

YESTERDAY'S AND TODAY'S SACRED PLACES **Maria-Teresa GAONA*, Paraguay**

The planet's primitive inhabitants may have seen God everywhere and in all nature's phenomenon had relationship with his power or his opposite, the evil.

Thinking about this aspect, I asked myself many questions, some of which can be answered immediately and others which consider deeper studies. The questions are: "Why does man's contact with God in nature had been concentrated in isolated buildings? What types of knowledge or technologies were developed to produce these changes? Is it possible that myths of creation are related to a place? Are temples manifestations of man's supremacy on nature? What is more important: Man's idea or God's idea? Does primitive cultures (called this way by a mere historical question), have a conception of "sacred place" different from ours?"

We find several stages in the process of humanity's evolution which, simplified, can be divided in two big periods that differ from each other in development of science and technology, the conception of God, man, space, time and nature etc and the relationship between them.

In the first period, man was nomadic, gatherer and hunter and his social organization was patriarchal, his relationship with nature was magic. Neither science nor technology had been developed. He explained phenomena as supernatural forces.

With an increase of population, families formed clans and tribes. Their knowledge of fire, first creative act that linked him to supernatural forces, and implements or weapons, allowed them to tame animals and to become less nomad.

The result of this was the beginning of a scientific knowledge generated from the observation of nature and the duration of its cycles. And, at night, the constant observation of the sky allowed man to develop astronomy.

With this knowledge man became sedentary and he evolves. From agricultural to industrial production and, in the last hundred and fifty years, from an industrial society to a computer science oriented one, in a quick process of science and technology development. In this process the mythical explanations are replaced by rational ones. And man, fearful and inserted in nature, becomes a creator and transformer.

Reasoning, the element that differentiates man from other creatures of the universe, is the base of this development. It becomes, when man checks on the force of thought, the foundation of all explanations of human facts and nature.

The supremacy of reasoning limits knowledge and sciences to think what is observed and measured.

Today, this rational knowledge is also questioned as it can only explain the facts for its causes and consequences. The intuition, the affectivity and the chance are considered as part of our knowing way. New theories, as the quantum physics or hyper-dimensional physics, explain the reality almost with the same concepts used in the oldest religions, but using different words.

In the diverse stages of the human evolution, man found different answers in the religious plane, in the relationship space - time, man - God - nature, in the use of space and the type of sacred places.

In my opinion, the fundamental change, which causes the other ones, is given in the concept that passes from man being fearful of natural phenomena to one who gradually observes nature, first to adapt to it, and then to develop knowledge and technologies that allow him to dominate it.

Man this way, acquired characteristics of 'his creator', he comes to the thought that he is able to create and to dominate to nature by means of reasoning.

The supremacy of reasoning reaches its maximum expression in the negation of the existence of God and in the theories sustaining that God has been created by men. From this point of view, the man is the only creator and, consequently, he is superior to God, his creature.

The primitive cultures related places of the creation or sacred places to a tree or a mountain. The selected element for each culture was in relation with their peculiar way of conceiving the origin of the world.

In spite of the varied accounts of creation myths, they are similar in some fundamental aspects: a) the directions: north and south, above and below; b) the polarity: good and evil, male and female; c) the primordial elements with which the creatures are formed: water, earth, fire; d) the different worlds: superior world, earth, dark world; e) the matter's density process; and f) the man like superior creature.

The most important is that, the myths relate the creation by means of a model centred in man and it responds, in all cases, to the two fundamental questions: Where do I come from? And where do I go? So, myths talk about the origin of the world, our role and, more important still, our return after having left this world.

This is symbolized in the sacred place that can be a lake, like in the myth of Viracocha, or a mountain like Yazuká Vendá or the Mount Meru or an indefinite place as the Paradise or Holy Jerusalem.

The man's domination over nature, through development of technology, keeps gradually separating him. In the constant search of expressing this separation and the superiority compared to other creatures and elements of the world, the man built temples and, this way, bounded the sacred space and, in a way, locked God into a space created by man, being no more an external element. This way man expressed his power.

In our conception that could have been seen in the Egypt of the Pharaohs, in Israel's First Temple, in Greece, in India, in Japan and in all traditions and religions derived from them: The place consecrated to enter in relationship and communication with God, was a temple. As such, it is a closed and sacred place, and has more sacred places inside. A small space to which the ordinary people do not have access we call tabernacle or "Santa sanctorum".

The place where temples were built can also be analysed in two stages. The first related to cultures previous to the Modern Age: Greece, Egyptian, Rome, Oriental Civilizations, Early Ages, Middle Ages and the colonies. In these times, temples were located on old sacred places or in places of seismic energy. In many cases, Gothic Cathedrals imitate the sky, as, all dedicated to Our Mother (Notre Dame) to reproduce the Virgo constellation. The pyramids of the plateau of Gizeh reproduce the belt of Osiers. Better yet, measures of the temples responded to dimensions proportional to earth or relationships and measures of cosmos like the number Pi or Phi, the sacred number of the creation that in mathematical expression is the Fibonacci series.

In the second stage, in modern age, and very especially in the 20th century, as an expression of the domination of reasoning, temples are located where man decides.

However, and in spite of all the existent rationality, temples are not only privileged places to enter in contact with divinity but teaching centres. In some cases very clearly, the Gothic cathedrals, the Hindu temples or Petra, true books carved in stone show their mysteries only to those people that know the hidden meaning of symbols. To them a superior spiritual knowledge is transmitted. In other cases, magic ceremonies of the Mess reminds us that the creative forces, or transmutation forces, come from above, from the Creator, and they teach us the way to return to Him: The identification with the Father is expressed in rite of the communion.

The evolution of magic to rational thought implied, also a change in conception of space and time. In primitive cultures, in constant contact with nature, space was limitless and time was measured by the agricultural cycles. The development of the scientific knowledge reminds us to other conceptions.

In the first stages of knowledge the concept of geometric space was developed, it was fundamentally, related to the surface or to the differentiation between objects. In this case, we speak about distance to be covered or of the three-dimensional, length, width and height. In both cases, time is a different dimension with its own categories.

In the last century, the notion of space and time was established in every day life. On the one hand time is necessary for observation, crossing or knowing a space that presents different facets and dimensions and, on the other hand, time is an expression of events that happened in that space.

The pos-modernity is characterized by progress in the field of communications, physics, knowledge of the mind, and sciences integration. They are founded on the proposals of Einstein, of the continuum of space and time. One can stop to think in a linear way and the convergence of present past and future in a point and is possible, as such, that the space does not exist or it is a simple point without dimensions.

We can conceive the world like multidimensional, as an infinite field of possible actions, one of which man selects and by these means he chooses a destination making use of his freedom, just as the old indigenous shamans thought and acted. or the Orientals propose the search of conscience's expansion.

The space is not only a geographical place. It's also a "place-situation" that the merely physical thing transcends, in which temporary, social, economic and cultural interrelations converge. The space is virtual, it is a mere concept, just as we live it every day in the internet, or as we speak of women's space or the social space, or as the primitive cultures did when they spoke of the sky, of the *Yby mba'eî asy*, the earth without evil called by the *Guaraní* tribes.

Under this conception, man materializes the creator's new characteristics, because the internet is omnipresent and some people think that it is omnipotent. This new contribution of science brings us nearer to ancestral conceptions.

Our ancestors were immersing in the mystic and mythical world, without the urgency that the industry printed to all our actions. Marvelled by creation and governed by the agricultural cycles, the primitive cultures did not conceive its separation of nature and the creative process of which they were part, helping, collaborating and feeling responsible for its continuity. Just At the winter solstice, the Inca celebrated the the *Inti Rama*, in Peru, during which a maiden that represented the "Mother Earth", the *Pacha Mama*, was offered and sacrificed to take care of the creation while Inti, the sun, transit trough the sub-world: the winter. In *Yasuká Vendá*, Paraguay, navel and origin of the world a ceremonial dance is performed every day. The sacred hill is designated to *Pa'i Tavvyterá*, considered as guardians of creation. They have to be veiled and to be thanked every day.

The relationship of man and nature, respectful of their cycles gets lost with the development of science and technology. The modern man, especially the scientist, considers himself as a creator and he feels able to modify the cycles of nature, to control it with technology and to transform it with the creation of transgenic products or recreating it by cloning.

With this, we reach the conception that man is superior to the cosmos and to planet earth. Man gained supremacy over God he assumes the creator's characteristics and puts into practice every day, manifesting his domination and separation from nature, previously considered as divine creation. Therefore, problems and climatic changes should not surprise us.

Recently, small groups supported by the calls "dissident scientists", called movements of the New Age or the environmentalists, based on ancestral knowledge or the discoveries of quantum and hyper-dimensional physics, leave the religious temples and the "scientific knowledge temples" and dive in nature being identified with it. Looking for the unit among cosmos and man, in that stratum that Jung called 'collective unconscious' and to which one can consent by means of altered states of conscience and this way, like in all previous cases, to look for the return to the origin, to the Father.

As a final reflection, we can say that:

Along the humanity's history man's concepts of God, nature, space and time and the relationship between them changed. As a consequence, the religious manifestation and the conception of sacred place as well as their physical expression, in essence, this concept of place privilege to unite to God, has not changed.

As the "myth of the eternal return" related us, the mentioned concepts reproduce over and over. People of the 21st century think in the same way as our ancestors did, just as some advances of the science demonstrate us the practice of some human groups, standing out among these forms of thinking: the man's basic union with nature, the continuum of space and time, the coexistence of present, past, and future and their accessibility to the same one, the non-spatiality and the multidimensionality of the world and of the whole creation.

Fundamentally, referring to the topic of this work, yesterday's sacred places remains the same as today's sacred places because, more than a physical space, they are an archetype, a concept, an lively teaching that explains us our origin and our destination.

Even more, it is possible that this sacred place will be for most of the population in next years, what it is now for some people: The man's heart, its "heart - temple", where divinity inhabits.

ABSTRACT

In the process of the humanity's evolution we find several stages, man found different answers in the religious planes, in the relationship of space and time, man - God and nature, in the use of the space and in the sacred place's type. The reasoning, element that differentiates man from other creatures, is the base of this development. However, the concept of the sacred place is the same although the space is different.

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