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SPIRITISM AND THE ENVIRONMENT: THE SPIRITIST ENVIRONMENTALIST DISCOURSE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

André Eugênio da Silva

Master in Environment and Society,
Universidade Estadual de Goiás, Campus
Sudeste – sede: Morrinhos – Goiás
<https://lattes.cnpq.br/4662419754701743>

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Abstract: The present research seeks to identify and analyze the emergence of a scientific and religious spiritist environmentalist discourse through a bibliographical survey that deals with ecology, environment and themes that relate to this subject in lectures, actions and spiritist books. Present its foundations, the relationship between the base works of the origin of spiritist philosophy and ecology, the reasons for this appearance and the implications of this new discourse for spiritist centers and their followers. Framing the spiritist environmentalist discourse according to the existing classifications in the academic environment. We approach the concept of environment and the classification of existing environmental discourses. We analyze the origin of Spiritism and its arrival in Brazil, its basic concepts and the emergence of the spiritist environmentalist discourse in the last two decades, the posture adopted for environmental preservation, the guidelines for its followers and its possible consequences. **Keywords:** Philosophy, Religion, Science, sustainability, spirituality.

INTRODUCTION

With the unbridled advance of capitalism and its globalization in the last 150 years, the increasingly intense use of technology and the acceleration in the pace of life, as well as the acceleration of the degradation of nature itself, several issues related to environmental impacts, the need for studies of these impacts and environmental preservation were raised, giving rise to the most varied discourses on the subject. Among these various discourses are the religious discourses that, as part of society, cannot avoid dealing with issues related to problems that affect that same society in which they are inserted, among them, environmental problems and the topic of ecology.

In order to identify the beginning and

development of the construction of the spiritist ecological discourse, we verified the way in which it was inserted in the vision of this religion, its proximity to other ecological discourses and the attempt that this discourse is not only religious, but also scientific, since Spiritism and its followers recognize religious, philosophical and scientific values in their practices.

For this reason, the present research justifies its importance by focusing on the religious expressions of Spiritism, in order to shed light on the construction of a discourse. Through an analysis of the construction of this religious ecological discourse, as well as its possible impacts, first for the followers of the doctrine and later for society.

THE ECOLOGICAL DEBATE IN THE WORLD: NEW PARADIGMS FOR A NEW CRISIS

Discussions about the impact of human actions on the environment are not new, Pádua (2010) states that the first productions regarding environmental problems date from the end of the 18th century, but that it only reached a significant status in society in the 1970s. Still according to the author, this happened because of globalization and the growth of scientific productions around the world.

In order to understand the growing clash of ecological discourses that flood the media, meetings of regulatory agencies and specialists in climatology and other areas, it is necessary to carry out a brief history of environmentalist discourses.

This concern is recent and gains more strength, the more what scientific studies from the early 1960s point to as possible future impacts caused by the indiscriminate exploitation of natural resources are proven in everyday reality.

For Drummond (2006), the

environmentalist discourse emerged long before the so-called Report ``*Nosso futuro comum*`` (1987), also known as the Brundtland Report, a document written by the World Commission on the Environment and Development (CMMAD), through the studies of scientists called natural scientists, that is, those who are linked to the research branch of the natural sciences.

Subsequently, social scientists, linked to the social sciences, with the knowledge of these studies began to develop their discourses that would give rise to the concept of sustainable development that is still discussed by specialists from the most diverse areas.

Then, the widely publicized and debated environmental issues were joined to social issues, to later embody the current socio-environmental discourse.

In 1962, Rachel Carson published the work that would have an enormous impact on the scientific community and would serve as the basis for some of the modern environmentalist discourses. Her book, with the original title: *Silent Spring*, Silent Spring in Portuguese. For Carson (1962) the life of vegetation and animals were determined by the very environment in which these animals and plants were born, thus, the environment determined the pace and way of life of the beings that inhabited there. With rare exceptions, the opposite occurred.

Carson's work denounced a whole chain of destruction that had formed a cycle of death with the use of currently called agricultural pesticides and thus faced the large industrial corporations of the time, pesticide producers and farmers.

Thus, in 1983, with the approval of the United Nations (UN), the CMMAD was created, which would be responsible for the deliberations regarding the studies published on environmental issues up to that point, along with other bodies created with the aim

of finding solutions to the issues raised. For Santos (2017), the aggregating power of the concept of sustainability begins to dominate ecological agendas, points to Eco 92, also known as Rio 92 or United Nations Conference on the Environment (UNCED), as an attempt to promote sustainable development on a planetary scale.

CLASSIFICATION OF THE GROUPS

The classifications of environmental groups in the scientific literature on the subject are made according to the concepts and positions of each group towards the environment.

In view of this, Santos (2017) points out that most of this classification is guided by social and ideological issues, present or not in the guidelines raised by each group. When talking about the formation of identities of environmentalist movements in Brazil and the paths taken by each of them, Alonso, Costa and Maciel (2007), not only demonstrate the importance of the political and social context in which each group is inserted, but also that collective actions depend on the activists' abilities to build a consistent interpretation of the moment in which they live and the environment that surrounds them and define two large groups, conservationists and political ecology.

According to these authors, the first group considers only nature in its wild state, leaving out political issues, defends the creation of reserves, ecological parks and a scientific tone that does not deal with social issues. The second group is considered socio-environmentalist, emphasizes the issues of the whole process between the social and the natural, brings the discussion to the clash in the political environment, seeks to add to the struggle for preservation, also the intricacies that lead to planning for social public policies.

For Zhouri (2006) there is an enormous difficulty in classifying these groups, however,

he uses an anthropological analysis, the personal and social relationships of the activists to identify the type of tendency, arriving at three main types: trees, people and trees & people. According to the author, the words that classify the groups are used metaphorically, to identify what is in the foreground in each of the groups, which would give each one of them a north in their speeches.

Thus, for Zhouri (2006), it is the relationship and discourse used by each group that characterizes its activity in relation to the environment, the aforementioned groups, for example, are classified within the “trees” trend, other institutions with a discourse more focused on ethics and politics such as groups ¹*Gaia Foundation, Reforest the Earth and World Rainforest Movement* are within the third classification, “trees and people.”

Santos (2017), after a long research on the types of classifications of environmental groups, separates the movements into three basic groups, following a conceptualization that takes into consideration, the relationship of environmental issues and the presence or absence of religious/spiritual discourse in this environmentalist engagement. Thus, he named them as: esoteric, rationalist and moralist. The latter being subdivided into two groups: intramundane and extramundane.

According to Santos (2007), the first group assumes that all environmental problems originate from mystical imbalances, that is, from negative energies that have arisen through the failure of communication between man and nature, causing disharmony. The earth, in this sense, is a living entity, not a property to be endlessly exploited, nor a gift that humanity owes to the creator, but a living

being that suffers and needs to be helped

The second group, called by Santos (2017) as rationalist, does not admit a view that is not material, all problems and even solutions to the same problems are material, excluding any moral or spiritual concept. This anthropocentric discourse is one of the pillars of the idea of sustainable development, that is, exploration must continue, but within a level of security for humanity and the progress of society.

Finally, Santos (2007) states that the third group, the moralists, treats nature as something that has dignity. The author clarifies that intramundane moralistic environmentalism brings a biocentric view, while extramundane moralistic environmentalism brings a theocentric view. In the first, the human being is not more important than the other lives on the planet, he is just another type of life within the great biological mass that is the Earth, in the second, the human being is different from other lives, he is superior and received the earth from his creator as a kind of inheritance that must be guarded.

Both differ from the first group, esoteric environmentalism, which brings a cosmocentric vision in which the earth is also a living and intelligent being, endowed with occult forces. Thus, the three strands confront rationalist environmentalism and oppose the latter's anthropocentrism.

Finally, it is necessary to say that the classifications present in this text are not considered as reference models that cannot be questioned or modified, since they are used only so that we can delimit and, through this delimitation, we can make the analysis comparisons necessary for this research.

1. *Gaia Foundation* is a UK-registered charitable organization that promotes ecologically sustainable development. A *Reforest World*, is a movement that counts on the most varied groups that fight for the reforestation of the planet. The organization: *World Rainforest Movement*, translated as World Rainforest Movement, it is an international initiative created to strengthen the global movement in defense of forests, in order to combat deforestation and forest degradation. It was founded in 1986 by activists from around the world.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF A SPIRITIST ENVIRONMENTALIST DISCOURSE

Spiritism, idealized by the scholar and pedagogue Hipolyte Léon Denizard Rivail, who later began to use the pseudonym Allan Kardec, which would name what some call Kardecism or Kardecist Spiritism. The spiritist works codified by Allan Kardec dealt with the most varied subjects and incited countless debates about the origin of humanity, its passage through Earth and its destiny. He sought broadly and objectively, according to the spiritist perspective, to demonstrate the immortality of the soul and its process of evolution through incarnation. He brought to his investigative path not only issues related to the human spirit, but a series of moral questions that accompany it, the impact of human behavior on its own evolution or backwardness, on the environment in which it lives and its relationship with nature and the planet Earth itself.

When analyzing Spiritism, we identified that, among so many subjects addressed, it approached the question of nature in different aspects, from its functioning, the question of different species and also the questions about the exploration that the human being made of it. When we consider that Spiritism emerged in the same century in which the expansion of the advances of the Industrial Revolution occurred, we realize that the initial concerns of those who questioned the spirits were related to the daily concerns of their time. Although many issues related to nature were present in the works considered as fundamental milestones of Spiritism and in other works psychographed by mediums such as Francisco Cândido Xavier, Divaldo Franco, among others, there was no in-depth debate on environmental issues in the Spiritist milieu.

Although it is not possible to say clearly

when the spiritist milieu started the more environmentalist discourse, since the spiritist centers are independent with regard to the organization of their work, as explained above, we will use as a framework for the creation of the spiritist discourse, the discourses that aim to deal with the environmental issue more broadly, that is, in the environmental sphere, in the socioeconomic sphere and in the moral sphere, as specific productions entirely focused on this theme.

Based on the aforementioned prerequisites, we will use the first years of the 21st century as a starting point for the creation of the spiritist environmentalist discourse, when some meetings and symposiums brought as a theme the ideas between the relationship between Spiritism and the Environment. The first of these is the VII Brazilian Symposium on Spiritist Thought, held in Cajamar-SP, in October 2001, where Carlos Orlando Villarraga began the dissemination of this theme with the lecture: Spiritist Education and Sustainable Development.

Since then, other Spiritist authors such as André Trigueiro Mendes, Izabel Gurgel, João Demétrio Loricchio have begun to address the issue and spread, in the Spiritist Centers of the country, the importance of raising awareness of environmental problems and the urgency of change, not only in the individual behavior of the Spiritist, but also in Spiritist centers, with the aim of making their actions sustainable and collaborating with the environment.

The spiritist environmentalist discourse is based on the idea that everything that exists is interdependent and mutually affects each other, not on an esoteric cosmivision in which everything is one and one is the whole, but on the evolutionary view that each item of creation is related in an evolutionary chain in which, within its class, it collaborates for the evolution of the class that is linked to its own, whether earlier or later. We must remember

that Spiritism is a doctrine based on the idea of reincarnation/spiritual evolution. Therefore, all the discourse present in the basic works, being a primary/base discourse, is reinforced in other works that work with the spiritist evolutionist vision.

As it is based on these ideals, it is possible to state that Spiritism creates its environmentalist discourse in order to meet not only the discursive conformity of its base works, but also the discursive conformity with other environmentalist currents based on the Deep Ecology developed by Arne Naes² and in the Gaia Hypothesis, formulated by James Lovelock³ and in accordance with discourses of other religions such as the discourse of the Catholic Church with regard to Christian morals and behavior towards nature and the Buddhist view of nature and its uniqueness.

However, Spiritism does not treat nature as being itself a type of divinity or coated with divine entities, as occurs in some segments, in this sense, it maintains the Christian view that all things are creatures of God. We conclude that Spiritism creates its environmentalist discourse in order to meet a demand that was abandoned in the Spiritist environment and becomes part of what is called eco-spirituality.

For Silveira (2019), eco-spiritualist discourses within their religious varieties occur because of the sharing of the same critical spirit in the face of progress and the impactful environmental destruction that is a result of it, while contesting the automatism of social relations and desiring an authentic life. In addition, he considers it as a contemporary religious phenomenon.

Religions have in their core moral and cosmogonic visions that are related because they have life in common, as the central

2. Arne Dekke Eide Næss (Slemdal, 27 January 1912 –Oslo, 12 January 2009) was a Norwegian philosopher and ecologist, famous for coining the term deep ecology. He was an important intellectual and an inspirational figure for the environmental movement of the late 20th century.

3. James Ephraim Lovelock(Hertfordshire, July 26, 1919) is an independent researcher and environmentalist who lives in Cornwall (west of England). The popular Gaia hypothesis was articulated by Lovelock with the collaboration of Lynn Margulis, to explain the systemic behavior of planet Earth.

point of their discourses. According to Maçaneiro (2011) so that we can review our place on planet Earth in an attempt to educate ourselves for ecological care, religions become indispensable for bringing essential knowledge for a cooperative construction of knowledge in an interdisciplinary, international and inter-religious way for the common good of humanity and the planet. The spiritist worldview, by valuing life in all its aspects, including evolution in non-living beings, such as minerals, has a broad and profound view of this interdependence.

Therefore, for spiritists, humanity is just a class of beings, among the most varied existing classes, because: “As a social and individual group, we currently incarnated and living on planet Earth, have the responsibility of taking care of our physical body, our spirit and the physical home that it offers us to carry out our tasks [...]” (Villarraga, 2004, p. 10).

The same discourse is found in Trigueiro (2010) when he states that, if everything is formed from a single element and infinitely modified, and that, by becoming aware of this, humanity will be able to understand this reality and change its attitude towards nature and all living beings on the planet, strive to become a collaborator of the environment and the evolutionary journey of earthly beings. For Spiritism, the cause of all crises is centered on humanity, as it is humanity who, through the use of reason and free will, decides the course of everything.

This first spiritist approach points out that the environmentalist discourse of this group, according to what Santos (2017) presents us with, fits into intramundane moral environmentalism in which, as human beings are just another entity that lives on the planet

and, being the only one endowed with reason, it is up to them to treat it with respect, zeal and dedication.

Based on this observation, one must realize that every spiritist environmentalist discourse will unfold in a constant revisitation of doctrine discourses for a reaffirmation of spiritist religious/scientific dialogue. This revisitation is fundamental, since there is a need to validate the ecological discourse within the source of spiritualist ideas from the spiritist point of view.

It is common for environmentalist discourses to point out the economic system based on maximum exploitation for the generation of wealth as the main cause of the massive destruction of nature. Villarraga (2001) shares the same opinion and points to two factors as generators of increased consumption of goods and services: population growth and increased purchasing power of part of this population. He claims that to meet this demand, the world economy has decided to base the economic model on linear and infinite growth without considering that natural resources are finite. He presents the economic model as follows:

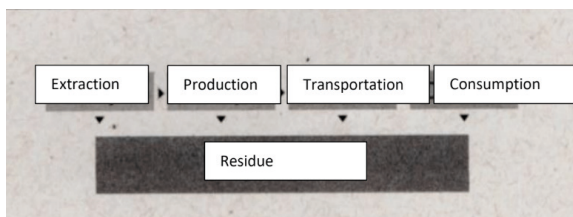


Figure 1 - Linear economic model (VILLARRAGA, 2013, p. 24)

According to Villarraga's (2001) presentation, at all stages of the current economic model there is a huge generation of waste that is returned to the natural environment without proper treatment, causing enormous damage to the environment. According to him, the increase in consumerism reinforces the current

economic model, as it bases the idea of well-being on a greater consumption of goods and services, is based on a satisfaction of quick gain that further favors the social gap between the rich and poor, accelerates environmental degradation and leverages misery. Therefore, the materialism that has consumerism as its ideological fruit must be fought.

It is important to differentiate consumption from consumerism, while consumption is something necessary and natural to maintain life – all living beings consume in some way, consumerism, as explained by Giacomini Filho (2010), is a quantitative extravagance, as it far exceeds what is necessary for subsistence, creating an unreal need that reflects in the spurious quality of consumption, since even the benefit of this excess is questionable.

This goes against the definition given by Villarraga (2013) who says that consumption is the acquisition of what is necessary to meet basic needs while consumerism is what we consume beyond the basics, often to meet an emotional need. Therefore, consumerism is a distortion of consumption, which has its legitimate economic and social character, to meet an illegitimate need generated by an emotional/psychological problem or a selfish spiritual one.

According to Spiritism, if we look from the micro to the macro, all systems are organized in such a way that the existence of everything is intimately linked and organized into subsystems. Thus, "The economy is a subsystem within the society system. The economy could cease to exist and society could continue." (VILLARRAGA, 2001, p. 146, and 2013 p. 39). Following this logic, the author says that society is a subsystem within nature and that consequently it can cease to exist without prejudice to other species and the planet. It exemplifies as follows:

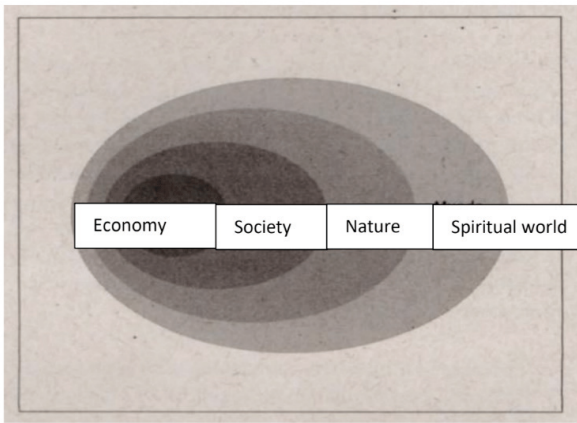


Figure 2 - Systems (VILLARRAGA, 2013, p. 40).

All of Villarraga's discourse (2004) boils down to demonstrating the interdependence of all things and their mutual impact on planetary evolution. For the author, the state of interdependence of the problems can be represented as follows:

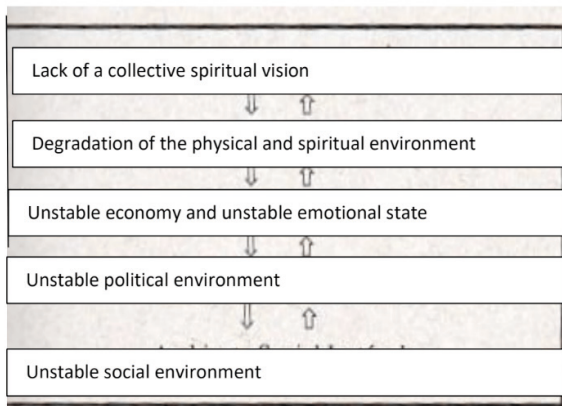


Figure 3 - Interdependence (VILLARRAGA, 2004, p. 11)

The human being, as an agent of the problems existing on planet Earth, has the duty, himself, to be the agent of the solution. Changing your attitude and way of life, leaving aside the current model for managing and consuming, according to what would be necessary for your rebalancing in terms of physical and mental health, as well as for environmental rebalancing.

For Villarraga (2004) it is necessary that

global measures are implemented by nations in a collaborative way to slow down the degradation of the planet, or the human species will be truly threatened. The global plan, according to him, must focus on measures for the sustainable development of humanity. He is emphatic when he says that this objective will only be achieved when the number of people with access to enlightening knowledge becomes a majority and that explain the true causes of environmental, social and spiritual problems. It implies that knowledge of only one of the three areas will not be enough to achieve the objective.

It is based on this explanation that the spiritist environmentalist discourse reaffirms the idea that interdependence allows human beings to interact with different environments and Villarraga (2004, p.23) presents them in four groups according to the following figure:

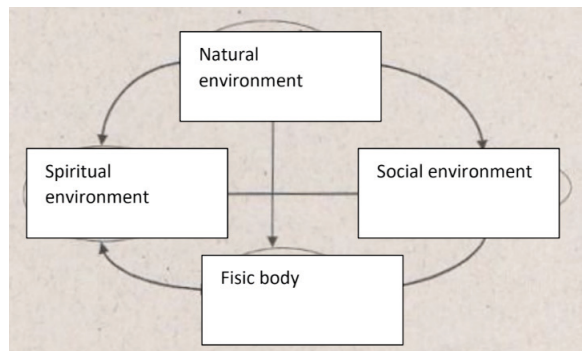


Figure 4 - Human interaction environments (VILLARRAGA, 2004, p.22)

Resting on the ideas of reincarnation and evolution, spiritist environmentalism rises, since for Spiritism we are all responsible for our actions and that these actions directly interfere with the Law of action and reaction that creates the reincarnation cycle. Thus, in the author's view, not doing anything about the environmental crisis is failing to do a good that could be done and assuming the consequences of this non-action as suffering for this or future life. It indicates that the way out so that we can overcome the problems

related to human needs, goes through a change of vision, in which we must recognize ourselves as part of the nature created by God.

He stands out in the group of impacts on the social environment, especially the increase in population, relating this increase to increased consumption, since our current lifestyle encourages exacerbated consumerism. Thus, the larger the population, the greater the consumption and, consequently, the greater the impacts on the natural and social environment. It points to sexual education and family planning as a private and collective solution.

Trigueiro (2010) makes a reflection to explain the absence of the Spiritist attitude towards the environment until that moment. He concludes that some spiritist assumptions that have become catchphrases for those who want to express in a few words their convictions according to spiritist precepts through short phrases such as: "These phrases feed our faith by the ideas they contain. *Chance does not exist [...], True life is spiritual life. [...], I'm here passing through.* (TRIGUEIRO, 2010, p. 11, 12, 13 excerpts highlighted by the author). They are wrong and represent well, part of the behavior of the followers of Spiritism that would reveal a certain dose of self-indulgence and contempt for life on the planet as a whole.

Trigueiro (2010) states that this is a misinterpretation, because, since Spiritism is a reincarnationist and evolutionist philosophy, thinking only about the spiritual life and leaving aside our obligations and responsibilities towards life on the planet is a burden that delays spiritual evolution. He clarifies that those who are incarnated here may reincarnate on this same planet in a future life. The author offers guidelines for spiritist centers to direct their work in order to undo this ecological stagnation and collaborate for a more sustainable society.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The transformations humanity has undergone have changed not only social relations between peoples, but also humanity's lifestyle and its relationship with nature, especially with regard to technological advances. Human actions have impacted the environment in a more accelerated and destructive way, mainly with the advent of industrialization around the world, which led to the choice of an economic model based on consumption. The increase in production led to the need for an increase in consumption of everything that is produced, thus creating a consumer society based on capitalism and the maximum and predatory exploitation of natural resources.

Among the most varied discourses on environmental problems are religious discourses that, in their own way, seek to respond to a problem of global demand and somehow collaborate to mitigate these problems. This is how religious environmentalist discourses arise. For religions, the necessary change is moral and spiritual, in which human beings must understand their role as children of God and responsible for life on the planet.

Spiritism, as a religion, could not remain silent in the face of such an important issue. The spiritist environmentalist discourse is based on its evolutionist vision through the principle of reincarnation. It was organized with the aim of raising the awareness of Spiritist religious leaders and their followers regarding the importance of this issue and with the aim of being included in the debate that is of worldwide interest. This organic discourse is carried out within the texts in order to reaffirm the triple basis of Spiritism, since the spiritist root seeks to establish itself in these three human aspects: the philosophical, the scientific and the religious.

It inserts practices linked to sustainability into the spiritist worldview and guides

the spiritist centers in what is possible to accomplish, how they can insert these practices in the three nuclei: family nucleus, spiritist religious nucleus and the social nucleus as a whole. It aims, through practice, to exemplify what is possible to be carried out effectively.

Finally, it remains for the future to verify how and to what extent the spiritist

environmentalist discourse, developed over these two decades, was put into practice by the spiritist centers, how much this was or was not significant for the local community in which they are inserted and the possible positive impacts that would be a reflection of this change in the attitude of Spiritism in the face of the ecological problems that the world faces.

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