

Leonardo Boff: Nature -- our access to God's revelation

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Many people wonder why, as a theologian and a philosopher by training, I should address topics that are alien to these disciplines, such as ecology, politics, global warming and others.

I always reply: I do pure theology, but I also deal with other topics simply because I am a theologian. "The job of a theologian," as Thomas Aquinas, the master theologian of them all, explained in the first question of the *Summa Theologica*, "is to study God and divine revelation, and after that, everything else 'in the light of God'(sub ratione Dei), because God is the beginning and the end of everything."

Therefore, it is also the job of theology to deal with other things that are not God, but to do it «in the light of God. To talk both of God and of things is an almost impossible task. First: How can one talk of God, if God does not fit in any dictionary? Second: how can one think about everything else, if the knowledge about them is so great that no one person can master it all? Logically, it is not a question of talking about the economy as an economist would, or about politics as a politician would, but to talk about such subjects from the perspective of God, which presupposes a prior knowledge of those realities in a critical and non-disingenuous form, with respect for their autonomy and recognizing their more solid results. Only after this hard labor, can a theologian ask: How do these realities remain when confronted with God? How do they fit into a more transcendent vision of life and history?

To do theology is not a task like any other, such as going to the movies or the theater. It is a pretty serious undertaking, because God, which is not a tangible object like everything else is, is the category to work with. This is why there is no sense in seeking for the particle God in the confines of matter or inside the Higgs Field. That would suppose that God were part of the world. I do not believe in that God. It would be part of the world and not God. I accept the words of the subtle Franciscan theologian, John Duns Scotus who wrote: "If God exists like things exist, then God does not exist."

This is, God does not belong to the order of things that can be found and described. God is the Precondition and the Support for those things to exist. Without God, things would have remained in nothingness or would return to nothingness. This is the nature of God: not to be a thing, but the Origin of things.

I apply to God as Origin what the Orientals apply to the force that permits them to think: the force by which the thought thinks, can not be thought. The Origin of things, cannot be a thing.

As deduced, doing theology is complicated. Henri Lacordaire, the great French orator, aptly said: "The Catholic

doctor is an almost impossible man. He has to know the depths of faith and the facts of the papacy and also what Saint Paul calls, 'Elements of The World'; this is, all. All." Let us recall what René Descartes said in Discourse on the Method, the basis of modern supreme knowledge: "If I wanted to do theology, I would have to be more than a man." And Erasmus of Rotterdam, the great wise man of the time of the Reformation, observed:

There is something superhuman in the profession of theology." It is not surprising that Martin Heidegger said that a philosophy which has not faced theological questions, has plainly not plumbed its depths. I say this not to glorify theology, but as a confession that its task is almost impossible, something I feel every day.

Logically, there is a theology that does not deserve the name, because is lazy and refuses to think of God. It only thinks what others have thought or what the popes have said.

My sense of the world tells me that now theology as theology has to proclaim out loud: we must conserve nature and enter into harmony with the universe, because they are the great book God has given us. That is where one finds what God wants to tell us. Since we did not bother to read that book, God gave us another, the Scriptures, Christian and of other peoples, for us to learn again that we must read the book of nature. Now nature is being devastated. And with nature, we destroy our access to the revelation of God. We must then talk of nature and of the world in the light of God and of reason. Without preserving nature and the world, the sacred books would lose their meaning, which is to teach us again to read nature and the world. The theological discourse has, then, its place along with all other discourses.

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