

Before The World Did Not Exist:¹ Sustainability, Amazonia and The Seven Capital Sins

Marcílio de Freitas²

1. Department of Physics at the Federal University of Amazonas, Amazonas State, Brazil

Abstract:

This article presents connections between representations of Christianity, Amazonia and the sustainability. It also analyzes ruptures and convergences in approaches, explanatory languages and narratives of science and religion into sustainable processes and Amazonia. Several scientific and ethnological scenarios of the indigenous peoples from Brazilian Amazonia are presented.

Keywords: Amazonia, environmental education, indigenous peoples, ethnosciences, anthropology of techniques

"The forest is born from a seed that sprouts in the land's uterus. The forest is also a plantation of symbols. At the Amazonian region there is a tangling of symbols starting by the own symbology of the forest for all men, result of the dream of leave of itself to the search of 'another that are us still, in a dialectic expression of the own being'." [1].

BEFORE THE WORLD DID NOT EXIST: SUSTAINABILITY AND AMAZONIA

This article presents connections between Christianity's representations, Amazonia and sustainability. It also analyzes points of convergences present in the approaches, explanatory languages and narratives of science and religion on sustainable processes and Amazonia.

Religion and science constitute different systems of understanding and interpretation of the world. The 'Theory of Big Bang'³ and the 'Christian Doctrine of Creation' have one common

¹ Amazonian peoples's mythology about the creation of the world. See: [2] Pārōkumu U, Kêhiri T. 1980. Antes o mundo não existia (Before the world did not exist). Livraria Cultura Publishing, São Paulo, pp. 64-82.

² Bibliographical note: Marcílio de Freitas has been Professor of the Department of Physics at the Federal University of Amazonas, Amazonas State, Brazil, since 1978. Former State Secretary of Science and Technology at the State of Amazonas, he has coordinated and implemented important scientific programs in this State of Brazilian Amazonia. Recent publications: "Sustainability and Covid-19: Michael's Challenges," Kindle Publishing – Amazon Book, US, September 2022a; "Amazonia our treasure," (portuguese language), Kindle Publishing - Amazon Book, US, September 2022b; "Amazonia and the children," (portuguese language), Kindle Publishing - Amazon Book, August 2022; "Who Will Save Amazonia: World Heritage or Full Destruction," Nova Science Publishing, NY, 2021; "Amazonia our love" (portuguese language), Trevo Publishing, SP, 2021; and, "The Future of Amazonia in Brazil: A Worldwide Tragedy," Peter Lang Publishing, NY, 2020.

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characteristic: the explanation of universe's origin has been qualified as science consolidates in Western culture as a specific way for world physical formation understanding, yet religious cosmological narratives and interpretations that continues to have widespread acceptance by the humanity.

It is understood that science should not have a conflicting relationship with religion, because this preaches kindness, justice, honesty, morality and ethics. These references should also guide science as form of explaining, transforming and improving human existence. Although, sometimes its political use has oppressed and threatened the existence of peoples and environments. The processes of colonization and imposition missionaries in the past and the imperialist expansions are unique examples. The physical destruction of the New World's indigenous peoples and the deconstruction of their cultural identities by these colonial processes illustrate this perverse picture. The emergence of sustainability incorporates new elements in this framework that was also present in Amazonia.

Predatory capitalism has caused much ecological destruction since its introduction in the depreciative exploitation of nature under conditions that require different approaches and methodologies for the preservation of biomes and the complex relationships between humans and non-human entities. Amazonia is a singular example. For thousands of years its inhabitants have interacted with nature beyond their physical condition and integrated with their material and symbolic representations [3].

As will be shown in this chapter, an Amazonia's important issue is its theological representation in the Judeo-Christian perspective.

On the other hand, the rich indigenous Amazonian mythological universe should also be highlighted. According to Silva [4], its characteristics include "Undifferentiation between humans and animals that relate to each other as equals; heaven and earth so close that they almost touch each other; cosmic journeys, flying humans, primeval twins, creative incests; underground origins; deluges; underwater humanities; chaos, conquests, transformations... It is the world taking forms, defining places and characteristics of personages known today. These are the mythical themes that narrate adventures and primordial beings (...)."

The Amazonian peoples' mythical representations are complex and are embedded in nature. The Quichua and Aymara peoples, descendants of the Incas, who inhabit the regions from western Amazonia located in Ecuador, Peru, Colombia and Bolivia, believe that the spirit of their ancestors continues to exist to guide them. They see the Sun and the Moon as divine entities from which they request blessings, whether for better harvests or for success in combat with rival groups. The Sun God (Inti) was the male God and they believed that their King descended from him.

The Dessana people, inhabitants from Upper Black River in the Brazilian West Amazonia, describe that in the beginning there was nothing and the darkness covered everything. One woman, Yebá

our love" (portuguese language), Trevo Publishing, SP, 2021; and, "The Future of Amazonia in Brazil: A Worldwide Tragedy," Peter Lang Publishing, NY, 2020.

³ It is important to clarify that the 'Big Bang Theory' does not explain the universe's origin. It describes the universe's evolution from the explosion of a unique region. Many physicists already defend the possibility that it is just a stage in the evolution of the universe. However, its logical consistency and capacity to integrate several fields of knowledge reserves it a relevant place in the history of science.

běló, made herself from six invisible things: benches, pan holders, gourds, gourds of ipadu, feet of maniva and cigarettes. (...) She chewed the ipadu again and smoked cigarette, then became invisible, took the ipadu from her mouth and turned it into men, the five thunders, immortals, and gave each of them a compartment in the sphere. (...) These compartments became houses, and only in them was light, as in the compartment of Yebá bëló. This recommended the thunders to make the world, to create the light, the rivers and humanity (...). [5-6].

The myths presented have some common characteristics. They highlight the environments in which these people lived, and which, of course, have conditioned the scenarios of their creation narratives. Water, fire, earth, air, animals, plants and sky prevail in these mythologies. Another notable influence is anthropomorphism, that is, the deities exhibit behaviors, forms and thoughts characteristic of human beings. Similar to science, the myths and the religions are human creations in close relation to nature. In the cosmic view of those who believe in the heavenly order, these humanity's treasures are creations of the Gods.

There is an indigenous narrative that represents the origin of the Amazonian basin. Cid [7] describes that "Many years ago the moon was the sun's bride, who wanted to marry her. But if this happened the world would be destroyed. The warm love of the sun would burn the world and the tears of the moon would flood the whole Earth. Therefore, they could not marry. (...). They were then separated. The moon to one side and the sun to the other. (...). The moon cried during day and night, and its tears flowed over the Earth to the sea. The sea was furious and so the moon's tears were not mixed with its waters, which for half a year run upwards and for half a year run downwards. It was the moon's tears that gave rise to the Amazonas River."

Amazonia's sustainability depends on the preservation of its ecologies and its cultures. Its importance is enlarged as the models of economic development based on the destructive use of nature are in the process of collapsing. In this sense, the world's role in Amazonia is also related to the symbolic links welding this region to Western culture's foundations [8].

CHRISTIAN TRADITION AND SUSTAINABILITY: LITTLE COMMENTS

The Christian tradition is embedded in Western civilization's material and symbolic foundations. From a religious perspective, God created the universe, the life that animates it and, simultaneously, all the laws of nature. His presence in humanity is very significant, it is independent of discourse and the reason. The subjective and intersubjective relationships between humans and God constitute Catholicism's important foundation.

The religious and political conquest of Amazonia by the Iberian Crown had a strong participation of the Catholic religion. During 17th and 18th centuries, in a slow but systematic and continuous form, the Portuguese Crown, in alliance with the Catholic Church, conquered the Brazilian Amazonia [9]. In this period, these institutions expanded and took possession of its immense territory, enslaving most of its indigenous peoples. This spiritual symbiosis was very problematic and painful in Amazonia. The religious and political conquest of Amazonia by the Iberian Crown had a strong participation of the Catholic religion. The missionary action in Amazonia was aimed to catechize the indigenous peoples in a perspective of transforming them into Christians, when necessary through violent methods. If necessary, eliminating their physical lives. Full control on their souls and labor, appropriation of material wealth and, subsequently, implantation of a political order over immense Amazonian territory guided the actions of the Crown and the Catholic Church in Amazonia. These were the political guidelines during this period of much

indoctrination and suffering in Amazonia. The political project of spiritual conversion of the indigenous peoples to transform these 'primitive and inferior populations' into subservient Christians and vassals [10-11] was a tragedy.

In harsh criticism against the Catholic Church, Gonçalves Dias [12] says "(...). We must consider the Indian in the state of catechesis as being in transition. (...) In this state the Indian was neither savage, nor civilized, nor pagan, nor Catholic. But passing, without preparation, instantaneously from one state to another, he becomes equally incapable of both – to live in the cities with the men who are called civilized or to live in the jungles among the so-called barbarians (...).".

Gradually, the Catholic Church was restructuring its doctrinal actions in Amazonia. After 520 years of its arrival in this region it has signed new commitments with its peoples. In October 2019, Holy Father led the organization of the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, to reflect on the theme: Amazonia; New Paths for the Church and for an Integral Ecology, which took place in Rome. The planet's future and Amazonia, the peoples of Amazonia, their territories, nature and culture, socio-cultural diversity and human rights, traditional knowledge and modern science, justice and public policies, and spirituality and wisdom are themes on the agenda of the Synod. This event also reaffirmed the importance of Pan-Amazonian culture and this region to the world, and presented the guidelines for a church with Amazonian identity. It insists on building a world that is less consumer-oriented and more committed to Christian values. In broad lines, this assembly discussed the prophetic religious dimensions articulated to a new relationship between humans and nature in a sustainable way [13-14].

Spiritual guidance remains a central concern of the Catholic Church. His commitment to educate and protect his followers from the derogatory impacts of certain basic human instincts resulted in the formulation and incorporation of capital sins into Christianity's doctrines by St. Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century.

These sins: gluttony, lust, avarice, wrath, pride, sloth and envy when practiced, must be confessed with due remorse for the purification of the sinner's soul. They are transgressions of divine laws. Broadly speaking, these seven capital sins constitute the matrix of the vast set of sins that torment Catholics' lives. And also those of non-Catholics.

The birth and evolution of modern science put new challenges to Christianity. The rationalization of the theories on the origin of world and the meaning of life, in a spiritualized universe, was definitely incorporated into human history's agenda. Science and religion have accumulated knowledge about the universe and humans through different methodologies. The main basis of science is reason, used to formulate hypotheses, generalizations and to construct theories legitimized by tests and experiments. Religions find their truths through revelation, faith, belief, and holiness. Yet they have different purposes. The science is concerned with physical processes, whereas creation religious narratives are concerned with proper relationships: that are oriented towards questions of meaning, value and purpose, which science, by itself, cannot answer. Despite these structural differences, most of the scientific and technical innovations prior to the scientific revolution and from the industrial revolutions were performed by societies organized through religious traditions.

Science and religion are social constructs. Both share diverse material and symbolic dimensions of our life and propose to improve the individuals and humanity. They are entangled with the confrontation 'nature × culture' in asymmetrical and systemic form.

The incorporation of science and technology into public policy has resulted in an improvement in quality of life of a humanity's significant portion. However, the commodification of life and the accelerated social pauperization and ecological degradation of the planet put new problems to humanity: problems that constrain the Christianity's conciliatory and humanizing spirit. Their solutions require restrictions to the expansion and unlimited reproduction of capital centered on the devaluation of nature and the alienation of people. The restructuring of capitalism is going on. Resistant to the destructive dimensions of science, the Catholic religion, in 2008 and through the Vatican, announced new capital sins. These include the 'morally dubious' experiments with 'stem cell', drug use, environmental pollution and social injustice present in exacerbated social inequality. Excessive wealth, the generation of poverty, and bioethical violations, such as artificial birth control, complement these new capital sins. New types of remorse and atonement have been introduced into the 'worlds of Christian sinners. On May 24, 2015, Pope Francis awarded the 'Encyclical Laudato Si' which clarifies and calls all people to joint responsibility to protect life and nature in all its material and symbolic dimensions. In this scenario, emerges the Catholic Climate movement [15].

However, the lack of social control over political systems and the compulsion of people and economic corporations to privatize natural environments and accumulate economic wealth have contributed to forming a humanity marked by narcissism, indifference and arrogance. The damaging use of science and technology in this process, in a nihilistic and selfish perspective, conspires against Christian foundations. Life and nature have been considered commodities, products to be consumed and discarded.

In this new civilizational stage, the Christian religion's importance has been reaffirmed. For Christianity, nature is a sacred entity that must be protected and sheltered from extinction. Christianity does not regard nature as an obstacle to the perfecting of humanity; on the contrary, it presupposes the human condition as an extension of it. Creating the links between the world's symbolic and material representations that articulate the sciences, religions and sustainability to each other are challenges for all [16]. The permanent fight against the commodification of life, the exacerbation socioeconomic inequality and climate change leads this picture of concerns. This challenge has global contours, the ecology as paradigm of modernity and strengthens Amazonia's world importance.

Maintaining life's perennially on the planet, in all its dimensions, requires a new scale of needs and values aimed at building a new existential relationship between humans and nature. The world requires a new aesthetic conception and civilizing framework centered on structures, systems and sustainable processes. At this juncture, the notion of sustainability can be applied, ad hoc, to the Universe and to Earth in their totalities, considering them as reciprocal extensions of human existence committed to our common future and in a collective process of material and spiritual sharing. Conceptions that will generate historical actions converge to construct a 'cosmic philosophy' of economic development whose central focus would be the scientific and spiritualized paradigm for sustainability.

An important dimension of sustainability's role refers to the existence of complex worldwide cultural and biological diversities. Building a political and religious unity encompassing these cultural and historical diversities in a sustainable perspective presents a great challenge for humanity. The continuous reinventions of sciences and techniques and the formation of new occupational matrices have given rise to new interventions by religion in the framework of sustainability. It is about recreating and reframing a new dialogue between science and religion, as well as between different religious traditions, permeated by sustainable processes and genuinely human ethical values. However, the operational conditions required by sustainability consider the category 'nature' broader and more sophisticated than the category 'environment'. This condition requires new methodologies and representations for the analysis of the relationship of: humans-nature-spirit [17].

William Lane Craig [18] presents six scenarios in which science and religion are mutually relevant. "Religion provides a conceptual frame in which science can flourish. Science is capable of both challenging and confirming various affirmations of religion. Science finds metaphysical problems that religion can help solve. Religion can help to decide among scientific theories. Religion can expand the explanatory capacity of science, and science can establish a premise in an argument that produces a conclusion of religious significance."

In this century, the fictional and mechanical language of science is intertwined to divine and aesthetic representations of religion to form a new universal framework. A framework motivated by sustainability, which requires the presence of Amazonia.

AMAZONIA, THE MYTH OF IMMORTALITY AND THE SEVEN CAPITAL SINS

As presented, Amazonia's general characteristics are surprising and complex. Euclides da Cunha [19] says "Amazonia is the page that God did not write in 'Genesis - the origin of life'". Definitely, Amazonia is linked to the process of building an authentically human life and to the planet's sustainable future. Humanity is faced with a new societal perspective: building and incorporating spiritualized sustainable programs into socioeconomic enterprises. This brief study reaffirms the Amazonia's importance in this global political and religious frame.

There was no sin yet. In paradise, after God had finished his work ... "He took the man and placed him in the Garden of Eden, to cultivate the soil and keep it. He gave to man the precept: 'You may eat the fruit of garden's trees, but do not eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and the evil, because in the day you eat, you will undoubtedly die.'" (...) The serpent said to the woman: "Has God really said, 'You shall not eat fruit of any tree of garden?'" The woman replied to serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees of the garden, but of the fruit from the tree which is in the middle of the Garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it. You shall not touch it, lest you die.'" "Oh, no! - said the serpent to woman, 'You won't really die, for God knows that in the day you eat it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing of good and the evil.'" [20]. Possessors of the knowledge of good and the evil, Adam and Eve lost the divine secret of eternal life. This is the main foundation of the doctrine of original sin.

From this Western Judeo-Christian matrix emerged a civilization based on technification and privatization. The growing distance between the human condition's realities and the edenic virtual state has unfolded in a relationship between humans and nature permeated by deep socioeconomic inequalities, embedded in global processes. Amazonia is also immersed in this symbolic world of colonial origin. Its destruction is a worldwide concern.

An important issue of Amazonia is its theological significance. The Judeo-Christian creation narrative is centered on the lost perfect condition, the Paradise. The fictional location of life's tree, immortality, and the knowledge's tree, good and evil, in Amazonia have reserved a special role for the world's symbolic representations in this region. This importance is enlarged as the models of economic development based on the instrumental use of nature are collapsing. This scenario has been aggravated as political actors insist on transforming the world into a large artificialized market.

In this sense, it is also important to investigate the links between religious phenomena and ideological processes [21] from the perspective of sustainability. This perspective when situated in the fields of philosophy, sociology, anthropology and natural sciences applied to different conceptions of sustainability puts new approaches and forms of intervention in world realities. It values collective projects and the sense of belonging to the world.

This perspective also allows us to identify the seven capital sins perpetuated against Amazonia and its native peoples. As presented below, these are the capitalist 'gluttony' for Amazonia's natural resources, accelerating its irreversible destruction; the globalization of 'lust', enhanced by the increasing erotization in human conviviality and materialized by sexual ecotourism centered on the exotic and traditional cultures, has increased in Amazonia generating prejudices and racism against its peoples; the 'avarice' expressed in the will and compulsive behavior of a growing number of self-aggrandising businessmen who insist on transforming Amazonia's natural and cultural beauties into global commodities as a way to accelerate the accumulation of their material goods; the 'wrath' of stupid and ignorant governments and politicians who do not understand its complexity and importance to humanity insisting on actions and programs that result in its ecological and cultural destruction; the 'pride' of the current colonizers, destroyers of nature and builders of racism, who have always considered the Amazonian peoples as obstacles to the economic development of the region. These warlords behave as superior beings to the original peoples. The mistaken use of the concept of 'sloth' by capitalist groups devalues the cultural identity of amazonian peoples. This type of discrimination has justified the destruction of region in name of its economic development. Sloth can also be attributed to those sectors of society who are indifferent to the destruction of Amazonia and to suffering of its peoples [22]. Finally, the 'envy' of the financial elite and of large global productive segments for not yet owning the Amazonia, priceless treasure of humanity.

Therefore, the seven capital sins: gluttony, lust, avarice, wrath, pride, sloth, envy and its new complements, have been very present in the growing practice of illicit and ecological and cultural destruction of Amazonia [23].

The discourses and proposals for defense of Amazonia must be guided by the entrepreneurship and the verbs to include and preserve that constitute the political basis of sustainability. It is, also, guided by the verbs believe, socialize and share that constitute its symbolic basis, and by the verbs educate, innovate and invest that are its material basis [24-25].

Similar to the capital sins of Christianity, the sins against Amazonia have been renewed generating new political and scientific interventions that have intensified socioeconomic inequalities in the region. The political 'purification' of the rulers and political and economic agents in favor of Amazonia is urgent. Who will save Amazonia? Its transformation into a world heritage is a way to protect it from its announced destruction. This same political project should

be applied to the main world forest reserves already mentioned in this article. Only a global intervention aimed at a new political and economic order centered on sustainability will enable the cultural and ecological protection of Amazonia and the planet.

Today, there is much pain and suffering in Amazonia. Its ecological destruction and deaths by covid-19 in the region are ongoing. Its future is at stake. Amazonia is a cultural and ecological treasure that needs to continue being loved and shared by us all.

AMAZONIA OUR LOVE

Amazonia our love⁴

Amazonia
Never to be forgotten
Your cultures, your lights, your rivers
Uplift our dreams and delights

Amazonia
For love of your forests
Your birds and animals
Our lives are brighter
Amazonia
Soak our thoughts
With gratitude and generosity
And solidarity for our fellow man

Amazonia
Never to be forgotten

Amazonia
Share your loves
With all the peoples of the world
Never abandon the weak

Amazonia
Embrace and comfort
Destroyers of nature
The warmongers

Amazonia
Tell the River Amazon
That he is blessed by the gods
That his waters work miracles

Amazonia
Never to be forgotten

⁴ Amazonia our love. Marcílio de Freitas's poem translated by Professor Bruce Osborne of Federal University of Amazonas.

Amazonia
Protect the Indian peoples
From the ambition and perversity
Worked by the white man

Amazonia
Don't let time
Slip through our fingers
Amazonia, we love you

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