

“It is the Season of Creation”

Francis has invited us this month to reflect on the “Season of Creation.” Today, theologians committed to ecology are returning to a re-reading of biblical texts on Creation. Francis, too, in his encyclical *Laudato Si*, attaches importance to this theme, which is found in the biblical accounts, looking in them for the “Gospel News of Creation” (Title of Chapter II). He finds great wisdom there, for “*the Lord by wisdom founded the earth*” (Prov. 3:19 in L.S. 69). He attempts to reread the Creation texts in their context with appropriate hermeneutics (LS 68) and thus is able to decipher its symbolic language. Using this method he discovered “*profound teachings about human existence and its historical reality*” (LS 66), above all about the relationship of human beings with the world (cf. LS 65). The biblical texts have impressed upon him that human existence is fundamentally based on a three-dimensional and interrelated relationship: “*relationship with God, with our neighbour and with the earth itself.*” (LS 66)

On reading today about the quality of our relationships, from looking at those biblical texts, Francis notes with concern that the harmony between these relationships has been lost: they are in disharmony in a disproportionate and unbalanced manner. Human beings have put themselves at the centre of Creation and thus in place of the Creator, but “*we are not God. The earth was here before us and it has been given to us.*” (LS67). We do not own it: “*The earth is the Lord’s*” (Ps 24:1, cf. LS 67). Francis affirms, with his profound judgment, that “*the Bible has no place for a despotic anthropocentrism*” (LS 68). Because human beings do not recognise themselves as part of creation, they misplace and distort the internal laws with which the world was created, they do not respect them and they do not observe the delicate balance among all created beings (cf. LS 67).

When *Laudato Si* speaks about the Gospel of Creation, it wishes to emphasise that the natural world contains laws about life that are valid for all creation, which also includes the human species. It does not suggest the need to change our mentality into having a new relationship with the earth and its environment and consequently with God the Creator. We must return to a “*relationship of responsible reciprocity between human beings and nature*” (ibid). Francis does not say this, but we missionaries know that this is how the indigenous peoples have lived for thousands of years. All of creation contains internal laws that reveal the wisdom of the Creator; they must be respected and a more incarnated/environmentalised relationship with God must be re-established that can only bring harmony to all three dimensions. This harmonious interdependence between such relationships needs to be considered as a way of thinking, as a gift and as a plan of the Creator Spirit in order to achieve fullness of life.

In the Encyclical *Laudato Si*, Francis wants to open our eyes to the fact that we are on the verge of collapse. Our ecological situation on the planetary level is catastrophic. It seems that the whole planet is in danger of self-destruction. Moreover, all of us on our planet earth are in deep crisis. The problems are escalating to the point where we feel we are in a situation of chaos.

More and more, however, we realise that the universe itself does not have a stable, unchanging structure. Rather, we are experiencing that the history of our own life and of all of humanity is a process in permanent flux. In reality, humanity, together with the universe, is at the beginning of an active process of transformation.

Creation emerges out of movement

We Christians call the beginning of the world and of life: "Creation". The suffix, - *ion* already indicates dynamism and movement within an unfinished process. According to one of the biblical texts on Creation, it was initiated by the action of the Spirit, symbolised by the movement of a flapping of wings (Gen 1, 3) that moves and stirs. Such an image invites us to look at our global crisis, as a hovering around between being closed and open, between darkness and light, between sickness and health, between past and future, between death and life. Let us not forget that we are crossing the frontier from one era to another, from one climate to another, from one form of society to another, from an anthropocentric to an integral ecological worldview, etc. These changes necessarily lead us to discern and seek new paradigms, new paths, and new styles of life and of living together.

We know that the Creation stories do not attempt to speak of the beginning of the world. Rather they have been written out of a deep concern over the crisis they shared with their people. They wanted to encourage them to search for meaning together. In the biblical account of Gen 1,1-2,4, the experience of crisis is presented in the image of a chaos over which the Spirit is hovering. Today we too should experience the hovering of the Spirit. We have always been taught that God created the world out of nothing. However, the Bible says that he created it from chaos. This is not the result of scientific research, but has been written based on the historical experiences gathered from the history of its people. They recorded several attempts at the refounding of their people, that always began from a national existential crisis. Therefore, we can understand in a rereading of Genesis that Creation is presented based on historical experiences of recreations that come from chaotic realities.

The chaos of our times is presented in L.S. in the form of the following symptoms: climate change, future increase in sea levels and flooding, pollution, the throwaway culture, the loss of biodiversity and plurality of cultures, the desertification of regions caused by deforestation, the consumer society, socio-economic, cultural and religious inequality, exclusion, violence, and aggressiveness. Francis synthesises these symptoms of the threat of collapse and chaos with the words: *"The current world system is unsustainable."*

These current symptoms are the result of a mind that is against nature, and therefore also anti-human. We humans have separated ourselves from our relationship with the natural world; we do not feel connected with the Earth despite the fact that "we are earth" (L.S.2). Therefore, also, our relationship with God — without his creation — is no longer harmonious; it remains separated from the earth and disembodied.

Francis calls us to a conversion like Jesus at the beginning of his public life in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark: the *metanoia*. It is a call to changing ourselves from within, which is not possible without the "*movement*" of the Spirit Creator who moves us and renews us. However, this situation is inviting us to return to our ultimate roots: those of our very existence.

Light (Gen 1, 3) illumines the darkness; it begins first to separate and order the chaotic into cosmic elements, where each one receives a place and a name: day — night; sky — earth; land — sea... That movement makes it possible to provide space for life: a diversity of species that together will form a sacred web of life: plants – animals – humans in harmonious

interdependence. Times and spaces are interconnected by “dawn and dusk” (Gen. 1, 5.8.13.19.23). This shows that the essence of life is interrelationship. In its symbolic language, this account of creation suggests that human existence is based on three fundamental relationships that are closely connected: relationship with the Creator, with one’s neighbour and with all of creation (cf. L.S. 66). Creation is an interrelationship that leads towards unity in harmonious and balanced diversity.

The recurrent theme of *Laudato Si* is that everything is interconnected and interrelated. Therefore, it is possible that the new may arise from the old, that is, that new life may arise from chaos, from the non-possibility of the current system of life that is in crisis. We can ascertain that the Spirit, being a creator, is consistently re-creating. Creation is not yet finished. It will undergo some falls into chaos but it is on its journey to the fullness of life. It moves in a rhythm between evolution and regression.

The word (*pbsh*) was always interpreted by the term “to dominate” (Gen. 1, 28), in order to justify the illicit exploitation of the earth, by becoming the centre and owner of its resources. However, the Hebrew word originally means “to tread,” which has the original meaning of “to tread by making a path,” that is, to follow in the footsteps of the path begun by the Creator, and to continue to do so, convinced that “everything was very good.” This path implies being attentive to the emergence of a new chaos provoked by the waywardness of humans inventing their own paths.

Separations within chaos that make new life possible

If we really want to recreate new life, a new society, with values that are more human, more in tune with the laws of life in the natural world, then the first thing would be to take a look at our current system. We should separate the worthless counter-values from the authentic, human life-giving values with which we can build a future. Francis shows the way, starting from the symptoms of sickness and death in our system and rescuing the human values that are nevertheless present – at times hidden in an embryonic state – within the same system. Francis in *Laudato Si*, shows us the way, starting from the symptoms and pointing out utopia, the goal towards which we should move:

- ✓ From the commodification of the Earth to the childlike relationship with a loving Mother
- ✓ From the misappropriation of the goods of the earth to accepting them as a common good for all
- ✓ From the ruthless devastation of nature to the care of life in its biosystems
- ✓ From the exclusion of the poor to the preferential option for restoring their dignity
- ✓ From an anthropocentric vision to a cosmic vision
- ✓ From a fragmented vision to a holistic vision
- ✓ From a dominant uniformity to the expression of diversity
- ✓ From technocracy to an effective use of technology
- ✓ From the imposition of a mono-culture to the multiple diversity of different cultures
- ✓ From the separation of mind and heart to an integration of feeling with reason
- ✓ From a certain independence to the recognition of our interdependence

- ✓ From a horizontal level of thinking to going deeply to the heart of things
- ✓ From bought-in privatisation to a just sharing of common goods
- ✓ From the eagerness for consumerism and profit to a “happy austerity” which brings freedom
- ✓ From a throwaway society to a creative life of re-use (re...)
- ✓ From overvaluing Western culture to the appreciation of one’s own culture
- ✓ From a sense of individualism to a communitarian sense
- ✓ From indifference to inequality to a balance and harmony in equality...
- ✓ From a cumulative economy to a cooperative and circular economy

Re-creation is part of Creation

These situations trigger questions in us about the meaning of life; they are moments in which remembering helps us to go right down to the deepest root of our existence. These are moments of **discernment**, of separating death from life - false or expired - from what is born of the Spirit, and of putting the true names on both sides.

We now recognise that we ourselves have caused the COVID-19 pandemic and many other pandemics, by living with each other in a state of inequality and imbalance. We have tolerated building up a capitalistic economic system with neoliberal politics and thus we live contrary to all the life principles of creation. Today we are discovering the consequences of this veritable chaos.

Nevertheless, the same concrete and historical experience is teaching us, in the Bible as well as in all the indigenous creation myths, **that chaos is not the end of the world, but the beginning of another world**. At times, it is represented as a **second creation** (cf. the flood). It is a message of **hope** that should encourage us to connect with the “hovering” of the Creator Spirit over the chaos and **to look together for the emergence of new life**. In the last book of the Bible, **the Apocalypse, the writer sees “a new heaven and a new earth”** (Apoc. 21, 1). He was writing for the small communities, persecuted to death by the Roman Empire and divided among themselves by ideologies. At that moment, they found themselves in an existential crisis, in chaos. And, nevertheless, this was **precisely the moment that the Spirit began to re-move in order to launch a new era** with a new system and a new culture and another Church.

Today we are living at a very similar historical moment; we see that the Spirit is waiting to recreate from our chaos. Therefore, our current situation of chaos rouses the cry of Psalm from us: *“Send forth your Spirit and renew the face of the earth”* (Psalm 104, 30), recognising that today we are in the “Season of Creation”.

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