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Introduction

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Introduction

JEAN-FRANÇOIS ROUSSEL

This first issue of the journal *Liberatio* hopefully announces a new chapter in the story of the World Forum on Theology and Liberation. *Liberatio* is an online, non-periodical journal, which is peer-reviewed and indexed in most databases in the social sciences and humanities. Of equal importance, *Liberatio* publishes in four languages: English, Spanish, Portuguese and French. It intends to disseminate the work of the World Forum on Theology and Liberation across the world, from academics, as well as from theologians and activists at the grassroots level, within a double perspective: academic research and analysis from the grassroots. It will help disseminate across the world a body of knowledge and reflection beyond the borders of the Western academy as well as of a thought arising from practices. This journal will be managed internationally and published by the Presses de l'Université de Montréal, Québec, Canada.

The World Forum on Theology and Liberation was founded in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 2005 as a “parallel forum” to the World Social Forum. It is part of a series of important intercontinental meetings that have been organised since 1975, where theological circles from several continents have recognised their convergences around a project of liberating theology: Latin American Liberation theologies, African American, feminist, African Liberation theologies, indigenous theologies, Asian theologies, etc. The creation of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (1976) is also a part of this evolution.

The World Forum on Theology and Liberation is alter-globalist, articulated at the World Social Forum as a concrete and open space for encounters between world movements committed to the search for “another possible world.” Since its inception, the World Forum on Theology and Liberation has been:

a space or platform for convergence, encounter, and exchange, with theologies and theologians who, around the world, commit themselves to the principle of *Liberation* in their personal, regional and international contexts. Its identity is manifested in its production: exchanges, debates, publications, spiritual and artistic spaces, aligned with its thematic axes and its principles (Principles and Procedures of the World Forum on Theology and Liberation).

At the World Forum on Theology and Liberation, people from Latin America, North America, Africa, Asia, Oceania and Europe work together in a range of activities, in an ongoing process, from a pluralistic, ecumenical, global and decolonial perspective. The articulation of the World Forum on Theology and Liberation with the World Social Forum, as a “parallel forum,” has been fundamental, as the World Social Forum intends

to connect various issues related to justice, peace, equality, ecology and sustainability, from many planetary perspectives.

The ecumenism of the World Forum on Theology and *Liberation* is certainly denominational, but it also welcomes, as a principle of life and discernment, the converging plurality of spiritual paths, cultures, languages, genders, historical struggles and the plural expressions of the divine mystery that is the foundation of the future. It is not institutionally linked to any religious structure; rather its participants are grouped based on their concrete commitments and ideas.

Over the years, the World Forum on Theology and Liberation has held 10 forums: in Porto Alegre (2005), Nairobi (2007), Belém (2009), Dakar (2011), Tunis (2013 and 2015), Montreal (2016), Salvador de Bahia (2018) and then online due to the COVID-19 pandemic (2020 and 2022).

The 2022 World Forum on Theology and Liberation

The World Will Never Be the Same: Theologies in a Time of Pandemic was the title of the collection of texts from the 2020 World Forum on Theology and Liberation.¹ Prepared within the context of a completely online World Social Forum, this forum led us to an unknown land, definitely other than that of Mexico where we had planned to hold the event. This collection, for its part, is issued from the forum held from May 1 to 6 and June 6 to 9, 2022, when the pandemic continued to disrupt plans.

The theme of the 2022 forum builds upon the previous one. Under the title “Action and Promise: Struggling Against Violence, Building Justice and Rethinking Relationality in the Time of Climate Change,” 42 panelists discussed their views based on the experience of a world turned upside down, of an unfolding polycrisis of which the pandemic was a painful symptom. The impacts of climate change and the destruction of ecosystems were revealed: those of social polarisation and even social fragmentation in an algorithmic continent, those of symbolic violence tipping over into social violence (conspiracy theories, millenarianism instrumentalized politically), those of a neoliberal economy that is more than ever deregulated, but also baffled by the derailment of transnational production chains, denounced by the middle and working classes who do not find it to their liking, those of a democracy in retreat, those of continental and transcontinental migration and human trafficking. Those of a war that had just begun in Ukraine, and which accentuated the multipolar character of the postcolonial world. Voices from all over the world shared their commitments and liberating visions from a theological perspective of Liberation: in a fragmented world of multiplied risks and violence, how can we rethink just relationships, our ways of

1. Luiza E. Tomita and Roberto Zwetsch, eds., *O mundo jamais será o mesmo: teologias de libertação em tempos de pandemia* (Porto Alegre: Editora Fundação Fênix, 2021).

entering into relationships? And what about the relationships between Churches, including gender equality and sexual abuses? How to rethink relationality there too?

The COVID-19 pandemic made the preparations for the World Social Forum (WSF) much more difficult. Ironically, the theme of the World Social Forum was “Another World Emerges from the Coronavirus Pandemic.” Throughout this project, we had the impression that the ground was unstable. On this unstable ground, “where to land?”, to quote the title of a book by Bruno Latour.² He argues that the new climate regime is transforming our relationship with the world, in practical, political, theoretical and even ontological ways. It speaks of a world of natural agents, interacting together, humans but also all the other dynamic entities of Gaia, such as viruses, unstable weather and so forth.

Latour questions the term “ecological crisis” or “climate crisis.” These suggest that we are in a crisis, a period of transition between two stable states. However, the reality is much different. We have entered a new era, a “new normal” so to say. What will characterise the new climate regime is permanent instability. Things will not go back to the “normal” one we used to live in. How can we recover a sense of balance in a world where the ground seems increasingly unsteady?

Despite the theme of the 2022 World Social Forum, “another world emerges from the Coronavirus pandemic,” we are all struggling to make this different world our own. One wonders what the “polycrisis” will change in the practice of the World Social Forum and the World Forum on Theology and Liberation.

The World Social Forum was conceived at the turn of the 21st century as a global response by social movements to neoliberal globalisation. Among the impacts of globalisation, we find an economy where goods and labour are moved from one continent to another. And according to the IPCC, over the past thirty years, CO₂ production has increased exponentially. The World Social Forum is intended to be a reaction to this globalisation, which impacts climate change, and more broadly, the environment. The pandemic is one effect among others, along with climate collapse.

In this first issue of *Liberatio*, there are twelve articles written in the wake of WFTL 2022: five in Spanish, four in English, two in French and one in Portuguese, across four sections: “Feminist Theology,” “Decolonial Theology,” “Ecotheology” and “Building Justice.” The issue presents a wide range of local perspectives, from India to Congo, from Mexico to the United States, from Brazil to Canada, from Hungary to Bolivia. It attests to the originality and creativity of today’s contextual theology.

2. Bruno Latour, *Où atterrir? : comment s’orienter en politique* (Paris: La Découverte, 2017).

The future

The World Social Forum project remains relevant 20 years later because globalisation has not finished revealing its impacts. But in a very brutal way, in this new world that is marked by instability, by unpredictability and by the climate emergency, until when will it be possible — and deemed relevant — to organise gatherings of tens of thousands of people, a very large part of them from abroad, with all the logistics that this implies, with all the mobilisation of financial resources that this also implies for the organisation of the World Social Forum itself and also for the organisation of the World Social Forum, grassroots activists who often need financial support to travel? And in the world marked by the climate emergency, are we preparing for another environmentally sustainable world by encouraging the release of thousands of tons of carbon dioxide for a week-long event? These concerns are addressed in the WSF.

However, the World Social Forum is not just a periodic happening that enlivens a given city every two years. Through its parallel forums, or through the various local forums, it is also a continuous process, with a decentred articulation of the global and the local, which can take more than one form. This is consistent with the fundamental approach, that of a convergence of multiple, very diverse struggles. It is also, fundamentally, the approach embraced by the World Forum on Theology and Liberation, now and for the future. The WFTL is an experiment. After 2022, it pledges to invent new practices, new modes of relationships, with a view towards global justice for another world already here.