

# **Ecosophy as an Epistemological Proposal of Ecofeminist Theology in the Latin American Context**

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The proposal of ecofeminist theology tries to give answers to the questions posed by the hermeneutics of gender and ecology regarding knowledge: how is it that we know, and where is it that we place ourselves in order to know? How can we experience this criterion of truth in the daily life of poor women of the 'third world'? How is it that a 'certain form of knowledge' has been used as an instrument of domination and exclusion of women and the ecosystems? The answer proposed by ecofeminist theology is ecosophy (the wisdom of the oikós). Ecosophy is a form of knowledge derived from the experience of ancestral Mesoamerican indigenous peoples, which is based upon equilibrium, fluidity, integration of the senses, and corporality. These elements are proposed as the starting point for the reflection of the ecofeminist theology, ethics, and spirituality. Ecosophy is characterised by being relational, inclusive, starting from corporal experience, integrating affectivity, and by being sustained in interdependence and interconnectivity. It is not only a 'traditional wisdom' but it is also an epistemological basis that can reconstruct symbols and rites in a different way from Western logic: 1) It deconstructs the epistemological model that make an understanding of human knowledge as masculine possible; 2) it deconstructs the knowledge that makes a centralising monotheism possible; 3) it upholds the immanence of God from a pantheistic theological reflection. Ecosophy is a holistic and inclusive theological line that emerges from the experience of a faith of *daily life for daily life*.

## 1. *Introduction*

A section of the Western and patriarchal-hierarchical epistemology has maintained that the question of knowledge is related to social classes and gender. In this vision, the masculine gender has kept the monopoly of knowledge. There are also some who affirm that race and ethnicity could also interfere with knowledge. In this way, domination has coloured the bases of knowledge and culture. Thus, the type of knowledge, promoted and accepted by those holding the political, social and religious power, was assumed as 'proper' and as the only criterion of truth.

I do not pretend to deny that epistemology is contextual and that culture, history, race, sex, and social status are elements that have an influence in our forms of knowledge. On the contrary, my goal is to show how these elements could be used to classify the knowledge and wisdom of other cultures and races as second class knowledge, when looked from a culture that 'dominates and detains knowledge', such as the Western, Eurocentric, patriarchal culture.

The wisdom of indigenous people, women, and peoples of African origins in Latin America has been considered as ‘another knowledge’ but it has never reached the character of epistemology or science according to some Western thinkers. The same goes for feminist theology, indigenous theology, and ecofeminist theology.

Before this reality, the epistemological proposal of the ecofeminist theology in Latin America, from a critical stand and an attitude of search, analyses the essentialism and fundamentalism of Western epistemology: How do we know and where do we place ourselves in order to know? To which human experience does this theory correspond? How can this criterion of truth be experienced in the *daily life* of poor women of the ‘third world’?

The proposal of the ecofeminist theology that searches to give answers to those questions is ecosophy (the wisdom of the *oikós*). This is a form of knowledge obtained from the experience of the ancestors of indigenous peoples, and it constitutes the starting point for the reflection of theology, ethics, and spirituality, as we shall see shortly.

Ecosophy, as an epistemological category, and aided by the hermeneutics of gender, could be a path towards a holistic theology, as it is proposed by Latin American ecofeminism, and could be the necessary mediation for the existence of a methodological dialogue between the North and the South.

## 2. *The epistemological roots of ecosophy*

According to some authors, such as the Post-Marxist philosopher, Felix Guattari, «Ecosophy, and ecophilosophy, are neologisms formed by contracting the phrase ecological philosophy».<sup>1</sup> For Arne Naess, who agrees with Guattari, ecosophy is «a philosophy of ecological harmony or equilibrium. A philosophy as a kind of sofia (or) wisdom, is openly normative, it contains both norms, rules, postulates, value priority announcements and hypotheses concerning the state of affairs in our universe. Wisdom is policy wisdom, prescription, not only scientific description and prediction. The details of an ecosophy will show many variations due to significant differences concerning not only the ‘facts’ of pollution, resources, population, etc. but also value priorities».<sup>2</sup>

Following the thought of Naess, I will make reference to the understanding of ecosophy as a practice of values, relationships, and experiences of millenary wisdoms, and ancestral cultures, such as those of the Mesoamerican peoples, and the Afro-Amerindians, who constituted the

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<sup>1</sup> F. GUATTARI, *The Three Ecologies*, London - New Brunswick (NJ) 2000, p. 27.

<sup>2</sup> A. DRENGSON - Y. INOUE, *The Deep Ecology Movement: An Introductory Anthology*, Berkeley (CA) 1995, p. 8.

so-called indigenous cultures. Those wisdoms, mainly transmitted in oral form, survived despite the colonial domination that Latin America underwent. It is important to mention that some of the writings, in which those wisdoms were preserved, were mutilated by the hand of missionaries since they saw in them 'witchcraft,' 'sorcery,' or 'superstition'.<sup>3</sup>

In Alirio Cáceres Aguirre's opinion, ecosophy is based on two elements. On the one hand, ecosophy is based on the «the insufficiency of the logos to give account of love and the need of integrating symbolic reason in the analytical and instrumental reason».<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, ecosophy is based on «the openness to other forms of wisdom of millenary origins or generated in emerging groups. A wisdom that is not always systematic and that it is not possible to lock up under the parameters of Western logic».<sup>5</sup>

The issue at stake, which was discussed during the World Forum of Liberation Theologies, when dealing with ecosophy is whether or not the assignation of the term 'ecosophy' to the wisdoms of indigenous and African peoples is the reflection of the fact that the latter are not considered as theologies under the criterion of Western kyriarchical-patriarchal thought. The following questions, then, might arise: which are the reasons and implications behind this thought, and how is it that this paper refers to ecosophy as an epistemological category and therefore as theology? What is it that provides a category with the character of science or epistemology, and what kind of epistemology upholds the Western kyriarchical-patriarchal theology? What is the epistemology (ecosophy) that upholds the ecofeminist theology, and what are its implications?

### 3. *The problem of ecosophy as an epistemological category*

The problem of ecosophy as an epistemological category resides in the fact that it could not be considered as such according to what Western logic considers as 'knowledge,' 'science,' and 'truth.' In Plato's opinion, «science is a truthful judgment accompanied by reason».<sup>6</sup> Once could ask, however, who determines whether a judgment is true or false? Which are the criteria to follow in order to justify and validate knowledge, science or truth?

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<sup>3</sup> S. MARCOS, *Raíces epistemológicas Mesoamericanas: La construcción Religiosa del Género*, in «Religión y género. Enciclopedia Iberoamericana de Religiones», (2004), 3, pp. 243-244.

<sup>4</sup> A. CACERES AGUIRRE, *Ecotheologia: Aproximaciones epistemológicas*, in «Concilium. Revista Internacional de Teología», (2009), 331, p. 403: «la insuficiencia del logos para dar cuenta del amor y la necesidad de integrar la razón simbólica en la razón analítica e instrumental».

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 403: «la apertura a otras formas de sabiduría de origen milenario o generadas en grupos emergentes. Sabiduría no siempre sistematizada y que no es posible encerrar en los parámetros de la lógica Occidental».

<sup>6</sup> PLATO, *Theaetetus*, 202, b-c.

For knowledge to be considered as such, besides being true and scientific, it is important to take into account the historical, social, psychological, and gender-related circumstances in which it was obtained. Thus, a concept of 'knowledge' or 'epistemological category' that responds to a context could not be generalised or universalised, pretending to be imposed as the sole criterion of truth. In this sense, we could affirm that epistemology is always contextual, and as it is rightly put by I. Gebara, «the act of knowledge is, thus, contextual, sexed, situated, and dated. It is an act marked by ideological aspects with sexist tendencies. The androcentric knowledge takes us also to an anthropocentric knowledge in which only the human actions and relationships are placed in evidence».<sup>7</sup>

In this sense, ecosophy as the wisdom of indigenous and Afro-American peoples is an epistemological turn in which the affective and the reason are integrated.<sup>8</sup> It constitutes itself as an epistemological category from the moment in which this is the experience of the *daily life* of whole peoples, which has ruled their customs, cultural values, worldviews, and the experience of being human in relationship and in communion with the divine, with all that surrounds them. This experience is what has built their history long before the Western world invaded their lands and annulled their wisdom.

If a group of people in Europe could determine that a type of philosophy, knowledge, or way of knowing is considered as such or as an epistemological category, and impose, thus, a norm by which their culture's thought should be ruled then, we could also ask, does this not exclude other forms of knowledge? Why do other cultures and forms of knowledge follow the dictate of those who exclude them, those who impose norms of classifying forms of knowledge according to different mental schemes, which are obviously in correspondence to different contexts? In this sense, ecosophy must exercise its right as an epistemological category that *responds to, and is at the same time the fruit of*, a contextual, historical, political, social, cultural, and gender-related experience.

Ecosophy is characterised by being relational and inclusive (holistic), starting from bodily experience, integrating affectivity, and by being based on interdependence and interconnectivity. It is not only a 'traditional wisdom,' but it is also constituted as an epistemological basis able to reconstruct symbols and rites in ways different from the Western logic: 1) It deconstructs the epistemological model that makes possible human knowledge as masculine, 2) It deconstructs the knowledge that upholds the centralising monotheism, 3) It upholds the immanence of God from a

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<sup>7</sup> I. GEBARA, *Intuiciones Ecofeministas. Ensayo para repensar el conocimiento y la religion*, Madrid 2000, p. 47: «el acto de conocer es pues contextual, sexuado, situado y fechado. Es un acto marcado por aspectos ideológicos con tendencias sexistas. El conocimiento androcéntrico nos lleva también a un conocimiento antropocéntrico en el cual solo las acciones y reacciones humanas son puestas en evidencia».

<sup>8</sup> A. CÁCERES AGUIRRE, *Ecotheologia*, p. 403.

theological reflection that is pantheistic. In order to achieve that, ecosophy, as an epistemological basis, introduces the hermeneutics of gender and the ecological question as constitutive elements of the forms of knowledge.

In the following section, I will show how ecosophy, as an epistemological category, performs this deconstruction and reconstruction via the elements that conform it.

#### 4. *The ecosophy as an epistemological category*

##### a. Deconstruction

First, we need to realise that each time we mention the ‘human being and nature’ we are falling into a dualism, since this distinction parts from the conscious or unconscious recognition that the human being is ‘different’ from what we conceive as nature. The very expression gives the impression that human beings and nature are two completely different realities, foreign to each other. Obviously, the human being is mentioned first, so as to confirm the primacy of the former over the latter. Honestly, I am not sure if we are really conscious of what we thus express. Some questions might arise: is the human being part of nature? Why, when talking about nature, do we place nature as an object of the human being, the subject?

Second, ecofeminism poses the question concerning the association of the woman, the indigenous and Afro-Amerindian peoples, as being closer to nature, and who, along with nature, should be ‘dominated.’ This association has produced the erroneous Eurocentric, kyriarchical, and patriarchal understanding that women, indigenous, Afro-Amerindians, and poor peoples do not have the same capacities to learn or are simply denied to learn by the mere fact of being ‘different’ or ‘the others,’ from the viewpoint of Western culture. In this way, we fall into a hierarchical order of knowledge based on ethnicity and gender,<sup>9</sup> as is rightly pointed out by Gebara:

«The poor and the women were always associated to the lowest levels of abstraction and, therefore, of knowledge, science and wisdom. In the patriarchal world, the hierarchical order of knowledge corresponds to the same hierarchical order of society, founded upon the growing exclusion of the majority in favour of masculine elite that detains power and knowledge. The hierarchical order of knowledge has to do, then, with the question of social classes, but also with gender».<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> I. GEBARA, *Intuiciones Ecofeministas*, p. 46.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 45: «Los pobres y las mujeres siempre estuvieron asociados a los niveles mas bajos de abstracción y por lo tanto de conocimiento, ciencia y sabiduría. En el mundo patriarcal la jerarquización del saber corresponde a la propia jerarquización de la sociedad, fundada en la exclusión creciente de la mayoría a favor de una elite masculina detentadora del poder y del saber. La jerarquización del saber tiene que ver, pues, con la cuestión de las clases sociales, pero también del genero».

Third, we find ourselves before the problem of subjectivity-objectivity, since for Western logic and reasoning, these are totally opposed elements: the subject is where the action of thinking and knowing takes place, directed towards his/her 'object' of study. The problem resides in the fact that the so-called 'objects' of study are subjects that are no longer willing to be treated as 'objects' and to be analysed from an androcentric view. Thus, ecosophy poses the following question: how is it possible to de-objectivise women, indigenous, Afro-Amerindians, and nature?

Fourth, we find the radical questioning of ecofeminism, and in this case, also of ecosophy: how could ecofeminism and ecosophy avoid the very essentialism that they criticise? In other words, are not ecofeminism and ecosophy also upholding the view of an affinity and identification between the woman and nature, and the indigenous and Afro-Amerindian peoples as closer and being part of nature, which is precisely what they try to overcome?

Finally, the binomial sex-gender that the feminist theory analyses, is it not per chance also a dualism since it generates a separation between the body and the actions performed by it?

#### b. Reconstruction

Cosmology: In Mesoamerican philosophical thought, duality, fluidity, equilibrium, and corporality are the constitutive elements of a cosmology in which the human beings found themselves immersed. The human being is not somebody who is outside, but he/she is integral part of the natural world, which also encompasses the divinities. All, divinities, humans, plants, animals, forces, and phenomena are integral parts of that whole that possesses in itself the masculine-feminine. We, thus, stand before an 'incarnated philosophy' as Sylvia Marcos points it out.<sup>11</sup>

For Mesoamerican cultures, there is a principle formed by a Lord and a Lady; in other words, a duality from which all that exists originates: «The king Tepeu and the bird/serpent are united, the masculine and feminine principle, celestial and terrestrial of all that exists. In them it is contained the germen and sense of reality».<sup>12</sup> The original father and the mother in all Mesoamerica form a creative masculine-feminine force of all that exists, including humanity. In this sense, a conception of a solely masculine divinity would have been monstrous.

The earth (pachamama) for the Andean culture is the mother, interpreted as the origin and source of life. Thus, the origins are not in the heavens, on high, but in the reality of the sacred earth. For Mesoamericans there

<sup>11</sup> S. MARCOS, *Raíces epistemológicas Mesoamericanas: La construcción Religiosa del Genero*, en *Religión y genero. Enciclopedia Iberoamericana de Religiones*, 3, Madrid 2004, p. 236.

<sup>12</sup> X. PIKAZA, *Para comprender hombre y mujer en las religiones Navarra 1996*, p. 40: «Están unidos el rey Tepeu y el pájaro/serpiente, el principio masculino y femenino, celeste y terrestre de todo cuanto existe. En ellos se contiene el germen y sentido de la realidad».

is no separation between the heavens and earth (heaven and hell, good and evil, up and down). «All that happens occurs in the principle that is the earth. The dance, the songs and prayers are sacred signs directed to the earth, the place where all that exists happens».<sup>13</sup>

The Mesoamerican divine duality must not be confused with the Western dualism soul-body, matter-spirit. The masculine-feminine is not a principle that is opposed radically, but that is integrated in itself, as S. Marcos affirms: «A recurrent feature of the Mesoamerican thought is the fusion of the feminine and the masculine in a unique polar principle. The duality-unity feminine-masculine was an integral part of the creation of the cosmos, of its regeneration and subsistence. This concept, that is both unique and dual, is expressed in the representations of the divinities in pairs».<sup>14</sup> This is, of course, the cosmology that ecosophy upholds. It is a cosmology in which there is no being that is exclusively masculine or feminine, but beings with different grades of combinations.

Anthropology: The human being woman-man in Mesoamerica is an integral part of nature and all of it is of divine origin, in the womb of the goddess mother earth. The conception of, and as a consequence the relation of the human being with, what the West calls the 'world' is not a foreign place in which we are located. For the Nahuas, for example, «the world ... is not out there, constituted exteriorly to me or through me. One could say that for the Nahuas there is no difference between the circumstantial complement of place (here) and the one that indicates the action: all spatial location implies precise modalities of action».<sup>15</sup>

In X. Pikaza's opinion, in the Mayan culture, the human being is continuous communication with the divinities (word), and he/she is vital relationship with the world (food).<sup>16</sup> For the Nahuas, as for the majority of the cultures in Mesoamerica, the human being is understood as «a face and a heart».<sup>17</sup> In the Mesoamerican cultures, however, the human being would never be centred as the axis around which the universe rotates. On the contrary, the universe, the cosmos and its complexity are the center of the Náhuatl philosophical reflection.

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 69: «Todo lo que acontece sucede en el principio que es la tierra. El baile, los cantos y las oraciones son signos sagrados dirigidos a la tierra lugar donde acontece todo cuanto existe».

<sup>14</sup> S. MARCOS, *Raíces epistemológicas Mesoamericanas*, p. 238: «Un rasgo recurrente del pensamiento mesoamericano es la fusión de lo femenino y masculino en un único principio polar. La dualidad-unidad femenina-masculina era parte integrante de la creación del cosmos, de su regeneración y manutención. Es este concepto a la vez único y dual que se expresa en las representaciones de las divinidades en pares».

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 256: «el mundo para los nahuas no está ahí afuera, constituido exteriormente a mí y a través de mí. Se podría decir que para el nahua, no hay diferencia entre el complemento circunstancial de lugar (aquí) y el que indica la acción: toda ubicación espacial implica precisas modalidades de acción».

<sup>16</sup> X. PIKAZA, *Para comprender hombre y mujer en las religiones*, p. 38.

<sup>17</sup> M. LEÓN PORTILLA, *La filosofía Náhuatl*, México 1983. «un rostro y un corazón».

Regarding human ways of knowing, according to Mesoamericans, «the highest thoughts and the passions most related in conversation with human life were performed in the heart and not in the liver or the head».<sup>18</sup> Thus, ecosophy, as we shall see later on, is the lived experience in the reality of the forms of ‘knowledge’ and ‘wisdom’ of the heart, and the cosmic behaviour in which the human being is situated. This cosmic behaviour is characterised by an ‘unfolding of dualities.’

The so-called ‘unfolding of dualities’ is «a continuous process that was in permanent flow. Duality (feminine-masculine) thus permeated the entire cosmos and stamped its seal on every particular object, on every situation, divinity, or body».<sup>19</sup> In this sense, ecosophy, as a form of knowledge, is characterised by its fluidity and dynamism, which in turn converge into a fluid equilibrium. In this view, the absolute, permanent and static would be a way to ‘stop or end’ the process of knowledge, which is impossible and incomprehensible for the Mesoamerican mindset.

Fluidity and equilibrium<sup>20</sup>: Fluidity and equilibrium are two categories known as one: the fluid equilibrium. The reason for being known as one is that one cannot exist without the other, since equilibrium is only possible via dynamism and flow: «a fundamental requirement for the maintenance of the cosmos, this fluid equilibrium could not coexist with closed categories, unmovable, unitarian. The demand of always reconstructing equilibrium, which was inherent to the Mesoamerican concept of a mobile universe, required that each point of equilibrium also be in permanent movement».<sup>21</sup> From this viewpoint, the thought (philosophy), the forms of knowing or accessing knowledge (epistemology), and wisdom (processes) that conform to what I called ecosophy are a constant balance of groups in a never-ending flow.

The understanding of equilibrium as something static, just mean or center, does not exist in the mindset of Mesoamerican cultures as Sylvia Marcos rightly affirms in her study on Mesoamerican epistemologies.<sup>22</sup> I will focus, however, on the interpretation that could be obtained from ecosophy as an epistemological category that is upheld by ecofeminist theology.

<sup>18</sup> A. LÓPEZ AUSTIN, *Cuerpo humano e ideología*, 2, México 1984. Citado por S. MARCOS, *Raíces epistemológicas Mesoamericanas*, p. 256: «los pensamientos mas elevados y las pasiones mas relacionadas con la conservación de la vida humana se realizaban en el corazón y no en el hígado ni en la cabeza».

<sup>19</sup> S. MARCOS, *Raíces epistemológicas Mesoamericanas*, p. 240: «Un proceso continuo que se encontraba en permanente flujo. La dualidad (femenino-masculina) permeaba a si el cosmos entero y ponía su sello en cada objeto particular, en cada situación, divinidad o cuerpo».

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 245. The terms «equilibrium» and «fluidity» were researched by Marcos.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 247. «Requerimiento fundamental para el mantenimiento del cosmos, este equilibrio fluido no podría coexistir con categorías cerradas, inamovibles, unitarias. La exigencia de equilibrio siempre reconstruyéndose, que era inherente al concepto mesoamericano de un universo móvil, hacia también que todo punto de equilibrio estuviera igualmente en permanente desplazamiento».

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*.



Ecofeminism points to an epistemology of Western, patriarchal-kyriarchal, and androcentric character as the main responsible for the disequilibrium of the ecosystems. This epistemology has centered its knowledge on ways to maintain domination, control and exploitation in order to achieve a 'scientific-technological advance.'

In this Western epistemology, the center or just mean is the man, not all human beings or humanity but only a certain class and typology of man. This form of knowledge has also assigned a pejorative character to the concept of 'nature,' by allocating it as the subject of a 'type of man.' This form of knowledge has also associated women, indigenous and Afro-Amerindian peoples as objects of knowledge. The resulting effect is that this 'type of man' does not find himself inside 'nature' but as someone superior to it, justifying his right to dominate and exploit by the 'superior knowledge of closed categories and eternal truths.'

The idea of ecosophy, then, is not to 'de-naturalise' women, indigenous and Afro-Amerindian peoples but to propose the 'fluid equilibrium' as an integrating and open form that is always willing to accept us as part of it. The idea is to de-centralise the abovementioned 'type of man' and to 'de-objectivise' nature so that together with all those who belong to it they might be responsible subjects who construct this fluid equilibrium. In this way, the theoretical model of development in which the benefit of one takes precedence above the whole is also deconstructed. Thus, let us continue with another characteristic element of ecosophy: holism.

Holism: The epistemic paradigm suggested by ecosophy advocates an ethical, political, and theological action that, at the same time, has at its basis a holistic proposal. In other words, the Mesoamerican thought is a way to access knowledge via the inter-relationality and inter-connectivity of systems: «Holism is understood to be that vision of reality that give precedence to the whole over the parts. This does not mean denying the parts. It means that the precedence in the approach is given to the whole. The parts have their sense, they have their own 'identity,' singularity, and specificity, but their ultimate sense is given by the totality in which they are inserted. Although the parts are significant, they are not ontologically substantive. They are not absolute, independent, static, and permanent».<sup>23</sup>

Under the Mesoamerican perspective, the parts are always in continuous dynamism, fluid, and open towards a permanent and final relationship

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<sup>23</sup> R.M. GRACIDO DAS NEVES, *Apuntes para una Eco-espiritualidad Holística*, in «Numero colectivo latinoamericano sobre ecología» programado por 13 revistas teológicas del Continente para el primer semestre de 2010, por iniciativa y servicio de la «Comisión Teológica Latinoamericana» de la ASETT/EATWOT, como gesto simbólico de apoyo a la causa de la urgencia ecológica planetaria. «Se entiende por holismo aquella visión de la realidad que concede predominio del todo sobre las partes. No significa negar las partes. Significa que el predominio del abordaje es la consideración del todo. Las partes tienen su sentido, tienen su propia 'identidad', su singularidad y especificidad, pero su sentido último se lo da la totalidad en la que están insertas. Aunque las partes son significativas, no son antológicamente substantivas. No son absolutas, independientes, estáticas y permanentes».

with the totality, which in turn is also in constant fluid equilibrium. In this way, the absolutisation of the parts does not exist in Mesoamerican thought since all is dependent on the whole. It is in this way that it is possible to find the revealed divinity in the always flowing whole.<sup>24</sup>

Viewed in this way, ecosophy represents an epistemological paradigm that defies an anthropology in which the isolated individual is placed above the community (to which he/she belongs), and above nature (of which the individual is also a member). Besides denouncing prophetically the unmeasured competition for the accumulation of natural riches, which engenders injustice and poverty, ecosophy not only deconstructs the dominating system or structure of thought, but also advocates for a change of ethical structures in the praxis, becoming, thus, political wisdom.

In my opinion, another of the integrating elements of holism is what R.M. Gracido refers to as the «holographic principle».<sup>25</sup> This principle maintains that the whole is always present in each one of the parts. This is how we come to what is known as panentheism. Panentheism is not pantheism. Pantheism affirms that all is God; whereas, panentheism affirms that God is *incarnated and immanent* in all the beings that form the cosmos and in each one of their elements. «Panentheism starts by distinguishing, although always relating, God and creatures. One is not the other. Each one possesses its relative autonomy, in other words, always related. All is not God, but God is in all. It is what the etymology of the word panentheism suggests: God is present in all. God makes of each reality God's temple».<sup>26</sup>

Under the logic of a theology that I prefer to call holistic, each part or being is a symbol or sacrament of the divinity. An example of this is the idea of the cosmos as the body of God, an idea that we find in many of contemporary feminist theologians, such as Sallie McFague, among others.<sup>27</sup> We could say then that holism has been one of the constitutive elements of ecosophy as an epistemological category, able to *inter-relate* and express the *inter-connection* of all parts with the whole, and the whole with the parts.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 4.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>26</sup> L. BOFF, *La dignidad de la tierra, Ecología, Mundialización, Espiritualidad. La emergencia de un nuevo paradigma*, Madrid 2000, pp. 57-58: «El panenteísmo parte distinguiendo, aunque siempre relacionando, Dios y criaturas. Uno no es el otro. Cada cual posee su autonomía relativa, es decir, siempre relacionada. Todo no es Dios, pero Dios está en todo. Es lo que etimología de la palabra panenteísmo sugiere: Dios esta presente en todo. Hace de cada realidad su templo».

<sup>27</sup> S. McFAGUE, *El mundo como cuerpo de Dios*, en «Concilium. Revista Internacional de Teología», (2002), 295, pp. 211-218. Cf. another text by the same author, *Modelos de Dios. Teología para una era ecológica y nuclear*, Santander 1994: «las modernas certezas científicas no son universales, sino construcciones históricas. Este modo de comprenderlas permite una manera menos limitada de considerar el mundo mesoamericano. Desde esta perspectiva, la divisoria biología-cultura (o la de género-sexo) demuestra ser insuficiente para aproximarse a este universo. Los conceptos de dualidad, equilibrio y fluidez son elementos integrantes del universo mesoamericano y resultan esenciales para comprender la corporalidad».

Corporality: Corporality is understood as porosity in the Mesoamerican thought, and as a fundamental element in the form of knowledge since we learn with the body and through the body: «Modern scientific certainties are not universal, but historical constructions. This way of understanding them allows a less limited way of considering the Mesoamerican world. From this perspective, the dividing line biology-culture (or gender-sex) shows to be insufficient to approach this universe. The concepts of duality, equilibrium and fluidity are integral elements of the Mesoamerican universe and become essentials to understand corporality».<sup>28</sup>

I would like to return, however, to the metaphor of *porosity*. In studies carried on by Sylvia Marcos, whom I have followed for some of the points treated in the development of this article, in the conception of the body in Mayan and Nahua cultures, as well as in some of the Mesoamerican peoples, the division inside-outside is not maintained. The skin is porosity, which means that between the inside and the outside there is a permanent and continuous exchange, which refers to the abovementioned fluidity.

«Everything lead towards a concept of corporality in which the body is open towards all directions of the cosmos: a body, as much singular as dual, which incorporates solids and fluids in continuous fluctuation, immaterial 'airs' or volatile emanations, as well as juices and solid matter. The Mesoamerican body could be imagined as a swirl generated by the dynamic confluence of multiple, and often contradictory, entities, both material and immaterial, which combine with each other again and again in a never-ending game».<sup>29</sup>

Thus, the porosity of the body is also a symbol of the porosity of the cosmos, which essentially permeates all realities. The separation between the material and the immaterial does not exist for the Mesoamerican world since porosity trespasses all corporality of the cosmos and is a constant flow between the inside and the outside. In this logic, the division sex-gender would be a dualism for the Mesoamerican cultures.

Finally, the body of the woman is not only recognised by its capacity to procreate or by its fertility. On the contrary, the majority of the sculptures of the goddess, for example, depict the veneration of the body of the woman as subjects of desire and pleasure.<sup>30</sup> In the Mesoamerican cultures, the body of the woman is not only valued for its maternity role or as the object of desire of the man. Women show their desires, pleasures, and longings with all freedom, being subjects. The 'moral' of colonial

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<sup>28</sup> S. MARCOS, *Cuerpos y Genero en las Religiones Mesoamericanas*, en «Concilium. Revista Internacional de teología», (2002), 295, p. 276.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 280. «Todo conduce hacia un concepto de corporalidad en el cual el cuerpo está abierto a todas las direcciones del cosmos: un cuerpo, tan singular como dual, que incorpora sólidos y fluidos en fluctuación permanente, 'aires' inmateriales o emanaciones volátiles, así como jugos y materia sólida. El cuerpo mesoamericano se puede imaginar cómo torbellino generado por la confluencia dinámica de múltiples entidades, tanto materiales, como inmateriales, y a menudo contradictorias, que se combinan y se vuelven a combinar en un juego sin fin».

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 286.

missionaries gave different categories to the body of the woman, which are still upheld.

### 5. *Conclusion*

To make a methodological-theological and interreligious dialogue between the North and the South possible, it is necessary to start from an epistemological conceptual base. This epistemological conceptual base, if not common, should be at least of the same recognition as any scientific category. Without this recognition, the methodological dialogue would be impossible, and any dialogue or approach would run the risk of submitting one line of thought to the other.

After going through some of the elements of Mesoamerican philosophical thought, one could notice the difference in language, symbols and metaphors, and above all in logic or reasoning. These differences emanate from the difference of experiences, which constitute the starting point of knowledge. This assertion makes us realise the possibility and validity of a plurality of epistemological processes in constant change.

From this assertion, follows the need to recognise ecosophy as an epistemological category that represents the wisdom of indigenous and Afro-Amerindian cultures, that is able to give answers to contemporary issues, that is the base for the reflection of ecofeminist theology. If classic epistemology does not allow this recognition, it would be digging its own grave, and with it, the grave of theology, since it would continue to exclude nature, women, and indigenous and Afro-Amerindian peoples, and it would exclude itself from the wealth of this thought.