

Mutual Accompaniment in the Divine *Ruah*

On Discernment and
Spirituality at Uncertain Times

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Carlos Mendoza-Álvarez

Prologue by Carmenmargarita Sánchez de León
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Foreword by
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Portland & Boston 2022

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First edition, 2023.

Spirituality Collection

Aliosventos Ediciones AC. Cardenal 32, Zibatá, El Marqués, Querétaro, 76269.

Telephone: 442 467 8838.

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Foreword: Carmenmargarita Sánchez de León

Paintings: Paulo Medina

Cover Design: Daniel Capri / Lumbral Studio

Editor: Juan Manuel Escamilla González Aragón

Editorial Design: Juan Antonio García Trejo

Translation: Yoli Jones

ISBN: 9798867050283 (Paperback)

ISBN: 9798867050559 (Hardcover)

Made, with love, in Mexico and the United Kingdom..

Printed on demand in:

Mexico, United States, United Kingdom, France, Spain, Italy, and Japan.

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Foreword

On September 15th, 1963, Addie Mae, Cynthia, Carole, and Carol Denise, four African-American girls attending Bible School, were killed by a bomb planted by white supremacists at the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama. This was an act that few could articulate or explain. Faced with such violent and heartbreaking realities, theology often runs out of ground to explain in depth why or how human beings are capable of so much evil against others, against our companion, the Earth, and against what lives on her. Although incredible theories have been developed in the social sciences that account for how human evil is forged in oppressive systems and structures such as patriarchy, racism, heteronormativity, extractive capitalism, or colonialism, among others, these theories and analyses are not enough to redirect humanity toward a deep look at ourselves and our environment. Perhaps when the body embraces its spirituality, it finds possibilities to overcome moments in which neither words nor analysis are enough. However, spirituality or spiritualities are not neutral or easy spaces since they are also conditioned to our power struggles from the materiality from which they emanate and of which they are a part. At the same time, spiritualities are spaces that offer more flexibility to maintain an openness to the possibilities of life that, from our more closed forms of knowledge, it is difficult to understand or address.

From the most open spirituality, one that refuses to find closed answers, conversations with multiple voices can develop, conversations that open windows of hope. In the face of the tragedy of September 15th, one of those multiple-voiced conversations took place that helped us process inexplicable pain, discern paths, and do so mutually. The tribute proclaimed by Martin Luther King before the coffins of Addie Mae, Cynthia, Carole, and Carol Denise, and the musical piece by John Coltrane, *Alabama*, became two “discursive” pieces of deep spirituality

that do not give us definitive answers but that, instead, opened up possibilities.

In his tribute, Luther King says:

...life is hard, at times as hard as crucible steel. It has its bleak and difficult moments. Like the ever-flowing waters of the river, life has its moments of drought and its moments of flood. Like the ever-changing cycle of the seasons, life has the soothing warmth of its summers and the piercing chill of its winters. And if one will hold on, he will discover that God walks with him and can lift you from the fatigue of despair to the buoyancy of hope and transform dark and desolate valleys into sunlit paths of inner peace.¹

In the piece *Alabama*,² Coltrane speaks through his saxophone in the same tone of voice as Luther King, with a breathless calm that requires our immediate attention. It is clear that the composition *Alabama* and its first interpretation interact with King's tribute. King, in turn, converses with the musicality that the music of Afro-descendant communities generates from the depths of their resistance. The tonic variants of the saxophone fill the gaps in Luther King's speech; they complement it, but Coltrane's interpretation is not a monologue. The piano intervenes with its repeated notes that force us to look more closely at what happened. The jingles of the cymbals insist on the clamor for acceptance, together with a contrabass that gives a weighty background to the conversations. Luther King does not speak alone either. He speaks with nature, his black and white siblings, and Shakespeare in *Hamlet* to finally close the tribute with a "Good night, princesses," which is an opening to tomorrow, to the conviction of a new sun. However, we are not sure what it will be like. For his part, Coltrane closes his performance with an ending that doesn't seem to end, and one remains waiting for the following note. There is no final note.

1 "Eulogy for the Martyred Children (September 18, 1963), Pt. 1." n.d., YouTube Video. Accessed November 15, 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ccFvd5DV5Y>. (Translation: *The Martin Luther King Papers Project*, "Eulogy for the Martyred Children," Birmingham, AL, September 18, 1963. Stanford University, 2003.)

2 Coltrane, John. "Alabama". YouTube Video. Accessed November 15, 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=saN1BwlxJxA>.



Nor is there a final note between Juan Carlos La Puente and Carlos Mendoza, who, in a spiral movement, resume a day of work/conversation in Nairobi, Kenya, on African lands, the place of the beginnings of humanity. The path is open to re-imagining, to letting ourselves be moved by the *Ruah* in these uncertain times. The *Ruah* will have infinite paths to offer; there is no end but possibilities in the face of the terror of the violence that shakes us, and that seems to have the last word. And from there, both La Puente and Mendoza, as well as Luther King and Coltrane, lead us to think again: what are the necessary spiritualities for these times?

But what is spirituality? Perhaps those of us who have always lived in ecclesial contexts do not ask ourselves this question; we assume what we have learned by rote and repetition. On the other hand, those who are exhausted from religious institutions or do not assume their faith from religions often start from the understanding that spirituality is not part of their lives. Spirituality, or better yet, spiritualities, are experiences that need to be questioned, deconstructed, and revisited again and again. Without such searching exercises, which the authors call discernment, it is very easy for spiritualities to become an object of consumption within the market system; without discernment, it is easy in the whirlwind of this world for spiritualities to be oversimplified to provide magical solutions to complex situations; or, in an act of rebellion and protest against the institutions that have robbed us of the right to see ourselves as inherently spiritual beings, to turn our backs on an element vital to our lives. The conversation of two friends in search, in discernment, Juan Carlos La Puente and Carlos Mendoza Álvarez, helps us to question, deconstruct, and revisit our concepts of spirituality, particularly within the Christian *ethos*. Through a conversation that develops in an epistolary manner, in the style of Jesus' initial movement, we feel in our bodies the spiritual crossroads that Juan Carlos and Carlos feel in the face of the pains, joys, and reconciliations of the families of the disappeared, of women attacked by patriarchal violence, of migrants, of people of diverse genders and sexualities, of the Earth

herself, among others. We feel the corporal-spiritual struggle of those who, like Jacob, fight against Divinity itself to realize that this process does not come out unscathed and that in order to receive a blessing, it will be necessary to be wounded. That struggle with the Divine is born of deep awareness –not only of oneself but of the awareness of the other in a relationship of mutuality and interconnection. That connection is “the bridge,”³ in old Spanish, “la puente,” allowing us to break the *other-ness* built in the bowels of systems of oppression.⁴ It is a change in the “postural geography,”⁵ which, instead of being upright/independent (the proposal of extractivist capitalism), is inclined towards the other to provide affection and care. That act is to attend to the wound (i.e., *vul*, one of the meanings of vulnerable) of the other from one’s own vulnerability. In this way, the vulnerability of life is transformed not into an element to be removed from our lives but into a field of struggle that allows resistances to germinate and strengthen.⁶

Juan Carlos and Carlos live their vulnerabilities from mutuality and interconnection with each other and others who challenge them from their own vulnerabilities, generating spaces of resistance and care. From what we hear from their multiple voices, this embrace of care as a jewel of the most coherent expression of spiritualities comes from the actions of women who seek to rescue their bodies/territories, to dig down to the last mound of earth to recover the remains of their loved ones, those murdered by the systems of oppression that impact us. The

3 In 1983, with the publication of the book *This Bridge Called My Back*, authors Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, among others, proclaimed in multiple voices and styles the need for intersectionality among feminists “of color”. Their stories and essays helped us to visualize the concept of intersectionality. From this work and others developed later, Gloria Anzaldúa would elaborate the concept of “the bridge” as a fundamental exercise for the corporo-spiritualities of women, especially racialized women. See: Anzaldúa, Gloria, and Cherrie Moraga, eds. “This Bridge Called My Back,” *Writings of Radical Women of Color*, 1981.

4 In the book *The Origin of Others*, African-American writer Toni Morrison argues in a series of essays how the slave system promoted the creation of the ‘other’ with the intention of dehumanizing a part of society. This construct of *otherness* has mutated but prevails in order to sustain systemic oppressions. See: Morrison, Toni. “The origin of others” in *The Origin of Others*. Harvard University Press, 2017.

5 This concept of change in postural geography is taken up by the philosopher Adriana Cavarero, in her reflections on the concept of vulnerability.

6 The concept of vulnerability as a possible space of struggle and inclination for the others is discussed by the philosopher and feminist Silvia López Gil in her doctoral thesis. See: López Gil, Silvia. *Filosofía de la diferencia y teoría feminista contemporáneas: ¿Cómo pensar la política hoy?*, 2013.

searching women move their spiritualities on uncertain paths because sometimes it is necessary to leave behind the security of what is dear/present to search for what is dear/abducted. This space of uncertainty moves spirituality to activate discernment, and from there, they are transformed into alternatives that cry out against the structures of the coloniality of power wherever they are found or manifest themselves.

Who Is Writing?

One of the riches of this four-handed writing is that it makes us feel-think about a relational theological work, in which the image of the theologian / solitary man is replaced by several voices and bodies that weave together with the two authors, thus emerging theological thoughts that are written not only with four hands, but with countless hands, eyes, ears and bodies, which are added to the process that the authors call discernment. Although liberation theology made a great methodological effort to build outside of academic solitude, integrating itself into base communities, it is no less true that over time, it remained confined to the spaces of seminaries or universities, talking about and not together with. Still, children of liberation theology, Carlos and Juan Carlos open their condor wings so that the uncertain winds of the *Ruah* may carry them with those who were not initially named by liberation theology: women, bodies affirmed as women, racialized people, people of sexual and gender diversity, and the land/territory. Mendoza and La Puente undress before us in their vulnerabilities to clothe themselves with the new poor, who have sexuality, joy, pains, and contradictions, which zigzag in search of new possibilities that make us question the systems we live in.

This methodological courage is fundamental to lead us to decolonizing theologies: theologies that recognize that knowledges are multiple, that acknowledge that in these lands of Abya Yala, institutional Christianity was and is the protagonist of an epistemic genocide that silences and demonizes other ways of imagining in theological and spiritual spaces. The systems that hide the diversity of knowledges are the

product of extractivism and mercantilist societies, in which even spirituality can become an ecclesiastical and theological merchandise.

From Where?

Feeling-thinking with Mendoza and La Puente, our skins enter diverse geographies: Mexico, Peru, Oregon, Colombia, Brazil, Puerto Rico, and Kenya, which are lived, paradoxically, from a non-place. This non-place, a border or marginal space, summons us to aspire to an Earth-home without borders and in affirmation of territories/bodies. These divine anarchies resist the attempted kidnapping of imperial and colonial religious institutions. They have another project among the desert topography of Sinaloa, in the canyon of Arequipa, or in the middle of our Latin American and Caribbean cities, full of contradictions and paradoxes.

Our route spirals back to Africa, from where we set off this time to contemplate the highest mountain on the African continent, Kilimanjaro. This three-volcano range, which points out into the universe with its white glow, is experiencing a gradual retreat of its snow. With an average annual loss of 2.5 percent from 1989 to 2007, it seems that the African firebrand will eventually cease to be. And it is from this threatened beauty that the *Ruah* blows in Juan Carlos and Carlos and provokes us again to call us to discernment, to the mobility that leads us to find new signs of life and hope even in the midst of that which is consumed by the voracity of systems lacking love for the earth and all its inhabitants. The *Ruah* continues to blow from the spiritual bodies that show us the possibilities of new suns and new times, new rhythms in a continuous concert of hope.

Carmenmargarita Sánchez de León
Mexico City, October 4th, 2022

Introduction

The starry sky of the African savannah welcomes us to feel at home after long geographical journeys and intense days of exchanging experiences and words with communities that care for the fragile life in these lands known as the cradle of humanity.

While moved by the colloquium that gathered us to think about the present and future of ecclesial African communities, we were touched with unexpected force by the visit to Kibera. This Nairobi neighborhood city is often described as the largest slum in the world, holding around one million inhabitants. But in the cracks of this crushing slab of urban marginalization, we discover sprouts of life that burst with surprising strength. Leonora speaks with a strong and clear voice. Her body radiates work and strength. With her frank smile and her informed words, she tells us about the schools and soup kitchens that a network of women has formed over the years, with the support of some national and foreign institutions, to take care of children abandoned to their fate or orphaned by war, internal migration or the effects of another, older, pandemic that has been ravaging Africa for decades: HIV-AIDS. The choirs and dances with which the smiling girls and boys, accompanied by their teachers, welcome us are both a celebration and a clamor that seeks to touch the hearts of those who want to be part of a community in a permanent gestation process. The taste of the cooked corn that Kalasina offered us at her vegetable stand, where she works to earn income for her family and the little school, still lingers on our palates. The words of Moses, one of the teachers, recounting his own story of vulnerability during his childhood and his courage to face marginalization, resound like a strong echo of prayers and consolation that springs with hope.

With these and so many other experiences in our hearts and minds, we arrived at a national park in Kenya to listen to the beasts and contemplate the summit of Kilimanjaro before its glacier disappears.

We came with the hope that the skies and the land would allow us to see glimpses of an ancestral world that saw the birth of humanity as a species – a world that we need to care for and inhabit in ways other than predation and extractivism.

What better environment to resume in that geographical and temporal space our conversation on spirituality and discernment in times of global uncertainty, where we reread what we shared in our virtual epistolary exchange by which we proposed to invite other people to join this conversation? How can we tell you, who reads our epistolary exchange now, who we are and what paths we have walked in Peru, Mexico, and other American lands that have motivated these conversations? Why do we wish to share with you these thoughts and intuitions that animate our question of spirituality today? Who has taught us how to come together in coexistence like the beasts of the African savannah that we have gazed upon in awe these days? Where do we sense that communities of life and mutual care lead us in these uncertain times? When rereading these pages written by four hands, we coincided with our good friend Elías González, who, having read the manuscript, asked us how we could make accessible to those who read it the motivations that moved us to write it and why it might be helpful to read and reflect on these lines. After these questions, in the evening, we talked about them and shared in these first pages what has moved us to write this book in four hands.

The Ruah

Margarita's hands dance as she recalls Jesus' inclusive banquet with song and prayer at the end of a retreat in a village in the central valleys of Mexico. They flutter like the divine *Ruah* that consecrates our bodies as places of blessing and communion. This image of a communitarian ritual of communion as a recognition of mutuality, proximity, and commitment to one another reflects that inner depth that animates us, which we call spirituality, to receive the vital force of the divine Sophia that summons us to create other worlds as responses of indignation and hope to the systemic violence in which we are immersed. But this *Ruah*

also moves us to discern responses to the threatened life that is marginalized for various reasons in order to dream and imagine paths of redemption amid this broken history of wounded humanity. In this way, we hope others will embark on paths of mutual accompaniment.

The Uncertainty of Our Time

This shared journey has opened our minds and hearts to allow us to be challenged by those whom the world does not see but with whom we seek to walk: indigenous peoples, migrants, women, LGBTIQ+ collectives, people with disabilities, and so many others who make their place of exclusion a space of indignation, resilience, and re-existence. This route also implies tuning our ears and learning to dialogue with other cultures to better understand the *uncertainty* of our times while savoring with relish the life that emerges from resistance. The cry of Cleusa Caldeira, the theologian of *theoquilombism*,⁷ who, with her passion for life, justice, and compassion, has opened new paths for us.

*Hope in the Potencia of Survivors*⁸

Chayito's strength as a mother who survived her son's disappearance years ago is a source of hope amid the despair that reigns in more than 120,000 families who have been going through the same drama in Mexico for the last two decades. Her endurance, but above all, the strength of her maternal love, surrounds us simultaneously as it pricks our souls like a sting. With her, we have also learned to walk.

7 In dialogue with critical black thought, the concept *theoquilombism* was developed by Black Christian Theology in Brazil and Africa to address political and liberation issues within the black afrodiaporic communities.

8 Translator's note: We keep here the word in Spanish, *Potencia*. This type of agency would be related to what Carlos explains as the "*potencia* of the poor." Instead of "*poder*" (power), he uses the Latin word *potentia*, which is different from the Latin word *potestas* (power). *Potentia* of the poor is about a resistance and re-existence that opens up new ways to live beyond hegemonic promises. Cf. Mendoza-Álvarez, Carlos. *A theology of mutual accompaniment. Pedagogical guide for reading the work of Carlos Mendoza-Álvarez*, edited by Cleusa Caldeira, Juan Carlos La Puente and Juan Jesús Vásquez. México, 2022 (<https://www.echo-eco.space/groundings>)

The Beginning of Our Mutual Accompaniment

We met two decades ago studying Latin American social problems concerning theology in a communitarian way in the Master's program in Latin American Thought at the Pedro de Córdoba Institute, which at that time was run by the Dominicans in Santiago, Chile, endorsed by the University of Arts and Social Sciences (ARCIS). It was a project of innovation in academic formation that sought to recreate a community style of teaching-learning, with students and faculty living in the same house, sharing both the classroom and daily life, moments of work, study, rituals, and festivities, in the spirit that five centuries ago encouraged the Dominicans in the Americas to think and act in the context of colonization.

Liberation theology was the terrain shared and explored in those years, following the reflections of a theology of the signs of the times rooted in the preaching of the first Dominicans in the American continent, such as Pedro de Córdoba and Bartolomé de Las Casas. But we reread them with the perspective opened by Gustavo Gutiérrez in Peru, the pastoral work of the Landless Rural Workers Movement in Brazil, and the indigenous theology of Mayan, Aymara, and Quechua communities. We learned to link these struggles for justice with modern approaches to a new social and political model that we explored in the critical European and Latin American thinking of the second half of the twentieth century.

That was the beginning of a friendship that has matured over the years. From the beginning, Juan Carlos' first concern was how to nourish the practice of human rights advocacy with spirituality and vice versa and sustain hope by going beyond social and religious activism. Carlos' theological work was moving from the initial dialogue of liberation theology with European liberal thought toward a work of attentive listening to the poor and forgotten, the victims and the excluded who have their own word and wisdom, to weave with their knowledge a theology from the victims and their resistances.

Over the years, mimetic theory, decolonial thought, and queer theory would be incorporated into this network of life and thought that Juan Carlos and Carlos began to weave with friends and colleagues

from the Peruvian and Brazilian suburbs, the Mexican highlands, and the northwest coast of the United States, who lived similar crossroads where social activism and spirituality were mutually invoked.

In the summer of 2016, a meeting took place in Puerto Rico, and there, surrounded by an embrace between Juan Carlos, Carlos, Ron, and Melissa, the seed of the Spiritual and Theological Mutual Accompaniment was sown, which, throughout the last seven years, has continued to summon more companions from different latitudes of the planet to nourish us with our experiences, practices, and thoughts. In this fertile land, this book is born. It really is an open letter of social and spiritual friendship to summon those who feel the same concern in their lives.

Moved by this shared history, with their concerns, intuitions, and experiences, tying up the loose ends of accompanying social movements of women, migrants, *quilombos*, the LGBTIQ+ community, native peoples, and so many other subjectivities and invisibilized collectives, the idea came of writing this book with four different hands.

A year ago, in Boston, in a meeting of fraternal friendship that we created to accompany us in the experience of migration in the North, the idea arose to write this itinerary that seeks to help us “drink from our own well,” as Gustavo Gutiérrez invited us to do several decades ago. To return to the sources means telling these stories of spirituality and discernment for us today.

Finally, we think it would be good to share these experiences and reflections with those with whom we have walked, but also to open the conversation to those who have the same thirst for mutuality in the present hour of global uncertainty to discover new paths of spirituality and discernment.

Let these lines serve as an invitation to sit at a common table of shared words, waiting for future meetings in social friendship for the *Ruah* that encourages us to weave networks of mutual accompaniment to seek commemorative justice and peace with truth.



I

Threshold

Boston, January 17th, 2022

After two years of pandemic, we have been discovering with dismay humanity's constitutive fragility as creatures inhabiting an environment that is both weak and strong simultaneously. The interdependence of all the beings that populate our common home has become increasingly evident in two seemingly unconnected but intimately related phenomena: climate change and global digital interconnection. Climate change has made us realize that ecological balance depends on all of us, and digital networks are showing us a new way of weaving virtual relationships.

Moved by the vertiginous changes we face, dear Juan Carlos, we wish to sow and cultivate in this book written by four hands and two hearts a germinal idea that arose in our conversations about the interior and communal life that the divine *Ruah* inspires in these uncertain times. In this way, we cultivate mutual accompaniment in these times of uncertainty and hope.

Two ancient names have come to our lips in the exchanges in Boston, Portland, and the virtual cloud: discernment and spirituality. Let us explore each of those depths of inner and communal life, learning to name with new words that flow in the silence of meditation and in the life shared with others in various forums, be they temples, public squares, or the vaulted night sky. Perhaps, at the end of this journey, the old words will give way to new forms, metaphors, and symbols to tell the stories of an embodied, caring resistance that we are discovering with those with whom we coincide in this life. Surely, we will draw from the ancestors' well of wise or provocative words, perhaps leaving with unanswered questions but with the strength to open a horizon where we can all belong.

I would like to begin by telling a story of our gathering from five years ago. We met with companions of Spiritual and Theological Mutual Accompaniment in Cuernavaca, Mexico, to close an annual cycle of the shared journey that was dedicated to strengthening our lives and our social and pastoral commitments of closeness with vulnerable people and communities in resistance, both in Mexico and in the United States, Peru, and Brazil. The final ritual of communion and thanksgiving was co-chaired by all, with meditations arranged in the cool morning grass, songs and ritual dances under the canopies of flowering flame trees, sacred texts, and group meditations around the pool of water. Gestures and movements prepared us to break bread and share the cup of the covenant in memory of Jesus of Nazareth and the righteous people of history. One of the phrases that resonated the most that noon was expressed with meridian clarity by Carmen Margarita Sánchez de León: “Let us return to the source of the spiritualities that were kidnapped by religions.” As we sang the prayer of the blessing of the gifts, guided by this woman of strong and joyful faith, we experienced a communal way of being that arose from our recognized, accepted, and welcomed diversity. Diversity of bodies and sexualities, religious and spiritual traditions, and ethnic and cultural roots – all summoned to the common table of the divine Sophia.

It seems that this shared spiritual journey experience was a provocative and new way for us. It comforted us. It strengthened and challenged us to return home with new energy to family, community, the temple, and the local and global public square. It was an expression of *communal discernment* and *incarnated spirituality* in a context of uncertain times. From this spiritual source, I would now like to drink with you the water of the interior life we long to name together in this book written with four hands and two hearts. Inner life that we usually describe as *discernment* in its inner dynamism and as *spirituality* in its expressive dimension that opens us to a new world of living relationship of proximity with others, be it the neighbor, the common home, or the Love that can do everything.

To begin the conversation, I would like to tell you what I understand now by discernment and spirituality at this meridian moment of my life, for us to then meditate, attending to your own words and

reflections on these themes. Of course, I am certain that we will be stammering together toward another language, other words, and other metaphors, which will allow us to pronounce with new tones of voice that source of life, dignity, and meaning that we call interior and communal life.

Discernment was a monastic practice of *fuga mundi* in ancient Christianity, which was born amid the collapse of the Roman Empire. In those centuries, fathers and mothers of the desert in Asia Minor rejected the *Pax Romana*, based on the idolatry of the power of the time, to search for something different, practicing meditation and asceticism to reach *contemplatio*. This way of life represented an authentic *counterculture* to the people's submission to the empire of the time, based on a constant exercise of knowledge of the inner world of desire, idols, dreams, and false images of oneself that human beings of any time often experience.

That countercultural monastic practice became, with the passage of time, the use and abuse of a moralizing power that, unfortunately, was denying the body and sexuality, hunger and work, joy and loving embrace as spaces of divinization.

In medieval times, the discernment of spirits was associated with the *vita moralis*, understood as an actualization of the grace of Christ, according to Thomas Aquinas. The mystics of those centuries in medieval Christianity and incipient modernity described spirituality as the care of the divine spark in the soul in the expression of Juliana of Norwich, the detachment of the self in the voice of Meister Eckhart, the dark light in the created human spirit as Ruysbroeck said, or as the "inner cell" that Catherine of Siena referred to, where God speaks to the soul as in a nuptial bed.

Centuries later, Ignatius of Loyola recovered the importance of the discernment of spirits "to attain love" as part of a profound process of interior life linked to the making of decisions that allow the person in discernment to follow Jesus Christ with greater freedom as a model of compassionate life given to others out of love. Thus, Ignatian discernment was born with a modern stamp of introspection for action as a form of spirituality that has animated many communities of Christian life for five hundred years.

Perhaps today, amidst another, now global, empire in times of crisis, is the occasion to revisit those ancient and modern foundational testimonies of exploring those nooks and crannies of interiority. Undoubtedly, in our context of the crisis of modernity, psychoanalysis, psychotherapy, and the peoples' wisdoms will help us to explore those subterranean rivers of dreams, memory, fears, traumas, and longings for fulfillment in order to distinguish (discern) in them the vital sap that must be preserved and allowed to flow, separating it from the debris of the ego that is not worth preserving.

But it is not a solitary inner journey. Although non-transferable, this experience of being 'I, myself' is a gift received from others, with all the masks and opportunities that the mystery of our inner self – that inner Self so explored and celebrated by the great Thomas Merton – represents in each new relationship. To begin with, it is a gift we receive from our ancestors and from the creatures accompanying us in our common home. And, in its radical depths, it designates an inner self that is discovered to be inhabited by a loving otherness of diverse names.

Situated in "the region of non-being," as Frantz Fanon reminded us, we must not forget that, in times of trauma, that inner self is constituted by remembering those who are missing because we are incomplete until we are together again. Suppose anything has nourished my inner discernment recently. In that case, it is the wisdom of the families of missing persons in Mexico who relentlessly search for their children. I am not only talking about the 43 students from Ayotzinapa who have been missing since 2014 but also about the more than one hundred thousand people from all over the planet who have disappeared in Mexico alone in the last fifteen years. And so we could evoke, all over the world, those who have been taken from us by different social traumas, from femicide to human trafficking through forced mobility.

In that sense, discernment today evokes for me a process of liberation from fear and healing from trauma – an inner path that prepares us to live with dignity, memory, and truth, forgetting and perhaps forgiveness, when possible, to sow seeds for the hard work of reconciliation in these times of extreme violence.

The word *spirituality* seems to me to be a minefield to be approached with great caution because of the history of denial of the body,

desire, sexuality, gender, culture, land, and so many other facets of individuals and peoples that have been denied for the sake of religion as an instrument of colonization.

In the name of spirituality, the Roman Catholic Church has for two thousand years denied the people of the LBGTIQ+ community their dignity as children of God; it has denied them their right to live and express their sexuality with responsible freedom. In the name of the spirituality of a male Christ, women have for millennia been denied their dignity as persons with equal rights to serve the community in the name of Christ and the Church. In the name of the spirituality of the clergy, most of God's people (*laos*) have been denied their irrevocable dignity as daughters and sons of God to be active members of the body of Christ. Ultimately, these spiritualities deny the incarnation of the Word of God as the source and inspiration of every expression of Christianity, from the dignity of each person to its self-expression in every community and people.

Spirituality, however – as the force of the *Ruah* that hovers over the original chaos and over the historical chaos since the origins of the world and of humanity in the biblical narrative – is the force that encourages survivors to rebuild their bodies, their territories and their ways of living together after having suffered any social, ecological or political trauma. Indignation, resistance, and resilience form a triptych of that inner life that sets the world on fire from below, from the reverse side. The world from below, from the reverse side of history, from the rubble of instrumental modernity.

It is a vital spirituality that is a *messianic insurrection* animated by the spirit of the Awakened Crucified. I have been tracing this force of a community of survivors for some years now in my personal life and thought, searching for its traces in the denied history of systemic victims, in the poetry of emptiness, and in the philosophical thought that foresaw the catastrophe of the great modern story. The catastrophe of the modern grand narrative. Now, I name it as *divine an-archy* because it is “beyond” all order, principle, and foundation. This intuition, for you, has also been a spark that has allowed you to reconstruct your experience and language about God.

In these times in which it has fallen to us to live among the rubble of the modern Promethean dream, spirituality is revealed as a power of experience that subverts death, for example, as a force of indignation experienced by the victims who say, “Enough!” to the processes of death. But this life of the Spirit also manifests itself as the joy and dance of liberated bodies when daughters and sons of forcefully disappeared persons identify the mortal remains finally returned to their families.

After all, spirituality is that of life that faces mafious death. That spirituality emerges from the survivors of all times – spirituality as resistance to waves of systemic violence. Spirituality, which in counter-current is the birth of new worlds.



II

Uprising

Portland, February 16th, 2022

Dear Carlos, thank you for the generosity of your first pages. It's fortifying to see how our conversations throughout time are made present in written words as nourishment for our current commitments.

With a hurting heart, but at the same time, with a rebellious fire, I understand the ecological global imbalance before us not as a fatality but as an invitation that we must heed with courage. It is a call from Life to Life for those who trust in the transforming agency and creative re-existence of the divine *Ruah*.

Without denying the pain of recognizing ourselves as drivers of climate change, the mass extermination of many beings, and the suffocation of our Common Home, that same recognition echoes a call.

I feel it as an invitation to draw closer to one another out of our vulnerabilities, to call upon our collective orphanhood, felt as never before, to evoke our stories, hidden and condemned by the hegemonic-predatory systems in which we ourselves are implicated, and summon diverse collective callings that aspire to care for Life, flowing from the recognition of our interdependence inseparable from all being.

In other words, how to draw near, call up, call upon, and come together in these uncertain times.

Predicate

I think our dialogue about *inner* and *communal-territorial life* is trying to stammer out feelings and answers to these questions.

On the one hand, how do we draw near to one another without losing ourselves in the process, that is, without abandoning *inner life*?

I see here the place of our listening to our deepest rebellions, which inhabit us and persist, even in the middle of collective survival calculations. There is space here for both hearing and paying attention to our pain, internalized and accumulated over generations and in our own bodies. There is also space to compassionately attend to the reactions derived from our pain.

Inner life has to do with the possibility of non-judgment, non-calculation, and the possibility of stillness, both pieces of a new time and space, a presence which redeems and rest which awakens. Its opposite, non-living, is a threat that causes anguish and an urgency that lulls us to sleep.

On the other hand, how can we draw near to one another without having to hide ourselves in the process, that is, without ignoring the wounds of the *communal-territorial life* that bleed through thousands and thousands of people, animals, and beings in this global village?

Communal-territorial life is the mysterious relationship that opens and sustains the space within us, or, better yet, births us; yes, giving birth with hope to our learning of being-with-others.

We carry in our bodies the prayers of communal life; they are prayers that clamor for the cessation of our ignorance and our estrangement from Life. Blood and prayers both run through our veins.

It is the same *communal-territorial life* that draws us into the *inner life*, and it is this same *inner life* that draws us into *communal-territorial life*. Our deepest hurts and our rebellions birthed from the womb of our *interiority* are mirrors of the wounds and prayers of *communal-territorial life*.

I have witnessed how *communal-territorial life* brings about the silencing of its own wounds and prayers; through this, I have seen how *inner life* is a redemptive call back to *communal living*. I have also witnessed how our *inner life* brings about the silencing of its own intimate pains and rebellions; as such, I have been able to experience how *communal-territorial life* becomes the true path for our inner life.

Both aspects – *inner life* and *communal-territorial life* – are needed, sought, found, and redeemed.

Subject

In our conversations, my brother, we've not only spoken but rather many times we've been silent in the face of a more profound silence, which is both presence and absence, an experience beyond experience: Ultimacy, Wellspring, Fervor, Wind, *Ruah*.

We spoke again, and the word *spirituality* came to help us transcend any pretext of control over the call to *inner life* and *communal-territorial life*. At the same time, in the same way, the word *discernment* comes up to protect us from every attempt to hold dominion over our response to that call.

It's been like this, I think, that in our faltering attempts to answer how we can approach one another, how to in-voke, how to e-voke, and how to convoke⁹ us through the vulnerability and felt impotence in the face of this global catastrophe, we have come closer to the depths of *inner-life* and *communal-life*: in *spirituality* and in *discernment*.

I understand *spirituality* as *being moved* and *discernment* as *allowing us to be moved*.

Such movement is loving, that is, *drawing near to one another, invoking, evoking, and convoking*. My brother, you speak of "acuerparnos." ¹⁰ How beautiful! Our Brazilian friend Cleusa Caldeira speaks of *re-existing together*, and our Mexican friend Elías González of *re-connecting ourselves*.

Letting ourselves move would thus adopt many names that reveal diverse shapes of *collective vocation in communion* with our grandmothers and grandfathers, our ancestors, future generations, and the interdependent emergence of all beings.

Just as *inner life* and *communal-territorial life* are implied one in the other, so too are *spirituality* and *discernment*. We are *not moved* without *letting ourselves move*, and we do not *let ourselves move* without *being moved*.

9 Translator's note: Juan Carlos' purpose here is to use words rooted in the Spanish word *vocación* as we are *responding to Life* through approaching one another. These terms come from Latin: *in/voke* (from INVOCATION, to allow to take place within us, or alongside us, to petition for help or support), *e/voke* (from EVOCATION, to recreate imaginatively), *con/voke* (from CONVO-CATION, to call together, to share life together).

10 Translator's note: Embodying mutual caring resistance. Cf. Mendoza-Álvarez, Carlos. *A theology of mutual accompaniment. Pedagogical guide for reading the work of Carlos Mendoza-Álvarez*, edited by Cleusa Caldeira, Juan Carlos La Puente and Juan Jesús Vásquez. México, 2022 (<https://www.echo-eco.space/groundings>).

I have often heard how we can – OURSELVES – do this or that even more perfectly, more deeply, more precisely, more lasting, more, and more, and more...

I am also witness to a WE that rises up and points to the future with dreams and proposals but fears finding and reconciling with our own past that appears in multiple faces in our present.

Who is the subject? I believe that *spirituality* and *discernment* point to keeping this question as a lamp that lights our way. If it is difficult to define who is the subject of the call and the response; that is a good sign, since then it would be difficult to control, or even to co-opt it!

The term *divine anarchy*, with which you would communicate those flashes of light from the denied history of systemic victims, the poetry of emptiness, and philosophical thought that left behind the night of the modern narrative, goes a long way to keep that lamp burning.

I think that walking lighter, yes, much lighter, would indicate *being moved* and *letting ourselves be moved*. *My burden is light*, said Jesus of Nazareth. Walking lighter would also imply that we are accessible to others and that others feel lighter when they encounter us. Without intending to attribute the same experience to others, I must confess that I have never felt my load lightened in any bishop's palace or in any cathedral – not even on the very altar. On the contrary, it is in roaming that I found the most beautiful altars, co-presided over by everyone, including you. Well, you indicate, my brother, when referring to our meeting in spiritual and theological mutual accompaniment in 2017 and in subsequent years. Similarly, I have been finding the most beautiful of communities in the institutional margins: friendship.

And if, at some point, we manage to ponder encounters with non-human others in our walk, we could ask ourselves from now on: are we accessible to the forests and the animals? Do the forests feel lighter, or do animals feel lighter in their encounters with us? I think that not-human others are a mirror of the lightness with which we walk.

Verb

I bring to our conversation two images that could reflect the verbs that would unite the subject and its predicate until now. In the Colca

Canyon, in Arequipa, a southern department of Perú, I have been able to appreciate the condors. They are enormous birds. I have seen how they spread their wings, and only by tuning themselves into the wind do they reach impressive speeds. I have even seen them on the coast as well. People say they come and go depending on their hunger. The wind carries them lightly; the wind, in conjunction with their effortless wings, makes possible the miracle that keeps them alive. *Letting ourselves be moved* and *being moved*, *discernment* and *spirituality* appear like *opening one's wings*, *depending on the wind's favor* and the *wind* itself.

Where does the wind come from? And, how to describe spreading one's wings depending on the wind's favor? These are questions to deepen our dialogue. By now, it would suffice to say that when both wings are spread in the wind's favor – *discernment* is when being possessed by the wind begins; being moved – *spirituality*.

In the Hebrew Bible, in the book of Genesis, we find that there was the *Ruah*, fluttering Their wings before the waters. Wind and fluttering go together, just as with the condors. And then, just as it was engendered from that fluttering, the creative word happens, provokes, invokes, evokes, and convokes new forms of vocations, from Life, in Life, and for Life.

We will surely come back to this later.

The second image is a non-linear and inviting movement as a collective dance that welcomes others to join in. We are moved by others' laughter, smiles, eyes, rhythms, and movements that invite us to dance with our own bodies in tune, not in a uniform way, but in creative harmony with the bodies of others. For the dance to be real, the experience of *being moved* (*spirituality*) is needed, and at the same time, the experience of *letting oneself be moved* (*discernment*). The dance is not linear; it's not a sum of consecutive steps in a line, but it is a collective harmony made of rhythms and movements that enliven and invite others to join in without losing their own bodies, even when they embody a collective subject as they dance.

How to make room with one's own body for the body of others? To dance is to give birth. It is a radical making space for others so that being others, they dance—otherness moving us as well. *Letting oneself move* and *being moved*, *discernment* and *spirituality*, *fluttering* and *wind*, are giving birth to other heavens and other worlds where we all fit.

You were speaking of embodied mutual caring resistance.

III

Radiance

Boston, March 28, 2022

Wingbeat and Wind

The flight of the condor you have evoked, dear Juan Carlos, to speak of discernment and spirituality in movement is a powerful metaphor from your Andean lands. I immediately associated it with the dance we have been doing on the retreats of spiritual and theological mutual accompaniment for the last six years.

I vividly remember the celebration after the Jojutla retreat in 2019. Tucked under a palapa, a dome made of palm leaves in the style of the villages of Mexico, we began to dance at dusk on the last day of the meeting. We went at our own pace, trying to find a rhythm that matched us all. It was like a stellar movement living now in the micro-space of a Mexican terrace on a hot autumn afternoon. There, Chayito danced with us, her face glowing despite the fact that she was still mourning her missing son. Bosque was also dancing with us, with his muscular queer body wrapped in an Indian skirt and accompanied by a charango in his hands that played a *son huasteco*. Yoli and Arcadia, companions from Oregon, moved like hummingbirds, waving their arms with agility and their hands gracefully as if drawing stars. TereMike also danced almost with rapture, her queer body wrapped in the shawl she had used as a veil covering her head as she declaimed a poem by Teresa la Grande in the pre-dance meditation.

Those were other condor flights that, on that autumn afternoon, were transmuted into flights of so many different birds that soared through our Jojutla sky.

Indeed, there are multiple flutterings of the *Ruah*-of-the-four-winds that moves freely. Sometimes, she is healing and caressing those who feel hurt. At other times, this divine vital force enlivens and awakens creative agency within those who resist – “potencia” those who resist. But, at times, it also moves and slaps those who have fallen so that they may recover strength, dignity, and courage. This is the experience of “the slap in the face” that is recounted in the Bible in various scenes of prophetic vocations. For example, Elijah hides in a cave full of shame and fear because he feels defeated (1 Kings 19: 9-15). Then the *Ruah* comes to him as a slap in the face and silences him (*demamáh*¹¹). This is how the great popular educator of the Bible in Brazil, Carlos Mesters, voiced it when he spoke of the people of God who react to oppression with indignation but must first become mute. This is how our dear friend James Alison also narrated it when speaking of *shame as a theological place*: once the false self has been shattered by the awareness of our implication in the scapegoating process that generates victims and resentment. Only then, from that place of shame, can we begin to listen to the tone of God’s voice, which is to live “beyond resentment.”

When our dreams of childlike omnipotence have been shattered, we can open our wings for the wind of God to inspire us in that inner movement of letting ourselves be moved (discernment) and being moved (spirituality).

Letting Ourselves Move and Being Moved

I have mentioned an angle of discernment that, when I was following Paul Ricoeur’s classes in Paris many years ago, I meditated on with fear and trembling: facing the collapse of dreams of omnipotence as the beginning of a phenomenology of vulnerable subjectivity, that is, of those people who had survived the wars of the twentieth century and decided to reinvent themselves licking their wounds in order to go beyond their trauma and resentment.

Over the years, I have seen that this collapse not only refers to an inner pain generated by some trauma – be it war or failure, frustration,

¹¹ Hebrew, the voice that speaks in the silence.

or denial suffered in many forms, such as gender violence, class violence, racism, and so many more. But it is also about the collapse of the hegemonic narrative. Because there is a break in the way of telling the story imposed by the executioners. This collapse is only possible thanks to the victims, who decide to speak out to reverse this violence, starting by telling their own stories of life, trauma, resistance, and, ultimately, resilience.

Deep down, the collapse of the ego evokes the call to face the personal and collective shame of discovering ourselves naked in front of our desires for power. Therein lies the starting point of the way back home of divine Wisdom, which is only possible as a windy path when we begin *to be moved* by the *Ruah* on the wings of a subjectivity liberated from its fears, traumas, and resentments.

That is why I think now, following this route traced by the mimetic theory, that discernment is an act of becoming aware of our complicity with the violence that appears in our lives. We are often trapped as victims in the labyrinths of denial of what happened, frustration for the violence suffered, resentment that remains inside like a poison, or even the desire for revenge that nestles in the resentful heart. But at other times, when we exercise the power of the executioners, we need someone to accuse, point at, belittle, and, sooner or later, eliminate. Then, we become trapped in those vicious circles of rivalry, impossible desire, and denial of the other.

Perhaps for this reason, in times of shipwreck of the modern ego, the discernment of which we speak opens the door to the impulse of conversion of desire. Our ways of being in the world, of being with others, permanently trapped in labyrinths of loneliness, more often than not denied, seldom assumed, begin to collapse. Then arises the need for the “discernment of spirits,” as it was said before, to seek, with the help of a good confessor or a person with the gift of interpretation, the call of God in the interior life. But now, amid the debris of the modern egoic dream, we are left only with the critical discernment of our narcissism, sharing with others who assume their own vulnerability. Together, we can discern the desire for power, sometimes disguised as virtue and honor. However, more often than not, it manifests itself as a life of self-absorption that makes us overbearing and empty beings.

Such restraint thus becomes the path to liberation from the false self that presides over the lie of sacrifice and the lie of sacrificing the other for the sake of my own survival.



But there is also communal discernment, cultivated with great care, for example, by Mayan indigenous theology.

With vivid emotion, I recall the Mayan Indian Theology Meeting held in 2016 in Bachajón, Chiapas. More than a thousand people from various Mayan communities of Chiapas, Yucatan, and Guatemala gathered there to “dream together” the future God promises for their communities. After all, they perceived the need to “untie the problem” of the community’s younger generations because “they no longer want to follow the tradition of the grandmothers and grandfathers.” A team of theologians animated by the beloved sage and grandmother Tina Lopez-Bac prepared a journey of several days to collectively embrace the dreams of those days. Every morning, we gathered in small groups to read the sacred texts of the Bible and the Popol Vuh that tell of dreams as voices of God. In this way, we were entering a path that then led us to the evening time lived with rituals around the Mayan altar, animated with candles and corn of the colors of the five cardinal directions because the Mayans add the sky-earth direction to the four traditional directions; a path of several days that was preparing us to dream during the starry night and then return the next day to tell our dreams in small groups. *Communal* discernment was thus woven with the help of dream interpreters. Together, we recognized common dream stories, recurring symbols, animals that appeared in the stories, voices of ancestors that appeared as echoes, and other signs that crossed our narratives. In this way, we wove a warp until the plenary gathered the *communal dream* that responded to the question that each community had asked itself in order to take up the tradition with new energy, accepting the latest stories, questions, and ways of life of the young people of the communities.

Inspired by this experience of discernment as a communal dream, I wonder with you now about the discernment that the *Ruah* moves today in communities scattered throughout the global village.

“Letting ourselves be moved,” us men, by the indignation of women, is an impulse that leads us to “be moved” to new experiences of masculinity. To “let ourselves be moved” by the “Enough is enough” of the first peoples leads us to “be moved” to return to the earth that shelters us as a mother. A new experience that I am now living in Boston invites me to “let myself be moved” by people with disabilities who live in alternate ways, their bodies and minds to “be moved” to other ways of living time, space, consciousness, and desire.

After all, discernment is a never-ending process of being affected by others and encouraging us to transform ourselves into new creatures, always beyond the mere desire to be above others, learning to be “born again” by the water from the depths of the I-they-we and by the *Ruah* that flutters in different ways like a wind blowing over the original chaos.

Conversion and Gratitude

That is why I dare to translate today, for these times of civilizational crisis that we are living through the Anthropocene-Capitalocene, the word “discernment” by “conversion” and “spirituality” by “gratitude.”

I will try to stammer out now, in a tone closer to the experience of any survivor, the creative force of the divine *Ruah* in us. The horizon of discernment is the conversion of some burden that prevents us from living and walking and from which we must free ourselves. An experience to let ourselves be and walk towards something for which “we are moved” by an otherness that “spells us out,” as the poet Octavio Paz used to say.

To close this section of our conversation, dear Juan Carlos, I would like to draw with these two extremes a garden field in which we all can flourish, choosing the best good and receiving the overflowing fullness of love in times of precarious life.

While discernment is an action proper to the interior life cultivated from ancient to modern times, today, we need to go beyond the intimate and self-centered language of discernment that focuses excessively on an individual who has lost himself. In our times of global violence, the

ultimate meaning of discernment seems to take the form of an opening in these times of global violence takes the form of an *opening*, a break, or a crack, to “let us move” and get out of self-absorption, break the vicious circle of rivalry, and learn to receive ourselves from others. It is a question of being born again, the *leitmotiv*¹² of the conversion of the prophet Elijah as of the apostle Mary of Magdala, but weaving other ways of the communal, other *acuerpamientos* (other ways of embodied mutual caring resistance).

As we have seen before, having the courage to face the triggering questions at a critical moment in our life is capital to give way to *the new* that is about to be born. The emerging novelty may be a word of forgiveness or a couple’s commitment amid the diversity of life. But the new can also be allowing ourselves to be challenged by the broken heart of a victim while allowing ourselves to be touched by the beauty of their queer bodies. For this reason, it seems to me that conversion is, above all, a change of perspective, another way of being “beyond rivalry” and beyond the “region of non-being.” Discernment enables us to see what the hegemonic world-system makes invisible; it is a way of scrutinizing the new world’s signs that emerge in the cracks of the power that kills.

“Then we shall know as we are known” (1 Corinthians 3: 12). St. Paul said to speak of the divine *glory* characteristic of the fulfilled Messianic times. But a theology ashamed of the body and the here-and-now transferred that glory to an ethereal beyond that is closer to the Platonic world of ideas than to the time of redemption arising from the crucified Messiah. That glory is the transfigured life of the victims who are remembered, of the oppressed people who are liberated, and of the community of ancestors (human, animal, vegetable, and cosmic minerals) who are received into the *cosmotheandric* community as the great Raimon Panikkar used to say.

Divine glory is, therefore, the heart of freely giving love. It is the radiance of messianic time sown by righteous people amid the contradictions of history broken by the lust for power, rivalry, and sacrifice thanks to their lives given in an overflowing fullness of love.

12 A theme which repeats throughout a musical composition, which is associated with a specific character or person.

So, when we are “moved” by the divine *Ruah*, wings are spread even where there reigned criminal systemic violence. As the refrain of the feminist hymn created by my fellow countrywoman Vivir Quintana, sung by women’s bodies in the women’s marches and in contemporary performances in squares all over the world: “We are sown all over the planet: ‘When they tried to sow fear in us, we grew wings.’”

In the plot of this broken story, dear Juan Carlos, discernment and spirituality are a swaying together of divine glory in freely given love “where we know as we are known,” beyond resentment, in the divine life – closer to us than we are to ourselves – that floods the earth.



IV

New Time

Portland, June 7, 2022

Major Opus, Ongoing Creation

What a beautiful memory you bring to mind, brother, the dance we shared at the retreat in Jojutla, Mexico.

I agree: the *Ruah* takes us to a rhythm that accompanies us all and, therefore, requires that we stop at certain moments and pay attention to the wave of expressions and feelings that each one of us carries. It is as if it were very small interludes between sections of a larger work.

You spoke of the divine slap in the face and the consequent speechlessness of the one who would later reclaim the word to bear witness, no longer of himself, but of a continuous creation. Once turned prophet, it is as if the person had been introduced into an open dance, or perhaps it would be better to say that such a person was possessed by a dance that summons, that narrates heavens and new worlds in space and time, as would the most beautiful of choreographies.

Here, I pause. I look inside, and the *self* – in the unimaginable variety of sizes, measures, and depths, is nothing but a surface that hides a very great pain. And once broken, as if it were a crack in a silenced heart, that surface ceases to be an obstacle. It begins to fall along with everything that disguised the pain we have been harboring for generations.

Our fall is our liberation. When that surface breaks, when the self succumbs to silence after the divine slap, we are immersed by the divine *Ruah* in a greater opus – this time, without size, without measure, and without depth. It is then that we are baptized into a continuous creation. And here, I am not referring to something that claims to grow

or prevail. I repeat, in that divine creation, there is no room for size, measure, or depth. There is no room for comparison or rivalry. We speak here of a *continuous creation* that is the very fall of the *self* over and over again.

The Fall of the Self

I want to explore this a little more, not from the individual asphyxiation in the current societal desert but savoring the breeze that comes from the intersectionality of our resistances. Carlos, I have heard you talk about this intersectionality in other spaces, and it seems to me very timely to draw closer to that reality now.

As if it were a disguise for the pain that, for generations, we have been carrying, the self is a veil. The self is a mental reaction in the form of a scream forged in the very organism that seeks to survive. What is it that is screaming? I think of a trembling voice that says: “No more pain, please. I won’t allow any more pain because it is unbearable!”

That self, that mental reaction – which projects an endless number of images and performances – is at the same time a narrative, an expression of one’s own defense against any provocation that may stir up the accumulated pain. That self is constituted by a series of memories forged as a disguise for the pain.

But even with the tremendous complexity that such a reaction carries, the self is, in my opinion, a superficial reality in the web of our subjectivities.

In the experience of love, we know/taste that there is pain when we are affected by the pain of those we love in depth. Underneath the pain, so to speak, there is love and a lot of it. Underneath the pain are deep rebellions, deep aspirations, and hidden prayers that cry out to heaven to shelter those we love.

The *self* takes on tremendous complexity and constitutes a trap for those of us who are moved by the divine *Ruah* to the depths of love in the interweaving of our rebellions, aspirations, and deepest prayers.

I do not deny the importance of the *self* with its mental capacity to veto this or that action that endangers our organism, thus avoiding

mental collapse. But beyond this veto capacity, this reaction, the *self* must succumb to the divine slap, the movements of the *Ruah*, and the collective dance of our resistances. It must give way to the experience of *continuous creation*.

When the *self* falls, the function of veto in the face of danger is not lost, but there is a transformation in the form of accepting danger. From the fall of the *self*, the experience of danger will be associated with the impossibility of allowing oneself to be moved and being moved by the divine *Ruah*. Our alertness is kindled with greater meekness when we do not allow ourselves to be moved by the divine *Ruah*. This same alertness becomes possessed by the *Ruah* Herself.

How fragile it is to talk about this. Every verb in the previous paragraphs is nothing but a babbling that should be in the gerund form (falling, transform-ing, mov-ing, and more.) It is a pilgrimage embraced by the same *continuous creation*.

In the Intersectionality of Our Resistances

Our pain for those who have been *disappeared, outraged, dismembered, mutilated, or mortally threatened* in myriad ways amid global violence today is the same pain we have been accumulating for generations. Our ancestral eyes have witnessed the most horrendous crimes, and there is much fear. And there is much pain.

What will become of me? What will happen to me? These are reactive questions that constitute the *self*. I do not judge them insofar as they can veto situations that endanger the organism itself. Still, I do find them limiting without the inspiration of the divine *Ruah*.

Without discernment, both questions lead us to dead ends in which there is only one door: survival alongside those who hold dominion over others, the hegemony or illusion of cultural supremacy, and the power that weaves laws of privilege. The *self* is the appearance that enables us passively or actively to be alongside hegemony, supremacy, and power. And, as you have mentioned repeatedly, brother, that disguise is blessed by *sacrificial religion*.

Discernment revolves around crucial questions: how can we let ourselves be moved by the divine *Ruah* and respond to Their motions and calls? These are questions that emerge simultaneously with the fall of the *self*. And we are liberated through *some* who “are on the side of” – “*pará-clitos*” or defense attorney, as the divine *Ruah* was called in ancient times – of those who do not disguise their pain and *shake off the veil of the self* by un-veiling their deepest rebellions in the midst of the hegemonic lie and global violence.

In other words, spirituality, and as you emphasize it, the conversion to which the *Ruah* leads us, is to open our pain with trust emerging out of the intersectionality of our resistances in the face of the current lying and hegemonic power.

Continual Creation, Continuous Incarnation

There is pain because others did not respond to us, ignored us, and betrayed us, and there is an even deeper pain due to the kidnapping, murder, disappearance, and deportation of our loved ones. Yes, and there are even deeper pains.

But grief is not just about disappointment or loss. Pain is a symptom of something more profound. It is about love, about wanting to be with others, share with others, live with others, play with others, dance with others, and be with others. Without love, there would be no disappointment and, therefore, no pain.

This is not the time to unravel the difference between a love woven of deep aspirations and rebellions and another love built by a set of desires that project concrete objects. Here, I only want to emphasize that there is something deeper beneath the pain.

Great disappointment corresponds with great love and vice versa. And this disappointment can accumulate until it silences the verb of love. And as I said above, this is when our organism generates *the self*, a sophisticated survival mechanism. That *self* is nothing more than the cry that we narrate disguised or disguise-mindedly; that *self* is the cry that vomits to the four winds, “Enough, no more pain, please!”

Conversion, the movement to which the *Ruah* invites us, goes from a *disguised-mindedness* to a *liberated-minded* opening into our pain in the intersectionality of our resistances so that, like embers still burning, our deepest rebellions begin to burn brightly alongside those who denounce the lie of violence perpetrated by those blessed by *sacrificial religion*. Violence hides the lie expressed in the saying, “Violence redeems and saves us.”

Violence and its lying counterpart are protected by those who live by the sacrificial religion that recycles rivalry, resentment, and sacrifice.

And the denunciation of the lie is an invitation to one and to all; it is not a condemnation of some and a reward for others. In conversion, there is no room for comparison.

Therefore, this conversion is not the isolation of a spiritual elite, but this conversion becomes an *incarnation*. It is in one’s own flesh that one finds the spiritual garment, and the latter is collective and ancestral, not individual. Our flesh is ancestral. It is the living memory of our ancestors; we cannot deny it: it is in our flesh that we carry their wounds, cries, and aspirations. The *self* does not let them speak.

But in the intersectionality of our resistances, we hear their voices; these are bearers of new worlds, new heavens, and new earths.

The term ‘*acuerparnos*’ that you mentioned earlier beautifully illuminates what I would understand by a continuous incarnation.

To meet each other, to come closer, is the fruit of discernment, and this implies incarnating ourselves as moved by the *Ruah* in the weavings that grow creatively through the fall of the *self* and the birth of our deepest rebellions and aspirations.

Up to this point, I have wanted to reflect on what you were saying about discernment as a path of liberation from the false self that presides over the lie of the sacrifice of the other for the sake of ‘my’ survival.

Leaving behind the disguise is not an easy task, nor an individual task, as no task is. The call of the *Ruah* is to come closer and incarnate ourselves *in others*, to know as we are known, to be born as we are given birth to.

Non-escaping

You say, brother, that discernment enables us to see what the hegemonic world-system makes invisible. And the past is a reality that many would like to bury more than once.

Spirituality – and, following our conversation, conversion – would involve embracing the past and no longer running from it.

Those who point to and promise a future that would bring the most coveted gifts must also be silent and give way to conversion. Institutions that claim to grow and prevail must also receive that divine slap in the face that shakes the *veil of self* by *un-veiling* the deepest rebellions of those who resist the lie of redemption that hides violence.

It seems to me that the future that the hegemonic world-system pursues is an escape from the past. The future is presented as a promise for some and an emptiness for others. Both extremes, as realities alien to the past, are lethargy for conversion.

I propose some images that can help us enter new experiences of time and space to which the *Ruah* invites us. This is not a theoretical inquiry but an experience in the interweaving of our resistance to the multiple facets of the hegemonic assault on our imagination.

The Past Comes from Ahead of Us

How good the sun feels in these pre-summer times. It takes eight minutes for the light that emerges from the sun to reach us. When we feel it, we are aware that eight minutes have passed since it left its origin. In some sense, we receive the sun's past in each present instant.

It is not only the light of the sun coming to us that is a fact of the past that is coming and will continue to come tomorrow and next year. The light from another star is also coming farther away than the sun. And there is starlight that left its origin billions of years ago and does not yet touch us but will in our future. Yes, our future, in some sense – and a critical sense! – is the past coming from ahead of us.

And in the same instant, I receive infinite lights from distant and nearby stars that left their origin at different times to touch us. I could say that I receive a multiplicity of temporalities at every instant.

Let's look at this from our own experience of getting to know each other.

Tomorrow, for example, I will meet people I don't know yet, and when I meet them, I will also meet their past, experiences, wounds, dreams...

Their past is coming from ahead of me. I haven't met them yet, but I know their past is coming from ahead of me. And possibly, their past will wake me up or lull me to sleep. It will depend on whether their past beats in their flesh or if they only come with the disguise of the *self*.

Our past is the very life of infinite beings who still persist in prayer in our flesh if we listen to them, and all this comes from ahead in each person whom I will meet in the future. Then, is it not the case that the future is the past that comes from ahead of us?

The anguish produced by a future, as if it were a blank page that only the false *self* will have to write, is understandable, but it is also aggravating. It is an atrocious illusion and a lethargy for conversion.

Spirituality, being moved by the *Ruah*, and discernment, letting ourselves be moved by Her, causes us to embrace the past that comes from ahead of us with confidence and hope.

I agree with you that discernment makes us see what the hegemonic world-system makes invisible, and the past is one of them.

In the intersectionality of our resistances, we shelter our past. Yes. Each person brings in the name of thousands and millions a pluriverse of prayers and aspirations as if the lights of infinite stars from different temporalities were arriving at the same instant.

Our past is ancestral and comes from ahead of us to awaken us from the lethargy and reverie recycled by the lie of the hegemonic world-system and the disguise of the *self*. This lethargy and reverie cause multiple forms of violence.

The *Ruah* moves us, and we must allow ourselves to be moved. Spirituality and discernment in the present times challenge us to embrace our past that comes from ahead in the lives of others, to embrace our wounds that come from ahead in the wounds of others. *Acuerpades*,

as if through the cracks – life emerges with strength, and we have even been able to contemplate its blossoming; so too, through the embrace of our wounds – we have seen how the deepest rebellions emerge, gestating new forms of life.

The salvation that comes from ahead, healing that comes from ahead, rebellions and aspirations that come from ahead, prayers that weep and sing and come from ahead of us.

Meeting One Another, Getting Closer

Raimundo, a friend who passed away a few years ago and whose absent presence continues to come to my heart, taught me, “Juan Carlos, I don’t know what I’m creating, but when I make a sculpture, I let myself be moved by what emerges in the tree trunk that is gone. Without a previous plan, each action goes hand in hand with what emerges. It is as if I were looking for a treasure present in each of the actions that search for it.”

My friend was a sculptor and one very well-known in this city. I was able to witness how, from a mere log that others would burn, my friend created or was created as well by drawing an unimaginable treasure from the very log he was sculpting.

Creating requires no prior plan. There is no place for moral contests of who is following the divine plan. There is no plan. And that is liberating good news.

Continuous creation is divine precisely because there is no plan. It is an artistic adventure in which we are involved – a beautiful adventure of the real. And beware, it is of greater responsibility, of greater acuity, firmness, and discipline to prepare oneself to be moved at every instant by the motions of Wisdom than to follow or repeat mere instructions given.

The coming past is like the log to be carved, and to embrace it is to discern by carving it.

To embrace the past that comes from ahead is to embrace that *continuous creation, continuous incarnation*. We come together, embracing our pains not to stay in them but to go after the more loving rebellions

that lie aching beneath them. We incarnate together as we meet, as we come closer.

Meeting each other is a creative art. To approach us is the emergence of the past that finds healing. Many temporalities which cease in the unconditional embrace that left behind the *self*, that left behind the disguise of pain.

And in that embrace, we all embrace each other from many temporalities yet to come. And here I join you in thanking Raimon Panikkar, who helped us to come out more and more from the prison of *the self* to glimpse the ultimacy that sustains and animates us, a cosmotheandric communion.

In the intersectionality of our resistances to criminal power, we witness this communion being born again and again creatively and incarnationally.

Although you have awakened in me the restlessness to write down some experiences around new experiences of time, I would like to continue talking about new ways of relating to each other that transcend the suffocating space of rivalry and resentment.

You had said, brother, “beyond resentment, in the divine life—closer to us than we are to ourselves—that floods the earth.”



V

The Human-Divine Dance

Boston, 12 June 2022

Sunday mornings have been, for me, a time of pause, solace, calm, and communion since childhood, as if every week time stopped with its hustle and bustle, to exist in another way, as if in a mother's lap. The games as a child with my siblings, in the morning light, waiting for the unhurried Sunday breakfast prepared by the grown-ups at home were like the prelude to a day of celebration. Dressed in the costumes of the time, we would go to mass with the Franciscans or the Dominicans; we liked that family atmosphere that could be breathed in their conventual temples in Puebla, my hometown. Grandma and my aunts, in that network of care that we then enjoyed without knowing their internal struggles as women, delighted us with ancestral recipes of different moles, combining flavors and aromas, colors and textures that today excite palates with their baroque mixtures of chiles, chocolate, spices and fruits of the Mexican highlands. Sunday was crowned, for the adults, by dancing danzones or tango, the rhythms of that generation of the Second World War, while we children invented games in the street. Such were my Sunday childhood days. Time and space crossed by the sacred and the profane, interweaving a way of living in common that, in the midst of family hardships and the hardships of the time, celebrated life.

But how do other families, religious communities, and other cultures live space and time in their creative depth? What continuous creation is revealed in other experiences? And what happens when that idyllic harmony of childhood or community is broken by an unexpected crisis due to someone's suicide, a personal failure, a war, or an enforced disappearance?

To ponder anew the time and space that opens the divine *Ruah*, like the spirit of the four winds of the Hebrew prophet, is the passion of the mystical person. I like this expression because it designates the *mysterion* of reality, its ungraspable, unmanipulable character, of an otherness that is attainable wherever it is found. This is what I would now like to explore with you in the following pages, evoking the flight of the Andean condor that you described as a metaphor for our living in the Spirit, as well as the dance of the diverse community of Jojutla that we also recalled in previous pages, as ways of coming together in resistance and hope.

Transcending Time: The Past that Lies Before Us

The expression of the “past that lies ahead” you mentioned in the previous letter has left me in suspense. It does not stop fluttering in my mind and in my heart. It brought to my memory, like a flash of lightning, a phrase I heard in the voice of the mother of a disappeared son a couple of years ago during a search brigade in Iguala, in the hot regions of the mountains of the Sierra Madre Occidental of Mexico, when she harangued her companions, telling them: “Let’s look for them; they show us the way.” Her children are no longer at home, where they used to live from day to day, or the long nights of celebration and rest. For some, that past is now only a memory of a lost time. And yet, those mothers feel that past in their flesh as a whiplash and a small light. That past goes ahead in their search. Going ahead it guides them like a glow in the middle of a long night of rage, grief, obsession, and weeping, and sometimes also of celebration for having found one of their children.

The starlight of celestial bodies that no longer exist and yet reach us is the powerful metaphor you have evoked to undo in our imagination the linear idea of time that so much lacerates our consciousness and our body. The relativity of time is something similar to what you tell us when you say that “the past comes from ahead of us.” Thus, the voices, traumas, and cries come to us, as well as the whispers of life, human ancestors, and other species of whom we are descendants in the marvelous interconnection of life in the cosmos.

You speak of transcending time as an act of spirituality that we can also call “full consciousness,” which is cultivated by mystics from East and West, North and South. Is this the evocation of the Spirit of the four winds today?

I would like to stop here with you, as on that occasion when we went to meditate in Mt. Tabor Park in Portland to “stop time” and see more clearly the common course that the divine *Ruah* opened for us in the mutual accompaniment that Melissa, Ron, you and I began on a walk on the beach, in San Juan, Puerto Rico, in June 2016.

Suppose prayer as deep and silent meditation is an experience accessible to any human being. In that case, it is so as an act of *simultaneous presence*. No more. No control, no absence, no power. Only mutual recognition. Then, the consciousness passes from chronology to full presence. From *chronos* to *kairos*, as the biblical Christian narrative would say. Time becomes intense, impassive in its exteriority, but fruitful passivity because it is hospitality fulfilled.

I would dare to call it a mystical time because it introduces us to the heart of the *mysterion* without making us flee from the everyday. On the contrary, we enter into its depths and return to the incessant *chronos* animated by the light of *kairos* as a flash or spark of the soul...and of the body.

Transcending Space: from Rivalry to a Common World

But it seems to me that life in the divine *Ruah* not only affects the consciousness with its diverse ways of living time, between *chronos* and *kairos*. It also recreates space. I am speaking of the *debita proportio* mentioned by the Greeks, referred to sometimes as the golden ratio in the arts and architecture, but above all as a common dwelling place, an *ethos* in which we all have a place, a welcome, hospitality, shared bread and wine.

This common space that allows the Spirit of the four winds to flutter is perceived by artists with their five senses and then re-created with their creative imagination. In their strokes on the canvas, as in the sound waves and silences of the musical work, or in the movement and

the pause that dance provokes in moving bodies, space is essential to recreate time and thus unfold movement.

But the common space is also a *locus*, a physical and ethical place, where bodies inhabit with joy and pain. Because there are spaces inhabited by confined, manipulated, or tortured bodies. The space of a convent cell conceived by Le Corbusier, contemplating the French countryside, is not the same as a common room in a public hospital where an AIDS patient is dying. Nor is the space of a traditional family constituted by a father, a mother, children, and pets like that of a household of survivors from hate crimes. The spaces are inhabited by empowered or lacerated bodies, healthy or sick, black or of other colors, each with their own ancestors ahead of them.

The space of the nuptial bed can become a battlefield in a couple's life. Garden or prison. Terrace of conviviality in an agro-ecology plot or prison cell in Guantanamo. Why is it so hard for us to share space with others? What impulses are unleashed in us by the physical space that can harbor both the sublime and the most vile of the human condition?

The gaze that alerts us to mimetic rivalry seems to me crucial to understand space as a crossroads of *eros* and *thanatos*, within the framework of an uncertain spiral where human freedom is put to the test. As you know, dear brother, for a couple of decades now, I have explored this path hand in hand with René Girard, James Alison, and João Cezar de Castro Rocha, to whom I owe that inner look at mimetic rivalry that is not only an objective analysis, nor is it condemnatory, of those we have all experienced at some time in our lives, being victims or executioners. What has most nourished my life and thought from this mimetic intelligence of desire is its capacity to look clearly at rivalry mechanisms without condemning. It enables me to dismantle in my own life the lie of the sacrifice of the weakest to maintain group stability. It opens for me a new space with coordinates to experience life in common beyond rivalry and resentment. Therefore, the path of forgiveness proposed by the mimetic theory is universal in that it opens an unusual space to the human condition, whatever its position in the infernal cycle of hatred, violence, resentment, and death.

To speak of forgiveness in order to transcend the space of rivalry does not imply an apology for Christianity. It is a universal invitation

to discover the power of the human condition when it is animated by the divine *Ruah* to go beyond resentment and the invisibilization of the other. We are able to name this gaze thanks to Jesus the Galilean, a just man who gave himself up to the end in an agonizing struggle to imitate the unconditional love of his Abba, who “makes his sun rise on the good and the bad, makes it rain on the just and on sinners.” This marvelous poetics of Jesus of Nazareth at the dawn of new times is our horizon for spreading our wings like the condor. In the depths of that vulnerable humanity, the divine life was revealed.

Born Again

How do we live in this new space and time? How do we leave the closed spaces of identity of *the self* that defends itself, and how to leave the empire of *chronos* that prevents us from going to the depths of the here and now? St. Paul’s theology of messianic time has been a growing tributary in my reflections and writing. “Time contracts” (1 Corinthians 7:29), the apostle wrote in a spark of clairvoyance about *this other way of living time and inhabiting space*. It is a delivery, a birth with its previous pains, the coming to light of something that has been brewing in the depths of the night.

“Contracting time” is an even more radical and powerful metaphor than just stopping time. It carries in its expressiveness the force of birth, of messianic contractions as a way of being born again.

In the Gospel of the Beloved Disciple, in a masterly dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus, which takes place in secret and in the middle of the night, this birth is evoked in its sources: the birth to new life happens “in water and the Spirit” (John 3: 1-7). The regeneration of a parched life, like a parched earth, as says the psalmist, is possible for those who let the divine *Ruah* flutter in its time and space. In the Christian tradition, both elements evoke the baptismal ritual, a fountain or, better, an oasis in the middle of the desert. I remember with gratitude the readings of the Gospels by Jewish authors I discovered in Paris as a student. They knew how to read between the lines, with the Hebrew eyes and heart, the power of the early Christian narrative that emerged

from Palestinian land. With those eyes, we can understand how the theophanies of Jesus, such as the baptism in the Jordan and the transfiguration on Mount Tabor, are told in the context of a desert people like the Hebrews: where white birds are fluttering, there lies a spring. That is why, in the story of Jesus, the living water that springs from the life of the just person is marked by the dove that flies around them as if they were a fountain.

And who are these oases of new life today?

For me, those springs are the people and communities that resist so much violence with loving dignity. It is the non-binary woman who, despite having been expelled from her family and her parish, created a shelter for other queer people in her village because she knows, in her own flesh, that time and space must be won inch by inch in a struggle against prejudice, hatred, and death.

Another source I have discovered with horror in recent years is the indignation of the mothers of disappeared persons who turn clandestine graves into sacred ground when they dig that earth with picks and shovels, with their hands and tears, to search for human remains until they find them. “They go out ahead” means to them that the clandestine grave is a map on which they find treasures. The foul smells that cling to the steel rod stuck in the ground when they track a grave are transformed when the women recognize them as smells of human bodies – and not dead animals. They caress a femur when they pull it out of the dust, speak to it with infinite tenderness, and dignify it when they light a candle, pray for it, and return it to a family. When a tattoo is recognized in a human tissue full of dust, they tattoo it on the soul and on the posters of the community of seekers as a sign of life.

The springs are, therefore, not only metaphors of life but – located in “the regions of non-being” evoked by the great Frantz Fanon – these spaces of pain can also be transformed by our resistances.

Thus, the clandestine graves become Jacob’s wells and empty tombs where an echo of life resounds. To be born again from the water and the divine *Ruah* then becomes a prophetic act and, in its mystical depths, the birthing of a new world here and now.

Another way of transcending space and time.

The Common Table

With all their creative agency of messianic acts that announced a new world, the prophetic acts of the people of Israel have been radicalized by Jesus of Nazareth and his messianic community that lives that new time and new space that we call the birth of fullness in the midst of uncertainty, of grace in the midst of so many historical tragedies.

Only then can we understand the meaning of the common table as a disruptive symbol of violent history, illuminating, that is, giving birth to a new way of being, of co-existing, of con-spiring thanks to the impetus of the *Ruah* of the Crucified One who was given as a gift and a mission on the cross, Pentecost from the depths of the night.

The convocation to the common table is expressed in many ways in history, every time a wounded community receives the balm of truth with justice and truth. This other time and space of redemption also takes place and time when a community celebrates the table of inclusion when it receives in a gesture of hospitality others from their wounds and vulnerabilities.

A pandemic story will allow me to illustrate what I evoke in these lines. During the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, when there were still no vaccines, the fear of the other became a body, with social distancing, the use of masks and hand sanitizer, with the impossibility of touching others even to give them the last goodbye before the obligatory cremation. My friend Edgar could no longer touch his father from the moment he was admitted to the emergency room for having contracted the virus. He only managed to glimpse his corpse to recognize him through the open coffin for a few seconds while he was being taken to the cremation. He then received the urn to place the ashes in a crypt.

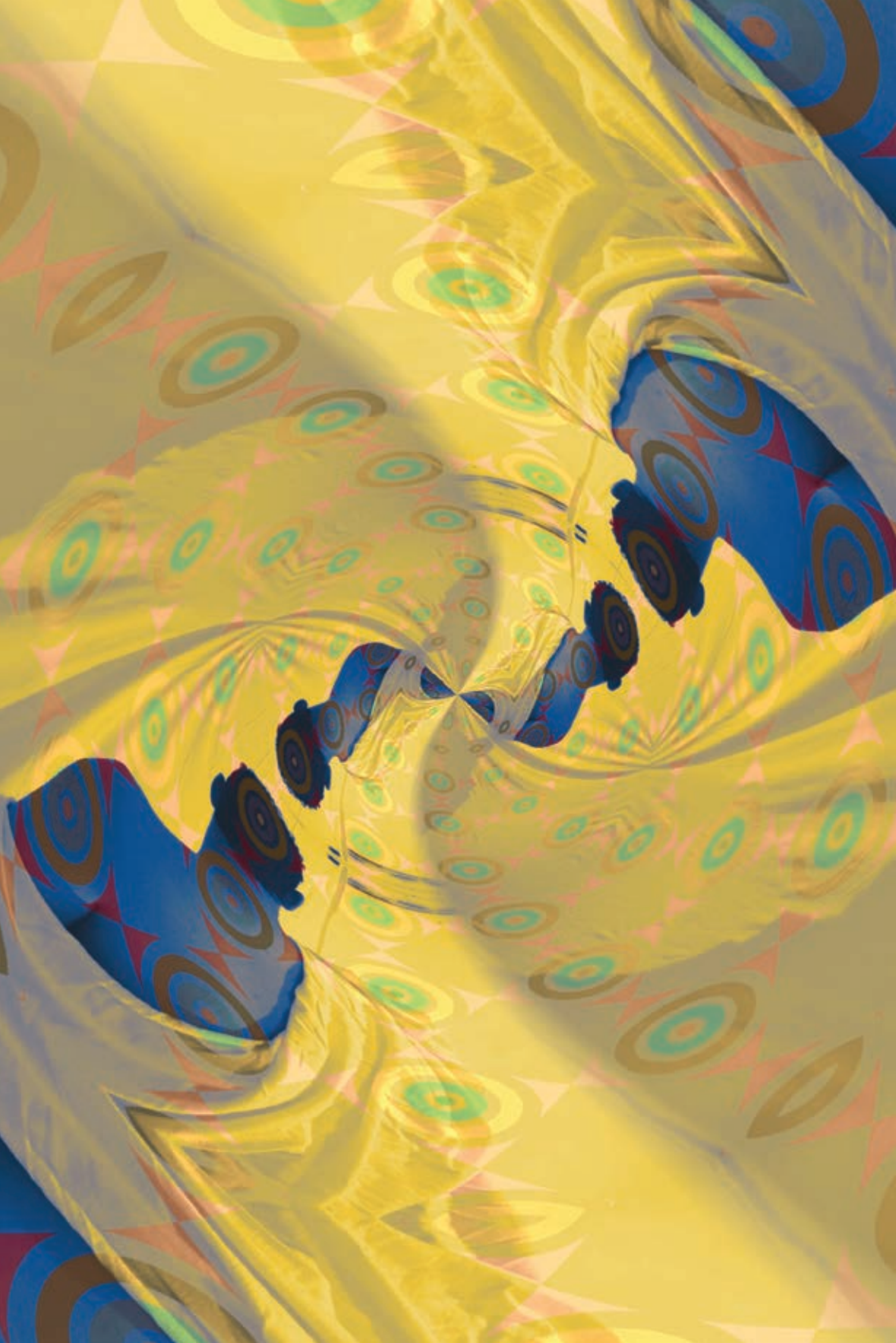
Another story of a common table in times of pandemic. In those dire times, something unusual happened in the city of Toluca, west of Mexico City. A pious bishop wanted to console his people and found no better way in his clerical mentality than to offer a blessing with the Blessed Sacrament, flying over the city in a helicopter, thanks to a “favor” from the governor, who lent him the aircraft. At the same time and in the same city, downstairs, in a marginal neighborhood – a scene from another space and another time – a collective of trans women, most of

them sex workers, opened a community kitchen to feed the poorest people in the area. Unlike the bishop, they exposed their bodies despite being protected with masks, offering, from their destitution, “a taco and a glass of fresh fruit water” to people in the area. Which of the two stories better communicated the divine delicacy? Which nourished the body of Christ? Which created contracted space and time that brought redemption to all?

Stories like the soup kitchen opened by trans women during the pandemic are alternative ways of living in space and time from vulnerable, diasporic, and marginalized bodies that, nevertheless, are *potent* in their powerlessness. And it seems to me that therein lies the spirituality of life that weaves communality, that heals wounds of the soul and social body, that heals us all because it arises from the depths of compassion and mercy from our own shared vulnerability.

With these and other stories that we can all remember after reading these accounts, we could write and describe the life force that insurges in violent history thanks to the fluttering of the divine *Ruah* in vulnerable and vulnerable people and communities that have twisted linear time to illuminate other times.

It seems to me that in this disruptive act lies spirituality and discernment today: knowing how to place ourselves in “the region of non-being,” where the victims of so much violence say “Enough” and generate other spaces and other times in which life can flourish. In these stories, “we are born again” as a hopeful humanity, thanks to “the water and the *Ruah*” that continues to flutter on the surface of original and historical chaos to communicate a full life.



VI

New Space

Thank you, brother, for inviting me to rethink space and time with a hunger for harmony after its rupture or perhaps with an infinite thirst for harmony that has never been lived. How to enter a new space and time with a torn heart and without shelter?

Is it possible?

Yes, it is possible, but whoever thinks and enters is *in-vised*. We could also say, *called to go inside* and *go outside*, *systole* and *diastole*, to beat in the very rhythm of the deepest and ultimate reality that sustains and animates us.

That *in-itation*, that going towards Life itself, is a *pro-vocation*. It is a *call* from the region of *non-being* and *non-place*, where the *self* finds nowhere comparatively to take root, where the blessing of sacrificial religion fades and ceases to stun, and the disguise of pain falls away.

In the region of *non-being*, the *self* cannot compare itself by saying I am “this and not that,” I am “one thing better than another, or worse than another, or different than another or similar to another.”

In the *non-place*, the *self* cannot compare itself by saying, I am “here and not there,” I am “in the center and not in the periphery,” I am “above and not below.”

Where the blessing of *sacrificial religion* vanishes, the *self* cannot be compared by saying, “Yes, I am, and you are not,” “Yes, I am safe, and you are not.”

And the Disguise of Pain Falls Away

When, in Mexico, Chayito told me: “God is the light that allows me to see my son that others do not see,” I understood that her pain was a

cracked surface that revealed something much deeper, a new time and space. God illuminated her son, who had disappeared, for her to see him and, paradoxically, to look for him, following him.

Something fell into place, and I was lifted up in friendship when, in Peru, Mamá Angélica told me: “You say that when my son was disappeared, you ignored all this because you were immersed in the racism of Lima towards those of us who live in the Sierra. You say that now that you want to go out alongside us, to search with us, you cannot do it without asking for forgiveness. Listen well, Juan Carlos: I forgive you, I forgive you a thousand times, and *quédate tranquilo*; let’s continue.”

As if falling from a competitive and comparative place, I was lifted into a new space: friendship with those who do not deny their pain and offer forgiveness. In that new space, in that non-place, *friendship* is stronger than the *self*, and out of that friendship is born, as you have well said, brother, a *simultaneous presence*.

Like when Marly, in Peru, told me, “The absence of my brother is a presence that encourages me.” Or when, in the Peruvian jungle, during the extractive invasion, Osvaldo and Enrique, leaders of a community, took me even deeper, telling me, “So that you can see firsthand the depredation that our sister suffers.” They used the term “sister” to refer to the earth herself. Likewise, Atilio once told me in Colombia, “Not because we resolve something, do we gain our dignity; rather, resisting, taking care of our territory – that already is our dignity.”

They are invitations of the divine *Ruah* happening from the region of *non-being* and *non-place* where human dignity and territory are implied or interpenetrated. *Territory*, in the words of Atilio in Colombia or of Osvaldo and Enrique in Peru, is *not-place-that-is-against-another*; it is a *non-place* full of life interrelated with everything. Its territory is not in competition but is a freely given *ofrenda*, an offering to be *cared for* that gives Life everywhere.

And also, one’s own dignity and loved ones are involved in forming a vital co-emergence, as when José, an immigrant friend who is kept undocumented by unjust systems in Oregon, smilingly told me, “I have been working in the same job for more than 26 years, in the same place, with the same salary, without being able to go to my homeland

to see my parents and then return here, but my children will be able to go and come back.

Violated territories and retained, deported, disappeared, or even dumped bodies are seen, or rather revealed, in the presence of people who do not disguise their pain but instead open it to reveal their deep-rooted love for their loved ones, their ancestors and the territories they inhabit and care for.

The source of that love is *mysterion*; in other words, it is neither controllable nor manipulable by hegemonic systems, and, therefore, it is good news for the poor, as Jesus of Nazareth reminded his contemporaries time and again.

This *co-emergence*, this *inter-penetration*, and this *simultaneous presence* have been attested to by symbols such as the Christian *perichoresis* referred to as the Trinity and the same Trinitarian life that transfuses communitarian agape. The same could be said of the conditioned mutual emergence or the universal concatenation that sustains the Buddhist notion of *pratityasamutpada*.

How do we approach each other?

As we began our conversation, I wondered *how to approach one another* regarding the challenge of global ecological imbalance and the global violence unleashed across the planet by hegemonic powers.

Our brother Gustavo Gutiérrez reminded us long ago from his reading of Bartolomé de las Casas, what Las Casas wrote in a letter sent to the Council of the Indies in 1531, “that of the most forgotten, God has a very recent and very vivid memory.” Interestingly, the Sanskrit term for *mindfulness* in English, or *atención plena* in Spanish, can be translated as “*remembar*,” “to recall,” “to remember,” “to return.”

Entering a new time, or transcending time, could be understood as returning, also, as we commented some time ago, to be transformed, to remember what has been dismembered, to enter into the memory of “the most forgotten”, of those who have of that time “a very recent and very vivid memory.”

Letting ourselves be moved by the Ruah (*discernment*) and *being moved by Her* (*spirituality*) we enter into the memory of those who open their pain to reveal their love, insides that ache to see those who others do not see, to see the most forgotten in our societies, those who are im-

prisoned, tortured, deported, abandoned, exploited, trashed and torn to pieces.

You mentioned the Pauline intuition about the time of salvation as a contraction of time similar to contractions in labor. Something like this happens when those who open their pain to reveal their love ultimately enable a greater encounter among all.

And entering the memory of those who open their pain activates us to enter into *mutuality*; also, into the dismembered love within us that begs for liberation. We *return* through *full attention* to the love underneath our pains. Those pains—and the love that lies underneath them—have been denied not only in our lifetime but for the centuries that our body carries as living memory.

To allow ourselves to be moved and to be moved by divine wisdom is to open our wounds and stories also when we enter into the memory of those who open their pain from the regions of *non-being* and *non-place*.

In this new space, what is dismembered in ourselves would be remembered by them in friendship. It is to be born again; it is to be rewoven, remembered with the love that cracks and transgresses hegemonic power. As a millenary psalm says, “You have recreated my innermost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb.” We are born again in the womb of friendship in resistance to rivalry, resentment, and sacrificial religion.

In that friendship, in that loving mutuality, we are encouraged to be true rather than defenders of some truth in competition and comparison with others. We perceive the good news of redemption in this new space.

Our open but shared wounds become a new space in which the love that we treasure and that underlies our pain begins to show its flashes of light through the crumbling of the *self*. That love awakens us and invites us to continue — letting ourselves crumble — together with the crumbling of the *self* of all the generations that we carry in our ancestral body. Then, we enter into a new space — a *simultaneous presence* — and a *new time* — *embracing our past that comes from ahead of us* — intrinsically linked to the pains of those we will meet in this pilgrimage.

Salvation

Carlos, our correspondence has led me to look at how distant our conversation is from the prevailing notion of what religious culture calls *salvation*. And I say *religious culture* and not *religions* in order to differentiate between what religions confess and practice from their impact. Their impact, whether by omission or action, becomes religious culture.

Salvation, as I can appreciate it in the prevailing religious culture here in Oregon, as well as in other states and countries, has not ceased to remain a notion that aims to protect the *self* from evil and to guarantee the immortality of the *self*.

I always associated salvation with not drowning. It is a compelling image that I carried since I was a child, and I don't know why.

And I always associated a boat, a hand, an arm; in short, someone extending their hand to me from a boat so that I would not drown.

Another image that carried less intensity in my memory is that of being healed. I picture a person who knows how to heal, and I am dying. Suddenly, the person heals me, and I experience healing, which is, in practice, salvation in the face of death.

Also, present as a memory is the image of a prison or dungeon and that there is someone who takes me out of there, a person who frees me from being trapped forever between bars or at the bottom of the earth.

All these images are powerful and I carried them with me since I was a child; I understand that they are images that I can still associate with the idea of salvation that religious culture offers as well.

But who saves themselves, or who is saved? The predominant religious culture continues to affirm the *self*. And that is very sad and painful.

On the contrary, our conversation has led us to speak of salvation as an entering, attracted, moved, invited to a new time and space, in which the *self* has no support or roots, in which a *simultaneous presence* is born and reborn that, like a divine-human-cosmic dance, continues to recreate its beat, its rhythms and its gestures with the presence of those who were sacrificed by hegemonic neurosis, but whose absences have not ceased to be a Living presence that awakens the entire creation to Life over and over again.

Let's imagine this dance as multiple rivers flowing into the ocean. Each river has numerous tributaries, and all of them are unique. As if we were a small stream that flows into another and then into others, we are a *simultaneous presence* of multiple rivers that flow deeper and deeper into a more open communion in which the forgotten and annihilated of this world participate very vividly as tributaries. There is a joy that emanates from that simultaneous presence that becomes an invitation for all the lies and blessings that the *self* falls into.

From here, we can smell the ocean!

And perhaps the ocean is nothing but a larger river that enters into another and this one into another and another, and so on, novel, without end. It is as if the absence of those of us who keep a living memory invokes us. They call us out ahead; they encourage us like tributaries of our flow to enter into a silence that at the same time enters into a greater silence that tunes the ear to hear songs of love. They are songs that do not repeat themselves but accompany the endlessly recreating and novel dance.

To Convoke

When we organize from our collective aspirations to Care for Life amid the pressures and violence of the hegemonic powers, we organize animated by the *simultaneous presence* we have been talking about, brother.

It is this *simultaneous presence* that is made public through our initiatives. And this *simultaneous presence* is a *risky public presence* because it challenges the hegemonic powers – not with power – but with a presence that reveals the *simultaneous presence of being absent and present, annihilated and survivors*. By its very emptiness of all power, this *new public presence – public (re)existence* – becomes a radical invitation to Live and care for Life, and this invitation has the Vital force to remove all the obstacles that limit it – including power and the *self* that sustains it.

The vital force that moves – even mountains, in the words of Jesus – is not power opposed to hegemonic power. Power cannot be defeated with power; not even when it is proposed as another kind of power. In essence, the root of power is the *self*, which is recreated in whatever

kind of power is alluded to. Why? Because the *self* is always nourished by counterposing itself against an 'other.'

Rivalry, imitation, and domination will not cease within a group that decides to gather power to confront the hegemonic powers. I repeat, 'power' is useless even when it is qualified as "good power", "power among many", power "among" and not "over", power "built among many from our histories"; in short, no matter what the type of power it is, it is useless. Why? Because it is based on opposing an 'other,' and that basis eats away at even the most beautiful narrative of power.

The *self*, sheltered by the blessing of sacrificial religion, is the root of all power.

Why not speak better of assuming a *risky public presence* and collectively *invite ourselves* in the public sphere to *let go of all power* and *embrace the simultaneous presence of those whom power regards as annihilated?*

Instead of power, we could speak of *potentialities-in-relationship* that *enliven the simultaneous presence, potentialities that care for Life; experiences that make transparent the divine presence*. Rather than roles or functions in a system, we speak of *potentialities-in-relationship* that *open the way between* hegemonic powers by piercing and unraveling them, deconstructing and transcending them. The divine presence encourages us to take on a risky public presence and calls us to invite one another collectively, in the public sphere, to recreate *the relationships* of all in favor of Life. Thinking of *potentialities in a relationship* makes it possible to re-imagine a co-existence and re-existence without the need to oppose an 'other.' Thinking in re-creation-of-relationships makes it possible to let go of the *self* in all the spheres of our initiatives.

Assuming a risky public presence based on the experience of a *simultaneous presence* becomes an invitation to recreate the *relationships, experiences, and potentialities* of all in favor of Life. There is no triumph, only a freely given sharing, an *ofrenda* to which our hearts open. There is nothing to be had but only to be received. Nothing is to be retained, but only that which is freely given and shared. It is an invitation that is already lived and which the hegemonic power cannot see because it is beyond its calculations and categories of power.

The vital force that emerges creatively from the experience of the simultaneous divine-human-cosmic presence is the same vital force

associated with the divine anarchy—on which you have commented in other spaces, Carlos. It is the force of messianic time.

How can we encourage ourselves and others to *gather* — as tributaries of memory and presence — the vital force to open new paths cracking through the powers of rivalry and violence? How can we encourage ourselves and others to *find* — as a true embrace — the vital force to recreate our roles in favor of the care of Life?

This question is crucial to nurture life in common where discernment and spirituality embrace each other. The imagination of our collective efforts is often imprisoned by the colonization of our memories that prevents us from glimpsing something other than the power to open new paths as cracks between the hegemonic powers.

To open new paths cracking through the hegemonic powers is not to oppose an ‘other;’ still, it is a liberation of all among all animated by the divine *Ruah* — all generations throughout all times, *simultaneous presence, continuous creation, continuous incarnation*.

Let Us Continue

I want to end by telling you that you can count on me, brother, so that our friendship may be a *letting ourselves be moved* by the divine *Ruah* and *being moved* by Her, entering a new time and space. Where the fall of the *self* takes place, *our wounds are opened to receive the past that comes from ahead of us in the wounds of those who confess their love for remembering the forgotten of this world*.

Then absence becomes a simultaneous presence that inhales, exhales, and recreates in a new and ever-iterating way the joy and banquet of Life.



Epilogue

Nairobi, July 25th, 2022

At the end of the many conferences and workshops in Nairobi, we had the opportunity to reach the slopes of Kilimanjaro, where we are contemplating the enormous diversity of animals in beautiful coexistence. It is a gift to be here, under the starry sky, and it is here that we joyfully recalled the epistolary dialogue we started a few months ago on discernment and spirituality for uncertain times.

Our remembrance does not end. On the contrary, it continues as an invitation that circles in our hearts; it remains as a call.

Succinctly, we could say that the *Ruah* calls us and wants to be *born, making space* in us for the wounded stories of others, because there is room for the others in our wounds. And this *being born making space* happens in *friendship*, in being received freely in the wounded stories of the others that offer forgiveness and new life for all, as if we were to enter and take root in the intersectionality of our solidarity, creative and transgressive resistances of the hegemonic powers.

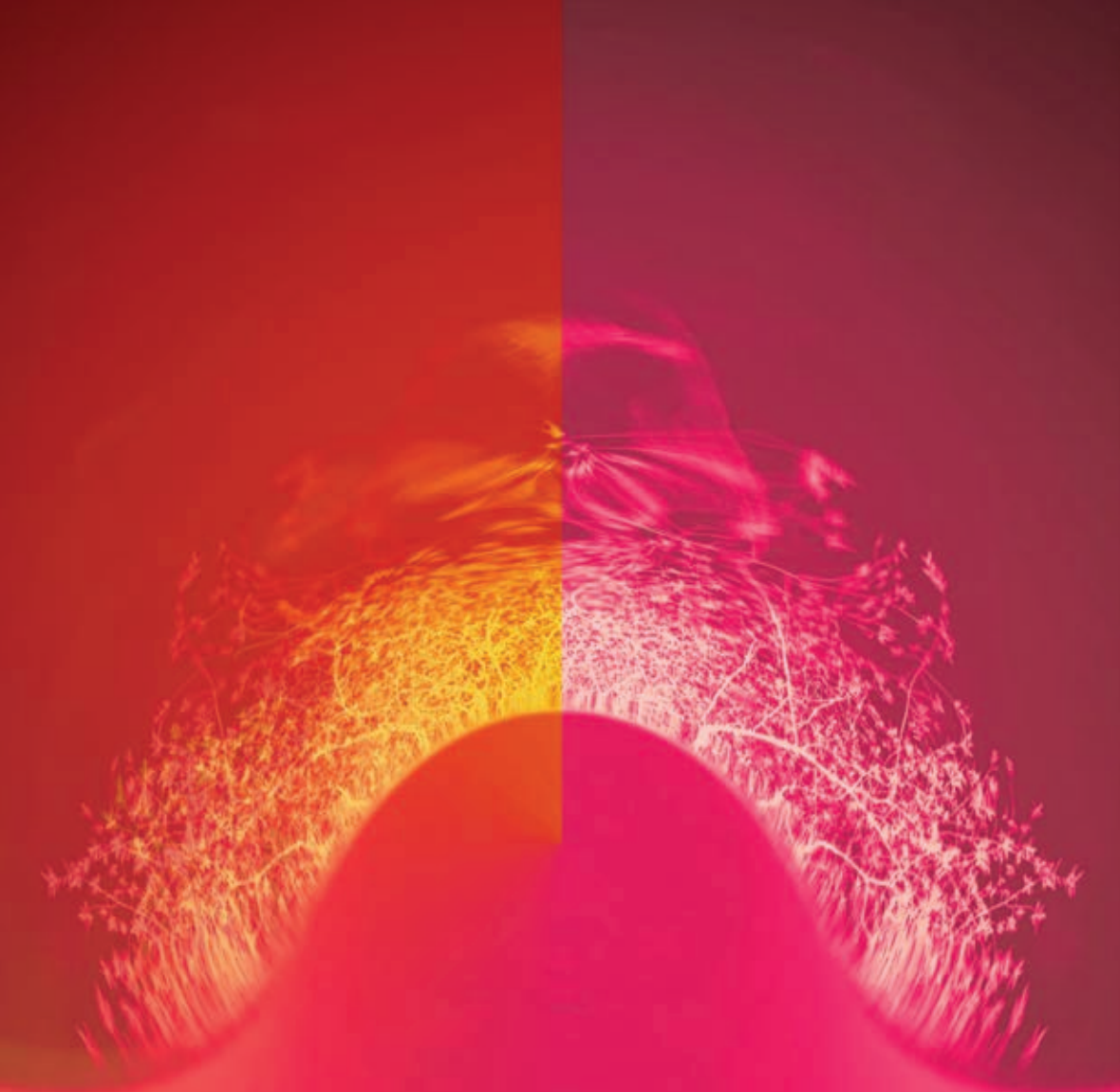
This invitation would reflect what has been affirmed since ancient times about conceiving God within through knowledge and, at the same time, penetrating God through love, as the Dominican Meister Eckhart told us in one of his many sermons. It is about being *born-with* and entering through friendship. It is about being received through freely-giving ourselves simultaneously.

In these uncertain times, we want to allow ourselves to let us move and be moved by the divine *Ruah* in friendship, in mutuality, receiving in our own wounds, often hidden, the wounded stories of those who courageously confess their deepest rebellions and aspirations from the invisible margins and discarded by power. And at the same time, to move or enter into friendship offered from the ignored margins to *re-imagine* a world in which all heavens and all worlds fit, a being born together in new time and space.

We thus wish to extend the invitation to undertake and receive diverse paths of spiritual and theological mutual accompaniment, whose primary dynamism is a liberating spiritual friendship, a liberating social friendship. On the one hand, spiritual because this mutual accompaniment is moved by the indomitable freedom of the divine *Ruah*, not calculated. Friendship is always grace. And theological – insofar as we discern our steps collectively in communion with those whom the hegemonic powers consider annihilated, forgotten, and discarded throughout history. It is from the reverse side of history that we creatively evoke intuitions, narratives, rituals, and liberating practices. It is also from the reverse side of history that we invoke those whose lives transgressed rivalry and opened paths of forgiveness and freely given offerings in friendship. Yes, we invoke the victims who are awakened together with the The Awakened Crucified. Thus, in spiritual and theological mutual accompaniment, we remember and perceive the footsteps of those we invoke beside our steps to continue letting ourselves be moved by divine wisdom.

In these uncertain times of global horror and violence, we embrace *Ruah's* invitation to keep alive the memory of that subtle Christian intuition: *there is no salvation without the body*. We come together in mutual accompaniment because our bodies, as if they were ancestral sounding boards, harbor an infinite number of wise transgressions that resist and creatively re-exist with Mother Earth in the face of the violation of our deepest aspirations and rebellions by the hegemonic powers.

We are *pro-voked* by the divine Sophia in these times. We are *newly called* by paths of communion that emerge from deep longings to *become together* in liberating spiritual friendship. We are *newly called* to paths where the diversity of our spiritualities embraces our vulnerabilities and enlivens the courageous steps that global challenges demand of us. We are *newly called* to paths where the diversity of our evocations and invocations will untie the knots of rivalry. We are *newly invited* to the simultaneous presence of *everyone* whom the Crucified and the victims of history have awakened to the banquet of Life.



Inspirations & Conspirations

AUSCULTA FILI VERBA MAGISTRI

THE FIRST EDITION OF
MUTUAL ACCOMPANIMENT IN THE DIVINE RUAH.
ON DISCERNMENT AND SPIRITUALITY AT UNCERTAIN TIMES, BY
JUAN CARLOS LA PUENTE-TAPIA Y CARLOS MENDOZA-ÁLVAREZ,
WITH A FOREWORD BY CARMENMARGARITA SÁNCHEZ DE LEÓN
AND ILLUSTRATED BY PAULO MEDINA,
PUBLISHED IN OPEN ACCESS BY ALIOSVENTOS EDICIONES AC IS PRINTED ON DEMAND
THROUGH AMAZON IN SPAIN, UNITED STATES, FRANCE, ITALY, JAPAN, AND THE
UNITED KINGDOM.
IN MEXICO, IT IS PRINTED ON DEMAND BY LIBRÁNTIDA.

THE FONTS PERPETUA AND TAFEL SANS PRO WERE EMPLOYED FOR THE TYPESETTING.



In times marked by uncertainty, horror, and global violence, this dialogue invites us to let ourselves move (discernment) and be moved (spirituality) by the divine Ruah “in friendship, in mutuality, receiving in our own wounds, often hidden, the wounded stories of those who courageously confess their deepest rebellions and aspirations from the invisible margins and discarded by power.”

In this four-handed book –which collects the epistolary dialogue between Juan Carlos La Puente-Tapia and Carlos Mendoza-Álvarez in conversation with the illustrations of Paulo Medina and prefaced by Carmenmargarita Sánchez de León– the authors invite us to embody each other through “mutual accompaniment because our bodies, as if they were ancestral sounding boards, harbor an infinite number of wise transgressions that resist and creatively re-exist with Mother Earth in the face of the violation of our deepest aspirations and rebellions by the hegemonic powers.”

Juan Carlos La Puente-Tapia accompanies people and groups so that their actions for justice and peace are rooted in spiritual, theological, and ritual work in mutual accompaniment.

Carlos Mendoza-Álvarez is a Mexican theologian of the Dominican order. Weaving critical thought and spirituality, he accompanies survivors of various forms of violence in dignified and hopeful resistance.



Santiago de Chile, 2002

“This book promises to inspire a new generation of spirituality practitioners, invited to take long journeys to the many matrices of humanity to learn anew to make friends with the earth and its creatures.” –Susan Abraham, President, Concilium: International Journal of Theology

“Wonderful glimpses of a new pneumatology: we catch a glimpse of how the Spirit produces rebirth, possessing us from the interstices and leading us to modes of presence and possibilities of donation not yet glimpsed. Rich nourishment for a holy and ‘embodied’ imagination.” –James Alison, Chair of the Education Committee, Imitatio