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To Gabi

Then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the earth and breathed a living breath into his nostrils, and man became a living being.
And the LORD God took man and settled him in the Garden of Eden to cultivate it and guard it.

Genesis 2:7, 2:15

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PREFACE

This work reflects on the doctrine of creation in light of current ecological issues and contributes to a current need to address this topic in Lutheran theology, especially in the context of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil (IELB), which has not addressed the topic despite several issues currently faced in Latin America. Consequently, this work intends mostly to introduce reflection on the doctrine of creation in light of ecological issues to Lutherans in Brazil and promote future reflection on the topic. Nevertheless, while considering theological partners for dialogue on the subject, I also found that Lutherans have not interacted yet with the Brazilian liberation theologian Leonardo Boff, who is one of the most prominent theologians on the topic and in theology in general in Brazil. As a result, this work also reflects and contributes to another need by offering a dialogue between Lutheran theology and the ecological theology of Leonardo Boff. In other words, while introducing reflection on the doctrine of creation in light of current issues on ecology, this work also introduces Boff and his ecological theology to Lutherans. The result highlights that Boff's ecological theology not only deals with issues in ecology today but questions the cause of such issues, and exposes the situation through social, economic, and political perspectives, thus offering relevant insights for life in relationship with creation today. This should lead Lutherans not to dismiss Boff's theology but to consider it for recommendations to reflect on the doctrine of creation in the face of current ecological issues. In sum, the pages ahead reflect on the doctrine of creation in order to help the Church and Christians to confess the Creator of heaven and earth, and to live as redeemed creatures in a redeemed creation, loving and caring for the neighbor and the planet as a whole.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AC	The Augsburg Confession
Ap	Apology of the Augsburg Confession
BC	Book of Concord
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
EPP	Environmental Pollution Panel
FC	Formula of Concord
IELB	The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil
LC	Large Catechism
SC	Small Catechism

ABSTRACT

Furst, Alan Diego. "Leonardo Boff's Social-Environmental Ecology: Exposition, Analysis, and Appropriation for Lutheran Theology." MA Thesis, Concordia Seminary, 2018. 107pp.

Ecological issues throughout the world present an urgent need for a deepened theological approach to the doctrine of creation. In fact, recent studies have shown that such issues point to a more serious problem with the entire system at work shaping social relations today. This situation calls Christian theologians to rethink the doctrine of creation in light of ecological issues. This includes Lutheran theologians, who still need to address the current situation involving ecological issues and to offer reflections and responses from a Lutheran perspective, identifying ways by which the doctrine of creation helps Christians to live out their faith within God's creation in the face of such reality. The question is how to do this. This thesis contributes to an answer by considering answers already given by theologians of other Christian traditions on the topic. Specifically, this thesis exposes and analyzes the most influential works of Leonardo Boff on ecological issues, and considers insights and recommendations for Lutheran theology. As a result, this thesis identifies Boff's reflection over the question of what it means to be human and what is the relation human beings have with other creatures and the rest of creation as his most basic contribution. More specifically, Boff's perspective analyzes how aspects such as society, economy, politics, etc. affect and give shape to the human relationship to creation today. In conclusion, this thesis argues that Lutheran theology should not dismiss Boff's theology but acknowledge and appreciate the relevance of his reflection on current issues. Accordingly, this thesis offers recommendations and possible appropriations from Boff's approach to Lutheran theology, especially on ways of rethinking the doctrine of vocation in light of current ecological issues.

CHAPTER ONE

THE ECOLOGICAL SITUATION

Chapter One observes that ecological issues are a current reality present throughout the world. Issues like pollution, deforestation, trash disposal, and population growth heighten the urgent need for a theological approach to ecology, or in other words, for a deepened doctrine of creation. Moreover, recent studies on environmental issues show that such problems represent a deeper problem with the current reality of life in the world. That is, ecological issues reflect consequences of a more serious problem with the entire system at work shaping social relations today. Therefore, the situation exposed by ecological issues calls for a deeper reflection on the problems faced today in order to identify not only the problems in ecology but the causes for current issues. In fact, it calls Christian theologians to rethink the doctrine of creation in light of current issues.

This call includes theologians of the Lutheran Church. They are not known for sharing deep interactions with the topic of ecological problems and their ramifications. Thus, there is still a need to address the current situation involving ecological issues and to offer reflections and responses from a Lutheran perspective. The more important question is how to do this. To begin an answer, this Chapter suggests that we explore answers already given by Catholic and Protestant traditions, and then, in view of them, offer some recommendations for Lutheran theology to explore further.

A Worldwide Reality

Today, ecological issues are a worldwide reality. Latin America, for instance, suffers with

this reality with problems like deforestation and pollution. Consider deforestation in the Amazon region. In 2016 alone, 7,989 km² of Amazon forest was destroyed, an area equal to more than 1,200,000 soccer fields. This destruction has caused the emission of 586 million tons of carbon in the atmosphere, which represents the same amount of carbon emission of all automobiles in Brazil for a period of eight years.¹ Likewise, pollution in the cities brings great danger to life in general. As an illustration, shortly before hosting the Olympics in 2016, news about the pollution in the Bay of Rio de Janeiro in which water events would be held brought calls to question holding them.² In fact, it is estimated that each day “150 metric tons of industrial wastewater flows into the bay,” enough to fill about seven larger tanker trucks.³ Moreover, industrialization, trash disposal, and population growth are part of current scenario in Brazil and other places of Latin America and contributed to ecological challenges and problems.⁴ The situation presented by ecological issues in Latin America is clearly urgent.

Furthermore, such ecological issues found in Latin America reflect the reality found across the globe. This reality points to the need for a broader understanding of the effects of ecological issues, which ultimately create impacts over not only natural environment but social contexts as well. In other words, current issues on ecology affect the environment as a whole, influencing

¹ “Desmatamento Dispara na Amazônia,” *Greenpeace Brazil*, November 2016, accessed December 7, 2017, <http://www.greenpeace.org/brasil/pt/Noticias/Desmatamento-dispara-na-Amazonia/>.

² “Lixo na Baía de Guanabara É Desafio Para os Jogos, Diz Secretário de Meio Ambiente,” *Folha de São Paulo*, July 2016, accessed January 19, 2018, <http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/esporte/olimpiada-no-rio/2016/07/1793748-lixo-na-baia-de-guanabara-e-desafio-para-os-jogos-diz-secretario-de-meio-ambiente.shtml>.

³ Lindsey Konkell, “What’s on Rio’s Bay and Beaches?” *National Geographic*, August 2016, accessed January 19, 2018, <https://news.nationalgeographic.com/2016/08/what-s-in-rio-s-bay-/>.

⁴ See Harald Malschitzky, “Reflexão Ecológica,” *Estudos Teológicos* 30, no. 1 (1990): 27–32, accessed February 5, 2018, http://periodicos.est.edu.br/index.php/estudos_teologicos/article/view/1020/981. Lois Ann Lorentzen and Salvador Leavitt-Alcantara, “Religion and Environmental Struggles in Latin America,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Ecology*, ed. Roger S. Gottlieb (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 510–11. Ana Carolina Moraes, “O Desafio do Descarte Correto de Lixo no Brasil,” *Repórter Unesco*, January 2017, accessed December 7, 2017, <http://reporterunesp.jor.br/2017/01/31/desafio-descarte-lixo-no-brasil/#>.

human and nonhuman life, and these effects should not be overlooked or ignored. To take a case in point, consider the example of trash disposal system in Brasília, the capital of Brazil. By lacking a proper trash disposal system, Brasília has produced the second largest open garbage dump in the world that is located only a few miles from the presidential palace and at the border of one of Brazil's national Parks filled with wildlife.⁵ Although it has been closed since the beginning of 2018,⁶ Brasília's open garbage dump became a problem for people and the natural environment. On the one hand, this gigantic pile of trash brought pollution to soil, water and air. On the other hand, because of years of no recyclable collection in the city, this place attracted people who survived out of recyclable items they find in the dump, who end up injured, with diseases, and some even die.

Brasília's trash disposal system is only one example of the current problems afflicting Brazil, Latin America more widely, and many countries throughout the world. Furthermore, this same system affects the wide natural environment. Global emissions of carbon (CO₂), for instance, have increased about 90% since the 1970s, reaching the mark of 9,855 million metric tons of carbon only in 2014, caused mainly by use of fossil-fuel burning and industry production.⁷ As a result, global warming threatens all life on Earth, human and nonhuman, and if not faced and changed, this situation will cause irreversible effects.

⁵ Philip Reeves, "As a Massive Garbage Dump Closes in Brazil, Trash-Pickers Face an Uncertain Future," *National Public Radio*, January 20, 2018, accessed April 29, 2018, <https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2018/01/20/579105943/as-a-massive-garbage-dump-closes-in-brazil-trash-pickers-face-an-uncertain-future>.

⁶ Anthony Boadle, "Brasilia Closes Latin America's Largest Rubbish Dump," *Reuters*, January 19, 2018, accessed July 3, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-brazil-dump/brasilia-closes-latin-americas-largest-rubbish-dump-idUSKBN1F82VI>.

⁷ T.A. Boden, G. Marland, and R.J. Andres, "Global, Regional, and National Fossil-Fuel CO₂ Emissions," *Carbon Dioxide Information Analysis Center* (Oak Ridge, TN: Oak Ridge National Laboratory, U.S. Department of Energy, 2017), accessed June 5, 2018, http://cdiac.ess-dive.lbl.gov/trends/emis/tre_glob_2014.html.

Nonetheless, although the urgent character is clear on the face of such issues, they raise a question about their origin. After all, what are the causes of ecological issues today? The answer to this question appears to be as important as the reflection on possible solutions to the actual ecological problems.

A Deeper Problem

Such issues point to a deeper problem causing this situation throughout the world. Specifically, current problems affecting ecology show they relate to social, economic, and political actions, which influence how people in general regard others and the whole environment. In fact, these areas influence one another, and they form a system that impacts the planet. Accordingly, any consideration of ecological problems needs to take into account economic, political, and cultural factors, too. In fact, economic, political, and cultural factors are key reasons that there are ecological problems.

To take a case in point, consider recent occurrences in the public sphere of the American Government. For decades, the effect of gases like carbon dioxide on the temperature of the earth has been a recognized political problem. In 1965, U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson issued the report of The Environmental Pollution Panel of the President's Science Advisory Council. It contained an appendix entitled "Atmospheric Carbon Dioxide." This appendix called carbon dioxide the "invisible pollutant" and discussed at length how marked increases of the gas in the earth's atmosphere could contribute to global warming. The report presents that through his worldwide industrial civilization, humankind has conducted geophysical experiments that resulted in the transformation of the environment.⁸ Among other things, the report noted how the

⁸ Environmental Pollution Panel, *Restoring the Quality of Our Environment*, Washington, DC, November 5, 1965, 126, accessed July 3, 2018, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.b4116127>.

melting of the Antarctic ice cap could affect sea level: “The melting of the Antarctic ice cap would raise sea level 400 feet. If 1,000 years were required to melt the ice cap, the sea level would rise 4 feet every 10 years, 40 feet per century.”⁹ And the report predicted that “measurable and perhaps marked changes in climate” might be realized by the year 2000.¹⁰

Today, studies show such predictions were right. According to NASA, the planet’s averaged temperatures in 2017 were about 1.62 degrees Fahrenheit warmer than the 1951 to 1980 mean, and “the five warmest years on record all have taken place since 2010.”¹¹ The effects of this climate change are warming of oceans, the decreasing of ice sheets, glacial retreat, etc. Considering the prediction of rising of sea level, it has risen 8 inches in the last century; however, just in the last two decades the sea level rose nearly double the number of last century.¹² Moreover, the new prediction on the face of the continued rising of global greenhouse emissions is that sea level will rise up to 7 meters by the end of this century.¹³

Nonetheless, under President Donald Trump this situation has not received the required attention. Despite many calls for reduction of greenhouse gas emissions especially on the sector of automobiles, President Trump requested a new review of fuel efficiency standards of vehicles only a few days after being elected, which resulted in negating the previous determination of

⁹ EPP, *Restoring the Quality of Our Environment*, 123.

¹⁰ EPP, *Restoring the Quality of Our Environment*, 126–27.

¹¹ “Long-Term Warming Trend Continued in 2017: NASA, NOAA,” *National Aeronautics and Space Administration*, January 18, 2018, accessed July 4, 2018, <https://www.giss.nasa.gov/research/news/20180118/>.

¹² “Climate Change: How Do We Know?” *National Aeronautics and Space Administration*, accessed July 4, 2018, <https://climate.nasa.gov/evidence/>. See also “Sea Level,” *National Aeronautics and Space Administration*, February 2018, accessed July 4, 2018, <https://climate.nasa.gov/vital-signs/sea-level/>.

¹³ “Climate Change 2014: Synthesis Report; Summary for Policymakers,” *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, accessed July 4, 2018, http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar5/syr/AR5_SYR_FINAL_SPM.pdf.

President Obama’s administration.¹⁴ The new review led the head of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) of the time, Scott Pruitt, to replace the previous standards with new ones that come to favor production by automakers instead of the reduction of emissions.¹⁵ This new review argued the previous report was based on “outdated information,” even though such data was from no more than a year before the new report, and that “more recent information” suggests such standards may be “too stringent.”¹⁶

This presents a reality where economic interests influence political administration and decisions referring to departments that should originally protect areas of social relations instead of interests of companies assaulting that sector. Furthermore, it exposes an intertwined system, where political mindset affects vocational duties, which in turn are protected by a government shaped by economic projects. As an illustration, a very recent publication in *The New Yorker* has shown that although Pruitt was connected to ethical scandals, he had kept his position as Trump’s administrator of the EPA, not only for his role helping with issues such fuel efficiency standards, but also because of his Evangelical influence.¹⁷ Writer Margaret Talbot observed that Pruitt’s connection to Evangelicals, who supported the current administration and its way of action, has favored him on the face of current accusations. In fact, Talbot explained at the time

¹⁴ John Decicco, “After Years of Green Promises, Automakers Renege on Emissions Standards,” *Yale Environment 360*, June 7, 2018, accessed June 25, 2018, <https://e360.yale.edu/features/after-years-of-green-promises-us-automakers-renege-on-emissions-standards>. Specifically, Decicco refers to the letter published by Obama’s administration. Cf. Environmental Protection Agency, *Mid-Term Evaluation Letter to Stakeholders*, Washington, DC, January 12, 2017, accessed June 25, 2018, <https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2017-01/documents/mte-stakeholder-letter-2017-01-12.pdf>.

¹⁵ Environmental Protection Agency, “Mid-Term Evaluation of Greenhouse Gas Emissions Standards for Model Year 2022–2025 Light-Duty Vehicles,” *Federal Register* 83, no. 72 (April 13, 2018): 16077–87, accessed June 25, 2018, <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2018-04-13/pdf/2018-07364.pdf>.

¹⁶ EPA, “Mid-Term Evaluation,” 16077.

¹⁷ Margaret Talbot, “Are Evangelical Leaders Saving Scott Pruitt’s Job?” *The New Yorker*, June 8, 2018, accessed June 9, 2018, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/are-evangelical-leaders-saving-scott-pruitts-job>.

that Pruitt, along with other Evangelicals in Trump's circle in D.C., had expressed skepticism on climate-change and other environmental issues, supporting actions that transform nature for the sake of progress and economic development from a "biblical perspective." Specifically, Talbot refers to Ralph Drollinger's essay published on the Capitol Ministries website.¹⁸ There, Drollinger argues that "God's purpose in creating the world was for man's betterment and enjoyment." He continues, "plants, animals, birds, and every moving thing were created by God to be man's food," and that "God is pleased when organic and inorganic substances, the lesser of creation, are utilized to benefit those uniquely created in His image."¹⁹ Essentially, Drollinger's point is to present creation as subject to human benefit, who can and should use creation to improve their life, and by doing this, he claims they please God who created all things for this very reason, especially political leaders who are to stand for the betterment of people. To put it succinctly, this recent case represents an illustration of the current reality where social relations influence each other and affect the way each area acts in social and natural environment.

Nonetheless, this situation is a worldwide problem. The same influence of economic power over political measures that affect the whole environment is a reality throughout the world. In Ukraine, for instance, public money is funding industrial development of chicken farms controlled by big companies, which are a source of misery for people and the environment. The heavy traffic damages houses, water levels in the wells have fallen, the quality of the water in the rivers are in danger, and people suffer not only with unpleasant smells but with fear coming from

¹⁸ Ralph Drollinger, "Coming to Grips With the Religion of Environmentalism," *Capitol Ministries*, April 2, 2018, accessed June 9, 2018, <http://capmin.org/coming-to-grips-with-the-religion-of-environmentalism/>. Drollinger is the founder and president of Capitol Ministries. He leads a weekly Bible study session for Cabinet members in Washington, DC.

¹⁹ Drollinger, "Coming to Grips," 6–7.

threats of violence against anyone who complains about the companies.²⁰ Another example is the reduction of development in the sector of green energy sources in the United Kingdom. James Tapper claims that a “hostile planning approach” of the government, which cut subsidies to the green energy sector, might be behind the decline in the number of renewable sources of energy in the past year. He observes that while investing £100m in the sector of green energy, forms of energy based on fossil fuels received more than 30 times this amount, representing an investment of over £3bn on companies running oil or coal-fired power stations.²¹

So we can observe that, on the one hand, economic interests shape and influence political views, which thus influence vocational life in society, as well as religious comprehension of life in relation to creation. On the other hand, we also see that the same applies in the opposite direction, since such interpretation provided by such a religious leader will support political decisions made by the government, which ultimately support the economic emphasis at work in current society.

Therefore, the ecological situation presents a deeper problem shaping social relations, which ultimately affect and influence the way people act toward the planet. Consequently, there is a need for an ecological reflection today that questions not only the environmental issues found throughout the globe, but which steps further into the issue and present a deeper approach to the topic by questioning what is behind the problems faced today.

²⁰ Oksana Grytsenko, “Living Next Door to 17 Million Chickens: 'We Want a Normal Life',” *The Guardian*, June 23, 2018, accessed June 23, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/jun/23/living-next-door-to-17-million-chickens-we-want-a-normal-life?CMP=tw_t_a-environment_b-gdneco.

²¹ James Tapper, “Green Energy Feels the Heat as Subsidies Go to Fossil Fuels,” *The Guardian*, June 23, 2018, accessed June 23, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/jun/23/green-energy-subsidies-community-projects-fossil-fuels?CMP=tw_t_a-environment_b-gdneco.

A Calling for Christian Perspective on Ecology

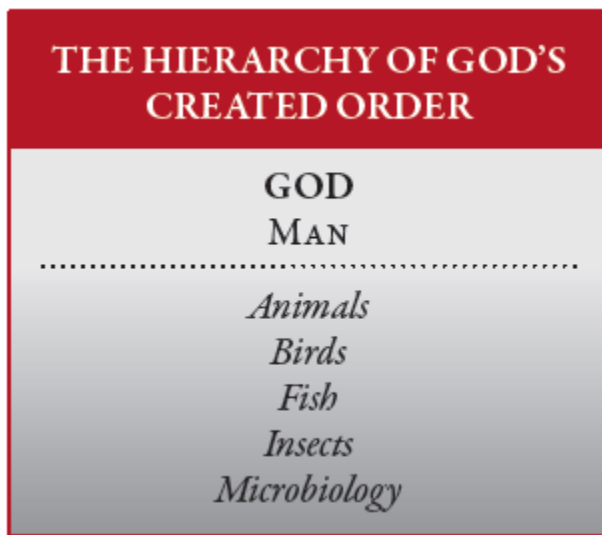
What kind of Christian theological response does this situation call for? Naturally, one could say this situation calls for Christian theologians to take up the subject and address it in light of the doctrine of creation. This is correct, but in view of the social, economic, and political aspects, the response should be stated more specifically. That is, the Christian teaching of human beings as creatures living within and part of God's creation demands a reflection of this current reality for it affects human understanding of themselves as creatures and their attitude to other creatures and the world as a whole.

As an illustration, consider Drollinger's interpretation of the purpose of creation and human place on it represented by Figure 1. Drollinger's socio-economic-political context leads him to argue that God has placed human beings in a superior position in relation to the rest of creation, which are intended to serve them.²² This perspective separates human creatures from the wider context of creation, placing them as masters over it instead of part of it. As a result, it affects how human creatures relate to one another and creation as a whole, coming to comprehend the planet and its creatures as means for their benefit which God himself created to serve them. In other words, issues faced today influence how Christians live their faith, since the system shaping social relations influences values and priorities of human life and will consequently affect the attitude humans have toward one another and the planet.

This situation affects life in the world in several ways, including religious life. Thus, it presents a topic of crucial importance for Christians, since it also impacts human understanding of the relationship between creatures and the world created by God. Specifically,

²² Drollinger, "Coming to Grips," 4.

Figure 1. The Hierarchy of God's Created Order.



Source: Ralph Drollinger, "Coming to Grips with the Religion of Environmentalism," *Capitol Ministries*, April 2, 2018, 4, accessed June 9, 2018, <http://capmin.org/coming-to-grips-with-the-religion-of-environmentalism/>.

it demands an approach from a perspective that goes deeper into the issues faced today in order to identify what are the causes of such problems. Moreover, it calls Christians and theologians to reflect on how the doctrine of creation is relevant in the face of such issues, promoting and recommending ways to reduce impacts over creatures and the environment.

Nevertheless, Lutheran theology has neither reflected nor addressed ecological issues, even though such a topic relates to fundamental aspects of Lutheran theological tradition such as what it means to be a human being and the relationship human beings have with creation. In fact, Lutherans are neither known by their interaction with the topic nor by interacting with approaches to the topic at hand. To take a case in point, consider publications on theological journals in the Seminaries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil (IELB). Granted that they have addressed the wider topic of creation in a variety of works and themes, such as

homiletic studies,²³ articles on family,²⁴ music,²⁵ and anthropology,²⁶ they have not addressed ecological issues of today in any of their publications and researches.²⁷ The only reflection on current ecological issues published in these journals is a short fragment from another theological journal of Brazil, which exhorts the church to study ecological stewardship.²⁸ Despite the exhortation, none of the journals has published any detailed research or study on the topic. As a result, the material for study of this topic is limited, and it does not reach any deep reflection. For instance, the *Dogmática Cristã*—the Dogmatic text used at the Seminary of IELB, the main source for theological formation—addresses the doctrine of creation but without deep reflection on ecological problems and how they influence the Christian faith and life within creation today. Consequently, there is still a need for Lutheran theology to address this topic from an ecological perspective that considers current problems, and identifies ways by which the doctrine of creation helps Christians to live out their faith within God’s creation in the face of such a situation. The question is how to answer these questions. This thesis wants to contribute to an

²³ Cf. Acir Rayman, “Criação,” *Igreja Luterana* 63, no. 02 (2004): 54–57, accessed October 13, 2017, <http://seminarioconcordia.com.br/seminario/documentos/il/122/IL20042.pdf> and Manfred Zeuch, “Último Domingo do Ano da Igreja,” *Igreja Luterana* 58, no. 1 (June 1999): 127–30, accessed October 16, 2017; <http://seminarioconcordia.com.br/seminario/documentos/il/112/IL19991.pdf>.

²⁴ Cf. Wilson Scholz, “A Bênção em Família,” *Igreja Luterana* 64, no. 2 (November 2005): 5–24, accessed October 13, 2017, <http://seminarioconcordia.com.br/seminario/documentos/il/124/IL20052.pdf> and Martin C. Warth, “A Responsabilidade dos Pais na Educação dos Filhos,” *Igreja Luterana* 50, no. 1 (1991): 22–35, accessed October 16, 2017, <http://seminarioconcordia.com.br/seminario/documentos/il/96/IL19911.pdf>

²⁵ Cf. Raul Blum approaches music as creation and gift of God in his article “Os Paradigmas de Lutero para a Música Sacra,” *Igreja Luterana* 62, no. 1 (June 2003): 5–39, accessed October 13, 2017, <http://seminarioconcordia.com.br/seminario/documentos/il/120/IL20031.pdf>.

²⁶ Anselmo E. Graff, “Falaremos aos Descendentes a Respeito do Poder de Deus’ Salmo 78.4,” *Igreja Luterana* 69, no. 1 (June 2010): 5–21, accessed October 15, 2017, <http://seminarioconcordia.com.br/seminario/documentos/il/205/Revista%20Luterana%202010%20todo%20corrigido.pdf>.

²⁷ This work has considered academic journals published by theological journals of IELB since 1990, from which it analyzed current Lutheran contributions to the topic in Brazil.

²⁸ See Azenilto G. Brito, “Ecologia: Este Tema É Bíblico?” *Igreja Luterana* 49, no. 1 (January/June 1990): 122–24, accessed October 16, 2017, <http://seminarioconcordia.com.br/seminario/documentos/il/94/IL19901.pdf>.

answer.

By contrast, a good number of theologians from both Protestant and Catholic traditions have offered ways to answer this question. Protestant theologians have argued that Christianity is capable of offering and establishing a new cosmological vision, as well as helping in the present ecological issues through this new vision where humans are placed not above other things, but together with them.²⁹ Others also argue that the ecological discourse of the Church needs to be based on an “eco(theo)logical” perspective which comprehends the understanding of Creation that comes from the Scriptures in addition to contributions from the field of ecology in scientific studies.³⁰ In addition, Catholic theologians have argued that, in the face of ecological issues, it is necessary for human beings to acquire an awareness of what surrounds them, assuming a new posture in relation to everything, which will lead to a new ecological covenant between humanity and environment.³¹ Similarly, others have argued that humanity needs a spirituality which is ecologically oriented (called “cosmic spirituality”), where the presence of God’s Spirit in every living being is emphasized.³²

Nonetheless, the most well-known theological voice in Latin America on this topic and for this approach is the Brazilian liberation theologian Leonardo Boff. Recent studies singled out

²⁹ Marcos de Almeida, “A Crise Ecológica e a Teologia de Leonardo Boff: Uma Resposta na Perspectiva da Teologia Evangelical” (master’s thesis, Universidade Presbiteriana Mackenzie, 2008), 148–149, accessed July 3, 2017, <http://tede.mackenzie.br/jspui/handle/tede/2495>.

³⁰ Amelia F. M. Limeira and Maristela O. de Andrade, “Eco(Teo)logia: Discurso Teológico Ambiental x Prática Comunitária Evangélica,” *Desenvolvimento e Meio Ambiente* 28 (July/December 2013): 190, accessed October 26, 2017, <http://dx.doi.org/10.5380/dma.v28i0.30780>.

³¹ Leomar A. Brustolin and Renato F. Machado, “Um Pacto Pela Terra: A Crise Ecológica na Agenda da Teologia,” *Teocomunicação* 38, no. 160 (May/August 2008): 228, accessed October 24, 2017, <http://revistaseletronicas.pucrs.br/teo/ojs/index.php/teo/article/view/4486/3405>.

³² Paulo S. L. Gonçalves and Luis F. Canatta, “O Paradigma da Ecologia na Teologia Contemporânea,” *Cultura Teológica* 16, no. 63 (April/June 2008): 77–96, accessed October 24, 2017, <http://dx.doi.org/10.19176/rct.v0i63.15614>.

Boff as an important source for reflecting about the ecological crisis, and for offering insights to change human beings' posture towards other creatures and the planet as a whole.³³ Specifically, very recent scholarship on Boff's ecological theology is offered in the 2014 doctoral dissertation of Rebecca Meier-Rao. She argues that the strength of his contribution is twofold. On the one hand, by developing a theology that systematically explains the experiential side of Christian spirituality, Boff indicates that life requires a symbolic and sacramental vision in order to see God, the other side of reality, and the willingness to be transformed in its light. On the other hand, she argues that Boff indicates that spirituality authentically lived will have concrete socio-ecological consequences.³⁴

To put it succinctly, Boff emphasizes in his theology the roots for ecological issues of today, offering a deeper perspective on the problems and the system at work that originates them. That is, his analysis presents not only an assessment to ecological issues today but also to the human relationship to creation as a whole, where he observes the system that shapes social relations shapes the way human beings understand themselves in relation to other beings and the environment. As a result, Boff offers unique insights for reflection on how to change the attitude from corrupting and exploiting to an attitude of care, serving and defending creation and its creatures in a new comprehension of life.

One way of answering the question, therefore, is to consider answers already given by theologians on the topic. Accordingly, in light of Lutheran need to reflect and address the topic,

³³ Cf. Antonio Carlos Ribeiro, "Boff: Diálogo com Lutero," *Horizonte* 7, no. 13 (December 2008): 200–215, accessed July 3, 2017, <http://periodicos.pucminas.br/index.php/horizonte/article/view/432/842>. See also Almeida's work, "A Crise Ecológica," 2008, for another example of study emphasizing Boff's relevance.

³⁴ Rebecca A. Meier-Rao, "Love for God and Earth: Ecospirituality in the Theologies of Sallie McFague and Leonardo Boff" (PhD diss., Marquette University, 2014), 285–86, accessed November 18, 2017, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses.

this thesis seeks to analyze the contribution offered by Leonardo Boff on ecological issues, considering possible insights and recommendations that might help Lutheran reflection of the topic in the face of the current situation. Specifically, it proposes to analyze how Boff's theology offers useful contributions to Christians' understanding of life within creation and their attitude towards it.

Conclusion

Despite ecological issues being a reality throughout the world today, they point to a deeper problem that gives origin to the attitude causing all these issues. Consequently, there is a need for a deepened reflection on ecological problems, which consider not only problems such pollution, deforestation, or global warming, but the system guiding human beings to an attitude that results in the destruction of the entire planet.

Considering such need for reflection, Lutheran theology has not addressed ecological issues, thus the need to reflect deeper on such situations in light of the doctrine of creation remains. The question is how to do this. In order to answer this question, this thesis considers other theologians from Christian traditions who have offered contributions to this answer. Among all, Leonardo Boff's ecological theology and framework stand as relevant in the face of current need for a deeper reflection on the problems. Thus, this thesis proposes to approach his theology in order to present ways he contributes to ecological reflection in the face of the reality of the world today. Furthermore, it offers an assessment of his approach while considering recommendations for Lutheran theology in order to answer to the current need of reflecting on ecological issues in light of the doctrine of creation.

CHAPTER TWO

AN INTRODUCTION TO LEONARDO BOFF

Chapter Two presents an introduction to Leonardo Boff, his career, and his theological thought. Despite being one of the major theologians in Latin America and in the world, Lutheran theology is not known for its interaction with the theologian and his theology. Consequently, this Chapter proposes to identify aspects of his life, formation, career, context, relation with the Catholic Church, etc. in order to help understand the evolution of his theology, thus clarifying his theological approach as a whole.

I will begin by offering a short account of Leonardo Boff's life, formation as a Franciscan priest, career as professor, and author of many theological works. Then I will analyze the evolution of his theological thought. For this I will follow Rebecca Meier-Rao's analysis of Boff's theology.¹ She showed that Boff's eco-theology extends his earlier liberation theology, rather than being a distinct theme that shares some concerns and motifs. Accordingly, this Chapter presents Boff's theological development as "a broadening of horizons,"² which ultimately comes to embrace the whole creation, focusing on ecological issues that are affecting social and natural environments.

¹ Meier-Rao, "Love for God and Earth," 148–209.

² Meier-Rao, "Love for God and Earth," 174. Meier-Rao asserts that Boff himself characterizes his theological development as a broadening of horizons.

Life, Formation, and Career

Leonardo Boff was born in December 14, 1938, in the city of Concórdia, located in the state of Santa Catarina, southern Brazil. A descendent of Italian immigrants and the oldest of eleven children, Boff grew up in a context of colonization and under the positive influence of his parents and the work they performed in the community. He writes that his parents helped colonizing new regions in southern Brazil by creating settlements, in which the very first thing they built after their own house was a little church and a school.³ Boff states that his father was the most influential person in his life.⁴ His father had a Jesuit education, and after leaving the Jesuit seminary, he used his education to teach Italian and German immigrants how to speak, read and write Portuguese in meetings of those settlements he helped to build. His father helped not only as teacher, but also as druggist, accountant, and advisor to the people. As the eldest brother, Boff followed his father in all these tasks where he helped the people, and such attitude is regarded by Boff as influential to him for his whole life. As Boff put it, “From him [father] I inherited that internal flame, without which intellectual work turns insipid; the option for the poor, without which our faith is ineffective; and the unquenchable hunger for justice, without which we cease to be human.”⁵

Boff’s formation started with classes of Portuguese given by his father, because, as once he observed, he “spoke hardly anything but Italian” until he was ten. Following his father’s classes, Boff studied in his hometown until 1949, then in the city of Joaçaba also located in Santa Catarina until 1951, and in the same year in the city of Rio Negro, State of Paraná, where he

³ Leonardo Boff, *The Path to Hope: Fragments from a Theologian’s Journey*, trans. Phillip Berryman (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993), 114.

⁴ Boff, *The Path to Hope*, 1.

⁵ Boff, *The Path to Hope*, 2.

started his secondary school in the seminary of São Luis de Tolosa. In 1953, Boff entered the seminary of Santo Antônio, in the city of Agudos, State of São Paulo, where in 1958 he completed his seminary training.

In 1959 he began studies on Franciscan spirituality at the convent of São Francisco de Assis.⁶ Boff went to Curitiba in 1960, where in 1961 he received a graduate degree in philosophy from the Faculdade de Filosofia (Seminário Maior) da Província da Imaculada Conceição. In 1962, he began graduate studies in theology at Faculdade de Teologia dos Franciscanos in Rio de Janeiro. He was ordained a priest in the Franciscan order on December 15, 1964, and received his degree in theology in 1965. Subsequently, from 1965 to 1970, Boff pursued doctorate studies in theology at Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich, Germany, studying under the direction of such well-known theologians of the Catholic Church as Karl Rahner, Leo Scheffczyk, and Heinrich Fries.⁷ During the same period, Boff completed extension courses for his advanced studies in the postgraduate departments of the University of Würzburg, Germany, and Oxford University, England, concentrating on anthropology and linguistic courses. Also in 1970, Boff received a doctorate in philosophy from the Instituto de Filosofia e Ciências Sociais (Institute of Philosophy and Social Sciences) of the Universidade Federal do Rio do Janeiro.⁸

After returning from doctorate studies in Germany, Boff started his career as professor of theology at Instituto Filosófico-Teológico Franciscano in Petrópolis, Rio de Janeiro, where he served in this position until 1991.⁹ In 1993, Boff began to serve as professor of Ethics,

⁶ Almeida, "A Crise Ecológica," 58.

⁷ Meier-Rao, "Love for God and Earth," 149.

⁸ Almeida, "A Crise Ecológica," 59.

⁹ During the same period of time (1970-1991), Boff served as professor simultaneously in other institutions. For example, he served as professor of spiritual theology and Franciscan mind ("franciscanismo") at Centro de Estudos Franciscanos e Pastorais para a América Latina from 1970 to 1980, and as professor of theology at Centro

Philosophy of Religion, and Philosophy of Ecology at Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, remaining in the position until 2001, when he became professor emeritus of this institution, a position in which he remains until the present day. Furthermore, Boff served as invited professor in several universities around the world, from which we highlight his presence as professor at the University of Lund, Sweden, in 1991; Harvard University, United States, in 1996; and at Heidelberg University, Germany, in 2001.¹⁰

Leonardo Boff has received wide recognition for this work. In 1985, Boff received the Herbert Haag Prize for Freedom of the Church in Luzern, Switzerland. In 1987, the Alfonso Comin Foundation and the city hall of Barcelona awarded Boff with the Alfonso Comin International Prize for his community and human rights work for the sake of the poor. He was also rewarded for his books, such as the Religious Book of the Year in United States with *Passion of Christ, Passion of the World*, in 1987, and the Sérgio Buarque de Holanda Award in Brazil with his book *Ecologia: Grito da Terra, Grito dos Pobres*, in 1994. In addition, Boff received multiple honorary degrees. In 1991, he received an honorary doctorate in politics from the University of Turin, Italy. Then, he received an honorary doctorate in theology from the University of Lund, Sweden, in 1992. More recently, Boff received an honorary doctorate in theology, ecumenism, human rights, ecology, and understanding among peoples from Escola Superior de Teologia (EST), Brazil, in 2008, and an honorary doctorate from Universidad Nacional de Rosario, Argentina, in 2010.¹¹

de Estudos Teológicos e Espirituais in the National Conference of Religious People, located in Rio de Janeiro, from 1975 to 1990. Cf. Almeida, “A Crise Ecológica,” 59.

¹⁰ Almeida, “A Crise Ecológica,” 60–61.

¹¹ “Sobre o autor,” *LeonardoBOFF.com*, accessed March 4, 2018, <https://leonardoboff.wordpress.com/sobre-o-autor/>.

In short, Boff is one of the most influential theologians of the present time. His books are known throughout the globe and have been translated to several languages. His successful career has been awarded with several prizes from different countries and continents. Boff is currently professor emeritus of Ethic, Philosophy of Religion, and Philosophy of Ecology at Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. He still writes and publishes books and articles to the present day.¹²

Evolution of Boff's Theological Thought

According to Rebecca Meier-Rao, Leonardo Boff's theological development is characterized by a broadening of horizons throughout his career.¹³ She observed three major developments in his theological thought. First, as liberal humanist, Boff was concerned with promoting values and making faith intelligible to society. Then, as liberation theologian, he was committed to the oppressed of the world, beginning with the poor in Latin America and moving to the entire creation. His third development thus refers to ecological theology, characterized by a global commitment to the oppressed, both human and nonhuman.

Although each development deals with different concerns, together they present a unified theology. Boff kept certain characteristics of each one, thus not switching from one to another but building up his theology according to situations he was facing at each time and studies he completed in the face of each of them. As a result, these developments do not reflect three different theologies but a single theological thought in process, characterized, once again, by a

¹² For instance, Leonardo Boff continues to write weekly in his blog (<https://leonardoboff.wordpress.com>), and daily through other means such as his Twitter account (<https://twitter.com/LeonardoBoff>), where he interacts with current issues especially related to liberation theology in the contexts of Brazil and Latin America.

¹³ Meier-Rao, "Love for God and Earth," 149–75.

broadening of horizons, which ultimately extend to all creation.¹⁴

Liberal Humanist

Boff's first theological development in his career (1970-75) is characterized by a commitment to make the Christian faith relevant to people in the midst of a secularized world. His concern was to promote Christian values, human dignity, democracy, progress, and justice to society through his early approach after returning from studies in Germany, engaging the common people in a way they may read theology as they read a newspaper.¹⁵

Meier-Rao observed that during this phase of his career Boff relied strongly on the Christology and cosmology of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. Teilhard led Boff to address questions and problems of this period through a perspective characterized by Christ as the "Motor and Omega Point of evolution," who holds the cosmos together and guides evolution forward.¹⁶ In other words, Boff held Christ as the center of history, in whom the eschaton and the Kingdom became already present in the world, and as such, he is the key to understanding the destiny of humankind and the whole of history.¹⁷ Boff also defined his anthropology according to his understanding of Christology. He argued that human destiny is to follow the model found in Christ, so as humanity and divinity meet in the person of Jesus, human beings are to become divine. This, in turn led him to argue for a society that reflects such understanding, suggesting that Christology offers a more humane and just understanding of society, since it comprehends

¹⁴ Meier-Rao, "Love for God and Earth," 174.

¹⁵ Harvey Cox, *The Silencing of Leonardo Boff: The Vatican and the Future of World Christianity* (Oak Park, IL: Meyer Stone Books, 1988), 27.

¹⁶ Meier-Rao, "Love for God and Earth," 154.

¹⁷ Meier-Rao, "Love for God and Earth," 154–55.

human destiny and vocation is divinization. Accordingly, people should live in equity now in society for they already have a future guaranteed in Jesus.¹⁸

This period of his career presents important aspects developed in Boff's theology that remained throughout his career. As Meier-Rao observed, Boff later expanded his thought into liberation theology, but he did not abandon his anthropological comprehension and teleological understanding based on Teilhard's Christology. Instead he assumed them into a more politicized system intended to work for the liberation of the poor in history.¹⁹

Liberation Theology

After his return from Germany, Boff found a situation of strong dictatorship in Latin America. These dictators usually were very dependent on a capitalist form of politics and economics. They ruled with oppression over people and nature in the form of poverty and misery on the one hand, and exploitation of raw materials on the other. This situation led Boff to struggle with his faith and theology very early in his career. In the face of such an oppressive and poor context, he started reflecting on how Christians are to live their faith in the midst of poverty and social injustices.²⁰

Popular movements had begun before Boff's return to Latin America. University students, the labor class, intellectuals, bishops, pastors and large numbers of lay Christians joined in these movements in order to protest against the situation they were facing and promote changes for all people suffering oppression throughout all Latin America. Out of such popular organizations in a

¹⁸ Meier-Rao, "Love for God and Earth," 155.

¹⁹ Meier-Rao, "Love for God and Earth," 155.

²⁰ Boff, *The Path to Hope*, 5.

search for liberation from their oppressive context and their oppressors, liberation theology began. It first made a mark with the publication of *A Theology of Liberation* by Gustavo Gutiérrez in 1971. This theology reflected critically on society and the Church in order to interpret and address them towards liberation in the light of the Word of God.²¹

In this political and economic climate, and encouraged by the will to make Christian faith significant for the people in that context, Boff embraced liberation theology. This move led him towards Karl Marx and St. Francis, who would be his major influences.²² The Marxist commitment to the oppressed helped Boff with the right perspective to recognize that the problems of poverty were structural in societies. Simultaneously, this turn to liberation theology took Boff to a deeper understanding of Franciscan spirituality that had already had a great effect over him during his formation. This guided Boff to understand St. Francis as a liberator himself, who revealed a relationship of brotherhood and sisterhood between all creatures in creation.²³ As a result, his books published during this period emphasize the communion between Franciscan spirituality and the poor, offering a theological approach from the perspective of the oppressed inspired by his engagement with Marxism, thus calling Christians to live as St. Francis in his time and support the liberation of the poor.²⁴

Furthermore, this period of Boff's theological thought also presents changes that came to influence the way he would approach issues from the perspective of liberation theology.

²¹ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Teología de la Libertación* (Salamanca: Sígueme, 2009), 67–72.

²² Meier-Rao, "Love for God and Earth," 159–61.

²³ Meier-Rao, "Love for God and Earth," 160.

²⁴ Meier-Rao points out three works that reflect this: Leonardo Boff, *Saint Francis: A Model for Human Liberation*, trans. John W. Diercksmeier (New York: Crossroad, 1982); *Francisco de Assis. Saudades do Paraíso* (Petrópolis, RJ: Vozes, 1985); and *The Prayer of Saint Francis: A Message of Peace for the World Today*, trans. Phillip Berryman (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2001).

Specifically, Meier-Rao observed that Boff himself identifies three major phases in his development of liberation theology, moving from embracing the liberation of the poor, to all society, then to the planet as a whole.²⁵

First, Boff's concern was to help the Church to engage the poor and support them in their liberation. As a result, his theology turned into a severe critique of the Catholic Church, claiming it had forgotten the true call given by Christ to serve the poor, and instead it had become an institution focused on prestige and earthly powers. This, however, led Boff to receive a silencing order from the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith in 1985.²⁶ Such differences with the Church resulted in Boff leaving the priesthood and the Franciscan order in 1992 after being silenced again and removed from his positions as professor and redactor. Nonetheless, he stated at the time that he would change the course but not the direction.²⁷ In other words, Boff left his vow to the Franciscan order and the Church but not his theological commitment to Franciscan theology and the Church. In fact, he continued to approach Franciscan spirituality and approach issues in order to help the Church engage society and the planet as a whole.

By contrast, in the second and third phases of Boff's liberation theology he expanded his horizon from the Church to all society, and then to creation as a whole, realizing "the real theological problem was not the Church but people, humanity, who are the center of God's salvific project and the ones for whom the Church exists."²⁸ Essentially, this change in Boff's reflection led him to switch from targeting the Church in his approach to attempting to help it to

²⁵ Meier-Rao, "Love for God and Earth," 161.

²⁶ Meier-Rao, "Love for God and Earth," 162–63.

²⁷ Leonardo Boff, "I Changed to Stay the Same: Why I Left the Priesthood," in *Any Room for Christ in Asia?* ed. Leonardo Boff and Virgil Elizondo (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993), 144.

²⁸ Meier-Rao, "Love for God and Earth," 164.

engage society in order to help people with Christian ways to live in society. As a result, he came to argue that Church and society should reflect the Trinity. That is, his anthropology received from Teilhard's theology guided him to claim that human beings exist in connection to all other beings in society just as each of the persons of the Trinity exist in connection to each other.²⁹

Boff's final expansion in his liberation theology horizons embraced issues on ecology and the entire creation. Such expansion committed to reflect upon ways to help others to be human and live in the planet, focusing not on the individual but on ecology and possible contributions to the preservation of the whole creation.³⁰

Ecological Theology

Boff's ecological theology represented his final major development in his theological thought. As with the previous stage of his theology, however, he did not abandon his early approach but expanded it to embrace issues related to ecological crisis and the mystery of creation. Accordingly, Boff's theological thought continued to present a great emphasis on a political commitment to liberation. However, now this commitment was not only for the liberation of the poor in Latin America but of the entire Earth, on which he held the survival of the poor and all creatures depend.³¹

In other words, although Boff did not change his theological thought by broadening his reflection to an ecological perspective of theology, he did add new features to his approach that expanded the commitment to the planet and all creatures living within it. As an illustration, Boff

²⁹ Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society*, trans. Paul Burns (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988), 6–7.

³⁰ Leonardo Boff, *Ecology and Liberation: A New Paradigm*, trans. John Cumming (Maryknoll, NY: 1996), 12.

³¹ Meier-Rao, "Love for God and Earth," 170.

still privileged the poor in his ecological theology, calling them the most threatened creatures in creation.³² Nonetheless, he included aspects that reflect his theological approach in a new dimension, such as his new cosmological view of the universe and a socio-ecological democracy that is taking place in the world.³³ We will explain these topics in detail in the Chapters ahead.

Conclusion

A brief study of Leonardo Boff's career presents him as one of the major theologians both in Latin America and in the world, and his theology as object of study in several theological publications today. Moreover, his career as a theologian shows him as someone committed to help not only the poor but the Church, society, and the planet as a whole in his theology. Accordingly, Boff's theological thought presents an expansion of his perspective, moving from Church to the entire creation, promoting a deeper reflection on current issues and ways by which the Christian faith can be relevant and help people with their struggles of everyday life.³⁴

In short, Boff's theology expands his Franciscan formation with approaches he engages along the way in his career such as Marxism, leading him to a great commitment to the oppressed, and calling Christians and the Church to promote more equality in life for all brothers and sisters in creation. Along the way, he becomes an important leader in ecological issues, accusing attitudes and the system causing harm for the environment, and advocating for socio-politico-economic justice for the entire creation.

³² Leonardo Boff, "Liberation Theology and Ecology: Alternative, Confrontation or Complementarity?," in *Ecology and Poverty: Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, ed. Leonardo Boff and Virgil Elizondo (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993), 73–75.

³³ Boff, *Ecology and Liberation*, 7–90.

³⁴ Boff, *The Path to Hope*, 3.

CHAPTER THREE

BOFF'S EXPOSITION OF THE ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

Chapter Three identifies the major themes in Leonardo Boff's exposition of the contemporary ecological crisis. His contributions in this area arose later in his career. Nonetheless, they stem from concerns and themes that were long part of Boff's theology. In fact, what shapes and directs his specifically ecological theology is his concern for the oppressed, characteristic in his liberation theology. To put it another way, Boff's ecological theology is an expansion of his liberation theology. His concern for the poor widens towards concern for the whole planet, which he understands as oppressed and violated by the same model evident in his liberation theology. This is why Boff identifies the current ecological crisis and the problems with a loss of connections created by an anthropocentric society. Because this self-centeredness promotes social and ecological injustices, Boff denounces this view throughout his work, calling church, society, and humankind to see the effects of such view not as innocent and natural, but unjust and problematic. His specifically ecological theology represents a change in focus rather than a change in direction.

For this reason, Chapter Three begins by presenting Boff's theological perspective, characterized first as denouncing social injustice against the poor, and second, as denouncing the same injustice against the planet as a whole. In addition, I explain that the analysis of such socio-ecological injustice leads Boff to identify an anthropocentric view at work. This anthropocentrism creates and promotes a disruption of the connections between human beings and creation, thus causing an attitude of violence and destruction towards other human and nonhuman creatures, both in society and in nature.

Boff's Theological Perspective

Although very influential in ecological discussions and having contributed with several works on the topic, Leonardo Boff confesses that ecology was not always part of the focus in his liberation theology.¹ In fact, ecology and the “cry of the planet” became part of his approach somewhat later in his career, first with his book *Ecology and Liberation* in 1993 and *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* a couple of years later. Before these publications, Boff's foremost concern was with the cause of the poor in Latin America, and also with developing ways to engage the Church in this liberating call. As presented in the previous Chapter, Boff's development of his theological perspective leads him to expand his horizons, coming to broaden his commitment to liberation in favor not only of the poor in Latin America but of the entire Earth.²

While characterized as expanding horizons, Boff's theological framework remains intact through this expansion of focus, especially his choice to approach and perceive society and the world from the perspective of the oppressed. Moreover, the main influences on his early career continue to shape his ecological theology, especially Francis of Assisi and Marxism as explained in the previous chapter. As a result, what guided Boff to perceive all human beings as brothers and sisters, led him also to see all creatures in creation as brothers and sisters. In the same way, the approach that allowed him to see the problems in society from the perspective of the oppressed, now allowed him to see the same problems affecting nature and oppressing the planet as a whole.³

¹ Cf. Boff, “Liberation Theology and Ecology,” 70.

² Meier-Rao, “Love for God and Earth,” 152–75.

³ Cf. Leonardo Boff, “Social Ecology: Poverty and Misery,” in *Ecotheology: Voices from South and North* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994), 235–47.

Therefore, Boff denounces oppression over people in society and over nature. This becomes a main characteristic of his theology. In addition, he exhorts the Church and society to work towards lifting the oppression of both human and nonhuman life in creation. While he seeks to, liberate and create proper relationships between creatures as brothers and sisters.

The Economic System

Since the beginning of his work in Latin America in the 1970s, after returning from doctoral studies in Germany, Boff's theological approach has consistently aimed to develop ways to present the Christian faith relevant to society. Meier-Rao observes that his approach "tries to promote a society of Christian values, human dignity, democracy, progress and social justice," and thus presents a concern to guide world and humanity towards a society which is just for all.⁴ Consequently, Boff comes to interact with models of economic systems at work in society, which directs him to criticize the oppression present in dominant systems, especially capitalism.

Boff argues the dominant capitalist system prioritizes not only free markets but the production and accumulation of material wealth.⁵ Accordingly, Boff points to inevitable consequences of the means used by this system concerned with the product. One of the consequences of this system is that "everything becomes a product, something with which to make money," and "all human activity is what it produces and is valued in monetary terms."⁶ In other words, Boff argues that capitalism promotes a mechanistic view of everything, which are seen as means of production of material goods, shaping the basis of society, and directing it to

⁴ Meier-Rao, "Love for God and Earth," 153.

⁵ Boff, "Social Ecology," 235.

⁶ Boff, *Ecology and Liberation*, 110.

seek riches and accumulation of wealth.⁷

Consequently, Boff claims that the capitalist system cannot stimulate economic development without producing social exploitation, thus not being able to create wealth without originating poverty and misery.⁸ He observes that the economic system at work produces progress and development of means of production for society through oppression over people, and at the cost of people. In fact, he accuses the capitalist model of production of basing every phase of its action upon the exploitation of people and nature.⁹ He explains that since this system is based on private ownership on the one hand and subordination of labor on the other, it divides society into opposed classes and interests, for in order to increase profits the owners need to lower the wages of the workers, thus producing social inequality.¹⁰

This led Boff to engage Marxism as a critical perspective to denounce problems in a capitalist minded society, which allowed him to perceive the exploitation promoted by the system that favors rich classes and rich nations at the cost of the workers class to have a miserable life and unemployed nations left in the margins. However, this dialogue between Boff and Marxism did not mean he embraced Marxism or socialism, but he saw in them a vehicle to favor the poor and oppressed, since it offered “means of improving the lives of and of achieving greater justice for the oppressed.”¹¹ In other words, Boff engages Marxism as a means to help the oppressed who were already the focus of liberation theology and Boff’s approach. However, he does not consider himself Marxist. Specifically, Boff holds Marxism as “an instrument in the

⁷ Boff, *Ecology and Liberation*, 27.

⁸ Boff, “Social Ecology,” 236.

⁹ Boff, “Social Ecology,” 240.

¹⁰ Boff, *Ecology and Liberation*, 111.

¹¹ Boff, *Ecology and Liberation*, 120.

hands of the oppressed” to identify the exploitation produced by the capitalist system.¹²

Accordingly, Boff accuses capitalism of allowing and promoting ways by which a few accumulate wealth at the expense of the others. This is how this system is oppressive to the poor, for the way it works leads the rich to get rich and stay rich at the expense of the poor.¹³ To put it another way, in order to have access to the benefits of this economic production promoted by the capitalist model, the great majority of the world’s population has to suffer with the lack of minimum conditions, and is reduced to a terrible quality of life. As an illustration, consider the inequality of the economic growth in the world today. According to a report published by OXFAM, 82% of all economic growth in 2017 went to the richest 1% of the world, while the poorest 50% of the population of the world had no increase at all in their economic situation.¹⁴ This worsens the previous report that showed the eight richest people in the world had the same wealth of the poorest half.¹⁵ In fact, the current report reaffirms that the top 1% of the economic pyramid owns more wealth than the other 99%. In other words, the rich get rich and richer at the cost of the poor who do not get any growth and struggle to survive with what they have. For instance, someone earning the minimum monthly wage in Brazil “would have to work 19 years to make the same money a Brazilian from the richest 0.1% of the population makes in one month.”¹⁶

Along the same lines, upper classes tend to receive more benefits from the system itself,

¹² Boff, *Ecology and Liberation*, 120.

¹³ Cf. Boff, “Social Ecology,” 240–42, and Boff, *Ecology and Liberation*, 93–101.

¹⁴ Oxfam, *Reward Work, Not Wealth: Briefing Paper* (Oxford, UK: OXFAM, 2018), 10, https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/file_attachments/bp-reward-work-not-wealth-220118-en.pdf.

¹⁵ Oxfam, *An Economy for the 99%* (Oxford, UK: OXFAM, 2017), 2, <https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/620170/bp-economy-for-99-percent-160117-en.pdf?sequence=1>.

¹⁶ “Brazil: Extreme Inequality in Numbers,” OXFAM, accessed July 13, 2018, <https://oxf.am/2wRZL3p>.

increasing the inequality between rich and poor. Considering Brazil, upper classes pay fewer taxes than poor people, receiving tax exemption up to 70% while the poorest workers receive no more than 9%.¹⁷ This might be the impact of a political system that follows the rules of such dominant logic, since almost half of the Congress elected in 2014 had a wealth of over a million Reals, which is 17 times the medium wealth of Brazilians.¹⁸ In other words, capitalism promotes a system that allows upper classes to entrench themselves as the center of society and the benefits it produces.

Ultimately, Boff claims that the search for unlimited development and progress brought by the capitalist economy has affected society as a whole, including social relations between human beings among themselves. According to him, the dominant capitalist system has developed ways to shape and construct the human mind towards their own individual fortune and satisfaction. He writes,

The capitalist and mercantile systems ... have managed to decide the individual's way of life, the development of the emotions, the way in which an individual relates to his or her neighbors or strangers, a particular mode of love or friendship, and, indeed, the whole gamut of life and death.¹⁹

Essentially, Boff's point is that the capitalist system has shaped human beings and society, as well as how they relate and interact with their environment. Everything becomes an object that the individual can manipulate and transform into a means to get what pleases him. Boff writes, "Other people are seen as strangers and hostage to the fortune or satisfaction of the individual and his or her needs."²⁰ In other words, a form of individualism shapes the relationship and

¹⁷ Oxfam, *A Distância Que Nos Une: Um Retrato das Desigualdades Brasileiras* (São Paulo: OXFAM Brazil, 2017), 46, <https://oxf.am/2yA3M9J>.

¹⁸ Oxfam, *A Distância Que Nos Une*, 70.

¹⁹ Boff, *Ecology and Liberation*, 34.

²⁰ Boff, *Ecology and Liberation*, 35.

interaction of individuals, characterized by antisocial and hostile attitudes that focus only on the need of the individual instead of the great majority. As a result, this model of society represses the actual needs and impulses of human beings, which are originally natural for them, and replaces them for misrepresenting and manipulating false needs focused on unlimited growth and accumulation of wealth, which the system creates in order to serve its own interests and goals.

In short, Boff accuses the system of creating a new empire, ruling over the spheres and shaping the way of life according to a capitalist mentality.

What is actually happening? A new imperialism! I state this without apology. We are witnessing a new empire of the type of rationalism, of development and the meaning of existence conceived in the belly of the merchant classes at the beginning of the modern era, and now disseminated throughout the world.²¹

Essentially, Boff's point is that a capitalist system has been ruling not only the economic sphere but all other spheres as well, creating a meaning of existence directed to an ideal of progress and material development, which gives shape to life in creation as it is today.

Accordingly, Boff insists on the need to go deeper into the ecological issues faced today in order to analyze what is causing these problems. He suggests that current issues point to a deeper problem, which comes from the ruling system at work, shaping economic, political, social, religious, and vocational understanding of life in creation. Hence, ecological studies ought to include these areas in their reflection of the issues faced today, considering how these areas influence human relationships with creation.

Therefore, Boff shows that the problem is in the whole system, which affects society, economy, politics, religion, and vocation, found currently connected to each other and influencing each other toward the same objective imposed by the system that shapes them.

²¹ Boff, *Ecology and Liberation*, 101.

Naturally, Boff points out this system affects human relationships to creation, since these areas form the current way of living as being human.

Consequently, such a model of society promoted by a capitalist economy impacts social environment and arrangements, and by extension over nature and the whole planet. That is, it separates human beings from the environment, both social and natural. Boff suggests that there is a rupture in the connection between human beings and other beings in creation, leading them to act without considering what might happen to their brothers and sisters. As a result, two forms of injustice have taken place. On the one hand, there is a social injustice at work, which separates human beings from other human beings in society, destroying social relations and causing problems such as poverty and misery. On the other hand, ecological injustice separates human beings from the natural environment, leading them to violate and exploit nature and planet as a whole.²² We should consider both kinds of injustice more closely.

Social Injustice

Throughout his career and publications as a theologian both in Latin America and around the world, social injustice (especially poverty) received great attention in Boff's theology. Meier-Rao reports that Boff's experience when getting back from his studies in Germany was one of poverty and misery in Brazil, which was facing times of dictatorship domination and a capitalist system based on exploitation of raw materials and human labor. Such context led him to shape his liberation theology around a concern to propagate Christian praxis as of and for the oppressed, of which the most affected was the poor.²³ In keeping with his appropriation of

²² Boff, *Ecology and Liberation*, 27

²³ Meier-Rao, "Love for God and Earth," 156–59.

Marxism, Boff focuses on those oppressed by the system and living without the minimal necessities for a dignified life, sentenced to live in misery and die before their time.

In light of such a perspective, Boff assumed the cause of denouncing social injustice at work in Latin America. In fact, this aspect of his theology remained the same throughout his career, even though this theology expanded such a cause to embrace the planet as a whole. Actually, multiple times in his works Boff claims that the starting point for an ecological discourse needs to be “the most threatened beings in creation,” which according to him are the poor.²⁴ Accordingly, this framework leads him to argue that the model of life created by the capitalist system resulted in an unequal society that exploits workers and deteriorates the quality of life of the great majority of the world’s population. For instance, Boff reports that four-fifths of the world’s population suffers with cold, hunger, and all sorts of deprivation, condemned to an early death, while the other small portion of the human population have access to and expend more than eighty percent of the wealth and production offered by this model of development and progress at work today.²⁵

Consider also the example of Latin America colonization in the sixteenth century given by Boff. He explains that the economic system shaped and oriented by a search for unlimited material development led to past and present inequality between capital and work in society, favoring the wealthy at the cost of the poor, who received the worst lands to work and live. As an illustration, Boff recalls the end of slavery in Brazil, when slaves were freed from their masters and thrown into the poorest town areas, forced to occupy the hills and to survive without the

²⁴ Leonardo Boff, “The Most Threatened Beings in Creation: The Poor,” in *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, trans. Phillip Berryman (New York: Orbis, 1997), chap. 5. Kindle.

²⁵ Boff, “Liberation Theology and Ecology,” 73–74.

minimum assistance from the government or compensation for their work in the big houses of slave masters.²⁶ This is the background of current poverty existing in the *favelas*, as the neighborhoods formed in these hills are known nowadays in Brazil, which present the same reality of their beginning, since the people living there have no basic conditions for health care, security, etc.

Accordingly, Boff emphasizes poverty and misery, along with the poor who suffer their consequences, as clear examples of effects caused by the current model of society. Since only a few groups have access to the wealth this economic system produces, the majority of humankind becomes nothing but a resource for the wealthy, condemned to live in poor conditions and forced to explore and violate the environment that surrounds them in order to survive in the midst of such exploitation.²⁷ To put it another way, the system produces poverty and misery while producing wealth and material resources, leaving billions suffering with deplorable conditions in order for a few who have conditions and access to these benefits to have a good life out of the consumption of such economic production.

Therefore, the poor occupy the first and most important emphasis in Boff's theology. By the perspective that comes from the oppressed, and through the engagement with Marxism, Boff came to denounce problems in societies, even those looking just fine from the perspective of the wealthy. Furthermore, he insisted that such oppression upon the poor is not natural and should not be happening, and thus should be denounced as produced by the system, calling for justice on behalf of those exploited and impoverished.²⁸ Consequently, he emphasized throughout his

²⁶ Boff, "Social Ecology," 241.

²⁷ Boff, *Ecology and Liberation*, 21.

²⁸ Boff, "Liberation Theology and Ecology," 72.

theological career the need to embrace the cause of the poor and to promote social justice.

Ecological Injustice

Boff's concern for the ecological crisis and the mystery of creation appeared later in his career as a further widening of his theological horizons. Meier-Rao observes that this took place around 1986 due to a deeper emersion in Franciscan spirituality along with contemporary science.²⁹ In fact, Boff himself confesses that his enthusiasm was first for the Franciscan order, and from that he went further to embrace church, people, then the poor, to humankind, until it expanded to the mystery of creation.³⁰

As a result, Boff's theology becomes a work for justice not only for the human poor but also for the whole planet. That is, by expanding his theology to embrace the entire Earth, Boff comes to see that just as the capitalist system cannot stimulate economic development without shaping social relations and producing social exploitation, it cannot produce the progress and the wealth it seeks without oppressing and ravaging natural environment and its creatures. In fact, he stresses that what is most abundant in modern society as result of the economic system at work is production of "garbage, toxic and radioactive wastes, atmospheric contamination, acid rain, deterioration of the ozone layer, poisoning the land, water and air — all adding up to a deterioration of the quality of life."³¹ In other words, Boff's ecological theology comes to argue that the economic system has reduced not only human beings to a status of mere resources or materials at the disposal of progress and economic development but also all of nature and the

²⁹ Meier-Rao, "Love for God and Earth," 168.

³⁰ Boff, *The Path to Hope*, 3.

³¹ Boff, "Social Ecology," 237.

planet as a whole. Accordingly, he emphasizes that this kind of economics has an impact over relations not only between human beings and society, but also on the relations between human beings and the environment as a whole.

Most importantly, Boff observes that humankind came to regard themselves over their own kind and over nature, as if they were outside creation. Such understanding brought problems to human relationship with creation, leading human beings to disregard nature's intrinsic value and consider it only valuable while they can use find a way to use it for their benefit.³² As a result, human beings find themselves in a path of constant ecological injustice, practicing violence against water, air, ozone layer, and ultimately against the planet as a whole.³³

By extension, the effects of such a relationship with creation have produced, and indeed still produce, irreversible impacts on nature. Boff asserts that issues such as desertification, deforestation of half of the world's forests, and global warming, are all disastrous consequences of the current violence for the sake of progress and prosperity, as well as widespread social inequities in the planet, causing perversity on society and the biosphere.³⁴

Ultimately, therefore, Boff's theology expands from society and oppression over poor human beings to the planet as a whole, embracing concerns affecting the entire creation. Such perspective allows Boff to denounce that the same model that causes social perversity also causes ecological perversity. This injustice over society and the natural environment disrespects the right belonging to all beings in creation, both human and nonhuman. Accordingly, Boff claims such model is neither innocent nor natural, but consequence of a misunderstanding of life

³² Leonardo Boff, *A Terra na Palma da Mão: Uma Nova Visão do Planeta e da Humanidade* (Petrópolis, RJ: Vozes, 2016), 21–22.

³³ Boff, "Social Ecology," 243.

³⁴ Boff, "The Earth Is Ill," in *Cry of the Earth*, chap. 1.

in creation.

Anthropocentrism: Loss of Connection

From the perspective of the oppressed both in society and in nature, Boff's assessment to today's situation came to expose a deeper problem behind current reality in the world: the existence of an anthropocentric view that destroys the connection between creatures within the wider creation. That is, Boff argues that an anthropocentric understanding is shaping the human relationship with creation by placing them *apart* from nature and from the planetary community, which has led them not to consider themselves members who belong to the great whole of creation.³⁵

Accordingly, Boff believes the current situation of the world reveals the current state of the human mind. If the world shows signs of illness, this is also a sign that human mentality is ill.³⁶ Violence and aggression against the environment and its creatures, such as atmospheric pollution, soil contamination, poverty and misery around the globe, etc., come from a deeper problem originated by a problematic understanding of human beings among creation, which results in a disequilibrium of relations within the planet as a whole.

Boff explains that human beings attach value to everything that exists in the world, and they act according to such value and understanding of themselves in relation to it. Consequently, this becomes the basis for their relationship with all things, which will shape their attitude in each relationship with the rest of creation. As an illustration, Boff argues that aggressions against nature and the will to dominate everything and use everything for their own benefit exist because

³⁵ Boff, "Radical or Deep Ecology: Crisis of the Spirit," in *Cry of the Earth*, chap. 1.

³⁶ Boff, *Ecology and Liberation*, 32.

visions, archetypes, and emotions that lead to such exploitation and violence are at work within the human mind.³⁷ In other words, human attitude in relation to other beings and the rest of the planet reflects the relationship human beings have with all things first in their mind.

This framework leads Boff to reflect upon what shapes human understanding of themselves and the relationship with all creation. After all, what does it mean to be a human being in today's society? What is the ethical principle that influences and shapes human relationship with all of the planet and its creatures? According to Boff, the current answer to these questions is a dominant utilitarian and anthropocentric ethic.³⁸

This understanding believes that human beings are the crown and the center of the universe, and considers nature and all creatures as means for humankind to use in order to satisfy their needs, according to their desires and preferences.³⁹ As a result, Boff points out that this conviction has shaped the human relationship with creation, ignoring the value of other things and beings in creation, directing humankind to an attitude of violence and domination over other human beings and over nature. He writes,

[Anthropocentrism] denies the subjectivity of other peoples, justice, classes, and the intrinsic value of certain other living creatures in nature. It does not understand that rights do not belong only to humankind and to nations, but also to other beings in creation. There is a human and social right, but there is also an ecological and cosmic right.⁴⁰

In other words, Boff is arguing that the anthropocentric model disregards the right to exist of other beings in creation. Furthermore, he believes this view is at the heart of human relationship to creation, and consequently at work on the current model of society. As a result, human beings

³⁷ Boff, "Mental Ecology: Nature Is Inside Us," in *Cry of the Earth*, chap. 1.

³⁸ Boff, *Ecology and Liberation*, 29.

³⁹ Boff, "Ecological Ethics: Responsibility for the Planet," in *Cry of the Earth*, chap. 1.

⁴⁰ Boff, *Ecology and Liberation*, 30.

relate to creation as if they were not *alongside* it anymore, but *above* and *over* it, leading them to understand everything in the planet as means and tools to use for their own enjoyment.⁴¹

Consequently, the same logic shapes and gives direction to the model of society at work today. That is, the current model of life prioritizes accumulation of material wealth, goods, and services in order to enjoy life on the planet, leading human beings to strive for individual advancement at the cost of human and nonhuman life.⁴² In other words, everything becomes an instrument, reduced to the level of means to an end: nature becomes the provider for natural resources or raw materials, and human beings become the means for production of such materials, seen ultimately as human resources.⁴³

Ultimately, Boff denounces throughout his works the existence of an anthropocentric view of human relationship with the world and other creatures, which promotes the assault, aggression, plunder and exclusion of nature, both human and nonhuman. Such relationship, according to Boff, originates socio-economic and political systems that produce violence against peoples, nations, and classes, and cause hunger, disease, and affect both humankind and the planet as a whole.⁴⁴

Conclusion

Leonardo Boff's theology presents what Meier-Rao calls a broadening of horizons: from promoting ways to present the Christian faith as relevant to modern society, and expanding to the cause of the oppressed in society, to ultimately widening his theology to embrace the whole

⁴¹ Boff, "The Earth Is Ill," in *Cry of the Earth*, chap. 1.

⁴² Boff, "The Earth Is Ill," in *Cry of the Earth*, chap. 1.

⁴³ Boff, *Ecology and Liberation*, 24–25.

⁴⁴ Boff, *Ecology and Liberation*, 27.

creation. Despite such changes, his theology remained approaching faith, life, and world from the perspective of the oppressed, working to expose the injustice at work upon society and the natural environment and promote justice for those suffering the consequences of such a perverse system. Through his analysis of this unjust model of life, Boff comes to perceive a formative view at work shaping the relationship between creatures and creation, especially that of human beings. As a result, he observes an anthropocentric understanding of life before the world, which has caused a disruption of the connection between human creatures and creation, directing them toward a relationship of violence and exploitation of brothers and sisters, both human and nonhuman, in society as well as in nature. Therefore, Boff's theology accuses the socio-ecological injustice present in the world, thus leading him to argue against the structures which promote such perversities. Furthermore, it leads him to develop a new way of understanding life within creation characterized by connection of all its creatures. In the next chapter I will present such a new understanding of creation offered by Boff, and how such understanding shapes the relationship between creatures and the whole creation.

CHAPTER FOUR

SOCIAL-ENVIRONMENTAL ECOLOGY

Chapter Four presents the need for a new cosmology to confront the crisis brought about in part by an anthropocentric capitalist system. This economic and political fact calls for any contemporary theological account of ecology to develop a new understanding of the relationship of human creatures with the rest of creation. In light of his particular criticism against social and ecological injustices, Leonardo Boff develops a new vision of creation, which considers the value and right to exist of every being in the universe, refusing to see the world and its creatures as mere resources. In fact, Boff confronts the disconnection between human creatures and the rest of creation at work today and claims that all things and beings are to be seen in connection with one another, forming a single entity, a single cosmological community.

Ultimately, Boff is concerned with the human relationship with creation. He rejects the current understanding, which comprehends human beings to be outside of or apart from creation. On the contrary, he advocates for a new cosmology which brings humankind back to creation, urging them to perceive themselves as part of a single universe together with all other created beings, and calling them to a new relationship with creation. A new ethic also must flow from a new vision, which presents human beings as beings with responsibilities to the rest of creation instead of freedom to use everything as they desire.

This responsibility is to shape the new relationship between human creatures and creation, directing them to a new attitude towards the world characterized by caring and serving brothers and sisters in creation. Boff argues the need for this relationship of responsibility to be not only

social but ecological. Since human action affects social and ecological relations, this new relationship directs human beings to care for their neighbor both in society and in the natural environment, acting as caretakers and seeking to preserve all life in the universe. Essentially, Boff is advocating for a social-environmental ecology.

In this chapter, I begin by identifying the theological framework used by Boff to analyze and assess the current understanding of life in creation and also to offer a new comprehension of human beings and the universe. Then, I explain how this framework leads Boff to support a new cosmology which contrasts with the capitalist-anthropocentric model. Specifically, it allows him to claim that humankind is part of a larger creation, called to a relationship of responsibility in relation to it. In the end, I present Boff's eco-spirituality, characterized by the idea of a "Christian Panentheism," which, he argues, should guide humankind towards reverence and respect to the world.

Boff's Ecological Framework

Confronting an ecological crisis affecting both human and nonhuman life, Leonardo Boff's ecological theology advocates for the liberation of the entire Earth, expanding his early commitment for liberation of the human poor to embrace the entire creation.¹ This approach is characterized by a holistic view of the universe, which connects everything and promotes justice and the common good for all its members.

The origins of this approach can be traced back to Teilhard de Chardin's cosmological theology, along with Boff's Franciscan background and his engagement with Marxism. These influenced Boff in his development of a new view of the universe, leading him to suggest and

¹ Meier-Rao, "Love for God and Earth," 170.

believe that creation is moving toward a new world marked by communion and love between creatures and the planet.² Accordingly, he claims that a new understanding of creation is emerging in response to the crisis, which character opposes the currently dominant capitalist system.

[It] is holistic, systemic, inclusive, panrelational and spiritual. It understands the universe not as a thing or a juxtaposition of things and objects, but as a subject through whom everything connects with everything, in every point, in every circumstance, and in every direction, creating an immense cosmological solidarity.³

Accordingly, he urges for a new relationship between creatures and the whole planet, based on justice and respect for nature and all living beings, especially of compassion from human beings to themselves and to the rest of the planetary community.

Ultimately, Boff's theological framework emphasizes a cosmological understanding that comes from Teilhard de Chardin along with his Franciscan spirituality. This has led him to comprehend creation as a unified entity formed by a planetary community where all living beings are brothers and sisters.⁴ In addition, in keeping his engagement with Marxism, Boff advocates for a society shaped by this global conscience of a cosmological community of brothers and sisters, which he characterizes as just for the planet as a whole, and seeks the common good for all beings in creation.⁵ In sum, Boff believes a new relationship of union and communion between all creatures will certify peace and integrity to creation, and the universe

² Meier-Rao, "Love for God and Earth," 170. Meier-Rao explained that Boff engages Teilhard's work since early in his theological formation, and she argues that his influence on Boff's theology is evident especially on his understanding of Christology and teleological understanding of history. Accordingly, the later reflects on the present exposition of Boff's understanding of a new cosmology. See Meier-Rao, "Love for God and Earth," 154 note 19.

³ "[Ele] é holístico, sistêmico, inclusivo, panrelacional e espiritual. Entende o universo não como uma coisa ou justaposição de coisas e objetos, mas como um sujeito no qual tudo tem a ver com tudo, em todos os pontos, em todas as circunstâncias e em todas as direções, gerando uma imensa solidariedade cósmica." Cf. Leonardo Boff, *Cuidar da Terra, Proteger a Vida* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2010), 242.

⁴ Cf. Boff, *Ecology and Liberation*, 152.

⁵ Boff, *Ecology and Liberation*, 120.

will move toward a new reality, which he often relates to what Teilhard de Chardin called *noosphere*. He refers to *noosphere* as a new reality characterized by love, care, and communion between all living beings on the planet, where all creatures are related to each other “at all points and at all times,” caring for each other so that all have what is necessary for life in creation.⁶ Therefore, Boff uses this framework to assess the crisis at work and to suggest a new ecological understanding of the universe, human beings, and society.

A New Cosmology

In line with an outlook informed by Marxist thought, Boff claims that the model of society and understanding of human life created by the capitalist system is facing a crisis. His basic diagnosis is that the capitalist logic, focused on progress and development, relies upon an idea of “two infinities”: the infinity of Earth’s resources, and the infinity of the future.⁷ In other words, Boff’s basic criticism of the current system of thinking lies in challenging two basic assumptions: that the planet had an infinity of resources, and that humankind could move toward a future of unlimited progress. He argues that both infinities are illusions. He explains that current studies report that Earth’s resources have a limit, and not all of these resources are renewable.⁸ Furthermore, Boff believes there will not be a future if the assaults to Earth and everything on it continue. Consequently, he suggests the current model of society faces a crisis which itself cannot offer any solution, since its sole focus continues to be the accumulation of

⁶ Boff explains *noosphere* as the sphere where “minds and hearts together in solidarity, love and care toward the Common Home, the Earth.” Boff, *A Terra na Palma da Mão*, 126. This appears in several other works of Boff, especially when developing the new cosmology and the relationship of connectedness between all things and beings in the universe. See, for instance, Boff, “The Ecological Age,” in *Cry of the Earth*, chap. 5, and Leonardo Boff, *A Opção-Terra: A Solução para a Terra Não Cai do Céu* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2009), 41.

⁷ Boff, *A Opção-Terra*, 73–75.

⁸ Boff, *A Opção-Terra*, 73.

wealth and material production.⁹

In addition, Boff claims this capitalist system has led human beings to understand themselves as separated from and standing over nature and all beings. He maintains that this system has exploited and violated the planet and all its creatures for the sake of accumulation of wealth and their own satisfaction. That is, it shaped the relationship of human beings not only with each other but also with the rest of creation and the way they live within it, promoting social and ecological injustices Boff denounces throughout his theological career, such as poverty, deforestation, air, water, and soil pollution. This, according to him, is unnatural and corrupts the original responsibility given to humankind, which is to care for and promote all life in creation.¹⁰ Therefore, he argues, “we have to abandon this system.”¹¹ Actually, Boff believes the moment has come to decide whether to continue with the current model of life and head towards a worldwide cataclysm, or to change the relationship with creation, which considers all beings in the planet in a common destiny.¹² This is why he holds that it is necessary to have a revolution of the human mind,¹³ which will lead to a new understanding of life and society that comprehends the whole at all times and thinks holistically about the world, considering not individual parts but the organic interdependence of all things.¹⁴

This need, according to Boff, calls on the development of a different cosmology. This cosmology must promote a change of relationship with creation, characterized by communion

⁹ Boff, *A Opção-Terra*, 74.

¹⁰ Boff, *Ecology and Liberation*, 46–47.

¹¹ Boff, *Ecology and Liberation*, 124.

¹² Boff, “Civilization against Nature,” in *Cry of the Earth*, chap. 3.

¹³ Boff, *Ecology and Liberation*, 36.

¹⁴ Boff, “Ecology: Source of Cosmogogenesis,” in *Cry of the Earth*, chap. 2.

and love between all creatures. This cosmology understands human beings, the planet, and all living beings not as juxtaposed and disunited, but profoundly interrelated, forming an organic whole.¹⁵ Consequently, this new comprehension of creation seeks for justice and the benefit of the entire planetary community, whereas the current dominant system reduces everything to conditions and instruments of happiness and progress at the disposal of a few members of one species. As a result, this cosmology can promote a new relationship between all beings and things in this community, focused on life and preservation of all that exists. Specifically, approaching human understanding of themselves, Boff insists they are to be *alongside* creation and acting *on behalf of* it as members who belong to the larger whole.¹⁶ In fact, he believes this cosmology is evoking on human beings the sense that, along with all beings and things of this planet, they compose a single entity, a unique universe, which “everything is connected with everything else.”¹⁷ He writes,

Such a claim assumes that human beings are not just on the Earth; we are not wayfarers, passengers from somewhere else who belong to other worlds. Far from it. We are sons and daughters of Earth.¹⁸

Boff’s point is to contribute to the perception that all living beings are part of a unique organism, thus reaffirming human beings not only as creatures living in this planet, but beings who belong to and *are* a part of this planet. As an illustration, Boff explains that, as a cell constitutes part of an organ, and each organ constitutes part of a body, each living being is a part that constitutes an ecosystem, and each ecosystem constitutes part of the Earth, which then is part of the Solar System, which constitutes part of the Milky Way, which ultimately constitutes part of the

¹⁵ Boff, *Ecology and Liberation*, 63.

¹⁶ Boff, “Radical or Deep Ecology,” in *Cry of the Earth*, chap. 1.

¹⁷ Boff, *Ecology and Liberation*, 40.

¹⁸ Boff, “The New Perspective,” in *Cry of the Earth*, chap. 1.

Cosmos.¹⁹ Therefore, Boff exhorts a vision of the cosmological community that considers all things and all beings connected into a single universe.

In addition, Boff suggests that this understanding characterizes a relationship of interdependence in creation. He explains that as all beings co-exist and constitute a single universe, they all depend upon each other for their existence, since “the universe is constituted by an immense web of relations in such a way that each being lives by the other, for the other and with the other.”²⁰ This means, according to Boff, that all things and beings have not only the right to exist but they exist in connection with everything, for one depends on the other to continue existing. Accordingly, one species should not act or decide the present and future of the world based only on their benefit, but rather needs to consider all members of the planetary community who exist in connection with them, moving toward justice and the common good for the entire universe.²¹

Ultimately, Boff is calling for a new understanding that comprehends all creatures as part of the same creation together and along with human creatures, regarding one another as brothers and sisters in a common home, which he characterizes in light of Teilhard’s *noosphere*, a reality where respect, reverence, care, and communion shape life in the universe.²² In other words, this understanding leads Boff to support a new way of living before the world, which acknowledges the right to exist of all creation, and demands justice for all cosmological community.

Furthermore, Boff advocates for a new politics. He argues for an expanded sense of

¹⁹ Boff, *A Opção-Terra*, 55.

²⁰ “[...] o universo é constituído por uma imensa teia de relações de tal forma que cada um vive pelo outro, para o outro e com o outro.” Boff, *A Opção-Terra*, 59. Cf. also Leonardo Boff, *Princípio-Terra: A Volta à Terra Como Pátria Comum* (São Paulo: Ática, 1995), 52.

²¹ Boff, *Princípio-Terra*, 79.

²² See Boff, “The Ecological Age,” in *Cry of the Earth*, chap. 5 and Boff, *A Opção-Terra*, 41.

democracy in light of this cosmological view.²³ According to him, since all beings belong to a single and shared home, democracy needs to listen to all members who are part of this universe, and not only be participatory or social but ecological.²⁴ Boff understands democracy as a system that listens to and considers all members in order to make decisions that benefit all of them. Hence, he insists on the need for a democracy that “accepts not only human beings as its components but every part of nature, especially living species.”²⁵ Essentially, Boff is advocating for a democracy that reflects the understanding of a new relationship between all beings and creation, based not on domination but on communion and participation of the whole creation. He concludes, “This is the political demand of an ecological education, if human beings are to live with all other beings, animate and inanimate, as citizens of the same society. This is cosmic ecologico-social democracy.”²⁶

Therefore, Boff claims that a new understanding of the universe needs to shape a new relationship between all brothers and sisters who are part of this planet. Moreover, he holds this relationship presents responsibilities for human creatures, which are to take place and originates a new form of living in communion along with all creation. Consequently, this leads Boff to call for a different understanding of democracy, which directs humankind towards a relation of care with the whole creation, corroborating to a more equalitarian way of life, which benefits and promotes life for all members of the universe.

²³ Boff addresses different forms and understandings of democracy in *Ecology and Liberation*, 82–84. In addition, he stresses his understanding of a new democracy on the following pages. Cf. Boff, *Ecology and Liberation*, 84–90.

²⁴ Boff, *Ecology and Liberation*, 84.

²⁵ Boff, *Ecology and Liberation*, 89.

²⁶ Boff, *Ecology and Liberation*, 90.

Humankind: Sons and Daughters of Earth

Boff's cosmology has specific implications for anthropology. In line with the long-standing Christian theological tradition, Leonardo Boff acknowledges that human beings have a special place and role within creation as members of the planetary community. However, he stresses their place to be neither above nor outside but *on* Earth, which is their home to cultivate with loving care and to guard with all their hearts.²⁷ In fact, he calls human beings "sons and daughters of Earth," and as such, he reaffirms that human beings have indeed a special place within the universe. Nonetheless, Boff insists this place is not at the top of creation but behind and at the end of creation, serving as responsible creatures in order to till and keep it.²⁸

Boff elaborates this view in economic and political terms. His understanding of what it means to be a human being in creation confronts the current capitalist understanding, presenting human creatures in connection to and responsible for others and the planet, thus advocating for social relations that promote the benefit of the greater whole instead of a few individuals at the cost of the majority. Boff argues insistently for a relationship between human beings and creation that is not of kingship or lordship but *responsibility*. He holds that human beings have responsibilities in relation to creation which are not of freedom to decide the fate of every living being according to their will or own benefit, but of responsible creatures which they can only fulfill by living, laboring and caring for creation, helping it in order to be fulfilled.²⁹ He writes,

The human being is no longer to be conceived as something over and above reality, indeed as dominating it, but is to be seen as a part of reality, as a participant in a whole, who has to preserve and respect the complexity and variety of that whole.³⁰

²⁷ Boff, *Ecology and Liberation*, 54.

²⁸ Boff, *Ecology and Liberation*, 46.

²⁹ Boff, *Ecology and Liberation*, 46.

³⁰ Boff, *Ecology and Liberation*, 64.

Essentially, Boff insists that human beings must understand they are Earth itself, and they live in the midst of other sons and daughters of this planet, connected to all of them, along with whom they constitute a single community. To put it succinctly, they are creatures who together with other creatures make up a single creation.³¹ Accordingly, Boff calls them to live in light of this comprehension of the universe, moving into a new relationship of care and communion, which seeks the common good for all brothers and sisters that are part of a single creation.³²

Ultimately, Boff believes that human beings are creatures capable of assuming responsibility that goes beyond their own interests, choosing not to destroy and exploit creation but to be responsible for its preservation, promoting all forms of life. In fact, he explains such responsibility as caretakers who are to cultivate and help the whole creation to improve and multiply.³³ In other words, Boff believes human beings may become responsible creatures whose task is to care for the world and all other creatures, both human and nonhuman, both in social and natural environments, for all creatures together with humankind constitute a single creation.

Social-Environmental Responsibility

As a result, Boff comes to advocate for an understanding of human relationship with creation characterized by a social-environmental responsibility, confronting the dominant model of society that produced injustice to creation as a whole in the form of destruction of ecosystems, exhaustion of the biosphere, and aggression against people.³⁴ In fact, he accuses the capitalist-anthropocentric system of shaping current human relationship towards creation, causing social

³¹ See, for example, Boff, *A Terra na Palma da Mão*, 47–50.

³² Boff, *A Opção-Terra*, 62–63.

³³ Boff, *Ecology and Liberation*, 86–87.

³⁴ Boff, *Ecology and Liberation*, 85.

and ecological disequilibrium. By contrast, Boff urges the need for a new model of society, which shapes human relation with creation as caretakers whose responsibility is to preserve and promote life, arguing for the common good both in nature and in society. As Boff puts it, “the challenge is to make people see one another as members of a great earthy family together with other species and find their way back to the community of other living beings, the planetary and cosmic community.”³⁵

In short, Boff is arguing that the understanding of society shapes social relations, which then affect society and the planet as a whole. Since human beings are part of society, they consequently become part of a relationship with other human and nonhuman creatures, since their attitude in and as society affect others in both social and natural environments. Accordingly, Boff calls human beings to a responsibility as caretakers. That is, “human beings must become accustomed to solidarity as a fundamental virtue and find their place in the ecological equilibrium, in the sense of being able to produce and reproduce their life and the life of all living beings and to help preserve the natural balance.”³⁶ In other words, Boff believes that to be a human being means to be a creature connected to society and the natural environment, whose actions affect life in the planet as a whole, thus called to be part of a relationship of responsibility with creation.

Therefore, Boff holds that the human relationship with creation presents a twofold *calling*. On the one hand, it calls human beings to serve and care for their fellow creatures in society. On the other hand, it calls them to be responsible toward the natural environment, since human action extends over nonhuman creatures outside society.

³⁵ Boff, “Liberation Theology and Ecology,” 75.

³⁶ Boff, “Social Ecology,” 242.

Social Call

Boff claims that human relationship with creation has a *social* aspect. He explains that human beings exist in connection and together with other human beings in society, thus their model of life and attitude in social contexts affect society and its members. Specifically, Boff draws attention to the impacts caused by the current system, reflected in all sorts of social injustices throughout the world. He deplores the tendency of the capitalist system to consider the benefit of a few groups at the cost of other human beings and the whole creation, disregarding their right to exist and to be part of the society, as the connection between all beings in creation. By contrast, Boff understands human beings in connection to each other and to all beings in creation, calling them to a relationship of responsibility towards one another, who are to advocate for a model of society that considers all citizens regardless of their differences.³⁷ In fact, human beings are to help promote this new society, assuming their calling to care and serve those around them in social contexts, advocating for justice to all of the planetary community so all creation may have a dignified life.

To put it succinctly, Boff is claiming for a new relationship between humankind and creation characterized by human responsibility toward all living beings, which will shape society into a new form of democracy.³⁸ He believes this new society will not reduce creation to mere resources or means to progress and development, but will take into account ways to preserve its integrity, assuring the safeguard of all forms of life, beginning with the most threatened.³⁹ In other words, Boff claims this understanding of a unified universe will lead human beings toward

³⁷ Boff, *Ecology and Liberation*, 83–84.

³⁸ See note 14 of this Chapter.

³⁹ Boff, *Ecology and Liberation*, 85.

a new relationship of harmony with themselves, perceiving their place alongside one another as creatures who are part of a single creation, called to live in society with human brothers and sisters.⁴⁰ Moreover, since he understands humans to be part of a society whose actions affect other human beings around them, Boff emphasizes that human beings need to consider the responsibility this presents. Accordingly, he exhorts them to understand themselves together with all other human beings, exercising such responsibility by serving and caring for those in need, and seeking to recover the original meaning of democracy, considering the common good that extends to all humankind.

Specifically, Boff pleads with human beings to hear the calling to care for those suffering with hunger, cold, social exclusion, and all sorts of human exploitation, helping them and advocating for a society where they can have the minimum of justice and quality of life.⁴¹ In other words, he emphasizes the need to attend to other human beings oppressed and condemned by social injustice, sentenced to live in misery and die before their time.

Environmental Call

Along the same lines, Boff claims that human relationship with creation has an *environmental* aspect. That is, while human beings are part of society and have a call to serve others in that social context, yet they are also part of the natural environment around them, and therefore have a call to attend in relation to it. He explains that human attitude today in society affects not only social context but the whole ecological environment.

Specifically, Boff believes that the same perverse model that produces social injustice,

⁴⁰ Boff, "Ecology: Source of Cosmogogenesis," in *Cry of the Earth*, chap. 2.

⁴¹ Boff, "Liberation Theology and Ecology," 74.

exploiting human beings in society, also produces ecological injustice, leading to a relationship of depredation and destruction of nature.⁴² In fact, he observes that the capitalist-anthropocentric system has also shaped human relationship with the whole planet, and the damages surpass boundaries of society. As a result, Boff accuses this system of committing ecological injustice in the form of deforestation, global warming, pollution of air, water, and soil, thus urging human beings to also attend to the natural environment, caring and serving nature and its creatures as the neighbor who are in need.

To put it succinctly, Boff is arguing that human relations as part of society extend to the natural environment, and accordingly their responsibilities as caretakers of creation extend to nature and the whole environment. He explains that society interacts with and affects not only social context but natural context as well, thus human beings are to care and serve not only their neighbors in society but in the entire environment around them. By extension, Boff considers democracy as needing to embrace the whole planet, including all components and species of nature as members of this community. He writes that a city, for instance, is not only inhabitants, buildings, roads, etc. but also “trees, water, stones, hills, domestic animals, birds, earth, air, and the stars in the firmament.”⁴³ In other words, Boff supports a society shaped by a democracy that comprehends the whole creation as citizens, connecting human and nonhuman lives both in society and in nature into a single community.

Therefore, Boff observes human relationship with creation as creatures whose actions affect social contexts and the planet as a whole. As a result, he calls them to recognize the responsibility they have toward the whole environment, which presents a calling to serve the

⁴² Boff, “Liberation Theology and Ecology,” 73.

⁴³ Boff, *Ecology and Liberation*, 89.

neighbor in need both in social contexts, but which also extends to all creation. Hence, Boff advocates for a holistic view of human relationship with creation, expanding their calling as creatures called to care and to serve other creatures in need to beyond social context, toward all creatures and the planet as a whole.

Ecosocialism

Boff believes a new system will replace the current dominant capitalist system. According to him, it will shape all social relations into an equalitarian society characterized by a participative democracy, which looks after the preservation of all life, human and nonhuman, both in society and in nature. As a result, this system will promote justice and defend the life of all living beings, whereas the current system promotes an ideal that benefits only economical goals, resulting in social and ecological injustices.

To put it succinctly, Boff supports a system that considers the dreams of socialism and the cry coming from the ecological community. As a result, Boff advocates for an ecosocialist system, even though he acknowledges weakness on the original discourse of Marx and previous failures in protecting ecosystems.⁴⁴ He explains,

First, it matters to clarify which is the basic intuition of socialism. It is to place society and “we” at the center of human preoccupations, and not the individual and the I. This means that the economic project must be at the service of the social and ecologic project of preservation of all life. The economy must submit itself to the

⁴⁴ Boff develops plainly this idea of ecosocialism in his work *Cuidar da Terra*, 263–73. It is important, nevertheless, to clarify again that Boff does not consider himself Marxist, but uses it for the sake of the poor. Just as important, Boff does not embrace Marxism without a critical mind. In fact, he accuses both Capitalism and Socialism of destroying ecosystems. However, Boff explains that Marx did not include the ecological crisis in his analysis, since it was not a reality at the time. According to him, this would have been different in the face of the current situation, for the socialist ideal was to reconcile between human beings with each other and nature. Thus, Boff continues, “there is a true affinity between the original socialism and ecology,” since “both are based on inclusion, and overcoming of all kinds of exploitation.” Boff, *Cuidar da Terra*, 265.

political, and the political to the ethic of solidarity and of participation of the biggest possible number of people.⁴⁵

Essentially, Boff's point is that socialism and ecology have the same goals, which are to end the exploitation of the oppressed and bring reconciliation and preservation to all living creatures.

Thus, ecosocialism needs to shape all spheres of social relations. That is, it needs to give shape to human understanding of themselves and their relationship with creation, guiding them towards an attitude of preservation of all that exists and in favor of all life in the world. In other words, Boff believes this ideal of ecosocialism will consider all creatures as part and members of democracy, emphasizing the dignity of planet and all that exists on it.

Furthermore, Boff holds that such an ecosocialist system will promote peace and communion between all creatures in creation. That is, this new system would direct human beings to move beyond the anthropocentric view brought by the capitalist system, thus overcoming the separation installed between them and rest of creation, creating a new connection in its place, which considers all living beings as brothers and sisters part of a single creation.⁴⁶ In other words, this system considers human beings alongside the rest of creation, and creates a new reality of communion and harmony.

Ultimately, Boff's point in advocating for ecosocialism is to offer a different perspective in the face of the current view offered by the capitalist system. Specifically, the ideal of this ecosocialist system proposes to confront how the dominant system today shapes social areas, proposing justice and dignity to all creation and its creatures, regarding them as valuable

⁴⁵ “Em primeiro lugar, importa deixar claro qual é a intuição básica do socialismo. É colocar a sociedade e o ‘nós’ no centro das preocupações humanas, e não o indivíduo e o eu. Isso significa que o projeto econômico deve estar a serviço do projeto social e do projeto ecológico de sustentação de toda a vida. A economia deve se submeter à política e a política à ética da solidariedade e da participação do maior número possível de pessoas.” Boff, *Cuidar da Terra*, 266.

⁴⁶ Boff, *Cuidar da Terra*, 269.

members of the planet who deserve consideration in the decisions taken in such areas. In other words, ecosocialism is to direct social, economic, political, religious, and vocational relations toward an understanding of the whole creation as part of democracy, since they are brothers and sisters of the same creation.

Therefore, Boff believes ecosocialism can shape the human relationship to creation, presenting human beings together with other creatures in both social and environmental contexts, urging them to care for the neighbor and preserve planet as a whole. This will inaugurate a new way of living in the world, where all creatures care for each other and defend life of the entire creation.

Eco-Spirituality

In addition to a new understanding of the universe and a new relationship between human beings and creation, Boff believes there is also a need for a new *spirituality*. According to him, this spirituality will make it possible for the new vision of the cosmological community to become active and effective in the hearts of human beings, guiding them not to a better way of living the old model of life, but to live a new life of respect and reverence with the entire universe.⁴⁷

Boff suggests that this spirituality will guide human beings to perceive again the presence of the divine in creation. He claims that the current capitalist-anthropocentric model withdrew God from the midst of his own creation and placed the human being as sovereign over it.⁴⁸ As a result, the planet and all creatures came to be perceived as non-spiritual and mere objects for

⁴⁷ Boff, *A Terra na Palma da Mão*, 135.

⁴⁸ Boff, *Ecology and Liberation*, 79.

humans to exploit and do what they desire. Conversely, Boff supports a vision that God is not away from the world but present to and in reality, found profoundly immanent in creation, and becomes transparent through the medium of all created beings.⁴⁹ In other words, he calls human beings to a spirituality that comprehends the Spirit of the Creator as permanently and constantly manifested in the world, who dwells in creation and moves through all things as Lord and giver of life. As he himself puts it, “the Spirit has made the cosmos a temple, the scene of the Spirit’s action and manifestation.”⁵⁰

Since this spirituality urges for an understanding of the universe as the dwelling place of God’s Spirit, Boff emphasizes that no teaching exposes the presence of the Spirit in creation as the concept of Panentheism. According to him, Panentheism distinguishes Creator from creature while maintaining the relation between them, offering a spirituality that connects God with his creatures, and creatures with one another. As he explains:

Not everything is God, but God is in everything, as we may deduce from the etymology of the word panentheism. God flows through all things; God is present in everything and makes of all reality a temple. And then, vice versa, everything is in God. We are only through God, we move only through God, because we are always in God.⁵¹

Essentially, Boff is arguing that Panentheism is the most appropriate form of understanding the universe as part of spirituality, presenting creation and all creatures as dependent of God and carriers of his Spirit within them.⁵²

Ultimately, Boff is advocating for a spirituality which provides an experience of God in the midst of his creation, considering all elements and members of the universe as expressions of his

⁴⁹ Boff, *Ecology and Liberation*, 77.

⁵⁰ Boff, *Ecology and Liberation*, 49.

⁵¹ Boff, *Ecology and Liberation*, 51.

⁵² Boff, “Panentheism: God in All and All in God,” in *Cry of the Earth*, chap. 7.

presence.⁵³ Accordingly, he holds that everything becomes part of a unified system, not random beings or unanimated objects disconnected from each other, but everything becomes spiritual.⁵⁴ In other words, a new spirituality will inaugurate a new covenant with creation and rescue the sacredness of all beings in the universe.

As a result, Boff believes this spirituality will promote and guide human beings into a new relationship with God's creation, based on respect and reverence for all things who bear the presence of the Spirit. After all, he asserts that spirituality is not about *thinking* God but *feeling* his presence *in* and *through* all beings in creation, living in harmony together with all his creatures.⁵⁵ To put it another way, the relationship flowing from this spirituality will confront the current system, promoting justice to human and nonhuman creatures. On the one hand, it will produce social justice, ending the forms of violence and oppression exercised in social relations, and promoting respect and concern for other human beings. On the other hand, it will bring ecological justice through respect and care for nature along with all other creatures within it.⁵⁶

Therefore, Boff proposes a spirituality that brings human beings back from their exile to within the planet where they belong. Likewise, it argues for the recovery of God's presence back into his creation, emphasizing the dwelling of his Spirit in and through all creatures, which directs human beings to move beyond the current attitude of exploitation and abuse into a posture of respect and reverence towards human and nonhuman life.⁵⁷

⁵³ Meier-Rao, "Love for God and Earth," 175–76.

⁵⁴ Boff, *Princípio-Terra*, 72–73. See also Boff, "The Spiritual Depth of the Universe," in *Cry of the Earth*, chap. 1.

⁵⁵ Boff, *A Terra na Palma da Mão*, 46.

⁵⁶ Boff, *Ecology and Liberation*, 77.

⁵⁷ Leonardo Boff, *Toward an Eco-Spirituality*, trans. Robert H. Hopke (New York: Crossroad, 2015), 42. Kindle.

Conclusion

Leonardo Boff assumes a theological framework that leads him to support a new cosmology that confronts the current understanding of creation as mere human and natural resources. Such cosmology restores the place of human beings back within creation and recovers the sense of responsibility towards all sons and daughters of Earth. In other words, Boff is confronting the current understanding of life in society and creation with a new comprehension of human beings and their relation to creation. As a result, Boff calls human beings to promote justice for all beings in creation instead of social and ecological injustices he faced throughout his career.

Ultimately, Boff believes this understanding will shape a new form of democracy, which once again places human beings at the center. However, he holds this central role not as lords and masters over creation, but as caretakers whose responsibilities guide them to ensure the flourishing of all living beings, human and nonhuman, since every form of life constitutes part of creation, thus being valuable and possessing the right to exist and live. Consequently, this understanding presents a responsibility for human beings to care and serve first in society, then in the planet as a whole, for just as the effects of the current model of society go beyond social context, the responsibility also expands to beyond social, towards all beings in creation.

Just as important, Boff believes a new ecological spirituality will tie all this understanding together in the hearts of human beings, leading them towards a new relationship of reverence and respect to all creatures in creation. Boff characterizes this spirituality in light of the concept of Pantheism, calling for a vision of creation that perceives the divine in and through all creatures. As a result, this eco-spirituality will shape human attitude to creation, leading them to live in harmony and advocating for justice to all brothers and sisters.

CHAPTER FIVE

ASSESSMENT AND APPROPRIATION FOR LUTHERAN THEOLOGY

The preceding chapters presented the main positions of Leonardo Boff's ecological theology, traced out their main influences, and noted their importance for Christians today. Chapter Five assesses Boff's ecological theology in view of Lutheran theology and proposes how Lutherans in Brazil and elsewhere should appropriate it.

The most important reason for seeing Boff's theology as important to consider is that he does not only deal with current problems and issues in ecology but also deals with factors usually not related or considered in theological approaches to ecology. Like many others, he recognizes how problems like pollution and climate change call for a Christian theological understanding and response. But unlike many others, he argues that ecological problems mean that theologians must ask whether human relationships to other beings and the world cause all sorts of ecological issues seen today. In other words, Boff seeks to "reframe" the discussion.

The framework used by Boff goes deeper into the subject of ecological issues than usually done by Lutherans in Brazil. This reason alone is enough for concluding his ecological theology is worth considering. But Boff's ecological theology also presents a right and necessary perspective for Lutherans. It is right and necessary because it deals with aspects such as society, politics, and economy that affect and give shape to current attitudes toward the planet. Boff's theology contributes to understanding the human relationship to creation in the context of life in contemporary industrial societies and also to rethinking basic aspects of life as creatures in the context lived today.

Lutheran theology needs to acknowledge that ecological theology should be understood to the extent brought out by Boff's framework, and to consider in ecological theology how factors like politics and economics influence the understanding of human relationship to creation. In fact, I claim that Lutheran theology ought to recognize the relevance of this reflection, since its own theological tradition presents a fundamental emphasis on human beings as creatures living within creation.

Chapter Five thus begins by identifying Boff's main concern as one of the fundamental concerns of the Lutheran Reformation. Then, by briefly presenting the Lutheran traditional answer to this subject, I observe a certain continuity between Boff and Lutheran theology, suggesting a common interest and concern. Since it is necessary to consider ecological issues from a perspective such as the one Boff's theology offers, Chapter Five reflects how this framework might help reflection upon a few aspects of human relationship to creation, offering recommendations and possible appropriations for Lutheran theology.

What It Means to Be Human

Leonardo Boff reflects on many topics in his ecological theology. However, the most basic feature of Boff's ecological theology is that it proposes a different discussion. Boff approaches ecological theology by arguing that it does not ask the right questions, and by seeking to correct this fundamental flaw. For the sake of assessment, then, we must first appreciate that Boff's ecological theology is deliberately unconventional. Boff thinks ecological theology is too often wrong-headed. Therefore, his own contribution should not be assessed first along the lines of other proposals, but rather on its own terms. After this, specific features like his eco-spirituality can be assessed.

What are these terms? Most simply, Boff argues that ecological theology must reflect over

questions of what it means to be human, and of what relationship human beings should have with other creatures and the rest of creation. In other words, Boff contributes to ecological theology in the most basic way through his thoughts on anthropology. As the previous chapters explained, he believes the understanding of the human relationship to creation shapes their relationships and attitudes toward the planet as a whole. Accordingly, Boff urges for reflection of what shapes human understanding of themselves today, and by doing this one might find what is at the heart of the causes for problems and issues in ecology today.

The gravity of ecological problems currently faced in Brazil and throughout the world, and the urgency that many already share to reflect on causes and ways to reduce the impact over the environment as a whole, are impossible to ignore. These two factors are key reasons why Boff's theology and contribution to the topic should not be dismissed. His framework to analyze ecological issues today presents not only a deeper perspective but it is an appropriate one for the current reality. That is because he considers comprehensively the influence and impact social relations have over the attitude towards the planet. News media show that everybody understands the influence of economics, politics, and social structures on the environment. But Boff does more than recognize this influence by presenting an accurate ecological framework. He gives a theological framework for understanding this influence and for leading more responsible lives in creation. Hence, Lutheran theology should appreciate the questions raised and work done by Boff in reflecting over current issues, thus appropriating from it in order to reflect and address ecological issues.

Put another way, Boff's most basic contribution to theological reflection and study on ecology is to argue that ecological reflection must be *about* human creatures, instead of assuming that ecological reflection is only *for* human creatures. He shows that it is not enough to present

ecological problems to people, but that people must be understood as an ecological problem. This does not mean that theological reflection on ecology reduces to theological anthropology, but that theological reflection on ecology requires rethinking anthropology.

A first question of assessment is about his anthropology, and, for this thesis, we should judge it in view of Lutheran theology, especially as presented in the Lutheran Confessions. The first answer is that Boff reflects over a question found at the center of the Reformation theology. Consider the Augsburg Confession.¹ Although the doctrines of God and Christ are essential to the faith confessed by the Reformers and received great attention in the Reformation, the Confession addresses them briefly (Articles I and III) and does not attempt to develop these doctrines further, but rather reaffirms the faith that comes from the ancient councils of the Church.² By contrast, the centrality of their reflection had an anthropological emphasis, which presented their understanding of human life as creatures in relation to God and to the world.³ The Reformation was not advocating for a fuller understanding of God and Christ, but instead for a fuller understanding of what it means for human beings to be creatures before the Creator and his creation. In fact, Robert Kolb and Charles Arand have argued in a recent work that one of the vital elements of all theological reflection for Luther and the Reformers was a theological understanding of what it means to be a human being.⁴

¹ Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 30–105.

² Cf. AC I and III, *The Book of Concord*, 36–39.

³ See for instance AC VI, XVI, and XX. This is even more evident in what might be considered “Part Two” of the Confession. Cf. AC XXII—XXVIII.

⁴ Robert Kolb and Charles P. Arand, “Presuppositions as the Framework of the Wittenberg Way of Practicing Theology,” in the introduction to *The Genius of Luther’s Theology: A Wittenberg Way of Thinking for the Contemporary Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008). Kindle. See also Kolb and Arand, introduction to “Our Theology,” in *The Genius of Luther’s Theology*, pt. 1.

Therefore, Lutheran theology and Leonardo Boff share a similar approach to theological reflection. Kolb and Arand showed that Luther, Melanchthon, and their Wittenberg colleagues understood topics like the image of God, original sin, justification, and sanctification as all “address[ing] questions of the origin and purpose of human life.”⁵ Boff’s ecological theology understands ecological topics in the same way, namely, as addressing questions of the origin and purpose of human life. Furthermore, Boff’s theology offers a current reflection on human beings and their relationship to creation, which is one of the central aspects of Reformation theology. Accordingly, Boff’s approach presents contributions that Lutheran theology should appreciate thoroughly to reflect on human relationships to God’s creation concerning important ecological issues.

A Lutheran Answer

How might Lutheran theology understand and appropriate Boff’s theological method and framework in ecological theology? On the basis of his anthropological approach, Boff’s first claim was about a new cosmology. This cosmology restores the place of human beings as creatures within creation. This cosmology is basic also to the Lutheran theology. The most basic claim Lutheran theology makes about human beings is that they are creatures of God. “I believe that God has made me and all creatures” is how the Small Catechism begins its explanation of the First Article of the Creed. Jaroslav Pelikan claimed that “creature” was the fundamental biblical category about the doctrine of man. According to him, “Whatever else Christian theology may have to say about the nature and destiny of man, it says in the limits described by that category,” and that “The Lutheran Confessions articulate their doctrine of man within this

⁵ Kolb and Arand, introduction to “Our Theology,” in *The Genius of Luther’s Theology*, pt. 1.

fundamental Biblical category.”⁶ Along with the same lines, Oswald Bayer has pointed out how this understanding played a central role in Luther’s anthropology. Bayer showed that the confession of human beings as creatures of God was the starting point of Luther’s theological reflection.⁷ This understanding points to a relationship of complete dependence of the human creature on the Creator, holding that the essence of human existence is relying on God’s activity, who provides life and all necessary for life in every second, being impossible for them to exist not even a second in or of themselves.⁸

Along the same lines, Kolb and Arand remind us that for Luther the summary of the First Article of the Creed is that human beings are creatures. According to them, “we are to perceive ourselves as creatures, and we are to recognize God as the exclusive giver of our lives and the whole context of created reality.”⁹ In short, the reflection of human beings as creatures occupies a central role in Lutheran theology. It characterizes the relationship between Creator and creatures, which is ultimately one in which creatures depend upon the action of the Creator in their favor.

In addition, Lutheran theology recognized that understanding human beings as creatures means considering them accountable to the Creator. Human beings as creatures find themselves living in a world they did not create, which does not belong to them. This means that the way they live and act within creation always makes them accountable to God.¹⁰ Therefore, Lutheran

⁶ Jaroslav Pelikan, “The Doctrine of Creation in Lutheran Confessional Theology,” *Concordia Theological Monthly* 26, no. 8 (August 1955): 569, accessed August 10, 2018, ATLA Religion Database.

⁷ Oswald Bayer, “Being in the Image of God,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 27, no. 1, trans. Mark C. Mattes and Ken Sundet Jones (Spring 2013): 76, accessed April 19, 2018, ATLA Religion Database.

⁸ Bayer, “Being in the Image of God,” 77.

⁹ Kolb and Arand, “The Righteousness of God,” in *The Genius of Luther’s Theology*, chap. 2.

¹⁰ Cf. Charles P. Arand, “Back to the Beginning: Creation Shapes the Entire Story,” *Concordia Journal* 40, no. 2 (Spring 2014): 134–35, accessed December 6, 2017, ATLA Religion Database.

theology presents human creatures in a twofold relationship, living as creatures before their Creator and before creation.

The Lutheran idea of a twofold relationship is something that Boff does not explore in his cosmology. But it is important to the Lutheran theological method and helpful for assessing Boff's ecological theology.

Two Situations

Another way to state this twofold relationship is to say that human beings are relational creatures who live constantly in two situations or dimensions, one before God (*coram Deo*), and the other before creation (*coram mundo*).¹¹ Lutheran theology follows Luther himself and calls this relationship “the two kinds of righteousness.” The two kinds of righteousness help Lutherans to understand and appreciate Boff's anthropology in general and his ecological theology in particular. So, a short explanation is in order.

One kind of righteousness understands human beings living in a “vertical” relationship as creatures before God (*coram Deo*), in which they are completely passive.¹² As his creatures, God is the one responsible to act in this dimension, and human beings are entirely dependent on his action. Specifically, God creates, governs, and redeems his human creatures. That is, he brought human beings into existence through his word, and by his power he sustains and provides his creation with all necessary for life. Furthermore, when human beings become lost by their own fall into sin, God is the one who acts in order to restore his creatures and give them life again. In

¹¹ This theological reflection about human life that God envisioned for them as creatures appears abundantly on Lutheran distinction of the two kinds of righteousness. Cf. Kolb and Arand, “‘Our Theology:’ Luther’s Definition of the Human Creature through ‘Two Kinds of Righteousness,’” in *The Genius of Luther’s Theology*, pt. 1, where they present the two kinds of human righteousness applied to the two situations approached here.

¹² Kolb and Arand, “The Contours of the Two Kinds of Righteousness,” in *The Genius of Luther’s Theology*, chap. 1.

short, human beings are only receivers and perform nothing in their relationship with the Creator.

Therefore, to be a human being before God means to be passive of his activeness. God is the one responsible to maintain and to work salvation for his creatures who are beings unable to do anything or add anything to the Creator's work. In fact, Lutheran theology holds that in the vertical relationship between Creator and creature, God acts all and performs all, provides everything and nourishes everything, while human beings remain dependent and passive of the Creator's work.

On the other hand, Lutheran theology presents human beings living simultaneously a horizontal relationship before creation (*coram mundo*). This is a second kind of righteousness. In contrast with the relationship with the Creator, in this relationship with creation human beings are always active, which places them as creatures who have responsibilities within creation.¹³ In other words, in the horizontal relationship *coram mundo* human beings have a calling to act, serving their fellow creatures and all other things created by God, becoming his instrument to preserve creation and promote its wellbeing. Therefore, to be a human creature before creation means to act and perform all works prepared by the Creator for them towards his creation, serving God and one another as instruments for bringing God's will to his creation.

Along similar lines, Leonardo Boff also addresses human life and relationship as a creature. However, while Lutheran theology distinguishes this relationship into two different situations, one before God and the other before creation, Boff focuses mainly on one situation in his eco-theology, which is the relationship between human beings and creation, and what it means to be human as part of the world they live. In other words, in Lutheran terms, Boff's

¹³ Kolb and Arand, "The Contours of the Two Kinds of Righteousness," in *The Genius of Luther's Theology*, chap. 1.

ecological theology is most basically a development of the second kind of, or horizontal, righteousness.

Boff's emphasis on righteousness *coram mundo* does push discussions of sin and of justification to the margins. This is understandable in a Roman Catholic theologian. In Lutheran terms, Roman Catholic theology generally understands sanctification preceding justification. In other words, justification is "sanative." Lutheran theology has the opposite understanding: sanctification follows justification. Lutherans understand that God's justifying work transforms sinners into saints. This is why Lutherans confess "good works are necessary." This is why Lutherans compare the good works to good fruit falling from a good tree.

How is this relevant for assessing Boff's ecological theology? It means that Lutheran theologians should judge Boff's ecological theology as *incomplete*. Boff's ecological theology is genuinely a liberation theology because it ultimately works out in practice. Lutherans should not fault this feature, but they recognize that human works can be motivated in two ways, not just one. Boff's ecological theology only sees practice coming from considering external factors and motives like rules, expectations, rewards, punishments, needs, desires. In Lutheran terms, Boff seems to understand practice only as motivated by the Law. But Lutheran theology teaches that practice can also be motivated from faith in the heart that trusts in God and seeks to do right by him apart from the Law, that is, apart from external considerations. These are what Lutherans call "good works" or "fruit of the Spirit" (FC VI). Boff's ecological theology has no place for this kind of analysis. In this way, at least, Boff's theology is incomplete.

Lutheran theology should consider taking up the work of making this kind of ecological theology more complete, by working through the two kinds of righteousness and the proper distinction of law and Gospel.

But if we turn our attention specifically to horizontal righteousness, we can see a continuity between Leonardo Boff and Lutheran theology, for both recognize and address the aspect of human life in relation with the created world. Therefore, it is relevant to consider the dialogue between both theologies on more specific matters of ecological theology. Specifically, I analyze possible contributions and recommendations Boff's theology might offer for Lutheran theology reflecting on ecological issues.

Boff on Human Relationship *coram mundo*

The basic premise in Leonardo Boff's ecological theology is that to be human is to be a creature within and part of creation. Based on this premise, Boff argues that we see a relationship between human creatures and all creation, understanding human beings alongside the greater universe, and calls them for a life in connection to fellow creatures in the greater context of creation. Then, with this understanding and calling in mind, Boff identifies social factors that affect how human creatures understand their relationship to creation. He especially focuses on those that distort the proper understanding of this relationship, that is, factors that tend to separate human beings from other creatures and the planet as a whole. This also explains why he advocates for an understanding of human beings as creatures connected to creation, who are part of the planet as a whole.

Accordingly, Boff observes aspects of life usually not considered as part of the reflection on ecological issues, which nonetheless come to contribute to the comprehension of what it means to be human in relation to creation today. He explains that central aspects of life relate to each other and affect directly how human creatures should understand themselves and their relation to other creatures and the planet as a whole, since human beings are right in the middle of all these relations between these aspects. Specifically, Boff analyzes how economic, political,

social, religious, and vocational understanding today relate and connect to each other, thus affecting and shaping human understand of themselves and their relationship with creation.

Consequently, Boff believes that the way one comprehends economics, politics, society, etc. will shape not only each of these spheres individually but the society as a whole and having an impact over the attitude human beings have toward their social and ecological environments. That is, the same system of values and interests that affects and shapes the social world in its political, vocational, and economic aspects, also shapes values and interests in relationship between human creatures and the rest of the world.

This is why Boff claims that ecological problems as usually understood today do not present the entire dimension of the problems in themselves. Instead, we must look to deeper problems found behind or at the roots of such problems as pollution, deforestation, poverty, global warming, etc. In this view, these problems are consequences of deeper problems. Accordingly, his theology goes deeper into ecological issues today by advocating the need to identify what causes these issues in order to find a solution for them.

To this point, Lutheran theology should find no difficulty with Boff's proposal. As noted in Chapter One, Lutheran theologians in Brazil have not explored ecological problems in this way before. This means, however, that they could benefit from guidance or an example for this sort of reflection. Boff gives this to Lutheran theologians.

Ultimately, Boff's analysis identifies capitalism and its anthropocentric disposition toward questions about the human relationship to creation to be at the root of ecological issues today. He argues that social and ecological injustices spread throughout the planet today are consequences of a single system that shapes the comprehension of these spheres and of human relation to creation, causing social and natural disequilibrium. Thus, according to Boff, by shaping and

directing social, economic, political, religious, and vocational spheres, capitalism also shapes and directs the human relationship to creation, replacing their responsibility of caretakers with an idea of progress and accumulation of wealth.

Despite Boff's emphasis on the effects of the capitalist system over the planet, we should also recognize that other systems have affected ecology. For instance, socialism and communism have shown difficulties to promote the safeguard of people and environment. Likewise, technology affected and still affects people and nature throughout the globe today through several technological advancements. Therefore, a more complete approach on the causes to ecological problems today should cover other systems affecting creation today.

Nonetheless, Boff holds human beings as creatures within creation who are part of social relations shaped by capitalism. He explains that capitalism has a global impact, and even people that are not part of capitalist societies are affected by this system. Since Boff believes capitalism has separated human beings from the whole creation, he advocates for a new understanding of human relationship with creation that presents them as creatures who are part of a single creation, thus not separated from all creatures and the planet but connected to all of them.

This scenario shaped by capitalism presents a matter of responsibility. Human choices related to this system have global impacts, both over other human creatures and over the entire environment. This is because human beings are involved in all these spheres (social, economic, etc.) corroborating for the kind of attitude over creatures and creation as a whole. This is why Boff claims humankind has a relation of responsibility before the entire creation. After all, although capitalism brings a big number of benefits, it still affects negatively people and nature

globally.¹⁴ As a result, Boff advocates for a worldwide comprehension of human responsibility. Since social, political, economic, religious, and vocational spheres influence human attitude to creation, thus human beings have a social, political, economic, religious, and vocational *responsibility* to other beings and creation as a whole.

This insight offered by Boff contributes relevantly to ecological reflection about human beings today, especially for the comprehension of human relation to the neighbor. It shows that human beings have not only an individual relation to their neighbor but a political, social, and economic relation to all society and the planet as a whole. Accordingly, human beings ought to recognize their responsibility before creation, which today involves actions in such social relations that affect human and nonhuman creatures in society and in nature. In fact, very recent scholarship on impacts over the environment today support the need for ecological reflection as Boff suggests in his theology. For instance, recent studies have shown the human choice of food impacts the environment throughout the world. There are over 570 million farms in the world that produce meat and dairy products, which result in vast land use related to a great part of current deforestation, climate change emissions, and pollution of air and water.¹⁵ Moreover, another study related to this subject shows that 60% of all mammals living on the planet today are livestock, mostly pigs and cattle; 36% are human beings, and only 4% are wild animals.¹⁶

¹⁴ Boff, "The Earth Is Ill," in *Cry of the Earth*, chap. 1.

¹⁵ Cf. Damian Carrington, "Avoiding Meat and Dairy Is 'Single Biggest Way' To Reduce Your Impact on Earth," *The Guardian*, May 31, 2018, accessed June 9, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/may/31/avoiding-meat-and-dairy-is-single-biggest-way-to-reduce-your-impact-on-earth>. The research he refers to is the article written by J. Poore and T. Nemecek, "Reducing Food's Environmental Impacts Through Producers and Consumers," *Science* 360, Issue 6392, 987–92.

¹⁶ Cf. Damian Carrington, "Humans Just 0.01% of All Life But Have Destroyed 83% of Wild Mammals – Study," *The Guardian*, May 21, 2018, accessed June 12, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/may/21/human-race-just-001-of-all-life-but-has-destroyed-over-80-of-wild-mammals-study>. Carrington refers to the following article, Yinon M. Bar-On, Rob Phillips, and Ron Milo, "The biomass distribution on Earth," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, May 21, 2018,

This proves that current ways of living in society affect the environment world wide, even by simple decisions and actions of daily life such as food options.

By extension, Boff's analysis appears not only to be profound but also accurate by presenting the necessary approach in the face of the current situation. His reflection on ecological issues presents a matter of urgency, since all creation suffers the effects of the attitude promoted by the current dominant system. Specifically, his urge for human beings to recognize their responsibility before the whole creation, and how their actions as members of this system affect life in general, help understanding ecological problems afflicting people, animals, wild life, and the planet as a whole today. Hence, Lutheran theology ought to reflect on these questions raised by Boff in his ecological theology, especially how current situation influences the human relationship to other creatures and creation in light of its theological tradition.

Lutheran Assessment and Appropriation

This situation calls Lutheran theology to address human beings as creatures and their relationship to creation. Considering Boff's analysis of the topic and current studies on environmental issues, Lutherans need to reflect on social relations such as economic, politics, society, and vocation in light of the doctrine of creation. That is, they need to ask how the doctrine of creation is relevant in the face of social relations influencing creatures and the planet as a whole, especially in the fields of economy and politics.

The answer demands a deeper perspective on current issues such as the one Boff proposes in his theology. In fact, since politics and economy affect life in creation, Lutheran theologians must interact and approach political and economic decisions in light of the Christian teaching of

creation. There can be no longer space neither to dismiss nor to take for granted such topics. They are part of understanding human life today, and consequently are part of current understanding of Christian life.

Accordingly, Lutherans ought to reflect on how the social-economic-political system affects the life and faith of creatures living within the greater context of creation. Boff identifies that the dominant system at work influences and gives shape to how human beings act towards creation, thus observing that current understanding of human relationship before creation has a social-economic-political aspect. His critique of capitalism then shows aspects of this system that need acknowledgement and reflection. We should not dismiss Boff's emphasis on how capitalism promotes inequality, allowing a few to accumulate wealth. We also should not dismiss Boff's criticism that capitalism can allow some in society to remain in great poverty. But even more important than the problem of inequality is his exposition of capitalism as a system that promotes injustice to society and the natural environment by transforming people and the entire creation into means to obtain material wealth and benefit the wealthy. In fact, despite the inequality present in Brazil and the world, the greater concern about economics and politics today is that they promote injustice to the poor by using them to keep the richest rich. To take a case in point, the system in Brazil supports such injustice by increasing taxes of the poor while reducing the taxes for the rich.¹⁷ As a result, capitalism transforms people into means to favor the wealthy, even though theoretically it promotes chances for anyone to succeed and have a better life. The truth is the majority does not have a chance.

Lutheran theologians should not dismiss but learn from Boff on this point. Regardless of

¹⁷ Oxfam, *A Distância Que Nos Une*, 46.

the good intentions of capitalism or any economic system, it nonetheless has a negative impact over the planet and over those who were supposed to benefit from the system. As an illustration, behind a discourse that intends to meet the demand for food for the world lies a serious impact on nature, the food itself, and ultimately the people who consume such products filled with chemical products that cause diseases and other problems.¹⁸ In fact, companies spent millions of dollars funding health studies to favor their products for the sake of consumption and benefit of their market.¹⁹ In other words, although the system argues it is helping the world, the truth is that it also allows some to use the demand it has created itself for the sake of accumulation of wealth not for the sake of those who receive the final product, affecting people and the environment even though it seems to harm no one.²⁰ People, environment, creation as a whole become nothing more than means to achieve the goals set by the system. Consequently, this analysis should contribute to Lutheran reflection on the topic, especially while considering capitalism and its influence on the human relationship to creation today. Specifically, since this system affects the faith and how Christians live their faith in these social relations, Lutheran theologians should appropriate from Boff's analysis to rethink central doctrines present in the theological tradition of the Reformation.

Nevertheless, this reflection should also help Christians to understand their call to assist one another and the society in general. In the face of a system that promotes injustice to the

¹⁸ Cf. Carrington, "Avoiding Meat and Dairy," and Ian Sample, "Diets High in Meat, Eggs and Dairy Could Be as Harmful to Health as Smoking," *The Guardian* March 5, 2014, accessed August 2, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2014/mar/04/animal-protein-diets-smoking-meat-eggs-dairy>.

¹⁹ Alison Moodie, "Before You Read Another Health Study, Check Who's Funding the Research," *The Guardian*, December 12, 2016, accessed August 3, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2016/dec/12/studies-health-nutrition-sugar-coca-cola-marion-nestle>.

²⁰ Cf. Grytsenko, "Living Next Door to 17 Million Chickens," and Tapper, "Green Energy Feels the Heat."

wider creation, this reflection should help them to rethink their attitude in social relations and identify injustices affecting people and the planet in aspects of life not often considered as harmful to creation. This can happen, for instance, by rethinking economic and political options. Economically, Christians should consider markets that minimize harm to people, animals, and nature as a whole. They should consider choosing to invest in renewable energy instead of fossil fuels energy, especially because options like this could reduce the effects of climate change and pollution. Even small changes, such as the one churches in England are doing, could help to reduce impacts on creation and improve the quality of life in the world.²¹ Politically, Christians should consider favoring governmental policies that promote the common good for all people and the planet as a whole. This means to think about politics not only for my personal good or choosing leaders who will favor myself and my class but the entire creation, which characterizes a form of government that cares for the needy, for forests, for pollution, and that ultimately improves life not only regionally but globally. In short, Christians need to reflect on their call to serve God and his creation in light of this system at work and the injustices it promotes to social and natural environments. This is to argue not that Christians should work toward a purpose of establishing a utopian society but to develop laws and customs for the sake of creation, helping to promote life until the restoration of this creation into a new creation.²²

Vocation and Responsibility

As discussed in Chapter Four, Boff's anthropological framework and new cosmology led

²¹ Press Association, "5,500 UK Churches Switch to Renewable Energy," *The Guardian*, August 2, 2018, accessed August 3, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/aug/03/5500-uk-churches-switch-to-renewable-energy>.

²² Kolb and Arand, "Faith Leavens Life within the Created World," in *The Genius of Luther's Theology*, chap. 5.

him to propose also an “eco-spirituality.” He called this spirituality “panentheism.” Boff proposes this spirituality, which understands God *in* all things, as a way to promote a more faithful relationship between human creatures and the rest of creation.

Lutheran theology should have a negative assessment on this spirituality, because it tends to erase the distinction between the Creator and creation. Lutherans will readily affirm that God is omnipresent and omnipotent. But this belief means his presence and activity are in all things and through all things at all times. Therefore, his presence and activity in creation cannot be reliably distinguished from anything in creation. This is because when anything is active, God is active. Lutheran dogmatician Francis Pieper gives a representative explanation: “God operates, and the [created] means operate. Ps. 127:1: The Lord builds the house, and the builders build the house. But the relation between the operation of the means and the operation of God is this: The operation of the means is not coordinate with the operation of God, but subordinate to it, and subordinate to that extent that the means work only that which God works through them, and they work only as long as God works.”²³ Boff’s panentheism, which is not about *thinking* God but *feeling* his presence *in* and *through* all beings in creation, is inconsistent with this doctrine of creation.

But Boff is correct in his conviction that Christians should understand concretely God’s presence and activity in their lives. Lutherans have already done this with the doctrine of *vocation*. This doctrine presents human beings as instruments or masks of God through whom he provides and preserves life in creation, calling them to love and perform works in benefit of their neighbor.²⁴ Thus, Lutheran theology understands vocation as forms of human responsibility to

²³ Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1950), 1:487.

²⁴ Gustaf Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, trans. Carl C. Rasmussen (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1957), 4–10.

act and serve one another, other creatures and creation as a whole.

Considering the situation of the world today and the analysis presented by Boff, there is a need to rethink how vocations are significant in the economic and political systems at work. In fact, Lutheran theology may offer great contributions to the Church through the doctrine of vocation, reflecting how God's call to serve and care for creation helps Christians and society to reduce violence against the environment and promote ways of living within creation in light of this calling and the current reality.

In particular, Lutheran theology ought to think how vocation as God's call to favor, care for, and love the neighbor is significant in the light of current ecological issues. The doctrine of vocation helps us to understand how God delivers his blessings to the entire creation through human calling to be a mother, a father, brother, sister, son, daughter, carpenters, farmers, etc. But Boff helps us understand that vocations serve all of creation.

So, the doctrine of vocation serves as a framework to analyze critically our callings within creation today. Since they are means through which God keeps creation and calls human beings to act in love toward one another and the whole world, the doctrine of vocation identifies problems in vocational attitudes, recognizing if they are still vocations. That is, this doctrine insists that in order to be a vocation a calling must be a means by which human beings perform love and care to other creatures and creation.²⁵ Consequently, if a "calling" leads you not to care for and love the neighbor, then it is not a vocation anymore.

To put it another way, Lutheran theology on vocation emphasizes God's call for human creatures to serve in his creation as not only referring to perform some kind of work in the world,

²⁵ Kolb and Arand, "Luther's Robust Theology of Creation," in *The Genius of Luther's Theology*, chap. 3.

but ultimately as a calling to love and act in favor of his creation. To take a case in point, Wingren observes that in his time Luther explained vocations in the ordinary callings of daily life such as milking cows, emphasizing that God was keeping his creation through all these works.²⁶ However, granted this was accurate in his days, current studies on the topic observe that vocational areas of life today such as milk production affect the environment worldwide and cause disequilibrium to both human and nonhuman creatures.

Therefore, there is a need to rethink vocation, and reflect how to attend to the calling to serve creation in love and care in light of the current situation. In fact, ecological studies need to include vocations, considering the system at work today influences vocational areas of human life, thus offering recommendations for living and acting according to what the doctrine of vocation teaches, helping human beings to attend to their responsibility to creation, serving and caring for it.

In sum, Boff's contribution to ecological reflection claims the focus needs to be on humanity's call to serve God's creation responsibly in the face of the system at work today. Hence, Lutheran theology ought to take up this reflection, addressing human relationship to creation and the significance of vocation in the face of this situation, presenting human beings as creatures with the responsibility of living within God's creation, serving and caring for it in love.

Recommendations

This reflection leads us to consider concrete suggestions for Christians in their vocations as creatures of God who are living in his creation. That is, what might be possible recommendations to follow in the face of the current situation so that human beings may

²⁶ Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, 9.

perform the works prepared beforehand by God for his creatures to keep and sustain his creature and creation as a whole? This final section proposes to answer this question with concrete suggestions for human vocation as creatures of God.

First, considering the current situation in light of the doctrine of vocation and the framework offered by Boff, we ought to suggest ways of living responsibly before creation on a household level. That is, how can Christians help other creatures and the planet through daily and ordinary tasks they perform? This question calls for a reflection on ways by which Christians can look after brothers and sisters in creation and reduce impacts over the planet through individual decisions such as consumption of food and transportation.

For instance, studies have shown that one of the most serious problems of current issues in ecology is the climate change and how it threatens all people everywhere in the world, especially the poor. “While climate change will be disruptive and expensive for rich households and rich countries, for the poor it will be catastrophic.”²⁷ Thus, there is a need to reduce actions that have impacts over the environment and promote issues with climate change. One way to reduce climate change is through the protection and recovering of the world’s forests. First, the destruction of forests contributes immensely to emissions that result in climate change. Second, forests are capable to absorb carbon emissions, thus reducing one of the main sources for climate change. In fact, numbers suggest that if deforestation ended today and damaged forests were allowed to recover naturally, they would be able to reduce annual global emissions by 24 to 30 percent.²⁸ In other words, the current reality of climate change demands the protection of forests,

²⁷ Frances Seymour and Jonah Busch, *Why Forests? Why Now? The Science, Economics, and Politics of Tropical Forests and Climate Change* (Washington, DC: Center For Global Development, 2016), 4, accessed June 25, 2018, <https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/Seymour-Busch-why-forests-why-now-full-book.PDF>.

²⁸ Seymour and Busch, *Why Forests?*, 6.

showing they can be an affordable and simple way to reduce impacts on the environment and people around the world.

Although someone might ask how daily vocations on a household level relate to protection of forests and reduction of climate change, the answer would be that human actions have a worldwide impact over creation, as shown in our analysis in this essay. Moreover, we have previously shown that reducing meat and dairy might be the simplest and fastest way to reduce human impact over the environment. After all, over 570 million farms around the world occupy vast amounts of land, leading to deforestation and other sources of pollution and emissions. Thus, Christians can protect forests and reduce climate change, thus helping to care for creation and creatures around the globe with actions of their daily life such as reducing their habits of consumption of food. Along the same lines, reducing the consumption of gasoline in personal transportation, the use of single use plastic recipients and electronic devices, and even the number of Google searches can help the world and reduce impacts over brothers and sisters.²⁹

Nevertheless, we ought to consider how Christians can help the neighbor and the whole creation on a social level. That is, this situation calls us to reflect on ways by which Christians may attend to God's call to care for his creation through the vocation of citizens. As citizens, Christians have a responsibility to care for creation that includes national and even worldwide

²⁹ See Gary Fuller, "Pollutionwatch: Let's Rate Exhaust Fumes as Also a Lethal Road Risk," *The Guardian*, June 21, 2018, accessed June 21, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/jun/21/pollutionwatch-lets-rate-exhaust-fumes-as-also-a-lethal-road-risk?CMP=tw_t_a-environment_b-gdneco; Fred Pearce, "Energy Hogs: Can World's Huge Data Centers Be Made More Efficient?" *Yale Environment 360*, April 3, 2018, accessed June 28, 2018, <https://e360.yale.edu/features/energy-hogs-can-huge-data-centers-be-made-more-efficient>; Hannah Ellis-Petersen, "Deluge of Electronic Waste Turning Thailand Into 'World's Rubbish Dump'," *The Guardian*, June 28, 2018, accessed June 28, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jun/28/deluge-of-electronic-waste-turning-thailand-into-worlds-rubbish-dump?CMP=tw_t_a-environment_b-gdneco; and Erin Rhoads, "You Don't Use So Much Plastic, Do You? How to Ditch It for July – And Beyond," *The Guardian*, June 22, 2018, accessed June 23, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/jun/23/you-dont-use-so-much-plastic-do-you-how-to-ditch-it-for-july-and-beyond?CMP=tw_t_a-environment_b-gdneco.

contexts. To take a case in point, we have shown previously that forms of governments affect human and nonhuman creatures along with the planet as a whole. Thus, this presents a political responsibility for Christian vocation before creation.

According to Boff, the Church ought to be concerned about what Boff labels “Politics.”³⁰ Since Politics search for the common good, the promotion of justice and rights, the denunciation of corruption and violence against human dignity, the definition of values, and the means and ethics of social relations, it needs to be part of the Church’s interest.³¹ Moreover, Boff believes they cannot cease to be involved. He explains that Church cannot be indifferent to justice or injustice, nor remain silent before forms of exploitation. As he puts it, “There is no neutrality in Politics: one is either for change in the direction of greater social participation or one is in favor of the status quo, which in many countries marginalizes a vast majority of the people.”³² Essentially, Boff’s point is that the Church cannot dismiss its own responsibility on Politics. On the contrary, it needs to become aware of how Politics affects the Gospel and the faith and address it in ways by which the Church might help supporting life that benefits the whole creation.

This is not to argue that we should politicize the Church. However, it should become conscious of its responsibility to support life in creation that benefits all creatures and the

³⁰ Boff presents two distinguished meanings for “politics.” On the one hand, he explains that “politics” with the capital *P* refers to “the common search of the common good, the promotion of justice and rights, the denunciation of corruption and violence to human dignity.” On the other hand, “politics” with a small *p* refers to “all the activity corresponding to the administration or transformation of society through the conquest and exercise of the power of the state.” This is the understanding I have in mind for my argumentation here. Cf. Leonardo Boff, “Church: Charism and Power: Liberation Theology and the Institutional Church,” in *Contemporary Latin American Social and Political Thought: An Anthology*, ed. Iván Márquez (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), 111–13.

³¹ Boff, “Church: Charism and Power,” 111–12.

³² Boff, “Church: Charism and Power,” 112.

environment. Specifically, it calls Christians to support political approaches that benefit the entire creation. This means Christians cannot remain neutral in the face of their political responsibility. After all, Boff claims that such neutrality does not exist. Accordingly, this responsibility calls Christians to get involved in Politics and help the neighbor and creation through their vocation as citizens. Actually, they should consider how future governments plan to deal with international debt and environmental problems such as climate change, since these issues affect directly the life of fellow human beings around the globe, as well as the planet as a whole.³³

In short, as creatures of God called to care for the world he created and to love one another, Christians need to recognize their political responsibility and support forms of Politics that benefit all God's creatures and his entire creation. Considering the example given above on climate change and protection of forests, for example, Christians should support governments envisioning political goals that consider such problems and support actions that guide their nation and other nations toward solutions that favor not economic interests but the world as a whole.

Therefore, Christians ought to be creatures in the face of the current situation and take up the issues of ecology and Politics from a perspective of the doctrine of creation. After all, God calls them to love their neighbors through vocations he prepared for them to perform. Accordingly, Christians are called to attend their responsibility to serve and care for other

³³ Cf. Dan Collins, "Climate Change Has Turned Peru's Glacial Lake Into a Deadly Flood Timebomb," *The Guardian*, June 29, 2018, accessed June 29, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/jun/29/climate-change-has-turned-perus-glacial-lake-into-a-deadly-flood-timebomb?CMP=tw_t_a-environment_b-gdneco. See also Elizabeth Rush, "Rising Seas: 'Florida Is About to Be Wiped Off the Map'," *The Guardian*, June 26, 2018, accessed June 29, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/jun/26/rising-seas-florida-climate-change-elizabeth-rush?CMP=tw_t_a-environment_b-gdneco.

creatures and the planet, helping to promote and sustain life for all God's creation.

Conclusion

Leonardo Boff's ecological theology presents a deeper and accurate framework to consider current issues. Specifically, Boff contributes not only understanding the problems faced today but also the underlying causes of such problems. As a result, he argues that social, economic, political, religious, and vocational areas of life influence and connect to each other today, which consequently affects the understanding of human relationship with creation. This leads him to advocate for a comprehension of human relationship with creation that considers such influences, calling human beings to responsibility towards creation as a whole.

Consequently, Boff points to human responsibility to other creatures and the entire creation. As part of society influenced by the dominant system, human beings have a social, political, economic, and vocational responsibility to their neighbor, both in society and in nature, which they are called to care and serve. Accordingly, Boff presents human beings in relation to the planet as a whole, urging them to promote justice and dignity to all brothers and sisters in creation.

By extension, this calls Lutheran theology to reflect on human relationship to creation in the face of this situation. In fact, its own theological tradition leads Lutheran theology to take up this reflection on ecological issues, since the system affecting the environment ultimately affects human beings and their understanding as creatures within creation. Thus, Lutheran theology ought to address current issues caused in order to contribute recommendations for living in a reality shaped by social, economic, and politic understanding.

Accordingly, this work suggests that one way of addressing ecological issues and recommending ways to help creation is through the doctrine of vocation. Through vocations on a

household level, as well as on a citizenship level, Christians may attend to God's call to care for creation, urging them to an attitude of responsibility in their relation to creation that ultimately benefits all creatures and all creation.

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