

Liberation Perspective in Ecological Ethics - Focusing on Leonardo Boff's "Liberating Ecojustice"

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Abstract

This paper illustrates an eco-ethical perspective from Leonardo Boff's Latin American theology of liberation. His works of the 1990s have made a bridge between the conception of liberation and ecological crisis. Specifically, Boff articulates "ecojustice" and "ecospirituality," claiming that the plight of the oppressed and the Earth are closely connected. This essay emphasizes the work of Boff as a representative not only of liberation theology, but more also of ecological ethics. Ecojustice assumes that to address ecological degradation in our world, we must also challenge the exploitation of the poor. The link between economic injustices and ecological deterioration should be the main concern of ecological ethics. Furthermore, ecojustice provides a dy-

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dynamic framework for thought and action that fosters ecological integrity and the struggle for social and economic justice. Boff regards the disruption of connectedness as the ultimate root of the ecological crisis. For Koreans, the concept of ecojustice is a reminder of the connection between the devastation of indigenous culture and the damage to our natural world. Ecojustice raises a fundamental question for capitalized Korean consumers. If we take interconnectedness based on a cosmological perspective for the future generations, our approach should be ecocentric. The main emphasis of ecocentric ecological ethics is a perspective which values all life as a sacred gift and which takes the interrelation of all life so seriously that it seeks to apply care and justice sensitively to the right relationship between our species and all other life forms. The dialogical relationship between love and justice is critical to our understanding of ecojustice.

• Key Words:

Leonardo Boff, Ecocentric Ecological Ethics, Liberation Theology, Ecojustice, Ecospirituality, Sacramental

I. Introduction

Liberation theology stresses the example of Jesus of going first to the poor and emphasizes doing theology in specific social, political, economic, and ecological contexts. The methodological priority on the poor is described with “preferential option for the poor” by most liberation theologians including Gustavo Gutierrez, Leonardo Boff, James Cone, and many others. This concept is also one of the major developments in Catholic social teaching in the 20th century. The option for the poor is simply the idea that, as reflected in the Bible, “whatever you did for the least of these, you did for me.”¹

Among many liberation scholars, Leonardo Boff is the first Latin American theologian of liberation to situate social and political liberation within a broader ecological framework. Although the Theology of Liberation did not begin with or express early a concern for the ecological issues, Boff’s works of the 1990s represent his emphasizing of liberation on ecological models. Boff argues that the logic leading dominant classes to oppress the poor also results in the exploitation of the natural world. Reflecting on the Latin American circumstances, Boff discerns interrelatedness among ecological, human, social, and spiritual aspects of life on Earth.²

Historically, Boff’s liberation perspectives took an ecological turn in the late 1980s and early 1990s. According to Boff, just as conventional ecology developed unrelated to social context, liberation theology had been articulated without reference to the natural world.³ Boff’s early

1 Matthew 25:40.

2 Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1997), 12.

3 Leonardo Boff, “Social Ecology: Poverty and Misery,” in *Ecotheology: Voices from South and*

ecological writings show the influence of Latin American social ecology that grew after the United Nations first international conference on the environment in Stockholm in 1972. Following the work of some scholars from Latin American countries, he argued for a “social ecology that is capable of articulating social justice.”⁴ Boff also points out that theologians must speak of “ecological sin.” For him, the commandment “You shall not kill,” for example, may also refer to biocide and ecocide.⁵

Ecology and Liberation was Boff’s first book expressing an ecologically-oriented liberation theology. Although he still claimed that the “social project is social ecology,” in this book he argued for a “holistic ecology” because it is “theological by nature.”⁶ In this and following works, he shows the influence of the South African philosopher Jan Smuts as he articulated a holistic ecological model. Drawing on the spiritual traditions of Francis of Assisi, Teilhard de Chardin, as well as Augustinian, Bonaventuran, Pascalian and existentialist traditions and the “new physics,” he calls for a merging of ecological and theological concerns.⁷ Elements of a liberation theology that protect the poor and the Earth, according to Boff, include Christian panentheism,⁸ a sacramental view of creation,⁹ and a doctrine of the Holy Spirit that

North (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), 245.

4 Ibid., 239.

5 Ibid., 245.

6 Leonardo Boff, *Ecology and Liberation: A New Paradigm* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 11.

7 Ibid., 16-18.

8 Boff expresses this meaning that is “God in all and all in God.” He points out that this term was first proposed by Karl Christian Frederick Krause. He further distinguishes this idea from pantheism which holds that God and the world are identical. See Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, 153.

9 According to Yongbum Park, the sacramental view of creation has been expressed by several

provides a model of reality as energy.

Boff further articulated this theological and ecological holism, focusing on the Amazon of Brazil as a concrete case, in his book, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*. In this volume he illustrated an ecology-based cosmology, rooted in evolutionary processes, in which sin is defined as “breaking connectedness.”¹⁰ Influenced by Brian Swimme, Thomas Berry, Meister Eckhart, and Teilhard de Chardin, Boff finds God within the “cosmogenic process of the universe.”¹¹ According to Boff, without a spiritual revolution, the new paradigm of connectedness is impossible, resulting in further damage to the Earth, including the Amazon, “temple of the planet’s biodiversity.”¹²

As a scholar of liberation ecological ethics, Boff’s concern has always been with the poor and oppressed of the world including the ecosystem. In his early writings, the oppression of the poor was exposed through Marxist social scientific analysis, evaluated in the light of faith, and then actively opposed. In Boff’s later writings, however, he has focused on ecological degradation and articulated “ecojustice” and “ecospirituality,” claiming that the plight of the oppressed and the

Christian ethicists, including James Nash in *Loving Nature: Ecological Integrity and Christian Responsibility*; Sallie McFague in *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology*; Larry Rasmussen in *Earth Community Earth Ethics*; and John Hart in *Sacramental Commons: Christian Ecological Ethics*. Their common notion is that “since Christian faith teaches that the creation reveals God and is the locus of God’s engagement with humanity, it clearly follows that Christians should be cautious about their impact on that world, and should treat natural systems with respect.” See Yongbum Park, “*Chondogyo* and a Sacramental Commons: Korean Indigenous Religion and Christianity on Common Ground,” in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Religion and Ecology*, ed. John Hart (Oxford, UK: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 2017), 336.

10 Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, 85.

11 Boff, *Ecology and Liberation*, 146.

12 Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, 87.

Earth are closely connected and interrelated.¹³

This paper will mainly focus on the work of Leonardo Boff as a representative not only of liberation theology, but more also of liberation ecological ethics. In particular, this exploration will investigate Boff's understanding of ecojustice within his liberation frameworks on the basis of Latin American context, and try to apply it to Korean settings.

I. Meaning of Ecojustice

Ecojustice is a term of joining together ecology and justice which makes a point of encounter between ecological protection and social justice. This notion was first articulated from the task which concluded in Earth Summit of Rio de Janeiro that was mainly for an ecojustice agenda. Ecojustice requires both social solidarity and sustainability, as the libertarian social ecologist Murray Bookchin pointed out in his critique of environmental fundamentalism.¹⁴ The call for ecojustice is premised on the view that the human degradation of nature is fundamentally linked to the social systems that oppress human beings. We cannot address one without the other. In other words, poverty is an ecological problem, just as violations of nature's biodiversity and the biosphere have worsened the extent of global poverty.¹⁵ Therefore, ecojustice assumes that to address ecological degradation in our world, we must also challenge the exploitation of the poor. In other words,

13 Boff states this idea in *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* beginning with two strong propositions: "The most threatened of nature's creatures today are the poor," and "living species are likewise threatened." See page one of the mentioned book.

14 Murray Bookchin, *Remaking Society* (Montreal: Black Rose, 1989), 7.

15 Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, 81.

one part of the world cannot live in the atmosphere of unrestrained consumption while the rest destroys its ecological systems just to survive on Earth by the disruption of universal connectedness.¹⁶ Ecojustice cannot be separated from economic or other justices. For example, as John Hart points out that in “an issue such as global climate change, many thinkers have criticized what is happening to the Earth and people,” especially the most vulnerable populations in the Earth, “confronts injustices.”¹⁷

Boff’s work is in many ways representative of an approach to ecojustice that has become quite common in liberation theology. In Boff’s work there remains a strong emphasis on issues of justice. The link between economic injustices and ecological deterioration is the topic of many ecumenical contributions to ecological ethics. This link is captured in the notion of “ecojustice” where the “eco” refers to both economic and ecological injustices together.¹⁸ The struggle for ecojustice seeks to challenge the abuse of power that results in the situation that poor people have to suffer the effects of ecological damage caused by the greed of others. Complementarily, Dieter Hessel defines ecojustice: “Ecojustice provides a dynamic framework for thought and action that fosters ecological integrity and the struggle for social and economic justice.”¹⁹ It emerges through constructive human responses that serve ecological health and social equity together.

This link between ecological degeneration and economic injustice is also well articulated in Boff’s work. The logic that exploits the op-

16 Ibid., 81-85.

17 Hart, *Wiley Blackwell Companion*, xxiv.

18 Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, 12.

19 Dieter T. Hessel, ed., *Theology for Earth Community: A Field Guide* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 18.

pressed classes and subjects peoples to the interests of a few rich and powerful countries is the same as the logic that devastates the Earth and plunders its wealth. In this context, Boff offers a sharp critique of the economic models of sustained growth and of sustainable development.²⁰ As a citizen of Brazil, he is particularly concerned with the destruction of the Amazon rainforests by macro-economic projects that are insensitive to the ecological balance of this bioregion.²¹ This is leading not only to a loss of biodiversity but also to injustices towards indigenous peoples.²² To emphasize the link between people and the natural world, Boff prefers to use the term “social ecology” instead of other forms of ecological awareness where the emphasis is on the natural world only.²³

In Boff’s work there is a strong emphasis on the concepts such as “ecological wholeness,” “interconnectedness,” a “holistic approach,” the “community of life,” a sense of “the dignity,” and “sacredness of the Earth.”²⁴ These themes have been elaborated in numerous contributions to ecological ethics, most notably in indigenous ethics, ecofeminist ethics, the creation spirituality of Matthew Fox, some exponents of process theology, socioecological ethics of John Hart, and many others. For instance, this correlates with what Rosemary Ruether has called a “sacramental approach” to ecological ethics.²⁵

20 Boff defines the term of sustainable development as a kind of “oxymoron,” which is especially true in capitalism. For him sustainability that serves only for the profit of materialism is nothing but “rhetoric and illusion.” See Boff, *Cry of the Earth*, 67.

21 Boff, *Cry of the Earth*, 86.

22 Ibid., 98-100.

23 Ibid., 105.

24 Ibid., 116-118.

25 Rosemary R. Ruether, “Conclusion: Eco-justice at the Center of the Church’s Mission,” In *Chris-*

Such a sacramental approach draws on the Bible and on patristic and medieval mysticism to speak to the heart, to inspire a vision of the sacred and to express an ecstatic experience of communion within the Earth community. It is distinct from a covenantal approach that draws inspiration from the Bible and the covenantal tradition to emphasize a commitment for right relationships within the Earth community.²⁶

Boff regards the disruption of connectedness as the ultimate root of the ecological crisis.²⁷ He mentions a new paradigm that is coming to birth in which connectedness and the sense of a planetary community will form the basis for a universal religion.²⁸ It will seek convergences through restoring the sacredness of all things, reclaiming the dignity of the Earth, rediscovering the mission of human beings to celebrate communion and life, and encountering the mystery of God.²⁹ It will draw not only on instrumental reason (*logos*) but also on affectivity and sensitivity (*pathos*), passion (*eros*) and nature's inner voice (*daimon*).³⁰ It is characterized by wholeness, interdependence, complexity, complementarity, reciprocity, creativity, the common good, a shared destiny, and sacramentality.

Many ecological ethicists draw inspiration from contemporary science, most notably from the "story of the universe" as reconstructed by astrophysics, geology, evolutionary biology, and others. Some

tianity and Ecology: Seeking the Wellbeing of Earth and Humans, ed. Dieter T. Hessel & Rosemary R. Ruether (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 603.

26 *Ibid.*, 604-614.

27 Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, 81.

28 *Ibid.*, 68-69.

29 *Ibid.*

30 *Ibid.*, 12

scholars find eco-ethical ideas from this story. On the one hand, the story of the universe, as Boff points out, illustrates the insignificance of the human species in space and time throughout the vast dimensions of the cosmos.³¹ This may help to counter the dominant culture of anthropocentrism and to rediscover our place in the cosmos and in solidarity with the rest of the Earth community. On the other hand, this story illustrates the significance, in terms of a high degree of complexity, of the emergence of the human species. This may help to emphasize human responsibility towards the Earth community.³²

In short, the most comprehensive exposition of ecojustice developed within a Christian context is that from a voice of liberation theology, Leonardo Boff. The following quotation expresses his book title well: *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*. This part makes Boff's intention clear:

It is not only the poor and oppressed that must be liberated; today all humans must be liberated. We are hostages to a paradigm that places us – against the thrust of the universe over things instead of being with them in the great cosmic community. That is why I am extending the intuitions of liberation theology and demonstrating their validity and applicability for the questions enveloping the Earth, our bountiful mother.³³

31 *Ibid.*, 65.

32 Larry Rasmussen, *Earth Community, Earth Ethics* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 17-20.

33 Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, xii.

II. Theory of Ecojustice

This section will develop a theory of ecojustice which involves extending discussions about social justice—especially from political philosophy—and integrating them with approaches to ecological ethics. Until now, little has been done in philosophical and applied ethics to integrate the two, although ecofeminism and socioecological ethics³⁴ have started off the task.

Some important questions are raised before starting the search for a theory of ecojustice: “who or what is the membership of the society in which we are to practice social justice and ecological ethics?” and “who or what is to be included in our moral consideration?”³⁵ For example, if we use a kind of perspective such that our moral concern is only for human beings, then we will develop an anthropocentric approach that has limited ecojustice purposes.

Here is then a further raised question of “membership” as a basis for the theory of ecojustice. According to Christopher Preston, approaches to ecological ethics in the philosophical literature can be classified in three broad categories.³⁶ The first category is “anthropocentrism” which determines the rightness or goodness of ecological questions in terms of their impact on humanity; from this point of view, pollution of ecosystems is to be avoided because of the human right to clean air and water, or wilderness is to be preserved

³⁴ John Hart, *Cosmic Commons: Spirit, Science, and Space* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013), 30, n2; 184-89. Hart coined this term to express the integration, in context, of justice within and among human communities and the ecological wellbeing of Earth and all living beings.

³⁵ Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, 67-68.

³⁶ Christopher J. Preston, *Saving Creation: Nature and Faith in the Life of Holmes Rolston III* (San Antonio, TX: Trinity University Press, 2009), 101.

primarily for human recreation. The second category is known as “extensionalism” which extends the community of moral consideration to all beings who have the quality of emotion or feeling. So, it does not include trees and waterways as such. From this ethical perspective the preservation of pandas that cannot co-exist with a road being built for human purposes would take priority over the road for human use. The third category is “ecocentrism” which encourages us to see the whole natural world as a living organism in which soils, waters and plants for instance have intrinsic value.³⁷

Which of these approaches should inform our theory of ecojustice? To answer this question, we need to declare the metaphysical perspective brought to our ethics. Here we touch on matters scientific or cosmological, even on religions and theologies. Put simply, for our purposes, if our belief system gives a unique and special place to human beings, for example, they alone in the natural world are made in the image of God and they alone have souls which survive death. Or, if we adopt the view that human intelligence entitles our species to dominance, then we are likely to be a side for an anthropocentric approach to ecojustice.³⁸

According to Preston, if we take seriously the interconnectedness of all human and non-human animals that have evolved from common ancestors, or if we insist that all pain and suffering should be minimized, then we might adopt extensionalism.³⁹ On the other hand, if we take interconnectedness further, based on a cosmology which explains all life emerged from star-dust, and that the biosphere itself not

37 Ibid., 101-103.

38 Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, 69.

39 Preston, *Saving Creation*, 102.

only sustains life but lives, and that there is a kind of continuity to life that we share, not only with past generations, but with future generations, then our approach to ecojustice would be ecocentric, valuing all of our natural world and taking seriously our obligations to future generations of all species.⁴⁰ This approach is, of course, in accord with the Gaia hypothesis proposed by biologist James Lovelock.⁴¹

The Gaia hypothesis invites us to see the Earth itself as a holistic, macro-organism. Just as each body has many parts but is unified, so is the body of Earth. Speaking of the Gaia hypothesis as a “splendid metaphor and religious vision that underlies ecological discourse,” Leonardo Boff writes:

This vision holds that the universe is made up of a vast network of relationships in such a way that each one lives through the other, for the other, and with the other; that the human being is a node of relationships going in all directions; and that the Divinity itself is revealed to be an all-relational Reality.⁴²

In broad terms, Boff emphasizes that this is the perspective that can be proposed we bring to ecojustice because it is a more plausible and accurate account of the social and ecological reality in which we frame our ethics and our spirituality.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 103.

⁴¹ James E. Lovelock, *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1979), 17.

⁴² Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, 20.

III. Ecocentric Theory of Ecojustice

This part will seek an ecocentric theory of ecojustice, but this raises many other ethical and theological questions. Are we entering into ecological fundamentalism, where there is no distinction between our moral obligations applying to reptiles and our obligations to human beings?⁴³ That is not what this chapter is proposing: The well-being of some human beings may not rate as highly as the preservation of a member of a non-human species in the Earth where it is under threat. Nor is it in harmony with the nature of the universe to abandon a sense of difference in value terms between species. Yet, it is a universe in which we eat each other according to the law which is popularly known as “the food chain or web.”⁴⁴ That is, our interdependence also suggests a comprehensively relational ethic. This means that choices about how we are to live, that are ethical choices, include decisions about using non-human animals for human purposes.⁴⁵

The main emphasis of ecocentric ecological ethics is a perspective which values all life as a sacred gift and which takes the interconnect-edness of all life seriously.⁴⁶ It also seeks to apply care and justice sensitively to the relationship between our species and all other life forms.⁴⁷ At all times, the basic consideration for such an ethic is “how

43 See Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1993), 124-129. for an appreciation and critique of deep ecology.

44 *Ibid.*, 129.

45 *Ibid.*

46 In *Chondogyo*, the Korean indigenous religion, this kind of relationship is also well described and further developed to overcome class confliction. See Park, “*Chondogyo* and Sacramental Commons,” 331-347. Korean Indigenous Religion and Christianity on Common Ground,” in John Hart ed., *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Religion and Ecology* (Oxford, UK: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 2017).

ought we live so as to enhance life on earth?" The difficult decisions, policies, and practices which arise from this perspective may be guided by an appropriate ethic of care and justice.⁴⁸

Christian ethics in the tradition of twentieth century teachers such as Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich have described justice as the expression of agape love when it engages with power.⁴⁹ When love moves into the social sphere, the economic sphere, or the political sphere, love must transform itself into justice, social justice, if there is to be right relationship. Agape seeks to shape our interconnectedness into right relationship. So, in this approach to Christian ethics, justice is the way to structure, channel, and challenge power to love's purpose. As Martin Luther King, Jr. summarized, "Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice. Justice at its best is love correcting everything that stands against love."⁵⁰

The dialogical relationship between love and justice is critical to our understanding of ecojustice. The engagement of love with power promotes certain realism in our endeavors for justice. It also suggests that the form of justice which addresses global poverty must be constantly enhanced and enriched by the qualities of compassion and mercy. It may be national interest or self-preservation which motivates the quest for global justice but only something more - quality of love, a sense of compassion, mercy, and friendship - will sustain and maintain a commitment to transcend the obstacles to achieving justice on the Earth.⁵¹

The link between love and ecojustice invites us another part which

47 Preston, *Saving Creation*, 103.

48 Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, 189.

49 Robert M. Franklin, "In pursuit of a Just Society: Martin Luther King, Jr. and John Rawls," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 18 (1990): 70.

50 Ibid.

has been studied by some Christian scholars. They might ask: Are we called to love nature? In what sense is the non-human world our neighbors? Francis of Assisi was sure that the injunction to love our neighbors extended to all creatures and beyond, to sister Moon and brother Sun as he sang. However, in practice, given its anthropocentric orientation, the dominant Christian tradition has tended to take a different position: While God and other people are to be subjects of our love, nature is not.⁵²

IV. Biblical Perspectives of Ecojustice

It is generally concluded in ecological ethics that apart from Francis of Assisi and certain medieval mystics, the Christian tradition has little to offer. Yet the story of creation in the Bible supplies plenty of teachings which suggest the intrinsic value of all creatures, an ecocentric perspective. In Genesis, God looked at creation and said: "It is good" – not good for people or even for God, but just good in itself.

Nonetheless, the dominant Christian attitudes to the natural world have moved between two anthropocentric perspectives derived from the Creation story of the book of Genesis. The Genesis story moves from the view of dominion in which the human species is lord and master of nature, to the more eco-friendly view of stewardship, in which human beings are partners of the Creator as guardians or gardeners of the Earth. Much more could be said about these and other images which derive from biblical origins. The notion of stewardship

51 Ibid., 76.

52 Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, 189-190.

is possible as an appropriate approach to ecojustice despite its anthropocentric interpretations by some scholars.⁵³ This concept also generates a concern for ethical responsibility at the same time as it questions any claims to ownership or ultimate control for human ends. The steward is the one entrusted with things precisely not his or her own. Biblically, this is a view in harmony with the Psalmist's assertion: "The Earth is the Lord's" (Psalm 24).

Stewardship is acceptable as an element within an ethic of ecojustice for it is consistent with the reality that has special responsibilities and potential for good or ill. If ecojustice is to be served by creation consciousness,⁵⁴ then human beings are to exercise their stewardship within an ecocentric rather than anthropocentric framework. Understood this way, stewardship is almost a synonym for another justice principle – "promotion of the common good." This is the principle of social solidarity and is prominent in Roman Catholic social teachings.⁵⁵ The common good emphasizes the interests of all in developing a society and the entire Earth which tries to achieve the good of all for present and future generations.

Given all this, how are we to summarize what we mean by ecojustice? Ecojustice seeks justice for both the nature and the human community. As such it is premised on an ecocentric understanding of the interconnectedness of all life on Earth, which respects, values, loves and cares about all life based on the Bible's creation story. Ecojustice therefore acknowledges the responsibility of human beings to promote

⁵³ Ibid., 189.

⁵⁴ John Hart has developed this idea throughout his research. See John Hart, *Sacramental Commons: Christian Ecological Ethics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), iii.

⁵⁵ Hart, *Sacramental Commons*, 9.

the common good through right relationship with all living beings. In exercising this responsibility, ecojustice requires practices and policies which respond primarily to the needs of the most disadvantaged and marginalized human and non-human beings in the world as liberation theology has similarly emphasized.

V. Ecological Ethics for Ecojustice

A credible Christian ecological ethics is taking shape through various texts that have been published in the last decade. This theological project is an imperative for the Christian tradition if it is to embrace a commitment to ecojustice and its ecocentric perspective. As this project develops a new discourse it must be open to multiple voices from various cultures and traditions, and a perspective which incorporates and values non-human species.⁵⁶

The fundamental platform of this ecological ethics is its rejection of traditional theism and instead its embrace of a panentheistic understanding of the divine. In a nutshell, panentheism declares that God is present in all aspects of creation, but is not confined to it. It affirms the divine co-creativity within the evolution of life rather than as an external agent based on a cause and effect relationship.⁵⁷

There are many derivative aspects of a panentheistic ecological ethics which we can merely name here. For a start, this approach signals a retreat from the traditional anthropocentric emphasis of Christian ethics, though it does not necessarily lead to an uncritical embrace

⁵⁶ Ibid., 110.

⁵⁷ Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, 153-154.

of a deep ecology which depreciates human responsibility. However, the doctrines of incarnation and *Imago Dei* must be reframed as in Sallie McFague's development of the metaphor of Earth as the body of God.⁵⁸ Another consequence of ecological ethics for Christian understandings is the place of the gospel story and the salvation-history theme as sacred narratives. They must be subjected to revision as theology comes to terms with the fact that "the Universe story" is the common narrative for all life as Hart indicated.⁵⁹ The long story of life on Earth puts a different perspective on the claims of Western monotheistic religions. Furthermore, the meaning of sin and salvation for individuals within the cosmic context must also come under revision if an ecocentric version of right relationship is to be legitimated.⁶⁰ Conventional views of the mission of the Church also come under challenge as missiology is interpreted primarily as a partnership with ecosystems. This might be the future of Missional Church.

The vision central to the Gospel, that of the Reign of God and its mandate in the Sermon on the Mount, envisions a community committed to the most vulnerable and marginalized. This is another element of Christian theology which requires reframing. All of nature is to be included in this vision. The Reign of God in our time takes shape as a community of ecojustice. The vision of an ecojustice community is expressed well in Boff's extension of liberation theology to ecological ethics.⁶¹ An ecojustice community, which practices sustainability and social solidarity, is the antithesis of domination, oppression, exploita-

58 McFague, *Body of God*, 67.

59 Hart, *Cosmic Commons*, 9.

60 *Ibid.*, 11.

61 Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, 155.

tion, and triumphalism, which are largely shaped by the Western capitalistic tradition.

VI. Conclusion

For Koreans, the concept of ecojustice is a reminder of the connection between the devastation of indigenous culture and the damage to our natural world throughout the Korean history and geopolitical situation, especially for the multiple problems caused by the Four Rivers Project.⁶² Therefore, ecojustice raises a strong question for Korean consumers: could the Earth cope if global equity meant that its more than six billion human inhabitants were to share the same consumer lifestyle as the average Korean of today? Fritz Capra reports that, “if all Third World countries were to reach the consumption level of the United States by the year 2060, the annual global ecological damage from the resulting economic activities is inconceivable”⁶³ and irrecoverable.

⁶² This project is the former Korean president Lee Myung-bark's major policy that is the most serious ecological catastrophe in all of Korean history. The environmental movement played a part in torpedoing one of the most grandiose public works schemes in recent decade, the Pan Korea Grand Waterway. Proposed in December 2007 by President Lee - the former Hyundai Construction CEO nicknamed the “Bulldozer” - the waterway was to have been a super canal system with the 336-mile-long main canal connecting Seoul to Busan. Cargo freighters would have gone up Korea's longest river, the Nakdong, floating through flooded mountain tunnels to connect to the Han River, which eventually winds through Seoul. South Korea's four main rivers, the Han, the Nakdong, the Guem and the Youngsan, were to be heavily dredged, channelized and fitted with many locks and dams.

⁶³ Fritz Capra, *The Hidden Connections: A Science for Sustainable Living* (London: Harper Collins, 2002), 129.

As a result, a common message emerges in the work of ecological ethicists because of the logic of creation-centered consciousness and ecojustice. That is, all of life is a sacred gift. Of course, that is a message which should not be marginalized to those formed in the biblical tradition, people who live under and by grace. But, by and large, contemporary Christian institutions struggle to nourish and sustain a life or a living that takes seriously the gift of all life as sacred or sacramental.⁶⁴

The most challenging implication of this exploration is the call to what has been named “an ecological conversion”⁶⁵ or “an ecological repentance.” This challenge asks for a personal call to a new spirituality and ethics that issues in action and reflection for ecojustice. On the one hand, it nourishes a lifestyle that moves toward harmony with the Earth. On the other hand, it celebrates the sacred gift of life on Earth in ways that sustain realistic hope. It is an ethic or spirituality which in many respects may be shared with many fellow global citizens including Koreans even though they do not embrace a common ethical or religious framework with Christianity.

For Leonardo Boff, such ecospirituality involves feeling, loving and thinking in harmony with the Earth and its creatures. He suggests the spirituality of Francis of Assisi as a model of this way, but he also cautions that this new spirituality “will not be the fruit of the musings or wonderful discoveries of an individual thinker, but the result of the spirit of a whole age or even several generations.”⁶⁶ He further adds that “spirituality by its very nature means that we must be humble

⁶⁴ John Hart is a representative scholar who has developed the idea of sacramental characteristic of Christian ecological ethics.

⁶⁵ In the words of Pope John Paul II is this message well described.

and unpretentious when we speak about it and want to help it emerge.”⁶⁷

In conclusion, this is an ethic of ecojustice influenced and developed by liberation theology. It is centered on compassion which is all inclusive and empowering, drawing on real Christian ethics that are both contemplative and prophetic. It is a spirituality which challenges the illusion that consumerism can give us eternal happiness, especially for the Korean contemporary Christians and churches. In the quest for a balance that is in harmony with the Earth, this kind of ecological ethics calls us to act justly, love all beings tenderly, and walk humbly with the Spirit of life.⁶⁸ So it becomes our real liberating perspective that renews a living and just Earth for future generations to inherit in global context.

66 Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, 187.

67 Ibid.

68 Micah 6:8.

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