

THE ONE, THE OTHER AND THE WHOLE

Socio-Eco-Theology according to Leonardo Boff

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1. Introduction

During the last fifty years, Latin America saw the appearance of several keen-minded theologians, who developed a new kind of thought named and known after “liberation theology.” It is a kind of thought that roots itself in the social matrices and is self-proclaimed “contextualised theology,” meaning that it is a theology that is rooted in the social environment where it takes place. Nevertheless, the society in Latin America has changed a lot in the past thirty years, especially in Brazil, coming from a 50% to a 90% urban society. Consequently liberation theology should develop into thoughts and guidelines that could be applied to an urban society. This does not mean, of course, that the social problems of Brazil since its “discovery” by the Cabral’s Portuguese fleet leading to India have disappeared. The problem is that with the colonization came also the idea of private land, one that was not among the ancient Brazilian societies, many of them now disappeared.¹

Leonardo Boff, one of the most important Brazilian Liberation theologians, was born in Brazil, in an Italian family that had immigrated to South America. Boff entered the Order of Minor Friars when he was twelve years old. During his doctoral research in Munich University (Germany), he started to engage with the idea that is present in all his

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¹There is a population of 817 thousand indigenous people in Brazil, distributed among 220 ethnic groups in 880 territories, speaking 180 different languages (not counting dialects). This is believed to be one fifth of the population that had existed when the Portuguese arrived. Many of them were killed in wars against Portuguese, Dutch or French colonisers and between themselves, involving the same colonisers. Many died due to unknown diseases. Some ethnic groups were also kept as slaves until the second half of nineteenth century. There are also about 82 uncontacted indigenous groups in Brazil, especially in Amazon Forest. See www.funai.org.br (FUNAI is the “National Foundation for Indians,” a government agency in Brazil. These numbers are based on 2010 census).

works: the Gospel of Jesus is about liberation of the poor. He is influenced by the thoughts of Karl Barth and Teilhard de Chardin. His thesis was entitled “Die Kirche als Sakrament im Horizont der Welterfahrung” (*The Church as a Sacrament on the Horizon of Worldly Affairs*). Boff was punished with an “obsequious silence” for his 1984 book “Igreja, Carisma e Poder” (*Church, Charism and Power*), in which he talks about power inside the Church. Though the punishment was suspended in 1986, a few years later, in 1992, he was again threatened with the same penalty, and he decided to leave the Franciscan Order and also priesthood, in his words “promoting myself to the lay state ... I left one trench just to keep fighting the same war.” He continues to be a theologian and acts as counsellor to many peasant associations in Brazil.²

He has published seventy books and many of them are translated from Portuguese to several languages. He is invited to many interviews, lectures, special classes in Universities and other intellectual activities. He lectures and writes on Liberation Theology, Ecology, Spirituality, Systematic Theology, Sacramentology, etc. He holds two honorary doctorates, one from Turin University, in Politics, and another one from Lund University, Switzerland, in Theology.

2. Brazil and Outlines of Eco-Theology

The first step to understand Eco-Theology as a continuation of liberation theology is to understand the socio-eco-political environment where it was born, the Latin America. In the case of Leonardo Boff, we should take a deeper look to Brazil, because it is imperative while doing Liberation Theology, to know the context and its relation to the proposed theory.

Brazil has become a rich country, listed among the six richest nations in the world, and also the fifth biggest carbon emission in the planet, due mostly to the Amazon forest devastation. Also, the poorest are slowly becoming fewer, because the Labour Party (supported also by Boff) has developed in the past 10 years a program of redistribution of wealth, striving towards social inclusion.

We should point out that this is the first time the power was given to a non-conservative party since the proclamation of Republic, in 1889. The Brazilian Republic itself can be considered as a reaction from the conservative politicians inside the Imperial Court who just could not cope with the loss of the last sustaining point to agricultural society: the freedom which was given to the black slaves by Princess Isabel, then

²www.leonardoboff.com

regent during one of the Emperor’s absences in the country.³ After that, there were many civil wars and revolutions, and the conservative parties took turns on the political power. There were struggles even between them, like the 1930 and 1932 revolutions.

After a period of 30 years under dictatorship, with a short transition time between Vargas and the military in Brazil, there were elections in 1989, and Fernando Affonso Collor de Mello was elected. In 1992, just 4 years after the proclamation of the new Constitution (1988) and two years after the election of Collor the people went to the streets, putting pressure on the Parliament to investigate the President. As a result of an Impeachment process Collor left Presidency.

Then the central Social-Democrat party, PSDB, was in power for eight years. Though they did not distribute the wealth among the poorest ones, they consolidated democracy. And after them, for the first time in 170 years (since the crowning of Pedro II) the power was transmitted to a governor by the Parliament. And, for the first time, it was given to an elected successor by another elected president. So, the liberals (the Labour Party) were back in power, and like Princess Isabel freed the slaves in 1888, now it was time to free the poor people in Brazil. This process is still going on, and the Labour Party is ruling Brazil for the last 10 years.

This is re-making Brazilian society, transforming it into a more just and productive one, and also giving access (in theory) to the benefits of wealth to all citizens. Nevertheless the promotion of a mostly urban society is pushing the boundaries of human occupation into the remaining natural native areas, especially in the Amazon region. In fact, some of the Brazilian *ecotona* are near to total destruction, like the *cerrado*, a kind of grasslands, and *pantanal*, the swamps located in mid-south-western Brazil.⁴

This maybe the reason why some liberation theologians have not insisted on the difference between the rich and the poor in the countryside, and started to aim at another major problem: the ecological output of a sick society that has profit as its desired and almost unique goal. Labelled as “Eco-Theology,” this new thought is a development of liberation theology, one that is still attached to the social needs of society. Maybe this “eco” label was given by the theologians and thinkers that are still enclosed on the 1970s or 1980s Brazilian society, who still want to depict a society

³Rocha Pombo, Manuel Francisco, *História do Brasil em 5 Volumes*, vol. 3, Rio de Janeiro: Jackson Editor, 1947, 33-36.

⁴Mendonça Maria Luisa, *Cana, Amazônia e Cerrado*, São Paulo: CNBB, 2008, 17-18.

that, in general, does not exist anymore. In fact, if the first mainstream that inaugurated liberation theology planned to free people from oppression, this second one wants to free the environment, including people, from oppression. It propounds, at its bottom, a new kind of relation between humankind and the Mother-Planet.

Of course, the idea of a Mother Planet is not a prerogative of Christian theology and religion, and perhaps it is more related to other religions, like the shamanic religions that were brought to Brazil by African slaves, and also those that had existed in Brazil. It must be noted that boundaries between traditions are not fixed, including those between these traditions and the Christian faith. These theogonies and cosmogonies identify Earth as the human place, and also the interior of Earth (in the case of the African religions) as the place where the gods live.⁵

Bringing an ecological sensitivity to theology forces the religions that are present in Brazil to a different kind of relation among them. Facing nature and paying attention to the many relations that are present among the various kinds of beings can have a more respectful approach to the “other,” which can be another religion, another group inside the same religion, the non-religious groups, society, and, of course, the planet. And, if this theology is a development of liberation theology, the same principle of context as the supreme source of theoligisation must have a prominent place. Leonardo Boff does this by coining a new term, Social Ecology, which we shall present and develop in the next section.

3. The Human as a Transcendent Species

The enduring point to all Boff’s ecological theology is transcendence; it is not a kind of transcendence based on an escape from reality, but an escape from paradise. Boff presents Adam and Eve’s story as a myth of transcendence. He states that human beings were trapped into Paradise, and the only way out was to acquire knowledge from the forbidden tree.⁶ They finally acquired knowledge and were able to understand themselves, and escape from the paradise they were trapped in.⁷

⁵Saraceni Rubens, *Tratado Geral de Umbanda*, São Paulo: Madras, 2009, 44.

⁶Luiz Carlos Susin, another Brazilian theologian, also approaches the “Forbidden Fruit Myth” from the same point of view. Susin goes even further, stating that the serpent in the Eden was a God’s pedagogic face, influencing Adam and Eve to take their part on His knowledge and by doing so, become humans. Susin Luiz Carlos, *A criação de Deus*, São Paulo: Paulinas, 2003, 23-25.

⁷His work *O casamento entre o céu e a terra: contos dos povos indígenas do Brasil*, São Paulo: Salamandra, 2002 deals with myths.

Boff used a myth from the Caraja People, a northern Brazilian ethnic group, according to which all humans were first created as fishes and eternal. They used to swim around a beautiful (but dark) water tank in which they lived in, in the bottom of which there was a forbidden light hole, and nobody was authorized to pass through it. The penalty was to lose eternity. One day one fish tried and passed through it. The hole connected the water tank with the Caraja River (from which the people borrows its name), and that fish was astonished about the beauty he could see. He was able to walk in a human body, and he experienced for the first time the sun rays, clouds and the sand of the river beaches under his feet. He enjoyed the fruits of the trees. When the day was about to finish, he planned to return to the water tank of eternity. But then the Moon and the stars came out, and he was even more pleased with them, and passed all the night staring at all that beauty that surrounded him. Eventually, he drank some water and the water had more significance to him. Maybe because now he was not trapped on the eternity water, but he was the water tank himself – who knows? The myth does not explain this new significance.

In the morning when the Sun rose, he realized that there was a place where he would be able to enjoy all that beauty on a daily basis. He returned through that hole (and did not receive any penalty, a unique feature the Caraja myth) and spoke with the other human-fishes about what he saw outside the boring and dark water tank.

They called on God and said to Him about it, and God admitted that there was really a superb world outside the tank, and they could take part in it if they wanted. He said that he wouldn't punish anybody who freely chose the other life, in which they would become a piece of the whole.⁸ If they choose the life outside the water tank, however, they would lose eternity. The human fishes assembled and decided unanimously for the new life, becoming part of the whole.

To be part of the whole is to transcend the one, Boff states. The vocation of human kind is to disobey any hard and pointless prohibition. Doing that, we become humans, in both myths. The difference among them is that in the Christian one, to lose eternity is a penalty, and in the Caraja one it is a free choice.⁹

There are some limits in applying such a myth, or any other similar to it, to the Christian faith, because Christian faith talks about a lost

⁸To me, this is the core of the myth, to quit from being a one to become a whole.

⁹Boff Leonardo, *Tempo de Transcendência*, São Paulo: Sextante, 2000, 9-10.

paradise that should be regained through the acceptance Jesus Christ, the Saviour. Instead of that, many non-Christian religions (as in the case of Caraja's religion) state nothing about the need of salvation, but insist on the idea of a unity between human life and the Nature. In many of these religions, paradise just does not exist; what exists is the cycle of birth and death. And, in many of the indigenous religious traditions from Brazil this cycle is eternal, linking forever all the souls to the Nature. A healthy relation with Nature in these traditions is important because Nature is the place from where we came and to where we would go back, together with other living beings in the environments that surround us. This sacralises Nature and gives her (our Mother) the assurance that we will not, as a species or a culture, harm her anyway.

Liberation Theology is not the exercise of speaking about the God's Kingdom, but is the surpassing of the orthodoxy of the Kingdom of God towards an orthopraxis. It is about surpassing the traditional boundaries of pastoral practice and trying to implode the economic and social system from inside, with the force of the Kingdom. It just does not matter whether you talk about Jesus Christ correctly, but it does matter to live how He would have responded if had to deal with the social problems that faces the theologian. It is a *kenosis* attitude, emptying Christianity of its traditional and sometimes limited discourse, to let the Force and Spirit it has in its kernel to flourish.

Once the person has surpassed his/her own boundaries, it is possible to think about liberating someone or something. In Boff's eco-theology this is the first and most important step. When confronted with the socio-political environment that was prevalent in the 1970's, the response of these theologians, including Boff, was to denounce it as the conservative dominance in Brazilian politics rested on slavery. The suppression of this slavery coasted the throne¹⁰ to the Brazilian imperial family, and gave the people its freedom. When the political situation changed and the liberals finally got the power, they started to distribute wealth and end slavery in

¹⁰The Baron of Cotejipe, then a member of Imperial Senate as a representative of rural oligarchies, voted against the law proposed by Princess Isabel. When she presented the Parliament the signed law, he looked at it and said to her: "Your Highness had just redeemed a race and lost a throne!" ("*Vossa Alteza acaba de redimir uma raça e perder um trono!*") Princess Isabel is known in Brazilian history as "Isabel, the Redeemer." In a later entry in her diaries, she wrote: "Even if it coasted me a thousand thrones, I would sign that Law" ("*Mesmo se me custasse mil tronos, eu assinaria aquela Lei*").

its many forms.¹¹ There was not the need to denounce the relations of power, because these relations were bringing hope. Now, it is time to free the Brazilian Society and Nature not only from a political system that enslaves its people, but from an economical system that enslaves its Nature, including people. This is another break through, another light hole in the bottom of another water tank, if we could say it in Caraja terms, towards another way to contemplate and enjoy ourselves in relation with Nature. This, surpassing the limits of its own thought, is the beginning of the Liberation process.¹²

4. Liberation Process

Liberation was always understood by Boff as a gradual process. First, a person must liberate him/herself, and then the person will be able to think and act in direction of liberating anything or anyone else. In one of his first books, “O destino do homem e do mundo” (*The Destiny of Man and the World*), written in 1973, Boff started to point out “ecological liberation” of the world. That also can be found in his “Paixão de Cristo e paixão do mundo” (*Passion of Christ, Passion of the World*), from 1976. The first of these two books deals with eschatology and the other one with soteriology, Boff links Christ to the world. We must understand Boff’s vision of Christ to understand what this link is all about.¹³

One could see parallels with the *panthokrator* concept, as presented by Teilhard de Chardin, where Christ is worshipped as the saviour of all things. Christ is not restricted to be the saviour of a community, a religion or a society, but he liberates everything because he is the heart of all matter and energy in the Universe. According to Chardin, we can make a conjunction between Matter, Cosmos, Evolution and Christ, where Christ is the agent of

¹¹We can observe in the Brazilian media that the efforts to eradicate slave labour had increased during the Labour Party government. Though this shows their will to diminish social inequities, slave labour is still present in Brazil in different forms.

¹²For a complete understanding of how the internal Catholic Cosmology can generate political actions, see Romano Roberto, *A Igreja contra o Estado*, São Paulo: Kairós, 1979.

¹³According to Carlos Alberto Steil, a Brazilian Religious Sociologist, “the new theological adventure of Boff during the 1990’s cannot be understood without the help of mysticism in the construction of such cosmic vision” (“*a nova aventura teológica empreendida por Boff a partir dos anos 1990 não pode ser entendida sem o suporte da mística na construção de sua peculiar cosmovisão*”) Steil Carlos Aberto, “*A Igreja dos Pobres: Da Secularização à Mística*,” *Religião e Sociedade* nº 19/2, 1998, 62.

the Evolution process, and because of that perceived as “The Evolutioner.” Being so, the very core of Jesus Christ coincides with the core of the Matter, in the fullness of Love, which is the impulse to Create and also the will for evolution of Cosmos, by God.¹⁴ We are here speaking about a Cosmic Christ, and not about Jesus ben Youssef, the son of a carpenter who lived and died at a small country in the Middle Orient during the first century. We are talking about the Risen One, the One who seated by the right hand side of the Father to rule the Universe and to preside over its judgement.

From the time Jesus assumed human nature, that is, a form of Nature, he also embodied all the living beings, by becoming one of them. Once resurrected, His appearances to the Apostles always included some kind of use of the Risen Body, let it be eating fish, being touched, or blowing air to give the Spirit. The One who ascended to the Throne in heavens has a transcendent Body. In this Body, we find non-earthly characteristics, like the capacity of appearing inside locked rooms or to disappear after the breaking of bread. It has also very mundane characteristics, as we pointed above. The Body that now sits on the Heavens’ Throne has something in It that includes matter. To transcend something, usually you have to include it. Otherwise, you are just ignoring, disguising this ignorance as transcendence.¹⁵

This transcendence that includes some aspects of immanence is the basis of the theology of *panthokrator*. Chardin points at these immanent characteristics, and not only in the human form of Christ, but also in the atoms that make this form possible. If we could say that every human being was divinized on the mystery of incarnation,¹⁶ Chardin is saying that every atom in the Universe was also sanctified by the same Mystery.

¹⁴Chardin Teilhard, *Le Coeur de la Matière*, Paris: Seuil, 1976, 60. The original in French reads: “(Je) laissât entrevoir (...) une merveilleuse conjonction (...) entre Christ et Matière: entre un Christ distinctement perçu comme <<évoluteur>> et un Foyer cosmique positivement reconnu à l’Évolution. *Le Coeur du Christ universalisé coïncidant avec un coeur de la Matière amorisée.*”

¹⁵Romano states that the “poor, the oppressed and the excluded are a way to transcend clergy and church wealth, power and ruling” (“o pobre, o oprimido e o excluído são maneiras de transcender a riqueza, o poder e a governança próprias da igreja e do clero”) Romano, *A Igreja contra o Estado*, 52.

¹⁶As in the words of Gregory Palamas, “God made himself man in order to be an example... Becoming the son of Man, and sharing their mortality, he achieved (for men) participation on divine immortality... ” (“*Deus incarnationes opus esset; ut exemplum nobis (...) Filius hominis factus, et mortalitatis particeps, hominis redderet divinae immortalitatis particeps*”) Gregorii Palamae, *Homilia XVI*, PG 151, 201 D-204 B.

Boff does a theology that is influenced by this idea, but is rooted deeply in the quest of the historical Jesus. To him, every human history is sanctified. Chardin’s influence may be found in many of his more recent works, but the historical Jesus also plays a great role (if not the biggest one) with the Cosmic Jesus. As an example, in his “*Jesus Cristo Libertador*” (*Jesus Christ the Liberator*) he depicts a human Jesus, who was concerned about liberating the exploited Jewish population from the Roman Empire and the Temple Sects, and because of that he was killed on a cross. This, of course, is not a partial or negative understanding about Jesus’ work in the world, but is a way to state that poverty, misery and death can only be transcended through their experience.¹⁷ The only way Jesus could win over the Roman and the Temple sects was to suffer in their hands.

Boff in his works includes the poverty of excluded and the sufferings of the persecuted ones, in order to give them insights about the Kingdom’s force, and to help changing the Brazilian structures from inside. In fact, people from the poor and the oppressed ascended to the presidency.¹⁸ In many other countries in Latin America the resistance to the tyrants, supported by the Liberation Theology, is victorious.¹⁹

Eco-Theology, however, is not just about liberating the oppressed ones, but to free the man-in-the-world, who has a *bios*, a biology, a life that is not inside him and away from the world, but inside him because this human is inside the world, the *locus* where the life takes place. In doing so, humans can enjoy a life of free relation with the earth, the society, the nature, the environment because the human is the environment, as a piece of the whole.²⁰ So, we should point out that even in the beginnings of Liberation Theology, Ecology was included, at least implicitly. And, with the changes of the society it was also the time to change the approach, because Liberation, like any process, is progressive, changing, and dynamic.

¹⁷L. Boff, *Jesus Cristo libertador*, Petrópolis: Vozes, 1975.

¹⁸The president who was elected in 1994, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, and also Dilma Rousseff, the present president were both prisoners. Luís Inácio Lula da Silva, who was also imprisoned during the 1964-1984 regime and who was a metal worker, and proudly stated from time to time during the eight years he was in the presidency that he did not have any academic degree. Today he is Doctor Honoris Causa by many Universities.

¹⁹Of course, Liberation Theology is not the only agent behind those political changes, but indeed it played important roles.

²⁰Ferreira Silvana Maria, *Agricultura familiar na Comissão Pastoral da Terra: Do sonho socialista ao paraíso ecológico*, Juiz de Fora: Livraria Editora Notas e Letras, 2004.

5. Is Eco-Theology a New Branch to Liberation Theology?

Once we understand the relations that are in Boff's earlier works between liberating the poor and the oppressed and liberating earth, we could discuss more about mainstream liberation theology, to find out if it is still applicable. In spite of all efforts the Labour Party has done during the last 10 years, Brazil is still a land of oppression for the poorest, but now in an urban society. The difference in the distribution of wealth is so large that the 50% poorest collectively have the same amount the 1% wealthiest retain. In the poorest region of Brazil, the northeast, 46.7% of the people are illiterate, and 29.5% of the total Brazilian population cannot write a text of five lines or do the four basic mathematic operations. The largest towns in Brazil have a lot of facilities, but 82% of cities do not have a museum, a theatre, a bookstore or any other culture-linked activity.

In spite of Brazil having one of the most water gallons rate per capita, in 2004, 89% of the patients in public hospitals in Brazil were there because they either did not have access to quality water or because they made use of bad water. If Brazil has a growing industrial activity, also 90% of the water supply lines are directed to these activities, leaving only 10% for human direct use. Besides, fifteen thousand locations in the country have their water contaminated mostly by these same industries.²¹

As the government has changed from an oppressor sector to a partner in the liberation of the oppressed by the powerful conservative industrial and agricultural sectors, now it is time not to fight against governments, but to search for spaces in the democratic Brazil. Looking at the history of the Labour Party, we know that Boff, Betto, Barros and many other liberation theologians were involved in the foundation of it and we may conclude that the liberation theology, in a sense, achieved power.

These relations between secular and religious spheres in Brazil is, although, out of the scope of this present essay, and for us it is enough to understand the status quo this country is having since the middle 1990's. Liberation Theology is not done starting from Scripture or Tradition, but from Society (including Religion, and in the case of Brazil, pagan religions as well) and Politics, using Tradition and Scripture to confirm it. This is, by the way, the most common critique about it: in some way, it has abandoned the traditional way Christianity used to build its theology. That stated, we cannot say that liberation theology lost its forces and then Eco-Theology took place in the works of Leonardo Boff and other theologians,

²¹Jornal do Brasil, Caderno Dois, *Descaso que mata*, Rio de Janeiro, 11/04/2004.

but we could conclude, as shown above, that Liberation Theology remains, since the 1970's as a kind of vision, that even could change in very profound ways Latin American power relations.

6. Socio-Eco-Theology or Social Ecological Theology

In Boff's thought, the great ecological problem we are passing through is not the extinction of the whales, the dolphins or some monkeys in the tropical Brazilian environments, but the extinction of the poor ones. For him, the problem of poverty, nevertheless, is not natural and inevitable, but it is rooted in the way we organize society. Though this could be criticized as a narrow view, a society which deals with natural resources not aiming to distribute them, but making this Nature a slave of profit, not as something everybody should have access to, but as something compromised with the comfort of just a few.²² In the opening of his book “*Ética da Vida: A nova centralidade*” (*Life Ethics: The New Centrality*) Boff examines the term “Ecology.” Ernst Haeckel, who coined the term, conceived it as the discipline that studies the inter-relations between the live organisms and their environment.²³ This “environment” is the organisms' home, their *oikos*. So, Ecology is not about the living things, but about the relation among them. It is in this relation that Boff develops his argument. Thinking about ecology is to think about the relations we are making with our home and our home-mates, who (or that) live in this same home. This home, Earth, our Mother-Planet, is not ours (as human species) at all. We are just one of the inhabitants of it. We just cannot sustain any special possession over it.

As a former Franciscan priest, Boff often recurs to some passages in the life of Francis of Assisi to deepen his discussion about ecology and spirituality. “*Terapeutas do deserto*” (*The Desert Therapists*) presents Francis as the ecological archetype. For Boff, Francis is an ecological man because “(he is) the universal brother that co-fraternize with everything, who re-links everything, the most distant and the nearest ones. Francis marries the skies with the abysses, the stars with the ants and makes a synthesis ... starting from inside himself. He links internal ecology with external ecology.”²⁴

²²L. Boff, *A Ética da Vida: a nova centralidade*, Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2009, 38-40.

²³Boff, *Ética da vida*, 11.

²⁴“o irmão universal que confraterniza com tudo, que religa tudo, o mais distante e mais próximo. Francisco casa os céus com os abismos, as estrelas com as

According to Boff, the experience of reality is about transcending the delusional appearance of unity and attaining the notion of being “one-in-totality.” Also, Boff points out that the experience Francis made, of being one of the multiple pieces and to be a piece in the whole, can be understood as an unmovable or a spinning image of reality. If we look at the reality of world like it is now and assume it will last forever and also all the resources are endless,²⁵ the kind of relation we will have with it is to consider ourselves, and also the reality, as unmovable. And if we depict the world as a dynamic being that evolves, we will see ourselves as one piece in the evolution that should not consider itself as having any particular precedence over the other pieces. The reality of the changing and living Being that our Mother Planet, an experience Francis had, puts us in another perspective. That perspective, to be a piece under a bigger force which is Evolution is the perception Chardin achieved. One who opts for taking Christ as “the Evolutioner” is on the right way to achieve the Francis’s perception of his own in the world. To live a “Franciscan spirituality”²⁶ we should make the option to consider ourselves either as one piece or the whole; always remembering, of course, that these ideas about ourselves are not fixed, but dynamic, as we are part of a *dynamis*.²⁷

So, we find in Boff’s Theology that an internal ecology may be required to do an external approach to ecology: we should dive deep inside ourselves to identify our tendencies and ideas and put them in their right place as pieces of the complex being every human is. Only by making that one can start to think how to deal with the “other” which is the world. Boff wrote on the internal ecology in his work, “Tempo de Transcendência” (*Time to Transcend*):

I consider that the new niche that can provide and seed new utopias of salvation comes from ecology. Not that kind of ecology reduced to

formigas e faz uma síntese (...) começando de dentro. Ele liga a ecologia interna com a ecologia externa.” L. Boff and Leloup Jean Yves, *Terapeutas do Deserto*, 6th ed., Petrópolis: Vozes, 2001, 45.

²⁵Boff, *A Ética da Vida*, 43-45.

²⁶This spiritual achievement seems to be Boff’s one and also his suggestion in the construction of the argument in the quoted book, *Terapeutas do Deserto*.

²⁷“Everyone must build the new starting from the place where one is: new synergy, new partnerships, and new nets. This attitude means the accumulation of the energy that is going to be necessary to the great rupture.” (“*Cada um tem que construir o novo a partir do lugar onde se encontra: a nova sinergia, as parcerias, as redes. Essa atitude significa acumulação de energia necessária para a grande ruptura.*”) L. Boff, *Tempo de transcendência*, São Paulo: Sextante, 2000, 35-36.

environment, about which we are tired, but a new kind of ecology that includes the human being with his mind and heart entering a new state of consciousness, in a new veneration towards every being. This is spiritual ecology.²⁸

Boff in his approaches to ecology invites us to look at the whole. Accepting his invitation and looking to the whole of his theological work to deepen our understanding about his propositions can also deepen our experience of God. Maybe this experience of God should include other traditions besides the Christian ones, especially those traditions where the idea of a “Mother Earth” sounds more familiar, let it be in Brazil, India or wherever these traditions are available as an invitation.

So, ecology is important to multicultural societies like Brazil, India and the world as a whole because it teaches us to deal with the “other” not as if we were dealing with an enemy. It teaches us that paying attention to the relation between Christianity (the one) and the other traditions (the other) is to learn that we are all made of and inhabitants of the same stuff (the whole).

Furthermore, in the 1970’s Liberation Theology linked its thoughts to Politics, with Marxism at its basis to propound a new kind of thought, contextualised with the reality and producing freedom utopias. Those utopias, eventually, gave fruit, as is the case of the election of central-left presidents in Brazil, Argentina, Guatemala, Paraguay and other Latin American countries, where Liberation Theology took place on those times. Nevertheless, the loss of hope that occurred with the fall of Marxist States (USSR and East Europe), their change in approximation to Capitalism Societies (China) or their isolation (Cuba, North Korea) forced Liberation Theology to transcend itself, something natural to a theory that from the start point states that even Christianity must transcend itself, as we explained above in this paper. The outsider theory (to Theology) that provides “niches for new utopias” was, in the case of Leonardo Boff and some others, Ecology.²⁹ That does not mean that Liberation Theology changed in a radical way but that it, being faithful to its own internal *dynamis*, adjusted itself. And by doing so it lays foundation to Ecology,

²⁸Boff, *Tempo de Transcendência*, 34.

²⁹Leonardo Boff points in this direction in *A Ética da vida*, 43, where he starts a new chapter about the ethics in a Global economy stating that from 1989 onwards the world sees the triumph of Capitalism. It is hard not to believe that he is pointing at the fall of USSR and East Europeans Socialist regimes.

the Science of Relation between the One, the Other and the Whole (of beings) its identity, now being revisited.

7. An “Inconclusive Conclusion”

Looking deeply into the complex network of relations that take place everywhere in nature makes the reader aware of the great risk of unfriendly approaches to other cultural and religious values. From the carriage of gametes by a specific insect that only eats the nectar from a specific plant to the long trip a coconut takes on the sea currents, all this make the reader of an eco-theology aware of how connected everything is in Nature.

Ecology, our relation between us and our Mother Planet is (besides important for itself) important to the religious groups because Nature is a depiction of the relation between humans, including our cultural and social values. Or – maybe – we are the depicting of ourselves, because we are part of Nature, and we disguise as social and cultural and religious relations the same relations that every living being has with the other ones in the surface of our Mother. In such direction, Lynn White Jr. pointed out: “What people do about their ecology depends on what they think about themselves in relation to things around them. Human ecology is deeply conditioned by beliefs about our nature and destiny, that is, by religion.”³⁰ And we are sisters and brothers not only among the ones of our species, but among every living thing on the universe, including the universe itself, like Francis had presented and lived. We must liberate our society and our minds and spirits of these sick ideas about our own species we got used to – the idea that we are the most important Religion, Society, Group or Species in the entire Universe – in order to promote justice and changing in the whole of society and planet. Indeed, “we are a way Universe created to know itself” (Carl Sagan).

³⁰Lynn White Jr., “The Historic Roots of Our Ecological Crisis” in *Science* 155(3767), Washington: AAAS, 1967, 1205-1206.