"Creation in light of Liberation": Ensuring Connection between "Life" and "Justice"

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I. Introduction

The 10th General Assembly of the World Council of Churches(WCC) will be held for ten days from the 30th of October 2012 to the 8th of November in Busan, Korea under the theme, "God of Life, lead us to Justice and Peace." For the first time in the history of the WCC, "justice" and "peace" have become the key words of the General Assembly. "Life" was chosen as a theme before (6th General Assembly in Vancouver, Canada), and "Justice, Peace, and Creation: JPC" have been death with since the Seoul Convention in 1990, but this is the first time that justice and peace have risen as the key words of the entire General Assembly. Now Christians in Korea, Asia, and all over the world are invited to contemplate more deeply about life, justice, and peace. It is one thing to contemplate these "new ecumenical trinity agenda" each and respectively; however, it is another to deal with these simultaneously and in a more integrated manner ensuring the interlocking and interpenetrating connection between them. As a matter of fact, theologians have already endeavored to ensure such connection. Indeed, one of the alarming features of the 21st Christian theology is that liberation theology and ecological theology have moved toward a point of convergence. Gustavo Gutierrez, the prominent Latin American liberation theologian, has made a crucial statement regarding the future of liberation theology: Recognizing the need to broaden our perspective on social solidarity including a respectful relationship with nature, he assured that a theology of creation and of life can provide fertile ground for ecological reflection on liberation.[1] James H. Cone, the "founding father" of North American black theology of liberation, also affirmed that "the fight for justice cannot be segregated

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[1] Gustavo Gutierrez, "Liberation Theology and the Future of the Poor," in *Liberating the Future: God, Mammon and Theology*, ed. Joerg Rieger (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 121-122.

but must be integrated with the fight for life in all its forms."[2] Indeed, liberation theologians have opened themselves and begun to incorporate ecological consciousness as one of their vital concerns.

Ecological theologians, too, have made vigorous efforts to incorporate the perspective of justice in their reflection on sustainability. John B. Cobb, Jr., one of the most articulate voices of process and ecological thought, accepts that there cannot be a reversal of patterns of destroying the Earth that does not involve the liberation and empowerment of oppressed people everywhere as much as there cannot be liberation and empowerment of oppressed people without restoration of the Earth.[3] To recall, it was actually Rosemary R. Ruether who has perceived clearly and articulated forcefully the interconnections between liberation theology and theology of nature since the late 1960s[4], affirming that the ecological ethic must always be the ethic of "ecojustice" that can interconnect the social domination and the domination of nature. Indeed, liberation theology and ecological theology have already taken great steps toward a point of convergence.

Nonetheless, a question remains. As Paul G. King and David O. Woodyard nicely put it: "Can a theology that is primarily focused on social transformation by infusing the historical order with a Liberative God address ecological disaster *with the same force*?"[5] I would like to add another question here: Can a theology that is primarily focused on ecological sustainability by infusing the evolutionary order with a deity of cosmic matrix of matter/energy address the issue of justice *with the same force* as well? Nobody denies the necessity to connect "the cry of the poor" with “the cry of the Earth," that is, to link the earth's crisis with the crisis of humanity. Still, the remaining question is this: How is it possible that we ensure the interlocking and interpenetrating connection between liberation theology ("justice") and ecological theology ("life") without diminishing the original forces in each.

With this question in mind, I will examine in this article John B. Cobb's process theology, his "biospheric vision," and "Earthism," showing how he has combined creation/life with liberation/justice in order to overcome not only the problem of evil in his early process thought but also today's biocentric visions which lack transcendental, theocentric, and biblically inspired prophetic visions. However, also arguing that ecological theologians in the West in general and John

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[2] James H. Cone, "Whose Earth Is It, Anyway?," in *Risks of Faith: The Emergence of a Black Theology of Liberation, 1968-1998* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), 138.

[3] John B. Cobb, Jr., *The Earthist Challenge to Economism: A Theological Critique of the World Bank* (New York: St,. Martin's Press, Inc., 1999), 179.

[4] Steven Bouma-Prediger, *The Greening of Theology: The Ecological Models of Rosemary Radford Ruether, Joseph Sittler, and Jurgen Moltmann* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1995), 12.

[5] King and Woodyard, *Liberating Nature: Theology and Economics in a New Order* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1999), 11. Emphases added.

Cobb in particular, despite their commendable effort not to overlook the issue of justice, tend to lose the sight of the fact that in a profound sense, nature and history are drawn together in the reality of the poor, I will insist, together with the late great theologian Dorothee Soelle, that we interpret creation/life in light of liberation/justice and apprehend the creation tradition from a liberation perspective in today's context in which justice is most denied and belittled.

II. Process Theology and the Divine

Process theology is one of many ecological theologies, but its presence and influence across the entire spectrum of ecological theologies is significant.[6] Process theology is ecological theology, because its primary concern (and thus its point of departure) is "life." For Cobb, life is neither self-made nor the product of human society alone but fundamentally "a gift of the total evolutionary process."[7] What is basic to the evolutionary process is "the urge for survival itself," "an urge for life, for continued life, for more and better life,"[8] or "the natural drive to enjoy life," i.e., "the enjoyment of life."[9] God's fundamental aim, according to Cobb, is the promotion of the creatures' own enjoyment.[10]

Process theology is ecological theology, for it gives primacy to interdependence, not independence, of all beings. Also known as the "philosophy of organism," process philosophy, first and above all, rejects the dualism of history and nature, of mind and matter, since its fundamental insight is the interrelatedness of each and every event,[11] and the continuity between human beings and the rest of the natural world.[12] Process theology, in opposition to a nature/history dualism, takes "evolutionary history" seriously in order to understand human history.[13] Cobb emphasizes that far from being endlessly repetitive and cyclical, life on the planet, and even the cosmos as a whole, has been in constant non-repetitive movement and the changes of nature and of history have been intimately

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[6] For instance, ecofeminist theologians like Rosemary R. Ruether and Sallie McFague have been strongly influenced by process theology.

[7] Cobb, "Ecology, Ethics, and Theology," in *Toward a Steady-State Economy*, Herman E. Daly (San Francisco, W.H. Freeman, 1973), 317.

[8] *Ibid*.

[9] Cobb and Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), 54-55.

[10] *Ibid*., 56.

[11] Cobb, *Sustainability: Economics, Ecology and Justice* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1992), 2f.

[12] Cobb and Birch, *The Liberation of Life: From the Cell to the Community* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 282.

[13] *Ibid*., 3.

interconnected; hence, we have to learn to read the story of the human past in terms of the decisive role of nature in order to break out of dualistic habits and to interpret our present actions.[14] Indeed, process thought gives primacy to interdependence over independence, not simply as an ideal but as an ontologically given characteristic.[15]

How then is God viewed in process theology? We must realize that process theology operates on two sides--one side in the metaphysical context provided by process philosophy and its doctrine of God and on the other from the perspective of Christian/biblical faith.[16] We need to first examine the former, for it is this process philosophy's doctrine of God that makes process theology distinctive from others. The God in process philosophy is understood as "the power in reality that calls life forth and forward and strives against the forces of inertia and death," which works, however, "very slowly and quietly, by persuasion, not calling attention to it."[17] According to Cobb, "It is not to be found somewhere outside the organisms in which it is at work, but it is not to be identified with them either."[18] Needless to say, this God of process philosophy rejects the traditional God of Christian deism which presents God as external to the world and the world as external to God;[19] nor is this God harmonious with Aristotelian *primum movens* who is pulling history to its future, but without being involved in history. The divine in process philosophy is not another agent alongside the creatures but acts only in and through them;[20] for this reason, it is not controlling "from without" but is calling, ordering, liberating, and comforting "from within."[21]

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[14] Cobb and Griffin, *Process Theology* (1976), 148-149. Cobb does not deny that human history *is* the locus of the most important events on this planet; and yet, his point is that history has been built too much on the denial of bodily reality.

[15] *Ibid*., 21, 24.

[16] *Ibid*., 141.

[17] Cobb, *Sustainability* (1992), 125.

[18] *Ibid*. He also says that "We can conceive it best as Spirit… the giver of life and love, that is the ground of hope… The Spirit of Life is at work in ever new and unforeseeable ways." Cobb finds the best analogy of this Spirit of Life in *Tao*, namely the "power that works slowly and undramatically, but is finally the most effective agency in reality." (Cobb and Griffin, *Process Theology*, 62.) Compared to Kwok Pui-lan's description of the *Tao* as "silent and non-intrusive," Cobb emphasizes the agency and final effectiveness of the God in process philosophy. (See Kwok, Pui-lan, "Ecology and the Recycling of Christianity," in *Ecology: Voices from the South and North*, ed., David G. Hallman [Geneva, Switzerland: WCC Publications & Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1994], 110.)

[19] Cobb, *Sustaining the Common Good: A Christian Perspective on the Global Economy* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1994), 21.

[20] Cobb and Griffin, *Process Theology*, 157.

[21] Cobb, "The Cosmos and God: The Dependence of Science on Faith," in *God, Cosmos, Nature and Creativity* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1995), 46. Probably, the following is Cobb's best explication of the point: "The divine reality, God,

According to Cobb and David R. Griffin, there are three essential characteristics of this God of process philosophy. First, the divine in process thought is "sympathetic compassion" and "sympathetic responsiveness." God is love, for sure; and yet, what is specifically emphasized here is that this love must involve a sympathetic response to the loved one in the fullest sense.[22] The key is mutual-interaction, a mutual-participation between God and cosmos.[23] Indeed, what makes God true God is "responsiveness" and, according to Cobb and Griffin, that is exactly the essential nature of God's "perfection."[24] In short, the foremost characteristic of the God in process philosophy is God's compassionate, sympathetic, and responsive love; and, first and above all, process philosophy is nothing but about this "emotional bond" between God, humanity, and the world. I believe that this emotional bond is crucial for an ecological awareness, because, as Gould puts it, "We cannot win this battle to save species and environments without forging an emotional bond between ourselves and nature as well for we will not fight to save what we do not love."[25]

Secondly, the God in process philosophy is characterized by God's "creative activity" and "novelty" derived from God's responsiveness just described above. The God of process philosophy is active in the world, working directly to overcome evil and to create new things and just conditions.[26] And what is specifically emphasized here in God's creative activity is the introduction of novelty. By virtue of this God, process philosophy emphasizes not only the interrelatedness of all events and things but also the possibility of *renewal and transformation*. One of the central insights of process thought is that

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does not…exist in some external sphere unaffected by the world. God interacts with the cosmos. God participates in forming the being and life of each creature. The life of each creature then participates in forming the divine Reality as well. By weakening the life system on this planet, human creatures are impoverishing the life of God... In short, God is in the world and the world is in God. There is no God apart form the cosmos. There is no cosmos apart form God."(Cobb, "The Cosmos and God: The Dependence of Science on Faith," in *God, Cosmos, Nature and Creativity*, 46, 49.)

[22] Cobb and Griffin, *Process Theology* (1976), 44.

[23] According to Cobb, "God interacts with the cosmos. God participates in forming the being and life of each creature. The life of each creature then participates in forming the divine Reality as well." (Cobb, "The Cosmos and God: The Dependence of Science on Faith," in *God, Cosmos, Nature and Creativity*, 49.) This notion of mutual-participation between God and the world is of course a clear objection to the traditional notion of God as an "Impassive Absolute" who has no element of responsiveness to the world. (Cobb and Griffin, *Process Theology*, 46.)

[24] *Ibid*., 48.

[25] Quoted from Daly, *Beyond Growth: The Economics of Sustainable Development* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 20. According to Cobb, *only feeling* is the locus of intrinsic value, without which God's "sympathetic compassion," "sympathetic responsiveness" is impossible.(Cobb, "Ecology, Ethics, and Theology," in *Toward a Steady-State Economy*, 308.)

[26] Cobb and Griffin, *Process Theology* (1976), 48f.

"all events are largely the outcome of antecedent events, *but* none are wholly determined by the past but something happens afresh in each event."[27] Because of this notion of divine creativity and novelty, process thought, despite its emphasis on the relatedness to the past, escapes from the pitfall of socio-historical conservatism.[28] The God in process philosophy is "the basic source of unrest in the universe," who "takes risks."[29] God is surely the source of order, but the order is derivative from divine novelty and is only instrumental to the one intrinsic good, which is the enjoyment of life; hence, this God of creative love cannot be "the Sanctioner of the Status Quo" but "the source of some of the chaos in the world."[30] Needless to say, this understanding of the divine and order emphasizes a changing, developing, and new order.

Thirdly, the God of process philosophy is not controlling, coercive power but *persuasive* power. In fact, Cobb and Griffin have a better term for such power--"divine creative influence."[31] This notion of power is derived from the idea of God as compassionate, sympathetic, and responsive love that, *by definition*, does not seek to control the loved ones by coercion.[32] Once again what is fundamentally rejected here is divine immutability, and what is basically embraced here is the assertion that all that happens in the created order "enters" fully into the divine life. This is why "God rejoices with us in our joy and suffers with us in our pain," according to Cobb.[33] However, is this God powerful enough to be God? Cobb insists that the God of persuasive power is not as powerless as Bonhoeffer's God. According to him, while Dietrich Bonhoeffer was right to move away from a controlling deity in speaking of the divine suffering, Bonhoeffer was dangerously misleading when he spoke of the divine as powerless.[34] Still, for critics of process philosophy, the God of persuasive power is not able to "guarantee" a favorable outcome and thus can be considered not to have the sort of power that is essential to a deity; therefore process philosophy/theology is viewed only a form of atheism. Cobb and Griffin's defense is that whereas atheists see the power of human beings to shape their own

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[27] Daly and Cobb, *For the Common Good: Redirecting the Economy toward Community, the Environment, and a Sustainable Future* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 399. Emphasis added.

[28] Cobb and Griffin, *Process Theology* (1976), 83. Like Moltmann, Cobb and Griffin emphasize that creative transformation is not simply about "adding" but about introducing the *Novum* (the qualitatively new or the creative novelty) which is the essence of the open future.

[29] *Ibid.*, 57, 59.

[30] *Ibid*., 59-60.

[31] *Ibid.*, 53.

[32] *Ibid*.

[33] Cobb, *Sustaining the Common Good* (1994), 21.

[34] Cobb, *Sustainability* (1992), 14.

destiny as arising out of their own given being or antecedent nature, process philosophy/theology sees the power of human beings as arising out of the persuasive power of God.[35]

For Cobb and Griffin, the concrete actuality is relative, dependent, and constantly changing; therefore, in each moment of God's life, there are always new and unforeseen happenings in the world; hence, God's concrete knowledge is dependent upon the decisions made by the worldly actualities.[36] This implies that God does not know what the result will be, for what will happen depends upon what human beings will do. Thus, "God lures, urges, and persuades. We decide," and "insofar as we allow God to do so, God makes all things new."[37] In a word, "Our decisions affect the life of God."[38] What is basically affirmed here is that God's power and knowledge is limited not because it is subject to human liberty, but because there is "ontological mutuality" between God and the world, i.e., just as God is "dependent" upon the world, there is no such thing as absolute human freedom.[39] For this reason, Cobb is deeply suspicious of Calvinism, for he believes that it led to a claim of personal autonomy upon which modern economic theory thrives.[40] Nevertheless, doesn't this idea of deity lead to a theodicy that is quite puzzling for those who are deeply concerned with the trauma of historical evil and injustice?

III. The Problem of Evil in Process Theology

For the *early* Cobb and Griffin, much that we regard evil is not genuinely so. They had in fact a very "evangelical" understanding of evil:

> We complain about our poverty or our failure to succeed in competition, whereas with spiritual maturity we can sometimes discover either that our poverty and failure have enriched our lives or that they have driven us to seek more important goods. What seems evil but ceases to be so when

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[35] Cobb and Griffin, *Process Theology* (1976), 35.

[36] *Ibid*., 47, 57, 119.

[37] *Ibid*., 157-158.

[38] Cobb, *Sustaining the Common Good* (1994), 21.

[39] Cobb and Griffin, *Process Theology* (1976), 47, 74. Cobb finds that although Aquinas affirmed the doctrine of human freedom in order to mute the traditional understanding of God the Controlling Power, he gave more credence to socially concerned, community-building aspects of human activity. (See *Ibid*., 52; Cobb and Daly. *For the Common Good*, 5.)

[40] Cobb and Daly, *Process Theology* (1976), 5-6.

> the Christian transvaluation of values occurs is not the evil that God must overcome in order to be worshiped as God.[41]

For sure, this way of understanding of evil can alleviate the suffering of those afflicted by personal and societal oppression. This interpretation of evil, however, shocks many when Cobb and Griffin go on to say that "the God who 'permitted' Auschwitz will permit anything the creatures choose to do."[42] This is indeed shocking, if not provocative, a statement! If God permits "anything" the creatures choose to do, in what sense does God "lure," "urge," and "persuade"? Can God oppose, resist, or compel by any chance? It seems that Cobb and Griffin paid too much for the "triumph" of the God of process over the God of justice. The problem involved in this statement, in my view, is that the seriousness of "moral evil" is hidden by the ground cover of "natural evil." Let us look back what Cobb and Griffin basically meant by evil:

> [T]here is much evil that is made possible by the risk taken by divine creative love in order to overcome triviality. The possibility of this sin and suffering is necessarily entailed in the creation of beings capable of high grades of enjoyment. God neither prevents this evil, nor guarantees compensation for it, although the divine creative love does encourage us to avoid unnecessary discord and to transform situations creatively so as to bring good out of evil. Rebelling against the universe because of this kind of evil reflects a misunderstanding not only of what perfect power can and cannot do, but also of the nature of evil, i.e., of the fact that triviality is as much to be avoided as discord.[43]

What Cobb and Griffin meant by evil was something that "is necessarily entailed in the creation," i.e., in the "creative-destructive process" inherent in evolution itself, distinguishable from the moral evil worked by human beings. This creative-destructive process, in other words, is "the constitutive reality of the universe," both positive and negative, which is inseparable in all the life processes.[44] Indeed, from the ecological point of view, there is no such thing as "sin" in life's destructive process, indeed no such thing as ultimate justice or ultimate injustice. After all, as Cobb and Griffin assures, the

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[41] *Ibid*., 83.

[42] *Ibid*., 157.

[43] *Ibid*., 119f.

[44] Ivone Gebara, "The Trinity and Human Experience: An Ecofeminist Approach," in *Women Healing Earth: Third World Women on Ecology, Feminism, and Religion*, ed., Rosemary R. Ruether (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1996), 19-20.

ultimate problem or "the final evil" for process philosophy/theology is not injustice or physical suffering but "temporality" or the "perpetual perishing" in the full ecological sense.[45]

This ecological view, however, is not new to Asian religions, particularly to Buddhism. According to the Buddhist scholar Leo D. Lefebure, human beings are not born and do not die in the ultimate sense, because we existed in all the elements of the universe before our birth, we now exist with all the elements of the universe during our life, and we will exist with all the elements of the universe after our death.[46] In this view, there is no such thing as evil, for even death itself means life for the whole.[47] This is why Masao Abe, another Buddhist scholar, argues that if we do not project human feeling and human interest upon natural phenomena, such as lion attacking rabbit and snake swallowing frog, physical and biological phenomena in the natural world take place entirely naturally and spontaneously in their "suchness."[48] Indeed, Buddhism teaches us to view our world, society, and life from the perspective of such "suchness." Thus, even Thich Nhat Hanh, the proponent of "engaged Buddhism," teaches us that the ground for historical hope is the experience of awakening to the Buddhist core doctrine of "dependent co-arising," that is, to the realization that nothing comes into being and nothing goes out of being, that no one can ultimately kill anyone, and that the dead still live.[49] Thus, he admonishes like this: "Do not take side. If you take sides, you are trying to eliminate half of reality, which is impossible."[50] After all, according to Lefebure, Buddhism has the "final answer" to what Christians call the "problem of evil":

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[45] Cobb and Griffin, *Process Theology* (1976), 120-122. Since the final evil is not injustice but temporality, the "kingdom of heaven," for Cobb and Griffin, is viewed as the "everlasting reality of the divine life."

[46] Leo D. Lefebure, *The Buddha and the Christ: Explorations in Buddhist and Christian Dialogue* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 184.

[47] Julia Esquivel Velasquez, "Spirituality of the Earth," in *The Power of Naming: A Concilium Reader in Feminist Liberation Theology* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1996), 337.

[48] Masao Abe, "Kenotic God and Dynamic Sunyata," in *The Emptying God: A Buddhist-Jewish-Christian Conversation*, eds., John B. Cobb, Jr. and Christopher Ives (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1989), 190.

[49] Lefebure, *The Buddha and the Christ* (1993), 190.

[50] *Ibid*., 160. Abe echoes to Thich Nhat Hanh, contending that the distinction between good and evil in the ethical dimension is ultimately relative and not absolute. According to Abe, the standpoint of justice, humanistic or divine, cannot be a proper basis for our life, because then we may fall into endless conflict and struggle between the judge and the judges; instead, insists Abe, the standpoint of wisdom and compassion can provide a more proper basis to cope with human suffering without getting involved in an endless conflict. (Abe, "Kenotic God and Dynamic Sunyata," 46, 51f.)

> [T]he universe of interbeing is itself marked by a nondiscriminating acceptance of good and evil alike; for in the perspective of dependent co-arising, roses and garbage are interdependent, as are wealthy and poor, oppressors and oppressed…[T]here is nothing pure or defiled. This is the central Buddhist resolution of what Christians name the problem of evil.[51]

Indeed, from this perspective, the problem of evil is only the vain effort to project human feeling and interest upon the creative-destructive process inherent in the evolution itself. I have no objection to this point, and I am also opposed the projection of human moral interest upon natural phenomena. By the same token, however, I *equally* oppose projecting natural phenomena upon society. Historical injustice, I believe, is not a thing that can be explained away in the name of ecological "suchness." The natural ("what is") should not be the excuse to give up the moral ("what ought to be").

Larry L. Rasmussen has a point: Unlike many others in the god-rich world of the ancient near East, says Rasmussen, the Hebrew God was not recognized as simply a power or force in the universe which suffused all nature with its energy; rather, this sacred power was a *moral force* that rejected the inevitability of oppression and injustice.[52] Rasmussen accepts that "God is the uncreated energy of the created, energy-suffused universe" and yet, this God is "a power-sharing God" and the *raison d'etre* of the sacred itself is nothing less than "marking, evoking and channeling extraordinary power."[53] Rasmussen's point is well taken: Whatever else theology of life, nature, or cosmos might mean, it must invoke *moral responsibility* on the part of human beings.[54] Cobb and Griffin would argue that although there is no divine assurance of the future (because "the future is *truly* open"), we can invoke the sense of moral responsibility by "trusting" a God who "lures," "urges," and "persuades" the unrealized possibilities and by "sensitizing" ourselves to this call giving up our present security.[55] This sounds, however, too optimistic about human nature and possibility of "sin." The God of persuasion, who can "permit" anything the creatures choose to do, seems irreconcilable with the God of Hebrew slaves in the Bible, who rejected the inevitability of oppression and injustice. Cobb sensed this problem and he had to overcome it.

IV. Cobb's "Bio-spheric Vision" and "Earthism"

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[51] Lefebure, *The Buddha and the Christ* (1993), 181.

[52] Rasmussen, "Theology of Life and Ecumenical Ethics," in *Ecology: Voices from South and North*, ed. David G. Hallman (Geneva, Switzerland: WCC Publications & Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1994), 113.

[53] *Ibid*., 125.

[54] *Ibid*., 124.

[55] Cobb and Griffin, *Process Theology* (1976), 157-158.

As I indicated earlier, process theology operates not only in the metaphysical context provided by process philosophy and its doctrine of deity, which we have just examined, but also from the perspective of Christian faith. Now then we need to see how and what kind of Christian faith has helped Cobb to overcome the problem entailed in his early process theology and thereby to distinguish his ecological vision from many other forms of eco-, geo-, and bio-centrism that deny transcendental perspectives. Indeed, as Reinhold Niebuhr pointed out, the particular weakness of all form of naturalism is its unconscious ascription of transcendence to the processes of nature and therefore to an introduction of ethical meaning into the process.[56] By vigorously incorporating theocentric and prophetic tradition into his process theology, however, Cobb has developed, together with Herman E. Daly, known as the "dean of ecological economics,"[57] a "bio-spheric" vision as a refined religious/theological vision for life.

Cobb admits that he had once underestimated the potential of the Bible; yet, he has now realized that, far less dualistic and anthropocentric than its standard interpretations, and despite its strong tendency to focus on human beings, the Bible does not separate human beings from the remainder of creation and does not support strict anthropocentrism but calls for theocentrism.[58] From this perspective of biblical theocentrism, Cobb and Daly, in their co-authored *For the Common Good* (1989), distinguish their religious vision not only from that of deep ecologists (i.e., those who have broken most dramatically from anthropocentrism, or "speciesism," by emphasizing the interdependent and unified character of the ecosystem as a whole) but also from that of James Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis (i.e., the view that sees the earth worthy of ultimate veneration).

For Cobb, deep ecologists' denial of human specialness is unacceptable, for human beings are not simply one species among others but created in the image of God and thus assigned a particular privilege and responsibility.[59] Against deep ecologists' urge to return to the state of innocence (i.e., before the "fall" of nature generated by human domestication of plants and animals), Cobb contends that there is no turning back, that the salvation mediated by Christ exceeds in value the innocence that

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[56] Reinhold Niebuhr, "The Truth in Myths," in *Faith and Politics: A Commentary on Religious, Social and Political Thought in a Technological Age*, edited by Ronald H. Stone (New York: George Braziller, 1968), 29.

[57] See Herman E. Daly, "The Steady-State Economy," in *Toward a Steady-State Economy* (San Francisco, W.H. Freeman, 1973), 158. He is also known as the "most far-seeing and heretical of economists," or "a voice crying in the wilderness," since he is opposed to the mainstream economists.

[58] Cobb, *Sustainability* (1993), 4, 92-93. Unlike neoconservative theologians who do not often appeal to the Bible, Cobb does appeal to the Bible, but *against* the Bible itself. (*Ibid*., 83.)

[59] *Ibid*., 110.

preceded the fall, and that in Christ we find something greater than what was originally lost.[60] Cobb argues that human beings do have dominion and we are responsible, and thus that *anthropocentricity* should not be rejected along with anthropocentrism.[61] For sure, Cobb agrees with deep ecologists' rejection of the Newtonian God; however, following Charles Hartshorne's assertion of panentheism, Cobb distinguishes his view from deep ecologists' pantheism,[62] contending that God is working through human efforts *and* that it is the transcending perspective that guides those efforts.[63] Cobb is convinced that there must be a privileged perspective for the guidance of human efforts, and that God is exactly such perspective, because God's perspective includes all others.[64]

For sure, the biospheric vision, developed by Cobb and Daly, is basically one of the organismic views of human beings and of their communities, which oppose anthropocentrism.[65] This organismic view, according to them, however, should be integrated into and grounded upon theocentrism in a way that does not neglect *justice*, and that, for this purpose, the biblical prophetic tradition, characterized by its consistent warning against idolatry, should be taken seriously.[66] For Cobb and Daly, theocentrism is required, if not confessed, since only such a view can provide the transcendental source of value that can provide a check against (a) anthropocentrism, which shows no concern for nature, (b) biocentrism, which makes no claim on human concern as exemplified in Gaia hypothesis,[67] (c) Eastern spirituality,

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[60] *Ibid*., 109-111. Some indigenous theologians echo to Cobb's view: Mary Judith Ress reports from her intensive study on Latin American *mestizo* identity that indigenous societies, while certainly more ecologically sensitive and egalitarian than Western society, are certainly not the "paradise lost"; according to her, some, such as the Aztec and Inca empires, had degenerated into a period of warfare, expansion and rigid hierarchy by the time of the Spaniards' arrival; what is more, although women were revered and deities were both masculine and feminine, men were still the rulers. (See Ress, "After Five Centuries of Mixings, Who Are We?: Walking with Our Dark Grandmother's Feet," in *Women Healing Earth: Third World Women on Ecology, Femoinism and Religion*, ed. Rosemary R. Ruether [Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1996], 53.) Another indigenous theologian Diego Irarrazaval also reports that although the key spirituality of Aymara indigenous people in the Andean highlands is the interconnectedness of all life, there is still a certain hierarchical ordering that places men first.

[61] Cobb, *Sustainability* (1993), 112-113.

[62] Cobb, "Ecology, Science, and Religion: Toward a Postmodern Worldview," in *Readings in Ecology and Feminist Theology*, eds., Mary Heather MacKinnon and Moni McIntyre (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1995), 246.

[63] Cobb and Daly, *For the Common Good* (1994), 396.

[64] Cobb, *Sustainability* (1993), 113.

[65] Cobb and Daly, *For the Common Good* (1994), 383.

[66] *Ibid*., 391.

[67] *Ibid*., 402-403. For Cobb and Daly, the Gaia hypothesis, for all the attractiveness, only leads to distortion, for it does not do justice to the intrinsic value of each living thing or of the biosphere as a whole. The problem is that in the Gaia hypothesis,

which, according to Cobb, directs attention away from history,[68] and (d) the scientific materialism which regards the cosmos as an absurd and life within it as no more than another accident, thus denying the reality of purpose, mind, and value in human beings as well as in the external world.[69] Without such a transcendental source of value, without an everlasting God, according to Cobb and Daly, we cannot provide a basis for understanding our relation to the future and to the yet unborn.[70] Cobb and Daly's biospheric vision then cancels out the criticism and popular misunderstanding that ecological theology is only a form of monistic naturalism, which identifies nature's becoming with the divine.[71]

Cobb has advocated Christian theistic and prophetic perspectives in opposition to biocentric visions of deep ecologists or of Gaia hypothesis; nevertheless, he has not totally abandoned the possibility of the Earth as "a more inclusive object of *penultimate* devotion" than Christianity, nation, or economic growth. Regretting that Protestants have for too long subordinated the doctrine of creation to idolatrous anthropocentrism, Cobb proposes that we consider "creationism" as the possibility of new religion and spirituality.[72] However, since creationism is too narrowly a Christian term for Cobb, he replaces it with "Earthism" as an inclusive term for his creation-centered theology. For sure, Cobb

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the value is located primarily in the entire biosphere so that its rich diversity and complex patterns, which contribute a rich beauty to the divine life, is neglected.

[68] Cobb, *The Earthist Challenge to Economism* (1999), 177.

[69] Cobb and Daly, *For the Common Good* (1994), 398; Daly, *Beyond Growth* (1996), 20.

[70] Cobb and Daly, *For the Common Good*(1994), 404. On account of political economic reason alone, Daly the economist cannot accept biocentrism or geocentrism, because they imply a form of "ecological reductionism" in which the human economy, which is a subsystem of the earth ecosystem, is simply shrunk to nothing so that everything is ecosystem. By the same token, Daly opposes "economic imperialism" in which the subsystem of human economy expands until everything is included. (Daly, *Beyond Growth* [1996], 11.)

[71] Max L. Stackhouse, whom I put into the North American neoconservative theological camp, argues in opposition to ecological theologies that it is only by the knowledge of something other than nature that we may know that the *status quo* is not as it should be, and that only by grasping what is beyond nature are we able to resist to reverting to the *status quo ante* of organicism or plunging into the *fluxus quo* of process. (See Stackhouse, *Christian Social Ethics in a Global Era* [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995], 52.) I do not see why Daly and Cobb would not agree with him. Still, the difference is that while Stackhouse's metaphysical-moral vision allows human beings to "cook" the "fallen" nature by human technology, Daly and Cobb's transcendental source of value is nothing but the check against such an "anthropocentric vandalism." Stackhouse argues that only the Reformed-Puritan tradition, in which each person has his/her own calling from God, not from the pregiven orders of nature or society, can enhance the work ethic necessary for vigorous economic activities; yet, for Daly and Cobb, such a work ethic is the expression of "growthmania" which is totally ignorant of the physical limit of Earth's ecosystem.

[72] Cobb, *The Earthist Challenge to Economism* (1999), 8. Emphasis is mine.

denies that the Earth is worthy of our *supreme* devotion and loyalty, because the Earth is not God, and God is not the Earth; nonetheless, he firmly believes that the Earth is far more inclusive and a more suitable object of our devotion than Christianity, a nation, or, particularly, our idolatrous belief in economic growth.[73]

Importantly, Cobb's Earthism is his refined theo-ethical alternative to "economism" which he defines as the belief that society should be organized for the sake of economic growth and that our primary devotion should be directed to the expansion of the economy.[74] For Cobb, "A world which once seemed open to almost infinite expansion of human population and economic activity now appears as a world of limits";[75] therefore, what becomes crucial for now is the *impossibility* of economic growth itself beyond certain limits, and of the industrial nonrenewing extractive economy itself, both capitalist and socialist alike. According to Cobb, the assumption that economic growth can continue indefinitely is simply a "fundamental error" and "profound illusion."[76] Therefore, a big U-turn is called for, and the change must begin with the reconnection of economics and ecology, in which economics becomes the rule for ordering "the whole household"(*oikoumene*) so that humanity can flourish alongside other species in a sustainable way.[77] Cobb's Earthism then is fundamentally a "limit-to-growth" argument that challenges the prescription of continued economic growth as a

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[73] *Ibid*., 179-180.

[74] *Ibid*., 5-6.

[75] Cobb, *Sustainability* (1993), 7.

[76] Cobb, "Liberation Theology and the Global Economy," in *Liberating the Future: God, Mammon and Theology*, ed., Rieger, Joerg (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 39. Herman E. Daly also affirms that long before we have reached ultimate biophysical limits to growth in the scale of our economy. (Daly, *Beyond Growth*, 215.)

[77] Cobb, "Christianity, Economics, and Ecology," in *Christianity and Ecology*, eds., Dieter T. Hessel and Rosemary R. Ruether (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2000), 507. These new principles of political economy, popularly known as "ecological economics," emphasize the traditionally ignored principles of right scale, sustainability, sufficiency, equity, and efficiency. (Daly, "Sustainable Growth? No Thank You," in *The Case Against the Global Economy and For a Turn Toward the Local*, eds. Jerry Mander and Edward Goldsmith [San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1996], *passim*.) "In its physical dimensions," argues Daly, "the economy is an open subsystem of the earth ecosystem, which is finite, nongrowing, and materially closed." (Daly, "Sustainable Growth: An Impossibility Theorem," in *Valuing the Earth: Economics, Ecology, Ethics* [Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993], 267; Daly and Townsend, *Valuing the Earth*, 3.) Cobb and Daly criticize both capitalism and socialism, because what is common to both of them is their equal commitment to large-scale, factory-style, and energy-capital-intensive modes of production heavily dependent upon nonrenewable resources. (Daly and Cobb, *For the Common Good*, 13.)

panacea for underdevelopment and maldistribution of wealth.[78] In other words, Cobb's Earthism is fundamentally a form of creation-centered economy that challenges the prevailing economic paradigm characterized by its strict anthropocentrism. By Earthism, Cobb is proposing to change our object of devotion from economic growth to the sustainability and wholeness of all the creation.

I am deeply persuaded by Cobb, because, as he puts it bluntly, there is simply no possibility of unlimited economic growth based on fossil fuels.[79] As the human economy continues to expand globally, nearly half of the world's forests, which once covered the Earth, have already been lost.[80] Surely, the Earth does not have an infinite capacity to supply the resources necessary for production and to absorb the resulting wastes from us; nonetheless, we are blindly exploiting our natural resource base and generating waste at a rate which exceeds the capacity of the natural world to regenerate and heal itself. Indeed, we are now borrowing and plundering from our future generations who will inherit from us only a depleted and degraded Earth. Probably, as the ecologist Robert Ayres warns, we may well be on the way to our own extinction.[81]

V. A Quarrel with Cobb

Christian theology began to take nature and ecological concerns as its decisive context since the early 1970s and its significance has gained wider public attention since the 1990s. As the world is now seen as fundamentally limited in a physical sense, we have witnessed in ecological theologies in general

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[78] Cobb has confidence that growth is incidental to the relief of poverty and it eliminates poverty only when it is accompanied by governmental policies designed to benefit the poor. (See Cobb, "Christianity, Economics, and Ecology," in *Christianity and Ecology*, 505; "Liberation Theology and the Global Economy," in *Liberating the Future*, 38.) Daly argues that the growth in the orthodox paradigm is actually an "antieconomic growth," because it impoverishes the quality of life of the poor and depletes nature. (Daly, *Steady-State Economics: The Economics of Biophysical Equilibrium and Moral Growth* [San Francisco: W.H. Freeman and Company, 1977], 101.) Since the elimination of the most degrading consequences of poverty can be in fact attained with little growth (Cobb, "Liberation Theology and the Global Economy," in *Liberating the Future*, 38.), the human capacity to overcome poverty or to prevent starvation should be limited. (Cobb, *Sustainability*, 9.)

[79] Cobb and Birch, *The Liberation of Life* (1981), 253. Indeed, we have to seriously rethink our whole economy in light of the sheer fact that since 1950 global economic output has jumped from $3.8 trillion to $18.9 trillion--a nearly five-fold increase--, meaning that our generation has consumed more of the world's natural capital in this brief period than during the *entire* human history to that point. (Wayne Ellwood, *The No-nonsense Guide to Globalization* [London: Verso, 2001], 92.)

[80] Hilary French, *Vanishing Borders: Protecting the Planet in the Age of Globalization* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000), 35.

[81] Quoted from Ellwood, *The No Non-sense Guide to Globalization* (2001), 93.

and Cobb's Earthism in particular an exodus from the anthropocentric understanding of the creation toward a fresh, new awareness of the fundamental limit of human freedom and creativity within creation's integrity. This movement away from anthropocentrism, I believe, is their biggest contribution.[82] However, ecological theologians in the West in general and Cobb in particular, despite their commendable effort not to overlook the issue of justice, tend to lose the sight of the fact that in a profound sense nature and history are drawn together in the reality of the poor.[83]

As I have already mentioned, ecological theologians have made vigorous efforts to incorporate the perspective of justice in their reflection on ecological sustainability. Still, I am not fully satisfied. Although Cobb shares the faith of "liberation" in that oppressive forces should be removed; he consciously distances himself from the "rhetoric of liberation," because he believes that if the meaning of the life is not clarified, liberation can be romantic in the sense of failing to recognize our capacities for evil.[84] Rather he believes that what is most needed today is "a deep spiritual transformation that will lead human beings to experience themselves simply as a part of the whole web and *not as agents of purposive change*."[85] For Cobb, what is presupposed in the notion of human beings as subject of purposive change is the assumption that human beings are able to fashion the world according to their rational purposes; and that is problematic, since it is such an assumption of *human omnipotence* that brings about the expression of "progress," "human responsibility," and the like.[86] For sure, Cobb does not deny that human beings are both responsible and, *in principle*, free to change; still, he wants to emphasize that human beings are not masters of history,[87] and that we need

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[82] However, a group of women arose and began to claim that overcoming anthropocentrism is not enough, for such a view is typically *men's* view and the roots of the problem run much deeper than that. This is the claim of the group of women, known as ecofeminists, whose central insight is that the domination of men over women (patriarchy) is the basic prototype for the domination of human beings over nature, and that there are deep structural resonances between men's violence toward nature and men's violence toward women. (See Ynestra King, "Healing the Wounds: Feminism, Ecology, and the Nature/Culture Dualism," in *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*, eds., Irene Diamond and Gloria Feman Orenstein [San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1990], 109.; Yaakov Jerome Garb, "Perspective or Escape? Ecofeminist Musings on Contemporary Earth Imagery," in *Ibid*., 269.)

[83] King and Woodyard, *Liberating Nature: Theology and Economics in a New Order* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1999), 86.

[84] Cobb and Birch, *The Liberation of Life* (1981), 2-3.

[85] *Ibid*., 65.

[86] Cobb, *Sustainability* (1993), 9.

[87] *Ibid*., 111. Elsewhere, Cobb says pungently: "The whole biosphere today would in fact be much healthier if evolution had not led to the appearance of human beings." (Cobb, "Ecology, Science, and Religion: Toward a Postmodern Worldview," in *Reading in Ecology and Feminist Theology*, ed., Mary Heather MacKinnon and Moni McIntyre [Kansas City:

to recognize "the physical limits of our context," and thus of our own capacities to envision needed change.[88] Accordingly, his prescription is clear: "Accept limits and seek a decent life for all within them; live in balance with other species and primarily on the renewable resources of the planet; and use nonrenewable resources only at a rate that is agreed upon in light of technological progress.[89]" But, I cannot help but ask, where in this prescription is the issue of injustice/justice today?

One cannot deny that stories of suffering and injustice are rampant all around the world, particularly in Asia where I stand. Asia is a continent where justice is denied, peace under threat and life is constantly abused and destroyed. As the most populous continent, it has been the home for the largest number of the poor in the world, with more than a billion hungry people, for military dictatorships, for terrorism, for religious fundamentalism and militant religious ideologies, for threats to religious freedom, for gross violation of human rights and human abuse, for the abominable caste system, for rampant abuse of women and children and human trafficking, for the striking contrasts between the rich and the poor, for the continued exclusion of millions of people from access to basic health care, education and shelter, etc. This reality does pose a serious challenge to the affirmation and practice of Christian theology. It compels us to move from actions of charity and service to serious engagement with the forces of injustice and to a vocation of advocacy, solidarity and partnership with those struggling for justice. In my view, justice is the most outstanding aspiration of the people of Asia and the world today. In fact, justice is crucial for peace and for the sanctity and future of life. I believe that a strong accent on justice in a diverse and multi-faith context such as Asia, which is featured by strife and struggles for justice, is likely to throw light on many creative possibilities for the Christian theology to discover itself afresh as it engages in conversation with global realities and challenges that Asia so well represents. Justice, in short. is the pre-condition, the foundation for peace and life.

Sheed & Ward, 1995], 244.) In fact, many others share the same belief with Cobb: For Daly, human beings are more creatures than creators "endowed with creativity *but also subject to limits*." (Daly, *Beyond Growth*, 224); for Larry L. Rasmussen, "we are not exactly cocreators [but] coparticipants" and therefore "freedom and the good life [must be sought] *within* the realm of necessity in accord with creation's integrity." (Rasmussen, *Earth Community Earth Ethics* [Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1998], 292); and for Sallie McFague, "we are not [earth's] creator, its center, or its means of continuation or transformation [but] recipients of a gift." (McFague, *Life Abundant*, 138.)

[88] Cobb, *Sustainability* (1992), 11. We should not forget, however, that Cobb equally emphasizes the openness of the future and the unlimited power of transformation, understood as the grace of God. This seemingly self-contradictory claim, in my view, has to do with Cobb's understanding of "the open-ended commitment of the evolutionary process." In fact, Cobb is critical of the French visionary scientist Teilhard de Chardin, because his account of evolutionary process as a *single* goal and *inevitable* destiny for the whole is insufficiently sensitive to the open-endedness of the evolutionary process. (*Ibid*., 11; Cobb and Birth, *The Liberation of Life*, 4.)

[89] *Ibid*., 7; See also Daly and Townsend, *Valuing the Earth* (1993), 214.

Cobb has his point and he has presented it well; nevertheless, in light of the contemporary challenge from economic neoliberalism, which is the moral, philosophical, and ideological basis of market fundamentalism today, I would like to argue that Cobb must reconsider the theological significance of "liberation" and find the way to secure and safeguard the principle of "justice" in order to envision needed change. Having investigated Cobb's theology that attempts to relate God with political economy, I have realized one very interesting thing--i.e., his lack of serious attention to and correct knowledge of economic neoliberalsim that has reshaped the fundamental structure of global economy for the past 40 years.[90] What surprises me most is that anti-growth proponents like Cobb and Daly, in their *For the Common Good*, appeal their case to F.A. Hayek, known as the "founding father" of economic neoliberalism, who taught that all future improvement depends on the continuance of the growth of wealth by blindly following the so-called "spontaneous order" of market.[91] As a staunch anti-Keynesian and anti-Marxist, Hayek rejected completely and unabashedly social justice as well as the fundamental Christian ethic of "love-thy-neighbour-as thyself," insisting that social justice is incompatible with individual liberty and that Jesus' teaching of neighbor love is primitive and unfit to modern world. Indeed, it is no coincidence that Hayek's idea has found its concrete embodiment in political neoconservatism today, often called the "New Right." Interestingly, Hayek's idea of spontaneous order is built upon a naturalistic societal/cultural evolutionism that implies a profound historical pessimism about the agenda for changing society (which is against the very principle of process thought that "the future is truly open") as well as a self-enclosed secularism that forecloses any transcendental principle of renewal and hope in history (which is against the very notion of the God in process philosophy as creative love and source of novelty). Hayek denied any creative human role in history, and he taught that resistance is futile, because the mechanisms of the free market are "natural," also because the power of constructive human reason is limited, and because there is no God transcendent over what simply "is."[92]

It is in this challenge and today's context that I insist that we need to ask the following questions seriously: Can a theology which is primarily focused on ecological sustainability address the issue of justice *with the same force*? How can we ensure the interlocking and interpenetrating connection between justice and sustainability without diminishing the original forces in each? How can we secure

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[90] Cobb only says that neoliberalism arose with the demise of Communism and the decline of socialist thinking (Cobb, *The Earthist Challenge to Economism*, 6.); however, the fact is that neoliberalism arose well before the event in 1989, competing with socialism in the East and replacing Keynesianism in the West.

[91] Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960), 305.

[92] Regarding Hayek's idea and its implication to theology see the author's article: Yoon-Jae Chang, "Economic Globalization and the Neo-liberalism of F.A. Hayek: A Theological Critique," in *Quest*, vil. 2, no. 2, November 2003.

and safeguard the principle of justice to offer a more socially and historically responsible eco-centrism? How can we prevent the danger of reductionism of theological language to that of the ecological sciences, when we vigorously take creation and life as our fertile ground for theological reflection?

VI. Conclusion: Creation in light of Liberation

I do not think that creation/life and liberation/justice are two separate things. Indeed, as Rosemary R. Ruether affirms, the "God/ess" who underlies creation and redemption is one and indivisible.[93] The Creator is our Savior. However, in order to secure and reinforce the perspectives justice, I'd like to propose with the late Dorothy Soelle that we interpret *creation in light of liberation*, that we apprehend the creation tradition from a liberation perspective. This way of dialectic, I believe, has a good and solid biblical ground as well, as Soelle herself explicates it as follows:

> Biblical faith originated from a historical event of liberation, not from belief in creation. For the people of Israel, the Exodus… was… a "root experience" … In Gerhard von Rad's opinion, faith in creation was a comparatively late development and decidedly an ancillary and secondary belief… In the words of Croatto, "Genesis is an 'interpretation' of Exodus." … If liberation precedes creation, then soteriology precedes cosmology… It is not creation that grants us our freedom; rather, we are enabled to understand creation in light of our memory and experience of liberation.[94]

Today, creation is no longer an ancillary and secondary belief for sure. Rather, in the context of our new and profound awareness of "the fundamental finitude of our planet," "the fundamental limits of our creaturedhood," and "ecological dependence," Cobb is not wrong to say that we should take creation as the context within which redemption/liberation occurs.[95] He did prioritize creation/life over against liberation/justice. However, "the fundamental limits of our creaturedhood" should not de-prioritize the need to change the system of greed and injustice that denies such limits of our creaturedhood. Nor can the ontology of our "ecological dependence" overlook the reality of our

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[93] Ruether, *Sexism and God-talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983), 215.

[94] Soelle, *To Work and To Love: A Theology of Creation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 7-11.

[95] Cobb, *Sustainability* (1993), 83.

societal relationship characterized by subordination, exploitation, and dependence. Moreover, in light of the challenge from neoliberalism that has dominated the world for the past 40 years denying justice and any possibility of human redemption/liberation in history, I am compelled to reemphasize liberation/justice as the basic instinct and underlying thrust *through which* creation/life is understood as the power and source for our survival and resistance. My argument is not to reinstitute a dichotomy between liberation/justice and creation/life but to rehabilitate liberation/justice as the due dialectical partner of creation/life in today's context where the former is denied contemptuously by its critics and/or belittled silently as the old rhetoric by its friendly partners, particularly ever since the fall the Berlin Wall in 1989.

To conclude, creation faith *alone* is susceptible to the danger of "cheap reconciliation," whereby we are asked to live as if we did not require freeing from present, unjust orders, as if the God of creation/nature had triumphed over the God of liberation/history.[96] We must move beyond a mere ecological rhetoric of "interconnectedness," because our problem is not that we are disconnected, but that, after all, we have become *badly* connected.[97] What we need is not the recovering or restoring of relationships *per se*, but a "liberated and liberating relationship,"[98] i.e., a just relationship among all beings. Indeed, as Aloysius Pieris affirmed, religion is the "memory of an Absolute Future," or the "memory of a Total Liberation";[99] and our God is the power of our liberation, redemption, and salvation, whose sacred power rejects the inevitability of oppression and injustice and whose sacred power invokes moral responsibility upon us. We must think anew as to how we can view life and peace through the lens of justice, for we know very well that life without justice is not life of all but the privilege of a few, and peace without justice is only a false peace that conceals injustice.

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[96] Soelle, *To Work and To Love* (1984), 7-11.

[97] Kathleen M. Sands, *Escape from Paradise: Evil and Tragedy in Feminist Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 48. She affirms, "bodies never become *un*related to minds, nor people to each other; nor culture to the ground beneath it we just become *badly* related."

[98] Call for Jubilee Year 1998, *African and Asian Spirituality Cosmic and Indigenous: New Awareness and Orientation* (Quezon City, The Philippines: Milcar Enterprises, 1992), 22.

[99] Aloysius Pieris, "Faith Communities and Communalism" in *Fire & Water*, 100.

Abstract

Nobody denies the necessity to connect "the cry of the poor" with “the cry of the Earth," i.e., to link the crisis of humanity with the crisis of the earth. And yet, can a theology which is primarily focused on ecological sustainability address the issue of justice with the same force as liberation theology? How can we ensure the interlocking and interpenetrating connection between creation/life and liberation/justice without diminishing the original forces in each? With these questions in mind, the author examines John B. Cobb, Jr.'s process theology including his "biospheric vision" and "Earthism," unfolding how he has combined creation/life with liberation/justice in order to overcome not only the problem of evil in his early process thought but also many forms of biocentrism which lacks transcendental and prophetic visions. Also arguing that ecological theologians in the West in general and John Cobb in particular, despite their commendable effort not to overlook the issue of justice, tend to lose the sight of the fact that in a profound sense nature and history are drawn together in the reality of the poor, the author proposes that we interpret creation/life in light of liberation/justice to ensure the interlocking and interpenetrating connection between them. The author's argument is not to reinstitute a dichotomy between liberation and creation but to rehabilitate liberation as the due dialectical partner of creation in today's context where justice is denied contemptuously by its critics or belittled silently as the old rhetoric by its friendly partners, particularly ever since the fall the Berlin Wall in 1989. This discussion is timely and important, according to the author, for the coming 10th General Assembly of the World Council of Church, which will be held in Busan, Korea in 2013, under the theme, "God of Life, lead us to Justice and Peace," will have to find a way to deal with the "new ecumenical trinity agenda," which is "life," "justice," and "peace" simultaneously and in a more integrated manner.

Keywords: life, justice, process theology, liberation theology, WCC

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