



The Spiritual Pathway to a Sustainable Environment

A Position of the Carmelite NGO on Climate Change

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Eduardo was born in Mendoza, Argentina. He joined the Carmelite Order at the age of 22. He has a MSc in Atmospheric Sciences and a PhD (2006) in Atmospheric and Oceanic Sciences at the National University of Buenos Aires (UBA), and has also a MDiv in Theology at the Buenos Aires Salesian Theology Institute (2005). He also did post doctorate studies in the Interdisciplinary Team for Studies on Atmospheric Processes in the Global Change (PEPACG in Spanish) at the Pontifical Argentinian Catholic University (UCA) where he currently works. He received fellowships for undergraduate studies from UBA in 1998-2000, and the National Council of Sciences and Technique Researches (CONICET). He is currently Professor at the UCA and is a CONICET Assistant Researcher. He works on climate variability and climate change, regional climate impacts on agriculture, and the relationship between galactic cosmic rays and climate. In addition, he reflects on the relationship between science and faith, and between spirituality and ecology. In 2004, he was recognized by the Montevideo Association of Universities (AUGM) for his investigation on links between the South American climate and the galactic cosmic rays in 2004. He is an active member of the American Geophysical Union (AGU) and the American Meteorological Society (AMS). He also belongs to the International Commission of Justice, Peace and integrity of Creation of the Carmelite Order since 2008, and he is a consultant of the Earth, Society and Environment Pastoral Section in the Latin American Council of Catholic Bishops (CELAM) since 2007. Since 2011, Eduardo has been a member of the Coordinating Team of the Carmelite NGO.

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PRINCIPLES

1. The roots of the ecological crisis are linked to the way human beings relate both to the Divine and to nature.
2. The human heart is not satisfied with anything less than the Infinite.
3. Created things can never take the place of God.
4. God has created us to live in harmony with all created things and with God the Creator.
5. Societies with no understanding of this will seek to deal with unlimited human desire by fostering consumerism by every means possible.
6. The Carmelite call to contemplation presents a path to wisdom that can heal both the human person and the planet on which we live.
7. The Carmelite path of contemplation re-orders our human desire and helps us attain happiness without constantly feeding every whim.
8. The Carmelite path can help people appreciate the beauty of Creation and see a way to preserve it for the good of future generations.



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INTRODUCTION

The gift that Carmel has received from God for the world (the Carmelite charism) is essentially based on three elements: prayer, community, and service. They guide the transforming spiritual journey of Carmelites and come together in contemplation, one of the elements of our charism that dynamically unifies them.

The whole of reality could be regarded from a trinitarian perspective: God, human beings and other created things (both visible and invisible), in mutual interpenetration, held together by the Divine Power, the Spirit of God, the enveloping and sustaining source of reality. The contemplation of such reality is a call to discover or be aware of the empowering love of God within human beings and other created things. Such a process requires a profound transformation. The Carmelite way proposes that this transformation is aided by prayer, community and service that are the paths to contemplation.

Ecology is the human activity concerned with the comprehensive management of nature in order to regulate the relationships within and between all created things on the earth that is home to all. Comprehensive management involves taking into account the often forgotten divine dimension. The expression *ecological crisis*, or environmental crisis, means that the comprehensive management of such relationships is at risk. The crisis arises from a number of factors including the lack of attention to the divine dimension of reality which is apparent in the way we have been behaving in westernized societies. The roots of the ecological crisis can be linked to the human relationship with the Divine and with nature. If this is so, the Carmelite value of contemplation can be regarded as an important way to rediscover the Divine dimension of reality. Therefore prayer, community and service are vital ways towards the healing of nature.



THE SPIRITUAL ROOTS OF THE ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

Understanding the link between ecology and the Carmelite charism requires understanding contemplation as a spiritual path that is intimately related to the human journey towards an integration of the human personality, both the dark and luminous sides. This is an ongoing journey towards maturity of human affectivity, intellect and sexuality. These three factors of human life can be considered as parts of the human desire dynamism. Carmelites sum up this journey towards integration with the proposal to *live in allegiance to Jesus Christ*. We believe that God has created us for life and to preserve harmonious relationships with all created things and with God. We need to understand that the roots of the current ecological crisis are human and not merely technical or scientific, as if ecological problems were only a matter of some changes in technology. It is not sufficient simply to change to new “clean” technologies. If it were so, we would not be speaking about a crisis.

The current ecological crisis, evidenced by climate change, energy resource depletion, and an increasing gap between the richest and the poorest, seems to have started with a crisis within human beings. During the past century very profound social changes have taken place. Our understanding of what it means to be human has changed considerably. We moved from thinking of ourselves as creatures equipped with reason, self-sufficiency and freedom, able to make choices regarding what we considered to be best and proper for each of us, towards an understanding of the human being as eternally dissatisfied. Now technology, as a caring nanny, is expected to meet every need and desire.

Because of the huge development in technology, we have been able to take some extraordinary strides to transform nature and enhance and embellish the quality of life. However our expectations have risen greatly and we often look to technology to grant us everything we wish without delay. Our lives are now more comfortable and healthier, thanks to growing scientific knowledge. However, technological development has been appropriated by economic and cultural models to consolidate a particular way of living, which is the technocratic westernized lifestyle. Our western societies have various guiding mantras: “grow or die”; “if you are unhappy go out and buy something,” “quantity and acceleration.” Thus the traditional human rhythms and cycles of nature are forgotten. We seem unaware that the technocracy model of human development is a human construction and is not an uncontrollable natural force before which we must bow.



Conventional economic theory is part of the model of technocratic human development. It is based on the logic of dissatisfaction of desire. Westernized economies empower the rivalry between human desire and greed, by producing an abundance of goods to temporarily alleviate the tension of desire.

In addition, globalized societies, guided by the technocracy laws, have created their own myths. The absence of material goods is seen as the ultimate evil and so human desire and greed are encouraged at every level. Other dangerous mantras of our societies are: "full is better than empty", "much is better than little", "big is better than small". Therefore, we must fill everything, have everything, know everything.

We have a developmental model that is based on the dissatisfaction-desire economy. Human desire can be easily manipulated by external factors. This fact is observed within the phenomenon of globalization, where social fragmentation, and the creation of goods and services for consumption induced by advertising, all become external forces that irresistibly control us from within. We no longer consume the things we need, but everything we are offered without distinction. We have new needs that did

not exist before. The technological novelties appear to be little paradises of illusion that are updated every day and suited to our increasingly fragmented world. Hence, consumerism has been imposed as the only way for the development of westernized life. It has been imposed by the strong interests in the local economy of global enterprises. The maximization of profit is at the expense of many people's lives as well as the environment. In the future, there will not be sufficient energy sources for life as we are now consuming many resources at the lowest cost and the maximum gain.

Another dilemma is that *human desire is unlimited*. According to the Carmelite, Saint John of the Cross, *the heart of the human being is not satisfied with less than Infinite*. For this reason when desire is given free rein on a global scale, natural resources are insufficient to satisfy it. The earth implodes. The physical limits of the planet are too finite in comparison to unlimited desire.



Apart from unlimited human desire and the economy based on that desire, there exists another human limitation which has a negative influence on the health of the earth. Our daily actions are performed locally, but their effects are global.



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this fact. This limitation can be seen in the issue of climate change. Global warming is a symptom of the global socioeconomic model that is ultimately unsustainable.

The planetary temperature is increasing because more greenhouse gases (GHGs, such as CO₂, etc.) are constantly emitted. The GHGs emissions increments are due primarily to energy consumption of oil, natural gas and coal. Ninety percent of global energy consumption is provided by non-renewable power sources. Most of these are starting to disappear. It is said that oil-based energy will be available another 30 to 50 years. The greater demands for energy come from the highly developed societies, which have 25 percent of the global population, and whose lifestyles are characterized by an excessive consumption. This means that we consume more than we need because of the manipulation of human desire through the latest thing presented to us constantly by means of the mass media.

Moreover, as a consequence of current global patterns of development and consumption, social injustice is prevalent in many parts of the world. Consumerism is a luxurious lifestyle when compared with half of the world's population, i.e., only few technologically developed societies enjoy high standards by depleting global resources. A quarter of the global population consumes 80 percent of the earth's resources in order to sustain their lifestyle.



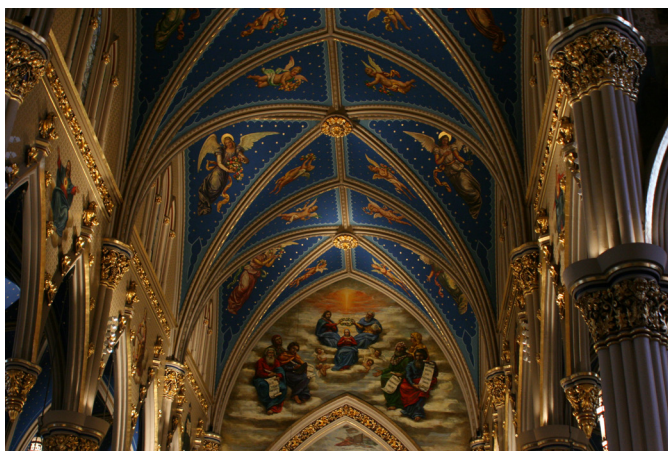
THE PATH OF HEALING

The wisdom of the Carmelite tradition takes us on the inner journey towards the maturity of our human desires. It helps us to recognize the priority of God in our lives. Human desire seems to have such unique characteristics that perplex psychologists of all generations. We have immediate wants but often we do not know exactly what it is we really want. The spiritual path for human beings is to pay attention to what really matters. Only when a person is centered, when all the strengths of his/her desire are channeled in and towards God, then it is possible to achieve equilibrium and peace.

The Carmelite, John of the Cross, describes the origin of unlimited human desire. He says that it is as if God wounds the soul and human life is a search for relief. In seeking relief, we can be too demanding, asking things to take the place of God. That is always the temptation: to make created things (either material or spiritual goods, such as success, pleasure, happiness, sex, power, science, etc., as well as people, our idols or gods and ask them to fulfill our unlimited desires.

However there is no thing or person that can take the place of God in our lives. The divine wound is only healed by the Spirit of God. John of the Cross teaches that human desire always runs the risk of fragmentation in multiple desires attaching themselves to things and people seeking from them what they cannot give. The Carmelite tells of the need to direct our desire toward God who alone can bring harmony and peace. Our addictions and unconscious desires are not obstacles to eliminate but to face up to and integrate within the desire for the Infinite. This process does not mean despising things since we need them, but is a way to bring some order to our desires. Hence, the Carmelite spiritual itinerary regards the interior of the human being as immensely cluttered and therefore needs to be emptied out in order to be filled by God, who is the fulfillment of every human desire.

Our secular societies have no other ways to treat unlimited human desire than to feed them with consumerism. Natural disasters, climate change, air and water pollution, social injustice, impoverishment of many peoples, among other environmental and social issues, are the result of unsustainable development patterns of production and consumption that are supported by economies based on the eternally dissatisfied human desire that has no God.



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CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Carmelite call to contemplation is an inner journey that leads to our maturity and reordering of our human desires. This leads to a healing for people and for the earth. Human beings need to abandon the belief that fulfillment is to be found in amassing material goods. Then we will be able to liberate the earth from the obligation to satisfy this desire for more and more. Such a proposal is certainly not easy because it requires, as a first step, recognition that human desire cannot be satisfied by the material. Opening oneself to experience the empowering love of God can help to re-orient our desires towards a simpler lifestyle. We can then learn that immediate gratification is not always necessary or possible. It requires some sacrifice so that we can receive something greater and better.

The Carmelite contemplative path of transformation by means of prayer, community and service brings about a personal, communitarian and planetary healing, helping us to understand that:

- ◆ Few things are really vital to our lives;
- ◆ Little is often sufficient;
- ◆ Dissatisfaction is part of life;
- ◆ Human aspirations and desires are infinite because they are made for God.

There is no doubt that humanity must face its capacity for self-destruction, which was limited by the sense of the sacred in the past, but now appears to be unlimited. Without a growth in awareness of the divine dimension of reality, an ecological catastrophe seems to be inevitable. It is a time for contemplation so that we might rediscover that all human desire is a manifestation of the profound desire for God.

In our communities we need to recognize that our local actions have global effects. Therefore it is urgent to change our patterns of communitarian life that affect the health of the planet. We need to work for the development of a new economy based on needs, and not to supply a never ending desire for more. We seek to help people become aware of the need to preserve the quality of life for the whole of creation because God has clothed all people and all things with a particular beauty that reflects the beauty of the Creator.

List of Endorsements

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