

A theological-biblical Reflection. Ways for peace: Shalom and Justice

Albert Weber (1868-1958), younger brother of Max Weber, in his book *Das Tragische und die Geschichte* (Piper, Munich 1959) found that of the 3,400 years of history that can be documented, 3,166 were years of war (p. 145). The remaining 234 years were probably not of peace, but of truce and preparation for another war.

See the famous correspondence between Einstein and Freud. In a letter dated 30 July 1932, Einstein asked Freud: "Is there a way to free human beings from the fate of war? Is there a possibility of influencing the psychic evolution to make human beings more capable of resisting the psychosis of hatred and destruction? (Nathan & Norden, *Einstein on Peace*, 1984, 98).

Einstein replied with great realism: "There is no hope of directly suppressing the aggressiveness of human beings. But indirect ways can be taken, for example, by strengthening Eros, the life principle, to the detriment of Thanatos, the death principle. Everything that creates emotional bonds between human beings goes against war. Everything that civilises human beings works against war" (Works III, 3.215). But in the end, Freud makes a resigned observation: "Hungry and starving, we think of the mill that grinds so slowly that we may starve to death before we get the flour". Freud supported the thesis that Eros and Thanatos are perennial principles and we do not know which of them will triumph.

Despite this realism, we still seek and will never cease to seek peace, if not as a lasting state, then at least as a spirit that makes us prefer dialogue to confrontation, the cordial search for points of agreement to conflictual

confrontation.

This observation by Freud leads us to a philosophical reflection on who we are as humans: we are the coexistence of contradictions. We are sapiens and demens simultaneously. Not because of a defect of creation, but because that is *the condition humaine*. We are bearers of intelligence, of wisdom, of inner energies oriented towards love, as demonstrated in 1953 by James Watson, who has decoded the human genetic code: "love is inscribed in the DNA of the human being" (Cf. DNA, O segredo da vida, 2005, p. 434).

But, at the same time, we are carriers of dementia and compulsions for death as we are unfortunately witnessing in the genocide of thousands of children by Netanyahu's extreme right-wing government in Gaza with the shameful support of the United States and the European Union, which betrays its entire legacy of human rights and democratic spirit. We are a metaphysical enigma, the living contradiction of angel and demon coexisting in the same person and in societies.

Everything is aggravated by the prevalence of the paradigm of modernity, from its founding fathers, Descartes, Francis Bacon and others who proposed as the structuring axis of the new era the will to power and power as domination of persons, of peoples, of nature, of matter, up to the Higgs boson, or of life up to the last gene. This paradigm, which has brought us so many advantages, has also created the principle of self-destruction with lethal weapons that can exterminate all human life and profoundly damage the biosphere.

How to build peace in this contradictory framework under which we are living and suffering? Peace is only possible to the extent that people individually and collectively are predisposed to give more space to the conscious and organised cultivation of the dimension of coexistence, respect,

tolerance, cooperation and love. The culture of peace depends on the predominance of these positivities and on how we all know how to keep the other, ever-present dimension of rivalry, selfishness and exclusion of others at bay.

Peace has its foundation in the other dimension also present in the human being who is not fatally condemned to power/domination. Alongside the paradigm of power/domination, i.e. of the human being as lord and master, feeling himself outside of nature, well represented by Alexander the Great and Hernán Cortés, archetypes of the conquerors, there is also the paradigm of universal brotherhood of Francis of Assisi, Francis of Rome, Gandhi, Luther King Jr. and so many others, who developed a spirit of universal brotherhood and cultivated care as a way of relating to all beings.

The native peoples in various parts of the world, particularly in Latin America, the hundreds of ethnic groups in the Amazon region continue to show that it is possible to live in peaceful relations and to treat each other humanely and to create a respectful bond of belonging to nature. They feel that they are part of nature and are responsible for its preservation. Peace is really lived there because the focus is not on power and the will to dominate, but on the acceptance of all, coexistence and the widest possible freedom.

Today, two paradigms are confronting each other. One is that of modernity, which considers the human being outside and above nature. It is the paradigm of the dominus, maître et possesseur de la nature, lord, master and owner of nature, in Descartes' words. This paradigm is currently in a deep crisis in all dimensions of reality: personal, social, economic and ecological. We have devastated practically all ecosystems to the point that we need more than one and a half Earth to meet the demands of humanity, especially the consumerists in the

Global North, in the affluent countries.

The other, so well formulated by Pope Francis in his encyclical *Fratelli tutti*, is the paradigm of frater, brother and sister and social love (n.6). Not only among ourselves, but with all beings in nature. We all form the great community of life. All living things, from the earliest cell that emerged 3.8 billion years ago, through the great forests, the dinosaurs, the horses, the hummingbirds and ending with us, all have the same 20 amino acids and the same four phosphate bases. Put more pedestrianly, we are all built by 20 types of bricks and four different cements. The multiform combinations of these elements give rise to biodiversity.

In other words, a thread of brotherhood binds us all together. We are by a scientific fact brothers and sisters, something that St. Francis intuited in his cosmic mysticism, calling all beings by the sweet name of brother and sister: sister dove and brother wolf, even sister death.

But this ideal becomes empty if personal, social and ecological justice is not the first presupposition. The uninterrupted message of the Scriptures, especially of the prophets, is: peace is the fruit of justice. Basic to the idea of justice is the following statement, a true declaration of love for humanity and Mother Earth: to each according to his or her needs (physical, psychological, cultural and spiritual) and from each according to his or her abilities (physical, intellectual and moral). With Mother Earth, ecological justice means truly respecting and caring for her as a Great Mother, observing the natural pact, obeying her natural rhythms, giving her time to regenerate her nutrients.

In this sense, justice presupposes a sense of belonging to one another, the equality of all in view of the common good between humans and nature. Pope John XXIII's encyclical *Pacem*

in Terris taught: "The common good is the sum total of the conditions of social life which permit and promote the integral development of the human person" (1963, n. 58). We, already in another, ecological, time, would add "which allow and favour the integrity of the Earth, its rights and its biocapacity".

No society can be built on structural and historical injustice. To be permanent, this peace requires historical reparations and policies that compensate for the damage that domination has caused to millions of victims, such as the 14 million Africans brought to the Americas to be enslaved and put as "parts" on the market. We must not forget the real holocaust of 45 million indigenous people during the colonisation of the Americas (according to the most recent data): Grondin, M. e M. Viezzer, *Abya Yala: genocídio, resistência e sobrevivência dos povos originários das Americas*, Editora Bambual, Rio de Janeiro 2021).

The colonial and slave-owning countries of yesteryear have not become aware of this dehumanisation. They have not even expressed their willingness to apologise for the crimes they have committed against humanity for centuries, as was seen at an international meeting of heads of state years ago in South Africa. No one from the colonial countries has accepted the idea of reparations or even apologies.

Here it is worth referring to the proposal of Emmanuel Kant (1724-1804) in his last work of 1795 *Zum ewigen Frieden* (For a perpetual peace). In proposing, like Einstein and Freud, the question of how to overcome "the infamous belligerence" between peoples, he proposes, as one of the first, the *Weltrepublik*, a world republic. This would be founded on two basic values: hospitality and human rights. For him, hospitality is a right and a duty for everyone. The earth belongs to everyone as a community (& 358). Everyone has the

right to go everywhere and be received as a citizen or the duty to receive them.

The other value is the respect for human rights which are for Kant "the apple of God's eye" or "the most sacred thing God has put on earth". This universal hospitality and the sacred observance of rights give birth to a community of peace and security that puts a definitive end to "the infamous belligerence".

This is a far-reaching ethical-political vision, but impossible to realise in the context of the raging capitalism that is dominating the whole earth, with its mantras of competition without any collaboration in view of an illusorily infinite growth from a finite planet of natural goods and services.

What would the peace of God witnessed in the Holy Scriptures look like? Without going into exegetical details, I would say that the theme of peace is the permanent longing of almost all the texts. Shalom is difficult to translate, perhaps the best translation is "Peace and Good" by St. Francis of Assisi. It means the well-being of life, the state of the human being living in harmony with himself, with nature and with God. Peace, especially in the prophets, derives from a life in righteousness which implies having a fruitful land, eating to one's fill, dwelling in security, sleeping without fear, triumphing over enemies, multiplying, and all this because God is with us (cf. Lev 26:1-13; cf. J. Comblin, *Theologie de la paix*, Paris 1960).

In the Second Testament, especially Luke and John have developed the theme of peace. Luke in his Gospel draws the portrait of the peaceful king from birth when the angels announce peace to those whom God loves (Lk 2,14). The disciples go around the world announcing the peace brought by

Jesus Christ by his power over sin and death and by his resurrection.

These two conditions are present in someone who, in my opinion, points the way to a possible peace. It is the well-known Prayer for Peace attributed to St. Francis of Assisi (+1228), which is prayed every time there is a meeting of religious leaders from all over the world. The content is so obvious and convincing that everyone can say their "amen". The language is religious, but its meaning is universal.

St Francis is aware that reality is contradictory. It abounds with hatred, discord, despair and darkness. With the wisdom of the simple, he intuits that evil is not there to be understood, but to be overcome by good. The healthy part will be able to heal the sick part. Light has more right than darkness, even though darkness always accompanies it.

Let me quote this prayer of the Sun of Assisi, as Dante calls Francis of Assisi in his Divine Comedy (Paradise, Canto XI, 28-66):

"Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, may I bring love.
Where there is offence, may I bring forgiveness.
Where there is discord, may I bring union.
Where there is doubt, may I bring faith.
Where there is error, may I bring truth.
Where there is despair, let me bring hope.
Where there is sadness, let me bring joy.
Where there is darkness, let me bring Light.
Master,
May I seek more to comfort than to be comforted.
More to understand than to be understood.
More to love than to be loved.
For it is in giving that one receives.

It is in forgiving that one is forgiven.

And it is by dying that one lives to eternal life.

As can be seen, the path to peace opens up the moment we strengthen the luminous dimension of love, forgiveness, union, truth, joy and light. These are the positivities. The negativities are neither denied nor repressed. But they are under the validity of the positivities. Indeed, peace emerges from this sapiential strategy of accepting the negative and submitting it to the positive. Peace then becomes viable for us contradictory human beings.

This is the path lived by St. Francis of Assisi that can be taken up by everyone, making peace not only a desired goal, but the shortest and surest way to reach it. Only peaceful means can produce the peace that is possible.

But in this prayer there is something very unique, typical of the way of Jesus, followed by St. Francis. It is the "more: "more to console, more to understand, more to love. All spiritual and ethical traditions say: love others as you would have them love you; do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Here, in the prayer for peace, there appears a "plus" typically of the Christian experience, captured by the Saint of Assisi. It does not seek correspondence, to love and be loved, but goes beyond it: it consoles more, understands more, loves more.

Here we find the deepest peace, perhaps the anticipation of the peace of God, the peace of the redeemed already living in the bosom of the God-Communion of divine Persons, the source of every kind of peace. This "more" is the secret of all viable peace. I think that we only attain this peace with the peace of God and of Christ, as a gift and as a grace. This is the Christian contribution to peace.

There is another element in the life of St. Francis that opens

up a possible path to peace. It is care: care for all creatures, care for the poor and for the most despised who were the lepers. The encyclical *Laudato Si': On Care for the Common Home*, by Pope Francis, rightly says: "Francis is the example par excellence of care for what is fragile...; for him, every creature was a sister united to him by bonds of affection. He felt called to care for all that exists" (n.10 and 11). Such care produces peace with nature and the earth.

It is well known that care belongs to the essence of the human being, as already stated in the fable 220 of Hyginus, the Egyptian slave and director of the imperial library of Caesar Augustus. Since then, care was taken up again as a defining category of the human being until Martin Heidegger, in his classic work *Being and Time* (1927), analyses care in detail as the essence of the human being; care that precedes the irruption of the spirit and the body (& 41-42). If there is care, there is no fear, no threat of extinction of life and of the human species. As Donald Winnicott (*Human Nature*, 2001), the great English psychoanalyst, said: "care produces tranquillity and peace for the individual and security for society as a whole".

I conclude: "Blessed are the peacemakers," Jesus said, "for they shall be called children of God" (Mt 5:9). Blessed are those who promote a possible and viable peace, nurture feelings of cordiality, disarm exalted spirits, cultivate care for one another and arouse more love than they are loved, because they will be the first citizens of the new Heaven and of the new Earth, the Great Mother of all.

Peace and Good. Thank you very much.

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