cannot be purely political, technological or scientific.

It must also be religious and Christian involving people in consecrated Religious Life and also those of other spiritualities that give meaning to existence and to all things. We must understand and give new meaning to the “created”, to nature, to the universe, as well as how to conduct our lives and commit ourselves to LIFE in all its diversity.

So Eco-spirituality demands an ethical, prophetic, social, political commitment which comes not only from indignation but also from a pro-

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found experience of the God of Life, with all that “lives and breathes”

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on the face of the earth.

2) Eco-spirituality

The prefix

eco

(greek:

oikos

) means

house

, the place where one

lives.

Ecology

is the science of the interrelationships in the “house”.

Spirituality

is a gift of the Spirit who plants in our innermost being

the thirst for God, stimulates deep desires for the fullness of life for all

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Psalm 150, 5b

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creatures, provokes us to live ethically and sensibly, plunges us into the fountain of Trinitarian love and transforms us into ecological beings.

Roberto Crema thus defines Spirituality, without basing himself on any religion:

Spirituality is a unified awareness, one of participating in something greater, one which in essence is love and in practice solidarity

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According to Crema a person who has become awakened to

Spirituality is a person who does not see himself/herself as separated from the other, from the community, from the universe.

Therefore, if I feel

not-separated

, would that light a fire in my

body? Would it prevent me from urinating on a homeless person who is sleeping under a marquise? Would it prevent me from welcoming, liste

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ning to and sharing food with someone who asks for help? If I feel not-

separated

from nature, would I invade and destroy eco-systems because of a compulsive desire for progress? Would I contaminate the waters, pollute the air, devastate rivers, destroy entire species of living creatures along with our Common House? Therefore, Eco-spirituality is the interior

pathway to give new meaning to the house

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In this light we might cite from the Earth Charter: “all things are inter-related and each form of life has value, independently of its human use”.

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We have to recognize that we are dependent on one another as the threads of a giant spider-web. If one thread breaks, the entire web suffers the impact. In the web all the threads are important and none can exist without the others. They are all inter-related and are all tied together.

The

multiplicity of threads forms the unique and beautiful pattern of the web.

In the vocabulary of ecology the term

holism

, which comes from

the Greek, means totality. So everything acquires new meaning, respect and care from the moment I become aware that I am a part of a totality and that the totality is part of me.

Eco-spirituality is a way to give new meaning to spirituality, taking into consideration the challenges though which LIFE and Mother Earth passes. It is a way of living in an integrated manner, in harmony with the totality of the relationships in the house. This comes about through the caring

of and

respect

for the entire

Community of Life

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recognizing our original source from which everything comes into being, our Trinitarian God from whom we try to learn how to live relationships.

A

holistic

vision implies, in the perspective of Eco-spirituality, a new sensitivity and a new comprehension of earth and of everything that lives on earth.

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Writer, at the Universidade Holística da Paz (
<http://gaian.zip.net>

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Earth Charter

, Principles, p. 17, item a.

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Expression of the
Earth Charter

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The theologian, J. B. Libanio writes in this perspective: “the capa

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city to cultivate an inclusive attitude, which contemplates the whole and invites us to have an integrating vision, is similar to the capacity to see the unique beauty of a particular star while at the same time become fascinated by the beauty of a star-studded night.

We substitute a detailed view which dissects the reality, in order to perceive the whole in its splendid harmony. Each being sounds a note in an immense symphony . We unite two paradoxical perspectives which

converge to form one comprehension. Each being is contemplated in its individual singularity so it appears we would see an infinity of disparate points. But, in a second moment, we are united in a vision, a marvelous design of spectacular unity. It appears like a star-studded night in which we contemplate each star with its own beauty and the entire heavens in a fantastic sidereal orchestra”.

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When we understand that we belong to Earth, that we are sons and daughters of the Earth and that we ARE humus

, then our perspective

of Mother Earth, confronted with our brothers and sisters, with hunger, with social and economic exclusion, all this will be very different! We will come to understand that everything has the same fundamental DNA and that each species of living beings has its own specific alphabet. We are all earth (humus), that is, we all come from the earth and will return to the earth. Earth is not in front of us as something distinct from us. It is in us. We are earth which in its evolution has arrived at the stage of feeling, comprehension, choice, responsibility and consciousness. This “earth” was worked on by Trinitarian love, “fiber by fiber” (Psalm 139). With special care He made us in “his own image”, projecting something of himself in us. The Trinity gave a great blessing to the created world: “Increase and multiply...I formed you and consecrated you...Before your birth I already knew you”.

The path of Eco-spirituality takes into account biodiversity

and

seeks to integrate human beings with nature, from which it comes and is a part. Life and self-consciousness of life are intertwined. Spirituality is a

becoming aware of the importance and the more profound significance of the life of the planet, as well as of the meaning of the Common House.

With this I want to emphasize the importance of Eco-spirituality for inte

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gral “Life”. It is to leave behind the “center”, leave anthropocentrism and

anthropo-exclusivism in favor of an awareness of belonging.

Almost everything in the universe was made without depending on us. So what right do we have to dominate the earth, calling ourselves “owners” and “lords”, destroying it and appropriating it for ourselves, or transforming everything into chaos? We are simply

humus

for new forms

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Libanio, J.B.,

Ecologia, vida ou morte?

Paulus, Sao Paulo, 2010

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Leonardo Boff,

Eco-spiritualidade: que significa ser e sentir-se Terra?

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of life. But a common future, ours and that of our Common House - Earth,

depends on us.

“Feeling ourselves as sons and daughters of Earth, being the thinking and loving Earth, we experience it as Mother. She is the generative begin

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ning. She represents the Feminine which conceives, nurtures and gives birth. She thus emerges as the archetype, the Great Mother, Pacha Mama and Nana. Just as everything generates and delivers life, she also wel

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comes and receives everything in her womb. Dying we return to Mother Earth. We go back to her generous and fruitful womb.”

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3) Eco-spirituality – an integrating experience

When I woke up to the ecological reality and there sprang up in me the awareness that

Eco-spirituality

could be a way of integrating human

ecology; and if the various spiritualities were united, there would be a

possibility to save our Common House and live in brotherhood as one

great Community of Life. At that point I began to think, reflect and dare

something new in my work as a resource person. I began including an

ecological dimension to my work until I finally began to give

Ecological

Retreats

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Five years have now gone by since I began directing such

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gical retreats

, in which the goal is to offer an experience of God using

the practice of contemplation and the application of Eco-spirituality to

day-to-day life. The dynamic of the retreat is one of silence in profound

contact with God, with ones' self, and with nature in a contemplative

way.

In other words, contemplate nature, one's personal life and one's

mission

as human beings illuminated by the Word of God. This implies letting

everything pass from the

eyes

to the

heart

, from

seeing

to

feeling

, from

experiencing

each thing to being a

part of
each thing, from
touching
to
being touched

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An
ecological retreat
is a special invitation to contemplation as a
pathway of the heart and of wisdom which leads us to admire, taste, and
be captivated by the wonders of creation. It is to experience one's self as
a part of creation and sense how the Lord is good.
Contemplation is a pathway which internally opens us to the beau

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tiful, to caring, to welcoming the good, to dialogue, to relationships, to a
new perspective on life, to the feeling of belonging, to reverence before
the mystery of life, of otherness, of the Great Other – God, the Trinity.

The invitation is :

“Remove your sandals because you are standing on sacred land.

Remove your sandals because the other is sacred space inhabited by
God.

Remove your sandals because biodiversity is sacred, inhabited by God.

It

is part of your life and you are part of its life.

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Contemplation is the space of integration with all of creation and
with the Creator, in the Son, Jesus, the firstborn of all creation. In his
letter to the Colossians Paul writes: “He is the image of the invisible
God,

the first-born of all creation, for it is in Him that all things were created
in heaven and on earth...for God desired that the plenitude of life should
dwell in him, and that through him God would reconcile with Himself
everything on earth and in heaven (Cl 1, 15-20).

All creatures and the universe are
sacred

, inhabited by the Trinitarian Word. In him dwells the plenitude of Life and He, by the Incarnation, dwells in our world as Firstborn. The world is saturated and penetrated by the Creator, “Logos”, the link which binds and unites everything in heaven and on earth. In this Trinitarian communion of the Father, and of the Son, in the Vivifying Spirit, we are called to commu-

nion in plurality and our differences. Creation has its place in God and he dwells in it, his ecological Sanctuary.

Within this contemplation there emerge deep desires and calls which lead to ethical postures and attitudes – indignation confronted with injustice, inequality, the destruction of nature, the disrespect for human life, with human trafficking, with misery and all the evils which assail the Community of Life.

Contemplation makes people sensitive to injustices, depredation and to the destruction of nature. Eco-spirituality is integrating and opens us up to

solidarity

with people and with the planet. It makes us aware, makes us persons of communion, constructors of Peace and Justice.

To contemplate is to view with the heart that which the eyes do not see. It is to perceive beyond that which one sees. It is to penetrate reality with the eyes of God and with his tenderness.

Contemplation, as the pathway of the heart and of wisdom, allows us to continue striving with respect, humility, a sense of caring and peace.

Where there is wisdom born of contemplation and not waste nor exclu-

sion, there are beings in relation. When we live our essence as relational beings we become listeners of the Word, which comes to us from all beings as well as from the social networks, which are made up of a vast multiplicity of links. In this way we become

humus

, beings of commu-

nion and integration, ecological beings.

My evaluation of this experience has been positive, as I feel that its objective has been achieved. By means of contemplation an ecological

awareness is created; a spirituality of caring for the Planet, the ecosys

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tems, nature and the totality of life, feeling a part of the whole, creating a relationship of respect and sensitivity, openness and love of God-Trinity, fountain of Life. According to L. Boff

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L. Boff,

A voz do Arco Iris

, p. 133.

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“the mission of human beings resides in being able the thousand echoes which arrive from the great Voice and which resounds from one end of the universe to the other vibrating in every being. It remains for us to unite our voice to that universal echo. We are called to be part of a symphony and to venerate the Maestro of this immense cosmic orches

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tra...God, the Giver of Life and the one who attracts all things to his paternal/maternal breast.”

4) Eco-spirituality: process of humanization/interiorization

Another dimension of Eco-spirituality is one that puts us in our true interior

home

– that of human beings. It humanizes us, drawing us back

to our interior house, our real habitat. It seems that post-modern woman and man have lost the direction to their own

interior life

, to their interior

house, to intimacy. Who knows, they may have “lost the keys”,

forgotten

the “secret”, the password which opens the heart and have become lost on the enchanting and seductive path which the post-modern world offers to them. Many people no longer know how to respond to existen-

tial questions such as: who am I? what am I seeking? Where am I going? What do I really want in life?

Never before has the human species been so “connected” and at the same time so isolated. Many people do not succeed in finding the gravitational axis of their lives. Others live in an “age of emptiness” or an “ice age”, in a “liquid” culture in which relationships, values, love, ethics...are reduced to narcissism or consumerism, to superficiality and to

a society of “discardability”. It is becoming difficult or almost impossible

to enter into contact even with one’s self, with the other or with God, in a profound, simple, humanizing and spiritual way.

With respect to our Religious Institutions, how are we living as

House (

oikos

)? And with respect to ourselves, our life community, our

people? Are we part of the

exteriority syndrome

, that of emptiness, noise,

efficient administration, the “stock market”? Do we, like the

Prudent

Virgins

still bring with us the precious oil of silence, togetherness, belon-

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ging, joy, prayer, pardon, compassion, solidarity, simplicity and detach-

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ment?

A while ago, as a consulter to the VRC, a certain Provincial said,

“we have excellent professionals, administrators, pedagogues, nurses...

but few religious. Another young sister shared this with me: “I didn’t

enter Religious Life to be an administrator...I don’t find the time to pray,

rest, be by myself, share with others...”. It’s true, we reflect, pray,
evaluate

ourselves, do courses about

levity

; we discuss mystical experiences, spiri

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tuality, relationships; we go on retreats. But in what sense do we
interio

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rize

and

humanize

ourselves? Do we enter and leave these retreats with a
lightness of spirit, with joy in our hearts, our community, our prayer, our
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mission, our

House

? How can Eco-spirituality be a path to interiorization
and humanization?

Eco-spirituality puts us on the pathway to the House: in the
inti

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macy

of our

interior house

; by enabling us to create

togetherness

and

humanizing

relationships

in our

house community

; in the love of our

house/country; by capacitating us to feel that we are
sister/brother

in

the great

Community of Life

; by feeling that we are a part of the whole,

that we are ethical links and that we have the capacity to love inside
the

Common House

– the

Planet

; by plunging ourselves into the warm

and welcoming intimacy of the Trinity, the

House

from which we have

come and to which we shall return. Where life is fullness, love is
infinite,

contemplation is eternal, relationships are circular, joy is contagious and
“pericorese” is eternally ended.

To live Eco-spirituality is to allow one’s self to become pregnant
with Divine Breath, to entwine oneself in his love and embrace which
gives energy to all, for everything that

lives and breathes

on earth has but

one Father-Mother, who sustains and gives life to all.

5) Challenges which confront Eco-spirituality

1) to remove human beings from the center (anthropocentrism
and anthropo-exclusivism), human beings being ethical links and not the
center; part and not the owner; eco-relation and not unique;

2) give value to the gift of cooperation and not to the law of com

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petition, caring for the most fragile, integrating that which is
disintegrated

and that which is lost;

3) grow in generosity, welcome the different, open spaces for the

new as well as for living the mystique of
care

giving, creating networks of
solidarity, for spirituality is the most
profound dimension of the human

,
the link which unites and reunites;

4) integrate everything; a human being is a
microcosm

, part of a
whole, of a
macrocosm

;

5) re-sacralize the “houses”, the planet, Gaia, nature, the House,
the body as dwelling place of the Trinity, the heart as home of the soul;

6) assume a more simple and detached life style as nature does:
sobriety cuts evil by its roots

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The cry of Ecology and Eco-spirituality is the possibility of a new
awareness of belonging to the Universe and that the Universe is part of
us. The awareness of the communion of a human being with the totality
of Creation places us once again before an ancient challenge, the one
that

Moses placed before the people of Israel: “Behold, today I propose to

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Libânio, J.B.,

O.C.

, p 67

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you life and happiness on the one hand, death and disgrace on the other;
today I choose the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you; I
place

before you life and death, blessing and condemnation” (Dt. 30, 15, 18).

Today we find ourselves confronted with two alternatives: life or chaos. Contemplating the reality of our world today the sentiment which deeply touches our hearts is that the choice of chaos predominates, even though our reason tells us the opposite. The dominant system may not intend to create chaos, but only short term profit. But the result of this choice is chaos, for an immediatist culture has no interest in the future. Profit is now; chaos is the future. Only a clear option of life and for Life will triumph over chaos. An option which situates us within a wider horizon, within the horizon desired by Jesus: “that all may have life in abundance”. This is the horizon of hope that allows us to triumph over chaos and envisage a new future.

6) A final invitation

As I indicated in the beginning of this article, I have no pretention to present a new thesis or the latest studies on Eco-spirituality or Ecology, but simply to share what I believe, have reflected on and put into prac-

tice. We are, you and I, standing before a choice – Life or chaos. Life is a movement which spring up from within. Jesus Christ is the Alfa and the Omega, that is, the Beginning and the End, the center of all creation. To bet on Life is to believe in Jesus and choose to care for the world which one day will be transformed by the power of the Spirit. To awaken in us an awareness of the question of sustentability is a new relation with nature. It is a vital question for humanity. A new mentality is urgent if we

\do not want to contemplate “chaos” and pay the tremendous price of a death-dealing process.

It is possible to change this chaotic reality beginning with the organization of men and women in the construction of a more just and sustainable society. Sustentability and solidarity go beyond the economic.

It is a process which envisions a transformation of social, cultural, politi

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cal and productive relations, in harmony with nature and with the active participation of society. It will demand our commitment to LIFE.

It consists in rediscovering the

mystique of caring

, cultivating an

Eco-spirituality

, creating new

relationships

, feeling oneself a

part of the

whole

, being an ethical link, a link of love which unites and reunites

beginning from within, from a profound experience of Trinity, from a contemplative listening and a sensitivity rooted in solidarity.

The Planet is constantly alerting us with heat waves, draughts, giant storms and floods. But we have to educate ourselves in order to grasp the message that He transmits to us and then learn to live in com-

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munion with everything which surrounds us. We must walk with eyes Eco-Spirituality. A path to integration

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wide open and not half asleep. The entire cosmos is like a great book which has to be read.

This is my final invitation to you:

be always one with God and one with the universe and be always welcome in the House. Your home is the universe and my heart and your heart as well. The universe is my home. We are all that is, all that was and all that will be.

Questions to help an individual reading and a community sharing

1) How can Eco-spirituality contribute to a new ecological awareness?

2) What challenges must Eco-spirituality confront?

3) How do you understand: “the mystique of caring”, “sustentabili

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ty” and “being part of the whole”?

4) Concretely, in day to day living, what can you and your commu

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nity do in the area of Ecology and Eco-spirituality?

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