

Cleaning Up Our Memory

By Pablo Romo

Contemporary theologies, especially contextual ones, tell us about subjects that appear in history in a very specific way. We see the poor in Latin America in the late '70s; feminist theologies and women as a revolution in history and as the face of God.

New Theological Subjects

Hand in hand in time and strength we recognize black theologies, from the blackness, and the black God that wants no one to be slave any more and wants to love with a new dance. In the '80s we find theologians who include homosexuals (lesbians and gays) as a part of the great history of salvation and recover the gay tenderness and energy in God's infinite love.

Latin American indigenous peoples come in the end, with their indigenous theologies, making space from the “forgotten corner of Christianity.” These theologies recover the God Who prepares Heaven and Earth for everyone and Who breaks the language of the purely rational to open for us a “new face and a new heart.”

At the very end of the millennium, from the Christian progressive side, theologians—women and men—asked themselves about “all the others, women and men” who had not been included: those who are not Christian, those who are looked at by God with love and who have not been taken into account by us.

Those with whom we have lived, those with whom we live and those we have not seen—with them we launch the search for interreligious dialogue. The second half of the XX th century leaves us as a legacy those newly “discovered” actors, who now make part of the mosaic that unveils God's face.

God is Love, Here and Now

Always, speaking of God has meant for the theologies of Jesus Christ and for other theologies, speaking about love. Identifying Love with God is a constant reflection in Christianity, and the most evident and clear of all theologians is Saint John : “God is Love.”

This is why it is necessary to contextualize love here and today. We talk about God when we liberate, when we include, when we break slavery, when we accept the different, when we come together and when we live in peace with the other—the one who does not believe in the same way as I do.

Contextualizing love is making God present in our lives, pushing us to an action of “transformative compassion.” The one who loves knows that the sides of love vary in a dynamic that unveils human vulnerability: a heart beating in diverse moments of life.

God does not make Godself present in the same way for everyone always. God is personal. The hieratic of a God Who contemplates from the Pantocratic image without making a wink or moving the finger from time to time is incomprehensible to us.

Perhaps that is why contemporary theologians, closer to the heart than to Immanuel Kant 's pure reason, tell us that “God dies with us” when we fail in love. God is a personal and close God.

This does not mean in itself that God can represent Godself as always unique, motionless and indivisible, avoiding the comfortable God Who does “what I want” or justifies my life as such without requiring changes or conversion (*metanoia*).

It is so personal that it requires constant change: it is Love that updates its content day after day in order not to get old and rotten. My father was a chemist and I was always impressed by something he continually repeated: matter varies and behaves differently depending on where it is, and with what it interacts.

As an example, carbon has many valences; this means that according to what it comes in contact with, it has a different number of electrons spinning around the nucleus. Love, I suppose, behaves the same way: it has many valences that vary according to the moment and the place.

It remains carbon, but varies its valence; remains love but varies its intensity and expression. Remains God, but becomes Emmanuel—God with us. If such is matter, rough and grotesque, with what we interact, what more can God be?

That is why God, Love, is love for us in a specific moment not only in the great history of humanity, but also in our own personal history, so small and insignificant. God is not God in the same way in each time in history, because God is a living being for us.

God Is Forgiveness, in Spite of All

Love that is hurt, if authentic, forgives. Liberation, if authentic, does not murder the exploiter; it converts her or him. Emancipation, if authentic, does not end with its “dialectic counterpart,” but overcomes it in a new relation.

Inclusion, if authentic, does not deny its adversary, but it assumes it in its totality to transform it. Recognizing the other, if authentic, contemplates God and directs this contemplation back to Earth. Love that is forgiveness is difficult to explain, and actualizes itself both in personal and in human history.

Revisiting the theologians who have worked after World War II, we see a lot of pain lived without resurrection: a kind of thorn of perplexity, anger and impotence: a feeling that God is dead.

God's death, the one they were talking about in those times, is precisely the interpretation that love died and did not bear fruits through love. In the Protestant and Roman Catholic contextual theologies of the following years, especially after the Second Vatican Council, forgiveness is a call for transformation, for conversion, and for a change of attitudes.

Forgiveness is proposed not from the perplexity and anger of the mystery of evil, but from the need for structural change (which is a fruit of love); one that changes radically the situation of humiliation, poverty, exploitation, discrimination, racism and exclusion.

Forgiveness transits through the revolutionary cause, the astonishment before the different, the transformation of patriarchal structures, the creation of commissions of truth, changes of systems, and radical acceptance of the different.

Certainly these expressions are all modern, because they recreate the emancipatory modern ideal and lead by the same mystery to a promise of a forgiveness-love. For some, especially for those in the “satisfied and disillusioned centre of the world,” this promise is an ideological expression that is never realized: it is a fantasy.

It is a simple romantic ideology from the past that has nothing to do with love or forgiveness. The disillusioned critique of the realities of the world seems to be taking place among members of the new Christian generation, who feel cheated when they see the concrete and tangible results of love left by Christianity in the XX th century.

God is with us Through History

The second part of the argument does not lack reason: the promise has remained distant from reality. Nevertheless it is necessary to deconstruct, more than promised love and needed forgiveness, the evil that has succeeded in keeping that love still a promise.

The disillusioned critique quickly loses the memory of a pain of many years and human processes of change. This is why it is important to point out that this disillusioned critique comes from the satisfied centre of the world, which has plenty of everything and which lacks memory.

Love, despite conflict and alienation, social or personal, requires as an unavoidable step the purifying of our memory. One cannot love without forgiving. Cleaning up that painful history of discrimination, poverty, patriarchalism, machismo, exclusion and slavery, requires more than just saying that it does not exist or that nothing can be done.

To love is not to conform to the small. It is necessary to be “in the shoes of the one who suffers” and not simply disqualify the present results. It is necessary to read history in a different way, healing the pain of the offences and naming each pain.

This takes time. Women who work every day to transform patriarchal realities know this well. Poor people who have lost many wars, and who think of themselves from faraway countries, know this well.

Indigenous peoples who patiently regain their history know this well. God with us is history with us. To forgive is to love in their valence of history. God is love. And love requires forgiving. To forgive is to purify our memory.

This article was translated by Horacio Mesones ..