

Forty-fourth Theology Congress

A WORLD IN COLLAPSE AND RADICAL CHRISTIANITY

Opening lecture

Juan José Tamayo

Secretary General of the Association of Theologians John XXIII

Good morning, good afternoon, good evening, depending on the continent or country where you are. We begin the 44th Theology Congress, which we have been holding continuously since 1981, except for the year of the pandemic, with the total participation of more than forty thousand people. In light of the turbulent and irrational global reality we are experiencing, this year's theme is A WORLD IN DARKNESS. IS THERE REASON FOR HOPE? I have been asked to give a presentation on A WORLD IN COLLAPSE AND RADICAL CHRISTIANITY, a difficult topic, but one that needs to be addressed.

I will divide my presentation into three parts: in the first, I will try to identify the current global collapse and its main manifestations; in the second, I will deal more briefly with the green shoots that may make it possible to reverse the collapse; in the third, I will try to answer the question of the possible contribution of radical Christianity to this reversal.

1. The main observation is found in the first part of the title: we live in a world in collapse caused by a series of mega-problems and systems of domination that prevent its unblocking. Here are some of the ones that I find most significant and challenging.

- Structural poverty and growing inequality, which constitute 'the common evil', as Ignacio Ellacuría stated, and give rise to the state of unrest that affects the popular majorities of the global South.

- The crisis and lethargy of democracy, subject to the dictatorship of the markets, populism and technocratic governments, which leads to anti-politics in a significant sector of the citizenry.

- The persistence of capitalism in its ultra-neoliberal version, which translates into necropolitics and necrocapitalism, which decides who should live and who must die.

- The persistence of patriarchy through the power of hegemonic masculinities that justify gender discrimination and lead to violence against women, in alliance with other systems of domination, as well as the intersectionality of discrimination against women: gender, sexual identity, ethnicity,

culture, religion, social class, geographical origin, and the decline of feminism in education and among young people.

- The depredation of nature, turned into a rubbish dump, which translates into ecocide through extractivism and other systems of exploitation.

- The arms race which, eighty years after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, could lead to a nuclear war that would destroy humanity and the planet.

- The clash of civilisations, which considers the friend-enemy dialectic in relations between peoples to be the law of history and prevents intercultural dialogue.

- The proliferation and strengthening of social and political fascism, with the consequent weakening of democratic processes and even the danger of their elimination.

- Cultural imperialism, which considers Western culture as the benchmark for all other cultures and leads to epistemicide, that is, the destruction of the knowledge of indigenous peoples.

- The commodification of life, the objectification of human beings and the dehumanisation of adversaries.

- Religious fundamentalism and deicide, which lead to wars of religion that destroy human lives and the planet and justify this in the name of God.

- Xenophobia, racism and aporophobia towards migrants, refugees and displaced poor people, which often lead to violent practices.

- *Idolatry*, which today consists of worshipping not the golden calf, but the gold of the calf, and the often pathological resurgence of religions.

- The systematic *violation of human rights* by states and international institutions whose mission is to ensure their observance.

- Colonialism and neocolonialism, whose survival, even after the independence processes, translates into the colonality of being, having and power.

- The birth of *christoneofascism* as a new religion with numerous followers, consisting of an alliance between the political and cultural far right, with the support of neoliberalism, and fundamentalist Christian movements, with the support of fundamentalist Christian leaders, which translates into hate speech.

- The *triumph of dystopias*, not only as a literary genre, but as a real phenomenon, which closes off any possibility of utopian thinking and projects.
- *Warmongering narratives*, which discredit pacifist language and practices and privilege discourses and practices of armed confrontation.
- The *naturalisation and normalisation of violence* in everyday life and in international relations. Its most destructive, nihilistic and life-threatening form today is Israel's colonial and Zionist project against the Palestinian people, which, based on the principles of the 'chosen people' and the 'promised land', is causing murders and hundreds of thousands of land occupations by Israeli settlers in the West Bank, and genocide in the Gaza Strip with the murder of more than 63,000 people, 70% of whom are women and children, 90% of buildings destroyed, hunger as a weapon of war especially against children with numerous deaths, and ethnic cleansing through the forced displacement of all inhabitants for the construction of a technology and tourism centre, which is Trump's project. And all this is happening with the ineffectiveness of the UN and other international organisations, the complicit inaction of Europe and most of the world's countries, including the Arab countries, the unconditional support of the United States and the silence of most of the world's religious leaders, with the honourable exception of the Latin and Orthodox patriarchs who have strongly condemned the invasion of Gaza City.

2. At this point, the question must be asked: Is the collapse caused by the accumulation of mega-problems and systems of domination operating in the world today irreversible? Is there an alternative to collapse, or do we have to live with it with no way out?

We cannot fall into fatalism and despair, but must seek ways out, paths of hope, at least in a fragmentary way. I believe that there are green shoots that must be helped to grow as an attempt to respond to the collapse. Here are some of them: movements to combat poverty; the awakening of participatory democracy beyond representative democracy; alternative economic practices in favour of the common good; counter-hegemonic globalisation and alter-globalisation movements; the new ecological consciousness that gives rise to the holistic eco-human paradigm and the ethics of care; feminist movements working for non-discrimination against women, gender equality and justice, and the recognition of the rights of LGBTBIQ+ groups as human rights; respect for cultural pluralism and symmetrical dialogue between worldviews, cultures and knowledge; popular mobilisations in favour of decolonisation and independence for the Palestinian people and against genocide, ethnic cleansing and the forced displacement of Gazans.

3. We continue to ask ourselves: what role can and should radical Christianity play in helping to overcome the paralysing collapse of so many utopian energies that are being lost?

I begin by stating that Christianity is either radical or it is not Christianity, understanding radical to mean going to the sources of being, of living and of coexisting, to the roots of the Gospel. It is radical Christians who have saved Christianity from the many crises it has undergone throughout history and who are saving it now. If Christianity does not want to fall into social, cultural, economic and political irrelevance and lose its meaning in the collapse we are experiencing, if it wants to be historically significant, critical and relevant in the field of knowledge and the transformation of the world, if it intends to maintain the liberating dimension that characterised its

origins, if it seeks to convey a message of hope in the darkness of the present and to commit to utopia in these dystopian times, it must have the following characteristics:

- *liberating* for the most vulnerable people, impoverished groups and oppressed peoples;
- *counter-hegemonic*: critical of imperialism and neo-imperialism;
- *alter-globalising*, including those excluded by neoliberal globalisation and practising shared tables where differences in rank and social class disappear;
- *feminist*, respecting diverse affective-sexual identities, beyond heteronormativity and sexual binary; questioning sexism, LGBTBIQ+phobia and hegemonic masculinities; condemning different forms of violence against women: sexual, symbolic, religious, ethnic, labour, legal, etc., in society and in religions, defending gender equality and justice and committing to a fraternal-sororal community;
- *ecological*, defending the dignity and rights of the Earth with the same commitment with which it defends the dignity and rights of human beings;
- *committed to peace* based on justice. Until now, a theology of just war has been developed, which has legitimised systems of domination. It is time to develop a *theology of just peace*;
- committed to the *practice of democracy within its institutions*;
- *inter-ethnic*, recognising and respecting the identities of indigenous cultures in dialogue and on equal terms with other cultural identities.
- a Christianity of *gratuitousness*, not commercialism;
- that recognises the *religious pluriverse* as well as *the plurality of knowledge and ways of life* within it and in society and the dialogue between them.
- that *defends human rights and the equal dignity of all people*, especially those whose rights are most threatened;
- *anti-idolatrous*, denouncing the idolatry of Money turned into a God to whom worship is paid;
- *non-dogmatic*, not entrenched in impossible certainties, but *questioning*, in an attitude of searching and open to doubt.

- *hospitable, Samaritan* towards migrants, refugees and displaced persons;
- *decolonial*, not imposing its Western conception on other cultures;
- in *alliance* with the alternative eco-socialist left and social movements;

If radical Christianity wishes to contribute to overcoming the current collapse and bring light in the midst of the darkness in which we live, it must be a *Christianity in polychrome*, that is, *one that combines the red of justice, the green of ecology and hope, the rainbow of LGTBIQ+, the purple of feminism and the white of peace.*

To bring us closer to the complex and turbulent reality that I have attempted to approach globally, we have specialists in political science, information science, liberation theology, and ecofeminist theology at this conference, who will offer rigorous analyses of some of the most important crises in our world and make proposals for a liberationist, ecological, and ecofeminist Christianity on the horizon of the political, economic, and ecological revolution carried out by Pope Francis in response to these crises. Let us listen to them.

Thank you very much.