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World Forum on Theology and Liberation (WFTL)  
In the context of the World Social Forum (WSF)

Montréal, August 8-13, 2016

Another world is needed. Together, it is  
possible!

## Presentation

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### Objectives

- To hold a forum, in a perspective of theology and liberation, around important issues of emancipation that are converging at this time;
- To share and celebrate the practices and know-how of groups from Québec and around the world who are engaged for justice, ecology, and peace;
- To build on the previous events of the World Forum on Theology and Liberation;
- To experience the encounter between voices from the global South, the Fourth World, and the North, keeping a critical perspective on the fact that the event is being held in the North;
- To experience an inclusive theological event, critical of oppression **systems**, which welcomes indigenous and secular voices as well as spiritual and religious traditions in their multiplicity;
- To develop the public events of the World Forum on Theology and Liberation in the context of the World Social Forum.

### Core Issues

*“Another world is needed. Together, it becomes possible!”* This is the theme of the World Social Forum, which will take place in Montréal in August 2016. This other world is necessary, urgent, and already in the making.

It is *needed* because of the deleterious effects of capitalist imperialism and globalized neoliberalism, which include but it is not limited to: militarism and political exploitation, market fundamentalism and ideological colonization, environmental crisis, global human insecurity, dispossession of peoples’ territories along with their means of subsistence, cultures and memory. This dispossession is particularly experienced by indigenous peoples, by exiled

populations, and by forced migrants across the world. Another world is needed as we see the various and enduring effects of colonization and coloniality upon indigenous peoples and colonized societies all over the world. We also need another possible world as many populations face religious violence.

Our planetary crises express themselves in global war waged by the living against the living as illustrated by patterns of social systems and relationships based on: domination of peoples by powerful elites; patriarchy, which multiplies the subordination of women and sexual minorities; racial and class stratification; interreligious hate and sectarian violence; fear that stirs migrants and refugees; systematic erasure of indigenous peoples; violence of neoliberalism against populations in precarious situations; neocolonial societal order imposed on populations in the Southern hemisphere; militarization and destruction of the Earth.

But *another possible world* is becoming visible in current alternative practices initiated by social and religious actors, in their indignation, in their creativity, in their practice of new ways of living, and especially in their intervention for constructive transformation. The work of the Spirit comes to light in anti-oppressive citizens' activism, environmentalists, pacifists, solidarity with indigenous peoples, welcoming of refugees and immigrants, and in many other social movements for human rights. There is room here for a liberating, subversive, prophetic, and prospective theology. New visions are emerging of the *common good*, with a focus on the concrete living world and its social and ethical ramifications for affirming human interdependence, exposing possibilities for new world realities and relationships, and for promoting together global peace (*shalom, salam, skennenkowa – the Great Peace*).

In secularized societies where Christian discourses intersect with secular ones, as well as with those from other spiritual traditions, a liberating theology finds its place within the World Social Forum as a practice marked by interaction with all other discursive practices focused on work for justice, life, and peace. While religions are radically criticized, we are committed to developing a spirituality which is socially relevant, grounded in solidarity, concrete, prophetic, and forward-looking.

Rigid and divisive interpretations of spirituality and religion can be found in various contexts, which fan the flames of violence and conflict and remind us that liberating theologies are also directed at religious and spiritual superstructures.

The World Forum on Theology and Liberation is a space for sharing and celebration of the emancipatory practices carried by the spiritual and religious traditions so often concealed by indifference, conservatism, and fundamentalism.

## Focal Areas

### (1) Indigenous peoples, between Marginalization and Empowerment

Canada remains challenged in 2016 by an aboriginal presence that is over ten thousand years old, but which remains in a position of extreme marginality, minimized both in mainstream history and in public debates. In Canada, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission on Indian

Residential Schools (2010-2015) aroused relatively little interest among non-indigenous populations.

However, might the wind be turning? Indigenous rights are being recognized at the international level. In Canada, First Nations are engaged in a “return” to the forefront, refusing to remain invisible. What do they wish to contribute to elaborating global, liberating alternatives today, for themselves and for all peoples? What processes of decolonization and emancipation are indigenous peoples around the world currently developing and putting into practice?

Many indigenous peoples don't consider themselves religious as such. However, they say their whole life is spiritual. What does it mean for theology? How can a theological reflection, indigenous and not, contribute in developing emancipating alternatives for life in abundance (*vivir bien*), in the midst of the First Peoples' struggles?

## (2) The Challenge of Hope in the Face of Environmental Crisis

Ecological calamity is permanently with us. More and more populations are reaching a critical juncture where life is reduced to mere survival. While countries in the global North have access to greater financial resources than those in the global South, these resources are allocated primarily to the consumption and commodification of nature rather than to the invention of other technologies, other lifestyles, and another culture of life. The results of COP21 are mitigated by the weak commitments made by rich countries.

Religious declarations and practices promoting ecological justice resonate way beyond religious circles. This encyclical conveys the urgency of global consciousness, one which is attentive to the real and concrete impoverishment of the living world, particularly of its significant impact on the global South. The current ecological crisis calls for a theologies of life, post-anthropocentric theologies. Facing a world-wide sense of hopelessness, often manifested as despair or resignation, theologies of hope becomes more relevant and urgent than ever.

## (3) Peacebuilding and the Struggle against Militarization

The destructive impact of the wars currently being waged on Life and on civilian populations is patently shocking, and it affects the entire planet. The coalition constituted by civil society organizations of Quebec, “*Échec à la Guerre*” declares support for the “struggles against the United States' open tendency to exert military domination on the planet.” This coalition reports that “80 to 90% of victims of war after the Cold War have been civilians,” and that “84% of the weapons produced and sold in the world come from North America and Western Europe.” How can we struggle against this well-established political and economic system of intense militarization, which marks our era?

Multiple groups, often grassroots organizations, contribute to conscientization about the urgency of active commitment to demilitarization. They are generating a diversity of alternative practices for peacebuilding. Which critiques of a culture of war are most urgent and necessary? How do they change the perspectives and/or possibilities of emancipation? What visions of peacebuilding are emerging? How do they intersect with the various struggles for justice and

environmental justice? Finally, as peacebuilding is also a spiritual issue, we invite contributions to share insightful visions of peace, capable of opening perspectives for a global peace between humans and with all living beings.

#### **(4) Land, Territories, Dispossession and Mobilization**

The dispossession of the common good takes place today through the despoliation of territories at the service of neocolonial and financial interests which pillage their wealth. Corporations covet and easily obtain the mineral, oil, forest, and aquatic resources, among others, upon which thousands of human beings across the world depend. Driven by a domineering and an utilitarian vision of nature, and compelled by desire of serving the economic interests of the few, the exploration and exploitation of those resources too often occur at the expense of the integrity of both, the ecosystems and the populations living within them.

Humans do not conceive of their lands simply as reservoirs of resources. For them, land and territory are also their home, locations of memory, sites of dreams and encounter, of love and of mourning: they are places charged with history and symbolism. Both at local and international levels people are engendering alternative struggles for: resisting territorial dispossession, opposing home demolitions and public spaces privatization, stopping the greed of civilian and military settlements, and ending colonizing occupation of their lands. What kind of religiously-based vision of land and territory can, or should, we provide? Working against the instrumental appropriation of territory and the uprooting of indigenous populations, what are the theological resources that we can contribute to celebrate these many struggles for the right of inhabiting one's own land?

#### **(5) Migration, Pluralism, Tensions over Identity and Interreligious Dialogue**

Large cities are centers of migration, where debates about identity proliferate not only as migrants struggle, but also as they contribute to their host societies and develop perspectives on them. Societies in the global South are the first affected by a flow of migrants that is now well-known to them. Societies in the global North, on the other hand, struggle to understand how migration results from the neocolonial system that structures international relations.

Practices of solidarity and welcome are organizing and intensifying themselves. Many people are speaking out in favour of interculturality, a concept with various meanings and connotations. Spiritual traditions, often invoked to defend a closed approach to immigration, are also called upon to promote hospitality and sharing. Indeed, refugees of war, of sectarianism, of climate disruption or of economic crises impose on us the imperatives of the Golden Rule, of encounter, of hospitality, and of solidarity.

#### **(6) Feminism, Gender, and Intersectionality**

Feminist movements and theories have demonstrated a pervasive pattern of gender hierarchies at all levels of society, culture and religion, all to the detriment of women. Inequalities based on gender multiply women's subordination in all areas of life, particularly for women from marginalized social groups in the global South. Patriarchal cultural imperialism exacerbates

women's subordination and violence against women by legitimizing socio-cultural values and relationships which are against the dignity and rights of women. The political use of human differences based on gender has stimulated women's dehumanization by intersecting with other social and religious inequalities based on social class, race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, and religious identity. In this way, Muslim and Jewish women frequently find themselves stereotyped by discourses intended to liberate them. Indigenous women experience disproportionate violence but this experience is often neglected. Gender inequality rooted on patriarchy and androcentric world-views is also manifested in discrimination against sexual minorities.

Voices of women can no longer be ignored in the world of religions. Even within the most constricting spiritual communities, women are making themselves heard. Many feminist religious, theological, and spiritual traditions have been developed in contemporary society and religion. Men and women alike bear the responsibility of both, supporting the global movement of justice for women and joining feminist theologians in their struggles to end religious patriarchy. While male theologians of liberation largely continue to remain silent about ending patriarchy, this Forum declares that another world will become possible when justice for women is fulfilled. What measures are we adopting to infuse our theologizing with the insights and contributions of feminist theologians of liberation? How can we contribute more actively to the transformation of patriarchal religions and theologies?

### **(7) Economics: Going Beyond *Homo Economicus***

Justice, environmentalism, and peacebuilding also have an important economic dimension. Many Western societies (Québec, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain, etc.) are experiencing the tension between neoliberal economic policies and the protection of the common good within a neoliberal global economy. The current imperialist system uses the idea of austerity to consolidate practices that favor the rich and the elites instead of an equitable distribution of wealth. The supposedly "realistic" and "sober" discourse of many proponents of neoliberalism often drowns out its victims' complaints. Moreover, "austerity policies" are not new: they constitute a permanent reality in many nations of the global South, where social benefits found in the global North are for the most part unheard of, where the destruction of the common good is a historical fact and its reconstruction an ever-present challenge.

Economists from various world locations have been abandoning the framework of neoliberal capitalist economics and growth, as they are becoming conscious that such an economic framework is rapidly moving towards a social and environmental stagnation at the planetary scale. There, too, economic models that respect the multi-dimensionality of the human condition and the limits of the living world are being sought. Beyond globalized neoliberal capitalism, alternatives include affirmation of an *Economy for Life*, which seeks to uphold the material conditions for making possible models of Good-Living, or living-well, within interdependent communities and sustainable environments. What are the religious resources available to us for contribution to alternative economics? How can we contribute to strengthen theological visions of an Economy for Life?

### **(8) Decoloniality, Engaging Epistemologies from the South**

With most of our world still wrestling with the aftermath of colonization through coloniality, including North America and Eastern Europe, how do we understand these phenomena and become more conscious of what this means? How does it explain the interconnected network of oppression and domination exhibited in increasingly alarming ways in our world today? What sort of decolonial strategies are needed and possible within liberating theological endeavor? While our theological epistemologies and pedagogies still take for granted provincialized perspectives that have been given privileged status as universal validity through coloniality, what sorts of theological resources serve to shift our epistemological grounds in ways that de-link us from these false universalities? Epistemologies from the global south and from marginalized communities in the global north give expression to these ways of thinking and living in ways that challenge not only dominant social structures, but religious and theological structures as well. How do liberative theological voices acknowledge and engage decolonial projects even when they recognize the coloniality of their own voices? Engaging these disruptive and re-creative epistemologies is a necessary component to creating another possible and liberative world.