NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (https://www.ncronline.org)

Leonardo Boff: The Franciscan truth: It is in giving that we receive

Rich Heffern | Mar. 1, 2011 Eco Catholic

Leonardo Boff is professor emeritus of ethics, philosophy of religion and ecology at Rio de Janeiro State University.

We are in the period of setting up the government. There are disputes over places and functions by parties and politicos. There are negotiations, charged with differing interests and plenty of vanity. In this context one hears the inspiring prayer for peace of Saint Francis: «it is by giving that we receive», invoked to justify the exchange of favors and support amid a torrent of money. It is a crass manipulation of the generous and selfless spirit of the saint of Assisi. But let's put aside these diversions and look at its true meaning.

There are two economies: one of material goods, and one of spiritual goods. The two are governed by different logic. In the economy of material goods, the more one gives away goods, clothes, houses, lands and money, the less one has. One who gives imprudently and squanders recklessly ends up in poverty. By contrast, in the economy of spiritual goods, when more is given, more is received; when one gives away more, one has more. That is to say, when you give more love, dedication and shelter (spiritual goods), you gain more as a person and you grow in the opinion of others. Spiritual goods are like love: when they are divided, they multiply. Or like fire: as it expands it grows.

We understand this paradox by considering the basic structure of the human being. The human is a being of unlimited relationships. The more one relates, this is, extends one's self towards the other, the different, nature and God, that is to say, one who is more welcoming and loving becomes richer, more adorned with values, grows more and shines as a person.

Therefore, it is by giving that we receive. Often we receive more than we have given. It this not the experience of the many women and men who give time, dedication and goods to help the victims of the socio-environmental disaster that occurred in the mountainous cities of Rio de Janeiro, in the sad month of January, when hundreds died and thousands were left homeless? This selfless «gift» produces a tremendous spiritual effect of feeling more human and enriched. They become people of good will, so necessary now.

Someone of means who gives material goods, following the logic of spiritual goods, to help those who lost everything and to help them remake their lives and their homes, experiences the inner satisfaction of being with the one who needs and can give witness to what Saint Paul would say: «It is more blessed to give than to receive» (Acts 20,35). One who is not poor feels spiritually rich.

There thus exists a circular relationship between giving and receiving, a true reciprocity. This represents, in a greater sense, the very logic of the universe, as biologists and astrophysicists tirelessly emphasize. Everything: galaxies, stars, planets, inorganic and organic beings, down to the elemental particles - everything is structured in the interconnected net of inter-retro-relations amongst all. All co-exist, inter-exist, mutually help each other, reciprocally give and receive what they need to exist and to co-evolve within a subtle dynamic equilibrium.

Our tragedy is that we learn nothing from nature. We take everything from the Earth and give her nothing in return, not even the time needed for her to rest and to regenerate. We only receive and give nothing back. This lack of reciprocity has brought the Earth to its present disequilibrium.

Therefore it is urgent that we vigorously incorporate the economics of spiritual goods into the economics of material goods. Only in this way will we establish the reciprocity of giving and receiving. There would be less opulence in the hands of the few and the many poor would no longer be lacking and could sit at the table eating and drinking of the fruits of their labor. It makes more sense to share than to accumulate, to strengthen the good life of everyone, than to avariciously seek the individual good. What do we take with us when we leave this Earth? Only our spiritual capital. Our material capital remains.

The truly important is to give, give... and once again, give. Only
that way can we receive. And there is no doubting the Franciscan truth, according to which "it is by giving that we receive" ceaselessly, love, recognition and forgiveness. Apart from this, there is only commerce and displays of vanity.

Source URL (retrieved on *08/31/2016 - 22:41*): https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/eco-catholic/leonardo-boff-franciscan-truth-it-giving-we-receive