



ECOLOGICAL SPIRITUALITY FOR A “NEW HUMANISM”: CONTRIBUTIONS FROM TEILHARD DE CHARDIN AND POPE FRANCIS

Espiritualidade ecológica por “um novo humanismo”: aportes de Teilhard de Chardin e do Papa Francisco

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ABSTRACT: Researchers from different fields argue that civilization has unsustainable projects and has reached extreme limits in its evolutionary trajectory. One aggravating factor, among others, is the dramatic environmental crisis. Considering this situation, the research intends to offer clues for the blossoming of a new planetary consciousness to be cultivated in the form of an ecological spirituality. That’s why it’s crucial to know, at first in a succinct way, the civilizational imbalance that the Covid-19 pandemic has uncovered. Next, we turn to Teilhard de Chardin who speaks of “critical points” in the course of the evolutionary process. They signal the birth of something new, topic two. The third and fourth topics are dedicated to the contributions of Teilhard de Chardin and Pope Francis, respectively, to the deepening of a spirituality that responds to the ecological crisis and, consequently, inspires a new humanism. The most significant result of the research points to the discovery of the underlying mystical perspective in *Laudato si’*.

KEYWORDS: Teilhard de Chardin. Pope Francis. Crisis of Civilization. Ecological Spirituality. New humanism.

RESUMO: Pesquisadores de diferentes áreas sustentam que a civilização tem projetos insustentáveis e que chegou a limites extremos em sua trajetória evolutiva. Um agravante, dentre outros, é a dramática crise ambiental. Considerando esta situação, a pesquisa tenciona oferecer pistas para o desabrochar de uma nova

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consciência planetária a ser cultivada na forma de uma espiritualidade ecológica. Daí ser crucial conhecer, num primeiro momento, sucintamente, o teor do desequilíbrio civilizacional que a pandemia da Covid-19 pôs a descoberto. Em seguida, voltamo-nos para Teilhard de Chardin, que fala de “pontos críticos” no decorrer do processo evolutivo. Eles sinalizam para o nascimento de algo novo, tópico dois. O terceiro e o quarto tópicos dedicaremos às contribuições de Teilhard de Chardin e do Papa Francisco, respectivamente, para o aprofundamento de uma espiritualidade que responda à crise ecológica e, conseqüentemente, inspire um novo humanismo. Um dos resultados da pesquisa aponta para a descoberta da perspectiva mística subjacente na *Laudato si’*.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Teilhard de Chardin. Papa Francisco. Crise civilizacional. Espiritualidade ecológica. Novo humanismo.

Introduction

Different contemporary theorists — some of whom we will specify in the first topic — maintain that the world has reached extreme limits and there are clear indications that humanity is going through a “change of era”. A number of factors seem to be indicative of these suspicions: the attack of September 11, 2001, the financial crisis of 2008, geopolitical disputes, health emergencies, domination and exploitation of the environment, the omnipotence of economic power, wars, among others. This complex and challenging scenario puts us on our guard against the imbalance that *homo sapiens sapiens* has demonstrably caused as a *homo demens* and a “*homo degradandis*”¹. Added to these findings are the cruel pathologies identified by South Korean philosopher Byung-Chul Han, which dominate the 21st century: a “society of fatigue” (2015), a “palliative society” (2021), and one that promotes the “expulsion of the Other” (2022).

Pope Francis, in his social encyclical *Fratelli tutti*, about fraternity and social friendship (20.10.2020), listed “the shadows of a closed world” (n. 9-52), which testify to the tribal logic of the world. According to him, “the Covid-19 pandemic has exposed our false security. [...] Despite being over-connected, there has been a fragmentation that has made it more difficult to solve the problems that affect us all” (n. 7).

In this movement, we can see that the health situation “has forced humanity to redesign its historical and temporal categories”². It is worth noting

¹ NINIS, A. B.; BILIBIO, M. A. Homo sapiens, Homo demens e Homo degradandis: a psiquê humana e a crise ambiental. *Psicologia e Sociedade*, v. 24, n. 1, abr. 2012. Doi.org/10.1590/S0102-71822012000100006. Available at: <https://www.scielo.br/j/psoc/a/w99gpkHvMPQSsrc34MW5zWc/?lang=pt>. Accessed on: January 10, 2023.

² VILLA, G. Vírus e filosofia: uma resenha. *Instituto Humanitas Unisinos — Adital*, São Leopoldo, April 22, 2020. Available at: <http://www.ihu.unisinos.br/598236-virus-e-filosofia-uma-resenha-artigo-de-giuseppe-villa>. Accessed on: April 29, 2020.

that history and time, from the perspective of the Christian faith, carry transformative hopes, since the Word of God, who was with the Father from the beginning, “became flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn 1:14). Undoubtedly, the *chronos* is permeated by the *kairos*, a messianic time of grace, of incomprehensible gravity, incognito and of singular actuality. From a Teilhardian perspective, this time marked by salvific grace, we can say is a “Divine Medium” (2010). It is “the Divine radiating from the depths of a Matter on fire” (1976, v. 13, p. 22).

Our aim is to offer clues to the blossoming of a new planetary consciousness that fosters an incarnate ecological spirituality. In order to do this, it is first of all useful to present some thought-provoking theses that maintain that there is a “change of era” underway, a “civilizational mutation”. It will be seen that the postulates to be presented deserve different analyses. However, in the confines of an article, such a task is not feasible. Teilhard de Chardin speaks of “critical points” that humanity has crossed throughout its evolutionary history and which mark the emergence of new realities. What’s more, he points out values that human beings are called to cultivate on their journey through the “Divine Environment” and towards *becoming more*. The course of the investigation continues by seeking to offer elements for a spirituality that corresponds to the cry of contemporaneity threatened by the socio-environmental crisis, as Pope Francis denounces. In topics three and four, we try to demonstrate that the contributions of Teilhard de Chardin and the Pontiff in dialogue are outstanding contributions to the experience of an ecological spirituality that serves as inspiration for “a new humanism”.

1 The global health catastrophe: sign of a “civilizational mutation”

In 2020, SARS-CoV-2, the pathogen of the serious respiratory disease Covid-19, spread around the world. “On January 30, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC). Subsequently, on March 11, a pandemic was declared.”³ The lethal guest stopped the frenetic and insane pace of life, and humanity was forced into involuntary captivity for its survival. The consequences of the spread of the virus have drastically affected the various public spheres, especially the most vulnerable population. Nevertheless, the hopeful “solution” to eradicate the virus with the launch of some immunizers, the

³ OPAS. Organização Pan-Americana da Saúde. Organização Mundial da Saúde – Américas. *OMS declara emergência de saúde pública de importância internacional por surto de novo coronavírus*. January 30, 2020. Available at: <<https://www.paho.org/pt/news/30-1-2020-who-declares-public-health-emergency-novel-coronavirus>>. Accessed on: April 20, 2020.

belief in the power of science, was shaken, as the scientific community was unable to stop the different strains that were spreading rapidly.

The truth is that the Covid era has stripped human beings of their imagery of empowerment and domination. The director-general of the WHO, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, bluntly stated that “the Covid-19 pandemic has left no country untouched. It has humiliated us all”⁴ and “shown us that we have reached extreme limits”⁵ (BERARDI, 2021, 1h08min).

Leonardo Boff adds to this statement the idea that “the coronavirus has brought the militaristic powers to their knees, whose weapons of mass destruction (which could destroy all life, several times over) have proved totally useless” (2021a, p. 134). Emphatically, he said that it is necessary to “redefine another course [...] for our human civilization. If we don’t, we could go down a path of no return and we could put the biosphere and our existence as a species at serious risk” (2021a, p. 8).

Several thinkers have debated the consequences of this deleterious micro-organism on the population, society and the economy and have already pointed out that the post-covid era could not be the same. There are those who, in addition to these findings, have pointed to a change of era, something like the overtaking of one level of humanity’s evolution to another, to a new order, a position that we now also defend, supported by the Teilhardian scientific-mystical vision.

Physicist Luiz Alberto Oliveira speaks of a “civilizational mutation”⁶. He doesn’t deal with the subject of the health catastrophe, but glimpses a civilizational framework that is fractured in its foundations and therefore needs a “re-foundation”. The term (mutation) comes from biology. This article presents it synthetically, based on the approach developed by the scientist.

The concept refers to the process of “replication of a member of a given species [...]. If the mutation that has occurred does not prevent the continuation of the march, we will have an innovation: the previous model and the new model coexisting”. (2022, min 23-24). Throughout history, according to the physicist, new forms of life have emerged from wanderings, from drifts. In view of this scenario, he argues:

⁴ O SUL *A Organização Mundial da Saúde informou que a pandemia do coronavírus está fora de controle na maioria dos países*. Porto Alegre, July 9, 2020. Available at: <https://www.osul.com.br/a-organizacao-mundial-da-saude-informou-que-a-pandemia-do-coronavirus-esta-fora-de-controle-na-maioria-dos-paises/>. Accessed on: October 30, 2020.

⁵ BERARDI, F. *A ruptura antropológica e o colapso econômico global: oportunidades para recodificar as vidas*. São Leopoldo: Instituto Humanitas Unisinos, march 25, 2021. Vídeo Youtube, (1:41:30). Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V0rAj8qFnVA>. Accessed on: March 27, 2021.

⁶ OLIVEIRA, L. A. *Mutação civilizacional*. São Paulo: Instituto CPFL, Canal Filosófico, TV Cultura, April 17, 2022. Vídeo Youtube (49min54). Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bKx97QYQM58>. Accessed on: September 10, 2022.

if we are experiencing a mutation, we are facing a process of innovation from which we have the possibility of entirely new configurations [...]. It is also considered that the power of indetermination is instaurating, creative, unavoidable. [...] We are capable of generating new actions and a new world. [...] It is then a question of, based on the diagnosis of the present, estimating the value of ethical and political initiatives, through which, among the possible scenarios, we can identify those that are probable and bring about those that are desirable. [...] In this way, we are encouraged to find the means to effectively move towards a desirable future (2022, min. 25-28).

“All our actions have planetary force” and will determine the future of humanity, of the “common home”. Luiz Alberto says, “civilization has the power to act on itself and modify its architecture, its functioning in order to adapt to the new challenges and circumstances that its own triumph has created” (2022, min. 34-35).

Boaventura de Sousa Santos’ sociological analyses postulate that the new century began in 2020 with the new coronavirus pandemic. He assures us that it is an unusual beginning. On the one hand, “if it is only the beginning of a century of intermittent pandemics, there will be something funereal and crepuscular about it, the beginning of an end” (2021, p. 16). On the other hand, “it could be the beginning of a new era, of a new model of civilization” (*ibid.*). He continues, “what it allows us to see and how it is interpreted and evaluated will determine the future of the civilization in which we live.” (2020, not paginated). In other words, the whole of life on the planet will depend on our choices, on the actions we take in the post-pandemic era.

The lessons that the coronavirus has left behind, according to Edgar Morin, indicate the metamorphosis that must take place in humanity.

The megacrisis caused by the coronavirus is the brutal symptom of a crisis of terrestrial (ecological) life, a crisis of humanity, which is in turn a crisis of modernity, a crisis of technical, economic and industrial development, a crisis of the master paradigm that fractures complexities in all spheres, causing a race that leads to the abyss. We therefore need to understand that, in order to survive, humanity must *metamorphose* (2020, p. 91, author’s emphasis).

Carlos Mendoza-Álvarez speaks of a “global crisis of civilization”. The floor is given to him:

the pandemic is a symptom of a deeper crisis. Some scholars talk about a crisis of the Anthropocene, a category that ecology and geology have developed to talk about the impact of the human species in the geological and Anthropocene eras. So there is a positive and a negative impact, especially the negative impact of the predominance of *homo sapiens* and *demens*. [...] The current point of this discussion points to two causes: 1st) the human species is responsible for the pandemic crisis, which some call the 4th or 5th extinction of the species caused by *homo sapiens* and *demens*; 2nd) the crisis of the capi-

tolocene, which concerns the concentration of wealth, power and hegemony in a part of humanity led by a logic of capital (2021, min. 9:55 – min. 11:30, author's emphasis)⁷.

Pope Francis, speaking about the current pandemic scenario on the seventy-fifth anniversary of the UN, said:

[...] the pandemic calls us 'to use this time of trial *as a time of decision* [...]: the time to decide what counts and what passes, to separate what is necessary from what is not'. It can represent a real opportunity for conversion, for transformation, for rethinking our way of life and our economic and social systems, which are widening the gap between the poor and the rich, the root of an unjust distribution of resources. But it can also be a possibility for a "defensive retreat" with individualistic and elitist characteristics (author's emphasis).⁸

Teilhard de Chardin, with a prophetic and uninstilling spirit, announced the state of crisis that humanity was in due to greed. And he already pointed out that we need to change our conscience. In his words:

we have been led, by the superior logic of Progress within us, to accumulate goods for the use we wish to make of them. The age of nations has passed. If we don't want to die, we must now shake off our old prejudices and build the Earth (1962, v. 6, p. 46).

The perspectives presented testify to an anthropocentric humanism and the exhaustion of a civilizational pattern. Crises, "critical points", in the Teilhardian perspective, herald leaps in quality. The sapiential perspective of a Christified Universe, among others points, points to the expansion of planetary consciousness that will possibly lead to a new Earth community.

2 Teilhard de Chardin: the "Terra Mater" christified

The paleontologist and mystic, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin SJ (1881-1955), developed an imposing world view articulating three universal components: the cosmic, the human and the Christic (1976, v. 13, p. 21-67). This triadic and sacramental structure of the Universe was constructed in the fields of science (paleontology, geology, biology), philosophy and

⁷ MENDOZA-ÁLVAREZ, C. *Falar de Deus em meio ao sofrimento humano: reflexões a partir das vítimas da pandemia*. São Leopoldo: Instituto Humanitas Unisinos, March 30, 2021. Vídeo Youtube (1h31min52). Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_k55CwaYdZY. Accessed on: March 30, 2021.

⁸ FRANCISCO, Pope. *Pope Francis' video message on the occasion of the 75th United Nations General Assembly* – September 25, 2020. Multimedia. Available at: http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/pt/messages/pont-messages/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20200925_videomessaggio-onu.html. Accessed on: October 02, 2020.

theology. The professional context, including expeditions to the Orient and military service in the trenches during the First World War, also contributed to forging an original, disquieting and no less complex way of thinking.

His search for the “‘Sense of Consistency’, the ‘Cosmic Sense’, the ‘Sense of the Earth’, the ‘Human Sense’ and the ‘Christic Sense’” (1976, v. 13, p. 26) and his “insatiable need for cosmic organicity” (1976, v. 13, p. 53) began in childhood.⁹ Contact with nature, minerals, stones and the influence of the spirituality of the Sacred Heart of Jesus had a decisive impact on his view of the world. These existential experiences, added to his scientific reflections, led him to glimpse an evolutionary Pole of the World, a “pole of consistency”, which had the properties of an Energy, of a Fire that crossed the Universe, metamorphosing anything” (1976, v. 13, p. 55).

The scientific/cosmic vision was developed from an orthogenetic perspective, an orientation that enabled his vision of the cosmic Christ, Alpha and Omega. The most compelling argument of this pre-Darwinian mold, whose exponent was Lamarck (1744-1828), was that “life forms invariably progress towards greater complexity and perfection” (VASCONCELOS, 2015, p. 38). This thesis was rejected by Charles Darwin (1809-1882), but it should be pointed out that the French Jesuit agreed with the role of chance and natural selection, neo-Darwinian postulates.

One caveat, which is rarely considered by scholars, is that the Teilhardian scientific vision must be seen through the lens of a geologist and a paleontologist. Such skills are limited to “knowing the structure and evolution of the world, by meticulous analysis of the most hidden phenomena of nature, but also by searching for the links that unite them into a coherent and intelligible whole” (WILDIERS, 1959, v. 5, p. 13). The aim of these scientists is therefore to “grasp the structure of the universe and of life in its historical dimensions” (*ibid.*). This favors, among other things, the possibility of investigating the future.

The cosmos is the composition of cosmogenesis, biogenesis, noogenesis and Christogenesis.¹⁰ The cosmological construction was conceived from an ascending perspective and thought of in the form

of an evolutionary cone (the Omega point) which first projects itself as a focus of immanent convergence: Humanity totally reflected on itself. But on examining it, we see that this focus, in order to be sustained, presupposes behind it a transcendent core — divine (TEILHARD DE CHARDIN, 1963, v. 7, p. 152).

⁹ Teilhard wrote certain themes or words in capital letters because of the objective and global content they acquired in his reflections.

¹⁰ For more details of this vision, see the French Jesuit’s main work, “The Human Phenomenon”.

The upward dynamics of the universe, presented here in a panoramic overview, was seen as a lively, complex and convergent movement. It should be noted that the origin of the world was not worked out, the phenomenon known today as the *Big Bang*, because Teilhard believed that the universe could never give the spectacle of an absolute beginning. Thus, the weft of the cosmos took on increasingly complex forms, with the characteristics of plurality, energy and unity, giving rise to the emergence and development of life.

Cosmogenesis took shape with the emergence of atoms, molecules, cells and multicells. Biogenesis, in continuity with cosmogenesis, gave rise to autonomous and more self-centered living beings. The movement of noogenesis marked the emergence of thought. This level of the evolutionary chain, according to theologian John Haught, a researcher in the fields of physical cosmology, evolutionary biology, geology and Christianity, is not dealt with by physicists and cosmologists, but postulated by Teilhard. On the horizon of this intuition, he states that “although the recent emergence of the noosphere is undoubtedly part of cosmic history, ironically it has not yet become a fundamental theme for cosmology” (2010, p. 113 *apud* VASCONCELOS, 2015, p. 98, note 201). With due caution, however, it is possible to affirm that this structure of the universe is not directed by mere chance, but presents an internal coherence and the essential meaning of universal history.

Teilhard explains that “from the physical-chemical process of revitalized Matter, a critical point ‘of reflection’ unleashed the specific properties of the Human” (1976, v. 13, p. 43.45). The expression “critical point”, in Teilhardian dialectics, attests to changes of state, points of tension, crises that signal the birth of something new and better. In his words: “There are ‘critical’ or ‘singular’ points everywhere in the movements of Matter. Why should they not appear in the transformations of life?” (1966, v. 3, p. 253). This position shows that “the mechanism of Creation demands it: *the same pain that kills and decomposes* is necessary for being in order for it to live and become spirit” (1968, p. 36, author’s emphasis). We also understand that these points are ruptures. In this way, we believe that humanity, in order to make the leap to more elaborate orders, new consciousnesses, needs to conceive of its destiny as unified with the *Terra Mater*.

We would dare to say that humanity is crossing “critical points” in its evolutionary trajectory. And the Covid-19 pandemic may, in fact, be the boundary of this passage. Despite this, the analyses of the thinkers listed in the previous topic leave no doubt that civilization is being pressured to free itself from the chaos that is suffocating it. What’s more, from its unbridled march towards what it sees as the potential for human fulfillment. Neuroscientist Sidarta Ribeiro argues that “planetary consciousness

needs to expand in order to change course”¹¹. In fact, this thesis was well explored by Teilhard when he worked on the idea of the thinking layer of the Universe.

The rise of consciousness has brought about an accelerated movement towards greater unification, complexity and convergence. This complex and evolved human maturation reached the critical and final point of a state of Ultra-reflection, the Ultra-human (collective reflection). From now on, at the head of cosmogenesis, the Jesuit sensed a “Pole, not only of attraction, but of consolidation, [...] in the form of the Omega Point, the consistency of the Universe” (1976, v. 13, p. 49). Its cosmic function is to arouse and maintain under its irradiation the reflection in the World ([19--], v. 1, p. 300). What’s more, this Pole is already a divine annunciation.

The human component of the Teilhardian vision is linked to the cosmic. The emergence of the “human phenomenon” was marked by the power to think and reflect ([19--], v. 1, p. 359, note 3)¹². The thinking layer of the Universe (*noos* — spirit — thought — intelligence) “is endowed with a living greatness, of planetary dimensions. [...] At the base (as in every ‘sphere’), ubiquity and solidarity. Higher up, by addition, organic unity of operation, [...] covering the disordered multitude of the living, human Oneness” (1976, v. 13, p. 42). It is possible to glimpse that this thinking sphere points to spiritual realities. Collaborative love between people and groups, unity, the *more-being*. The fraternity that is the inherent condition of a humanity that grows and develops ([19--], v. 1, p. 278, author’s emphasis).

Union is the essential phenomenon of evolutionary movement: “everything in the universe moves towards unification” (1963, v. 7, p. 122). God’s own creative action takes place by uniting all things, the Son who united himself to human finitude (Phil 2:6-8). It should be noted that the sense of unification can give the impression of uniformity. However, Teilhard affirms that

[...] *union differentiates* ([19--], v. 1, p. 296). The more people unite, the more they become the Other, the more they become ‘themselves’ ([19--], v. 1, p. 296, author’s emphasis; 2010, p. 88). The more we associate ourselves with others, the more we achieve the fullness of our person (1959, v. 5, p. 248), “the more we connect with the Greater than ourselves” (2010, p. 57, author’s emphasis).

¹¹ RIBEIRO, S. *Futuro depende de expansão da consciência planetária, diz Sidarta Ribeiro*. São Paulo: Folha de São Paulo, May 7, 2022. *Podcast*. Available at: <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/ilustrissima/2022/05/futuro-depende-de-expansao-da-consciencia-planetaria-diz-sidarta-ribeiro.shtml>. Accessed on: September 03, 2023.

¹² We are using the Portuguese translation of the work “The Human Phenomenon”, whose translation and explanatory notes were made by José Luiz Archanjo.

The path to union is love, understood in the profoundly Christian incarnational sense. This virtue is seen as “the most universal, the most formidable and the most mysterious of cosmic energies” (TEILHARD DE CHARDIN, 1962, v. 6, p. 40), and is experienced through the very attraction of the Omega Christ and in the encounter with the other. Man must find in the different realities the food that nourishes the search for *being-more* (1968). This neologism is well explored in Teilhard’s writings. The first sense concerns the cosmic vision. In the different phases of evolution, the world becomes “more”, it becomes organized around new, higher, unifying centers. This is the physical phenomenon of centration. The second concerns the “spiritual phenomenon” (1962, v. 6, p. 130). Centration here takes on an intellectual, moral and spiritual aspect. This means that “in order to be ourselves, we must [...] always seek more order, more unity in our ideas, our feelings and our conduct. [...] To take an interest in the inner life, with its inevitable drift towards ever more spiritual and elevated objects.” (TEILHARD DE CHARDIN, 1973, v. 11, p. 130)

Next, decentration. “We can only progress to the end of ourselves by going out and uniting with others, so as to develop through this union an increase in consciousness” (1973, v. 11, p. 131). It therefore becomes necessary to realize “the emergence of love which, in all its forms, urges us to associate with others [...]. Love, whose function and charm are essential to complete us” (*ibid.*).

What’s more, we need to focus on a Greater One: “a center of a higher order that awaits us, [...] no longer just beside, but *beyond* and *above* ourselves”. In unfolding, “no longer just developing oneself, nor just giving oneself to another — but submitting and leading one’s life to one greater than oneself. In other words, first to be, then to love, and finally to adore” (1973, v. 11, p. 131, author’s emphasis). It should be emphasized that this category, more-being, excludes any attitude of domination that human beings may seek in their relationships.

In continuity, the third universal component of the Teilhardian vision is the Christic. Here, we make the stage of Christogenesis precise. The hypothetical identity of the Omega of reason now takes on the meaning of Revelation. Thus, this point is identified with the “Christ-Omega”, also Alpha, because he has always been with the Father (Col 1:15), incarnate in the “heart of matter” and Risen, dynamizing, energizing, redeeming, polarizing all things in HIM. The luminosity that Teilhard perceived in the interior of the earth, even as a child, gained certainty. The divine, with its “properties of an Energy, of a Fire, gradually metamorphoses matter” (1976, v. 13, p. 55). Now, the “consistency” “of the human-divine illuminated and exploded from within matter, like a heart and center of every element and reality in the universe.

The *Terra Mater* is Christified. In her womb, she gave birth to the Son of God and her center is the cosmic Christ, the Evolving Christ. From now on, it is “charged with creative Power, it is an Ocean stirred by the Spirit, Clay kneaded and animated by the incarnate Word” (TEILHARD DE CHARDIN, 1965, p. 445). There, all living beings are interrelated, there is an organic relationship between all events, the Universe becomes loving and has purpose. In the midst of this vision, the Christian is called to guard it, to revere it, and to “consider its limits and scope, [...] to feel like brother and sister to all the beings that the Earth has created together with us” (BOFF, 2021b, p. 262). In particular, through their actions, they Christianize this environment, “in which we move, are and exist (Acts 17:28). It’s about taking up your vocation as a “pilgrim of the future”¹³ with more inspiration and creativity.

The journey we have made so far shows us that two links are vital to “constitute ourselves as a ‘we’ that inhabits the Common Home” (FT, n. 22): the task of linking personal conversion and socio-environmental transformation. A universe that has been seen as a field of divine energies effectively evokes an ecological spirituality. It is extremely important to note that Teilhard did not work on ecological issues, since in his time these problems had not yet triggered the serious socio-environmental crises and disasters. Nevertheless, his threefold vision of cosmic, human and divine reality undoubtedly fosters an ecological spirituality.

3 Ecological spirituality: contributions from Teilhard de Chardin and Pope Francis

Humanity has been painfully experiencing the deleterious effects of the destruction of our “common home”. To get to the root of the crisis causing this destruction is to “understand the current reality of our planet [...] and believe “that there is an acute pathology that is intrinsic to the system that currently dominates and exploits the world” (BOFF, 2022, p. 51). Despite this, we can already assume that this observation immediately brings us back to the fact of the development and spread of

¹³ Teilhard was given the title of “pilgrim of the future” because, for him, “the world is only interesting if it goes forward and upwards”, “everything that ascends converges”. His mind is not circular (it’s not the eternal return), but everything goes ‘forward’ with all the force of the past”. SEQUEIROS, L. *Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. A century since the writing of “The Spiritual Power of Matter”*. Instituto Humanitas Unisinos, São Leopoldo, August 10, 2019. Published by Religião Digital, August 08, 2019. Available at: <https://www.ihu.unisinos.br/categorias/591532-pierre-teilhard-de-chardin-completa-se-um-seculo-da-redacao-de-a-potencia-espiritual-da-materia>. Accessed on: September 10, 2023.

global, savage capitalism. Proof that the Franciscan theologian supports. Decline, however, as we have seen, following Teilhard de Chardin, is undoubtedly an opportunity for transformation and growth. Leonardo Boff (2002), following this path, says that crisis is a good symptom because it opens up possibilities and ferments a purifying process. Welcoming it, understanding it and going through it without running away can, in fact, be “an opportunity to mature and take a leap into a richer horizon of human and divine life” (p. 47).

Overcoming the crisis, he proposes, requires serious reflection and meditation, recollection, elements that should enable liberating decisions and purification. The one we are currently facing has required a review of the place of the humans in the world and their relationship with the cosmos and reality, a review of the understanding of power that has been exercised as domination. In the midst of this crisis, we can say that there is a need to cultivate a spirituality capable of responding to the ecological crisis and inspiring a new humanism. At this point, we will highlight the contributions of Teilhard de Chardin and Pope Francis, which can be understood in a profound correlation, since it cannot be denied that many elements of Teilhardian mysticism are at the basis of Francis’ reflection.

Eight years after the publication of *Laudato si’*, in which he calls everyone’s attention to caring for our common home, Pope Francis is once again addressing all people of good will to warn about the risks of deepening environmental imbalances, but also to encourage and motivate everyone to care for the common good, reminding the Catholic faithful and brothers and sisters of other religions that caring for life is intrinsically linked to faith. In his Apostolic Exhortation *Laudate Deum* (LD), he reiterates his concern about the global climate crisis which, as shown by various factors listed in the encyclical, has a human origin. The increased use of fossil fuels has accelerated the “greenhouse effect and, especially since the middle of the twentieth century”, has caused global climate imbalances that are intensely felt today. One cannot doubt, he insists, the “enormous progress linked to unbridled human intervention in nature over the last two centuries” (LD, n. 14). The Covid-19 pandemic,

has confirmed the close relationship between human life and that of other living beings and the environment, showing in particular that what happens in any part of the world has repercussions for the entire planet. This allows me to insist on two convictions that I never tire of reiterating: “everything is interconnected” and “no one is saved alone” (LD, n. 19).

We are still in the grip of the technocratic paradigm, the Pope denounces, confident in the power of technology and the economy that carries the idea of infinite or unlimited growth. Under the reference of limitless technological development, “everything that exists ceases to be a gift to be

appreciated, valued and cared for, and becomes a slave, a victim of every whim of the human mind and its capacities” (LD, n. 22). The technocratic paradigm has distanced humans from a harmonious relationship with nature, from the possibility of integrating with the environment in such a way that human intelligence and freedom become enriching factors, acting as part of their inner strength and balance (LD, n. 26). Part of the theocratic paradigm is an unethical attitude disguised with the resources of marketing and false information, the illusion of maximum profit disguised as rationality, illusory promises of progress and misguided ideas of meritocracy.

The Pontiff regrets that we have not made good use of crises in current times. He reaffirms what is already in *Fratelli Tutti*: the strategies developed after the financial crisis of 2007-2008 and the Covid-19 pandemic “have been oriented towards greater individualism and greater freedom for the powerful” (LD, n. 9). The challenge, according to him, is to redesign multilateralism. He advocates a multilateralism “from below”, the creation of “spaces for dialogue, consultation, arbitration, conflict resolution, supervision and, in short, a kind of ‘democratization’ in the global sphere, to express and include the different situations” (LD, n. 43).

Concerned about the climate crisis, he evaluates the efforts made at the global level by the Climate Conferences and concludes that the agreements signed have had a low level of implementation due to the lack of “control mechanisms, periodic review and sanctioning of violations” (LD, n. 52). Without losing hope “in the human capacity to transcend its small interests and think big”, the pope proposes that everyone pay attention and commit themselves so that the COP28 to be held in Dubai proposes “binding energy transition formulas” that are “efficient, binding and easily monitored” (LD, n. 59).

This picture, which shows the deepening of the crisis on a planetary scale and calls for everyone’s commitment to caring for life, also calls for a conversion in terms of reconciliation with creation that involves a broad social and environmental commitment. A conversion that brings about lasting change on a personal and community level, as proposed in the encyclical *Laudato si’* (n. 218-219).

According to the encyclical, considering the biblical tradition, human beings have a responsibility to lead creation to its full realization. In paragraph 83, bearing in mind the Teilhardian mysticism, Francis states: “The goal of the journey of the universe lies in the fullness of God, which has already been reached by the risen Christ” (LS, n. 83). And he adds: “The human being, endowed with intelligence and love and attracted by the fullness of Christ, is called to bring all creatures back to their creator” (LS, n. 83). From these considerations, it can be said that the destiny of the world is

to be transfigured by the experience of agape. And that “awareness of this universal communion in the context of the vocation of love to which the human person is called must lead to an integral ecology, since it brings the requirement to unite concern for the environment with sincere love for human beings and commitment to the problems of society (LS, n. 91)” (MARIANI, 2017, p. 21).

Teilhard is an inspiring figure for a spirituality that cultivates respect and reverence for the earth, because the universe is a “divine environment” and lets God’s presence shine through. It is immediately clear that this vision suggests a spirituality in which human beings are open to the gratuitous manifestation of the Lord of Life in human history, in nature and in the relationships of ecosystems. Prominent theologians are unanimous in saying that his worldview is inspiring for today’s ecological problems. In fact, he saw the action of the Incarnate Word traversing the Universe from its very beginnings and thus attracting, redeeming and polarizing all creatures in Him.

In criticism of a spirituality that opposes the world and the body, Teilhard argues that God “truly awaits us in things, since it is in them that he comes to meet us” (2010, p. 14). By virtue of the powerful Incarnation of the Word, he says, our soul is totally turned towards God, which means that God is in the world and reveals to the world with Christ, through Christ and in Christ, his loving action that draws evolving life to himself. In this evolving universe, all reality is for God through our soul configured to Christ, the incarnate Word.

Before a new ecological paradigm began to gain ground with the civilizational crisis that took hold at the end of the 20th century, the Jesuit, with his paleontologist’s eye, already saw the human being as rooted in matter:

The roots of our being? But they first delve into the most unfathomable past. What a mystery was that of the first cells that once super-animated the breath of our soul! What an indecipherable synthesis of successive influences into which we have been forever incorporated! Through matter, in each of us, the entire history of the world is partially reflected. However autonomous our soul may be, it is heir to an existence that was prodigiously worked on, before it, by all the earth’s energies: it encounters and brings together life on a specific level (2010, p. 25-26).

Each human being, he grasps, contemplating reality, is a unique synthesis that acts in the construction of God’s work that evolves towards universal communion: “In each soul, God loves and partially saves the whole world, which this soul summarizes in a particular and incommunicable way” (2010, p. 27). Through the matter-soul-Christ interconnection, everything we do participates and collaborates in the perfecting of the world, to the

extent of our adherence to God's creative power. By virtue of creation and, above all, through the Incarnation, everything is sacred for those who see in everything God's salvific action involving and leading the world to its consummation. Touched by this revelation, Teilhard dreams of the coming awareness that human work, whatever it may be, is received and used by a divine Center of the universe:

Ah! The time will come when men, awakened to the sense of the close connection that links all the movements of this world in the one work of the Incarnation, will not be able to give themselves to any of their tasks without the illumination of this distinct vision that their work, however elementary, is received and used by a divine Center of the universe (2010, p. 34-35)!

This means that we need to wake up to the fact that when humans act, they are participating in God's creative and saving project, which involves everything. This process, however, adds Chardin, does not only take place through action. Even when suffering, humans participate in the divinization of creation. Diving into the depths of oneself leads to an ocean of forces that influence us. The passive part of our existence is immersed in a vast darkness, rich, murky and complex, made up of confused energies, friendly forces that favor our efforts and enemy forces that interfere with our tendencies and keep us away from the *more-being*. They are, as they are called, "passivities of growth" and "decrease" that are found in the descent into the most secret part of ourselves. As we move away from the surface illuminated by social life, he says, we move towards the bottomless abyss from which life springs, a frontal reality that escapes us because it is not under our control. Based on his own experience, he describes the experience of descent, which has an undeniably mystical aspect:

Then, for perhaps the first time in my life (I, who am supposed to meditate every day!), I took the lamp and, leaving the apparently clear area of my daily occupations and relationships, I descended into the depths of myself, into the deep abyss from which I feel my power to act emanates confusingly. [...] With each step down, another character was revealed in me, whose exact name I couldn't say, and who no longer obeyed me. And when I had to stop my exploration, because I lacked the ground beneath my steps, there was at my feet a bottomless abyss from which came, I don't know where from, the wave that I dare call *my life* (2010, p. 44, author's emphasis).

The "passivities of growth", Teilhard explains, reflect the perception of the presence of God himself in the life that arises within us and in the matter that supports it. It concerns the encounter with the One who makes one participate in one's being, shapes it and drives it to completion. These passivities, which are the will to be, the desire to be this or that, the opportunity for fulfillment, are charged with God's influence, an influence that will manifest itself as the organizing energy of the mystical Body of Christ. For communion with God, the source of life, he continues, we

have to recognize him in these passivities and ask him to be in them more and more. And on the basis of this recognition, we must be willing to collaborate with his active presence. Placing himself as the one praying to God, again in the first person, he writes:

I would collaborate with your delicate action and I would do so doubly. First of all, I would respond to your profound inspiration, which commands me to be, by taking care never to stifle, divert or dissipate my power to love and to act. And then, to your all-embracing providence, which indicates to me at every moment, through the events of the day, the next step to take and the rung to climb, I would be careful not to miss any opportunity to climb 'towards the Spirit' (2010, p. 47).

On the other hand, as participants in life, we also suffer influences that hinder growth, the so-called "passivities of decrease" that cause a detour on the path of evolution towards Christification, which is transformation through the power of love. There are many and varied decreasing powers, both internal and external. We face a variety of physical evils, but also moral evil, a result of the misuse of our freedom. Due to the Resurrection, however, nothing else has the power of death. God, in his struggle against evil, integrates the decreasing powers in the establishment of the Kingdom of God and the Divine Environment:

God, since we entrust ourselves lovingly to him, without discarding from us the partial deaths or the final death, which are essentially part of our life, transfigures them, integrating them into a better plan. And this transformation accepts not only our inevitable evils, but also our faults, even the most willful, only on the condition that we mourn them (2010, p. 55).

Providence, for those who believe in the mystery of the incarnation and in the saving power of the Incarnate Word, the heart of the Christian faith, Teilhard adds, converts evil into good. Thus, when the failure suffered in our activity diverts us towards more favorable objects or directions; when the experience of loss launches us into the depths, into a less material realm; when we face situations that are "entirely disconcerting", the experiences of greater failure become a factor of union with God.

According to the paleontologist, surrendering to Providence in the face of the decreasing powers takes us out of ourselves, destroys our selfishness and broadens our human perspectives, just as the spiritualization of our tastes and ambitions promotes in us an ecstasy that must sweep us away in order to subordinate us to God. In this sense, "development and renunciation, attachment and detachment, are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, they harmonize, like, in the function of our lungs, the aspiration of air and its expiration" (2010, p. 69). When accepted with faith, the enemy force, which kills and disintegrates, can become a loving principle of renewal. In this context, the meaning of the Cross is understood:

[...] Jesus, on the cross, is the symbol and the reality, all together, of the immense secular labor that, little by little, raises the created spirit to lead it to the depths of the Divine Environment. He represents (in a true sense, He is) creation which, sustained by God, climbs the slopes of being, sometimes clinging to things in order to gain a foothold in them, sometimes tearing itself away from them in order to overcome them, always compensating by its physical pains for the setback brought about by its moral falls (2010, p. 74).

Just as it sheds light on the cross, Christian spirituality, from this perspective, far from leading to an escape from the world, reveals the spiritual power of matter. This is what the mystic teaches us through his passionate witness:

Fascinating and strong matter, matter that caresses and virilizes. Matter that enriches and destroys, trusting in the celestial influences that perfume and purify your waters, I abandon myself to your potent layers. The virtue of *Christ has been assimilated into you*. By your charms you sweep me off my feet, by your sap you nourish me, by your resistance you harden me. By your uprooting, you set me free. By yourself, finally, you divinize me (2010, p. 81-82, author's emphasis).

As we have seen, Teilhard de Chardin's perception of Christian spirituality corresponds to the demands of the ecological crisis we are currently experiencing. It inspires an experience of faith committed to a Christian existence. The "Divine Environment" invites us to look at reality to see in it the diaphany of God in the universe, the divine omnipresence that transfigures everything. The light of faith makes us see that natural reality, Pope Francis agrees, is enveloped by the Risen Lord who guides it towards the absolute (LD, n. 65).

4 Ecological spirituality and new humanism

The goal, for Francis and Teilhard, is communion, "walking in communion and with responsibility". In fact, we can find in the new humanism proposed by the Pontiff a great connection with the ecological spirituality that has Teilhard de Chardin as one of its inspirations. The paleontologist's optimism, passionate about the vitality revealed in the heart of matter, values the human presence in the world, which he considers to be the "rising arrow of evolution" (1956, v. 8, p. 61 — 76). At the same time, he sees the human being as detached from individual interests and willing to collaborate with God, acting and surrendering to Providence, which integrates everything into its divinizing project. According to him, three human virtues contribute to the development of the "Divine Environment", that is, to the growing perception of the divine omnipresence acting from the heart of matter: purity, faith and fidelity.

The virtue of purity, unlike what is usually interpreted, is not the absence of fault, but decentering. The impure is the one who bows to selfishness

and “introduces in himself and around himself a principle of slowness and division in the unification of the universe in God” (TEILHARD DE CHARDIN, 2010, p. 107). Pure is the one who “according to his place in the world, seeks to make the preoccupation of the Christ to be consummated in all things, dominate above an immediate or momentary advantage” (*ibid.*, p. 107). Evangelical faith, Teilhard explains, is the “practical conviction” that the Creator continues to be present and active in his work, integrating events on a higher plane:

If we don't believe, the waves swallow us up, the wind blows, we lack food, sickness overwhelms or kills us, the divine power is impotent or distant. If, on the other hand, we believe, the waters become welcoming and sweet, bread multiplies, eyes are opened, the dead are raised, God's power becomes as if bursting with strength and spreads throughout all of nature (2010, p. 110).

If we believe, chance becomes orderly and reality, which seems threatening and irreducible, gradually becomes welcoming and familiar to us. Faith makes us see that reality is not driven by rigid determinisms of matter and large numbers, but by “flexible combinations of the Spirit that give the universe its consistency” (2010, p. 113).

Through the virtue of fidelity, we become collaborators in God's work. “Faith consecrates the world. Faithfulness communes it” (2010, p. 113). In faith, the world, life, is placed in our hands as a host, “ready to be charged with the divine influence, that is, with a real presence of the incarnate Word” (*ibid.*, p. 111). In fidelity, we place ourselves in God's hands, we join him in his action. God calls us to collaborate in his eternal growth, in a dynamic that implies love and detachment:

the more we think we understand him, the more He reveals himself to be something else. The more we think we possess him, the more He recedes, drawing us into the depths of himself. The closer we get to him, through all the efforts of nature and grace, the more He increases, in one and the same movement, his attraction to our powers and the receptivity of these powers to this divine charm (2010, p. 115).

To be faithful to this dynamic is to do God's will, to allow oneself to grow in a movement that requires moving from lesser desires to greater desires, a continuous exercise of renunciation for ever greater integration into divine life.

However, salvation, says Teilhard, is only consummated in solidarity. Charity intensifies the “Divine Mean”. The “tension of communion” that makes humans apply themselves “to their duty to extract life even from death-laden powers” (2010, p. 121) leads to love for others, which is, in his view, the great human challenge. More than the attraction of personal sympathy, God invites us to become aware of the spiritual power of unity that comes from the Incarnate Word: “Christian charity [...] is nothing

other than the more or less conscious cohesion of souls, generated by their common convergence *in Christo Jesu*" (*ibid.*, p. 120).

As you can see, the French Jesuit's contribution to living out Christian ecological spirituality is very current. It is in line with the need for a new awareness of the place humans occupy in the world. The Judeo-Christian tradition, Pope Francis confirms, "defends the particular and central value of the human being in the world". However, faced with the threat of the technocratic paradigm, we need to overcome an understanding of the human being as autonomous, omnipotent and unlimited. We must defend a "situated anthropocentrism" (LD, n. 67), based on recognizing the existence of a communion between all beings "that leads us to a sacred, loving and humble respect" (LD, n. 67). What's more, a new humanism that calls for the contribution of different types of knowledge towards a more integral and integrative vision, which takes into account the link between the human being in their social context (family, work, urban) and the environment, i.e. the interaction between ecosystems and between the different worlds of social reference (LS, n. 141).

The humanism to be relaunched by the Church, Francis affirms in the letter *Humana communitas* (HC), the "humanism of life", must be founded on the perception of God's passion for creatures and their world, revealed by his Only Begotten Son, and on the awareness that "this world of ours is the earthly dwelling place of our initiation into life, the place and time in which we can already begin to taste the heavenly dwelling place to which we are all destined (2 Cor 5:1), where we will live in full communion with God and with all". He insists on the need for a fraternal and supportive humanism of individuals and peoples, which must put at the forefront the universal fraternity sown by the good news of the kingdom of God, because

It is one thing to feel obliged to live together, but quite another to appreciate the richness and beauty of the seeds of common life that must be sought out and cultivated together. It is one thing to resign oneself to conceiving of life as a struggle against antagonists that never end; it is another to recognize the human family as a sign of the vitality of God the Father and a promise of a common destiny for the redemption of all the love that already keeps it alive (HC, n. 6).

Analyzing Francis' ideas and actions, the social scientist Robson Sávio Reis Souza Souza (2022, p. 63) states that Francis' mysticism linked to the ethics of care "is concretized in a Samaritan humanism (supportive, of cooperation between nations, of collective peace-building, of the interconnection of everything)". A new humanism that is a project built collectively and based on praxis. In Francis' magisterium, this author points out, listening to the Word of God has inspired the construction of new paths, new bridges, new pacts in the field of economics, education, culture, politics and religions.

Conclusion

This article seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the notion of ecological spirituality which, from Pope Francis' perspective, has the spiritual writings of Teilhard de Chardin as one of its references. This observation appears explicitly in a note to paragraph 83 of the Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'*, and implicitly throughout the reflection on spirituality. In order to carry out the proposal, the investigative path initially situated the current "crisis of civilization" from the point of view of some authors. They agree that the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted this crisis.

Next, the Teilhardian worldview, triadic and sacramental, showed that the universe, in the course of its evolutionary history, goes through "critical points", which actually mark the emergence of new realities. Beyond any crisis, the sapiential perspective of a Christified universe evokes the Christian's role as co-creator in Christ. And how can we not say the same of every person of good will who witnesses a transcendent human trajectory.

The course of the research moved on to the developments of Teilhard de Chardin's and Pope Francis' positions on ecological spirituality and the new humanism. There, we glimpsed two perspectives. Firstly, the perception of the sacred dynamics of the Universe. This perspective, from a Teilhardian point of view, motivates us to inquire about human participation in the ecology of life and its responsibility in the evolutionary journey of the universe towards the fulfillment of creation in Christ. The humanism glimpsed in this vision emphasizes the collaborative participation of the person with God, willing, in their existential trajectory, to act in reality in order to transform it.

The Pontiff, who presents a second perspective, assures us that, in the face of the destruction of our "common home", everyone needs to be committed to preserving it. What's more, in order to assume this responsibility, reconciliation is obviously required with creation, which has been destroyed by those who have been entrusted with caring for it. The new humanism proposed by Francis overcomes modern anthropocentrism, which relativizes the place of humans in the world and their responsibility towards creation. To overcome this, logically, it is necessary to assume a posture of reverence before the sacredness of the world, since the human being is part of creation, a unique synthesis in the evolutionary process of the universe.

The significant contribution of both, or of Teilhardian mysticism to Francis' exhortation, which has insisted on the need to deepen an ecological spirituality, can be seen in the creative insistence on showing radical inter-relationality. The interconexion of all things in the Universe is being

perceived and assumed from the new ecological paradigm, which is announced in the midst of the current civilizational crisis, founded on the mystery of the incarnation.

In the course of this research, we realized that the theme of integral ecology deserved further development. Including showing how spirituality must be integral and, as such, also ecological. However, this is beyond the scope of this study. This study has shown that ecological spirituality can best be developed through the cultivation of a “new humanism”. In turn, a “new humanism” must be based on an ecological spirituality. Furthermore, the research has highlighted the mystical perspective underlying *Laudato si’*. We therefore believe that it is possible to sustain that the contributions of Teilhard de Chardin and Pope Francis are significant contributions to overcoming the “critical point” that humanity is going through in its evolutionary trajectory.

Abbreviations

- FT = Encyclical Letter *Fratelli tutti*
HC = Letter *Humana communitas*
LS = Encyclical Letter *Laudato si’*
LD = Apostolic Exhortation *Laudate Deum*
WHO = World Health Organization

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