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**AN ANALYSIS AND CRITIQUE OF
LEONARDO BOFF'S THEOLOGY AND SOCIAL ETHICS**

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ABSTRACT

Leonardo Boff wrestles seriously with two challenging questions, namely, the reality of poverty in today's world and the contemporary ecological crisis. His overall project is to offer a Christian response to them. This project has three cornerstones: first, some Marxist axioms underlying his social analysis; second, an ontology appropriated from Teilhard de Chardin and strongly emphasizing the evolution of the universe; third, an epistemological suspicion of the human ability to know reality in itself.

While the importance of Boff's work cannot be denied, the theological price Boff pays for putting his priority on social ethics is considerable. His dismissal of classical theism, and his adoption of panentheism have serious implications which must be faced before one counts the advantages gained. As to his epistemology, Boff suggests that, given the human limits to grasp reality, one should be open to benefit from the dialogue with various and even opposing contributions. The principle which should rule one's understanding of reality, particularly on complex issues, is the principle of complementarity. Nevertheless, when it comes to socio-economic issues, Boff is willing to make universal moral claims which do not seem warranted by that epistemological commitment. A specific illustration showing how Boff could benefit from following his own recommendation is presented through the introduction of a dialogue-partner, Nicholas Wolterstorff, who has offered contributions on epistemology and social-ethics. Even if Boff is not willing to embrace Wolterstorff's commitment to realism in epistemology, consistency with the principle of complementarity demands that the former still has to consider the latter's revised neo-Calvinism in social ethics.

Wolterstorff, while nurturing Boff's concerns, does not depart from the Christian tradition by adopting panentheism. Nor does Wolterstorff appeal to different spiritual traditions in connection with his social ethics. Rather, he appeals to Christianity and argues that Christians have a fundamental role to play in the reform of the social order. His effort toward a synthesis between liberation theology and neo-Calvinism is a promising strategy to reach Boff's ultimate goal, that of human beings dwelling in peace in all their relationships, namely, with God, with self, with fellows, and with nature.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The Reality of Poverty in Today's World

“Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor”? This he said, not that he cared for the poor but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box he used to take what was put into it. Jesus said: “Let her alone, let her keep it for the day of my burial. The poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me.” (John 12:5-8, RSV)

Almost two thousand years after Jesus declared, The poor you always have with you, poverty still remains an insurmountable reality. In its most recent *World Development Report 2000/01*, the World Bank admits that despite the increase of global prosperity, poverty has persisted and even intensified among certain groups and in some parts of the world.¹ Around 1.5 billion people live on less than one U.S. dollar per day, and around 2.8 billion people have a budget of two dollars per day. “Poverty,” says a Moldavian woman according to the report, “is pain, it seems a disease. It attacks a person not only materially, but also morally. It devours one’s dignity and leads to total despair.” Out of 4.4 billion people living in developing countries, adds the World Bank’s dossier,

¹ Charo Nogueira, “Vozes dos Pobres: Banco Mundial Publica Depoimentos sobre a Miséria [World Bank Publishes Depositions about Misery],” (March 21, 2000), 1 at <http://www.uol.com.br/elpais/e12103200001.htm>.

around 60% do not have access to basic sanitary services, 33% do not have clean water, 25% do not have appropriate living quarters, and 20% do not have access to medical services. Among the children, 20% do not conclude 5 years of school, nor feed themselves properly. The same report, after listening to 60,000 poor men and women from 60 countries, recognizes that in the past decade economic insecurity has increased among the poor, who “feel they have not been able to take advantage of new economic opportunities because of lack of connections and lack of information, skills and credit.”² The World Bank identifies corruption and ineffectiveness of government institutions as major causes of the problem, but keeps alive the hope of overcoming this situation through the development of appropriate socio-economic measures.³

The World Bank’s diagnosis is confirmed by the U.N.’s September 2000-statement affirming that “one third of the world’s 6 billion inhabitants live a life of

² <http://www.worldbank.org/poverty/wdrpoverty/conspeer/overview.htm>, 1. This general sense of insecurity is linked, adds the report, to unpredictability of agriculture, loss of traditional livelihoods, breakdown of the state, breakdown of traditional social solidarity, social isolation, increased crime and violence, lack of access to justice, extortion and brutality from the police rather than protection. Illness is dreaded and lack of affordable health care pushes many families into indebtedness and destitution.” (1) In Charo Nogueira’s article “Banco Mundial Publica Depoimentos sobre a Miséria,” the reader finds this testimony of a poor woman: “My children were starving, and I kept telling them that the rice was cooking, until they would fall sleep.” Charo Nogueira, “Vozes dos Pobres: Banco Mundial Publica Depoimentos sobre a Miséria [World Bank Publishes Depositions about Misery],” (March 21, 2000), 1 at <http://www.uol.com.br/elpais/e12103200001.htm>.

³ The reality of corruption in Brazil is attested in the report of the N.G.O. International Transparency. “On a scale of 0 for countries highly corrupt through 10 for countries free of corruption, Brazil ranks 3.9.” In the report, Brazil “is considered more corrupt than [some] Latin American countries such as El Salvador, Peru, Costa Rica, Chile, as well as others like South Africa, Botswana, Poland, Lithuania, Biel-Russia, Czech Republic, South Korea, and Jordan.” According to Professor Fernando Garcia (Fundação Getúlio Vargas), the Brazilian “per capita” income would increase around US \$3,000/year if the corruption in the country would decrease to Canada’s level.” Article by Leonardo Fuhrmann, published on September 13, 2000, at <http://www.uol.com.br/folha/brasil/ult96u6222.shl>. Brazil’s corruption has been the source of concern for religious leaders, especially within the Roman Catholic Church as revealed in the article “Bispo Reza contra a Corrupção em São Paulo [Bishop prays against Corruption in São Paulo],” (April 21, 2000) at <http://www.uol.com.br/ultnot21042000241.htm>.

misery and experience a situation of 'brutal inequality' that stains the birth of the new millennium."⁴

The Challenge of Offering a Distinctive Christian Answer to Poverty and Other Socio-Economic Issues

Contemporary Christian theologians and Christian ethicists from different backgrounds have investigated the problem of poverty and its potential correlation with capitalism. Speaking more broadly, they have tried to determine what relationship, if any, there is between Christianity and economics.⁵ The range of answers to both issues is so wide that one is left in doubt as to whether a distinctive Christian conclusion can be drawn. Illustrative of the lack of consensus regarding a possible correlation between poverty and capitalism is the picture drawn by Craig M. Gay in his *With Liberty and Justice for Whom?* Here the author describes the recent evangelical debate over capitalism in North America. Gay basically claims that the contrasting trends of opinions arise primarily from sociological differences. He expresses reservations about the feasibility of construing a Christian socio-economic ethic that may effectively address the complex issues in the economic realm without distancing from Christian orthodoxy. Gay's own project lacks specific prescriptive proposals as the result of two factors: first, his fear of departing from Christian orthodoxy by falling into the theological trap he

⁴ See "Dois Bilhões de Pessoas Vivem na Miséria, Informa ONU [U.N. Informs that Two Billion People Live in Misery] ," at <http://www.uol.com.br/inter/reuters/ult27u4145.htm>.

⁵ See John P. Tiemstra, "Christianity and Economics; A Review of the Recent Literature," *Christian Scholar's Review* vol. 22 (1993):227-247.

labels “immanentization;”⁶ second, the adoption of an eschatological ideal which cannot be clearly known at this point, as *the* pattern against which present reality should be measured.⁷ In other words, while Gay’s adoption of the eschatological ideal inhibits him from making universal claims, his desire to avoid immanentization discourages him from making particular assessments of specific economic issues.⁸ The question whether Craig Gay is being overly cautious as a consequence of the factors mentioned above and thus excessively enlarges the grey area on socio-economic issues in which one is unable to make sound moral judgments, is an interesting one, but one that will not be pursued in the present work. In any case, Gay’s reservations are understandable, and it is interesting to note that several authors who have endeavored to go beyond Gay’s project by identifying principles which should be part of a Christian socio-economic ethics, have fallen into the

⁶ By “immanentization,” apparently a term borrowed from the evangelical philosopher Bernard Zylstra, Gay means what “seems to happen theologically when evangelicals actively take up issues of social concern in the contemporary situation,” namely, “that the more transcendent, ‘other-worldly’ elements of evangelical faith, though not directly threatened by political-economical proposals, become subject to compromise.” Craig M. Gay, *With Liberty and Justice for Whom?* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Co., 1991), 8 (For the connection between the term and Zylstra’s work, see page 62). Consequently, Gay argues, “these transcendent elements seem either to drop out of the picture altogether or to require rather radical reinterpretation along the lines of immanence.” Gay, *With Liberty and Justice for Whom?*, 8-9. According to Gay, “[m]aintaining the balance between theological transcendence and immanence is crucial to conservative Protestant orthodoxy, and a shift in the center of gravity away from the transcendent and toward the immanent or vice versa signals a move away from orthodoxy and toward secularity.” Gay, *With Liberty and Justice for Whom?*, 9.

⁷ God’s redemptive activity in Christ is, according to Gay, a “surprising gift.” This entails that “[w]hile this activity decisively redeems ‘world-historical’ events, it remains largely *hidden* from us at present and is recognized only with the eyes of faith. Thus while an evangelical understanding of history does not posit a radical disjunction between ‘sacred’ and ‘secular’ histories, it does insist that *we cannot at present know what the relation between those two is.*” Gay, *With Liberty and Justice for Whom?*, 214 (emphasis mine).

⁸ See *With Liberty and Justice for Whom?*, pages 218-219, where Gay recommends that “an evangelical economic ethics must exhibit a kind of prescriptive humility.” The consequence, Gay acknowledges, is clear: “Because it is prescriptively humble, an evangelical economic ethic is likely to appear conservative in practice.” (220)

immanentization problem to which he alerts us. Of those who have, one in particular will be the focus of our attention, namely, Leonardo Boff.

The Significance of Leonardo Boff

Leonardo Boff, an ex-Roman Catholic priest in South America and a liberation theologian, is a prolific author. In 1991, on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of Boff's first book,⁹ a collection of texts written over the course of his theological journey was published under the title *Seleção de Textos Militantes*,¹⁰ which was translated into English as *The Path to Hope: Fragments from a Theologian's Journey*.¹¹ Between February 1971 and July 1991, Boff authored or co-authored sixty-six books, many of them dealing specifically with socio-economic issues. Until 1991, Boff's enormous output had been translated into 147 works in fifteen different languages.¹² In his works published since 1992,¹³ Boff has begun to pay attention to issues of ecology,¹⁴ an area

⁹ Leonardo Boff, *O Evangelho do Cristo Cósmico [The Gospel of the Cosmic Christ]* (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1971).

¹⁰ Boff, *Seleção de Textos Militantes [Selection of Militant Texts]*, eds. Cládia Zarvos, Jânio Savoldi, Márcia Monteiro Miranda, and Waldemar Boff (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1991).

¹¹ Boff, *The Path to Hope: Fragments from a Theologian's Journey*, trans. Philip Berryman (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993).

¹² Cládia Zarvos, Jânio Savoldi, Márcia Monteiro Miranda, and Waldemar Boff, *Seleção de Textos Militantes*, 7.

¹³ Since 1992, Boff has published the following works: *América Latina: Da Conquista à Nova Evangelização* (São Paulo: Editora Ática, 1992); *Ecologia, Mundialização, Espiritualidade: A Emergência de um Novo Paradigma* (São Paulo: Editora Ática, 1993); *Mística e Espiritualidade* (with Frei Betto) (Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 1994); *Igreja: Entre Norte e Sul* (with others), trans. Desidério Amaro Freiburger (São Paulo: Editora Ática, 1995); *A Teologia da Libertação; Balanço e Perspectivas* (with José Ramos Regidor, and Clodovis Boff) (São Paulo: Editora Ática, 1996); *A Águia e a Galinha: Uma Metáfora da Condição Humana* (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1997); *O Despertar da Águia: O Dia-bólico e o Sim-bólico na Construção da Realidade* (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1998); *Nova Era: A Civilização Planetária. Desafios à Sociedade e ao Cristianismo*. (São Paulo: Editora Ática, 1998); *Dignitas Terrae. Ecologia: Grito da Terra, Grito dos Pobres* (São Paulo: Editora Ática, 1999); *Saber Cuidar: Ética do Humano - Compaixão*

which he has called a “new paradigm.” Subsequent chapters will show that Boff’s move did not represent a change of focus, for he continues to nurture a concern for the poor and to blame capitalism for most, if not all, of the social evils in the world.¹⁵ Moreover, Boff’s original ontological and epistemological presuppositions remain intact and have been fully developed in this later stage of his theological career. While some aspects of Boff’s work have received consideration,¹⁶ an analysis of his overall project paying attention to

pela Terra (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1999); *A Oração de São Francisco: Uma Mensagem de Paz para o Mundo Atual* (Rio de Janeiro: Sextante, 1999); *Faith on the Edge: Religion and Marginalized Existence*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1999); *Holy Trinity, Perfect Community* (N.Y., Northam: Orbis, Roundhouse, 2000); *Depois de 500 Anos: Que Brasil Queremos?* (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 2000); *Il Creato in una Carezza: Verso un’Etica Universale: prendersi Cura della Terra* (Assisi, Perugia: Cittadella, 2000); *The Prayer of Saint Francis: A Message for the World Today* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2001). The present dissertation is based mostly on the analysis of works published between 1971-1998. Given the consistency of Boff’s positions throughout his theological career this should not present a problem.

¹⁴ Besides his publications on ecology, Boff has addressed the issue in his speeches. One example is the plenary speech delivered on the First Day of the Earth Charter Continental Meeting entitled “The Earth Charter Campaign; Promoting a People’s Earth Charter for the Twenty First Century and beyond...” delivered in Mato Grosso, Brazil, in December 1998. See http://www.earthcharter.org/report/special/boff_en.htm.

¹⁵ Boff’s voice against capitalism is by no means an isolated one. He has simply given expression to a reasonably wide-spread bitterness in Latin America against this economic system to which, for instance, the Argentinian economist Jorge Beinstein, from the University of Buenos Aires, refers as “senile and decadent.” See “Capitalismo Está ‘Senil e Decadente,’ Diz Economista Argentino [Capitalism is Senile and Decadent, Says Argentinian Economist],” (January 26, 2001) at <http://www.uol.com.br/folha/brasil/ult96u14444.shl>.

¹⁶ The following areas of Boff’s work have been addressed by doctoral dissertations: *Anthropology*: Nkosiyo Zhou Zvandasara, “The Concept of Sin in the Theologies of Ellen G. White and Leonardo Boff: A Comparative Study,” (D.Th. diss., University of South Africa, 1996); Luis R. Rivera Rodríguez, “Anthropogenesis: The Theological Anthropology of Leonardo Boff,” (Th.D. diss., Harvard University, 1993); *Christology*: Charles Ivan Spencer, “An Analysis of the Christology of Latin American Liberation Theology (Jon Sobrino, Leonardo Boff, Juan Luis Segundo),” (Ph.D. diss., The University of Texas at Arlington, 1997); Carlos Raimundo Piar, “Jesus and Liberation: a Critical Analysis of the Christology of Latin American Liberation Theology with Special Emphasis on Leonardo Boff, Jon Sobrino, and Juan I. Segundo,” (Ph.D. diss., University of Southern California, 1991); Stanley Dale Clark, Jr., “The Political Jesus: a Study of the Gospels and a Comparison with Selected Liberation Christologies,” (Ph.D. diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1990); Donald Eugene Waltermire, Jr., “The Liberation Christologies of Leonardo Boff and Jon Sobrino: Latin American Contributions to Contemporary Christology,” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1990); John Scott Horrell, “Analysis of the Deity of Christ in Boff and Segundo,” (Th.D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1988);

David Carey Dixon, "A Critical Analysis of Liberationist Christology in the Writings of Gustavo Gutierrez, Leonardo Boff, and Jon Sobrino," (Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1988); *Ecclesiology*: Mary McGovern Treyz, "Mary as Model of the Church: The Liberationist Perspective of Leonardo Boff and the Feminist Perspective of Rosemary Radford Ruether," (Ph.D. diss., Fordham University, 1998); Rex I. Bland, "Theological Ecumenism in Four Contemporary Catholic Ecclesiologies (Joseph Ratzinger, Hans Kung, Leonardo Boff, Rosemary Radford Ruether)," (Ph.D. diss., Baylor University, 1997); John Joseph Markey, "Community and Communion: An Analysis of the Understanding of Community in some 'Communion Ecclesiologies' in Post-Vatican II Roman Catholic Thought and a Proposal for Clarification and further Dialogue," (Ph.D. diss., Graduate Theological Union, 1997); Pamela Beth Monaco, "A History and Analysis of Certain Modern/Contemporary Catholic Reform Movements in North America (Vatican II, Hans Küng, Leonardo Boff)," (Ph.D. diss., Temple University, 1996); Lawrence W. 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his ontology and his epistemology, and how they relate to his social ethics, still awaits development, and is the subject of the present dissertation.¹⁷

Method and Structure

Theology and social ethics always rely on some epistemological presuppositions.

Boff's project is no exception. It will become clear to the reader of this dissertation that

Boff, for reasons that will be discussed later, is rather suspicious of the human ability to

Mystical Theory of Encounter with God in Latin American Theology of Liberation," (Ph.D. diss., The University of Chicago, 1995); *Pneumatologia*: Manuel Graciano Soto, "La Gracia Liberadora como Auto-Comunicacion del Espiritu Santo en el Pensamiento de Leonardo Boff," (Th.D. diss., Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, 1991); *Prayer*: Rex T. Kaney, "Living with the Lord's Prayer: An Experiment in Personal and Social Transformation," (D.Min diss., Candler School of Theology, Emory University, 1988); *Poverty*: Christopher Jon Adams, "Franciscan Poverty: Then and Now (Saint Francis, Cajetan Esser, Leonardo Boff)," (M.A. diss., University of Calgary, 1997); Adela Diubaldo Torchia, "Radical Responses to the Search for the *Vita Apostolica*: Francis of Assisi and the Liberation Theology of Leonardo Boff," (M.A. diss., The University of Manitoba, 1991); *Sacraments*: Alfeu Piso, "Igreja e Sacramentos: Renovação da Teologia Sacramentaria na America Latina," (Th.D. diss., Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, 1995); *Sacrament*: Jacobus Joannes Antonius De Boer, "The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick in the Latin American Context of Suffering Caused by Poverty: A Challenge for Greater Relevance," (Ph.D. diss., Katholieke University Leuven (Belgium), 1994); Victor M. Martinez Morales, "Acceso a una Lectura Ético-Social del Misterio Eucaristico en la Teologia Post-Conciliar," (Th.D. diss., Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, 1992); *Scripture*: Oscar Lopez Marroquin, "Boff's Use of the Bible in Selected Christological Passages," (Th.D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1993); Sérgio Antonio Estrada, "A Critique of Liberationist Exegesis of the Gospel of Luke as Reflected in the Writings of Jose Miguez Bonino, Leonardo Boff, and Gustavo Gutierrez," (Ph. D. diss., Southwestern Theological Seminary," (Ph.D. diss., 1992); Javier Elizondo, "The Use of the Bible in the Moral Deliberation of Liberation Theologians: An Examination of the Works of Leonardo Boff, José Miguez Bonino, and Porfirio Miranda," (Ph.D. diss., Baylor University, 1988); *Social Ethics*: Thomas Brent, Stevenson, "Toward an Understanding of the Ideal of Freedom Through an Analysis of the Thought of Gabriel Marcel, Roberto Unger, and Leonardo Boff," (Ph.D. diss., Graduate Theological Union, 1993); *Soteriology*: Ezequiel Castillo Solano, "El Mistério de Salvacion y Liberacion en las Obras de E. Schillebeeckx y L. Boff," (Th.D. diss., Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, 1990); Alberto Lazaro Garcia, "Theology of the Cross: A Critical Study of Leonardo Boff's and Jon Sobrino's Theology of the Cross in Light of Martin Luther's Theology of the Cross as Interpreted by Contemporary Lutheran Scholars," (Th.D. diss., Lutheran School of Theology, 1987); *Trinity*: David Blake Clotfelter, "Before All Worlds: the Doctrine of Eternal Trinitarian Processions," (Ph.D. diss., The Claremont Graduate University, 1999); Thomas R. Thompson, "*Imitatio Trinitatis*: The Trinity as Social Model in the Theologies of Jürgen Moltmann and Leonardo Boff," (Ph.D. diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 1996); *Worship*: Ernest Byron Anderson, "Practicing Ourselves: Liturgical Catechesis as a Practice of the Theonomous Self," (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 1997).

¹⁷ I have mainly worked with the Portuguese editions of Boff's works. In a few cases I have appealed to the English translations. The quotations of Boff's words are usually my own translation from the Portuguese and always try to preserve Boff's original style as much as possible, even though this effort may result in some awkwardness.

ultimately know reality. However, he remains committed to a fundamental axiom of liberation theology—the “epistemological privilege” of the poor.¹⁸ According to Boff, the poor and those who embrace their cause have a unique access to reality. Apparently this privilege is not limited to spiritual issues, but can be extended to include other aspects of reality in general, as I will argue in chapter 4. This fundamental assumption gives Boff justification for dismissing critiques launched from other perspectives. In other words, anyone evaluating Boff’s work from a standpoint different from his own could automatically be discarded by him. From this follows that an effort to offer an analysis and critique of Boff’s project from a Reformed perspective, though not without merit, does not commend itself as the best strategy to pursue. Therefore, the present work intends to develop an analysis of Boff’s theology and social-ethics from within. By “from within” I mean that Boff’s ideas will be evaluated primarily by his own standards. This evaluation will make two things clear. First, the theological price Boff pays for putting his priority on social ethics is considerable. His dismissal of classical theism and his adoption of panentheism have serious implications that must be weighed against the advantages gained. The second is the existence of a tension between his epistemology and his social ethics. While Boff suggests that, given the human limits to grasp reality, one should be open to benefit from the dialogue with various, even opposing, contributions, he does not follow this criterion when it comes to his socio-economic ethics. A specific illustration

¹⁸ See, for instance, William A. Dyrness, *Learning about Theology from the Third World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 97-98. For more on the subject, see also John O’Brien’s “The Hermeneutical Privilege of the Poor: The Option for the Poor as a Hermeneutical Perspective according to Some Contemporary Catholic Theologians,” mentioned above.

showing how Boff could benefit from following his own recommendation will be offered by introducing a dialogue- partner, namely Nicholas Wolterstorff, someone who has written on epistemology and social-ethics.

The analysis of Boff's project will be developed according to the following structure. After this introductory chapter, chapter 2 will provide an overview of Boff's background. Considering, as Boff writes, that "every point of view is the view from one point," the understanding of his standpoint will provide important information, thus helping us better to understand his perspective. Two brief sections dealing with Leonardo Boff's biographical data, and with his contribution to liberation theology's birth, will put the reader in contact with Boff's personal life and with his commitment to the cause of the poor. The Vatican's negative reaction to Boff's writings will then be evaluated, particularly as it concerns his appropriation of Marxist axioms, a general trend of liberation theology in general. After a brief reference to Boff's distinctive contribution to liberation theology in the 1990's, we will then consider the impact of Teilhard de Chardin and Niels Bohr on Boff's ontology and epistemology. This will be followed by an analysis of the potential inner tension created by Boff's appropriation of both a Teilhardian ontology and a Bohrian epistemology.

Chapter 3 will investigate Boff's commitment to panentheism and his consequent departure from classical theism. As a comprehensive discussion of panentheism would go beyond the scope of the present work, an effort will be made to provide a succinct, yet accurate characterization of panentheism. Further sections will gather evidences of Boff's commitment not only to pan-psychism but to panentheism itself. As a consequence of

such a commitment, God is presented as the alpha and omega of the cosmos' evolutionary process in a language that clearly reminds one of Teilhard de Chardin. Panentheism, Boff believes, serves his social ethics and his defense of ecology better than classical theism does, since the latter's emphasis on God's transcendence detaches God from the world, thus making the world hostage to human exploitation. Though Boff succeeds in his effort to prove the superiority of panentheism over pantheism, the same is not true of his comparison between panentheism and classical theism. The claimed advantages of a panentheist cosmology, from both a social and religious-theological standpoint, as I will argue, are superseded by the serious theological problems regarding God's being, the cosmos and humanity. Besides the theological problems in these areas, Boff's panentheism also leans toward universalism in the area of soteriology. Finally, it will be shown in chapter three that by adopting panentheism evil presents an additional difficulty.

Chapter 4 will construct and critique Boff's epistemology. Initial contact with Boff's rejection of the human ability to ultimately grasp reality in itself may suggest that Boff is committed to anti-realism, a position that would undermine his theology and social ethics. By appealing to a standard definition of realism, I will show that Leonardo Boff is not a skeptic. Instead, and as the result of at least three factors, he adopts some version of weak realism. These factors are, first, his understanding that reality is dependent upon the observer; second, his view that the universe is in evolution; and third, his conviction that the universe is complex. According to Boff, reality always presents itself as a duality, so that, to understand it, we are required to adopt the principle of complementarity. It is possible to achieve a true, yet partial knowledge of reality insofar

as one appeals to the appropriate epistemological resources. These resources are *pathos*, the feminine, myths and legends, utopia, dialogical logic, mysticism, and the position of the poor, and will be separately analyzed. A discussion of the implications of Boff's ontological and epistemological proposal for both his religion-theology and his ethics will follow. In what concerns religion and theology, the adoption of complementarity will place Boff's position somewhere between Christian inclusivism and sheer pluralism. In what concerns social-ethics, Boff's willingness to face the challenges imposed by both the reality of poverty and ecological issues will lead him to propose a universal *ethos* according to which diverse particular moralities must be judged. Given the complexity of the issues involved one would expect Boff to apply his own epistemological recommendation and appeal to the principle of complementarity, thus benefitting from the contributions of different social-economic systems. However, this expectation leads to frustration. Following the principle of complementarity, an alternative epistemology will be introduced, the Reformed epistemology proposed by Nicholas Wolterstorff. The choice of Wolterstorff is not arbitrary. The spectrum of concerns covered by Wolterstorff's epistemology is very similar to Boff's, and several elements within the former's project reveal some degree of sympathy with the latter's. Some specific common points will be explored, showing Wolterstorff's position in the role of reason and perspectival learning. Wolterstorff's commitment to realism, despite his rejection of strong foundationalism, will be presented as a potential alternative to Boff's epistemology. However, even if Wolterstorff's realism is dismissed, I will argue on the basis Boff's principle of complementarity and his defense of dialogical logic, that his

liberationist ethics must consider other alternatives, such as Wolterstorff's neo-Calvinism.

Following this insight, chapter 5 compares and contrasts Boff's liberationist socio-economic ethics and Wolterstorff's revised neo-Calvinist economics. The investigation of their diagnoses of the current situation, as well as their proposed solutions, is developed according to a common grid, focusing on socio-cultural, economic, and religious models. A dialogue between Boff's proposal of a cosmic-planetary-democratic society and Wolterstorff's idea of all nations striving cooperatively after shalom will be attempted. The chapter will conclude that Wolterstorff's contribution represents an interesting alternative to Boff's project insofar as it wrestles seriously with the very same issues and makes a critical evaluation of the current socio-cultural, economical, and religious model. In addition, it proposes a solution which not only avoids some potential risks of Boff's proposal, but also preserves the integrity of classical theism, thus avoiding the theological problems resulting from the adoption of panentheism.

Chapter 6 concludes with a summary of the main findings of the previous chapters. The pertinence of Boff's project is recognized in the light of the seriousness of the issues addressed. Some final considerations regarding Boff's methodology and foundations, the continuity of his project, and the historical reasons which determined a watershed in his theological career are offered. The theological problems created by the adoption of panentheism are weighed against the alleged advantages, once more making clear the price involved in uncritically elevating the status of socio-economic ethics. A

brief note calls the reader's attention to the epistemological implications of Boff's ontological standpoint, as well as to his suggestion of adopting the principle of complementarity. The benefits of Wolterstorff's Reformed epistemology are succinctly summarized. Finally, the main aspects of Boff's liberationist ethics and Wolterstorff's neo-Calvinism are put side by side to show the advantages of the latter, and to identify the general direction in which the topic of this present dissertation may be advanced in the future.

CHAPTER TWO

LEONARDO BOFF'S BACKGROUND

Introduction

Every point of view is the view from one point. To understand how one reads [reality], it is necessary to know how one's eyes are, and what one's vision of the world is. This always makes reading a re-reading. One always thinks from where one's feet stand. To comprehend, it is essential to know the social place of the one who sees.¹

One of Leonardo Boff's fundamental beliefs is that the place where one stands has a decisive effect upon one's apprehension of reality. In chapter 4 I will evaluate this belief along with others that comprise Boff's epistemology. At this point, however, it is already clear that, according to Boff's own criterion, his project cannot be understood unless we stand where he stands, unless we understand where he comes from. Or, as Boff himself expresses it, we must know "how one lives, with whom one lives, what experiences one has, what one's job is, what desires one nurtures, how one faces the dramas of life and death, as well as what hopes encourage one."² In other words, any effort to read, understand, and criticize Boff without taking into consideration this axiomatic principle would be dismissed by him for the simple reason that one cannot really understand what

¹ Boff, *A Águia e a Galinha: Uma Metáfora da Condição Humana*, 32nd ed. (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1999), 9.

² Boff, *A Águia e a Galinha*, 9.

his project is all about unless one stands where he stands and sees reality as he sees it. Our initial effort, then, will be to provide the reader with some background information about Leonardo Boff, about his personal life, and about his contribution to liberation theology in its early stages. The Vatican's reaction to Boff's writings and its criticism of liberation theology's appropriation of Marxist principles will also receive attention as important elements of Boff's journey.

Boff's novel contribution to liberation theology in the 1990's with a strong emphasis upon ecology will be presented as the natural development of social-political factors at the fall of socialism in Eastern Europe in the late 1980's, a development consistent with his theological career. Boff's writings on theology and ecology, I will show, are deeply influenced by two major thinkers who shaped his ontology and his epistemology, namely, Teilhard de Chardin and Niels Bohr. Since Boff himself never presents a systematic discussion of these authors, but only makes scattered references to them in his works, a brief discussion of their own works will be provided. This, I believe, will help us to better understand Boff's own ontology and epistemology which will be the object of analysis in chapters 3 and 4.

Biographical Data

Genézio Darci Boff,³ known as Friar Leonardo Boff after his ordination, was born on December 14, 1938 in Concordia, a small town in the state of Santa Catarina in

³ See *O Popular On Line* at <http://www.opopular.com.br/especiais/materias/boff.htm>, 1.

southern Brazil. His mother, although illiterate,⁴ was a devout woman who had a pragmatic rather than an intellectual faith in God. She was, shares Boff, “convinced of having seen him several times at sunset among reddish clouds.”⁵ His father, on the other hand, was a “sophisticated intellectual,” according to Boff’s own testimony.⁶ Moreover, he was “religiously restless.”⁷ Both, father and mother, says Boff, “marked my life.” They had an acute sensitivity for the dramatic situation of the poor as well as for other issues related to social justice. “Much of my sacred irascibility [on social issues] comes from this homely matrix.”⁸ The religiousness of his parents deeply impacted not only Boff’s

⁴ In different books, Boff insists upon this fact. For instance, in his lecture entitled “God—Poor—Liberation,” given when Boff received the Honorary Doctorate in Political Science from the University of Turim, he states: “My mother was illiterate, but with a great practical sense.” *Seleção de Textos Militantes* (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1991), 81; at the dedication of *O Destino do Homem e do Mundo*, Boff says: “I would rather dedicate this book to my mother. But this would not make her happy because she does not know how to read. However, she learned how to live. She was only enrolled in the school of life. Therefore, I dedicate it to my sisters Tarcila, Clotilde and Claudia, They know both [how] to read and to live. I learned things from them that no school, but life’s, can teach.” *O Destino do Homem e do Mundo. Ensaio sobre a Vocação Humana*, 8th ed. (Petrópolis, Editora Vozes, 1998), 5; in his essay “Uma Caminhada Humana e Espiritual,” [A Human and Spiritual Journey], Boff starts by declaring: “My mother was illiterate and my father a sophisticated intellectual.” *Mística e Espiritualidade*, 4th ed. (Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 1999), 159.

⁵ *Mística e Espiritualidade*, 159. Earlier in the same work, Boff honestly shares that his mother, who was able to see God in her own life experiences, lamented that Boff was not capable of doing the same, despite all his years of theological training, and even his ordination as a priest (see *Mística e Espiritualidade*, 73). Boff refers, I believe, to an earlier stage of his spiritual-theological journey.

⁶ *Mística e Espiritualidade*, 159.

⁷ *Mística e Espiritualidade*, 159. “My father,” adds Boff, “almost became a Jesuit and bestowed upon me the non-conformity with the Church’s authoritarianism, and its pretentiousness of having a monopoly on the means of salvation.” *Mística e Espiritualidade*, 159.

⁸ *Mística e Espiritualidade*, 159.

own life. Among Boff's ten siblings, a brother—Clodovis Boff—also became a priest and theologian involved in social issues, and a sister became a nun.⁹

When Boff turned ten years old, he entered a minor seminary in Petropolis, a city located in a mountain range called Star, about 800 meters (2600 feet) above sea level and not very far from Rio de Janeiro (65 kilometers or 40 miles). Years later, he studied in a major seminary in the same town. In 1961, he received a college degree in philosophy in Curitiba, state of Parana, and another degree in theology, in 1965, in Petrópolis, state of Rio de Janeiro.¹⁰ Following his ordination in the Franciscan order in 1964, he took advanced courses in theology at the University of Würzburg in West Germany, the Catholic University of Louvain in Belgium, and the University of Oxford in England. From 1965 to 1970, he studied under the Catholic theologian Karl Rahner at the University of Munich, where he received his doctoral degree in theology in 1972.¹¹ His doctoral dissertation was on the sacramental nature of the church. Boff writes about his academic efforts: "I studied very much in my life, in many places in Brazil and abroad."¹² After completing his dissertation, Boff returned to Brazil and joined the faculty of the

⁹ See <http://coqui.metro.inter.edu/boff.htm>, 1.

¹⁰ <http://coqui.metro.inter.edu/boff.htm>, 1.

¹¹ Charles Frederic Moritz, ed. *Current Biography Yearbook 1988* (US: H. W. Wilson, 1988), 73.

¹² *Mística e Espiritualidade*, 159. Other passages in other books also reveal Boff's passion for studying. In *A Águia e a Galinha*, where he develops a rich symbolism about the dual structure of reality, appealing to a metaphor of an eagle raised among the chicken, he writes about the effort he put in that enterprise: "To develop it [the symbolism about the eagle and the chicken], I walked through libraries and bookstores, looking for information. I found many specialized books, not only in our idiom [Portuguese], but also in many other languages. Thus, I learned much about eagles and from them I elicited instructive lessons for life." *A Águia e a Galinha*, 47.

Petrópolis Institute for Philosophy and Theology in Petrópolis. His first books were *A Oração no Mundo Secular; Desafio e Chance* (*Prayer in the Secular World; Challenge and Chance*); *O Evangelho do Cristo Cósmico: a Realidade de um Mito, o Mito de uma Realidade* (*The Gospel of the Cosmic Christ: The Reality of a Myth, the Myth of a Reality*), *Jesus Cristo Libertador. Ensaio de Cristologia Crítica para o nosso Tempo* (*Jesus Christ Liberator*), *A Ressurreição de Cristo - A nossa Ressurreição na Morte.* (*The Resurrection of Christ - Our Resurrection from Death*).¹³ In addition to teaching and writing, he became editor of the *Revista Eclesiástica Brasileira* (*Brazilian Ecclesiastical Review*), a leading theological journal in Brazil.¹⁴ However, theological production was not the only focus of Leonardo Boff after his return to Brazil. “In the 1970’s,” he writes, “having returned from Europe, I found myself in the real Brazil, [a country] with two-thirds of the people poor and marginal.”¹⁵ This social reality had a deep impact on him. Along with Gustavo Gutierrez from Peru and Juan Luiz Segundo from Uruguai, he developed a theology devoted to the dispossessed that became known as a theology of

¹³ Boff, and others, *A Oração no Mundo Secular* (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1971); *O Evangelho do Cristo Cósmico: A Realidade de um Mito, o Mito de uma Realidade* (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1971); *Jesus Cristo Libertador. Ensaio de Cristologia Crítica para o nosso Tempo* (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1972); *A Nossa Ressurreição na Morte* (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1972). I am not including here the so-called “Synthesis Series” published in Portuguese by *Revista Eclesiástica Brasileira*, and published in English under the title *The Question of Faith in the Resurrection of Jesus* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1971).

¹⁴ According to the *Current Biography Yearbook 1988*, 73.

¹⁵ *Mística e Espiritualidade*, 159.

liberation.¹⁶ This theological project, arising out of a deep compassion for the poor,¹⁷ provided the intellectual framework that inspired, nourished, and brought growth to the so-called base ecclesiastical communities (BEC).¹⁸ The BEC are described as an effort toward the evangelization of those huge masses of people that were economically despised, politically alienated, and religiously syncretistic. Throughout the 1970's and 1980's, Boff traveled throughout Brazil as well as through other Latin American countries to visit and strengthen the BEC. Boff writes about this enterprise: "I have always stood with one foot in the social movements and another in the academy."¹⁹

Boff's writings, especially in the early stage of his theological career, can only be properly understood against the socio-economic-political background of Latin-America in

¹⁶ *Mística e Espiritualidade*, 159. Boff also refers to Gustavo Gutierrez in *Teologia da Libertação: Balanço e Perspectivas*, 30, 41.

¹⁷ See, for instance, *Brasa sob Cinzas: Estórias do Anti-Cotidiano*, 3rd ed. (Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo; Editora Record, 1997), 23, 26, 38, 79. Boff's own childhood also explains his sensitivity to the poor's condition. He shares a little of that phase of his life, saying: "That boy with bare feet, from a poor family of an Italian background, but full of willingness to work and to develop himself, is the one who is here today receiving this degree from the Università degli Studi di Torino." *Seleção de Textos Militantes*, 82.

¹⁸ The base ecclesiastical communities (BEC) started in the 1950s as 'Bible Circles' or groups of Christian labor unionists. (See Dyrness, *Learning about Theology from the Third World*). Nevertheless, Dyrness notes, the BEC came "to play a major role in the development of liberation theology, especially in its later period." Dyrness, *Learning from Theology in the Third World*, 99 (emphasis mine). In 1968, still under the impact of the Council Vatican II, the Roman Catholic bishops of Latin America, gathered in Medellin, Colombia, decided to "encourage and to support all efforts by the people to foster and institute their own grassroots organizations, aiming at... the search for a true justice." *Current Biography Yearbook 1988*, 73. The BEC, says Boff, were constituted by a group of 15-20 families gathered around the Word of God to discuss and to feed their faith, as well as to discuss their problems in the light of this Word. See Boff, *E a Igreja Se Fez Povo. Eclesiogênese: A Igreja Que Nasce da Fé do Povo*, 3rd ed. (Petropolis: Editora Vozes, 1991), 94. They were, therefore, devoted "to deepening the Christian faith of their members and to promoting social and economic development." *Current Biography Yearbook 1988*, 73. José Ramos Regidor notes that within the BEC, "Christians realized that the traditional interpretation of the gospel was put in check *vis a vis* their new experience, and, therefore, they tried to elaborate a new interpretation of the Bible and of Christianity from the viewpoint of the poor." *A Teologia da Libertação: Balanços e Perspectivas*, 18.

¹⁹ *Mística e Espiritualidade*, 159.

general, and of Brazil in particular. In what concerns the political context, Boff developed his theology in the midst of a severe repression that had started with Brazil's military coup of 1964 and subsequently led to twenty-one years of corrupt dictatorial rule and deplorable violation of human rights.²⁰ With regards to Boff's socio-economic background, I will briefly present his own portrayal of Brazil's socio-economic context as it relates to the presentation of his theological project.

Liberation Theology's Birth and Its Methodology

Liberation theology, according to Boff, is "the daughter of the marriage between the Church and the poor."²¹ Boff traces the historical roots of this "marriage" back to the Vatican II Council. During that Council (1962-1965), a group of forty bishops from all over the world, inspired by the prophetic spirit of Dom Helder Camara, made this commitment: "when returning to their countries, they would deprive themselves of the symbols of sacred power, would leave their episcopal palaces, and would live poorly."²²

²⁰ "During the final fifteen years of the dictatorship, more than five hundred of the religious activists were arrested, more than a score were brutally tortured, and a few died in government hands." *Current Biography Book 1988*, 74. In the English edition of *Jesus Christ Liberator: A Critical Christology for Our Time* (Orbis, 1978), Boff added that "a more open and straightforward type of socio-analytical thought" had not been possible in the Brazilian edition due to the severe political repression that prevailed at that time in Brazil. See "Preface," *Jesus Christ Liberator*, xii. For additional information on the twenty one years of military dictatorship in Brazil (1964-1985), Gláucio Ary Dillon Soares, Maria Celina Soares d'Araújo, and Almir Pazzianotto Pinto, *21 Anos de Regime Militar: Balanços e Perspectivas* [Twenty One Years of Military Regime: Balance and Perspectives] (Rio de Janeiro: Editora da Fundação Getúlio Vargas, 1994); Thomas Skidmore, *Brasil: De Getúlio a Castelo* [Brasil: from Getulio to Castelo], 10th ed., Ismênia Tunes Dantas, trans. (São Paulo: Paz e Terra, 1968); and *Brasil: De Castelo a Tancredo* [Brazil: from Castelo to Tancredo], Mário Salviano Silva, trans. (São Paulo: Paz e Terra, 1994).

²¹ *A Teologia da Libertação: Balanços e Perspectivas*, 9. Boff repeats a similar claim on page 10, stating: "The theology of liberation is the daughter of the first love of the Church toward the poor and sufferers of this world."

²² *A Teologia da Libertação: Balanço e Perspectivas*, 9.

The marriage itself happened in the Second Latin-American Episcopal Conference, in Medellin, Colombia, in 1968. Liberation theology—the daughter—was born in 1971, says Boff, with the publication of its first systematic texts in Peru, Uruguay, and other parts of Latin America.²³ Boff defines such texts as “the crystallization of a whole walk of reflection about the option for the poor and oppressed, translated into popular and religious practices, which aimed at an alternative to the system that produces misery and injustice.”²⁴ The distinctiveness of this theological production, Boff recognizes, was its distinctive methodology. Liberation theology’s center of gravity became the *práxis* of liberation of the poor, rather than Scripture or tradition. In Boff’s own words:

Liberation theology is the first historical theology born from Christianity’s periphery. It presents a new way of doing theology, [but now] with a coherent systematization of the contents of faith. It puts into its center the practice of liberating the poor.... From this practice, it rediscovers the biblical God as a God of life.²⁵

The need of an alternative theology based upon a distinctive methodology is consistent with Boff’s claims regarding epistemology, which we will explore in detail in chapter 4. At this point, it is sufficient to observe one of Boff’s epistemological

²³ *A Teologia da Libertação: Balanços e Perspectivas*, 10.

²⁴ *A Teologia da Libertação: Balanço e Perspectivas*, 10.

²⁵ *A Teologia da Libertação: Balanço e Perspectivas*, 13. Boff elsewhere claims that liberation theology’s novelty “is to be a reflection of faith from and within the practice of liberation.” Therefore, rather than a reflection upon the theoretical theme of liberation, it is based “upon the concrete praxis developed by the poor and their allies along with the poor.” Boff, *Do Lugar do Pobre*, 4th ed. (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1997), 25 (see also pp. 31 ff) Rivera Rodrigues acknowledges praxis as the ground of reflection of liberation theology, stating: “Praxis is the ground of reflection. Any form of reflection and theoretical work emerges in relation to specific activities of the production, reproduction, organization, and orientation of human social existence. *All reflection is connected to and dependent on the social praxis of people and classes which try to solve practical and theoretical problems present in concrete societies.*” Luis Rafael Rivera Rodrigues, “Anthropogenesis: The Theological Anthropology of Leonardo Boff,” (Th. D. diss., Harvard University, 1993), 50 (emphasis mine).

principles: to understand one's reading of one's own environment, it is "essential to know [one's] social place."²⁶ According to this principle, Boff's distinctive social context provides him a distinctive view and interpretation of reality in general, and with a distinctive theology and social-ethics in particular.²⁷

Boff has strong convictions regarding the decisive contribution of liberation theology to the general task of theology. Indeed, liberation theology demands from all other theological movements that they critically examine their social role and their relevance. All theological movements must think the questions of the world, "because these questions are objectively related to God, since, in one way or another, He is present in them."²⁸ Liberation theology, by virtue of its compassion toward human suffering, as well as by virtue of its association with the oppressed, possesses an "indisputable ethical grandeur."²⁹ Boff could reach no other conclusion, since "the preferential option for the poor is rooted in the very nature of God. Being drawn to the oppressed and unjustly

²⁶ *A Águia e a Galinha*, 9.

²⁷ See Boff, *Do Lugar do Pobre*, 9-11. "The minimum that may be required from a theologian who makes the Church's option for the poor his own is that he try to exercise the ministry of reflection from the perspective of the poor, aiming at their liberation. Liberation theology is not fashionable because being poor and exploited have never been fashionable; God grant this were so, for it would end as all other fashions do; then there would be no more poor, but only people participating in a just and fraternal society." *Do Lugar do Pobre*, 11.

²⁸ Boff, *A Teologia da Libertação: Balanço e Perspectivas*, 14. Boff's view of the intrinsic connection God and the world bear to each other will be the object of our consideration on chapter 3.

²⁹ "Fundamentally, and in contradiction to the prevailing version in the means of communication, the theology of liberation was approved by the Church." *A Teologia da Libertação: Balanços e Perspectivas*, 15.

impoverished comes from the depths of God's being."³⁰ While some of Boff's claims may sound exaggerated, a grasp of his own socio-economic context may be sufficient to explain them. Instead of providing statistical data about Brazil's or Latin America's socio-economic reality, I have chosen to provide a social picture formed by Boff's own eyes. In *Do Lugar do Pobre (From the Place of the Poor)*, Boff refers not only to Brazil, but to Latin America as a whole, and compares it to the victim of violence left to die in the parable of the Good Samaritan. "In a word," says Boff, "a whole continent is lying at the side of the road, a victim of a century of exploitation."³¹ Boff repeatedly links this situation to the entire history of colonialism.³² Boff's anguish and indignation are perhaps best portrayed in a short chronicle entitled "Our Father of the Poor and the Dogs:"

Very early, as in all mornings,
Boys quarrel with dogs
around the trash can.
They shuffle and re-shuffle,
take and put back
the remnants of food from the garbage.
And they share with the dogs
the rotten bread from the garbage.

In a contemptible world
without heart,
it was the way God found
to answer the prayer

³⁰ "An offense against them [the poor]," concludes Boff, "is an offense against the nature and glory of God." Boff, *Trinity and Society* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 124.

³¹ Boff, *Do Lugar do Pobre*, 48.

³² Boff, *Do Lugar do Pobre*, 47-49. See also "Uma Dívida na América Latina: A Nova Evangelização," preface to *Nova Evangelização: Perspectiva dos Oprimidos*, 4th ed. (Fortaleza: Vozes, 1991), 9-14; "A Voz das Vítimas: a Nossa Permanente Má Consciência, *América Latina: Da Conquista à Nova Evangelização*, 3rd ed. (São Paulo: Editora Ática, 1992), 9-14.

of those miserable little ones:
'Give us today our daily bread.'

From that day on,
The bread from home
(I say it and do not lie)
It was not the same.
Because of those starving
it was a bitter bread,
full of blasphemies of the poor
that, to God, are supplications.

And it only became sweet and good again
When it started being shared
(with an apprehensive heart)
with those starving
boys and dogs.³³

The Vatican's Reaction to Liberation Theology and to Boff's Writing

In Boff's own evaluation, the Vatican's reaction to liberation theology was essentially positive. Liberation theology, he argues, "was approved by the Church."³⁴ He recognizes that such approval was not unconditional, for it pointed to two potential dangers to which liberation theology was exposed: the reduction of faith to politics and the uncritical use of Marxism.³⁵ Nevertheless, in Boff's understanding, the main positions of liberation theology were adopted by the churches, despite the reactions in 1984 and in 1986 from the doctrinal authorities of Roman Catholicism.³⁶ In May 1984, Boff received

³³ Boff, *Brasa sob Cinzas: Estórias do Anti-Cotidiano*, 38-39.

³⁴ *A Teologia da Libertação: Balanços e Perspectivas*, 14.

³⁵ *A Teologia da Libertação: Balanços e Perspectivas*, 14. Clodovis Boff makes a similar claim in his essay "A Teologia da Libertação e a Crise de Nossa Época," *Teologia da Libertação: Balanço e Perspectivas*, 103.

³⁶ Boff does not make clear to what "churches" he is referring. The main positions he has in mind are: (1) the preferential option for the poor; (2) the historical-liberating dimension of the Christian faith; (3) the

a letter from Cardinal Ratzinger questioning statements from Boff's book *Igreja: Carisma e Poder (Church: Charisma and Power)*³⁷ on "dogma and revelation as well as the structure of the church and hierarchical authority."³⁸ A four-hour closed-door "conversation" with Ratzinger and several of his curia colleagues took place on September 7 of that year, and was described by both Boff and Ratzinger as "fraternal."³⁹ Nevertheless, Boff's response was given in his and his brother's book *Teologia de Libertação no Debate Atual in 1985 (Liberation Theology from Dialogue to Confrontation)*, where "he criticized the Sacred Congregation for writing its instruction without any consultation with the Latin American church," for "picturing the liberation movement solely through European eyes," and for "displaying a paternalistic attitude to the poor... which... helps to keep them in their position of dependency."⁴⁰ In March 1985, Boff was notified that the Sacred Congregation had considered some aspects of his work "dangerous" to the faith and to acceptance of hierarchical authority."⁴¹ In May of the

ecclesiastical base communities (BEC); and (4) liberation as an open and an integral process. *A Teologia da Libertação: Balanço e Perspectivas*, 14.

³⁷ Boff, *Igreja; Carisma e Poder* (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1981).

³⁸ See 1988 *Current Biography Yearbook*, 75. Boff, *Church: Charism and Power: Liberation Theology and the Institutional Church*, John W. Diercksmeier, trans. (New York: Crossroad, 1985), originally published as *Igreja; Carisma e Poder* (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1981).

³⁹ 1988 *Current Biography Yearbook*, 75. Nevertheless, years later, in *Mística e Espiritualidade*, Boff refers to the same "conversation" in rather different terms. "I wrote more than 50 books. One of them, *Igreja: Carisma e Poder*, brought me to the courts' bar of the Holy Inquisition in Rome. In former times, I would have been burnt alive in the public square. Now, thank God, I only received [a punishment of] one year of silence and other smaller punishments." *Mística e Espiritualidade*, 160 (emphasis mine).

⁴⁰ 1988 *Current Biography Yearbook*, 75.

⁴¹ 1988 *Current Biography Yearbook*, 75.

same year, the Vatican imposed a “penitential silencing” on Leonardo Boff, ordering him to refrain from public speaking and from publishing, as well as relieving him from his position as editor of the *Revista Eclesiástica Brasileira*. Boff, who had called public attention to his confrontation with Ratzinger, saw his writings become the object of worldwide attention as a consequence of the imposed silencing.⁴² The ban was lifted in April 1986, about a week before a new document of the Sacred Congregation, “Instructions on Christian Freedom and Liberation,” was issued. The document “was generally seen as a conciliatory document, and Boff was grateful to the Vatican for giving universal significance to values that initially were only those of the Third World.”⁴³ However, the conciliatory tone did not last for more than five years. The tension with the Roman Catholic ecclesiastical structure escalated to the point where Boff resigned from the priesthood, as he describes:

In June 1992, pressured by ecclesiastical authority to quit my work, I changed to continue the same: I renounced the presbyterial magistry and became a lay person. I now find myself in the very same situation as Jesus who also was a layman—from David’s tribe and not from Levi’s—and as Saint Francis of Assisi, who never in his life was a priest.⁴⁴

Renouncing Roman Catholicism, Boff claims, is to be understood as a necessary step to avoid compromising what he considers to be an unbreakable and more important

⁴² José Ramos Regidor acknowledges this fact in his essay “Vinte e Cinco Anos de Teologia da Libertação” (Twenty Five Years of Liberation Theology), stressing that Boff’s imposed silence had as a non-intentioned side-effect a world-wide publicity of liberation theology. See Boff, et al, *Teologia da Libertação: Balanço e Perspectivas*, 20.

⁴³ 1988 *Current Biography Yearbook*, 76.

⁴⁴ Boff, *Mística e Espiritualidade*, 160-161.

commitment to God's kingdom. Boff compares his experience with that of Teilhard de Chardin, with whom he deeply identifies:

Some [people] told me when I decided to leave the ministry: 'You must do what Teilhard de Chardin did. Go to China, but remain in the Order.'
 Teilhard has his charisma, I have mine. As a good Jesuit he had a view of the Church that I no longer have: that the Church is something absolute. For me it is the Kingdom of God that is absolute, and if [someone were to] ask me to leave the Kingdom of God, I [would] say no. One can kill me, but I don't leave. But the Church I relativize.⁴⁵

The effort to avoid a rupture with Rome, observable in Boff's earlier works, and even after his first discipline,⁴⁶ gave place to a harsh tone in his more recent books, especially after his voluntary withdrawal from the clergy in the Roman Catholic Church.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Boff, *Mística e Espiritualidade*, 39.

⁴⁶ For instance, with regard to the new ecclesiastical model described in *E a Igreja se Fez Povo (And the Church Became People)*, with its strong participation of lay people, Boff states: "This way of *being Church* does not intend to oppose other manifestations of the Church, like something parallel and unrelated to the unity represented by the hierarchy of the institutional Church." Boff adds that "the hierarchy is represented in the BEC or Popular Church through the participation of cardinals, bishops, priests, religious men, theologian and a great number of committed lay people. The legitimacy of this reality was acknowledged by Pope John Paul II..." *E A Igreja se Fez Povo. Ecclesiogenesis: A Igreja que Nasce da Fé do Povo*, 13-14 (first edition published in 1986). See also page 20, where Boff makes a clever use of the doctrine of infallibility, claiming that "the pope cannot be against the pope," in the matter of some previous positive assessments made by John Paul II with respect to the theology of liberation.

⁴⁷ For instance, in *Brasa sob Cinzas*, published in 1996, Boff refers to one of his dialogues with the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, the Vatican's heart, as an "afflicting dialogue of deaf [men]" *Brasa sob Cinzas*, 96. For more on the events related to Boff's discipline by the Roman Catholic Church, see "The Testing of Leonardo Boff," *America* v. 151 (September 1-8, 1984): 89; Eloise Salholz, and others, "Liberation Theology on Trial," *Newsweek* 104 (September 17, 1984): 83; Leslie R. Keylock, "The Vatican Tries to Rein In a Leading Proponent of Liberation Theology," *Christianity Today* 28 (October 19, 1984): 46-47; Michael Novak, "The Case against Liberation Theology," *The York Times Magazine* (October 21, 1984): 50-51; "Boff Silenced," *Time* 125 (May 20, 1985): 44; "Boff Punished again: [Forced to Resign as Editor of *Vozes (Voices)*]," *Christian Century* 108 (May 29-June 5, 1991): 586; "Boff Resigns: [fr Priesthood]," *Christian Century* 109 (July 29-August 5, 1992): 709; Jim Rice, "Leonardo Boff Resigns Priesthood," *Sojourners* (October 1992): 37; Tim Rian, "The Boff Case," *Grail* 9 (September 1993): 10-36; Jon Sobrino, "Leonardo Boff: An Apostolic and Pastoral Crisis," *SEDOS Bulletin* 25 (November 15, 1993): 283-287.

As I mentioned above, among the reservations Rome has towards liberation theology is its uncritical use of Marxism. We will briefly consider Boff's answer to this charge.

The Appropriation of Marxist Principles by Liberation Theology

Marxism was commonly associated with liberation theology, and with the BEC in particular. Leonardo Boff answers this charge made by certain critics, with a reference to the Fifth Meeting of the BEC, held in Ceará (a state located in the Northeast of Brazil), from July 4-8, 1983:

[Some] imagine that there [in the BEC] the strategies of the 'Popular Church' are developed; [and that] the most common words would be Socialism and Marxism, popular parties, violence, revolution, and liberation. Fear produces monsters. These monsters dwell in the minds of some uninformed critics of the BEC.... At no time was Marx's name or 'socialism' mentioned.⁴⁸

However, even if it is true that Marxism had no connection with the BEC, the same cannot be argued about the use of Marxist principles by liberation theology, or, more precisely, by some liberation theologians. Even Boff himself admits this fact, despite claiming that liberation theology's use of Marxist principles is purely an "instrumental" one.⁴⁹ According to him, a liberation theologian "maintains a decisively critical relation to

⁴⁸ Boff, *E a Igreja se Fez Povo*, 81.

⁴⁹ See Boff, *Como Fazer Teologia da Libertação*, 7th ed. (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1998), 50 (originally published by Vozes in 1985).

Marxism.”⁵⁰ Nevertheless, it is worth paying attention to the changes that liberation theology in general, and Leonardo Boff in particular, have undergone since 1989.

1989 brought about the fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent “implosion of socialism,” as José Ramos Regidor phrases it.⁵¹ Regidor insists that this implosion did not present a real problem to liberation theology since, according to liberation theologians, “Marxism was never the center of their theology. Their center was always the poor.”⁵² Nevertheless, Regidor adds, the same theologians “recognize that there took place a *strong crisis*, because *a point of reference was gone*—Soviet socialism—pictured as the true alternative to capitalism.”⁵³ Regidor’s own frustration with the fall of socialism shows up when he argues:

[T]he fall of socialism and the crisis of capitalism are not history’s last word. If it is true that socialism failed in Europe, it is equally true that capitalism is equally failing not only in the South, where it abandoned to misery two thirds of humankind, as well as in what concerns the ecological crisis.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Boff, *Como Fazer Teologia da Libertação*, 51. “Marx,” adds Boff, “can be a journey-partner... but never ‘the’ guide.” Therefore, he concludes, “materialism and Marxist atheism never constitute a temptation” for a liberation theologian.” *Como Fazer Teologia da Libertação*, 51.

⁵¹ José Ramos Regidor, “Vinte e Cinco Anos de Teologia da Libertação,” in *Teologia da Libertação: Balanço e Perspectivas*, 24.

⁵² José Ramos Regidor, “Vinte e Cinco Anos de Teologia da Libertação,” in *Teologia da Libertação: Balanço e Perspectivas*, 24.

⁵³ José Ramos Regidor, “Vinte e Cinco Anos de Teologia da Libertação,” in *Teologia da Libertação: Balanço e Perspectivas*, 24 (emphasis mine).

⁵⁴ José Ramos Regidor, “Vinte e Cinco Anos de Teologia da Libertação,” in *Teologia da Libertação: Balanço e Perspectivas*, 27.

Despite Regidor's claim that "in its initial stages liberation theology used the social, economic, and political sciences, including Marxism, with a *critical spirit*,"⁵⁵ one may wonder what this "critical spirit" ultimately means. The appreciation of Marxism as an important reference has not been abandoned, as Clodovis Boff himself acknowledges in his essay in the same work. When he talks about the dialectical enlargement of liberation theology's agenda, Clodovis Boff argues that on a methodological level liberation theology "is assuming a more plural socio-analytical mediation, even though Marxism remains as [an] important reference."⁵⁶ In addition, he honestly recognizes that "many false certainties collapsed," on three levels: (a) certainties of *analysis* about what was the capitalist social system; (b) certainties about the historical *project* of society toward which liberation theology was striving, namely an alternative socialist system; (c) certainties about the right *strategies* (class and revolutionary) to achieve the utopia.⁵⁷

Leonardo Boff agrees with his brother's analysis. Liberation theology cannot be developed as it had been in the two previous decades. Among the factors that require a change of strategy he mentions the fall of the Berlin Wall, the implosion of the Soviet Empire, the homogenization of markets in the world economy, the spreading of

⁵⁵ José Ramos Regidor, "Vinte e Cinco Anos de Teologia da Libertação," in *Teologia da Libertação: Balanço e Perspectivas*, 31 (emphasis mine). As noted above, a similar claim is made by Leonardo and Clodovis Boff in their *Como Fazer Teologia da Libertação*. According to them, liberation theology borrowed from Marxism some "methodological indications" which reveal themselves to be fecund for the comprehension of the oppressed's universe." See *Como Fazer Teologia da Libertação*, 50-51.

⁵⁶ Clodovis Boff, "A Teologia da Libertação e a Crise de Nossa Época," in *Teologia da Libertação: Balanço e Perspectivas*, 100.

⁵⁷ Clodovis Boff, "A Teologia da Libertação e a Crise de Nossa Época," in *Teologia da Libertação: Balanço e Perspectivas*, 102.

neoliberalism as the last stage of the capitalist system with its inherent highly elevated level of exclusion of people from the generated prosperity.⁵⁸ All these factors, Leonardo Boff acknowledges, “obliged [liberation] theology to recycle its analytical categories, to open the horizon of its perspective of liberation, and to develop other strategies of liberating effort.”⁵⁹ In spite of such recognition, Boff still shows appreciation for Marx’s work. While I elaborate on this point in chapter 5, a short reference here may suffice to substantiate my claim. In *O Despertar da Águia*, Boff argues:

A large part of the development in modern society is due to the tension between capital and work, between those who possess technological knowledge and those who are excluded from it, between the various markets in competition. It was Karl Marx’s (1818-1883) merit to have emphasized the importance of the struggle of classes... as the dynamic of history, though not the only one.⁶⁰

It is also clear that Boff does not see any tension in a marriage between Marxism and Christianity, as his uncritical appraisal of Kwame N’Krumah, agent of Ghana’s independence from England, indicates: “In his inauguration speech, he surprised all by proclaiming: “I am socialist, I am Marxist, and I am Christian.”⁶¹

⁵⁸ Leonardo Boff, “Libertação Integral: Do Pobre e da Terra,” in *Teologia da Libertação: Balanço e Perspectivas*, 115.

⁵⁹ Boff, “Libertação Integral: Do Pobre e da Terra,” in *Teologia da Libertação: Balanço e Perspectivas*, 115.

⁶⁰ It is not clear in the original text, whether Boff has in mind that Marx was not the only one who emphasized the importance of the struggle of classes or that the struggle of classes is not the only “engine” advancing history. The second reading is obviously compatible with Leonardo Boff’s ontology and its emphasis on the role of spirit in the evolutionary process, as chapter 3 will make clear. Boff, *O Despertar da Águia: O Dia-bólico e o Sim-bólico na Construção da Realidade*, 11th ed. (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1999), 100.

⁶¹ Boff, *A Águia e a Galinha*, 25.

In summary, Boff is appreciative of Marxist analysis and, despite the failures of some historical efforts to realize Marxist principles, these principles remain a valid option to which Boff appeals in the development of his social-ethics proposal, to which we will turn our attention later.

Boff's Theology of Liberation in the 1990's: A New Paradigm

Boff's distinctive contribution to liberation theology started in the 1990's. The new global context mentioned above required an enlargement of the previous focus. Boff justifies the change in the following terms:

We cannot produce the same kind of liberation theology that was produced in the 1970's and 1980's. The global scene has changed.... We are confronted with the emergence of a new civilizational paradigm toward a unique world-wide society, [one] with universal consciousness and ethical responsibility to guarantee a future of integrity, justice, collaboration, and world peace.⁶²

In the 1970's the great concern was "the poor and the materially, socially, and politically oppressed;" in the 1980's it was "the poor and the culturally oppressed." The 1990's, however, brought a louder cry. "Not only do the poor and oppressed cry out. The earth also does."⁶³ The risk is now global and demands a global liberation. Theology of liberation gains its full stature:

It is important to articulate a truly integral liberation of the earth, and of its captive sons and daughters. In order to fulfill it, we have to introduce a new paradigm, that of re-connection, of cooperation, and of a new

⁶² Boff, *A Teologia da Libertação Balanço e Perspectivas*, 12.

⁶³ Boff, *A Teologia da Libertação: Balanço e Perspectivas*, 12.

covenant with Mother-earth. Now, liberation theology has a chance to become truly integral.⁶⁴

Ecology is the “new paradigm.”⁶⁵ Even though Boff refers to ecology as a new paradigm in the development of his social-ethics, we should not expect to find a discontinuity within Boff’s overall project. As he himself admits, despite having “jumped into another trench... he has not left the frontline.”⁶⁶ The theological roots of this new development, which will be the object of our consideration in chapter 3, may be traced further back to his 1975-*Mínima Sacramentalia: Os Sacramentos da Vida e a Vida dos Sacramentos*,⁶⁷ and even earlier.⁶⁸

Boff’s Ontological-Epistemological Background

Socio-economic and political factors are not the only sources of influence for Boff’s project in social-ethics and theology. Two major thinkers also have a major role in

⁶⁴ Boff, *A Teologia da Libertação: Balanço e Perspectivas*, 13. The Portuguese word Boff uses for “re-connection” is *religação*, a cognate of religion (*religare* in Latin)

⁶⁵ Boff, *A Teologia da Libertação: Balanço e Perspectivas*, 61.

⁶⁶ Leonardo Boff, *Ecology and Liberation: A New Paradigm*, John Cumming, trans. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1995), xi. “The pieces collected in this volume,” confesses Boff in the preface entitled ‘Creative Crisis,’ “were composed in the last two years [1991-1992, since the book was published in 1993 in its Portuguese edition], under the influence of precipitate and momentous upheavals that have affected the author’s life too. *But he has only taken a different route. He has jumped into another trench, but he has not left the frontline. The struggle continues.*” *Ecology and Liberation*, xi (emphasis mine).

⁶⁷ The 20th edition of *Os Sacramentos da Vida e a Vida dos Sacramentos* was published by Vozes in 1999. The original edition was translated into English and published in 1987 under the title *Sacraments of Life: Life of the Sacraments*, John Drury, trans. (Washington, DC: Pastoral Press, 1987).

⁶⁸ See *O Destino do Homem e do Mundo*, first published by Vozes in 1973; *A Nossa Ressurreição na Morte*, 9th ed. (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1999), originally published under the title *A Ressurreição de Cristo—A nossa Ressurreição na Morte* in 1972.

shaping Boff's ontology and epistemology, respectively, Teilhard de Chardin and Niels Bohr.⁶⁹

Teilhard de Chardin and his Theology of Evolution

Boff's Use of Teilhard de Chardin

Leonardo Boff's appreciation of Teilhard de Chardin⁷⁰ is beyond doubt. Boff not only incorporates some of Teilhard's insights; he also refers to the latter's work on numerous occasions, invariably showing appreciation.⁷¹ Boff even compares his problems

⁶⁹ In stressing the relevance of Teilhard and Bohr, I am not denying the influence of other authors that Boff mentions in his works. Nevertheless, I am convinced that Teilhard and Bohr play a major role in shaping Boff's whole system.

⁷⁰ For a brief introduction to Teilhard's biography, see "Teilhard's Scientific Character," in N. M. Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin* (New York, and Evanston: Harper & Row, 1968), 41-44. For a more detailed work, see Robert Speaight's *The Life of Teilhard de Chardin* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967); or John Grim, and Mary Evelyn Grim's *Teilhard de Chardin: A Short Biography* (Chambersburg, PA: ANIMA Books, 1984).

⁷¹ In *A Nossa Ressurreição na Morte*, Boff refers to the risen Christ as "Kyrios, the cosmic Christ (cf. Col 1,15-20; Eph 1,10) and the *pleroma* (Eph 1,13; Col 2,9), i.e., that element through which the totality of the world reaches its plenitude, and the end of its perfection. This theme was developed by Teilhard de Chardin with unusual passion, even though it was present in the Pauline thought and in his communities." Boff, *A Nossa Ressurreição na Morte*, 62. "[T]he christic and spiritual mysticism is the one of open eyes, and cosmic. It aims at the unity in all differences, insofar as a divine string passes by the Universe, human consciousness and action, in order to unite them forward and upward, from the perspective of a supreme synthesis with God, Omega of evolution and creation. This mysticism of unity and union is well witnessed by a vigorous trend which comes from the Gregorian fathers (Gregorio de Nissa and Gregorio Nazianzeno), passes through the Platonic-Augustinian tradition, it arrive at Saint Bonaventure with his admirable *Itinerário da Mente para dentro de Deus*, and culminates with Saint John of the Cross (*Subida ao Monte Carmelo*), and with Saint Teresa d'Ávila (*Castelo e suas Moradas*), until leading into the ardent mystical texts *O Meio Divino* [*The Divine Milieu*] and *Ciência e Cristo* [*Science and Christ*], by Teilhard de Chardin." *Mística e Espiritualidade*, 22. Later in the same work, Boff refers again to Teilhard the Chardin "who had the same basic experience [as Francis of Assisi]: the rediscovery of the sacred within the cosmos and of God within the world. He calls everything brother, God is there. Teilhard is, in the modern world, a great mystic, anthropologist, geologist, paleontologist, who wrote the famous book *O Meio Divino* (*Le milieu divin*). A man who came from modern cosmology, from the world in evolution, who realized that the Christ is not only Mediterranean, is not only incarnate in our history, but has a pre-history, as our body and our psyche also have a pre-history of millions of years. Christ is at the beginning of the world's organization, of the organization of matter, and he is evolving—the Christogenesis—, he is being conceived in the innermost, in the cosmic womb, until he is born. The universe is Christic. It comes marked by Christ." *Mística e Espiritualidade*, 38. According to Teilhard, Boff says, "[G]od comes mixed within matter, The cosmic Christ is inside, is being born; since I do well whatever I do, I am attuned with God." *Mística e*

with the Roman Catholic Church with Teilhard's who, as a consequence of his theological insights, was transferred to China in the 1920's, where, so Boff claims, there were no Christians at the time.⁷² Boff succinctly portrays Teilhard's exile in terms that seem to reveal his own pain:

Rome obliges the General of the Order to transfer him to China, where there are no Christians. He celebrates the Mass in the French embassy and on Sundays is allowed to have dinner with the Franciscans, with whom he can talk about theology. Twenty five years he stays in China, away from the theological discussions, from the renewal of the 30 and 40s. Only in [19]50 does he receive a licence to return to Paris. Of his works—many of which were already written—no one is published. All [are] censored. Teilhard de Chardin died in 1955, on the day he wished to die, Easter.⁷³

Despite his identification with Teilhard's work, Boff candidly acknowledges his unwillingness to follow Teilhard's steps in submitting to the Roman Catholic Church, as a previous section has shown.

Espiritualidade, 39. "It belonged to Teilhard de Chardin to elaborate a global vision which would insert in the process of evolution the Christian phenomenon. The cosmogenesis sustains the biogenesis, which sustains the anthropogenesis, which sustains the christogenesis which ends up in the theogenesis." *Nova Era: A Civilização Planetária*, 35. "Matter," urges Boff, "is also something spiritual, subtle, mysterious, worthy of the fascination and contemplation of the mystics, as the psalmists, Saint Francis, or Teilhard de Chardin within our cultural tradition." *Nova Era: a Civilização Planetária, . Desafios à Sociedade e ao Cristianismo*, 3rd ed. (São Paulo: Editora Ática, 1998), 36. In the same work, Boff adds: "Teilhard de Chardin had noted a growing logic in the evolution: the more it ascends, the more complex it becomes; the more complex it becomes, the more it interiorizes itself, the more it interiorizes itself; the more conscious it becomes; the more conscious it becomes, the more it converges toward a point where everything concentrates, synthesizes, and constitutes a superior unity." *Nova Era: A Civilização Planetária*, 46. See also *Nova Era: A Civilização Planetária*, 40; *Vida para Além da Morte. O Presente: seu Futuro, sua Festa, sua Contestação*, 16th ed. (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1997), 108.

⁷² Boff, *Mística e Espiritualidade*, 39. Boff's literal quotation reads: "Rome obliges the [Jesuit] Order to transfer him to China, where there *are* no Christians." (emphasis mine). Since there are Christians in China nowadays, I imagine that Boff has in mind that there would be no Christians in that country in the 1920s. Nevertheless, this assumption is challenged by K. S. Latourette's classic *A History of Christian Missions in China* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1929), in the chapter entitled "China in a Time of Reorganization (1901-1926). Protestant Missions from the Close of the War to the Close of 1926." See, for instance, pp. 775 ff.

⁷³ Boff, *Mística e Espiritualidade*, 39.

The influence of Teilhard's work upon Boff's ontological proposal, which will be the focus of our consideration in chapter 3, will not become clear unless Teilhard's own project is the object of some analysis at this point. Boff's cosmic-evolutionary panentheism, we hope to show, is very similar to Teilhard's.⁷⁴ McCarthy's and Baudry's works, however, make clear that an in-depth analysis of Teilhard's theology is far beyond the scope of the present dissertation.⁷⁵ Therefore, from among the available sources I have chosen to rely primarily on Wildiers' concise but helpful work entitled *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin* for providing a general portrayal of Teilhard's work.⁷⁶

Teilhard's Synthesis between God and the World

Although Teilhard's work may at first give a somewhat chaotic impression, due to its considerable diversity,⁷⁷ a large degree of unity nevertheless marks his thinking, "a unity that readily becomes apparent as soon as one realizes what the central problem was

⁷⁴ In fairness to Teilhard, it is necessary to observe that he does not refer to his ontological proposal as panentheism but as a "superior form of 'pantheism'..." See *The Phenomenon of Man*, Bernard Wall, trans. (New York: Harper & Brothers Pub., 1959), 294. He also calls his ontological proposal a "very real 'pantheism,' one "absolutely legitimate." According to Teilhard, in the *eschaton*, the reflective centers of the world will become one with God. However, this final state will not be achieved by "identification (God becoming all), but by the differentiating and communicating action of love (God all *in everyone*)." This, Teilhard concludes, is "essentially orthodox and Christian." *The Phenomenon of Man*, 308.

⁷⁵ Joseph M. McCarthy, *Pierre Teilhard de Chardin: A Comprehensive Bibliography* (New York: Garland Pub., 1981), 438 pages; Gerard-Henry Baudry, *Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. Bibliographie (1881-1972)* (Lille, Facultes Catholiques, 1972), 113 pages.

⁷⁶ Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*. Another valuable reference for Teilhard's work is Christopher F. Mooney, *Teilhard de Chardin and the Mystery of Christ*, 1st ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1966).

⁷⁷ Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 21.

which dominated his whole life and work.”⁷⁸ This central problem was to reconcile two poles apparently at odds with each other, namely, God and the world, or the world of faith and the world of science.⁷⁹

Wildiers summarizes Teilhard’s inner tension in the following words:

For many people the world of science and the world of faith have nothing in common. They constitute two totally different territories, fenced off from each other by an impenetrable barrier. To begin with, this was also the case for Teilhard; but with this state of inner division, this intellectual and spiritual ‘schizophrenia’, he found no contentment. His mind hankered after unity. He was impelled by an ‘insatiable need for cosmic organicity’.⁸⁰

Teilhard himself refers to his effort toward a “unique all-sufficing and necessary reality” as something that constitutes an “appetite or irresistible demand,” whose roots were present far back in his childhood⁸¹ and motivated him throughout his entire intellectual journey.

⁷⁸ Christopher F. Mooney, “Preface,” *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 5. Wildiers adds: “[I]t soon becomes evident that all this many-sided and seemingly chaotic activity has in no small measure an inner, organic unity, so that it can be wholly reduced to a few central ideas, or, it might even be said, to one central problem.” Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 21.

⁷⁹ “Teilhard’s eventual synthesis of science and religion could never have taken place had not his thinking been polarized from the very start by the two apparently opposed concepts of God and the world.” Christopher F. Mooney, “Preface,” *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 12. “[T]he whole of his work is governed by one fundamental concern and by a single problem, personally experienced. This core of his mental life could be reduce to these two concepts: God and the universe. They form the twin poles of his thinking; and his whole endeavour was to be concentrated on the task of discovering the connection between them.” Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 21.

⁸⁰ Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 22.

⁸¹ Teilhard de Chardin, René Hague, trans. *The Heart of Matter* (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 16. “This urge to unity, cohesion, synthesis,” adds Wildiers, “is one of the most characteristic properties of his [Teilhard’s] mind. It is the totality that he wishes to encompass, and not just a constituent part of it.” Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 22.

On the one hand, he was aware of the discoveries of natural science, particularly of geology and paleontology, fields in which he was an outstanding scientist⁸² and which pointed towards a new, dynamic, evolutionary perspective of the universe. Nowadays, states Wildiers when referring to Teilhard's conviction,

we see the universe as an enormous historical process, an evolutive happening which has been going on for thousands of millions of years and is moving on into an incalculable future. The reason why the idea of evolution is of great importance is that it points us to the fundamental and dynamic unity or oneness of the world.⁸³

On the other hand, primarily as a man of science and not as a theologian, he strived to promote a synthesis of religion and science which would allow him to have an integrated worldview that benefitted from both fields,⁸⁴ a synthesis that he considered to be “one of the most pressing tasks for the Christian thinking in our time.”⁸⁵

Teilhard's search for such a synthesis, rather than a mere intellectual pursuit, was driven by a very practical motivation: to reconcile love for God and love of the world, to bring them together into unity, to harmonize the “cult of progress and the passion for the

⁸² Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 21. See also page 43, where Wildiers stresses that Teilhard's research was chiefly concerned with three areas: “pure geology, mammal paleontology, man (his origins and his history).”

⁸³ Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 57. Therefore, “a world envisaged as ‘motionless’ does not unveil to us its deepest reality.” Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 54. “To understand the world is “to want to understand a process, a history.” (54)

⁸⁴ In Wildiers's words: “[T]eilhard never aspired to being recognized as a theologian. He declared most emphatically on many occasions that he did not regard himself as having any special theological competence.... He wanted to be a man of science—but a scientist who was at the same time a man of faith, someone who did not keep his faith and his science in separate compartments but from an inner necessity strove for a harmonious synthesis between the two.” Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 28.

⁸⁵ Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 31.

glory of God.”⁸⁶ He considered the achievement of this synthesis “the most precious conquest” he accomplished in his life; the discovery of the “marvellous and liberating harmony between a religion of the Christic type and an Evolution of the convergent type.”⁸⁷

A New Cosmology: A Phenomenology of the Universe

The integral worldview Teilhard was striving for required the adoption of a broader perspective of reality; the ‘total world’ could not be understood merely by focusing on what it looks like at a given point in time.⁸⁸ It should encompass both past and future.⁸⁹ It would demand “a disposition of the mind to survey the totality of things from an elevated standpoint and to conceive the universe as a unity.”⁹⁰ This project, the

⁸⁶ Teilhard de Chardin, *La Vie Cosmique*, 1916, in *Écrits du Temps de la Guerre* (Paris: Grasser, 1965), 46, according to Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 25. “His true problem lies rather in the plane of living and of ‘lived religion’ or, better, in the plane of action. The question that preoccupies him is how *love* for God and *love* of the world may be reconciled and brought into unity.” Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 25. “[T]his problem of the relationship between God and the world was to his mind much more than a purely abstract and theoretical question, suitable for calm discussion at academic get-togethers or in dry-as-dust treatises. For him this was a genuinely existential question in which his whole being was implicated—as though his existence as a human being and a Christian were at stake.” Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 26.

⁸⁷ Teilhard de Chardin, *Le Christique*, (1955), 8, according to Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 25-26.

⁸⁸ “We can never succeed in really understanding the world so long as we are obliged to restrict our view to the present alone. Just as we cannot fully understand a human individual if we make no allowance for the whole course which his life has taken, so a complete knowledge of the world must be conditional upon having been able to survey the entire course of universal evolution, from beginning to end.” Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 54.

⁸⁹ “A total knowledge of the world would therefore have to encompass the past and the future; and from this it follows that a phenomenology of the world phenomenon must involve in its enquiry not only the study of the past but—in so far as such a thing is possible—the problem of the future as well.” Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 55.

⁹⁰ Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 45.

study of the universe as it manifests itself to the observer, as a phenomenon, Teilhard entitled a phenomenology of the universe.⁹¹

Departing from the old cosmologies that conceived of the universe as a “fundamentally changeless and static whole,”⁹² Teilhard embraced a new cosmology which incorporated modern science’s discovery of time as constituent of everything, and came to conclude that “we live in a universe gigantic in its dimensions, building itself up organically as a cohesive whole, and impelled by an inner dynamic and energy toward its completion.”⁹³ Therefore, according to Teilhard, the world in which we live presents itself to us not as a machine, artificially contrived, but “as an organism building itself from within—an organism in which all entities have appeared through something like a stage by process of growth.”⁹⁴ The appearance of mankind is located within this evolutionary trend, this universal process of becoming. This comprehension establishes a fundamental, intimate connection between man and the world,⁹⁵ and leads Teilhard to claim that a

⁹¹ Phenomenology “is a science which seeks to describe the universe as an observable phenomenon in its totality and its intrinsic cohesion, and to discover the meaning concealed in that totality.” Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 48.

⁹² Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 57. While there are mutations and motions occurring, the old cosmology argued that “these changes were always on the surface of things and did not affect their essential nature.” (57)

⁹³ Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 57.

⁹⁴ Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 56. The importance of Charles Darwin’s work *The Origin of Species by means of Natural Selection*, 6th ed. (London: John Murray, 1872) with his emphasis upon evolution over the scientific world in general, and over Teilhard’s project in particular, is acknowledged by Wildiers (see pages 57, 58).

⁹⁵ “Man and world, then, cannot be viewed in isolation from each other. Man forms a constituent part, an aspect of the world, and is the highest expression of the energies operative in that world.” Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 62.

phenomenology of the cosmos must include “the phenomenon of man” as part, indeed *the* most important part, of the scope of its reflection.⁹⁶

Wildiers concisely summarizes the starting point of Teilhard’s worldview as follows:

The point of departure, then, for Teilhard’s world view is clear enough: the universe presents itself to the eye of the beholder as a four-dimensional continuum, extended in space and time, an organically cohesive and evolving whole which is most completely manifested in man and so is best understood in that context and perspective.⁹⁷

Teilhard de Chardin identifies two crucial moments in the cosmos’ evolutionary process, the emergence of life, and the breakthrough of mind.⁹⁸ The former was responsible for a transition from the geosphere to the biosphere,⁹⁹ the latter, from the

⁹⁶ “[T]he phenomenon of man’ is of capital and central importance for arriving at a right concept of the world. The whole evolution has moved *de facto* in the direction of man, has led up to the emergence of man, who forms the crown and the climax of it.... *The phenomenon ‘world’ will not be fully intelligible for the objective observer, unless he involves the phenomenon ‘man’ in his analysis—nay, more, unless he concedes to this phenomenon of man the first, salient, key position.*” Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 62 (emphasis mine).

⁹⁷ Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 62, 63. It is an interesting fact that *Seleção de Textos Militantes*, a selection of Boff’s texts published on the occasion of the twenty years of his theological career, starts with a section on anthropology entitled “Man: As God’s Parable.”

⁹⁸ Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 67. See echoes of Teilhard, for instance, in Boff’s *O Despertar da Águia*, 129, *Vida para Além da Morte*, 108, *Saber Cuidar*, 72, *O Destino do Homem e do Mundo*, 23.

⁹⁹ “The second phase, then is characterized by the emergence and marvellous upsurge and progress of life, which added an entirely new aspect to our earth, encircling it with a wonderful covering of plant growth and populating it with an infinite variety of changing forms of life: the biosphere, a band of life enveloping the world.” Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 65. This transition from inorganic matter to organic matter and life has not been completely proved, being accepted as a “working hypothesis by all scientific investigators.” Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 68.

biosphere to the noosphere.¹⁰⁰ Teilhard argues for the plausibility of his standpoint in the following terms:

In every domain, when anything exceeds a certain measurement, it suddenly changes its aspect, condition or nature. The curve doubles back, the surface contracts to a point. The solid disintegrates, the liquid boils, the germ cell divides, intuition suddenly bursts on the piled up facts... Critical points have been reached, rungs on the ladder, involving a change of state—jumps of all sorts *in the course* of development. Henceforward this is the *only* way in which science can speak of a ‘first instance.’ But it is none the less a *true way*.¹⁰¹

While a fundamental distinction might be made between matter and life, and life and man, an intrinsic cohesion, an element of continuity still exists between the so-called three “spheres,” geosphere, biosphere, and noosphere. This becomes clear as soon as we recall that vegetal and animal life, as well as man’s own life, “is contingent upon all sorts of chemical elements.” Moreover, man is in “continual need of nourishment” from the “plant and animal kingdoms.”¹⁰²

Two Chief Characteristics of the Universe’s Evolution

The evolutionary process in our world, according to Teilhard, follows a pattern, obeys an intrinsic orientation. Rather than a disorderly succession of events, it reveals a “gradual ascent, set irreversibly in one direction.”¹⁰³ In fact, Teilhard claims that pure

¹⁰⁰ After five or six hundred thousand years a new phenomenon comes on the scene, the phenomenon of the mind (*noia*, in Greek). “From his source in the biosphere man entered upon the terrestrial scene; and this event soon came to have such central and all-embracing significance that it can only be described as a new stage in the world’s history. Our earth acquired a second ‘envelope’: the envelope of mind, the noosphere.” Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 66.

¹⁰¹ Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 78.

¹⁰² Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 67.

¹⁰³ Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 72.

observation, detached of any theological or philosophical presuppositions, reveals that the world as a whole has consistently followed a course toward what is more complex. “It invariably proceeds from simpler to more intricate structures....It looks as though the whole course of the world’s history is orientated toward the building up of conditions of ever greater complexity.”¹⁰⁴

Parallel to this increasing complexity is a second feature of evolution: “an orientation toward an ever increasing degree of consciousness.”¹⁰⁵ This gradual growth of psychic manifestation, Teilhard believes, reaches its apex in man.

How do these two observable phenomena, increasing complexity and gradual growth of psychism, relate to each other, if at all? The fact that both occur together is in itself no proof that one is a consequence of the other.¹⁰⁶ Nevertheless, Teilhard seems inclined to argue that “we may be sure that every time a richer and better organized

¹⁰⁴ Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 73. “By this increasing complexity we mean... that [creatures] exhibit a greater richness in internal organization and manifest in their structure an ever greater degree of intrinsic unity and quality of concentration. Now this increasing complexity is not a philosophical theory or an *a priori* principle or a vague speculation, but something quite factual and objectively established by the natural scientist. *It is an incontrovertible fact that the whole evolutionary process, the traces of which are everywhere around us, has moved in this direction—in the direction, that is, of an increasing complexity.*” Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 73 (emphasis mine). For Boff’s appropriation of Teilhard, see *O Despertar da Águia*, 63, 73; *A Águia e a Galinha*, 72, 125

¹⁰⁵ Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 74. “Throughout the whole long, evolutive process there is gradual growth of psychic manifestation, supported by the steady advance to perfection of the nervous system and reaching its point of climax in man.” For Boff’s appropriation of Teilhard, see *O Despertar da Águia*, 73, 85, 132.

¹⁰⁶ “Obviously,” argues Wildiers, “Teilhard has no intention of asserting that psychism is dependent simply and solely on the degree of organic complexity—as though forcing a machine’s complexity up to a high enough pitch would suffice automatically to give it a consciousness of the same character as man’s.” Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 76.

structure will correspond to the more developed consciousness.”¹⁰⁷ However, consciousness, or interiority, a privilege *par excellence of man*, is ultimately also present to some degree in animals, in plants, and even in more primitive forms of life.¹⁰⁸

Man is not only considered the apex of the evolution of the cosmos (cosmogensis) at this point, but also a new beginning.¹⁰⁹ As a free and reflective being, man now plays a decisive role in the completion of the evolutionary process.¹¹⁰

Prospects for the Universe's Evolution

Insofar as it is possible to identify the two general principles that have ruled the whole of evolution up to this point, Teilhard believes it possible to make a *scientific* projection about the future of the universe.¹¹¹ Such a projection he even characterizes as an “urgent need” in view of man’s inherent responsibility for moving the evolutionary

¹⁰⁷ Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, 60.

¹⁰⁸ Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 78. The further we descend toward more primitive forms of life, “the more difficult this interiority is to observe, even though its existence cannot be disproved.” (78) Whether Teilhard defends some sort of pan-psychism, a claim that Wildiers dismisses as a misrepresentation of Teilhard’s thought, is a discussion which is not developed here. In any case, Wildiers’ summary of Teilhard’s position is clear: “[I]f we want to arrive at a coherent account of the universe—one based on a scientific phenomenology—we must accept that, albeit in an analogous fashion and in varying degree, all creatures possess a certain interiority, an interior aspect.” Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 79. See Boff’s analogous claim in *O Despertar da Águia*, 132.

¹⁰⁹ “We have no reason to think that cosmogenesis has now [in the appearance of man] reached its full and final term and that from now on everything will stay just as it is until the end of time.” Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 81.

¹¹⁰ “[I]t is in and through man that the world moves on toward greater completion.... By exerting his [man’s] creative energies he will surely do his part toward completing the evolutionary process.” Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 82. See also pages 92 and 102.

¹¹¹ Teilhard’s standpoint, Wildiers insist, “is not the philosopher’s, the historian’s, or the economist’s, but that of the geologist and paleontologist,” in sum, of the scientist. See Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 86. “If we can succeed in discovering the fundamental laws that have governed cosmic evolution in the past, then we cannot reasonable be denied the right to project the continuing effect of those laws into the future.” Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 89.

process in the direction of mind. With man, evolution entered another sphere, the noosphere, and now moves on as noogenesis, “the growth process of mind.”¹¹² According to Teilhard this process entails a “further ascent toward more truth and knowledge, more social justice and greater understanding, more beauty and art,” even though the possibility of a catastrophic disaster cannot be excluded.¹¹³

Teilhard appeals to some outer and inner symptoms that, he believes, support his general conclusions. Some of these are a clear source of inspiration for Leonardo Boff’s own project in social-ethics, as will become clear in chapter 5. For instance, among the outer symptoms Teilhard identifies the emergence of a “real unification of mankind on a planetary scale.”¹¹⁴ He also sees the feeling of solidarity among all peoples, especially toward those less privileged, as a symptom that humanity is evolving toward deeper levels of consciousness.¹¹⁵ This inner law that rules the cosmogenesis suggests that

¹¹² Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 92. An analogous claim is made by Boff in *Nova Era: A Civilização Planetária*, 7.

¹¹³ Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 93.

¹¹⁴ Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 94. “[A]t last men right around the globe are beginning to sense their solidarity. All peoples and nations are faced with the same problems; and all without exception find themselves concerned with, and involved in, whatever is happening, in the same great adventure.... Side by side with this drawing together of all the races and peoples on earth the effort is being made to structure an interior organization. *Mankind today is plainly bent on creating some organizational pattern on a planetary scale.* Admittedly, we are still a long way from this goal; yet it cannot be gainsaid that men are searching and working with such an end in view and are advancing, however slowly, toward it.” Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 95 [emphasis mine]. Teilhard’s aspiration of some organizational pattern on a planetary scale is a source of inspiration for Leonardo Boff’s social ethics. See, for instance, Boff, *Nova Era: A Civilização Planetária*, 46.

¹¹⁵ “[I]t is being brought home to us that solidarity is an aim incumbent upon all peoples, and that *the more favored have an obligation to help and support the less privileged.* We are coming to realize more and more that *we are all bound together, that we constitute a great human community* and that from now on, in view of the powerful means of extermination at our disposal, we are locked solidly together in life and death, because we have before us only this one choice: either to live together in peace or perish together in total disaster. In every quarter, then... there would be symptoms pointing to a growth of *common*

mankind is on the road to increase socialization, to grow out of multiplicity into unity.¹¹⁶

“Man’s future, *qua* species, evidently lies in the direction of increasing socialization.”¹¹⁷

The ‘planetization’ of man has already begun, and will ultimately lead to the Omega point: “the final or furthest point of the whole of biological evolution, of the whole cosmic process; a final point where the law of universal love will have reached its climax and its crown.”¹¹⁸

According to Teilhard, then, the final stage of the cosmos’ evolution “lies in the awakening of a collective super-consciousness with its source in the moral solidarity and union of all men.”¹¹⁹

Teilhard’s Theological Renewal

So far we have considered the conclusions Teilhard reached primarily as the result of his scientific investigation.¹²⁰ Nevertheless, the central problem with which he labored throughout his life was to reconcile his scientific investigation with his faith, the universe

awareness, a communal consciousness, in mankind as a whole.” Wildiers, An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin, 96.

¹¹⁶ Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 97.

¹¹⁷ Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 97. See also pages 100-101, where Wildiers stresses that for Teilhard the future of man in all probability lies in the social plane.

¹¹⁸ Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 100.

¹¹⁹ Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 101.

¹²⁰ It must be observed that Teilhard accurately acknowledges that his scientific investigation was not dissociated from his own beliefs on religious issues. In the final instance, all scientific work must be supported and stimulated by some kind of “faith.” See Teilhard de Chardin, *Recherche, Travail et Adoration* (1955), 1, quoted in Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 112.

and God.¹²¹ How did he accomplish this task? Teilhard believed that a new form of natural religion arose out of his conception of the cosmos's evolution, a religion marked by three distinct features: (1) the predominance of totality over the individual; (2) a passionate belief in the worth and potentialities of human endeavor; and (3) a lively awareness of the sacred nature of scientific inquiry in all fields.¹²² Christianity, Teilhard believed, should benefit from this new form of religion by substituting the latter's "immanent, organicist, and evolutive character" for the former's concepts of "personality, transcendence, juridical relations, a doctrine of fixity."¹²³ The incorporation of these elements from the new natural religion would allegedly help Christianity in its evangelistic-apologetical outreach.¹²⁴ Christian theology should be involved in this meeting of Christianity and the new natural religion, in order to promote needed theological revisions or renewal. According to Teilhard's point of view, no other religion would be as capable of doing so as Christianity.¹²⁵ Whether Teilhard was willing to

¹²¹ See pages 37 ff.

¹²² Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 113.

¹²³ Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 116, 117. What Teilhard wanted for Catholic doctrine was to restate it from the standpoint of the world conceived in dynamic terms, given that the doctrine had been formulated within the framework of a static world. (123)

¹²⁴ "The best... of the anti-Christians keep away from Christianity, not because it is too hard for them but because it appears to them not sufficiently exalted. If they do not accept Christ, it is because they do not detect in him the features which they reverence and look for." Teilhard de Chardin, *Quelques Réflexions sur la Conversion du Monde*, 3, quoted in Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 117.

¹²⁵ "If one wanted to devise a religion that would fall within the extended line of general evolution one would be hard put to it to think up anything better than this [Christianity] or anything that would be more in harmony with the world in which we live.... This harmony between the deeper structure of Christianity and the requirements of convergent evolution represented for him [Teilhard] a rational justification of his faith and was for him 'the miracle *par excellence*'. [*Comment je crois*, (1934), 31, quoted in Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 128, 129.

compromise Christian orthodoxy, or whether he only aimed at revising some external aspects of Christian theology, as Wildiers insists,¹²⁶ is a discussion which does not belong to the scope of this work.

Teilhard saw the reconciliation of God and the world, supernatural and natural, as a possible project, given that these poles do not relate antithetically. Indeed, as a Christian Teilhard believed that God and the world have a point of contact, namely, Christ, the God-man. Hence the importance which Teilhard gave to “the necessity for us to give profounder consideration to Christology.”¹²⁷

According to Teilhard, his view of a cosmos in evolution offered a new and better perspective for understanding Christ’s place and function. While in the earlier worldview, Christ’s relation to the world was conceived in terms of kingship, the new worldview presents Christ’s position and function in terms of the Omega point toward which the cosmos is evolving.¹²⁸

The whole of history is seen as progressing toward the “building up and unifying of the entire human race into a supranatural community of which Christ is the head and

¹²⁶ “The renewal at which he aimed in theology never affected the kernel of Catholic teaching in matters of faith, but only its exterior aspect, the way in which it was presented. He believed that the solution and the renewal which was so badly needed were to be found not in a departure from traditional theology but in a deeper exploration of it.” Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 120. And more, Teilhard’s “orthodoxy is not to be doubted for a moment. His love for Christ and the Church are above and beyond all questioning.” (119)

¹²⁷ Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 124.

¹²⁸ Teilhard de Chardin, *Super-humanité, Super-Christ, Super-charité*, (1943), 9, quoted in Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 134. See, for instance, Boff, *Vida para Além da Morte*, 125.

all of us the members.”¹²⁹ Christ is, therefore, for Teilhard de Chardin “the goal and crown of the natural as of the supernatural order.”¹³⁰ He is the “great source of power and energy which is drawing all things toward itself.”¹³¹ Christ’s parousia will coincide with that moment of the cosmos’ evolution when mankind will have finally arrived at the Omega point, attaining its natural fulfillment and becoming qualified to receive its supernatural consummation.¹³²

The point Omega of science, therefore, coincides for Teilhard with Christ’s parousia. The cosmogenic process in all its spheres, from geosphere, to biosphere, to noosphere, culminates in a Christogenesis, or an ascent to Christ.¹³³

Teilhard concludes his *Phenomenon of Man* with a brief consideration of the place of evil in his evolutionary view of the cosmos. One statement makes clear his understanding of the issue:

¹²⁹ Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 135.

¹³⁰ Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 136. While a distinction can be made between these two realms, “let us not lose sight of the fact that... there is no [absolute] separation.” They “interpenetrate each other and the distinction which we draw between the various ‘planes’ in the work of God conceals a large measure of anthropomorphism. God’s work is *one* work.” Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 136. It will become clear in chapter 3 that this perspective in particular is appropriated by Boff in his treatment of the notion of grace.

¹³¹ Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 139. In *The Phenomenon of Man*, Teilhard refers to the power that draws the entire edifice of the universe to higher stages in the evolutionary process, while keeping its unity as a combination of the tangential and the radial energies. See, for instance, *The Phenomenon of Man*, 66. Such energies are called “spiritual,” insofar as they relate to spirit/Spirit (see *The Phenomenon of Man*, pages 176, 239, 273, 287).

¹³² Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 141.

¹³³ Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 142. Boff refers to the Omega point, for instance, in *Vida para Além da Morte*, 17.

We live in a universe in evolution: that is to say, in a world that is not only subject to continuous change but ought to be envisaged rather as a process of growth toward ever higher states of complexity. Step by step the world is being built up: in other words, the world is growing out of relatively imperfect states into more perfect ones. In a world of that sort evil is inevitable. Whatever has to be completed is of necessity imperfect, defective, unfinished. Evil is thus *structurally* part and parcel of a world in evolution.¹³⁴

This perspective, I will show in chapter 3, is echoed by Leonardo Boff in the development of his ontology.

Whereas Teilhard de Chardin is a major influence on Leonardo Boff's ontology, Niels Bohr exercises great influence on Boff's epistemology. The next section provides an overview of Bohr's project and philosophy of science.

Niels Bohr and the Principle of Complementarity

Boff's Use of Niels Bohr

Leonardo Boff frequently refers to complementarity¹³⁵ as a key principle for understanding the structure of reality. I will explore Boff's use of the principle and its implications for his theology and social ethics in chapter 4. Nevertheless, at this point, I wish to show the source from which Boff borrows this principle. Boff does not claim originality for his use of complementarity. Rather, he explicitly borrows the idea from Niels Henrik David Bohr's developments in quantum physics. Boff's indebtedness

¹³⁴ Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, 142, 143. "Since God willed to create a world that must grow to its completion via an evolutive process, imperfection and evil were bound to occur in this creation. It could not be otherwise." (143) Teilhard's consideration refers not only to physical but also to moral evil. In summary, "evil is a universal phenomenon in a world in evolution." (143)

¹³⁵ By complementarity Boff means that the apprehension of reality will always require the grasp of its multiple, even contradictory manifestations. See page 134, footnote 47.

becomes clear, for instance, in *A Águia e a Galinha* (*The Chicken and the Eagle*), where he offers an account of the dual structure of the universe. He states:

Besides the chaos-cosmos duality, there exists another, the particle-wave. This [duality] also presents itself in the proper structuring of reality, as it is understood by contemporary science. In the 1920s, scientists as *Niels Bohr*, Werner Heisenberg, founders of the quantum physics, and Albert Einstein, with his relativity theory, built a new comprehension of the structure of matter.... *Niels Bohr suggested the principle of complementarity of particle and wave, as a key [foundational] to understand reality on a global scale.* Even though they may appear to be contradictory, the two behaviors [light and particle] complement each other. Paradox belongs to the dynamics of the universe. Everything is complementary. Duality inserts itself into a totality and provides dynamism and elegance.¹³⁶

While Werner Heisenberg is also mentioned in the passage above—as well as in others in connection with Bohr—Boff seems to identify the principle of complementarity with Bohr's work. Not only the latter section of the above passage indicates so. Later in *Águia e a Galinha*, Boff contrasts Darwin's principle of survival of the fittest or strongest with Bohr's principle of "solidarity-love of all toward all."¹³⁷ This solidarity-love, according to Boff, constitutes the great cosmic, earthly, and human community. In other words, there is a bond, an intrinsic relationship between everything that exists. The reason behind this all-encompassing relationship, this pan-relatedness, will be discussed later in chapter 3. Nevertheless, what is important at this point is to observe one specific

¹³⁶ *A Águia e a Galinha*, 79-80, 81-82 (emphasis mine). At the end of the same work, in the glossary, Boff provides succinct information about Bohr: "Bohr, Niels (1885-1962): Danish physicist who devised the atom's model, similar to the solar system. One of the proposers of the quantum physics which sees all reality as constituted by energy bundles (*quantum, quanta* in Latin) organized into fields and related to others in the form of a net. He formulated the principle of complementarity, through which the contrary must be seen and assumed as an expression of the same complex reality, in order to have a complete picture of truth and of reality." *A Águia e a Galinha*, 187-188.

¹³⁷ *A Águia e a Galinha*, 133.

consequence that Boff, following Bohr, draws from such relationship. It is this principle that “gives origin to the principle of reciprocity-complementarity.”¹³⁸ Upon this foundation, Boff claims: “All [things] complement each other and grow together: the species, the eco-systems, and the entire universe.... [T]he interwovenness of all with all reveals our deep poverty, and, at the same time, our unsuspected wealth. We need each other to be and to free ourselves...”¹³⁹ It is not difficult to see how this ontological (pan-relatedness)-epistemological (complementarity) proposal goes well with Boff’s social ethics with its emphasis upon caring for the poor and all threatened creatures, as well as for the whole planet.

Bohr is mentioned along with others for revolutionary work in quantum physics which not only elicited a new approach to theoretical physics but also laid the foundations for a new cosmology and a new spirituality.¹⁴⁰ In *Saber Cuidar (Knowing How to Care)*, Bohr is mentioned along with Heisenberg for his work in quantum physics and his work, as well as that of others, is acknowledged as a valuable contribution toward rescuing the “centrality of feeling, the importance of tenderness, of compassion, [and] of care.”¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ The full quotation reads: “More fundamental than the principle of survival of the strongest (Darwin) is the [principle] of solidarity-love of all toward all (Bohr). It is this love-solidarity which constitutes the great cosmic, earthly, and human community. It is that which gives origin to the principle of reciprocity-complementarity.” *A Águia e a Galinha*, 133.

¹³⁹ *A Águia e a Galinha*, 133, 134.

¹⁴⁰ “This spirituality articulates itself with the modern cosmology, i.e., with the new image of the world that emerges from the sciences of the earth, from the so-called depth psychology of C. G. Jung and his school, from the mutations of the theoretical physics, from the works of Einstein, Heisenberg, Bohr, Hawking, and especially Prigogine & Stengers with their dissipative structures, and the much discussed F. Capra with his new paradigm.” *Nova Era: A Civilização Planetária*, 37.

¹⁴¹ *Saber Cuidar*, 100. Other names such as Freud, Jung, Adler, Rogers, and Hilman are mentioned in the same passage for their contributions in the field of depth psychology.

Since Boff himself, despite clear references to Bohr's work, does not provide a broader discussion of Bohr's philosophical presuppositions and background, it seems important to advance this investigation. This procedure, I believe, will help us in at least two ways: first, in evaluating whether Boff is properly appropriating Bohr's concept of complementarity; second, in assessing some potential implications of such appropriation for Boff's social-ethics and theology, as well as to his overall ontological-epistemological proposal. While many sources could be considered,¹⁴² I primarily rely on John Honner's scholarly discussion of Bohr's work, *The Descriptions of Nature: Niels Bohr and the Philosophy of Quantum Physics*.¹⁴³

Foundational Elements of Bohr's Philosophy of Science

While Niels Bohr became known mostly for his development of quantum physics in his investigation of sub-atomic phenomena, he was, as Heisenberg puts it, "primarily a philosopher, not a physicist."¹⁴⁴ Indeed, "it may not be an exaggeration," suggests Jørgen Kalckar, "to describe Bohr as a born philosopher of nature, who found in physics a

¹⁴² Niels Blaedel, *Harmony and Unity: The Life of Niels Bohr* (New York: Science Tech., 1988); Herman Feshbach, et al, eds. *Niels Bohr, Physics and the World; Proceedings of the Niels Bohr Centennial Symposium* (New York: Harwood Academy, 1988); Henry J. Folse, *The Philosophy of Niels Bohr: The Framework of Complementarity* (Amsterdam, New York: North-Holland, Elsevier Science Pub. Co., 1985); A. P. French, and P. J. Kennedy, eds. *Niels Bohr: A Centenary Volume* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985); Ruth E. Moore, *Niels Bohr: The Man, his Science, and the World They Changed* (New York: Knopf, 1966); Stefan Rozental, ed. *Niels Bohr: His Life and his Work as Seen by his Friends and Colleagues* (Amsterdam, New York: North-Holland Pub. Co.; Wiley, 1967); Wolfgang Pauli, *Niels Bohr and the Development of Physics* (London: Pergamon Press, 1955). For a comprehensive bibliography, consult John Honner's work mentioned below.

¹⁴³ John Honner, *The Description of Nature: Niels Bohr and the Philosophy of Quantum Physics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).

¹⁴⁴ W. Heisenberg, "Quantum Theory and its Interpretation," S. Rozental, ed., *Niels Bohr: His Life and Work* (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1967), 95.

marvelously powerful instrument for probing into the foundations of human knowledge and man's description of the world."¹⁴⁵ Bohr's interest in the problems of knowledge and perception may be traced back to 1910, the year when, writing to his brother Harald, he refers to his difficulties in harmonizing various sources of elation,¹⁴⁶ observing that "sensations, like cognitions, must be arranged in planes that cannot be compared."¹⁴⁷

Departing from classical physics' emphasis upon the continuity of motion, fields, and waves, Bohr proposed and developed a quantum theory which "seemed to imply discontinuity at the core of physical reality,"¹⁴⁸ i.e., the sub-atomic level, thus claiming the limited applicability of the mechanical model for that environment.¹⁴⁹ While, for instance, in classical astronomy one could make a series of measurements of planetary motions and, using Newton's laws, determine with certainty the behavior of heavenly bodies, new quantum physics "dampened hope for a similar achievement at the sub-

¹⁴⁵ J. Kalckar, "General Introduction," *Niels Bohr: Collected Works* 6 (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1985), xvii, quoted in Honner, *The Description of Nature*, 71. "Physics," adds Honner, "provided a special impetus to philosophy [for Niels Bohr]." *The Description of Nature*, 74.

¹⁴⁶ From the Latin *elatio*, meaning "a feeling of exultant joy or pride," according to the *Webster's New World Dictionary*.

¹⁴⁷ Letter to Harald Bohr, 26 June 1910, quoted in Honner, *The Description of Nature*, 75.

¹⁴⁸ Honner, *The Description of Nature*, 27. In fact, rather than a radical discontinuity between classical and quantum physics, Bohr admitted an overlapping between the two theoretical formulations by asserting that both produce equivalent results for high quantum numbers, i.e., on a macroscopic scale. See *The Description of Nature*, 35.

¹⁴⁹ Honner, *The Description of Nature*, 28-29, 158-159.

atomic level.”¹⁵⁰ The reason behind these two opposing frameworks is explained by

Honner in the following terms:

In classical physics one was permitted to make a series of measurements without in any way disturbing the system being measure.... In quantum physics, however, it seems that each experiment describes a particular event in which one aspect or another of an interaction between atomic system and measuring agency can be investigated. Each experiment interferes with the process under observation to such a degree, moreover, that the possibility of a series of detached observations is out of the question.¹⁵¹

It is crucial to observe that, according to Bohr, the difficulty of making measurements in quantum physics was a *particular instance of a universal problem*, namely, our capability as human beings of knowing reality. While willing to argue that human beings can achieve some knowledge of reality, Bohr insists that this noetic process occurs by participation rather than by some sort of distant abstraction.¹⁵² In other words, foundational for Niels Bohr’s philosophy of science is his epistemological claim that “we

¹⁵⁰ Honner, *The Description of Nature*, 45. Later, Honner adds: “... while classical physics applies successfully within certain limits, it is idealization to think that it applies universally, especially on the sub-atomic scale. If one accepts this limitation, then a new account of description of nature is required in order to achieve a more complete physics.” (81). This new description of nature, alluded to by Honner, is Bohr’s quantum theory.

¹⁵¹ Honner, *The Description of Nature*, 52. This formulation is also known as the Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle, according to David C. Cassidy, *Uncertainty : The Life and Science of Werner Heisenberg* (New York: W. H. Freeman, 1992), 226-246. The connection between Heisenberg’s and Bohr’s proposals is recognized by Cassidy who writes: “In other words, as Bohr would make much clearer in his work, the very procedures of laboratory observation and measurement, previously of only minor concern to the classical physicist, became a central concern of the quantum physicist—and a fundamental point for the creators of the Copenhagen interpretation.” Cassidy, *Uncertainty: The Life and Science of Werner Heisenberg*, 227. Another helpful resource for an evaluation of Heisenberg’s work is Patrick A. Heelan, S.J.’s *Quantum Mechanics and Objectivity: A Study of the Physical Philosophy of Werner Heisenberg* (Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1965).

¹⁵² Honner, *The Description of Nature*, 68.

are simultaneously actors as well as spectators on the great stage of life.”¹⁵³ Rejecting the classical framework for the description of nature, built upon causality, space, time, and strong objectivity, Bohr proposes a broader framework of complementarity, based upon his presupposition that subject and object are “less sharply separated.”¹⁵⁴ Bohr’s intention is not to claim that observation constitutes reality.¹⁵⁵ Rather, what he is willing to stress is that human observation necessarily interferes with the observed phenomena, thus never allowing one to fully grasp reality in itself. In other words, at the sub-atomic level, where light appears to behave either as wave or as particle under different experiments, one can see what the problem is. The real issue, argues Bohr, is the rigidity of our frameworks. As Honner notes, Bohr resolves the problem of wave-particle duality in one ‘stroke:’

We are not dealing with a choice between wave or corpuscular theory of light. Indeed the wave and corpuscular ideas are able only to account for complementary sides of the phenomena.¹⁵⁶

Nevertheless, Bohr’s suspicion of man’s noetic abilities to know how things are in themselves goes beyond the sub-atomic realm¹⁵⁷ and ultimately leads him to propose the principle of complementarity. As Honner puts it:

¹⁵³ Honner, *The Description of Nature*, 1.

¹⁵⁴ Honner, *The Description of Nature*, 2. Bohr, notes Honner, “was firmly convinced that the claim to *absolute* objectivity inherent in the ethos of classical physics, in which physical objects are assumed to be grasped in a completely detached and non-subjective matter, was denied to the broader view of science demanded by quantum mechanics.” *The Description of Nature*, 3. See also pages 5, 17, 67, 86, 87, 91, 92, 94, 143, 146, 165, 172, 221.

¹⁵⁵ Honner, *The Description of Nature*, 54, 65- 66.

¹⁵⁶ Niels Bohr, *Niels Bohr: Collected Works* (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1985), 6:76, quoted in Honner, *The Description of Nature*, 51. See also page 52, where Honner adds that, according to Bohr, “the possibility of a series of detached observations is out of the question.”

¹⁵⁷ See Honner, *The Description of Nature*, 69, 91, 92, 93.

Complementarity is required by the feature of wholeness not just in quantum physics, but in any circumstances transcending the ordinary bounds of experiential reference where one attempts to apply descriptive concepts.¹⁵⁸

Whether Bohr's insistence upon blurring the distinction between observed phenomena and observer is a straightforward conclusion derived from his sub-atomic experiments or, to use Nicholas Wolterstorff's terminology,¹⁵⁹ a control-belief determining the conclusions of such experiments, remains an issue open to further investigation. Nevertheless, it is important to note that Honner, who confessedly presents himself as a "partisan of Bohr"¹⁶⁰ at a given point of his book, seems to admit the latter alternative.¹⁶¹

Once, following Bohr, we admit our ultimate inability to grasp reality, what are we left with? Bohr's answer seems to indicate that our expectation should be reduced to an objective use of language, so that an unambiguous description of reality can be provided.¹⁶² Objectivity, however, will always have to be considered a limited goal, for

¹⁵⁸ Honner, *The Description of Nature*, 95.

¹⁵⁹ Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Theology and Science: Listening to Each Other," in *Religion and Science: History, Method, Dialogue*, ed. W. Mark Richardson, and Wesley J. Wildman (New York, London: Routledge, 1996), 98-99.

¹⁶⁰ Honner, *The Description of Nature*, 224.

¹⁶¹ Honner focuses not only on Bohr's physics and his quantum theory, but pays special attention to his philosophical presuppositions, reluctantly admitting that the latter may have an influence over the former. Bohr's awareness of the implications of quantum physics forced him to consider the fundamental questions about knowing and objectivity which have concerned philosophers since the beginning of human speculation. *It is even possible, perhaps, that the reverse is also true: that his early reflections on the actor-dilemma shaped his formulation of original quantum postulate in 1913.* Honner, *The Description of Nature*, 6.

¹⁶² "It is a necessary condition for the possibility of unambiguous communication that suitably refined everyday concepts be used, no matter how far the processes concerned transcend the range of ordinary

we are always engaged with the world we seek to describe,¹⁶³ and, in addition, our daily language is ultimately inadequate to describe both the quantum phenomena and other loci which are affected by the same epistemological limitation.¹⁶⁴

Problems Related to Bohr's Epistemological Proposal

Three important observations must be made regarding Bohr's proposal. First, it is questionable whether the limitations one faces at the quantum level as a consequence of inappropriate measuring devices would provide ground to propose that the context of human experience as a whole is inherently subjective, as Bohr seems to suggest.¹⁶⁵

Second, Bohr's claim that his notion of complementarity must be stretched to include

experience." Honner, *The Description of Nature*, 88. See also page 89.

¹⁶³ According to Bohr, in those areas of experience where strong subject-object distinctions are impossible, all that one can rely on is on the framework of complementarity. See Honner, *The Description of Nature*, 98. Honner does not clarify what areas of experience Bohr would have in mind. But there are evidences that these areas would go beyond the scientific realm to include religious and ethical issues (see page 56) Bohr's descriptions of reality "differs from the classical account, however, in that he stresses that our descriptions of nature are not descriptions of independently existing realities, but descriptions of our encounters with such realities. Thus his position includes a recognition of the holism of subject and object, since subject and object can only be separated arbitrarily." Honner, *The Description of Nature*, 146. Moreover, "descriptive language belongs to the framework of the subject," which constitutes an additional obstacle towards objectivity. Honner, *The Description of Nature*, 147.

¹⁶⁴ As Honner notes, "Bohr views both the discussion of quantum theory *and* the consideration of consciousness as similar instances of a fundamental issue: the problem of communicating objectively about processes which transcend the limits of ordinary experience." Honner, *The Description of Nature*, 93. "Complementarity is required by the feature of wholeness not just in quantum physics, but *in any circumstances transcending the ordinary bounds of experiential reference* where one attempts to apply descriptive concepts." Honner, *The Description of Nature*, 95 [emphasis mine].

¹⁶⁵ "Bohr's notion of objectivity differs from the classical account, however, in that he stresses that our descriptions of nature are not descriptions of independently existing realities, but descriptions of our encounters with such realities. Thus his position includes a recognition of the holism of subject and object, since subject and object can only be separated arbitrarily. Hence in the light of quantum physics, this 'objectivity' of physical observations becomes particularly suited to emphasize the subjective character of all experience." Honner, *The Description of Nature*, 146.

even religious issues¹⁶⁶ yields problematic consequences. First, the same epistemological suspicion Bohr applies to quantum physics is the basis for rejecting any personification of the “providence” he identifies in the world. In other words, Bohr’s proposal does not allow room for a personal God or, at least, for any statements about him. This may be observed in Bohr’s claim that the complementary statements “There is a God” and “There is no God” are equally statements of “great wisdom and truth.”¹⁶⁷ A second problem is that everyday concepts have a limitation and cannot be applied to religious language without going beyond the point where their objectivity is lost.¹⁶⁸ The third, and, I believe, the most important observation is that the principle of complementarity presupposes, according to Bohr, the impossibility of achieving a synthesis between two paradoxical views of reality, given human noetic limitations. Honner makes this point clear:

‘Complementarity’ is intended by Bohr to connote a complete framework for intelligent description and unambiguous communication of those aspects of our experience where mutually exclusive and apparently contradictory concepts are employed. It thus applies particularly to events at the bounds of our awareness, the deep truths, where the ordinary univocity of descriptive concepts no longer applies. *Because the possibility*

¹⁶⁶ “I think you theologians should make much more use than you are doing of the principle of complementarity.” Bohr, quoted by J. Baillie in his *Our Sense of the Presence of God* (London, Oxford University Press, 1962), 217. Honner adds: “The comment suggests that Bohr thought the framework of complementarity would provide a possible means of resolving the difficulties which he saw as besetting any discourse about God. If this is so, then there is not going to be a great deal of difference between the conditions applying to language in quantum physics and in theology.” Honner, *The Description of Nature*, 180.

¹⁶⁷ Honner, *The Description of Nature*, 179.

¹⁶⁸ Honner, *The Description of Nature*, 178-179.

*of further synthesis is out of the question, complementarity is not to be confused with dialectic.*¹⁶⁹

In other words, it would be inconsistent to appropriate Bohr's principle of complementarity while holding a dialectical perspective. Complementarity, if expanded beyond the limits of quantum physics to life as a whole, entails two things: (1) suspending judgment on moral and religious issues, since it may not be possible to determine which among two or more competing views may be right; and (2) either rejecting or postponing the use of dialectical synthesis. For instance, the principle of complementarity would require that different religions holding opposite perspectives on key theological issues would have to be considered as potentially equally valid sources of access to spiritual reality. Similarly, competing socio-economic systems would have to be taken into consideration, aiming at the grasp of as much reality as possible in the socio-economic realm. However, it seems that Leonardo Boff's effort to make ultimate judgments on some socio-economic issues, on the one hand, and his dialectical evolutionary perspective of the universe, on the other, are in some degree compromised by his adoption of Bohr's principle of complementarity.

¹⁶⁹ Honner, *The Description of Nature*, 60 (emphasis mine). Bohr states that "the impossibility of combining phenomena observed under different experimental arrangements into a single classical picture implies that such apparently contradictory phenomena must be regarded as complementary in the sense that, taken together, they exhaust all well-defined knowledge about the atomic object." Niels Bohr, *Essays*, 25, quoted in Honner, *The Description of Nature*, 90, 91.

Despite these potential problems, Leonardo Boff is confessedly attracted to Bohr's epistemological proposal. Perhaps Bohr's identification with the cause of the poor,¹⁷⁰ and his explicit sympathy to Buddhism,¹⁷¹ shared also by Boff,¹⁷² may explain such attraction.

In any case, Boff's appropriation of Bohr's principle of complementarity is a fact. The use of complementarity within Boff's ontological proposal, as well as the implications of such appropriation for Boff's overall project will be considered in chapter 4.

Conclusion

Leonardo Boff's commitment to the cause of the poor is a distinctive feature of his work. However, more than a mere intellectual pursuit, such a commitment has deep

¹⁷⁰ "He [Bohr] also soon came to share the negative attitude of the progressive bourgeoisie to which his family belonged towards the church and religious beliefs in general; but it is characteristic of his candor and independence of judgment that he only arrived at this conclusion after he had convinced himself that the church upheld doctrines that were logically untenable and shunned the pressing task... of alleviating a still widespread pauperism. He never found any occasion in later life to depart from the position of free-thinker, which he maintained with tolerance and humanity." L. Roselfeld, "Biographical Sketch", in *Niels Bohr Complete Works*, 1: pp. xx f., quoted in Honner, *The Description of Nature*, 178.

¹⁷¹ Honner observes Bohr's fascination with Eastern philosophies by remarking: "Bohr himself, appealing neither to Kant nor to Aristotle, draws a modicum of support from the philosophies of the East. As the centre [sic]-piece for his coat of arms he chose the Yin-Yang mandala with its composition of opposites in unity; neither dualist nor monist, the attached motto that 'Contraria sunt Complementa' echoes the acceptance of paradoxical unity-in-difference which is to be found in the Vedas and Buddhist thought. Bohr once observed: 'For a parallel to the lesson of atomic theory regarding the limited applicability of such customary idealizations [as the distinction between object and observer], we must in fact turn to... that kind of epistemological problem with which already thinkers like Buddha and Lao Tse have been confronted, when trying to harmonize our position as spectators and actors in the great drama of existence.'" Niels Bohr, *Atomic Physics and Human Knowledge*, pp. 19 f, quoted in Honner, *The Description of Nature*, 211.

¹⁷² "In *Mística e Espiritualidade*, Boff talks about the "great contribution of zen-Budhism." (72). Later in the same work, he lists zen-Buddhism among the many ways which lead to God (85, 86). "Zen-Buddhism and the other spiritual traditions of the East interest to us... Their ways as well as ours [in reference to Christianity] has wise lessons to give." *Mística e Espiritualidade*, 140. "This irradiation of care—radical compassion—represents the major contribution that Buddhism offered to humanity." *Saber Cuidar*, 126.

roots in Boff's own life. It is a vital concern whose origins may be traced back to his childhood, a concern already present in the "boy with bare feet from an Italian family."¹⁷³ From earlier texts to the most recent ones that focus on ecology, from the theological to the popular texts,¹⁷⁴ the struggle against poverty and its causes, as Boff sees them, is a pervasive theme, the project of a life time.¹⁷⁵ Boff's contribution to the birth and development of liberation theology becomes clearer to the degree that one understands the socio-economic-political context of Latin America and of Brazil in particular in the 1960's and 1970's. Boff's own social-economic context provided him with the framework for his developments in social ethics and theology. The Vatican's reactions to Boff's writings resulted in his abandonment of the Roman Catholic Church's clergy in 1992, which he explained as a refusal to compromise his commitment to a more important value, namely, God's kingdom. Since then, Boff has increasingly appealed to ecology as the new paradigm through which his project is now reaching maturity by enlarging its concern from the poor to the whole earth as the object of liberation.

This chapter has shown that Teilhard de Chardin is a major influence on Boff's work, especially on his ontology and his panentheist evolutionary cosmology. Such

¹⁷³ Boff, *Seleção de Textos Militantes*, 82.

¹⁷⁴ See, for instance, the *A Mistica do Animador Popular* (São Paulo: Editora Ática, 1996), part of the series *Religião e Cidadania (Religion and Citizenship)*, written by a group of people who studied theology at the Franciscan Theological Institute in Petrópolis, RJ, among them Leonardo Boff. The work clearly addresses the popular classes in a popular language.

¹⁷⁵ In February 2001, Boff, 63, participated in the Forum Social of Porto Alegre, held at the same time as the Economic Forum of Davos (Switzerland). As part of the event in Porto Alegre, there was a video-conference between participants of both forums. See "Soros Considera Debate com Porto Alegre 'Interessante,' Mas Não O Repetiria," ("Soros Considers Debate with Porto Alegre 'Interesting,' But Would Not Repeat It") at <http://www.uol.com.br/economia/afp/ult35u4265.htm>.

influence, present already in an earlier stage of Boff's career in the 1970's,¹⁷⁶ becomes more clear in some of Boff's most recent works.¹⁷⁷ Teilhard's concept of an evolutionary universe, with its increasing complexity and increasing degree of consciousness, as well as Teilhard's terminology, are incorporated into Boff's project. In addition, Teilhard's picture of mankind's unification on a planetary scale is clearly identical with Boff's social-ecological democracy, the object of consideration in chapter 5. Teilhard's proposal of a renewal of Christian theology was embraced and implemented by Boff, not without consequences. The evaluation of these consequences will be the object of consideration in the next chapter.

Boff's indebtedness to Niels Bohr, as well as the former's appropriation of the principle of complementarity from the latter, has also become evident from previous sections. Although this constitutes a source of tension for Boff's entire project, Boff, as far as I can tell, does not discuss the impact of the adoption of the principle of complementarity on his Teilhardian ontology.

Against this background it is appropriate at this point to turn our attention, first to the evaluation of Boff's ontological proposal, and then to his epistemology. These are the foci of the next chapters.

¹⁷⁶ See, for instance, *A Nossa Ressurreição na Morte* (1972), *O Destino do Homem e do Mundo* (1973), *Graça e Experiência Humana: A Graça Libertadora no Mundo*, 5th ed. (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1998) (originally published by Vozes in 1976).

¹⁷⁷ See *Mística e Espiritualidade, e Nova Era: a Civilização Planetária*.

CHAPTER THREE

BOFF’S COMMITMENT TO PANENTHEISM:

THE THEOLOGICAL PRICE OF PRIORITIZING SOCIAL

ETHICS

Introduction

While scattered traces of panentheism¹ can be identified in Boff’s early works, an explicit commitment to this theological-cosmological perspective has been made only in his most recent writings on ecology. Indeed, Boff has unhesitatingly claimed that a panentheist cosmology is consistent with the Christian faith, and has based his later advances in social-ethics upon this foundation which he labels as Christian panentheism.² Panentheism, Boff holds, serves his ecological cause better than classical theism does, for the latter’s emphasis upon God’s transcendence detaches God from the world and, consequently, makes the world hostage to abusive human exploitation. Moreover, given the ontological relation God bears to the whole cosmos, each being is seen “as God’s messenger, his representative and sacrament. Each one is worthy, [and] must be embraced

¹ From the Greek *pan* (all), *en* (in), *theos* (God). A cosmological perspective that views all reality as part of God’s being. See E. R. Naughton, “Panentheism,” *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), 10:943-945; William L. Reese, *Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion: Eastern and Western Thought* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1980), 545.

² See Leonardo Boff, *Ecologia, Mundialização, Espiritualidade: A Emergência de um Novo Paradigma*, 3rd ed. (São Paulo: Editora Ática, 1993), 45 and ff.

and heard.”³ Consequently, within this cosmology and theology of creation, “there are neither hierarchies nor exclusive representatives. All come from the same love of God.”⁴

It is important to acknowledge from the outset that a comprehensive treatment of panentheism does not belong to the scope of this chapter.⁵ Such a treatment would go far beyond the goal of the present work, namely, to offer an analysis of the theology and social-ethics of Leonardo Boff. Therefore, for the purposes of this analysis, I will adopt a heuristic definition of panentheism construed from the analysis of some standard academic reference works. The next step will be to assemble particular evidences of Boff’s commitment to panentheism. These evidences will be gathered in three sections. The first will focus on the universe’s pan-relatedness, an ecological tenet based, according to Boff, on the pervasive presence of spirit. The second will demonstrate that spirit and Spirit are terms that Boff uses interchangeably. This fact will reveal that Boff is committed not only to panpsychism, but also to panentheism. The third section will

³ *Ecologia, Mundialização, Espiritualidade*, 48.

⁴ *Ecologia, Mundialização, Espiritualidade*, 48. It is not difficult to see how this represents a challenge to the hierarchical structure of Roman Catholicism.

⁵ Some of the works dealing with the subject are Joseph A. Bracken and Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, eds., *Trinity in Process: A Relational Theology of God* (New York: Continuum, 1997); John B. Cobb, Jr. and W. Widick Schroeder, eds., *Process Philosophy and Social Thought* (Chicago: Center for the Scientific Study of Religion, 1981); Christopher Key Chapple, ed., *Ecological Prospects: Scientific, Religious, and Aesthetic Perspectives* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994); Mary Heather MacKinnon and Moni McIntyre, eds., *Readings in Ecology and Feminist Theology* (Kansas City, Mo.: Sheed & Ward, 1995); Maureen A. Tilley and Susan A. Ross, eds., *Broken and Whole: Essays on Religion and the Body* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1995); Charles Hartshorne and William L. Reese, *Philosophers Speak of God*, (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1953). Among the eighteen dissertations dealing with the topic see, for instance, Michael Barnes, “Responsive and Unresponsive Deity: The Religious Character of Panentheism and Classical Theism according to Charles Hartshorne,” (Ph.D. diss., Marquette University, 1976); William Lad, “A Critical Examination of Dipolar Panentheism,” Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1971).

highlight a specific feature of Boff's panentheism, the evolutionary journey in which, he argues, the cosmos is involved. The distinction Boff draws between panentheism and pantheism will be considered in a further section where the notion of *perichoresis*—the foundation that allegedly comprises the mutuality and the ontological distinction between God and the cosmos— will be explained. At that point, Boff's commitment to panentheism will have become evident from the comparison with the heuristic definition previously construed. Finally, the chapter will conclude with an investigation of the advantages—social and religious-theological—Boff envisions as resulting from his adoption of panentheism. These advantages will be balanced against some potential theological problems arising from Boff's panentheist cosmology. Unless these problems are adequately solved, I will claim, the departure from classical theism and the adoption of panentheism are not justifiable.

While only stressing the weight of panentheism in Boff's attempt to re-construe Christian theology in the present chapter, I am well aware that his commitment to both liberation theology and the cause of the poor in an earlier stage of his theological career have a profound impact on his theology. Boff has made this fact clear in previous works, as for instance in *E a Igreja se Fez Povo. Ecclesiogênese; A Igreja que Nasce da Fé do Povo* (*And the Church Became People. Ecclesiogenesis: The Church Which is Born from the People's Faith*), where he states:

Liberation theology is made from this social locus: along with the poor, assuming their cause, and sharing their fights. All theology is made from some predominant place, even that which intends to be universal and official.... Today theology has been elaborated, in the Latin American context, from another locus, along with the poor and amidst their fights,

[which are] animated and enlightened by the ecclesiastical faith. From there important questions are raised for the theologian who joined this journey: What *image of God* emerges from the practice of liberation?... What *image of Jesus Christ* comes from the very core of religious experience, from the fights and martyrdom of communities committed to the struggle for land, to the denunciation of human rights' violation, as well as in their contact with women forced to prostitute themselves?... What *Church model* lies beneath the practices of communal participation, with new ministries and with a social responsibility toward necessary changes in society?⁶

Nevertheless, the focus of this chapter will be limited to the impact of panentheism on Boff's theology.

Toward a Definition of Panentheism

To provide a succinct yet broad definition of panentheism is more complex than it may appear at first. This is due to the fact that this theological-cosmological perspective presents varying characteristics in different traditions. On the one hand, different philosophical schools, and even different religious backgrounds, have appropriated this cosmology, as E. R. Naughton has shown in his brief, helpful historical survey.⁷ On the other hand, even some standard references either do not include a discussion of

⁶ Leonardo Boff, *E a Igreja se Fez Povo*, 21-22 (emphasis mine).

⁷ E. R. Naughton, "Panentheism," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 10:943-945. Plato (see sections 31B through 31C dealing respectively with "The Body of the World," and "the World-Soul," in *Timaeus: Plato's Cosmology*, trans. Francis MacDonald Cornford (New York: The Humanities Press, and London: Routledge & Kegan Paul LTD, 1952), John Scotus Erigena, John Duns Scotus, Meister Eckhart (constantly mentioned by Boff), Friedrich Schelling, and Hegel are counted among those names mentioned by Naughton. Among the contemporary theologians committed to panentheism, Naughton includes Alfred N. Whitehead, Charles Hartshorne, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (to whom Boff is confessedly indebted), and Paul Tillich. Rāmānuja, from a Hindu background, states Naughton, "tempered the impersonal Hindu pantheism of his day with a personalistic notion of Brahman as cause of all things, but he also maintained that all the things of the world formed the body of Brahman," a typically pantheist concept (see *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 944).

panentheism, or provide a superficial analysis.⁸ The term panentheism “seems to have been introduced by Karl C. F. Krause (1781-1832) to distinguish his doctrine from contemporary forms of pantheism and emanationism.”⁹ Besides this clue regarding the historical genesis of the term, Naughton offers a definition which is worth considering:

Panentheism (Gr. *pan*, all; *en*, in; *Theos*, God) views all things as being in God without exhausting the infinity of the divine nature. In metaphysics, it utilizes a real distinction between the essence of God and His existence, or considers God as having accidents really distinct from His nature. Panentheism stands as a kind of surrelativism holding for a real convertible relation of dependence between God and the world—not only is the world dependent upon God, but He is dependent upon the world.¹⁰

According to the first part of the previous definition, panentheism utilizes and consequently presupposes the existence of a real distinction between God’s essence and His existence, a position opposed to the classical view.¹¹ The identification of God’s essence and his existence, as well as the doctrine of God’s simplicity, has been challenged in the last two decades. The theological dialogue initiated by Alvin Plantinga¹²

⁸ For instance, *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* contains an entry on “panpsychism,” but no reference to “panentheism.” See Simon Blackburn, ed. *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). William Reese, editor of the *Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion* provides only a brief section on “panentheism,” followed by a larger discussion of “panpsychism.” See William L. Reese, ed. *Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion: Eastern and Western Thought*, 545-546.

⁹ E. R. Naughton, “Panentheism,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 944. A similar claim is made by Jay B. McDaniel, “Emerging Options in Ecological Christianity: The New Story, the Biblical Story, and Panentheism,” *Ecological Prospects: Scientific, Religious, and Aesthetic Perspectives*, 137.

¹⁰ E. R. Naughton, “Panentheism,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 944.

¹¹ According to Thomas Aquinas, for instance, God is not only His own essence, but also His own existence (Part 1, Question 3, Article 4). There can be no accidents in Him (1.3.6). Therefore, concludes Aquinas, appealing to Augustine, God is absolutely simple (1.3.7). See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 5 vols. (Allen, Texas: Christian Classics, repr. 1981), 1:14-20.

¹² Alvin Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1980).

on the doctrine of divine simplicity remains open for further contributions. Until such a dialogue advances to the point of reaching a conclusion, it seems appropriate to avoid those clauses of Naughton's definition which remain *sub judice*. Yet the second part of the above definition seems more promising: "Panentheism stands as a kind of surrelativism holding for a real convertible relation of dependence between God and the world—not only is the world dependent upon God, but He is dependent upon the world." One potential problem of the previous statement comes from the term *dependence*, which might be read as entailing that God, by some sort of ontological necessity, had to create *a*—not necessarily this—world. In any case panentheism affirms that, whether necessarily or contingently the world is in God, and so interacts with him, as to bring about a mutual change. Therefore, a revised version of the last definition would read: Panentheism stands as a kind of surrelativism holding to a relation between God and the world, in which both constitute a symbiosis,¹³ i.e., they are already part of one another and will actualize this relation in a fuller way. This heuristic definition may eventually not comprise all features of panentheism. Nevertheless, it is sufficient to point out a major point in which panentheism departs from classical theism, namely, the change in God's actuality as a

¹³ From the Greek *symbiōsis* (to live together). In biology, symbiosis refers to "the intimate living together of two kinds of organisms." In the case of God and the world, it may refer to a "similar relationship of mutual interdependence." Victoria Neufeldt, and David B. Guralnik, eds. 3rd College Edition, *Webster's New World Dictionary of American English* (New York: Macmillan General Reference, 1994).

consequence of a symbiotic relationship with the world.¹⁴ Evidences of Leonardo Boff's commitment to panentheism will be gathered in the next sections.

An Ecological Thesis: The Universe's *Pan*-Relatedness

All beings, says Leonardo Boff in his ecological discourse, both living and non-living, relate, interact, and carry on a continuous dialogue among themselves, and with everything else that exists.¹⁵ In referring to *everything else*, Boff seems to have in mind the cultural—as opposed to natural—realities. They too belong to this all-encompassing network of relationships.¹⁶ This pan-relatedness, therefore, is a basic tenet of Boff's ecological vision of nature, as he says: "All is related with all in all points."¹⁷ Nature, from its most elementary particles and primordial energies to the most complex forms of life, as well as culture, and society constitute altogether a very intricate fabric which unites everything. Nothing is left outside. According to this ecological perspective,

everything that exists co-exists. Everything that co-exists pre-exists. And everything that co-exists and pre-exists subsists through an endless net of

¹⁴ A change in God's actuality has been proposed by philosophers who have not committed themselves to panentheism, as, for instance, Nicholas Wolterstorff, who has argued against the classical understanding of some Christian doctrines, such as God's eternity, immutability, impassibility, and divine simplicity. See, for instance, Nicholas Wolterstorff, "God Everlasting," in *God and the Good: Essays in Honor of Henry Stob*, ed. Clifton J. Orlebeke and Lewis B. Smedes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975).

¹⁵ Boff, *Ecologia, Mundialização, Espiritualidade*, 17. See also *A Águia e a Galinha*, where Boff states: "Complexity is one of the most visible characteristics of the reality that surrounds us. By it [complexity] we mean the multiple factors, energies, relations, inter-retro-reactions which characterize each being and the whole set of beings in the universe. Everything is in relation with everything. Nothing is isolated, existing alone, from and for itself. Everything co-exists and inter-exists with all other beings of the universe." *A Águia e a Galinha*, 72.

¹⁶ Ecology, says Boff, "wants to emphasize the bond existing between all natural and cultural beings, and to underline the actual network of interdependences of all with all in all points." Boff, *Ecologia, Mundialização, Espiritualidade*, 18.

¹⁷ Boff, *Ecologia, Mundialização, Espiritualidade*, 18.

inclusive relations. Everything is in relation. Outside of this [comprehensive] relation, nothing exists.¹⁸

Boff makes plain how this cosmological viewpoint provides the foundation for a social ethics which places a strong emphasis on justice understood as equality, rather than as equity.¹⁹ “In stating the interdependence of all beings,” says Boff, “ecology makes all hierarchies functional, and denies the ‘right’ of the stronger.” In summary, “all beings have their relative autonomy; nothing is superfluous or marginal. Each being is a link of the immense cosmic chain which, from the perspective of faith, departs from God and comes back to God.”²⁰ Although a full exploration of Boff’s social ethics is reserved for chapter 5, an anticipation of Boff’s critique of the current social model is useful at this point, as it helps us to realize how he envisions the relationship between God and the world:

This [current] social model presents itself as deeply dualist. It divides person/nature, man/woman, masculine/feminine, God/world, body/spirit/sex/tenderness. And this division always benefits one of the poles, [thus] originating hierarchies and subordinations in the other [pole]. In our case, it expresses itself through a society with a patriarchal and *macho* structure. Even monotheism (only one God) is interpreted in monarchic terms rather than in trinitarian and communal ones.²¹

¹⁸ Boff, *Ecologia, Mundialização, Espiritualidade*, 19.

¹⁹ I will come back to this topic in chapter 5.

²⁰ Boff, *Ecologia, Mundialização, Espiritualidade*, 19. There is a solidarity among all beings, since “we all belong to each other.” See *Brasa sob Cinzas*, 37.

²¹ Boff, *Ecologia, Mundialização, Espiritualidade*, 31.

Boff emphatically rejects this dualist model as “fragmentary, myopic, and also false.”²² What are the implications of this statement? As the ideas of hierarchy and subordination are ruled out in the relation between person and nature,²³ man and woman, masculine and feminine, body and spirit, sex and tenderness, so they are in the relation between God and the world. The dualist model is harshly criticized by Boff since, according to him, “it does not perceive the differences within a larger unity, nor the interdependence between society and the environment.”²⁴ Should God and the world, by analogy, be included in this same perspective: distinct from each other, yet mutually interdependent? This preliminary conjecture will be supported by further evidence in the course of this chapter. But at this point, it seems interesting to add what Boff considers to be a plausible justification for rejecting the legitimacy of hierarchical relationships in the world. Boff offers this reason:

First of all, we must understand creation as [a] game of divine expression, dance of his love, *mirror in which He sees himself and projects fellows in his life and communion*. In this sense, each being is God’s messenger, his

²² Boff, *Ecologia, Mundialização, Espiritualidade*, 31.

²³ Human beings are urged to find their place within the cosmic-planetary community, not outside or above it, but along with all other species. In other words, the idea of man’s right over the earth is considered an intolerable anthropocentrism. See *A Teologia da Libertação: Balanços e Perspectivas*, 119. We are exhorted to transform this world of sin, thus construing the world of the God of Jesus Christ, where all, humans and non-humans, will live as children of God and as brothers among themselves. See also *Saber Cuidar*, where Boff argues that it was man’s forgetting of his union with the earth that gave rise to a delusional anthropocentrism. It is not because human beings can think and plan the Earth that they have the right to rule over it, and use it for their own pleasure. (76) Our relation with nature must not be a relation between subject and object, but between subject and subject. “We have to experience all beings as subjects, as values, as symbols which propel toward an original Reality.... [Therefore], the relation is not one of dominion over, but of fellowship with.” *Saber Cuidar*, 95. Among all those to be cared for, the needy are to receive special attention in this journey toward a fraternal society, a new civilizational paradigm (see *A Teologia da Libertação: Balanços e Perspectivas*, 43). I will come back to this point in chapter 5.

²⁴ Boff, *Ecologia, Mundialização, Espiritualidade*, 31.

representative and sacrament. Each one is worthy, must be welcome and listened to. According to this creational vision there are no hierarchies, no exclusive representatives. All come from the same love of God.²⁵

This new cosmology in which the world is envisioned as unified, non-hierarchical, organic, holistic, feminine-masculine, and spiritual,²⁶ derives from the belief that the whole universe is nothing else but an overflow, a spilling over, of the trinitarian diversity and union. In other words, “the world is complex, diverse, one, interwoven, and interconnected because it is a mirror of the Trinity,”²⁷ which is the best community, “the prototype of a society that welcomes differences, and, through the fellowship among the different members, creates union.”²⁸ Do this interconnectedness and this interdependence apply only to the (human) beings among themselves, or also to the relation of each one of them—and the relation of the world as a whole—to God? A definitive answer requires that our investigation move one step further.

All beings, then, from the simplest to the most complex, come from the same Creator and carry traces of him. More than that, urges Boff, they are “symbols of a Presence that dwells in the

²⁵ Boff, *Ecologia, Mundialização, Espiritualidade*, 48 (emphasis mine).

²⁶ Boff, *Ecologia, Mundialização, Espiritualidade*, 66.

²⁷ Boff, *Ecologia, Mundialização, Espiritualidade*, 50. “God is not loneliness, but fellowship of three divine figures, Father, Son, and Spirit. They are co-existent and eternally cohabit without any hierarchy among themselves. As distinct persons they are able to offer themselves to each other. Their mutual indwelling of life and love (*perichoresis* in religious language) is of such depth and radicalness that they unify themselves and constitute one single God.” Boff, *Ecologia, Mundialização, Espiritualidade*, 152.

²⁸ Boff, *Ecologia, Mundialização, Espiritualidade*, 153.

universe.” This presence, he adds, is called today “the Spirit in creation.”²⁹ As the notion of spirit/Spirit is of fundamental importance for understanding accurately why Boff’s cosmology must be considered a panentheist one, the next section will deal with this specific topic.

spirit = Spirit: From Panpsychism to Panentheism

Panpsychism (from the Greek *pan* and *psyche*) is the belief that “everything is possessed of soul,”³⁰ or that “all parts of matter involve consciousness.”³¹ Boff’s commitment to panpsychism is beyond doubt. In his defense of spirituality as fundamental to an appropriate development of ethics, this commitment becomes clear:

Ethics degenerates into codes of precepts and behavioral habits, and the ecology of the mind risks to lose itself in its fascinating inner symbolic world, if both [ethics and the ecology of the mind] are not expressions of a spirituality or a mysticism. When we speak of mysticism, we think of an all-encompassing basic experience through which we grasp the totality of things, an organic totality, full of meaning and value. Mysticism is linked to spirituality. Spirit, in its original sense, from which derives the word spirituality, is all being that breathes. Therefore [spirit] is all being that lives, the human being, the animal, and the plant. But not only [these]. *The whole earth and the universe are experienced as bearers of spirit*, because

²⁹ Boff, *Ecologia, Mundialização, Espiritualidade*, 77. The capital letter in the word Spirit comes from Boff’s text. As I will show in the next section “spirit,” and “Spirit” are terms used interchangeably.

³⁰ Reese, *Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion*, 545.

³¹ Blackburn, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, 275. “The world, or nature, produces living creatures, and accordingly ought to be thought of as itself an alive and animated organism, literally describable as possessing reason, emotion, and a ‘world-soul’. The view that man is a microcosmos, or small version of the cosmos, which can therefore be understood in anthropomorphic terms, is a staple theme in Greek philosophy. It passed into the medieval period via Neoplatonism, and became shared by Leibniz, Schopenhauer, Schelling, and many others. Its most intelligible modern version is perhaps the view that for environmental reasons we do well to think as if the world is a complex organism (sometimes rather preciously called Gaia), whose unity is as fragile as that of any living thing.” Blackburn, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, 275-276.

life comes from them, and they provide all the elements for life and keep all of creation in motion.³²

Since the whole cosmos is pervaded by “spirit,” as Boff repeatedly emphasizes,³³ he does not hesitate to refer to it as a “great cosmic organism.”³⁴ By the same token, he understands the earth as a living super-organism called Gaia.³⁵ All cosmic manifestations, from the very first movement of the subatomic matter to the most complex forms of plant and animal are, according to him, full of “energy and

³² Boff, *Ecologia, Mundialização, Espiritualidade*, 39, 40 (emphasis mine). Boff’s commitment to pan-psychism is also explicit when he argues: “spirit [lower case] is fundamentally relation, interaction, and self-organization in distinct levels of actualization... The universe is full of spirit because it is reactive, pan-relational, self-organizing and complex. In this sense, there are no inert beings... all participate, each in its own degree, in spirit and life. The difference between the spirit of a rock and of the human spirit is not one of principle but of degree.” *O Despertar da Águia*, 132

³³ “spirit [lower case],” affirms Boff, “belongs to nature and nature presents itself spiritualized.” Boff, *Ecologia: Grito da Terra, Grito do Pobre*, 3rd ed. (São Paulo: Editora Ática, 1999), 54. “Everything... is energy in diverse degrees of concentration and stabilization in very complex systems of relations, where all is connected with all, thus originating a universal symphony, the mountains, the microorganisms, the animals, the human beings. Everything possesses interiority. Everything is spiritual. Life and spirit have, therefore, emergences more and more complex and richer.” *Ecologia: Grito da Terra, Grito do Pobre*, 57. Since spirit is present everywhere, argues Boff, it is meaningful to speak as the ancients have done about the *spiritus loci*, the spirit of the place, the halo and soul that all things have. See *Brasa sob Cinzas*, 96.

³⁴ Boff, *Ecologia, Mundialização, Espiritualidade*, 40.

³⁵ *A Teologia da Libertação: Balanços e Perspectivas*, 118. See also *O Despertar da Águia*, 7, 22, 55. Boff embraces the so-called Gaia hypothesis proposed by the English scientist James E. Lovelock, according to which the Earth is conceived as a living super-organism (see *Nova Era: A Civilização Planetária*, 42). Boff’s argument is candid: “If the super-organism earth produces such intelligent beings as human beings, then it is a higher intelligent principle itself with a memory that has been developing for billions of years.” *Nova Era: A Civilização Planetária*, 43. The idea of earth’s consciousness is also evidenced, argues Boff, by the appearance of human beings from the evolutionary process in which the cosmos is involved. I will deal with this specific aspect later in this chapter. At this point, however, two quotations are enough to understand Boff’s claim. Human beings are the “universe itself that feels, that thinks, that loves, that is solidary, and that venerates.” Boff, *Brasa sob Cinzas*, 37. Or, as he says elsewhere: “Human beings are the earth itself that feels, thinks, loves, and venerates.” *O Despertar da Águia*, 56. See also *O Despertar da Águia*, 22, 77, and *Saber Cuidar*, 72. In summary, “we are the earth in its moment of self-realization and self-consciousness.” Boff, *Saber Cuidar*, 72.

intentionality.”³⁶ In an essay entitled “Spirituality and Sexuality: A Radical Perspective,” Boff suggests and finally concludes, that both spirituality and sexuality are nothing but manifestations of the one and same vital energy that pervades all human beings, and, ultimately, the whole cosmos.³⁷ Boff, confessing his indebtedness to the old wisdom of Hindu tantric yoga, talks about this (universal) sexuality which makes itself present not only in the micro-cosmos (human beings) but also in the macro-cosmos (the whole universe):³⁸

This... (universal sexuality) is within the human being... This energy is called *Kundalini* (or *Parakundalini*) which in sanscrit means “energy of the serpent.” It comes as a serpent rolled up at the basis of our vertebral column. It lies there as if sleeping. And it can be awakened. Its irruption can be either blessed or tragic. It is the awakening of the cosmic energy which is [present] within the whole, and which acquires human form in us.... Once awakened, the Kundalini makes its ascending walk, which means that it achieves consciousness and integrates with reality as a whole. Awakened it passes the various energy centers of human being. Yoga calls such centers *chakras* (centers) or *lótus*.... ***The totality of this ascending walk is the manifestation of the sole and single vital energy. Before, we called this spirit. Here, we call it sexuality...***³⁹

Is it fair to affirm that Boff identifies such *spirit* with the third person of the trinity, the Holy Spirit, or simply *Spirit*? Boff’s clarity on this issue leaves no margin for doubt. In the same essay on “Spirituality and Sexuality,” he affirms that within the

³⁶ Boff, *Ecologia, Mundialização, Espiritualidade*, 165. “Everything suggests,” adds Boff, “that the universe is conscious and has a purpose. If it wanted to engender harmony, life in its diversity, and beings capable of sensitiveness, intelligence, and loving relations as we, human beings, then it should have followed exactly the course that it did.” *Saber Cuidar*, 79.

³⁷ Boff, *Ecologia, Mundialização, Espiritualidade*, 164.

³⁸ Boff, *Ecologia, Mundialização, Espiritualidade*, 171.

³⁹ Boff, *Ecologia, Mundialização, Espiritualidade*, 173 (plain italics belong to the text; bold italics, are mine).

Christian tradition “there is a category which interprets this human and cosmic vitality: the Holy Spirit.”⁴⁰ Human beings are challenged to develop their spirituality/sexuality to their utmost level, in order to experience a full communion with the Holy Spirit. In Boff’s own words:

It is not a matter of activating only one *chakra*, the one linked to the genital organs, or some energy of spirit; [Rather it is a matter of activating] all inner forces so that they vitalize the whole human being until he/she reaches full communion with *the radical cosmic energy*, with *the Holy Spirit*, that principle which sustains all beings in their relatedness, causing, as the atomic physics have taught, all (even the subatomic elementary particles) to exist in the others, [and] with the others, in a universal net of relations. Spirituality consists in tuning up with the Spirit that is in all and for all, to live the enthusiasm (from the Greek, *en-theos-mos*, “to possess a god inside”) that such tuning raises, and to allow oneself to be possessed by that which passes through us and is bigger than us.⁴¹

The last statement makes explicit what several other passages also suggested.⁴²

According to Boff, spirit and Spirit are interchangeable terms. In other words, Boff is committed not only to panpsychism, but also to panentheism, a theological-cosmological

⁴⁰ Boff, *Ecologia, Mundialização, Espiritualidade*, 174. Earlier in the same work Boff states: “The Christian tradition has a category to understand reality as both energy and life. It is the figure of the Holy Spirit. He is the *Spiritus Creator per excellence*. [He] acts in everything which moves, makes life to expand, raises prophets, inspires poets, and inflames the charismatic leaders, and fills all hearts with enthusiasm. The Spirit, according to the testimony of Scripture, fulfills the universe and constantly renews the cosmic structure.” (51)

⁴¹ Boff, *Ecologia, Mundialização, Espiritualidade*, 175 (emphasis mine). “Sexuality and spirituality,” insists Boff, “are the two faces of this radical energy (the Spirit and its energies, Kundalini).” Boff, *Ecologia, Mundialização, Espiritualidade*, 176

⁴² “We are immersed into an ocean of life, of *spirit*, of vibration, and of communion. We comprise a whole in the *Spirit* that, as a pearl-string, ties everything together and drives everything toward a full fellowship in the kingdom of the Trinity.” Boff, *Ecologia, Mundialização, Espiritualidade*, 51 (emphasis mine). Elsewhere, Boff says: “The modern cosmology demonstrated that this universe is mathematically inconsistent without the existence of a Sacred Spirit, and of an infinitely ordaining Mind.” *Saber Cuidar*, 24.

system which he considers to be inside the boundaries of the Christian faith. “The cosmic ubiquity of the Spirit,” he urges, “allows us to recover an old Christian idea which comes to reinforce our spirituality as well as to enrich our theological reading of ecology, namely, panentheism.”⁴³ In fairness to Boff, however, it is important to acknowledge that he occasionally admits that his ecological reflection, founded upon a panentheist cosmology, departs from classical theism.⁴⁴ Panentheism, as Boff defines it, means “all in God and God in all; [it is] a doctrine which affirms the mutual presence of the creatures in God and of God in the creatures.”⁴⁵ Boff repeatedly appeals to Francis of Assisi who realized that realized that “while embracing all things, he was embracing God himself.”⁴⁶ He also refers to the apocryphal Gospel of Thomas to support his view: “Chop the wood and I am inside it. Lift up the stone and you will find me under it.”⁴⁷ This conception of the relation between God and the world helps us to understand the ecstatic experience he eloquently describes while embracing a tree in the forest close to his home in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, to the point of believing that he was one with it, one with its roots,

⁴³ Boff, *Ecologia, Mundialização, Espiritualidade*, 52. Boff’s explicit commitment to panentheism may also be seen in other works. In *A Águia e a Galinha*, for instance, he states: “We are not God, in the simple and direct sense of the word. This would mean pantheism which does not respect the differences between creature and Creator. We are in God. And God is in us. This is the panentheism which respects the differences.” (*A Águia e a Galinha*, 161). See also *O Despertar da Águia*, 37.

⁴⁴ In *Ecology: Grito da Terra, Grito do Pobre*, he explicitly confesses: “Then, beforehand, we warn that the ecological reflection breaks up with the classical theist framework. This [classical theist framework] tended to show God as a being so absolute, self-sufficient, perfect, and transcendent that he could prescind the world. A God without the world easily leads to a world without God.” (218)

⁴⁵ Boff, *Saber Cuidar*, 197.

⁴⁶ *Brasa sob Cinzas*, 99. See also *São Francisco de Assis: Ternura e Vigor. Uma Leitura a partir dos Pobres*, 7th ed. (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1999).

⁴⁷ *Brasa sob Cinzas*, 103. *A Nossa Ressurreição na Morte*, 63.

branches, and leaves.⁴⁸ While embracing that tree, Boff felt not only ontologically united with the tree itself, but with its surrounding ecological system, with the cosmos, and ultimately, with God himself. Even today, he adds, “when I pass by that site, I feel how sacramental that place is. It is loaded with *axé*, with *mana*, with energy, with divine and earthly grace.”⁴⁹ Despite the fact that God and the world are both present and interpenetrating, they still keep their own identities. In fact, Boff argues, it is their differences that allow their mutual relationship.⁵⁰

Again it is worth reviewing how Boff’s pantheist cosmology fits well with his social-ecological project which seeks to defend the value of every being, whether poor or rich, threatened or protected. The vital energy which permeates and connects everything that exists, ultimately “leads us to not excluding anything, [but] opening ourselves to a fellowship with everything that surrounds us (people, nature, cosmos), as well as with the absolute *Alterity* that is the Sacred, the deity, God.”⁵¹

⁴⁸ Boff, *Brasa sob Cinzas*, p. 85. “Gradually,” he says, “I was making myself the tree.... Suddenly, I did not feel myself anymore. I was pure cosmic and vital energy. The tree was me. I was the tree.” *Brasa sob Cinzas*, 83.

⁴⁹ *Brasa sob Cinzas*, 85. *Axé*, word used in African cults to refer to spiritual energy.

⁵⁰ Boff, *A Águia e a Galinha*, 161. “The new religion,” says Boff elsewhere, “which integrates masculine and feminine (*animus* and *anima*) emphasizes the link between faith and life. It identifies the deep unity of spiritual experience, expressed in many ways and religions. It underlines the pantheism by which one affirms: *God is in all things and all things are in God. There is communion and not separation between God and creature. God inhabits not only the heavens, but all parts, especially the depth of the human heart.*” Boff, *O Despertar da Águia*, 37 (emphasis mine).

⁵¹ Boff, *Ecologia, Mundialização, Espiritualidade*, 176. *Alterity*, a neologism derived from the Greek *alter* (other), means the state or quality of one who is other, distinct, different.

According to Boff, spirit/Spirit is not only the source of a universal link discussed in the previous section. It/He⁵² is also the driving force leading the whole cosmos toward its ultimate source and its final destiny, God.⁵³ This particular aspect of Boff's panentheism will now be the object of our consideration.

God: The Alpha and Omega of the Cosmos' Evolutionary Journey

Nature, Boff proposes, derives from a very long ascending cosmic process, the "cosmogenesis."⁵⁴ All beings gradually emerged from most simple to most complex.⁵⁵ Behind this evolutionary process Boff identifies the action of four forces—a strong nuclear force, a weak nuclear force, an electromagnetic force, and a gravitational force. These forces symphonically interact, to create and to advance the universe toward its final

⁵² The use of "it" only intends to highlight the fact that for Boff spirit [lower case] is not personal. The theological implications of this perspective will be further discussed in this chapter.

⁵³ In Boff's own words: "Humanizing means to embrace and to listen to this [vital] energy. Spirituality, then, happens in all we do and are, insofar as we are totally what we do and want to be.... Then we will be in tune with the calling of all reality, full of Spirit, the cosmic force which unifies all, and also drives forward and upward." *Ecologia, Mundialização, Espiritualidade*, 176.

⁵⁴ In *Vida para além da Morte*, Boff describes this evolutionary process as follows: "If we look to the road covered by evolution we will note, without great effort, that there was an ascending line. It is true that there has been and continues to be some evolutionary trends that have bifurcated, gone backwards or even faded. Nevertheless, an ascending line has prevailed..." *Vida para além da Morte, O Presente: seu Futuro, sua Festa, sua Contestação*, 16th ed. (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1997), 107-108 (originally published in 1973). The notion that the cosmos is involved in a dialectical process converging toward God is not a recent development in Boff's theological career. In *Brasa sob Cinzas*, for instance, Boff, while describing the pain and despair of a family that lost one of its members, says that their cry was "[t]he cry of millions and millions of years, collected and accumulated, since this is the age of each one of us." Boff, *Brasa sob Cinzas* "Estórias do Anti-Cotidiano", 29 (see also *A Águia e a Galinha*, 126, 163; *A Teologia da Libertação: Balanços e Perspectivas*, 60; *O Despertar da Águia*, 20, 22, 129; *Saber Cuidar*, 72, 73, 93, 147, 148). Rather, it is a development which has its roots back in Boff's earlier works. See *A Nossa Ressurreição na Morte*, 9th ed. (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1999), 9, 82, 108. Originally published under the title *A Ressurreição de Cristo - A nossa Ressurreição na Morte* (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1972); *Vida para Além da Morte*, 17, 19, 37, 42, 108, 109; *O Destino do Homem no Mundo: Ensaio sobre a Vocação Humana*, 32, 35, 36, 46.

⁵⁵ Boff, *Ecologia, Mundialização, Espiritualidade*, 43.

goal. These forces “constitute the internal logic of the evolutionary process,” and are, so to speak, “the ordaining mind of the cosmos,” which continues “to keep the cosmological arrow of time moving towards forms of beings that are increasingly relational and complex.”⁵⁶ *Autopoiesis* is the name Boff gives to this capacity for self-organization that each being in the universe, even the most primordial elements of creation, possesses.⁵⁷ Such capacity, he argues, derives from the interiority intrinsic to all beings.⁵⁸

Boff candidly acknowledges the influence of Teilhard de Chardin’s work upon this theological insight when he states:

Biochemists and biophysicists such as Prigogine/Stengers and others realized and proved what Teilhard de Chardin already in the 1930’s had intuited: the farther the evolutionary process advances, the more complex it becomes; the more complex it becomes, the more consciousness it acquires; the more consciousness it acquires, the more self-conscious it becomes. Everything interacts, therefore, because *everything possesses a certain level of life and of spirit*.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Boff, *Ecologia: Grito da Terra, Grito do Pobre*, 39.

⁵⁷ Boff, *Ecologia: Grito da Terra, Grito dos Pobres*, 54-55. “We are formed,” adds Boff in a recent work, “from the same energies, from the same physical-chemical elements, within the same network of relation which connects all with all, which have been operative in the last fifteen billion years, since the universe, from an incommensurable instability... emerged in the form that we now know it.” *Saber Cuidar*, 73. Boff confesses his indebtedness to Swimme and Berry for his definition of autopoiesis (See Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry, *The Universe Story: From the Primordial Flaring forth to the Ecozoic Era. A Celebration of the Unfolding of the Cosmos* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1992), 75-76).

⁵⁸ All beings, stresses Boff, “possess an interiority from which all forms of organization and self-manifestation actualize themselves. Even a simple atom possesses a quantum of spontaneity in its self-manifestation. Such spontaneity grows proportionally to [the being’s] complexity, until being dominant in the most complex beings, so-called organic. The category of self-organization is fundamental to understand life.... Here, in the relation and complexity resulting [from the interaction of primordial forces of the universe] lies the origin and the spirit’s crib...” *Ecologia: Grito da Terra, Grito dos Pobres*, 54-55.

⁵⁹ Boff, *Ecologia: Grito da Terra, Grito dos Pobres*, 56 (emphasis mine). See Ilya Prigogine, and Isabelle Stengers, *Order out of Chaos: Man’s New Dialogue with Nature* (Boulder, Co.: New Science Library, 1984). The task of evaluating whether Boff’s reading of Teilhard is fully accurate, and of evaluating to what extent Teilhard’s should be considered a panentheist, is beyond the scope of the present work.

Boff, following Teilhard,⁶⁰ identifies several stages of this evolutionary process: from the cosmogenesis,⁶¹ the evolution reached the biogenesis;⁶² the biogenesis ended in the anthropogenesis;⁶³ the anthropogenesis, according to Boff's understanding of the Christian tradition, allowed the emergence of the Christogenesis, which Boff defines as "that moment of consciousness which identifies itself with the Deity."⁶⁴ The Christogenesis, however, is not the final stage of the evolutionary process of the cosmos. This final stage relates to the Triune God. According to Boff, not only is the whole cosmos involved in the evolutionary process; God himself has become, since the creation of the cosmos, an integral part of the same process, apparently because of the symbiotic relation he bears with the universe. In other words, God himself is in process of becoming what he aims to be. When the cosmos will finally reach the Omega point⁶⁵ at the very end

⁶⁰ "It was Teilhard de Chardin," declares Boff, "who elaborated a vision of globality which inserted the Christian phenomenon into the process of evolution." See *Nova Era: a Civilização Planetária*, 35.

⁶¹ See Boff, *O Despertar da Águia*, 49-54.

⁶² "The universe is an unceasing movement aiming at its equilibrium, [a universe] always fragile and exposed to mutations. Life itself arose from matter without balance (total balance is equivalent to death), in a situation of chaos. This situation prompts interactions, instigates creativity, and originates a point of bifurcation from which a new order arises." Boff, *O Despertar da Águia*, 66.

⁶³ See Boff, *O Despertar da Águia*, 61-63. We, human beings, says Boff, are the outcome of cosmic-planetary-biological processes that preceded our appearance. Indeed, we are "the latest to arrive. We entered into the scene when 99.98% of the history of the universe had already occurred." Boff, *O Despertar da Águia*, 129. Nevertheless, it should be noted that, according to Boff, "[m]an, fully man, has not yet been born. He/she is being woven in the enormous placenta of history as a process which ascends and converges toward God." Boff, *O Destino do Homem e do Mundo*, 36. The same quotation is also found in *Seleção de Textos Militantes*, 18. In other words, man—as everything else—is still a project to be actualized, a latent project in the dynamics of evolution (see *A Nossa Ressurreição na Morte* 9, 108). "To be like God: full, absolute, infinitely actualized," this is man's ultimate vocation (*Encarnação: A Humanidades e a Jovialidade do nosso Deus*, according to *Seleção de Textos Militantes*, 11).

⁶⁴ Leonardo Boff, *Vida para Além da Morte*, 23.

⁶⁵ See *Vida para Além da Morte*, 17.

of cosmogenesis, the last phase of the evolutionary process will take place, namely, the theogenesis: God himself will be fulfilled, at last consummating the end toward which he is now evolving. Boff's following statement helps us to grasp his understanding of this process:

[S]acramentality must point not only toward a vertical view of [the relation] God-universe, but also toward a horizontal view, God-cosmogenic evolutionary process. No being is ready. All are open to new advances, to new revelations.⁶⁶

Both God and the cosmos are envisioned by Boff as participating, in the same level, in the evolutionary process. Since no being is ready, God himself is not ready either. The legitimacy of this conclusion Boff substantiates by other assertions:

[B]oth the Son, who incarnated himself, and the Spirit are related to the mystery of Creation. They are present, fermenting the process of ascension toward the kingdom of the Trinity. They synthesize the universe both in themselves and in man, and give it [the universe] the sure orientation that will converge into a blessed synthesis. It will also participate in the resurrection of all flesh.... This conviction allowed early Christians to speak of the cosmic Christ and of the Spirit's inhabiting the energies of the universe. This christic and spiritual presence was lived by San Francis of Assisi.... Teilhard de Chardin updated this experience in the context of modern cosmology, trying to identify the emerging of consciousness, and the unequivocal sign of God's nearness in the growing process of the complexity of matter. The cosmogenesis opens itself to the anthropogenesis, this to the christogenesis, and the latter to the *theogenesis*, until that God-communion makes himself all in all things.⁶⁷

At the Omega point, God and the whole cosmos will achieve a supreme synthesis, overcoming all the hindrances which now forbid the plenitude of their symbiotic

⁶⁶ Boff, *Ecologia: Grito da Terra, Grito dos Pobres*, 234.

⁶⁷ Boff, *Ecologia, Mundialização, Espiritualidade*, 152.

relation.⁶⁸ The cosmos, then, will be transfigured, and will assume the characteristics of the Spirit, namely, plenitude of life, full communication.⁶⁹ This, believes Boff, is the future of the world, its divinization:

The future of the world consists in becoming 'God's body.' This means that all the limitations of the evolutionary process, the diseases, the deformations will disappear and give place to total divinization.⁷⁰

Boff calls this climax of the evolutionary history the "pneumatification of all creation." God who already lives in creation will reach a fuller and completely open relation with it. The whole cosmos and humanity will not only enjoy the life of God, but will plunge into God's own living,⁷¹ forming an unlimited symbiotic relation with him. At last, the world, now richer and more complete, will have returned to its origin, God, thus

⁶⁸ The christic and spiritual mystic, says Boff, "looks for unity in all differences, insofar as a divine string pervades the *universe*, as well as *human consciousness and action*, in order to unify them forward and upward, *toward the supreme synthesis with God*, Omega [point] of evolution and creation." Boff, *Ecologia, Mundialização, Espiritualidade*, 152 (emphasis mine).

⁶⁹ Elsewhere, Boff calls this process *Christification*, a becoming like Christ (see *Vida para além da Morte*, 108).

⁷⁰ *Vida para Além da Morte*, 110. Boff occasionally uses beautiful, graphic language to describe the evolutionary process of the cosmos: "It will be the end when we implode and explode within the unsearchable Abyss of actualization and beatitude, God. Then, we will one in the One, convergent in the fusion, and diverse in the communion. The Original Source of Energy will be completely in us, and we in it." *A Águia e a Galinha*, 161.

⁷¹ Then, adds Boff, "the eternal history of unlimited development and of inexhaustive appropriation of the kingdom of the Trinity will be inaugurated. The Spirit, who unifies everything inside and outside the Trinity, will orchestrate the universal symphony. Ecology will be complete, since all will be, in an infinite bond of sympathy and love [*amorização*, in Portuguese], in their true *oikos*, in their maternal and paternal house which was always inhabited by the Spirit, and which is now totally illuminated and transfigured for its complete self-communication." Boff, *Ecologia: Grito da Terra, Grito dos Pobres*, 265.

fulfilling its own vocation.⁷² In this final theosphere, as Boff labels this eschatological picture, “all will be in God and God [will be] in all. This is the truth of panentheism.”⁷³

Panentheism, Not Pantheism

Boff carefully distinguishes his panentheism from pantheism which, he observes, does not respect the differences between creature and Creator.⁷⁴ Pantheism, he stresses, “claims that everything is God. The primordial energy, the mountains, the stars, and human beings are all parts of the same and unique subsisting reality, God.”⁷⁵ In other words, all things are mere actualizations of the cosmic, universal God. Panentheism, on the other hand, though it relates God and creatures, still distinguishes between the two.

As Boff phrases it:

[According to panentheism] one [God/creatures] is not the other [creatures/God]. Each one possesses his/its relative autonomy, i.e., they are always related. Everything is not God, but God is in everything. It is what the etymology of the word [panentheism] suggests; God is present in all. He makes all reality his temple. And vice-versa, all is in God. We never go to him, since we never departed from him, we are always in him.... Panentheism allows us to embrace the universe with supreme affection because we are embracing the God-Trinity himself.⁷⁶

⁷² *Nova Era: a Civilização Planetária*, 54. Elsewhere Boff stresses this same idea: “The vocation to which the world is called is sublime: God himself.” *O Destino do Homem e do Mundo*, 29. And, “the Christian faith affirms that the world moves on not toward a cosmic catastrophe, but to its plenitude. The world’s ultimate goal consists in an interpenetration with God. The creation’s destiny is to be penetrated by God in such a way that He will constitute its most intimate essence.” *O Destino do Homem e do Mundo*, 28.

⁷³ Boff, *Ecologia; Grito da Terra, Grito do Mundo*, 12.

⁷⁴ See *A Águia e a Galinha*, 161.

⁷⁵ Boff, *Ecologia, Mundialização, Espiritualidade*, 52. See also *Ecologia: Grito da Terra, Grito dos Pobres*, where Boff also admonishes: “Panentheism must be clearly distinguished from pantheism...” (235)

⁷⁶ Boff, *Ecologia, Mundialização, Espiritualidade*, 52.

The foundation Boff needs to hold simultaneously to the mutuality and the ontological distinction between God and his creatures comes from the concept *perichoresis*. “*Perichoresis*, in Trinitarian theology, refers to the mutual presence and interpenetration of God and universe or to the Three Divine Persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) among themselves and in relation to their creation.”⁷⁷

Boff appeals to A. N Whitehead and his disciples Hartshorne, Ogden, Cobb Jr., Griffin, and Haught among others⁷⁸ as those who made the evolutionary perspective analyzed in the previous section “the paradigmatic axis of a whole new cosmology.”⁷⁹ Rather than seeing God face to face, he says, such cosmology “puts God within the world’s process and considers the world within God’s process.”⁸⁰

According to Boff, therefore, both God and the world are perichoretically related.

Boff details the theological implications of this idea in the following terms:

Everything that happens in the world somehow affects God. And everything that happens in God somehow affects the world... The Creator always involves his creature and vice-versa but each one keeps his/its own identity and distinction. The distinction is for union and fellowship. That is why we said that “somehow” God and the world affect each other mutually. God does not identify himself *with* the cosmic process (one is not simply the other; the related alterity remains in existence) but he identifies himself *in* the cosmic process (he gains actuality, reveals himself, and makes known his related alterity). Analogously, we must say:

⁷⁷ Boff, *Ecologia: Grito da Terra, Grito dos Pobres*, 49-50.

⁷⁸ Boff, *Ecologia: Grito da Terra, Grito dos Pobres*, 227.

⁷⁹ Boff, *Ecologia: Grito da Terra, Grito dos Pobres*, 227.

⁸⁰ Boff, *Ecologia: Grito da Terra, Grito dos Pobres*, 227.

the universe does not identify itself *with God* (one is not the other) but it identifies itself *in God* (it acquires in him its true being and meaning).⁸¹

This perichoretic relation, this mutual indwelling, this mutual interpenetration which allows those in relation to enjoy an intimate—in fact, the most intimate—fellowship while still conserving their respective identities is what one finds in the trinitarian life itself. The *ad-intra* operations of the Trinity are characterized, says Boff, by these perichoretic relations. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, while keeping their own identities, eternally relate themselves to each other, penetrate each other, love one another, thus constituting a single and perfect society, in which human societies must mirror themselves.⁸² Or, in Boff's own words, to say that the persons of the Trinity are involved in a perichoretic relation means that "each Person contains the other two, each one penetrates the other two and is penetrated by them, one lives in the other, one lives in the other and vice-versa."⁸³ The notion of perichoresis, argues Boff, is preferable to the traditional idea of procession. To say that the Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the

⁸¹ Boff, *Ecologia: Grito da Terra, Grito dos Pobres*, 227.

⁸² The pan-relatedness of the universe, says Boff, points to the perfect relatedness existing in the trinitarian life. "If everything in the universe constitutes a net of relations, if all is in fellowship with all, if the images of God [the universe is God's metaphor] present themselves as structured in communal form, then this is an indication that this Supreme Prototype is fundamentally and essentially fellowship, life in relation, energy in expansion and love supreme." Boff, *Ecologia: Grito da Terra, Grito dos Pobres*, 224. In the same work Boff argues that this inclusiveness of the other (alterity as Boff occasionally names it) is the basis for proposing a dialogic or perichoretic logic in which the other, even the contrary other, is not excluded but embraced as leading to a richer, more complete truth. It is, as Boff puts it "the most complex logic, and, therefore, the most complete." This very important concept and its implications will be the object of detailed investigation in the next chapter. For Boff's defense of the thesis that the Trinity provides a pattern of social life which may prove helpful in structuring human society, see *Trinity and Society*, 11. See also "The Communion of the Trinity: [Source of] Critique and Inspiration for Society and the Church," *A Santíssima Trindade É a Melhor Comunidade*, 6th ed. (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1999), 107 ff.

⁸³ *Trinity and Society*, 5.

Son puts the former in a double dependency. "He always comes later and in third place."⁸⁴

Concludes Boff,

This is why many theologians, among which the author himself, postulate a divine perichoresis and sustain the simultaneity of the divine Persons, equally eternal and infinite. They do not proceed from the other as a sort of theogony, as if the principle of causality would apply to God himself and thus would be above God. The language of procession is analogical and a metaphorical-symbolic form of showing the inclusiveness of the three and the eternal fellowship through which the divine Three are always one, for the other, with the other, and in the other (perichoresis or circumcessio). The relations are rather of participation and reciprocal revelation than of hypostatic derivation. They are [relations] of correlation and communion and less of production and procession.⁸⁵

In summary, God in his *ad-intra* as well as in his *ad-extra* relations operates perichoretically. *Perichoresis* allows God to interact with the universe in a way that, while he penetrates the whole universe with spirit and dwells there and is reciprocally penetrated and inhabited by the universe, God and the universe still remain ontologically distinct.⁸⁶ Panentheism, beyond doubt, succeeds in distinguishing itself from pantheism.

But if panentheism, on the one hand, is able to avoid pantheism's ontological

⁸⁴ Boff, *Ecologia: Grito da Terra, Grito dos Pobres*, 254.

⁸⁵ Boff, *Ecologia: Grito da Terra, Grito dos Pobres*, 254. Boff's anxiety concerning whether the principle of causality may exist independently of God and, consequently, be above him resembles Thomas Aquinas's concerns in the development of the doctrine of divine simplicity. Whether this principle existed apart from God, or was eternally present in God's mind, or was just created with the universe is a difficult philosophical question whose discussion I will consciously avoid. See Alvin Plantinga's *Does God Have a Nature?*, 140-146.

⁸⁶ "Everything is not God. But God is in all and all in is God. Because of this God ... guarantees his permanent presence within the creature. The creature always depends on God and carries him within itself. God and the world are different. One is not the other. But they are not separated or closed. They are always mutually including each other. If they are different it is to be able to communicate with each other, and to be united through communion and mutual indwelling. Because of this mutual indwelling, simple transcendence and pure immanence is overcome. An intermediary category appears, *transparency*, which is exactly the presence of transcendence within the immanence." Boff, *Ecologia: Grito da Terra, Grito dos Pobres*, 236.

reductionism, does it have concrete advantages over classical theism to justify its adoption? On the other hand, do panentheism's potential advantages raise any theological problems by postulating a symbiotic relation between God and the world? The answers to these questions will be investigated next.

Advantages of a Panentheist Cosmology

In the introduction of this chapter I have mentioned that panentheism, according to Boff, serves his ecological cause better than classical theism does, since the latter's emphasis on God's transcendence, so Boff argues with reference to the Ecumenical Council of Canberra, detaches God from the world and, consequently, makes the world hostage to abusive human exploitation.⁸⁷ As I read Boff, this is one of the major justifications for embracing this new cosmology; but it certainly is not the only one. For didactic purposes, I will explore the advantages Boff sees in panentheism under two major categories, social and religious-theological. The exposition of such advantages will be followed by my own identification of some theological problems, since Boff himself, as far as I can tell, does not develop such an identification.

Social Advantages

Spirituality, the presence of spirit/Spirit in the cosmos, gives a new status to the human experience/mode of being-in-the-world. Since the whole cosmos is God's social

⁸⁷ "The Churches were accomplices of the mentality which led to the contemporary crisis of the biosphere. They were not sufficiently critical and did not articulate their theological position clearly enough to cultivate a relation of respect and veneration toward the created order. Quoting again the [VIII] Assembly [of the Ecumenical Council of Churches] of Canberra [in 1990]: 'The more theology insisted on God's transcendence and his distance from the material world, the more the earth was understood as a simple object of human exploitation and as a "non-spiritual" reality'." Boff, *Ecologia, Mundialização, Espiritualidade*, 77.

and cosmic temple,⁸⁸ God is experienced behind everything, at all times, through all relations. While this perspective also has a religious/theological benefit that will be explored later, I now wish to point to what seems to be a clear social-ethical advantage, namely, *to discourage, if not prevent, the exploitation of the world.*

The universe in cosmogenesis [a key feature of Boff's panentheism, as noted above] invites us to live the experience which underlies panentheism; in each minimal manifestation of being, in each movement, in each expression of life and intelligence and love, we are facing the Mystery of the universe-in-process.⁸⁹

The world is full of spirit/Spirit. Everything sends us a message, trees, colors, winds, pathways, persons, and domestic objects.⁹⁰ Therefore, Boff concludes, we must strive to come up with a new economic paradigm; instead of an economy of unlimited growth, we must look for an economy-of-enough, centered on the life of people and nature, on solidarity with "those persons or beings of creation that have less life."⁹¹ This new paradigm rests on Boff's panentheistic proposal and must lead to tenderness toward and *veneration* of all creation.⁹²

⁸⁸ Boff, *Ecologia: Grito da Terra, Grito dos Pobres*, 233.

⁸⁹ Boff, *Ecologia: Grito da Terra, Grito dos Pobres*, 236.

⁹⁰ Boff, *Ecologia: Grito da Terra, Grito dos Pobres*, 244.

⁹¹ Boff, *Ecologia, Mundialização, Espiritualidade*, 40.

⁹² Boff, *Ecologia, Mundialização, Espiritualidade*, 33. A parallel statement says: "Development must be with nature, and not against nature. What must be globalized now is not so much capital, market, science, and technique. Rather what must be globalized is solidarity with all beings, starting with the most victimized, the valuing of life in all its forms, the responding to the call from each [suffering] and from the inner dynamic of the universe, *the veneration of nature of which we are a part, a responsible part.*" Boff, *Ecologia, Mundialização, Espiritualidade*, 41 (emphasis mine).

A second advantage, already mentioned in the exposition of Boff's panentheism, is that this new cosmology provides a basis *to defend social justice understood as equality rather than equity*.⁹³ Since all beings are permeated by a common spirit, they constitute a single, common, all-encompassing net of relations. As noticed above,

in reaffirming the interdependence of all beings, ecology makes all hierarchies functional and denies the "right of the strongest." All beings count and possess their relative autonomy; nothing is superfluous or marginal.⁹⁴

Panentheism, by emphasizing the great unity and interdependence between all beings, rules out a dualist perspective that generates hierarchies and subordinations.⁹⁵ According to this cosmological view, adds Boff, "each being is God's messenger, his representative, and sacrament. Each one has worth, and must be accepted and heard.... There are no hierarchies nor exclusive representatives."⁹⁶ Since all beings, from the most simple to the most complex, comprise an organic whole, since all are derived from the same loving Creator's act, there is, Boff concludes, "a fundamental fraternity and sorority between all beings."⁹⁷ If all are ultimately equal because of the ontological relation they

⁹³ Boff is not arguing for purely ontological equality between all beings. This would lead to such absurd conclusions that plants are ontologically equal to human beings. His argument seems to be that, since all beings are equally ontologically linked to God's own being, they should all be equally valued in the social realm. In what concerns human beings, this would rule out hierarchies, and societies of classes, thus opening the doors for a society organically structured, characterized by respect, appreciation of differences, and mutual dependence.

⁹⁴ Boff, *Ecologia, Mundialização, Espiritualidade*, 19.

⁹⁵ Boff, *Ecologia, Mundialização, Espiritualidade*, 31.

⁹⁶ Boff, *Ecologia, Mundialização, Espiritualidade*, 48. It is easy to see how this perspective represents a source of tension with Roman Catholicism. See, for instance, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Liguori: Liguori Pub., 1994), §§ 880-896.

⁹⁷ Boff, *Ecologia, Mundialização, Espiritualidade*, 77.

hold with God, justice demands equality (all must receive the same), rather than equity (all must receive what is due to them individually). In chapter 5, I will show how this implication fits well into Boff's social ethics.

Religious-Theological Advantages

As the churches are blamed for the contemporary crisis of the biosphere, they are challenged to "re-cosmologize" their old theological formulations and to re-structure themselves, in the light of a panentheist cosmology/theology of creation. In Boff's own words,

a theology centered upon creation obliges the religious and ecclesiastical institutions to re-structure themselves functionally. They must be at the service of cosmic revelation, under which all find themselves; [they] must recover [the doctrine of] original grace over [the doctrine of] original sin, must re-cosmologize theological statements [originally] applied only to human beings (theological anthropocentrism), but which now must concern the whole universe, such as grace, ultimate destiny, divinization, resurrection, eternal life, and the kingdom of the Trinity.⁹⁸

What are the religious-theological advantages Boff sees as resulting from adopting panentheism? First, *to broaden the experience of God and the idea of spirituality*. People, says Boff, want "to experience God. They are tired of listening to catechisms, of listening to religious authorities talk about God, and to theologians espouse the traditional doctrines."⁹⁹ According to Boff's panentheism, spirituality must be redefined as an ordinary experience linked to "natural and cosmic processes."¹⁰⁰ The idea of an intrinsic

⁹⁸ Boff, *Ecologia: Grito da Terra, Grito dos Pobres*, 233. By the term "re-cosmologize," Boff means to give new meaning to existing theological formulations, in consonance with a panentheist orientation.

⁹⁹ Boff, *Ecologia, Mundialização, Espiritualidade*, 62.

¹⁰⁰ Boff, *Ecologia: Grito da Terra, Grito dos Pobres*, 259-260.

connection between God and the cosmos creates the possibility of experiencing the presence of the Divine in all things in the universe.¹⁰¹ God, the Mystery, is behind and within each being, each person, and reality as a whole.¹⁰² In other words, Boff's panentheist cosmology makes one's experience of God a daily one, part of the everyday challenges of reality and life. Rather than confining such experience to some ecstatic moments in life, or to some sacred spaces, Boff expands it to involve man's whole existence.¹⁰³ As he urges:

God does not want to be found only at the end of the process [of cosmogenesis], but in each moment, in each point of existence. He seeks to meet us in the transitory, in the imperfect, in the process itself.¹⁰⁴

It is just as spiritual, therefore, to enjoy the sun-set as it is to engage in some spiritual discipline. It is as spiritual to care for the poor and the marginal as it is to sing praises to God. Moreover, this broadening of spirituality still has another consequence. Anyone, and not just the spiritual elite, is enabled to nurture and to exercise his/her spirituality in the activities of daily life. This represents a socialization of spiritual power

¹⁰¹ Boff, *A Águia e a Galinha*, 153.

¹⁰² Boff, *Mística e Espiritualidade*, 14. See also *América Latina: Da Conquista à Nova Evangelização*, where Boff states: "Each being, its families, the whole population of beings have a language, communicate a message, and make themselves revealers of a mystery, the mystery of existence and of life, which drives us toward a larger mystery, one that unifies, penetrates and shines in all things, namely, God communion-of-divine-persons-of-life-and-love." (68)

¹⁰³ See *Mística e Espiritualidade*, 17, 71.

¹⁰⁴ *O Despertar da Águia*, 159.

which had been kept in the hands of a few. “There are no hierarchies,” insists Boff, “nor are there exclusive representatives.”¹⁰⁵

A second advantage which arises from Boff’s panentheist cosmology is *the recovery of a sacramental view of reality*. In Boff’s own words,

For religious experience, everything is sacramental, since it is pervaded by divine presence. As the Japanese Buddhists say, everything can transform itself in *kami*, in [something] sacred and deifiable. Finally, it [the religious experience] reveals itself through the working of the divine within the world’s processes. The divine is not something added from outside to the experiences... All things possess a depth which is their other side and their mystery that direct to the Mystery.¹⁰⁶

Boff’s recognition of God’s pervading presence in the universe is the basis for a sacramental theology, to which I turn my attention now. It is important to realize that Boff’s sacramental theology is not a new development in his theological career, connected with his recent defense of ecology as a new paradigm.¹⁰⁷ Rather, its roots can be traced as far back as his 1975-*Mínima Sacramentalia: Os Sacramentos da Vida e a Vida dos Sacramentos (Sacraments of Life: Life of the Sacraments)*, and even his 1973-*O Destino do Homem e do Mundo (The Destiny of Man and of the World)*.¹⁰⁸ After five

¹⁰⁵ Boff, *Ecologia, Mundialização, Espiritualidade*, 48.

¹⁰⁶ Boff, *Ecologia, Mundialização, Espiritualidade*, 64.

¹⁰⁷ See *Ecologia, Mundialização, Espiritualidade*, 15.

¹⁰⁸ Boff, *Os Sacramentos da Vida e a Vida dos Sacramentos. Ensaio de Teologia Narrativa*, 20th ed. (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1999). In *O Destino do Homem e do Mundo*, Boff mentions some background sources of his development: Joseph Ratzinger, *Die sakramentale Begründung Existenz [The Sacramental Ground of Existence]*, 2 vols., 2nd ed. (Meitingen: Kyrios-Verlag, 1967); Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christus Sakrament der Gottbegegnung [Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God]* (Mainz: Matthais-Grünewald-Verlag, 1960); Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Sakramentales Denken* (Kassel: J. Stauda, 1959), and *Einführung in die Phänomenologie der Religion* (Darmstadt: WissenschaftlicheBuchgesellschaft, 1961).

years of studying everything that had been written on the sacraments, Boff writes, all his efforts simply revealed to him what was quite obvious:

Sacraments were what I always lived and all [people] always live, but I did not know this and only few people do.... Everyday life is full of sacraments. The living sacraments... are mixed into daily archeology. It is the cup of my family, my mom's *polenta*, the last butt of my father's straw-cigarette preserved carefully... All these things are no longer things anymore. They became people. They speak. We can listen to their voice and their message. They have an inner reality and a heart. They became sacraments. In other words, they are signs that contain, exhibit, recall, visualize, and communicate another reality different from themselves but present within them.¹⁰⁹

According to Boff's sacramental way of thinking, the world is not seen as mere world. Rather, everything within it is acknowledged to be a sign, an image, a symbol of a superior reality. As a consequence of the divine presence "things, while continuing to be what they are, transmute themselves into symbolic and sacramental realities, thus producing in us a new state of awareness."¹¹⁰ Seeing this world, says Boff, we detect God within it. Indeed, "it is through the world and with the world that we grasp God."¹¹¹ As God is in all things, "everything becomes transparent and transfigures itself into God's sacrament."¹¹²

By suggesting that everything is a sacrament, Boff is not denying either the tangibility or materiality of all things. Rather, he is claiming that, beyond their physical-

¹⁰⁹ *Os Sacramentos da Vida e a Vida dos Sacramentos*, 17-18.

¹¹⁰ *A Águia e a Galinha*, 154. "All our reality of the world, of history, of the cosmos, insofar as it was touched by divinity, became transparent, sacramental." *Mística e Espiritualidade*, 71.

¹¹¹ *Mística e Espiritualidade*, 71.

¹¹² *O Destino do Homem e do Mundo*, 140.

chemical dimensions, things have a dimension that actualizes the reality of the Transcendent and Eternal God within the world and within time.¹¹³ Man, says Boff, is able to read this singular message from the Transcendent One. As he puts it,

Man is a being who is able to read the message from the world. He/she is never an illiterate. Rather, he/she is always one who, in the multiplicity of languages, can read and interpret. Indeed, to live is to read and to interpret. In the transitory he/she is able to read the Permanent; in the temporal, the Eternal; in the world, God. Then, the ephemeral transfigures itself in a sign of the Permanent's presence; the temporal in symbols of the Eternal's reality; the world in God's great sacrament.¹¹⁴

Sacrament, Boff adds, presupposes the possibility of a meeting between God and man. While looking into an object, man is able to see beyond it to what it reveals of God. In other words, God who is invisible and unreachable, becomes sacramentally visible and reachable in and through the world. The sacrament, rather than taking man away from the world, invites him to look more deeply into its heart.¹¹⁵

Sacraments are not only material objects. Human history, where God works out his plan of salvation, is considered a sacrament. All events point to a hidden reality, namely, God's redemptive purpose. They point to either acceptance or rejection of that purpose. Boff does not exclusively include major historical events in this sacramental perspective. All minor events that compose our daily lives in the social arena, too, are

¹¹³ *O Destino do Homem e do Mundo*, 142.

¹¹⁴ *Os Sacramentos da Vida e a Vida dos Sacramentos*, 9.

¹¹⁵ *Os Sacramentos da Vida e a Vida dos Sacramentos*, 35.

sacramental in nature. To sum up, “the whole of history, viewed as a meaningful unity, assumes a sacramental character.”¹¹⁶

Although everything is a sacrament, there are different levels in which things, persons, institutions, or facts reveal their sacramental character. Or, to use Boff’s own terminology, there are “sacramental densities.”¹¹⁷ This means that some things or beings have more sacramental content or sacramental weight than do others. Christ, for instance, is the sacrament *par excellence*, the one who most transparently reveals God. And as Christ is the Father’s sacrament, Boff argues, so the Church is Christ’s sacrament.¹¹⁸

Despite his enthusiasm for the sacramental dimension of reality, Boff shows clear reservations when he talks about the so-called Christian sacramental universe. In this context, so he argues, a process of fossilization has occurred. The contemporary sacramental rites must now be explained, as otherwise they are meaningless. But a sign that must be explained is not a sign anymore.¹¹⁹ Boff also points out the danger of a sacrament to introduce a dia-bolic reality, thus leading to separation, scandal, and

¹¹⁶ *Os Sacramentos da Vida e a Vida dos Sacramentos*, 40. “Similarly,” adds Boff, “the struggle of a people for its liberation becomes a sacrament; labor unions which secured with sweat and blood the workers’ fundamental rights; the people from a given neighborhood who celebrate the public services installed in that place, such as school, medical assistance, electric power, and water [also become sacraments of the history of salvation].” (40)

¹¹⁷ *Os Sacramentos da Vida e a Vida dos Sacramentos*, 54.

¹¹⁸ *Os Sacramentos da Vida e a Vida dos Sacramentos*, 50. Boff’s rationale for the legitimacy of the seven sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church goes beyond the scope of the present dissertation. Those interested in the subject may check *Os Sacramentos da Vida e a Vida dos Sacramentos*, 55-59. It is worth noting to hear Boff admit that the Primitive Church had only two sacraments, namely, baptism and the Lord’s Supper (see *A nossa Ressurreição na Morte*, 52).

¹¹⁹ *Os Sacramentos da Vida e a Vida dos Sacramentos*, 10.

deviation, rather than a sym-bolic reality, through which it unites, recalls the past, and makes it present again.¹²⁰

At a given point Boff seems to realize that his sacramental theology can pose serious problems for his social project. After all, if everything in some way or other is God's sacrament, all social-economic systems would bear a measure of "sacramental density," to use Boff's terminology. The implications of this conclusion, which could create pressure points for Boff's rejection of capitalism, are addressed only *en passant* when he recognizes that "there are expressions that do not adequately reveal the mystery called God, but either reduce him to a mere thing or manipulate him by the use of human power."¹²¹ Despite this potential difficulty, Boff is optimistic about the benefits that the recovery of a sacramental view of reality would bring. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the emphasis on sacramentality, and the consequent valorization of the cosmos as God's creation, would not necessarily require a commitment to panentheism. An appropriate emphasis upon God's immanence would be enough to accomplish these ends, as my analysis of Nicholas Wolterstorff's social-ethics in chapter 5 will show.

The benefits that flow from the adoption of panentheism, particularly for the purpose of Boff's social program, appear so self-evident that he does not seem to be

¹²⁰ See *Os Sacramentos da Vida e a Vida dos Sacramentos*, 77-80. It is interesting to note Boff's critique of capitalism even in the development of his sacramental theology. While discussing the potentiality for the dia-bolic in the sacrament, Boff argues that an infiltration of the *capitalist spirit* may be observed in the sacramental universe. "There are," he says, "people who use all and every occasion to receive the sacrament, because they want to *accumulate* grace upon grace." *Os Sacramentos da Vida e a Vida dos Sacramentos*, 79 (emphasis mine).

¹²¹ *O Destino do Homem e do Mundo*, 92. While these articulations, adds Boff, are not outside of God, they do not allow God to be God.

disturbed by some potential theological problems that this commitment creates. I will discuss some of these problems in the next section.

Theological Problems

Panentheism, according to our heuristic definition, posits that God and cosmos relate to each other in such a way that “both constitute a symbiosis, i.e., they are part of one another, and will actualize this relation in a fuller way.”¹²² The two poles in the relation are God and cosmos. An analysis of the theological problems derived from Boff’s panentheism, I suggest, must flow from an investigation of these two loci, God and cosmos or God and man, for Boff considers man to be a micro-cosmos of the macro-cosmos.

God’s Being

The first theological problem concerning God is that he seems to become the object of some sort of *reductionism*. To explain what I mean by reductionism, it is necessary to recall a few aspects of Boff’s cosmology. According to Boff, the whole cosmos has emanated from God, and is on an evolutionary journey toward him. This process is not driven by chance but by God himself. At least two persons of the Trinity are explicitly mentioned in connection with this evolutionary journey, the Son, and the Spirit. Nevertheless, while the Son is mentioned in connection with the evolution of the cosmos, greater emphasis is placed on the action of the Spirit. The following rather lengthy quotation makes this plain:

¹²² See page 70.

The article of faith, “the Spirit is [the Lord and] giver of life” (*Dominus vivifans*), presupposes that He self-communicated himself personally to the universe. He surrendered himself completely and departed from himself to within his creation. Being within it *he then could assume various forms*, according to the various stages of the cosmogenic process. His presence makes itself noticeable through the vitality of all things—everything is pervaded, as we consider previously—, through the reality of life, [even] from the energies and most elementary particles. He announces himself by the differences of being and [different] expressions of complexity, of subjectivity, of interiority, of capacity for fellowship of each being, particularly the most complex ones.... He reveals himself as the engine of the cosmogenic process, as [the] arrow of time, full of purpose, and as convergency in the diversity.... [T]he Spirit participates in the avatars of creation. He does not stay distant from it. Because he assumed it [creation] from the beginning, and because he lives within it permanently, he rejoices with it, suffers with it, groans with the other creatures waiting for redemption and liberation.¹²³

What are the implications of stating that the Spirit *assumes various forms* in the different stages of the cosmogenesis? Boff seems to mean not only that the Spirit drives the process from the outside (transcendentally), but also from the inside, identifying himself with the energies that bring about the development of the cosmos. Some other statements appear to support this conclusion.¹²⁴ As far as I can tell, Boff never works out some of the potential questions arising from this identification of *spirit* and *Spirit*. Does God’s Spirit have different levels of consciousness? Does he voluntarily limit himself

¹²³ Boff, *Ecologia: Grito da Terra, Grito dos Pobres*, 258 (emphasis mine). “Avatar,” according to the *Webster’s New World Dictionary* means: 1. *Hinduism* a god’s coming down in bodily form to the earth; incarnation of a god; 2. Any incarnation or embodiment, as of a quality or concept in a person. As Boff uses the word in its plural form (avatars), it seems that he does not have in mind the incarnation of the Logos, but probably the fact that the evolutionary process, bringing to existence more complex forms of life, are incarnations of God himself in his creation.

¹²⁴ “We are plunged into a field of absolute Energy—the *Spiritus Creator*—that manifests itself in the energies of the universe and in our own vital and spiritual energy.” Boff, *Ecologia: Grito da Terra, Grito dos Pobres*, 259-260. In the same work, Boff refers to the gravitational, the electromagnetic, and the strong and weak nuclear forces as “the four basic interactions which preside over the whole evolutionary and cosmogenic process.... They do not refer to anything beyond themselves, before them, or under them.” Boff, *Ecologia: Grito da Terra, Grito dos Pobres*, 229.

when he participates in a rock's inner life? Does he allow himself more consciousness when he participates in the life of a plant or of an animal? Is God's Spirit the sum of all the various degrees of spirit? If this is so, would it be legitimate to say that God's spirit in all its relations to the so-called inanimate objects has voluntarily decided to experience a non-conscious life? Even if it is argued that God is more than each of these unilateral associations, since he is in fact the overall sum of the interconnections of all individual beings,¹²⁵ this still would not solve the problem just mentioned, since still he would still contain, even though indirectly, non-conscious levels of existence. These are some of the issues Boff would have to answer as a consequence of his willingness to identify God with impersonal physical forces/energies, a procedure that I have called reductionism.

A second theological issue related to God's being comes from Boff's claim that *God undergoes an ontological change as a consequence of his relation with the cosmos*. God, says Boff, "is immanent in the world, participates in the world's open process, reveals himself in it, and *enriches* himself with it."¹²⁶ If the last statement may be interpreted merely in relational and not ontological terms, some other assertions leave no room for doubt. Mary, argues Boff, was hypostatically united to the Third Person of the Trinity,¹²⁷ thus "anticipating the blessed end of all creation and unfolding the perspective

¹²⁵ As Thomas Finger notes, some process theologians maintain that "God is constituted by the interconnected network of identities that make up the universe, as apprehended through God's unique experience." "Trinity, Ecology and Panentheism," *Christian Scholar's Review* 27, number 1 (1997), 76. Nevertheless, it is not altogether clear whether Boff makes this claim.

¹²⁶ Boff, *Ecologia: Grito da Terra, Grito dos Pobres*, 227 (emphasis mine)

¹²⁷ Boff, *Ecologia: Grito da Terra, Grito dos Pobres*, 261. In Boff's own words, "The virgin Mary, mother of God and of men, actualizes the feminine in an absolute and eschatological form because the Holy Spirit makes her his temple, his tabernacle in such a real and true manner, that she must be considered as

of what will happen to each human person: to be able to shelter God, and, consequently, respect the differences between creature and Creator, unify themselves with God, i.e., be one with the Triune-God.”¹²⁸ I will not comment on the soteriological implications of Boff’s claim until a later section. At this point, however, my focus will be to investigate whether God’s being suffers any change as a consequence of his panentheist relation with the cosmos. Boff’s insistence that the differences between creature and creator are not ruled out in the cosmos’ eschatological unification with God does not seem sufficient to avoid a change in God’s being. The “pneumatification of all creation,” that is, the removal of all hindrances, will be the last step toward the accomplishment of a full symbiotic relation between God and the cosmos in which the latter will be hypostatically absorbed by the former. Only then, after this union, God will experience ultimate fulfillment, the theogenesis will have happened, God-fellowship will make himself all in all.¹²⁹ In pointing out *God’s ontological change as a consequence of his relation to the cosmos* as a problem raised by panentheism, it is appropriate to admit that classical theism faces a similar challenge with respect to the Mystery of Incarnation. Both the non-communication of Christ’s two natures, and the strict separation of the *opera ad-extra* from the *opera ad-intra* are theological efforts of dealing with a very complex issue whose discussion lies beyond the scope of this work.

hypostatically united to the Third Person of the most Holy Trinity.”

¹²⁸ Boff, *Ecologia: Grito da Terra, Grito dos Pobres*, 264.

¹²⁹ Boff, *Ecologia, Mundialização, Espiritualidade*, 152.

Cosmos-Man

The other pole of the symbiotic relation, cosmos (in general) or man (in particular), seems to generate further problems. Because the cosmos is permeated by spirit/Spirit and as such sustains a mutual relation with God, claims concerning its *divinization* are explicit. According to Boff, the cosmos is to be “venerated.”¹³⁰ This may sound like idolatry, to which both Scripture and the Christian tradition are opposed.¹³¹ Nevertheless, says Boff, divinization is not only the present condition of the cosmos and man; it is their ultimate *telos*; *both cosmos and man are destined to be divinized, to become divine*. Their ultimate vocation is to plunge into God’s living, i.e., to plunge into “an infinite process of self-actualization without loss, without entropy, a process which started at the beginning of the universe.” At that time, Boff adds, “the eternal history of an unlimited development and inexhaustible appropriation of the kingdom of the Trinity will be inaugurated.”¹³² Again, Boff’s insistence that the distinction between creature and Creator is to be preserved does not seem to prevent the whole cosmos, in general, and human beings, in particular, from suffering an ontological mutation, thus becoming something they were not before, and were not meant to be according to the Christian

¹³⁰ See *A Teologia da Libertação: Balanços e Perspectivas*, 128. “For the natives, work is the cooperation that human beings offer to Great Mother earth, since it is the earth which produces and provides everything. The earth is not, as the Western man supposes, a means of production, but [is] an extension of the living human body, a reality with divine characteristics. Because of that *it is venerable*; human beings form a deep mystic union with it.” Boff, *America Latina: Da Conquista à Nova Evangelização*, 37 (emphasis mine).

¹³¹ It must be recognized that the Roman Catholic doctrine technically distinguishes between veneration and worship. Although worship of nature would be considered an act of idolatry, its veneration would be acceptable. Whether this subtle theological distinction can be made by the simple believer is debatable.

¹³² Boff, *Ecologia: Grito dos Pobres, Grito da Terra*, 265.

tradition. Classical theism, on the other hand, pictures the future differently. The world, now groaning, will be redeemed at the end of history; new heavens and a new earth will become a reality. However, this new creation, this cosmogenesis if you will, entails neither the divinization of the cosmos nor its final absorption into God's being himself. An ontological distinction between God's being and the universe still remains when the *telos* will have fully come. What one can joyfully and hopefully expect is not an ontological fusion of Creator and creature, but the removal of all alien elements from God's originally good creation and which now frustrate an intimate relationship with him. To say with Scripture that God will be all in all (1 Corinthians 15:28) does not mean that a symbiotic relation between Creator and creatures will be fully achieved. What it means, rather, is that the hindrances for full fellowship will be totally and definitively removed.

Boff's eschatological picture of the relation between man/cosmos and God leads us to consider another theological issue associated with his panentheism, namely, his soteriology.

Soteriology: Universalism

I have noted above that Boff sees God not only as the One who generates, but also the One who permeates everything. In Boff's own words,

We can only speak meaningfully of God if He emerges from within man's experience in man's walk through life with others and with the world. Consequently, God never is nor can be thought of as beyond the world, or, what would be even worse, as outside the world.¹³³

¹³³ Boff, *Graça e Experiência Humana*, 60.

This explains why Boff conceives of all phenomena in the world as God's revelations and manifestations. To speak of a dichotomy between the natural and the supernatural is meaningless. The natural and the supernatural are not two orders of being. In fact, argues Boff, "the natural is always pervaded by the supernatural."¹³⁴ On the basis of this understanding of God's ontological relation with the world, Boff suggests that the entire world, more than anything else, is a symbol, a sacrament, a revealing sign of God, a "bridge" toward him.¹³⁵ The eyes of faith, therefore, Boff claims, see everything from God's point of view. Consequently, according to faith, "everything is grace."¹³⁶

Rather than producing a theoretical exposition of grace, Boff emphasizes upon the *experience* of grace in the world. It is in the world that man meets God and enters into relation with him. Behind objects, nature, people, social relations, and historical events, God is inviting man to meet and to have fellowship with him.

Boff deliberately distances himself from the traditional development of the doctrine of grace, which he sees as flawed by either cultural, biographical, or even social influences. In reference to biographical influences, Boff claims that the most important theologians who developed a doctrine of grace—Paul, Augustine, and Luther—had deep personal problems that were reflected in their theologies. Grace for them was understood as God's gift which helps man to restore a broken relation with God. The starting point of

¹³⁴ *Graça e Experiência Humana*, 71. He adds, "[i]t will never be possible to tell what in our experiences is 'natural' and what is 'supernatural,' because it is not possible, within life's concreteness, to distill in its pureness one and the other. When we think of all creation christologically, as we will do later, then it becomes clear that everything is soaked in the supernatural." *Graça e Experiência Humana*, 75.

¹³⁵ See *Graça e Experiência Humana*, 97.

¹³⁶ *Graça e Experiência Humana*, 97.

their theological development was a “deep existential pessimism.”¹³⁷ Boff, on the other hand, proposes to construe a flawless understanding of grace, one that starts with his own cultural context. Why Boff is confident that his own cultural context is immune from mistakes he does not explain.

Boff’s understanding of grace evidently does not suffer from any “existential pessimism.” In *Graça e Experiência Humana (Grace and Human Experience)*, he dismisses up front any idea of grace that is the necessary outcome of God’s offended righteousness. He does this in his Preface, entitled “Grace, the *daimon* of God”¹³⁸ Boff stresses that “[t]he experience of grace speaks of a dancing God, the eternal child who awakes in people and happenings, the joker who laughs at rigid morals.”¹³⁹ He likens God’s grace to a train which transports everybody speedily and gratuitously to his/her destiny. There is no way for anyone to flee from, jump off, or get out the train. It is true that, according to him, there is some degree of freedom within the train. Some can walk towards the last car, and have the impression that they are moving against the direction of the train. One can travel and either enjoy the landscape or complain about life and its pains. However, no matter how people react to the offering of grace, “the train remains running towards its appointed destiny, gently carrying all.”¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ *Graça e Experiência Humana*, 43.

¹³⁸ According to Boff, the Greeks used to call *daimon* the force which irrupts, produces enthusiasm, and makes a presence, a shining one. See *Graça e Experiência Humana*, 9.

¹³⁹ *Graça e Experiência Humana*, 9.

¹⁴⁰ *Graça e Experiência Humana*, 10-12. In *Brasa sob Cinzas*, Boff comes back to the same analogy, stressing: “God’s grace carries all like a train. God is the final destiny. The way itself is also God. The train carries even those who resist.” *Brasa sob Cinzas*, 124.

In fairness to Boff I must recognize that, even though there is a clear tendency toward universalism in his most recent works, where he explicitly embraces panentheism, in his earlier books he seems more inclined to admit the possibility of eternal damnation. For instance, in *A Nossa Ressurreição na Morte (Our Resurrection from Death)*, originally published in 1972, Boff argues that history will irreversibly end up in God, either for salvation or for total damnation.¹⁴¹ On an individual level, Boff adds that only in the moment of death, when one is finally free from all external conditioning, he/she will make a radical decision which will determine his/her eternal destiny.¹⁴² Boff identifies the point where man faces God and Christ as an ultimate crisis whose outcome will be either an act of total surrender or isolation from others. This decision, adds Boff,

causes a definitive rupture between time and eternity and man moves from earthly life to a life either of an intimate, face-to-face communion with God or of total frustration of his/her personality, also called hell.¹⁴³

Death opens a door to man which allows him/her to be him/herself. At that crucial moment, everyone will meet God and the Risen One face to face, even if he/she did not hear his name during his/her existence. Then, all will once more be offered the chance of becoming Christians, and of making a choice for God and for Christ.¹⁴⁴ At that moment,

¹⁴¹ *A Nossa Ressurreição na Morte*, 17.

¹⁴² *A Nossa Ressurreição na Morte*, 98. A similar claim is made in his 1973 *Vida para Além da Morte*, where Boff says: "Through his/her de-cision, made at the rupture of time and eternity, man determines forever his/her destiny. Until then, in life, he/she lived in the inevitable ambiguity of human condition [subject to all sorts of conditioning]... All this mediated his/her free decisions. Therefore, none of them, by themselves, could determine a happy or unhappy eternity." *Vida para Além da Morte*, 47.

¹⁴³ *A Nossa Ressurreição na Morte*, 98.

¹⁴⁴ *Vida para Além da Morte*, 47.

when all masks will be removed, all human beings will have a final chance to convert, to open themselves to the Absolute.¹⁴⁵

However, even in his earlier books, where Boff presents hell as a theoretical possibility to those who stubbornly reject God, he still seems inclined to universalism. In *Vida para Além da Morte*, in accordance with Roman Catholic doctrine,¹⁴⁶ he defends purgatory, as an instrument in the process of “man’s fully maturing before God.”¹⁴⁷

Elsewhere, he argues that,

all who respond with sincerity of heart constitute God’s people who comprise those from all peoples and religions, even atheists of good will who strive after truth and follow their conscience.¹⁴⁸

Therefore, it is not surprising that Boff appreciates the universal phenomenon of religious life as an evidence of God’s benevolent and salvific work.¹⁴⁹

In later works, Boff’s universalism is more outspoken. After all, God does not have a trash-can in which he disposes of all the things that did not work out. “By his mercy He is able to make, in one way or another, everything work out. For some at the beginning, for the great majority in the middle, and for all at the end.”¹⁵⁰ Boff’s emphasis

¹⁴⁵ *Vida para Além da Morte*, 50, 52, 95

¹⁴⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §§ 1030-1032.

¹⁴⁷ *Vida para Além da Morte*, 55-66. Therefore, he adds, “it is meaningful to pray for the dead in purgatory” *Vida para Além da Morte*, 63.

¹⁴⁸ *O Destino do Homem e do Mundo*, 78.

¹⁴⁹ *O Destino do Homem e do Mundo*, 165.

¹⁵⁰ *Brasa sob Cinzas*, 8.

on God's love and mercy seems to induce him to minimize the requirements of God's justice. Hence, Boff argues that the existence of hell would constitute God's eternal shame. While God's justice fills hell, he believes, God's mercy empties it.¹⁵¹

Boff's universalism does not seem to derive solely from his adoption of panentheism. His social awareness, or, in other words, his concern for the poor also seems to feed into his universalist approach. "God is the God of those who are not able to believe perhaps because their life has been too hard."¹⁵² In any case, some texts reveal more clearly that the traditional notions of salvation and heaven have given place to a new panentheist conception in Boff's theology. For instance, when in *Brasa sob Cinzas* he describes the tragic experience of a woman who loses her 22-year-old son, Duda, hit by a car on his way to College, he confidently states:

Finally, he is taken to be buried on the farm. It was Duda's last desire.... In the middle of the virgin forest there is an open spot. There are flowers, birds, butterflies, the symphony of the forest's inhabitants, in sum, the great cosmic community. He is going to be united to the great Pacha Mama from where he came. He is going to become cosmos, tree, sap, seed, flower, fruit, a new man risen in the heart of the universe where God has his home.¹⁵³

Another reason for Boff's universalism flows from his epistemology, but I will save the analysis of this aspect for the next chapter. At this point, I wish to return to

¹⁵¹ *Brasa sob Cinzas*, 51ff. Hell is said to be a projection to deal with the requirements of justice and linear logic. "Only a male-authoritarian representation of God the Father requires a definitive hell. Only religions and churches controlled by a patriarchal mentality posit the idea of hell." *Brasa sob Cinzas*, 56. Even if we have to pass through hell, argues Boff confidently, "mercy will prevail at the end." *Brasa sob Cinzas*, 67.

¹⁵² *Brasa sob Cinzas*, 24.

¹⁵³ *Brasa sob Cinzas*, 30.

another theological problem linked to Boff's adoption of panentheism, namely, the problem of evil.

The Problem of Evil

Evil represents an additional difficulty for Boff's panentheist cosmology, in two distinct aspects. First, in what concerns its *origin*. Second, in *its relationship with God* himself, given the symbiotic relation between God and the cosmos. Regarding the *origin* of evil, Boff argues that evil is an "original condition."¹⁵⁴ Or, in other words, evil is portrayed as a necessary part of the evolutionary process in which the whole cosmos is involved. In this process, he writes,

urges, therefore, to de-freeze both evil and the diabolic, thus putting them into motion, as part of a process. They both belong to the cosmogenesis and the anthropogenesis. They are original conditions of the evolution.¹⁵⁵

Since God both generated and carries on the evolutionary process, according to Boff, there seems to be no other option than to attribute the existence of evil to God's direct causality and not merely to his permission, as classical theism argues. This conclusion, however, does not seem to be a cause of concern for Boff, since he departed from the classical understanding of evil to adopt one more in conformity with his panentheism. Evil, Boff argues in his 1980-*Teologia do Cativo e da Libertação* (*Theology of Captivity and Liberation*), "does not arise primarily from depraved acts that

¹⁵⁴ In *A Águia e a Galinha*, Boff states: "From the cosmogenic and dynamic perspective, evil is an original condition. The all-creative-force has brought into existence the most diverse beings, all provisionally incomplete. They are all ensnared in the intrinsic need of overcoming several stages until they reach their potential plenitude." *A Águia e a Galinha*, 79.

¹⁵⁵ *O Despertar da Águia*, 20. By the "diabolic," Boff means the inclination to separate, alienate (see *O Despertar da Águia*, 12).

man may commit, thus creating a history of sin in the world.”¹⁵⁶ Rather, evil is originally a metaphysical reality, an ontological state “linked to the mystery of creation,”¹⁵⁷ and as such independent of any human act, or of any created moral being’s action. Boff explains what he means by metaphysical evil in these terms:

By the fact of being created, the world is limited, contingent, dependent, separated, and different from God. It is not God, and therefore, is decadent, and imperfect, no matter how great its created perfection; it is never God’s perfection; before Him it is always imperfect.¹⁵⁸

This metaphysical evil, he adds, is “a necessary evil,” “the conscious finitude of the world.”¹⁵⁹ Or, as he puts it even more plainly: “Evil consists in being separated from God, *in not being God, in being creature, in living, therefore, the absence of God.*”¹⁶⁰ It is not difficult to see how this definition is linked to Boff’s panentheism, particularly to his soteriological developments presented above, in which salvation is understood as ultimately entailing the “totality of the world in God.”¹⁶¹

Metaphysical evil is the ground of actual evil which has a certain dynamic, an historical element, a structural characteristic. Regarding the question, what is behind (actual) evil?, Boff appeals to Scripture and answers: a spiritual being, *Satan*, the one

¹⁵⁶ Boff, *Teologia do Cativo e da Libertação*, 161.

¹⁵⁷ Boff, *Teologia do Cativo e da Libertação*, 162.

¹⁵⁸ Boff, *Teologia do Cativo e da Libertação*, 162.

¹⁵⁹ Boff, *Teologia do Cativo e da Libertação*, 162.

¹⁶⁰ Boff, *Teologia do Cativo e da Libertação*, 162 (Boff’s emphasis, not mine).

¹⁶¹ Boff, *Teologia do Cativo e da Libertação*, 119.

responsible for lies, hatred, illness, and death. Whether this being should be understood as a myth or a real being, Boff does not say.¹⁶² But where he does speak clearly is when he discusses the concrete manifestation of evil in contemporary society. In our days, “the Evil One that offends God and humbles man appears as a social elitist system characterized by collective egotism and lack of care for the poverty of the great majority.”¹⁶³ It has a name, he says:

The Capitalism of private property, and the Capitalism of State. In the name of profit, privileges, and strengthening of the State, people are kept terrified, many are put in jail, tortured or killed. 2/3 of the population are kept under legions of demons of hunger, illness, family dissolution, lack of homes, schools, and hospitals. This Evil has its own seductions, and subtly penetrates [human] mentality, making the human heart insensitive to the structural iniquities it produces.¹⁶⁴

This statement anticipates Boff’s vehement repudiation of capitalism which will be the object of analysis in chapter 5. Now I would like to turn my attention to a second aspect of the problem, namely, *evil’s relationship to God* himself. As far as I can tell, Boff does not deal with this specific implication of his commitment to panentheism. Given the symbiotic relation between God and cosmos, the presence of evil in the world might be expected to affect God’s being. Thomas Finger raises the question as follows, “if the cosmos is part of God’s being, and if evil exists in the cosmos, then—simple logic seems to show—evil is part of God.”¹⁶⁵ While in classic theism, floods, hurricanes, tornadoes,

¹⁶² Boff, *O Pai Nosso: A Oração da Libertação Integral*, 8th ed. (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1998), 138.

¹⁶³ Boff, *O Pai Nosso*, 142-143.

¹⁶⁴ Boff, *O Pai Nosso*, 143.

¹⁶⁵ Thomas Finger, “Trinity, Ecology and Panentheism,” 86.

and other natural phenomena are considered to happen only by God's permission—since he ultimately transcends the cosmos—the straight identification of this world with God's body rules out this alternative. Perhaps the notion of *perichoresis*—the emphasis on intimate fellowship, while preserving ontological identity—would help Boff to avoid the problem of a direct association of evil with God's being, since God and the world would still have their ontological identity preserved in spite of their symbiotic relation. But, would not *perichoresis* demand the interpenetration of God and evil? How could this interpenetration take place without affecting God's being? To these difficult questions arising from embracing pantheism Boff seems to have no answer, at least in the bibliographical sources consulted.

Conclusion

Boff's commitment to pantheism is beyond doubt. His recent candid commitment to this cosmological perspective makes explicit what was already implied in his earlier theological career. Boff's defense of the universe's pan-relatedness in his ecological works flows from his adoption of panpsychism, his belief in the pervading presence of spirit in creation. Indeed, Boff not only embraces panpsychism but also pantheism, a fact that has been substantiated by his interchangeable use of the terms spirit/Spirit. The evolutionary journey in which the whole cosmos is involved reveals another characteristic of Boff's pantheism, for which he is indebted to Teilhard de Chardin. God is presented not only as the origin and the very end of this ascending process, but also as the one who participates in it. God himself is in the process of becoming what he aims to be. Only at the very end of this journey will the theogenesis

happen. God will finally be fulfilled and the symbiotic relation he bears with the cosmos will be fully actualized.

Boff's panentheist cosmology is carefully distinguished from pantheism by his appeal to the concept of *perichoresis*, which, so Boff argues, allows for God's and the universe's mutual interpenetration without the surrender of their ontological identities. In this chapter I have argued that the advantages Boff envisions as resulting from his embrace of panentheism are primarily related to his social ethics, though he also claims some religious-theological advantages. These advantages, however, are superseded by the theological problems arising from Boff's commitment to panentheism: God's being becomes subject to a kind of reductionism as well as to an ontological change as a consequence of his symbiotic relation to the cosmos. This relation raises complex issues concerning the problem of evil, thus rendering the development of a theodicy a very difficult task. On the other hand, the cosmos assumes a divine character as a consequence of its symbiotic relation with God, thus ultimately requiring its veneration by human beings, something that is alien to Scripture and tradition. Boff's commitment to panentheism also seems to be co-responsible for a soteriological development that ultimately leads to universalism.

A recovery of the doctrine of divine immanence in combination with a neo-Calvinist development in socio-economic ethics, I believe, would achieve Boff's goals in social ethics. It would have the additional advantage of avoiding the theological problems mentioned above.

CHAPTER FOUR

A CONSTRUAL AND CRITIQUE OF BOFF'S EPISTEMOLOGY

Introduction

Leonardo Boff does not have a specific work in which he develops his epistemology. Epistemological statements, however, are scattered throughout especially some of his most recent books. An evaluation of his epistemology, therefore, will first of all require that we gather such statements and organize them systematically.

Initial contact with Leonardo Boff's rejection of the human ability to grasp ultimate reality may suggest to the reader that Boff is committed to anti-realism, a position which would undermine both his social-ethics and his theology. An effort will be made, therefore, to investigate whether Boff is an anti-realist. Some of Boff's epistemological claims will be evaluated against the background of a standard definition of anti-realism. This will reveal that Boff is definitely not a complete skeptic. Rather, he is a moderate or a weak realist who, while admitting the existence of reality even to the point of including the imaginary and the fantastic within it, also acknowledges the limits of the human ability to know such reality. These limits come primarily from two features of Boff's ontology considered in chapter 3, namely, the cosmos' evolutionary process toward God, cosmogenesis, and the complexity of the universe resulting from his panentheism.

Given its complexity, reality always presents itself as being dual in nature. Boff claims that our grasp of reality demands the adoption of the principle of complementarity. This principle will help us to acquire as much knowledge of reality as possible from distinct and even contrary contributions.

While ultimate knowledge of reality is not possible at this stage of the evolutionary process, still some true, yet partial, knowledge is possible.

First, the epistemological resources Boff believes we must tentatively appeal to, such as pathos, openness to the feminine, myths and legends, utopia, dialogical logic, mysticism, and the epistemologically privileged position of the poor, will be presented and discussed.

Second, the consideration of these epistemological resources will be followed by an analysis of the implications of Boff's ontological-epistemological principles not only for his religion and theology, but also for his ethics. This analysis will reveal that Boff's commitment to the principle of complementarity leads him to a position somewhere between Christian inclusivism and pluralism in soteriology. If one would expect Boff to adopt the same principle of complementarity on moral issues, however, Boff surprises his reader by his appeal to an intuited universal ethical principle by which different moralities are to be judged.

Third, Boff's own commitment to the principle of complementarity is the reason for presenting an alternative epistemological proposal, namely, Nicholas Wolterstorff's Reformed epistemology. Wolterstorff is an interesting dialogue partner for Boff. Several parts of Wolterstorff's program match Boff's own concerns. Wolterstorff's suspicion of

reason revealed in his rejection of strong foundationalism, his appraisal of perspectival learning as the foundation for dialogue within the academy, his strong interest in the dialogue between theology and science, as well as his interest in socio-economic ethics, all reveal some overlapping with Boff's proposal. One fundamental belief from which Boff could benefit comes from Wolterstorff's strong commitment to metaphysical realism. This belief will be the object of our consideration.

Nevertheless, even if Boff is not willing to make a full commitment to realism, Wolterstorff's socio-economic ethics remains a reasonable option, and Boff's adoption of the principle of complementarity will demand his attention to Wolterstorff's contribution. A thorough investigation and comparison of both Boff's and Wolterstorff's socio-economic ethics must wait till chapter 5.

A Standard Definition of Realism

An analysis of Simon Blackburn's entry on "realism/anti-realism" in *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* reveals that providing a comprehensive yet accurate definition of realism (and by implication of anti-realism) is no easy task. According to Blackburn,

a realist about a subject-matter S may hold: (i) that the kinds of things described by S exist; (ii) that their existence is independent of us, or not an artifact of our minds, or our language or conceptual scheme; (iii) that the statement we make in S are not reducible to other kinds of statement, revealing them to be about some different subject-matter; (iv) that the statements we make in S have truth conditions, being straightforward descriptions of aspects of the world and made true or false by facts in the world; (v) that we are able to attain truths about S, and that it is appropriate to fully believe things we claim in S."¹

¹ Simon Blackburn, "realism/anti-realism," *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 319-320.

Skeptics, adds Blackburn, either deny (i) or deny our right to affirm (i). Conceptualists and idealists deny (ii). Reductionists deny (iii). Instrumentalists and projectivists deny (iv). And constructive empiricists deny (v).²

While a full commitment to any of these philosophical schools could be characterized as anti-realism, a more nuanced rejection of some specific features of realism would entail the commitment to some version of weak realism. This, I believe, is the position of Leonardo Boff and I will make a case for this view in the coming sections, following Blackburn's categories.³

Leonardo Boff's Epistemology

Is Boff a Skeptic? Is There Reality At All?

"[T]here is no reality in itself..." Boff claims at a given point in his critique of materialist realism.⁴ This isolated statement and Boff's insistent suspicion of the human noetic ability to grasp reality may lead one to wonder whether Boff believes there is a reality at all to be grasped.⁵ Nevertheless, close reading of his works reveals that he is not a total skeptic. It is possible, for instance, to dissipate any suspicion of Boff's embracing

² See Blackburn, *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, 320.

³ I will not consider the third category of Blackburn's definition, namely, reductionism, since Boff's writings do not fit into this category.

⁴ *Saber Cuidar*, 24

⁵ I will explore this point later when evaluating whether the fifth point of Blackburn's definition applies to Boff. At this point, a single quotation is enough to stress Leonardo Boff's suspicion of man's capability of attaining ultimate truth about reality: "The more we are able to know a concrete thing using several resources (emotional, mythical, intuitive, holistic) the more we realize that there are still other sides to consider, other perspectives to grasp." *Mística e Espiritualidade*, 14.

skepticism simply by appealing to *A Águia e a Galinha* (*The Eagle and the Chicken*), where he beautifully draws his dialectical understanding of the human condition from a metaphor first told by James Aggrey.⁶ According to this metaphor, a man from the country once went to a nearby forest to catch a bird to raise at his home. He managed to catch a baby eagle, and put it in the chicken coop with the other chickens. The eagle was raised like any other chicken, eating corn and chicken-feed. After five years, the man was visited by a naturalist who spotted the eagle among the chickens, and was puzzled by this awkward situation. When asked about it, the man simply argued that the eagle was not an eagle anymore; having been raised as a chicken, it had become a chicken like all the others. The naturalist's answer, used by both Aggrey and Boff in their own contexts, was straightforward: "No. It is and it will always be an eagle, since it has an eagle's heart. And one day this heart will make it soar like an eagle."⁷ Boff repeatedly stresses the same idea in parallel contexts: "It is and it will always be an eagle."⁸ This conclusion reveals that, according to Boff, it does not matter how distorted one's perception of reality may be, the essential nature of things is not affected by his misconception. In other words, for

⁶ James Aggrey, from Ghana, an African country located in the Guinea Gulf, believed that in order to free his country, it was first necessary to free the people's consciousness. He, says Boff, nourished feelings of solidarity among his fellow Ghana-citizens. Aggrey was not able to see Ghana's liberation from England which happened only a generation later under Kwame N'Krumah (see *A Águia e a Galinha*, 24-25).

⁷ *A Águia e a Galinha*, 31. Both Aggrey and Boff use the metaphor to claim that human beings, in spite of being like eagles, created in God's image to reach the heights, have been convinced by evil social-systems that they are only chickens, and as such have lived within the limits of the chicken-coop, whereas they were born to fly.

⁸ Boff, *A Águia e a Galinha*, 31, 60, 61, 62, 63, 135, 137.

Boff, a flawed epistemology does not compromise ontology, what or how things ultimately are.⁹ Evidently, he is not a skeptic.

Is Boff a Conceptualist? Reality: Dependent upon the Observer

According to Blackburn, conceptualists and idealists deny that reality is independent of us; rather, they say, it is an *artifact of our minds, or of our language, or of our conceptual scheme*. While Leonardo Boff does not seem to endorse this *last* clause, he is inclined to reject the idea that reality exists independently from the observer. Because of some of his statements I am reticent to affirm beyond a doubt that Boff does *not* understand reality as a construal of the human mind. For instance, when he develops a harsh criticism of the philosophical system that underlies the technical-scientific enterprise, which he labels materialist realism, he states:

Today the bells toll over materialist realism. Quantum physics has demonstrated the deep interconnection of everything with everything, and the indestructible link between reality and observer: *there is no reality in itself, disconnected from the mind who thinks it; both are dimensions of the same and complex reality.*¹⁰

Perhaps Boff only intended to say that our *apprehension* of reality always involves some subjectivity, a claim he also makes elsewhere.¹¹ Nevertheless, the claim that “there

⁹ While an exploration of Boff’s social ethics is reserved for the next chapter, it seems appropriate to note at this point that, according to him, social structures are fundamentally responsible for distorting our perception of reality. In other words, to use Aggrey’s metaphor, social structures—and particularly capitalism—are responsible for having eagles raised as mere chickens. Human beings, with extraordinary potentialities for development, are restricted and limited by unjust social structures imposed upon them.

¹⁰ Boff, *Saber Cuidar*, 24 (emphasis mine).

¹¹ In *O Despertar da Águia*, Boff makes clear that apprehension of reality always involves subjectivity: “Each one has a proper name, a description of oneself, because each one represents a point where the evolutionary process ends, and synthesizes itself. Because humans are speaking, reflexive, and self-aware, each one makes a non-repetitive, unique, singular synthesis from everything he/she grasps, feels,

is no reality in itself, disconnected from the mind who thinks it” seems very strong for the purpose of merely emphasizing this subjectivity. In any case, even if reality is not a mere construal of the human mind, it seems evident that, according to Boff, reality is not independent from the human observer. In *A Águia e a Galinha (The Eagle and the Chicken)*, for instance, when arguing about the dual structure of (physical) reality, he states:

All the atomic and sub-atomic particles present a dual behavior. Either they behave as material particles, with their mass actualized at a given specific point within space, or they behave as waves that spread like spectrums in all directions. *The human observer is intimately inserted into this entire process in such a way that he helps determine the nature of the phenomena.* If he decides to grasp [capture] waves, he effectively grasps [captures] waves. If, conversely, he wants to grasp [capture] particles, he infallibly grasps [captures] particles.... Niels Bohr suggested the principle of complementarity between the particle and the wave, as [a/the] key [foundational] to understand *reality as a whole*. Even though they may seem contradictory, both the behavior of wave and of particle complement each other. Paradox belongs to the universe’s dynamic. Everything is complementary.¹²

The context of the above passage makes clear that Boff is not merely providing an account of Bohr’s defense of complementarity. Instead, he is presenting his own view of the universe’s structure, a view for which he is confessedly indebted to Bohr. Both Boff

understands, and loves. From both the materials stored in his/her collective sub-consciousness and from those gathered in his/her consciousness, he/she builds up a reading and appreciation that only he/she, and no one else can make.” *O Despertar da Águia*, 127. In *A Águia e a Galinha*, he also states: “Each one reads with the eyes he/she has. And [he/she] interprets from where the feet stand. All point of view is the view from one point. In order to understand, how someone reads, it is necessary to know how his/her eyes are, and what is his/her vision of the world.... To comprehend, it is essential to know the social place of the one who looks. It means to say: how one lives, with whom he/she lives together, what experiences he/she has, in what he/she works, what desires he/she has, how he/she faces the dramas of life and death, and what hopes encourage him/her. This makes comprehension always an interpretation.” *A Águia e a Galinha*, 9.

¹² *A Águia e a Galinha*, 80, 81(emphasis mine).

and Bohr maintain that observer (subject) and observed phenomena (object) cannot be detached from each other, and that the former influences the latter in the observation process.¹³

The intrinsic connection, even inter-dependence, between reality and observer is also stressed in Boff's critique of materialist realism referred to above. In that context, he argues:

This philosophy is called *realism* because it imagines realities as existing as [detached] objects, independent from the subject that observes them. In fact, *they are not independent*. There is neither object without subject nor subject without object. There is a *sacred unity of reality* which, like in a game, always includes all as participants and never as mere spectators.¹⁴

Boff does not spell out whether he is merely talking about physical realities or about reality in general, including spiritual and moral realities. There is evidence that what he has in mind includes the latter alternatives.¹⁵ To understand the potential implications of Boff's claim, let us assume for a moment that he is talking about physical realities and arguing that they are not independent from human observation. What exactly

¹³ See section on Niels Bohr, chapter 2, pages 51 ff. There, appealing to Honner, I have shown that Niels Bohr's philosophy of science is based on a foundational epistemological claim: "We are simultaneously actors as well as spectators on the great stage of life." Honner, *The Description of Nature*, 1. Bohr's way of thinking, adds Honner, offers us an epistemological lesson: "how our usual framework for the description of nature (constructed on causality, space-time, and strong objectivity) is superseded by the more *general framework of complementarity in which subject and object are less sharply separated*." *The Description of Nature*, 2. The noetic process through which human beings can achieve some knowledge of reality occurs, according to Bohr, by participation rather than some sort of distant abstraction. See Honner, *The Description of Nature*, 68. I will discuss later in this chapter why blurring the line between observer and observed phenomena entails complementarity.

¹⁴ Boff, *Saber Cuidar*, 23.

¹⁵ Later in the same passage, Boff writes: "This realism [the philosophical system Boff is criticizing] is somewhat realist since it reduces the scope of reality by not including in it the phenomena of subjectivity, consciousness, life, and spirituality." *Saber Cuidar*, 23.

does that mean? Before entering the library to write this chapter, I parked my car in a parking spot close to the entrance door. Is the fact that my car is parked there right now dependent in some degree on my or someone else's observation? Common sense dictates that it is still there whether observed or not. Boff's claim, however, seems to require that the existence of my car depends on its being observed. Perhaps, returning to a previous consideration, Boff only wants to stress that our participation in reality is such that the possibility of a detached, objective observation is impossible. In any case, his insistence upon the interdependence of *realities* and observer requires from us that we describe his philosophical standpoint as a weak, halfhearted, or participatory realism. Of course, were he committed to the idea that reality is nothing but an artifact of our minds, he would be a full-blooded anti-realist. In that case his social project would be flawed and undermined by an internal inconsistency. After all, how can one make universal, warranted moral claims about socio-economic issues if reality in general—either physical, social, or even moral—is nothing but a construal of human imagination? Boff, however, seems committed to some version of weak realism, a participatory or perspectival realism if one wills, thus apparently avoiding what would be a dilemma for his social-project.

Is Boff a Projectivist? The Imaginary and the Fantastic as Part of Reality

According to Blackburn, instrumentalists and projectivists deny that the statements we make about reality “are straightforward descriptions of aspects of the world and made true or false by facts in the world.” Does Leonardo Boff fall into this category? In the preface of *Brasa sob Cinzas (Burning Coal under Ashes)*, a collection of stories and thoughts rooted in the author's own experience, Boff excuses himself for arguing that

the imaginary also belongs to reality, in fact to its best part.¹⁶ He does not define what he means by the imaginary, but adds a statement which may help us realize what such a definition should include. According to Boff, a common conviction underlies all those stories:

it persists in each one of us, a little of paradise lost; the rustling of angel wings continues to be heard in the heart; the sym-bolic, despite all the power of the dia-bolic, emerges over and over again in our life and fills it with meaning.¹⁷

It seems that for Boff the imaginary refers to a reality which cannot be grasped by the physical senses. Spiritual truths, past and present—paradise lost and angels—, and moral categories—the symbolic and the diabolic—seem to belong to this metaphysical realm. The important question here is whether or not our statements about the spiritual and moral truths which comprise this realm Boff calls the imaginary are straightforward descriptions? While Boff does not offer an answer, the appeal to imagine these realities may suggest a negative answer.

In the same work Boff also claims that the fantastic belongs to what is real.¹⁸ Again Boff does not offer a definition of what he means by the term. The context in which he introduces this claim, however, may help us to understand what he has in mind.

¹⁶ *Brasa sob Cinzas*, 7.

¹⁷ *Brasa sob Cinzas*, 7. The symbolic, Boff says elsewhere, “comes from *symbolleîn* or *symbollesthai*. Literally, it means to throw things in such a way that they remain together. In a complex process, it means to re-unite realities, to join them from different directions, thus making diverse forces to converge into one single strand.” On the other hand, the diabolic “comes from *dia-balleîn*. Literally, it means to throw things inordinately, without direction... Dia-bolic, as one may see, is the sym-bolic’s opposite. It is everything that separates and opposes.” *O Despertar da Águia*, 11-12.

¹⁸ “The fantastic belongs to the real. And what is real always shows itself in some way.” *Brasa sob Cinzas*, 86.

Boff comes to the conclusion about the fantastic in the context of embracing a tree, an experience briefly described in chapter 3. Suddenly, he was not himself anymore. He was “pure, cosmic and vital energy.” He translates this experience by simply saying: “The tree was me, and I was the tree.” His awareness of this symbiotic relation suddenly became clear. Trees, suggests Boff, “like women, love to be seduced by beautiful words and enchanting tunes. But they only surrender, as do women, when they feel that the words are not spoken to seduce but to create fellowship and tenderness.”¹⁹ While Boff whispered to the tree with growing tenderness, it started to express itself in a way that only the language of fellowship is able to interpret:

Its leaves all started to move. Slowly at first; later with more frenzy. Finally, it was an ocean of leaves moving like waves... At last, it was the whole crown of the tree moving itself forward, backward, in a circle, thus showing that it was expressing great joy.... Then [a] wonderful thing happened. The tree covered itself with flowers. At first white, then pink, yellow, orangish, red. Finally... all colors, multi-colored. I repeated to it: ‘Dear little sister, *dimmi tutto*, say everything, every tiny thing, speak of yourself, reveal you presence, surrender you mystery. Then, the flowers started to fall as a fall of broken suns, gold, and silver.... I closed my eyes to see better. I remained that way for a long time. The tree started to grow within me. I was flooded with the perfume of flowers and the taste of many fruits. I was not myself. I myself was the leaves which smiled, the flowers which irrupted, the fruits which exploded. Once more I was the tree.²⁰

It is this remarkable experience that leads Boff to conclude: “the fantastic belongs to the real. And what is real always reveals itself somehow.”²¹ What does he mean by the

¹⁹ *Brasa sob Cinzas*, 84.

²⁰ *Brasa sob Cinzas*, 84-85.

²¹ *Brasa sob Cinzas*, 86.

fantastic? The metaphysical experience of becoming one with the tree? The physical effects of that ecstatic experience? Boff does not offer an answer; but, it seems legitimate to conclude that, for him, the fantastic is that part of reality which, while transcending the physical realm, is able to affect it, and may be grasped if the appropriate epistemological resources are used. Nevertheless, the important point to make is that Boff's description of reality includes at least elements that are made neither true nor false by facts in the world.²²

In summary, reality, both physical and metaphysical, exists, but its pure apprehension seems to be impossible given the intrinsic connection that exists between observed phenomena and observer. This is not the only factor, however, that imposes limits on the human ability to know reality. There are some additional factors which we will consider next in connection with the fifth category of Blackburn's definition.

Is Boff a Constructive Empiricist? Limits on the Human Ability to Know Reality

Blackburn affirms that constructive empiricists deny "that we are able to attain truths about reality, and that it is appropriate to fully believe things we claim in S." At least two correlated factors related to Boff's ontology are co-responsible for imposing

²² For instance, Boff did *not* become the tree, or part of the tree despite his identification with it. His statement should not be considered as a straightforward description of what happened, but as an expression of a personal ecstatic experience whose source(s) cannot be identified.

limits upon the human ability to know reality, namely, the evolutionary process in which the whole cosmos is involved, and the universe's complexity (or *pan*-relatedness).²³

I have already noted in chapter 3 that Boff envisions the whole cosmos as evolving toward God, its ultimate goal. All of history is portrayed as a dialectical process ascending and converging toward God.²⁴ The logic according to which the whole universe carries on this process is a continuous "organizing-disorganizing-interacting-restructuring-new organizing process."²⁵ There is no static equilibrium, but an endless and dynamic process in progress.²⁶ Boff describes his conception of this dynamic process as follows:

Everything is in permanent and open process, striving toward a dynamic equilibrium. This is why we speak justifiably of cosmogenesis, and of anthropogenesis, i.e., the genesis of the cosmos, and of the human being. They still are in the process of birth. They have not been born yet. They are not perfect but perfectible. This process, insofar as it advances, tends to create more and more diversity and consequently to reinforce complexity.²⁷

I will refer to complexity later; my focus here is the evolutionary process. In this connection, two important additional observations must be made. First, the range which Boff is willing to include in this picture. The evolutionary process, with its pattern of

²³ I refer to them as correlated because, according to Boff, complexity is also a consequence of the evolutionary process.

²⁴ See chapter 3, page 81 ff.

²⁵ "The logic of the universe and of all existing beings is this: organization-disorganization-interaction-restructuring-new organization. There is never a static equilibrium, but always a dynamic [one], ever in progress." *O Despertar da Águia*, 19.

²⁶ See *O Despertar da Águia*, 19.

²⁷ *A Águia e a Galinha*, 77-78.

order-disorder-new order, is present in all areas, “in fields of energy, in atoms, in galaxies, in biological systems, in human societies, in cultures, and in persons.”²⁸ Second, the observer is also part of this ongoing process, and not a stable point of accurate observation. Consequently, the observer is never able to make purely detached, objective observations.

This ontological perspective has an important epistemological implication. Since so far the true nature of things has not been fully actualized, truth does not consist only in what *is*, but mainly in what *will be*.²⁹ Final truth is reserved only for the *eschaton*. As Boff puts it, “[t]he evolutionary process presupposes a perfectible universe, open, and still unfinished. The true nature of things has not been actualized yet. It is being actualized as the process evolves.”³⁰ Consequently, we, human beings, are not currently able to grasp ultimate truth, or to make final assertions about reality.³¹

²⁸ *A Águia e a Galinha*, 78.

²⁹ *Vida para Além da Morte*, 143.

³⁰ *A Águia e a Galinha*, 125.

³¹ This conclusion is also corroborated by these statements: “Intelligence which on earth is attacked for being an unquenchable thirst for seeing and knowing, but which sees itself as always limited, skimming only the surface of things, now [after death] can celebrate the ecstasy of its full light, freed from every hindrance. All is there, seen from its core, evident in the heart of all things and of the cosmos.” *Vida para Além da Morte*, 41. “Life is dialectical... our understanding of things and of men is opaque, occupying itself with externalities.” *Vida para Além da Morte*, 69. “If all things, human beings and human formulations, are open to something more and full of hope, then truth—to use Ernst Bloch’s fortunate formulation—does not consist only in what is, but mainly in what is not, but still will be.” *Vida para Além da Morte*, 143. Nevertheless, while incapable of fully grasping reality, human consciousness characterizes itself “by the capacity of making an image of the totality of reality, and by feeling inhabited for an infinite desire... [Human] consciousness can foresee the end of the evolutionary process. In the imagination’s dreams and projections, it foresees the perfection and the full actualization of the potentialities of creation. It dreams of the human diving into the unsearchable ocean of Being. It has the ability to jump over time and the current process, and out of itself to the evolution’s last climax.” *A Águia e a Galinha*, 126-127. I will come back to the epistemological resources human consciousness must appeal to later on in this chapter.

I also mentioned in chapter 3 that *pan*-relatedness or complexity is another feature of the universe as Boff sees it. His panentheism provides the foundation for seeing reality as a network of entities and events intrinsically connected to each other. spirit/Spirit is present everywhere and is the common link that interweaves all reality. Therefore, “nothing is isolated [from everything else], existing solitarily in and for itself. Rather, everything co-exists and inter-exists with all other beings in the universe.”³² Consequently, entities and events should never be seen as discrete, but as part of a larger, indeed universal network whose laws of interaction are far beyond our ability to grasp fully.³³

In *O Rosto Materno de Deus (The Maternal Face of God)*, a discussion of the relevance of the feminine as a theological category to convey knowledge of God, Boff introduces a chapter by focusing on the basic epistemological hindrances concerning the feminine. However, the reading of his section entitled “epistemological note” indicates that those epistemological hindrances do not refer exclusively to the knowledge of the feminine but to knowledge of reality in general.³⁴ Boff’s exposition is fairly short, but helpful. He identifies seven epistemological principles that frame his (and any other’s) reflection.

³² Boff, *A Águia e a Galinha*, 72. “The centrality of the new perception consists in realizing the complexity of reality.” Boff, *Nova Era: A Civilização Planetária*, 27.

³³ “Any reality composed of interconnected and interacting parts is complex and produces a dynamic and open system that is always open to new syntheses.” Boff, *A Águia e a Galinha*, 75.

³⁴ In his exposition of the first epistemological hindrance—to know is always to represent the real—Boff states: “We accede to the real—in this case to the feminine—not with a naked eye, but with glasses that we inherited from the past and from the culture.” Boff, *O Rosto Materno de Deus: Ensaio Interdisciplinar sobre o Feminino e suas Formas Religiosas*, 7th ed. (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1998), 38.

First, *to know is always to represent the real*. Our grasp of reality is made with glasses we inherited from the past and from the culture in which we live. We all possess concepts and pre-concepts that are prior to any new knowledge we acquire. Therefore, so Boff concludes, “to know is always to interpret either for or against our prior knowledge.”³⁵ The possibility of a simple reading of the real is dismissed as ingenuity.

Second, *to know is always to construe the object of knowledge*. It is necessary to distinguish between the real object and the object of knowledge. “Our knowledge,” Boff writes, “is always filtered through models, paradigms, formulas, mental constructions, and ideals through which we grasp the real...”³⁶ In summary, we always have a mediate, never an immediate, knowledge of reality.

Third, *our knowledge is always proximate*. Since we always access reality within the framework of our constructions, our knowledge is always proximate; it is never absolute. “The object (in the case the feminine),” affirms Boff, “is always unreachable. Each approach defines its object according to its own presuppositions, according to the questions it asks and the procedure it follows.”³⁷

Fourth, *knowledge is always historical*. Knowledge is always fitted into a specific temporal-spatial framework; it arises out of a class interest, and is construed with instruments characteristic of a historical moment.³⁸

³⁵ Boff, *O Rosto Materno de Deus*, 38.

³⁶ Boff, *O Rosto Materno de Deus*, 38.

³⁷ Boff, *O Rosto Materno de Deus*, 38-39.

³⁸ Boff, *O Rosto Materno de Deus*, 39.

Fifth, *the tendency of knowledge is to transcend the idea*. Knowledge aims at going beyond the theoretical construal and at achieving the real as it exists in itself. This goal, however, is never fully accomplished. The effort toward grasping of reality is made through experience and experimentation. Experimentation, in turn, is controlled by theoretical formulations. Hence, the effort to achieve knowledge is an interaction between the rational and the real. Boff describes this interaction as follows:

The tendency of knowledge is not to remain in the mediate (idea, theory), but to provide a meeting with the real. Hence, it is permanently driven to experimentation and requires an experience. This [experience] never happens pure and simple, but is framed by the boundaries of a construal, while it also frees itself from them and allows a richer access to the real through new construals.³⁹

Sixth, *[We] must think what we know*. Reason and philosophy are instruments to help us to think responsibly what we know. Nevertheless, as later sections will show, they are neither the only, nor the final epistemological resources available to us.

Seventh, *it is possible to think all knowledge from (out of) the absolute mystery called God*. This is the task of theology and “presupposes the rupture of faith.”⁴⁰

The ontological and epistemological principles set forth above reveal that, although Boff cannot be considered a constructive empiricist, he rejects the idea that we are able to attain *ultimate* truths about reality. In other words, rather than an anti-realist,

³⁹ Boff, *O Rosto Materno de Deus*, 39.

⁴⁰ Boff, *O Rosto Materno de Deus*, 40. Boff does not explain what he means by “rupture of faith.” What he seems to say is simply that faith is the means by which reality, or some specific aspect of reality, must be thought about in connection with God.

Boff must be seen as a weak realist, who understands that our ability to grasp reality is affected by our own participation in reality, as well as by the place where we stand.

In summary, while there is a reality to be known, the human ability to grasp it always faces several limits, some of an ontological, others of an epistemological nature. Given such limitations, how does this ever evolving, complex reality presents itself to the human observer? How do the epistemological limits intrinsic to human beings affect their apprehension of reality? The answer to these questions introduces a key feature of Boff's epistemology, namely, the notion of complementarity.

Complementarity and the Human Apprehension of Reality

Reality, argues Boff, always presents itself as dual in nature or bi-polar. No matter where we look, we will find two dimensions, two poles. Boff uses the metaphor of the eagle among the chickens to refer to this duality which he explicitly distinguishes from dualism.⁴¹ The eagle and the chicken each represents one dimension of reality. The latter points to necessity, history, facts, roots, body, power and closed system. The former, on the other hand, points to desire, utopia, idea, openness, soul, charisma, and open system.⁴² Both dimensions always come intertwined, thus constituting a reality that holds a permanent dialectical tension. Elsewhere, Boff refers to these two dimensions as the

⁴¹ "Dualism sees the pairs as juxtaposed realities without relation between themselves. It separates what, in actuality, always comes together. Thus, it thinks left *or* right, interior *or* exterior, masculine *or* feminine. Duality, on the other hand, puts *and* where dualism puts *or*. It sees the pairs as two sides of the same body, dimensions of the same complex reality." *A Águia e a Galinha*, 74-75.

⁴² *A Águia e a Galinha*, 71.

constantly co-existing sym-bolic and dia-bolic.⁴³ The sym-bolic, argues Boff appealing to Greek language, comes from either *symbállein*, or *symbáalleshai* which literally mean to throw (*bállein*) together (*syn*). In other words, the sym-bolic means,

to throw things in a such way that they remain together. Through a complex process it means to re-unite all realities, join them from different points, thus causing diverse forces to converge into a unique bundle.⁴⁴

On the other hand, the dia-bolic, from *diaballein*, means to throw things away, without any aggregating and direction. In summary, “dia-bolic is the opposite of sym-bolic. It is everything that, dissipates, disunites, separates, and opposes.”⁴⁵

It is basic to keep in mind that Boff sees both the sym-bolic and the dia-bolic as principles that structure all of reality: nature, the cosmos, social behavior, and human nature itself.⁴⁶ A proper and fruitful experience of reality will have to take these dialectically related poles into consideration; in other words, an adequate grasp of reality requires the adoption of the principle of complementarity. This principle Boff defines as follows: “The contraries must always be viewed and thought of as expressions of the same complex reality in order to have a complete picture of truth and reality.”⁴⁷ Whatever other labels we may give these poles, the fact remains that throughout life we are

⁴³ In Boff’s own words: “[W]e want to come back to that tension [between eagle and chicken], looking to it from a similar angle, one that is both challenging and dialectical: the co-existence of both the sym-bolic and the dia-bolic in the universe, in history, and in each human being.” *O Despertar da Águia*, 11.

⁴⁴ *O Despertar da Águia*, 11.

⁴⁵ *O Despertar da Águia*, 12.

⁴⁶ *O Despertar da Águia*, 13.

⁴⁷ See “Glossary,” *A Águia e a Galinha*, 187-188, entry on “Niels Bohr,” from whom Boff borrows the principle of complementarity explained in chapter 2.

permanently confronted with two complementary principles: the eagle and the chicken, the sym-bolic and the dia-bolic, chaos and cosmos, particle and wave.

Why does reality always present itself as dual in nature ? Boff's answer is clear. All the pairs we have mentioned, as well as others, are "expressions of the *complexity* of a single and unique reality."⁴⁸ Complexity, according to Boff, is "one of the most visible characteristics of the reality that surrounds us."⁴⁹ Everything is in relation to everything else. Nothing exists in isolation. A statement already quoted in chapter 2 helps us to understand how Boff envisions the relationship between complexity and complementarity:

All beings in the universe are not simply juxtaposed with each other, or thrown there like pool balls bouncing off each other. [Rather] *they form well constituted systems where all have to do with all*. What is more, they are dense and stabilized forms of energy, ever in motion and in relation to each other. All the atomic and subatomic particles behave in a dual fashion. At times they behave as material particles, with their masses actualized at a given point in space, at times they behave as waves spreading in spectrums in all directions. *The human observer is closely inserted into this whole process* in such a way that he helps to determine the nature of the phenomena. If he decides to grasp waves , he effectively grasps waves. If, on the contrary, he wants to grasp particles, he infallibly grasps particles.... Niels Bohr suggested the principle of complementarity of particle and wave as a key to understand *reality on a global scale*. Even though they may appear to be contradictory, the two behaviors [light and particle] complement each other. Paradox belongs to the dynamics of the universe. Everything is complementary.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ *A Águia e a Galinha*, 72 (emphasis mine)

⁴⁹ *A Águia e a Galinha*, 72.

⁵⁰ *A Águia e a Galinha*, 80-81.

These two factors, the interconnectedness of all beings that constitute reality, and the insertion or participation of the human observer in the observed phenomena, are ultimately responsible for imposing inevitable limits on human observation. We may try to summarize Boff's argument so far as follows. Truth, at least to some degree, can be accessed by us; but ultimate truth cannot. Though we are able to grasp truth, and eventually much truth, we are still unable to grasp final truth.⁵¹ While what the human agent observes may be real and true, his knowledge is always partial and depends upon his perspective and participation. How to cope with this insurmountable limitation? Boff's answer is clear. We must understand that all these apparent polarities, wave and particle, diabolic and symbolic, chicken and eagle are nothing but "sides of a same, single, diverse, contradictory, plural reality."⁵² Wave and particle, as well as the other forms of polarity, are complementary. Therefore, "[o]nly by adopting both [poles] will we gain a global description of reality."⁵³

It is not surprising then that Boff judges both analytical reason and linear logic as insufficient resources to provide an accurate interpretation of reality. Writes he, "abstract

⁵¹ "The more we are able to know a concrete thing by using several resources (emotional, mystical, intuitive, scientific, holistic), the more we realize that there are still other sides to consider, other perspectives to grasp." *Mística e Espiritualidade*, 14. "We may know a reality, but we will know it exhaustively.... What we call reality presents itself as immeasurably larger than our reason and our will to dominate through knowledge." *Mística e Espiritualidade*, 14, 15.

⁵² *O Despertar da Águia*, 18.

⁵³ *O Despertar da Águia*, 64. Boff's statement also suggests that he does not limit his conclusion to physical experiments only but to reality in general. "Wave and particle are not discrete realities; [they] are dimensions of the same reality. *All phenomena and existing beings are jointly constituted by waves and particles, by energy and matter....* Quantum physicists verified that reality in its deepest dimension is neither totally wave nor totally particle, but a combination of both." *O Despertar da Águia*, 64 (emphasis mine).

and cold principles are unable to translate the colors of reality. They do not generate symbols in the imagination. Hence, in a way, [they] falsify our experience of the phenomena of life.”⁵⁴ Boff urges humanity to overthrow the dictatorship of cold rationality and to abandon critical reason’s pretentiousness of universality.⁵⁵ Reason, while necessary, is not sufficient.⁵⁶ Linear logic, or the logic of pure and simple identity as Boff calls it, while useful on a certain level, is insufficient for the purpose of expressing the complexity of reality. It is necessary to utilize the logic of the complex, or the dialogical logic. Boff writes::

When we speak of complexity, we wish to express this singular feature [literally, nature] of reality.... Consequently, the logic of the complex reveals itself as overcoming the linear logic of pure and simple identity. It is the dialogical logic that actualizes itself by establishing connections in all directions. The difficulties related to the co-existence of the dia-bolic and the sym-bolic arise from the fact that both are seen as separate and opposite. The connection, not always visible and always mysterious that exists between the sym-bolic and the dia-bolic, is not taken into consideration. Nor are the mutual belonging and complementarity [they have] within a larger system.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ *Saber Cuidar*, 37.

⁵⁵ “To give centrality to caring does not mean to stop working and intervening in the world. It means to renounce the will of power that reduces everything to objects, robbed of human subjectivity. It means to refuse all despotism and all domination. It means to impose limits to the obsession for efficacy at any cost. It means to overthrow the dictatorship of cold and abstract rationality to give place to care.” *Saber Cuidar*, 102. “The practice of tenderness is also present in the theological enterprise: it means the introduction of emotion and feeling as sources of knowledge and communication.

⁵⁶ In *Saber Cuidar*, Boff proposes that analytical-instrumental intelligence must be combined with what he calls emotional-cordial intelligence (see *Saber Cuidar*, 37). He also claims that the multidimensional characteristic of nature requires more than rational knowledge for its apprehension (*Saber Cuidar*, 116-118). See also *Teologia da Libertação: Balanço e Perspectivas*, where Boff presents the elements which must be joined to critical reason, to help it to overcome its pretensions of universality. (69)

⁵⁷ *O Despertar da Águia*, 18-19.

Boff's twofold recognition—the insufficiency of reason for a proper apprehension of the complexity of reality and the deficiency of linear logic to provide a proper expression of such reality—leads to a consideration of the epistemological resources we must appeal in order to obtain as much truth as possible, given the human limits to know reality.

Epistemological Resources to Achieve a True, yet Partial, Knowledge of Reality

Eagle and chicken are dialectical dimensions present in all human beings. Having been created to live as eagles, to soar in the heights, we have lived as chickens, confined to a chicken coop, unaware of our identity and potential. Boff's aspiration is to free the eagle that lives in all of us. This requires listening to the archetypes we all carry—symbols that represent universal values, and present in all cultures.⁵⁸ Among these archetypes, Boff singles out the archetype of the *wise*, stating:

Wise (*Sábio*) has to do with knowledge (*saber*) and with flavor (*sabor*); not with any *saber*, but with *saber* which has *sabor*. Knowledge (*saber*) has flavor (*sabor*) when it arises out of experiences, and sufferings, and observations of the ups and downs of life. The wise sees beyond the appearances. He is not deceived by them. Therefore, he does not have illusions *He has right intuitions*. He sees within things. *He grasps the deep truth that surrenders itself only to those who are attentive*. Truth is not made out of correct phrases but of visions that tune up the heart with desire, and tune up desire with reality. *Only one who opens himself to reality, and nurtures deep sympathy toward it, has access to reality.*⁵⁹

This is a very important statement. It adds something very important to our previous conclusions about Boff's epistemological views. So far we noted that, while

⁵⁸ *A Águia e a Galinha*, 115, 186.

⁵⁹ *A Águia e a Galinha*, 121-122.

there are limits to the human ability to know ultimate reality, at least some knowledge is possible. Now Boff goes beyond this to offer good news: reality is accessible to those who are open, who nurture deep sympathy toward it. I read Boff's statement carefully and try to be sympathetic to it in order to access the truth it contains. Boff does not spell out its implications. It may be that a sympathetic reading discovers that truth involves implies precise statements. But it will also discover that such statements are not capable of fully reflecting the complexity of reality.

In any case, if we cannot rely only on precise statements and on reason to grasp a deeper truth about reality, or, as Boff optimistically says, *the deep truth*, to what epistemological resources should we then turn our attention? Before we consider Boff's answer to this question, one additional matter must be considered. Since Boff has not written a systematic work on epistemology, it is not clear what relationship the epistemological resources have to each other. Still, I believe it possible to argue that these resources cohere together. A possible rationale for Boff's epistemology would be: Boff's evolutionary view of the universe and his panentheism lead him to reject the possibility of an objective understanding of reality. Our understanding is conditioned and limited by at least two major factors, namely, our participation in the evolutionary process and the place where we stand. This leads Boff to propose a weak realism which one could call "participatory-perspectival." Despite these limitations, some knowledge of reality is possible once we appeal to our intuition and trust our deep feelings.⁶⁰ Boff's reliance

⁶⁰ Such intuitions and deep feelings are common to every human being (another evidence of Boff's commitment to realism to some degree). As far as I can tell, Boff never discusses the effects of sin on these intuitions and feelings.

upon feeling also explains his emphasis upon the feminine which, he believes, values intuition and is more sensitive to people, life, the whole cosmos, and consequently God. Deep truths like the importance of care can better be grasped by myths and legends, resources that ultimately point to utopia, human mythical destiny. Since an ultimate understanding of reality is not possible, dialogue with different perspectives must be valued and encouraged. Dialogical logic is the appropriate instrument to avoid reductionist conclusions and to provide a better grasp of complex reality. Boff's panentheism is the factor behind his appeal to mysticism as an additional epistemological resource. God is ultimately mysterious. Therefore, the world is also mysterious, given the ontological relation God and the world bear to each other. The appropriate attitude towards this mystery is mysticism. Finally, Boff's understanding of the epistemological privilege of the poor, and of those committed to their cause, is consistent with his perspectival realism. Those standing in that position have better access to several, perhaps the most important, aspects of reality. In the next sections, each one of these epistemological resources will be the object of consideration.

Pathos Rather Than Logos

Boff, following his dual view of reality, mentions two basic modes of being-in-the-world: work and care. From these two modes of being emerges the process of construing human reality.⁶¹ Work, says Boff, has prevailed over care. The balance must be restored. We must rescue care. Through care human beings are able to see nature and

⁶¹ *Saber Cuidar*, 92. I will focus on these two modes of being-in-the-world in my analysis of Boff's social ethics in chapter 5.

everything it contains as not mere objects. “The relation is not subject-object, but subject-subject. We experience beings as subjects, as values, as symbols that lead to original Reality.”⁶² While the mode of being work is associated with analytical reason, the mode of being care is linked to other epistemological resources. In Boff’s words, when care is embraced,

analytical-instrumental reason gives way to cordial reason, the *spirit of finesse*, the spirit of gentleness, deep feeling. Centrality is no more occupied by *logos*, reason, but by *pathos*, feeling.⁶³

Pathos is at the very root of Boff’s proposal for a new, ecological paradigm that aims at a caring relationship with the earth.⁶⁴

Keeping in mind this emphasis upon *pathos*, it is not surprising that Boff appeals to the heart as *the* epistemological organ providing a holistic understanding of reality. Following Antoine St. Exupéry, Boff says: “It is with the heart (feeling) that one sees accurately; the essential is invisible to the eyes.”⁶⁵ The heart, he adds, “is able to see beyond the facts; it sees their connection within totality; it discerns meanings and finds values.”⁶⁶

⁶² *Saber Cuidar*, 95.

⁶³ *Saber Cuidar*, 96.

⁶⁴ *Saber Cuidar*, 117. “Again we find *pathos*, deep feeling, at the root of the new paradigm of fellowship with the Earth. From both listening to the earth and passion for it arises essential care. Without this careful listening we will not hear earth’s great voice inviting us to synergy, compassion, peaceful co-existence of all beings.” (117) “The logic of the heart,” argues Boff, “is the capacity for finding the right measure and construing the dynamic balance. Therefore, each person must be part of his/her local ecosystem and his/her biotic community, either in its natural or in its cultural form.” *Saber Cuidar*, 135.

⁶⁵ *Saber Cuidar*, 100, 122.

⁶⁶ *Saber Cuidar*, 122.

He also appeals to a distinction introduced by Pascal between the *esprit of géometrie* and the *esprit de finesse*.⁶⁷ The latter goes beyond the former by adding sensitiveness and intuition to mere thinking and reasoning. The former is the calculating spirit, primarily concerned with efficacy and power, the way of being in-the-world that has ruled modernity.⁶⁸ The latter, argues Boff, is “the spirit of sensitiveness, of care, and of tenderness. [This] spirit not only thinks and reasons. It goes beyond that and adds sensitiveness and intuition.”⁶⁹

In summary, the heart is *the* fundamental epistemological organ for an holistic understanding of an extremely complex reality, otherwise inaccessible to human beings.

Openness to the Feminine

In his essay *O Rosto Materno de Deus: Ensaio Disciplinar sobre o Feminino e suas Formas Religiosas* (*The Maternal Face of God: An Essay on the Feminine and its Religious Forms*), Boff argues that the last decades have witnessed a strong critique of rationality. This critique, he believes, is the key word for understanding the world in the past four centuries. “Culture,” he says, “is effectuating a grand valorization of intuition,

⁶⁷ Cailliet and Blankenael note in their introduction to *Great Shorter Works of Pascal* that Pascal gradually became aware that “matters are felt rather than seen.” In Pascal’s words, the principles that go beyond what the mind of the geometrician can distinguish “are so subtle and so numerous, that a very delicate and very clear sense is needed to perceive them and to judge rightly and justly when they are perceived. And it is difficult to do this when so often we are unable to demonstrate them *in proper order* as in mathematics, since the principles are not known to us in the same way, and since it would be an endless matter to understand.” (*Pensées*, fr. i, vol. XII, 11, 12) *Great Shorter Works of Pascal*, trans. Emille Cailliet and John C. Blankenael (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1948), 28.

⁶⁸ *Saber Cuidar*, 119.

⁶⁹ *Saber Cuidar*, 119.

of the feminine, of everything that affects and concerns subjectivity.”⁷⁰ Humanity is entering into another era, *sophia*, where a new archetype is emerging, namely, the archetype of Anima in its multiple manifestations.⁷¹ This represents, so Boff thinks, a universal change of the historical axis. Human beings, males and females, re-interpret themselves, re-define their relations to each other, vis-a-vis the institutional framework of power, and of God.⁷² Though he acknowledges that his knowledge of the feminine has only an “approximate hypothetical character,”⁷³ Boff attempts to develop what he calls an analytical approximation of the feminine. The feminine, he writes,

is the capacity to grasp jointed totalities, of having wholeness, of cultivating the inner world, of developing deep levels of spirituality, of thinking through our bodies, of learning in our intimacy the reverberations of the external world in terms of symbols and archetypes, of making room for tenderness and care, of opening ourselves to feeling, to gratuity, and to sensitivity towards the mystery of people, of life, and of the entire universe.⁷⁴

The previous statement clearly reveals the epistemological advantages of the feminine. The feminine, believes Boff, values intuition, makes room for tenderness and care, is open to feeling, is sensitive to people, to life, to the whole universe, and, given Boff’s panentheism, to God . It is, therefore, capable of a better, fuller, less fragmented understanding of reality. Are these feminine capabilities restricted to women? Boff’s

⁷⁰ *O Rosto Materno de Deus*, 14.

⁷¹ *O Rosto Materno de Deus*, 15.

⁷² *O Rosto Materno de Deus*, 15.

⁷³ *O Rosto Materno de Deus*, 47.

⁷⁴ *O Despertar da Águia*, 35.

answer is negative. Sexuality, he says, is more than a purely biological dimension of human beings. Sex is not something human beings *have*, but something they *are*. In other words, the human being is always male or female. To be male and female are two different ways of being in the world.⁷⁵ This distinction, however, should be understood in terms of reciprocity: each one is male and female simultaneously.⁷⁶ In other words, masculine and feminine are different dimensions of being human.⁷⁷ This implies that the feminine exists as a dimension of each human being, both male and female, and represents the human dimension of obscurity, mystery, depth, night, death, interiority, earth, feeling, receptivity, generative power, and vitality.⁷⁸ On the other hand, the masculine, present in both male and female, expresses the dimension of light, sun, order, exteriority, objectivity, and reason.⁷⁹ The task of each human person, argues Boff, is to integrate both dimensions,⁸⁰ whatever one's biological condition may be. While acknowledging that exacerbations may occur in either dimension,⁸¹ Boff stresses that

⁷⁵ *O Rosto Materno de Deus*, 59.

⁷⁶ *O Rosto Materno de Deus*, 62-63.

⁷⁷ *O Rosto Materno de Deus*, 65.

⁷⁸ *O Rosto Materno de Deus*, 65.

⁷⁹ *O Rosto Materno de Deus*, 65.

⁸⁰ *O Rosto Materno de Deus*, 66.

⁸¹ On the one hand, an over-emphasis on the masculine will bring about a rationalist, cold, purely objective attitude. On the other hand, an over-development of the feminine will be the source of irrationality, passion, and chaos. Therefore, concludes Boff, only a balanced synthesis of both, masculine and feminine, will produce life in full harmony. (See *O Rosto Materno de Deus*, 66-67) Why the feminine is necessarily related to irrationality and passion, and the masculine to rationalism, and objectivity deprived of subjectivity, Boff does not explain. These conclusions are rooted in his (stereotypical?) understanding of both masculine and feminine.

society may greatly benefit from emphasizing the feminine dimension: it will produce a more caring relationship to others and to the universe, a deeper spirituality, and, more importantly, a better grasp of reality. This is understandable since, for Boff, the feminine implies the capacity for “grasping jointed realities,” the ability to acquire a deep knowledge of external realities and to express this knowledge through appropriate symbols and archetypes.⁸²

Myths and Legends

Boff introduces myths and legends as epistemological resources in his recent book *Saber Cuidar (Knowing to Care)*. Lack of care, he diagnoses, is a stigma of our time. There is an urgent need for a new civilizational *ethos*, for a “new set of transcultural principles that govern human behavior in order to render such behavior truly human, i.e., conscious, free, and responsible.”⁸³ Such an *ethos* must emerge from the very depth of the human being. But what is the human being? This question, suggests Boff, may elicit different answers depending on the context in which it is raised: a rational animal, a participatory being, a social actor, an agent working toward more egalitarian social relations, a sacred being, the apex of the evolutionary process, a being capable of dialoguing with the Mystery of the world, of searching for ultimate meaning, of entering in fellowship with and being one with that Mystery.⁸⁴ The most adequate answer, however, says Boff, is to define the human being as a being of care, whose essence

⁸² See footnote 74, page 143.

⁸³ *Saber Cuidar*, 27, 195.

⁸⁴ *Saber Cuidar*, 35.

consists of care. “To put care in all that he projects and does is the distinguishing feature of the human being.”⁸⁵ Humanity, according to Boff, has used many ways to identify the essence of the human being: arts, painting on cave walls, drawing on clay vases, great monuments, folklore songs, myths, fables, poems, and narratives, and philosophy and worldviews. “All these resources have an immense value,” acknowledges Boff, but then adds:

However, for our part, *we will choose another way, that of myths. We venture to say that mythologies, more so than science and philosophy, but along with religions, contain the great illuminations of the human essence. There [in the myths], cultures projected, generation after generation, great visions, stored reflections, deepened them, and transmitted them to later generations.*⁸⁶

Myths, Boff urges, “are languages that translate deep phenomena, inaccessible to analytical reason.”⁸⁷ Of course, Boff does not mean to say that analytical reason is worthless. Following his complementary way of thinking, he simply claims that we must combine instrumental-analytical intelligence, and its scientific precision, with emotional-cordial intelligence, and its images and myths.⁸⁸ We modern people, with our instrumental intelligence and use of empirical research, do not know more about the human being than the ancient creators of myths did.⁸⁹ Usually myths use symbols and

⁸⁵ *Saber Cuidar*, 35.

⁸⁶ *Saber Cuidar*, 36 (emphasis mine).

⁸⁷ *Saber Cuidar*, 37.

⁸⁸ *Saber Cuidar*, 37.

⁸⁹ *Saber Cuidar*, 37.

powerful representations such as gods and goddesses to express true situations or stories; they try to explain the origin of realities that have special meaning and value for certain communities—the name of a place, the importance of a certain behavior for either good or evil purposes.⁹⁰ Later in the same work, Boff repeats his claim in slightly different terms, when he stresses the importance of legends. Ecological care will be effective, he argues, insofar as the majority of people have access to information and engage in an ‘exchange of knowledge.’” Forms of popular knowledge—*folk-lore*—stored in the tradition of the elderly, in the legends of natives, *caboclos*, blacks, and immigrants should be complemented with scientific knowledge. “These forms of knowledge reveal dimensions of local reality and are bearers of truth and of deep meaning to be deciphered and appropriated by all.”⁹¹

In his *Saber Cuidar* Boff provides examples of fable-myths. For instance, he offers a translation of the Latin text of the fable-myth of care, elaborated by Higino and found in *Ser e Tempo (Being and Time)*⁹² What does this myth mean? Boff offers his

⁹⁰ *Saber Cuidar*, 58.

⁹¹ *Saber Cuidar*, 136.

⁹² *Ser e Tempo*, Martin Heidegger, vol. I (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1989), 263. Boff’s free translation reads as follows. “One day, Care saw a piece of clay. Soon he had an inspired idea. He took the clay and started shaping it. While he contemplated what he had done, Jupiter appeared. Care asked him to blow spirit in the sculpted work. This Jupiter did with good will. However, when Care wanted to give a name to the creature he had molded, Jupiter forbade it, demanding that his [Jupiter’s] name be given. While Jupiter and Care were discussing this, the earth suddenly appeared. She also wanted to give her name to the creature, since it had been made with clay, earth’s own material. A long discussion took place. By common agreement they asked Saturn to work as a referee. This required the following decision that looked fair to him: ‘You, Jupiter gave it spirit; you, therefore, will receive this spirit at occasion of the creature’s death. You, earth, gave it body; you, therefore, will receive the body back when the creature dies. But since you, Care, were the one who first molded the creature, it will remain under your care as long as it will live. And, since there is a heated discussion regarding the name, I decide that this creature will be called *Man*, i.e., made of *humus*, which means fertile land.” *Saber Cuidar*, 46.

answer. Care is so important for human life and for the preservation of all types of life, that it gave birth to a fable-myth. Care was personalized and became a concrete being.

The fable-myth of care wants to explain the meaning of care for human life. It also testifies that

the human being cannot be explained from below, from the earth (Tellus). He possesses something from heaven, from the divine (Jupiter). Hence, the account reveals that this clay did not remain inert. It received from the deity the beginning of life, spirit. Only he is really a complete human being. It is Jupiter, the supreme deity, who infuses him with spirituality.⁹³

What about Saturn? Boff identifies the Roman god Saturn with the Greek god *Chronos*, the ancient god of the original utopia. Saturno/Chronos is an ancestral god, wise and just, the god of time and utopia, ruling beyond all conflict. As a symbol of utopia he points to a golden age, to an ideal society, a kingdom of peace, justice, and abundance. As a symbol of time, Saturno/Chronos assumes time's role: "it creates everything, it reaps everything; it devours everything; everything is submissive to him; he is sovereign over people's destiny."⁹⁴

This myth captures the essence of human nature. The human being, concludes Boff,

is simultaneously utopian and historic-temporal. He carries within himself the Saturn dimension, together with the yearning for heaven, for transcendence, for the eagle's flight (Jupiter). In him the weight of the earth is also revealed, [the weight] of immanence, the chicken's scratching the earth (Tellus). It is through care that human beings keep these two

⁹³ See *Saber Cuidar*, 61.

⁹⁴ *Saber Cuidar*, 67.

polarities united, and make them the material from which they construe their existence in the world and in history. Therefore, care is essential.⁹⁵

Myths and legends, therefore, are heralds of truth, epistemological resources through which important aspects of reality— such as the essence of human nature in the example considered— may be grasped.

Utopia

Utopia⁹⁶ too has an important place among the sources of knowledge proposed by Boff. He refers to the utopian vision as an important resource through which the human being “overcomes the possibilities of the present and anticipates future actualization.”⁹⁷

Moreover, argues Boff,

[t]he realism of brute facts is not sufficiently real, since the potential and the utopia also take place within the real as dimensions not grasped by realism. Pure realism condemns us to fatalism, to resignation and lack of hope. Both the potential and the utopia, as dimensions and not negations of reality, open up the perspective of the future and create an utopian horizon that generates forces to construe and receive what is new and not experience.⁹⁸

I will provide an analysis of Boff’s social utopia in chapter 5. At this point, it is sufficient to note that he dreams of a planetary civilization, a terrestrial citizenship and a

⁹⁵ *Saber Cuidar*, 67.

⁹⁶ “(1) Any idealized place, state, or situation of perfection; (2) any visionary scheme or system for an ideally perfect society.” *Webster’s New World Dictionary*.

⁹⁷ “Scientific knowledge is limited. But the human being has other knowledge resources. He/she has the intuition through which, in a glance, he/she sees the moment of reality. He/she has the spiritual and mystic vision which grasps the secret movement of things. He/she has the utopian gaze, through which he/she overcomes the present possibilities, and foresees the future actualization.” *O Despertar da Águia*, 76.

⁹⁸ *Nova Era: A Civilização Planetária*, 86. Boff does not spell out what kind of materialism he is referring to. He probably has in mind some sort of materialistic realism that reduces reality to the physical realm.

single family that will include not just humans, but the earth-system with all its beings; a social cosmic community in which stars and the physical elements that constitute our bodies will be sisters and brothers. This utopia is not far away, Boff believes. The first rays of this new dawn can already be seen.⁹⁹

Dialogical Logic: The Logic of the Complex

We have noted that, according to Boff, reality is complex. As a consequence of the pervading presence of spirit/Spirit everything is connected with everything else in the universe, thus constituting an all-encompassing spacial-temporal network.¹⁰⁰ This complex reality always presents itself in a dual form: diabolic and symbolic, chicken and eagle, chaos and cosmos. Linear logic, the logic of pure and simple identity, is insufficient to express this complexity. An appropriate translation of the universe's complexity requires a different logic, the logic of the complex or dialogical logic. As Boff puts it:

There is no simple being. All beings are complex. The more related they are, the more complex they are. Hence the need for a logic of the complex that surpasses/transcends the linear logic of what is pure and simple. It is dialogical logic that is needed to establish connections in all directions.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ *Nova Era: A Civilização Planetária*, 85.

¹⁰⁰ In Boff's own words: "Dia-bolic and sym-bolic, eagle and chicken find themselves within a larger system that comprise them, dynamize them, and goes beyond them. In fact, as we will see, they constitute the secret engine of evolution and of all universal movement. Both have a common root: the interdependence of all beings. One needs the other, lives with the other, through the other, and for the other. All complement each other. No one stays out of the net of including and involving relations. No one merely exists. All inter-exist and co-exist." *O Despertar da Águia*, 18.

¹⁰¹ *O Despertar da Águia*, 18.

Boff offers neither a systematic exposition of what dialogical logic is nor its background. In order to clarify what he might have in mind, let us consider the entry on “dialogism” in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*. This entry refers one to the entry on Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, “a Russian philosopher and cultural theorist whose influence is pervasive in a wide range of academic disciplines—from literary hermeneutics to the epistemology of the human sciences, cultural theory, and feminism.”¹⁰² In fairness to Boff, it is important to note that neither the texts in which he speaks of dialogical logic nor their bibliographies contain any explicit reference to Bakhtin’s work.¹⁰³ My focus, therefore, is simply the possible parallel between Bakhtin’s dialogism and Boff’s dialogical logic.

Dialogism, or the construal of dialogue, according to *The Cambridge Dictionary*, is the “hallmark of Bakhtin’s thought.”¹⁰⁴ Bakhtin’s dialogism differs from Hegelian and Marxian dialectics, and is closer to the Chinese correlative logic of yin and yang. It is defined as follows:

Bakhtin’s dialogism is infinitely polyphonic, open-ended, and indeterminate, i.e., ‘unfinalizable’—to use his term. Dialogue means that there are neither first nor last words. The past and the future are interlocked and revolve around the axis of the present.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Hwa Yul Jung, “Bakhtin, Michail Mikhailovich,” in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 70-71.

¹⁰³ *O Despertar da Águia; Nova Era: A Civilização Planetária*. For an analysis of Bakhtin’s own work, an available source in English is *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, Michael Holquist, ed. Caryl Emerson, trans. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

¹⁰⁴ Jung, “Bakhtin, Michail Mikhailovich,” 71.

¹⁰⁵ Jung, “Bakhtin, Michail Mikhailovich,” 71.

“The most distinguishing characteristic of Bakhtin’s dialogism is the primacy of the other over the self,” with consequences for both ethics and epistemology:

Ethically, Bakhtin’s dialogism, based on heteronomy, signals the birth of a new philosophy of responsibility that challenges and transgresses the Anglo-American tradition of ‘rights-talk.’ Epistemologically, it lends our welcoming ears to the credence that the other may be right—the attitude that Gadamer calls the soul of dialogical hermeneutics.¹⁰⁶

Dialogical logic, Boff argues, makes an effort to take into consideration the complexity of reality, thus recognizing that along with the “known there is always the unknown;” moreover, “the contrary and the antagonist are considered as manifestations of reality’s pluri-dimensionality, rather than its denial.”¹⁰⁷ The adoption of a dialogical logic avoids reductionist conclusions; instead of yes/no solutions¹⁰⁸ it contributes to provide a synthetic (holistic) perspective of reality.¹⁰⁹

Boff’s emphasis upon dialogical logic is particularly clear in connection with his ongoing struggle to preserve other cultures and of his dialogue with them as bearers of truth. The logic of identity and of difference (linear logic) does not possess sufficient strength to safeguard the cultures. “The cultures must incorporate the dialogical logic through which they open themselves to each other, listen to their messages, and learn wise lessons, as they witness their own inner wealth.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ Jung, “Bakhtin, Michail Mikhailovich,” 71.

¹⁰⁷ *Nova Era: a Civilização Planetária*, 27.

¹⁰⁸ *Nova Era: a Civilização Planetária*, 27.

¹⁰⁹ *Nova Era: a Civilização Planetária*, 37.

¹¹⁰ *Nova Era: a Civilização Planetária*, 85.

According to Boff, what is at the foundation of this dialogical logic, this diligent effort toward respectful dialogue?

The dialogical logic presupposes the perichoretic logos (perichoresis means the game of all with all relations), the logos which lives from the inter-retro-relation with all and for all. The perichoretic logos fits the complexity of reality; it allows one to see the contrary and even the contradictory as complementary within the great system of life and of humanity.¹¹¹

Perichoresis, as defined in chapter 3, implies an interpenetration, a mutual engagement of those involved in the dialogue, while preserving their ontological identities. Boff does not appear to see any problem in incorporating dialogical logic and the notion of complementarity into his larger Teilhardian view of the universe in evolution through dialectical synthesis. Perhaps he simply has in mind that both dialogical logic and complementarity are necessary epistemological resources until the evolutionary process leads to a further synthesis of the contributions that earlier appeared to be contrary or even contradictory. However, as far as I can tell, Boff never spells out this interface. The application of complementarity to social ethics may be observed in the following statement:

[To achieve a planetary society, one and diverse, dynamic and inclusive], it matters to add dialectically, to integrate the several contributions, and to see the complementarity, and thus to construe the new [society] in a convergent fashion. Politically it entails for instance using the moment of truth of all historical systems in a realistic, non-verbal synthesis, and human-spiritual synthesis.¹¹²

In chapter 5 I will measure this nuanced statement over against Boff's socio-

¹¹¹ *Nova Era : A Civilização Planetária*, 85.

¹¹² *Nova Era: A Civilização Planetária*, 71.

economic ethics, paying special attention to his moral judgment of capitalism. Now, however, it seems appropriate to anticipate the contribution, as Boff envisions it, that religion might make toward this goal of a planetary society. Religion must work as a guiding thread connecting “all experiences, all knowledge, all spiritual traditions, all politics, all forms of hominization” in the process of forming a planetary society.¹¹³ This new religion or spirituality is the road toward a new meeting with the “Mystery of the world, the Reason of evolution, the Arrow of Time. In one word, God.”¹¹⁴ Since Boff, following Karl Rahner,¹¹⁵ conceives God as the Mystery of the world, it is not surprising that he recommends mysticism as an important epistemological resource for gaining some knowledge of the reality which will always remain mysterious.

Mysticism

“Mystery,” says Boff, “designates the dimension of depth that is inscribed in each person, in each being, and in the totality of reality, and that is indecipherable in nature.”¹¹⁶ The positing of this mysterious dimension of reality seems to be the natural outcome of Boff’s panentheism. Since God is conceived as the “Mystery of the world” there seems to

¹¹³ *Nova Era: a Civilização Planetária*, 71.

¹¹⁴ *Nova Era: a Civilização Planetária*, 71.

¹¹⁵ See, for instance, the section “Man in the Presence of Absolute Mystery,” in Karl Rahner’s *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, trans. William V. Dych (New York: The Seabury Press, 2nd print, 1978), 44-89.

¹¹⁶ *Mística e Espiritualidade*, 14. Boff appeals to the testimony of several scientists who, according to him, share this “existential comprehension.” Among them are Niels Bohr, Werner Heisenberg, Max Planck, David Bohm, and Albert Einstein.

be no alternative to thinking of the world as mysterious, given the symbiotic relation God and the world bear to each other.

To state that reality is mysterious does not imply that it opposes knowledge, but only that it veils full knowledge.¹¹⁷ What, then, is the proper attitude toward reality, given its intrinsically mysterious character? Boff's advice regarding a certain aspect of reality—the human person—helps to answer this question:

The more we get to know a concrete thing with the help of several sources (emotional, mythical, intuitive, scientific, holistic), the more we realize that there still are [other] sides to consider and [new] perspectives to grasp. When we face the infinitely complex—the human person, male and female—we become very conscious of what a mystery the human persons is...*and of our mystical attitude toward it.*¹¹⁸

It seems beyond doubt that, for Boff, a mystical attitude is not only the proper stance vis-à-vis the human person, but also vis-à-vis reality in general, since reality as a whole is mysterious. Boff makes this point clear when he talks about his utopian planetary society. The binding glue of the new society will come from an experience of the sacred. The sacred, he says, is not a thing but the “shining quality of [all] things.”¹¹⁹ He concludes:

[The sacred] is an irradiation which emanates from all existent [being], from each person, and from the whole universe. Everything may cause admiration and enchantment. Everything may contain a message to be deciphered. Everything may be bearer of a mystery.... *Mystery is the depth*

¹¹⁷ “Mystery, therefore, does not constitute a reality which opposes knowledge. It belongs to mystery to be known. But it also belongs to mystery to remain mysterious to knowledge.” *Mística e Espiritualidade*, 14.

¹¹⁸ *Mística e Espiritualidade*, 14. It seems clear that, for Boff, human beings as well as reality in general are the object of mysticism.

¹¹⁹ *O Despertar da Águia*, 34.

*of each reality which, [when] known, challenges us to know more, and which always remains mystery in all knowledge.*¹²⁰

The experience of the mystery is the experience of God himself.¹²¹ At the very root of each religion, Boff believes, there is an experience of this mystery.¹²² While everyone is challenged to develop a mystical attitude, only some seem able to succeed. The latter Boff calls mystics, or spiritual masters. They are those initiated who are able to see “things from the point of view of the Absolute”¹²³ and belong to different spiritual traditions.¹²⁴

The mystics, those who dare to give names to the mystery,¹²⁵ pose a danger for (institutional) religion, Boff observes. He mentions Saint Francis of Assisi as an example

¹²⁰ *O Despertar da Águia*, 34 (emphasis mine).

¹²¹ *Mística e Espiritualidade*, 18.

¹²² *Mística e Espiritualidade*, 17.

¹²³ “The wise learns to see things from the point of view of the Absolute. This point of view is free from both conceptual rigidity and ideological seduction. [The wise] is able to see all ways as arrows pointing to the supreme goal. In the many religions, for instance, he/she discerns the re-connection of everything with everything and with the Source from where all beings flow.” *A Águia e a Galinha*, 122. The mystic, defines Boff, is the one who “has a personal experience of the Supreme Reality,” one who “does not teach doctrines, but experiences a meeting with the Divine and builds an experiential path toward the ultimate Mystery of the universe.” *A Águia e a Galinha*, 198. It is the mystical vision that enables one to see the secret movement of all things, argues Boff in *O Despertar da Águia*, 76. One could possibly argue that since the mystic is able to see things from the point of view of the Absolute, there is no room left for mystery whatsoever. I imagine that Boff’s answer would be that the wise is able to see certain—not all—things from this ultimate perspective.

¹²⁴ “The mystical phenomenon lacks a homeland and a religion. It belongs to all cultures that have spiritual masters, those who have made the great journey and have had radical experiences from which religious experiences were born, some vigorous even today.” *Mística e Espiritualidade*, 66. It is not surprising, then, that Boff appeals to a master of the Muslim mystical tradition (see *A Águia e a Galinha*, 162), as well as to such Christian mystics as Julian of Norwich and Meister Eckhart.

¹²⁵ “The mystics give names to the mystery. It is their boldness, because the mystery is unnamable. They call him God, Soul, Tao, Jehovah, El, Father, etc. The name does not matter. It will always be a label for the One without a name.” *Mística e Espiritualidade*, 17.

of this claim: “He, who was from the bourgeoisie, forsook them to live among lepers... Francis stayed within the [ecclesiastical] institution at the cost of great suffering, for he was sufficiently mystical to realize that Jesus lives in the Church, but as the crucified One. The transcendent One who is crucified within the [ecclesiastical] power.”¹²⁶ Another example is Teilhard de Chardin who “had the same basic experience: the rediscovery of the sacred within the cosmos and of God within the world. He calls each thing brother, for God is present there. Teilhard de Chardin, in the modern world, is a great mystic...”¹²⁷ The appeal to Christian mystics as well as to mystics from other spiritual traditions substantiates Boff’s claim that faith, rather than the Christian religion, is a universal phenomenon.¹²⁸

Boff’s appeal to mysticism as a valid epistemological resource for obtaining some knowledge of the (spiritual) reality seems to be a natural outcome of his ontological-epistemological scheme in general and of his emphasis upon complementarity in particular. His attraction to Saint Francis of Assisi in particular introduces us to another

¹²⁶ *Mística e Espiritualidade*, 36, 38.

¹²⁷ *Mística e Espiritualidade*, 38.

¹²⁸ “Faith always implies a radical meeting with the Mystery that inhabits this world and that the religions and wisdoms interpret as being God. The faith-meeting can be expressed in many languages. Therefore, it can be expressed in other codes and in other times. By its very nature it is universal, since it is a universal experience, i.e., transcultural and occurring in all places and all histories. Hence, faith creates community. The translations of this faith are always cultural, localized and dated. They show differences. When religion naively identifies itself with faith, thus forgetting that it is but one particular translation of it, it makes the difference a [reason for] excluding all that do not have the same translation. The difference then creates division. And the divisions [create] religious wars. Therefore, what separates men and women is not faith (the experience of the Mystery) but religions (interpretations of the Mystery) that identify themselves with faith.” *Nova Era: A Civilização Planetária*, 52.

important epistemological conviction pervading Boff's whole project: the epistemological privilege of the poor.

The Epistemologically Privileged Condition of the Poor

The analysis of liberation theology's methodology in chapter 2 revealed the central position of the poor in the effort to re-construe Christian theology.¹²⁹ It is important to briefly add something to the previous conclusion. In his project, Boff goes far beyond claiming that the poor occupy this epistemological position to grasp *spiritual* reality(ies). According to him,

the poor constitute the place from where one strives to think the concept of God, of Christ, of grace, of history, of the Churches' mission, the meaning of economy, of politics, and the future of societies and of human beings.¹³⁰

At least two additional realms of human knowledge, therefore, can benefit from this epistemic privilege, *economics*, and *politics*. If we recall the limits Boff's ascribes to one's apprehension of reality, it is easy to see how he not only claims his own privileged access to reality but also imposes the commitment to the fate of the poor as an indispensable step toward overcoming many of the hindrances considered above. After

¹²⁹ "Never, in the history of Christian theologies, did the poor occupy such a central position. This is the singular intuition of liberation theology: to strive toward construing all of theology from the perspective of the victims, in order to denounce the mechanisms which made them victims and to help them to overcome such mechanisms, using the spiritual background of Christianity as well as the victims' religious traditions and wisdom-traditions, through the collective gestation of a society that has more chances of life, of justice, and of participation." *A Teologia da Libertação: Balanços e Perspectivas*, 120.

¹³⁰ *A Teologia da Libertação: Balanços e Perspectivas*, 121. See also *Do Lugar do Pobre*, where Boff states: "What is today the most central point from which we have the most accurate view of reality? For Latin America this point is presently constituted by the place [position] of the poor." *Do Lugar do Pobre*, 9.

all, “the poor’s perspective does not lead toward a reductionist vision; rather, it concretely universalizes the vision of reality.”¹³¹

We observed above that Boff shows an attraction for mysticism either within or outside the Christian tradition. This observation leads us to consider some implications of Boff’s ontological-epistemological proposal.

Implications of Boff’s Ontological-Epistemological Proposal on Religion and Theology as well as on Ethics

Boff’s adoption of complementarity as the fundamental principle that rules his epistemology has implications for his religion and theology, and for his ethics.

Religion-Theology

In what concerns religion and theology, the adoption of complementarity leads Boff to adopt a standpoint somewhere between Christian inclusivism¹³² and sheer

¹³¹ *A Teologia da Libertação: Balanços e Perspectivas*, 121.

¹³² By Christian inclusivism I mean the claim that “other religions are partially equipped to attain that to which Christianity affords surer access.” Joseph A. DiNoia, “Varieties of Religious Aims: Beyond Exclusivism, Inclusivism, and Pluralism,” in *Theology and Dialogue: Essays in Conversation with George Lindbeck*, ed., Bruce D. Marshall (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 263. “The inclusivist approach,” stresses Gavin D’Costa, “has been characterized as one that affirms the salvific presence of God in non-Christian religions while still maintaining that Christ is the definitive and authoritative revelation of God.” Gavin D’Costa, *Theology and Religious Pluralism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 80. D’Costa also reminds his readers that inclusivism is “by no means a modern Roman Catholic phenomenon.” (80) Indeed, he argues that its twentieth century roots should be traced back to the Protestant missionary John Farquhar, a claim whose verification goes beyond the scope of this work. Nevertheless, “since Vatican II, a large number of Catholic theologians have taken this inclusivist stance.” (80) Vatican II is not only presented as a watershed in Christian attitudes toward other religions, but Karl Rahner—Leonardo Boff’s advisor during his doctoral studies in Germany—is introduced as the “chief engineer” of this theological trend. Christian inclusivism seems to be supported in *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* which teaches: “Basing itself on Scripture and Tradition, the Council teaches that the Church, a pilgrim now on earth, is necessary for salvation.... [Christ] explicitly asserted the necessity of faith and Baptism, and thereby affirmed at the same time the necessity of the Church which men enter through Baptism as through a door.” (§ 846). However, the Catechism suggests that those who ignore that the Church was founded as necessary for salvation may also be saved, if they “seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their

pluralism.¹³³ The weight of the principle of complementarity in Boff's appreciation of other spiritual traditions is undeniable: "We must consider all different spiritual ways not as opposite but as complementary."¹³⁴ The same complementarity is the rationale to which Boff appeals in order to justify the contribution of all spiritual traditions in the process of building a new religion for a new planetary society, "single and diverse, dynamic and inclusive."¹³⁵ All religions are nothing else but expressions of "the meeting with God in the codes of different cultures."¹³⁶ They all share a common spirituality.¹³⁷ Therefore, the globalization process must be expanded from economy, technology, and

conscience." "Those too may achieve eternal salvation," concludes the Catechism (§ 847). "God can lead those who, through no fault of their own, are ignorant of the Gospel, to their faith without which it is impossible to please him." (§ 848). This salvation is not inconsistent with the doctrine of the Church as a necessary means of salvation because ultimately "all men are called to this catholic unity of the People of God... And to it, in different ways, belong or are ordered: the Catholic, others who believe in Christ, and finally all mankind, called by God's grace to salvation." (§ 836).

¹³³ By pluralism I mean the claim that "all religions are more or less equally equipped to attain something that finally eludes them all." Joseph A. DiNoia, "Varieties of Religious Aims: Beyond Exclusivism, Inclusivism, and Pluralism," 263. "The pluralist paradigm," defines D'Costa, "has been characterized as one that maintains that other religions are equally salvific paths to the one God." D'Costa, *Theology and Religious Pluralism*, 22. Therefore, "Christianity's claim that it is the only path (exclusivism), or the fulfilment of other paths (inclusivism) should be rejected for good theological and phenomenological reasons." (23) For an evaluation of such reasons see pages 22-51.

¹³⁴ *Mística e Espiritualidade*, 141.

¹³⁵ *Nova Era: A Civilização Planetária*, 70.

¹³⁶ *Saber Cuidar*, 151. See also *América Latina; Da Conquista à Evangelização* where Boff says: "Religions are answers that a people collectively gave to God's proposal. Then, through the religions, God has always visited his people and the people have always met their God." (38, 141)

¹³⁷ "What is decisive is not the religions [themselves] but their subjacent spirituality. It is spirituality that unites, links, re-links, and integrates. It is spirituality, and not religions, that helps to reconstrue the alternatives of a new civilizational paradigm." *Saber Cuidar*, 21.

science to include spiritualities and cultural values from which all may benefit and be enriched.¹³⁸

It is true that in some texts Boff seems to point to Jesus Christ as the one manifesting himself and acting in and through the various religious backgrounds.¹³⁹ He states:

It is fundamental that other religions be recognized and valued.... This implies seeing in them *the presence and action of God, as well as those of the Spirit and the eternal Logos*. Such theological acknowledgment will allow a dialogue of mutual learning and reciprocal evangelization. Evangelization [in this context] means therefore a progressive discovery of divine revelation within the religions.¹⁴⁰

Nevertheless, this appeal to the hidden and ultimate presence of Christ working in all religious backgrounds—which would suggest a commitment to Christian inclusivism—contrasts with some other statements in which Boff seems to lean toward pluralism. Christianity’s claim of exclusivism—Christ as the only means of salvation—is apparently dismissed by Boff when he engages in a dialogue with a Zen-Buddhist master from Sri-Lanka:

¹³⁸ See *Mística e Espiritualidade*, 66. “It is necessary, therefore, to be attentive to the importance of the many spiritual traditions and to learn how we can be enriched by them.” *Mística e Espiritualidade*, 67.

¹³⁹ “In this way the Christian, as Jesus Christ, is a man of universal reconciliation *per excellence*. All tensions and differences are seen in deeper unity, that of *the Mystery of God and of Christ manifesting and acting through all*. [The Christian] does not intend to level, to homogenize everything, but tries to see *the divine identity in its different articulations and manifestations, respecting them as new faces through which it [this divine identity] communicates itself to the world*.” *O Destino do Homem e do Mundo*, 93 (emphasis mine)

¹⁴⁰ *América Latina: Da Conquista à Evangelização*, 40, 112 (emphasis mine). This leads Boff to stress that polytheism, properly understood, “does not mean to affirm the multiplicity of deities but the thousand faces of the same and unique Deity, the unique Mystery, linked to the open dynamics of both world and spirit.” *Saber Cuidar*, 38. We must accept the translation of the *gospel* according to the categories and standpoints of the aborigines’ cultures and religions, since “they already received the visit of the Spirit of Christ.” *Teologia da Libertação: Balanço e Perspectivas*, 72.

There, we considered as absolutely irrelevant the *Christian claim to possess the revealed truth, the instruments of salvation, and the unique way leading to God. This claim is our illusion.*¹⁴¹

Boff repeats a similar claim in *América Latina: Da Conquista à Evangelização*

(*Latin América: from Conquest to Evangelization*):

We Christians must overcome our cultural ethnocentrism and, above all, our self-centering in our own experience of revelation which makes us *arrogant and pretentious possessors of revealed truth and of the means of salvation.*¹⁴²

Whether Boff is ultimately committed to Christian inclusivism or to pluralism is difficult to affirm. Nevertheless, whatever his commitment, it seems beyond a doubt that it flows from his ontological-epistemological scheme, and more specifically from his adoption of the principle of complementarity. It is also clear that his commitment, whatever it may be, is tied to his dismissal of Scripture as the final or only authoritative source of specially revealed truth about spiritual and/or moral reality(ies). A discussion of Boff's doctrine of revelation is beyond the scope of this chapter. Nevertheless, a few remarks tying Boff's position about Scripture to his commitment to panentheism may be helpful. In chapter 3 we noted that, according to Boff, God and the universe indwell each other and are mutually dependent upon each other. Consequently, the supernatural totally pervades the natural, and vice-versa, to the point that a division between natural and

¹⁴¹ *Mística e Espiritualidade*, 111 (emphasis mine). Elsewhere Boff states: "Faith and not Christian religion is universal. Faith [understood as] a radical meeting with the Mystery that all religions and wisdom traditions interpret as being God. The faith-meeting may be expressed in many languages and cultures..." *Nova Era: A Civilização Planetária*, 52.

¹⁴² *América Latina: Da Conquista à Evangelização*, 43 (emphasis mine) "There is no justification" in our days," adds Boff, "for any ethnocentrism. We must move toward pluri-ethnic, pluri-cultural, pluri-religious societies." *América Latina: Da Conquista à Evangelização*, 67.

supernatural is no longer appropriate. It is not surprising, then, that Boff considers history as the locus of God's revelation.¹⁴³ While he does not completely dismiss the possibility of God's direct intervention in the world,¹⁴⁴ he proposes that, rather than "falling from heaven" God's revelation happens in history. Hence, it is "by seeing and living life that we can discover the future of life itself."¹⁴⁵

Human beings, Boff says, are equipped with a conscience, through which they are able to grasp God's revelation.¹⁴⁶ Indeed, man is ontologically designed to hear God's word.¹⁴⁷ In other words,

Revelation is a way of considering the only history that we live, but from the [standpoint of] Ultimate Reality, [so that history is] discovered and discerned as the ultimate meaning of Reality.¹⁴⁸

The Judeo-Christian experience of God as contained in Scripture is not, according to Boff, unique but, at best, one among others. This assumption distances him from the Christian tradition which, while admitting God's natural revelation in the cosmos and in

¹⁴³ *O Destino do Homem e do Mundo*, 82.

¹⁴⁴ In *O Destino do Homem e do Mundo*, Boff argues that while the possibility of God's intervention in the world history is not excluded, this is not the usual way God reveals himself and communicates his Word (79). What he means is not quite clear since, according to his ontological proposal, God is intervening in and through all historical agents all the time.

¹⁴⁵ *Vida para Além da Morte*, 16.

¹⁴⁶ *O Destino do Homem e do Mundo*, 82.

¹⁴⁷ *O Destino do Homem e do Mundo*, 81.

¹⁴⁸ *O Destino do Homem e do Mundo*, 80.

history, has always considered Scripture—and in the case of the Roman Catholic Church, Scripture and Tradition as indispensable and definitive instruments of God’s revelation.¹⁴⁹

Ethics

If Boff does not show much confidence about achieving a final answer on theological-religious issues, the same does not seem to be true with respect to ethics. To understand Boff’s perspective and argument, however, it is necessary first to pay attention to his terminology. Morality, he writes, “represents a repetitive, traditional, and sanctioned domain of *acts*.”¹⁵⁰ On the other hand, ethics

embodies a domain of *attitudes* that go beyond these acts.... It provides us with the courage to abandon the obsolete elements of various moralities. It grants us the boldness to assume new postures of responsibility, to create new values that are in fashion, but at the service of the human habitat.¹⁵¹

Starting from these definitions, Boff concludes that “morality is always plural. There are as many moralities as there are cultures and homes.”¹⁵² Nevertheless, Boff argues, all different moralities must be at the service of ethics.¹⁵³ The fundamental ethical principle, the *ethos*—sculpturing the human house—according to which all particular

¹⁴⁹ See the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §§ 80-83, and 120-141. The discussion of the different understandings of the Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches concerning both the canonical books and the role of Tradition is beyond the scope of the present work.

¹⁵⁰ *A Águia e a Galinha*, 94.

¹⁵¹ *A Águia e a Galinha*, 94, 95.

¹⁵² “The ‘yanomamis’ morality is different from the gold seeker’s. There are moralities of groups within the same culture: the morality of the entrepreneur, who aims at profit, and the morality of the fabric worker, who aims at a raise in his/her pay-check, are all different. Here we are dealing with the morality of [social] classes. There are also the morality of different professions: physicians, lawyers, businessman, psychoanalysts, priests, and trash-pickers, among others.” *A Águia e a Galinha*, 92.

¹⁵³ *A Águia e a Galinha*, 92.

moral codes must be both judged and renewed, is “to preserve the planet, to assure the conditions of development and co-evolution of the human being toward forms of actualization of the human essence, increasingly more collective, interior, and spiritualized.”¹⁵⁴ This civilizational ethos, Boff believes, is something built into human nature.¹⁵⁵ Therefore, so he urges, “we must all drink from our own spring, listen to our essential nature, and consult our true heart.”¹⁵⁶ From this fundamental ethical principle Boff derives as a minimum this categorical moral imperative: “Good is everything that conserves and promotes life; evil is everything that diminishes and destroys life.”¹⁵⁷

Following the principle complementarity, Boff concedes that this universal ethos will actualize itself in diverse concrete moralities—particular values, attitudes, and practical behaviors—in accordance with the various cultural and spiritual traditions.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁴ *Saber Cuidar*, 27. Later, in the same work, Boff urges: “It is not enough to be only moral and attached to traditional values. This would make us moralists and traditionalists, enclosed by our value system. It also belongs to us to be ethical, i.e., open to values which overcome those from the traditional system or from a fixed culture; *open to values that concern all human beings*, such as the preservation of our common house [the earth], our splendid blue-white planet; values of respect paid to the body’s dignity, of defense of life in all its forms, of love for truth, of compassion toward those who suffer and are defenseless; of combat of corruption, violence, and war. *Saber Cuidar*, 95.

¹⁵⁵ “[This] new civilizational ethos must emerge from the depth of human nature.” *Saber Cuidar*, 27. This indicates that while Boff stands somewhere between realism and anti-realism on metaphysical issues, as previous sections have shown, in matters that concern morality he cannot be considered an anti-realist.

¹⁵⁶ *Saber Cuidar*, 28. Boff suggests that we must appeal not only to the contents of the conscious life, but also to the “enormous potential, positive and negative, which comes from our sub-conscious both personal and collective.” Personality, he adds, “must tend, beyond its perfection, toward a harmonious integration of the various dynamics of both consciousness and unconsciousness... To accept the shadows without ‘traumas,’ and to integrate them in a synthesis of opposing elements with realism is to create the basis for a mature ethical attitude.” *O Destino do Homem e do Mundo*, 47. The exact role of sub-consciousness in the creation of such “mature ethical attitude” is not discussed in details by Boff.

¹⁵⁷ *A Águia e a Galinha*, 56.

¹⁵⁸ *Saber Cuidar*, 27.

Each of these particular moralities should be judged against the most fundamental ethical principle, namely, care for the planet, care for life. Boff also seems to believe that different moralities can complement each other in an effort to translate the most fundamental ethical principle into practice. This seems to be the natural reading of the following statement:

This mode-of-being in the world, under the form of care, allows the human being to live the fundamental experience of value, of [giving value] to what has real importance and really matters. Not a utilitarian value, only for his/her own use, but the intrinsic value of things. From this substantive value emerges the dimension of alterity, of respect, of reciprocity, and of complementarity.¹⁵⁹

Perhaps the adoption of “care for life” as a fundamental ethical principle explains why Boff regrets his refusal to make love with a poor woman who begged him to give her that pleasure.¹⁶⁰ After all, Boff’s consent could somehow have enhanced her psychological-emotional life.¹⁶¹

In what concerns socio-economic ethics, given the complexity of the issues involved, one would expect Boff to apply his own epistemological recommendation and appeal to the principle of complementarity, thus benefitting from the contributions of different social-economic systems. Nevertheless, as the next chapter will show, Boff’s unilateral appraisal of capitalism and socialism does not seem to follow this trend and therefore creates some internal tension in his whole project.

¹⁵⁹ *Saber Cuidar*, 96.

¹⁶⁰ Boff records the woman’s plea as follows: “You are a well-fed, handsome, strong, and attractive man. I have just known ugly, sick, and mal-nourished men. Give me this happiness. Make love with me! Just once.” *Brasa sob Cinzas*, 21.

¹⁶¹ As Boff argues, “love is beyond good and evil.” *Brasa sob Cinzas*, 21.

At this point, however, I turn my attention to an alternative epistemological proposal, namely, a Reformed epistemology, the one proposed by Nicholas Wolterstorff.

A Complementary Epistemological Proposal:

Nicholas Wolterstorff's Reformed Epistemology

Introduction

The choice of Wolterstorff as Boff's dialogue-partner is not just arbitrary. His epistemology, like Boff's, covers a wide range of topics and includes social, cultural, and religious issues.¹⁶² In addition, several elements in Wolterstorff's project reveal a degree of similarity with Boff's, namely, Wolterstorff's suspicion of reason as a necessary epistemological resource for providing justified beliefs about reality (or at least, some aspects of it), his understanding of perspectival learning, his interest in a multi-disciplinary dialogue, especially with science as an important resource to achieve a wider grasp of reality. Wolterstorff's engagement with social-economic issues, and even his sympathy to some of liberation theology's tenets are additional points of similarity between him and Boff. These last two points will be considered in chapter 5. Here the focus will be some epistemological points of similarity and an important distinction, namely, Wolterstorff's full commitment to realism, one from which Boff's project could benefit.¹⁶³

¹⁶² For instance, on Wolterstorff's discussion of the rationality of belief in God, see "Can Belief in God Be Rational If It Has No Foundations," in *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 135-186.

¹⁶³ One must not expect a point by point comparison between Boff and Wolterstorff in the following sections. While both authors cover similar topics and have several areas of agreement, the effort to identify each of Wolterstorff's potential answers to each aspect of Boff's epistemology would be unfruitful and even misleading.

Points of Similarity

Suspicion of Reason

In *John Locke and the Ethics of Belief*, Nicholas Wolterstorff examines and rejects Locke's strong foundationalism which, he argues, "has shaped the modern mind."¹⁶⁴ According to strong foundationalism, only basic beliefs can be found in the foundations of a noetic structure.¹⁶⁵ Basic beliefs are those which are self-evident, incorrigible, or evident to the senses. All other beliefs are derived from these basic beliefs either by deduction or induction. For a strong foundationalist, one is justified in holding a set of beliefs either if these beliefs are basic or if there are *good reasons* to believe that the reliability of these basic beliefs has been passed on to non-basic beliefs.

An example may help us to understand this terminology better. Let us assume the belief that in my carrel in the library I am writing the *second draft* of this chapter of my dissertation. A strong foundationalist would argue that I am justified in holding this belief if I have incontestable *reason* to do so. For instance, I look at the first draft with notations and question marks from my advisors; I search my computer and come across the first draft whose content is identical with the hard copy I have before me. Using my reason, these factors would allow me to justifiedly believe that I am writing the second draft of my dissertation. Of course, there could be *defeaters* that cause this belief to be wrong. Perhaps I suffered a car accident and loss of memory and the only copy of my second

¹⁶⁴ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *John Locke and the Ethics of Belief* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), xi.

¹⁶⁵ See Alvin Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God," in *Faith and Rationality*, 55.

draft, which I forgot to save on my hard-drive, was destroyed. Perhaps, to use one of Alvin Plantinga's illustrations,¹⁶⁶ I am the victim of some Alpha-Centaurian evil scientist making me believe that I am in my carrel writing the second draft of this chapter whereas in fact I am trapped in her lab. The point that I wish to stress, however, is that, in the opinion of a strong foundationalist my non-foundational belief (I am writing the *second draft of this chapter*) will be justified if and only if to the best of my knowledge I am using *my reason* to judge this inference based on some foundational beliefs (the first draft with several notations and question marks, the virtual copy of my first draft, no recollection of an accident that could defeat my belief).

Wolterstorff's main complaint against Locke's project is the latter's willingness to ascribe to *reason* a controlling role, an "alethic obligation," in the belief-forming process.¹⁶⁷ Wolterstorff summarizes Locke's understanding of such obligation as follows:

[Our] faculties of belief-formation [according to Locke] do not operate deterministically; they can be governed. Furthermore, if allowed to operate ungoverned they produce a rather high proportion of false beliefs. So God, concerned as God was with our having true beliefs, intended that we *would* govern them. The principle of governance which holds most promise for our achieving the goal God requires of us is governing our assent 'according as reason direct us.'¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 62.

¹⁶⁷ Wolterstorff does not have a problem with Locke's own cultural agenda, namely, how one should form beliefs on crucial issues of religion and morality, in order to live harmoniously, when it is no longer possible to appeal to a shared and unified tradition (see *John Locke and the Ethics of Belief*, x). Nor does he question Locke's foundationalist conviction that it is possible for human beings to have direct insight into certain facts of reality or, in other words, to have direct awareness of reality (see *John Locke and the Ethics of Belief*, xi-xii).

¹⁶⁸ Wolterstorff, *John Locke and the Ethics of Belief*, 11. An additional helpful synthesis of Locke's project is offered by Wolterstorff later in his book, when he argues: "The deep structure of Locke's thought begins to emerge. Some propositions we just see to be true. The fact presents itself to us directly. Others,

In other words, we are, according to Locke, all responsible for our beliefs and, as such, we are required to exercise our epistemic duties, by listening to the voice of reason.¹⁶⁹

Conversely, Wolterstorff gives preference to a weaker version of foundationalist in his own epistemology. According to him,

We human beings are endowed with a variety of processes for immediate belief-formation which gives us more reliable access to facts of various sorts than does the Lockian evidentialist practice with its base consisting exclusively of beliefs evoked by episodes of direct awareness.¹⁷⁰

The various processes Wolterstorff has in mind are perception, introspection, other's testimony, *a priori* beliefs which are truth-conducive, i.e., "tend to produce true rather than false beliefs."¹⁷¹ In the example considered, my belief that I am writing the second draft of this chapter does not have to be justified by appeal to reason. My

though we cannot see them to be true, are still such that we can see that they are probable with respect to those that we can see to be true. These phenomena of insight are the fundamental phenomena to be used as we set about trying our best to proportion our level of confidence in propositions to their probability. Their fundamental role in the practice Locke recommends is what accounts for the foundationalist character of that practice, as it accounts (in part) for the prominence place he gives Reason in his summations of the proposed practice. Reason is a mode of *insight*. Locke thinks that for our non-immediate beliefs we must have reasons, good reasons evidence. Reason tells us which *reasons* are *good* reasons. Reason yields *insight*." *John Locke and the Ethics of Belief*, 90.

¹⁶⁹ "Locke," Wolterstorff states, "was the first to develop with profundity and defend the thesis that we are all responsible for our believings and that to do one's duty with respect to one's believings one must, at appropriate junctures and in appropriate ways, listen to the voice of Reason. Reason must be one's guide." *John Locke and the Ethics of Belief*, xiv.

¹⁷⁰ *John Locke and the Ethics of Belief*, 178.

¹⁷¹ *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, 322.

perception, my memory, and the testimony of my wife are sufficient to ground my belief without further ado.¹⁷²

While Wolterstorff's project keeps some degree of resemblance to Boff's unwillingness to stress the role of reason in achieving (justified) beliefs about reality, the grounds to which they appeal are different. Boff, I noted above, believes reason is an insufficient epistemological resource for providing an ultimate, accurate grasp of reality, given the evolutionary journey of the universe, the pan-relatedness of all beings in the universe, and the unavoidable participation of the observer in the observed phenomena. Wolterstorff, on the other hand, simply argues that one does not need to rely on reason to justify beliefs about reality because the noetic apparatus of human beings does not require it¹⁷³

Perspectival Learning: Dialogue within the Academy

The persistent goal pursued by Leonardo Boff, I have noted in previous chapters, is a theological reconstrual from the perspective of the poor. The position of the poor, Boff claims, conveys an insight into reality otherwise unattainable. Wolterstorff refers to the broader epistemological claim implicit in Boff's affirmation as perspectival learning. What, we ask, is Wolterstorff's answer to such a claim in general, and to its specific form in Boff? Does he dismiss the idea of perspectival learning altogether? Those expecting a

¹⁷² At this point I will not discuss how defeaters would eventually present a challenge to changing the status of this immediate belief.

¹⁷³ Such noetic apparatus, Alvin Plantinga argues, was designed in such a way that it produces warranted beliefs, if it is working properly and in an appropriate epistemic environment. For Plantinga's discussion on the issue, see *Warrant: The Current Debate*, and *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). Especially in his most recent book, Plantinga develops much of what Wolterstorff merely indicates or suggests.

thorough rejection will be disappointed. Wolterstorff points out two revolutions that have occurred in the past quarter century. The first is related to the fact that “strong foundationalism has been found wanting.”¹⁷⁴ The Kantian ambition for a common human conceptual framework that gives rise to a shared body of beliefs through sense perception has been discredited.¹⁷⁵ The second revolution is the repudiation by the academy of the once-reigning view of learning as a generically human enterprise.¹⁷⁶ This second revolution has led the practitioners of perspectival or particularist learning to argue that, while the academy has historically developed its scholarship from the perspective of white, Western, middle class, heterosexual males, now the time has come to listen to other perspectives. Equity demands it. Behind such a claim, Wolterstorff accurately observes, stands an anti-realist trend arguing that “there is no ready-made world; things exist and propositions are true relative to a particular conceptual scheme.” Therefore, he

¹⁷⁴ Nicholas Wolterstorff, “Can Scholarship and Christian Conviction Mix? A New Look at the Integration of Knowledge,” *Journal of Education & Christian Belief* 3 (Spring 1999):35.

¹⁷⁵ See Nicholas Wolterstorff, “Is It Possible and Desirable for Theologians to Recover from Kant?” *Modern Theology* 14:1 (January 1998):11, 17-18. Wolterstorff appeals to Thomas Kuhn’s *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* to argue that “revolutions in science do not occur simply because the new theory is discerned to be more probable, on evidence accepted by all parties, than is the old theory; not... because the old theory has been falsified. Instead, something like a conversion takes place. Kuhn himself,” adds Wolterstorff, “used religious language at this point.” “Can Scholarship and Christian Conviction Mix?,” 39. Wolterstorff’s argument is that in science as well as in other fields of human knowledge, one never approaches the data and the existing theories without *pre*-suppositions. Rather we approach both data and theories with a previous system of beliefs.

¹⁷⁶ Nicholas Wolterstorff, “Suffering, Power, and Privileged Cognitive Access: The Revenge of the Particular,” in *Christianity and Culture in the Crossfire*, ed. David A. Hoekema and Bobby Fong (Grand Rapids: Calvin Center for Christian Scholarship, 1997), 35. “[T]he conviction is now widespread that there can be no such thing as generically human learning; the ideal of such learning is and always has been illusory.” “Can Scholarship and Christian Conviction Mix?...” 42.

adds, “the decisions as to which scheme to adopt can in the last resort be made only by reference to which best serves one’s interests.”¹⁷⁷

What is Wolterstorff’s alternative? In science, as well as in other fields of human knowledge, he argues, one never approaches the available data and the existing theories without *pre*-suppositions. Rather one always approaches both data and theories with a previous belief-system, a “cognitive programming,” to use Wolterstorff’s terminology, which affects the beliefs one yields.¹⁷⁸ This may be observed in Bohr’s approach to quantum physics described in chapter 2.¹⁷⁹ There it became clear that Bohr’s control-beliefs on epistemology had an important role in his proposal of the principle of complementarity.¹⁸⁰ The role of control-beliefs may also be noted in Einstein’s reaction to

¹⁷⁷ Nicholas Wolterstorff, “Suffering, Power, and Privileged Cognitive Access,” 81. Later, in the same essay, Wolterstorff adds: “The particularities of programming—that is, of particular habits of awareness, of particular concepts, of particular beliefs—which we bring with us from everyday life to the academy have traditionally been regarded as biases and prejudices obstructing our access to reality. That is the ground for turning away all particularist perspectival learning at the doorway of the academy. The prevalent current argument for allowing them entrance, on the other hand, is starkly political: it assumes that no one ever has any awareness of reality and argues on that ground that it would be unjustly discriminatory to exclude any perspective. If we are all prisoners in our own houses of interpretation, what justification could there be for preferring one kind of prison to another?” (91). Obviously, Wolterstorff rejects this anti-realist diagnosis.

¹⁷⁸ Nicholas Wolterstorff, “Suffering, Power, and Privileged Cognitive Access,” 88.

¹⁷⁹ See chapter 2, pages 56 ff

¹⁸⁰ As noted in chapter 2, Bohr believes that one always participates in the reality observed. This leads him to claim that a detached, objective observation is not possible. Following this control-belief, he extrapolates the dual results obtained in his scientific experiments with light (wave and particle), thus affirming that our apprehension of reality as a whole is always dual in nature, and this fact requires the adoption of the principle of complementarity.

Bohr's development in quantum physics.¹⁸¹ He referred to Bohr's approach as "a sell-out, a soft opinion, and reprehensible."¹⁸² Here are Einstein's own words:

Quantum mechanics is very impressive. But an *inner voice tells me it is not yet the real thing*. The theory produces a good deal but hardly brings us closer to the secret of the Old One. I am at all events convinced that *He* does not play dice... It is only in the quantum theory that Newton's differential method becomes inadequate, and indeed strict causality fails us. But the last word has not yet been said. May the spirit of Newton's method give us the power to restore unison between physical reality and the profoundest characteristic of Newton's teaching-strict causality.¹⁸³

An *inner voice* tells me it is not yet the real thing, says Einstein. To which inner voice is he appealing? Wolterstorff would answer to his control-beliefs, his belief-programming. This moves Einstein to dismiss both the data and the theories Bohr proposes.

This cognitive programming is not purely personal; it is also social, which is equivalent to saying that one "operate[s] inside a tradition."¹⁸⁴ Wolterstorff's following statement may help us to understand how he envisions the belief-forming process:

¹⁸¹ "Einstein," says Honner, "it needs hardly to be said, was troubled by Bohr's *subversive remarks* about the scope of physics." *The Description of Nature*, 39. Physics, Einstein would insist "is an attempt to grasp reality as it is thought independently of its being observed." "Autobiographical Notes," *Albert Einstein: Philosopher-Scientist*, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp, (Evanston, Illinois: The Library of Living Philosophers, Inc.:1949), 81.

¹⁸² Honner, *The Description of Nature*, 59.

¹⁸³ Abraham Pais, "*Subtle is the Lord...*": *The Science and Life of Albert Einstein* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 443.

¹⁸⁴ Wolterstorff, "Suffering, Power, and Privileged Cognitive Access," 88. Wolterstorff also appeals to William Alston who argues that one's doxastic practices are "thoroughly *social*: socially established by socially monitored learning, and socially shared." This does not mean that innate mechanisms do not play a role in the belief-forming process. "We still have much to learn about the relative contribution of innate structures and social learning in the development of doxastic practices... But whatever the details," concludes Wolterstorff, "both have a role to play; and the final outcome is socially organized, reinforced, monitored and shared." Wolterstorff, *John Locke and the Ethics of Belief*, xviii.

How do we acquire our cognitive programming? We acquire it by way of the output of our already programmed constitution becoming components of our new program. Which beliefs will be formed in us by a given input is almost never a function just of the input to our dispositional nature coupled with the concepts we possess and our attentiveness at the moment. Almost always, beliefs we already have function as elements of our programming. And those beliefs were the output of our programmed constitution. In that way, we function *inside* our system of beliefs.¹⁸⁵

The picture, then, according to Wolterstorff, can be described as follows. One's output-beliefs will be the result of one's dispositional nature, of the beliefs which one already has, and of one's attentiveness at the moment. In other words, one always operates within a control-belief system. Control beliefs, adds Wolterstorff, are of many different sorts: "Sometimes they take the form of methodological convictions... Sometimes they take the form of ontological convictions."¹⁸⁶ In any case, so Wolterstorff suggests, "most of the deep conflict between science and religion occur at the control-belief level."¹⁸⁷

Wolterstorff not only proposes that human beings produce their beliefs according to a personal control-belief system, but he also reminds us that frequently the beliefs that function as elements of our programming are false, with the awkward result that "our personal programs at many points don't enable access to reality but *obstruct it*."¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁵ Wolterstorff, "Suffering, Power, and Privileged Cognitive Access," 87-88.

¹⁸⁶ Wolterstorff, "Theology and Science: Listening to each Other," 98-99.

¹⁸⁷ Wolterstorff, "Theology and Science: Listening to each Other," 99.

¹⁸⁸ Wolterstorff, "Suffering, Power, and Privileged Cognitive Access," 88 [emphasis mine]. "Running throughout our personal programming," adds Wolterstorff, "are glitches consisting of false beliefs functioning to *obstruct the formation of true beliefs*..." (88)

Despite recognizing this potential risk associated with perspectival learning, Wolterstorff's evaluation is not entirely negative. On the contrary, he even recognizes that some perspectives can give us access to realms of reality otherwise inaccessible. In a specific reference to liberation theology, he rhetorically asks:

May it not be that some of them [the perspectives which give access to realms of reality] constitute in that way privileged cognitive access?... May it not be that we can expect to learn something from the work of a liberationist perspective on theology, something that it's most unlikely the rest of us would ever learn on our own.¹⁸⁹

In summary, since the classical foundationalist proposal of taking learning as a genuine human enterprise has been repudiated, what are we left with? Wolterstorff's answer is simple: dialogue. "The academy," he proposes, "must be a place where genuine dialogue takes place among representatives of different perspectives."¹⁹⁰ This new context presents an opportunity to the Christian scholar, who, as a Christian, is legitimately entitled to engage in the pursuit of learning.¹⁹¹ This means that he/she is allowed to participate in the academic dialogue without abandoning his/her Christian beliefs. But, as Wolterstorff acknowledges, in this dialogue the Christian must be prepared to eventually change his/her mind on issues that he/she previously believed to be right about. "The

¹⁸⁹ Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Suffering, Power, and Privileged Cognitive Access," 91. Elsewhere, he even says: "I have in fact found illuminating to read some of the writings of those whose narrative identity comprises being victims of Western imperialism and who look at history from that perspective." (92)

¹⁹⁰ Wolterstorff, "Suffering, Power, and Privileged Cognitive Access," 92. By genuine dialogue, he means a dialogue characterized by "willingness to speak and willingness to listen." (92).

¹⁹¹ "In weighing a theory, [any]one always brings along the whole complex of one's beliefs. One does not strip away all but those beliefs functioning as data relative to the theory being weighed. On the contrary, one remains cloaked in belief, aware of some strands, unaware of most." Wolterstorff, "Can Scholarship and Christian Convict Mix?," 46. Having said that, he adds: "In saying that one is entitled to engage in the various practices of learning *as a Christian*, I am assuming, of course, that it is relevant to do so—that there really is a Christian perspective on many of those matters that academics deal with." (47)

Christian scholar not only talks but listens, and often by listening discovers he/she was wrong.”¹⁹² At least two reasons, Wolterstorff suggests, should lead the Christian scholar to adopt this humble attitude: first, the recognition that God’s image is not only found in Christians;¹⁹³ second, while there is a Word of God from outside our existence, such a Word comes to fallen creatures, “creatures fallen in their religion as well as in the rest of their existence. It comes to creatures whose existence *remains* fallen, even though they have heard and obeyed the voice of the Lord their God.”¹⁹⁴ Nevertheless, Wolterstorff makes clear that the revisions required in the dialogue can go either way. “Sometimes the best strategy is to revise something in our complex of Christian belief; but sometimes the best strategy is, on the contrary, to revise something in what science presents to us.”¹⁹⁵

Considering the second alternative, Wolterstorff does not hesitate to propose the authority of Scripture as the ground on which revision of science can be claimed. He states:

For a variety of reasons, there is a deep tendency in most contemporary members of the academy in the West to assume that, in case of conflict between science and religion, religion has to give. But why should that be? Suppose that what it means to affirm the authority of scripture is to say

¹⁹² Wolterstorff, “Can Scholarship and Christian Conviction Mix?,” 48

¹⁹³ Wolterstorff, “Can Scholarship and Christian Conviction Mix?,” 48.

¹⁹⁴ Wolterstorff, “Can Scholarship and Christian Conviction Mix?,” 50.

¹⁹⁵ Wolterstorff, “Theology and Science: Listening to Each Other,” 103. It should be added that, when considering the need of revising Christian belief, Wolterstorff stresses two important qualifications: (1) there is a hierarchy of importance within the body of Christian belief. In other words, “giving up some elements would require relatively little attention in the remainder, giving up others would require a ripple of alterations throughout most of the remainder. Some elements are in that way more deeply ingressed into the totality than others.” “Can Scholarship and Christian Conviction Mix?,” 49-50. In summary, if alteration in one’s Christian belief is required, one “ought to begin with those elements which are last deeply ingressed.” “Can Scholarship and Christian Conviction Mix?,” 49-50; (2) this revision should not be conducted on an individual basis, “in lonely isolation,” to use Wolterstorff’s own words, “but as a member of the Christian community, in prayer.” “Can Scholarship and Christian Conviction Mix?,” 49-50.

that scripture gives us our best access to certain realms of truth. Then, to say that always, in case of conflict between religion and science, religion has to give, is to imply either that scripture does not have such authority, or that theorizing somehow never speaks about that realm of truth to which scripture gives us our best access. On what seems to me the best equilibrated view of the matter, neither of these implications is correct.¹⁹⁶

With respect to Scripture, then, Wolterstorff clearly distances himself from Boff by ascribing an authority to it that Boff does not seem willing to give it.¹⁹⁷

Wolterstorff, as far as I can tell, never explicitly explores the connection between epistemology and quantum physics, the way Boff does. Nor does he struggle with the implications of an evolutionary view of the universe for theology, the way as Teilhard de Chardin and Boff do. Nevertheless, Wolterstorff identifies and spells out the need for advancing the dialogue between science and Christian belief. Indeed, he claims that “we are presented with the challenge of working out a picture of cosmos and self that brings contemporary science into equilibrium with Christian belief”¹⁹⁸ Even if it is not possible to know precisely what outcome would result from a dialogue between theology and science as proposed by Wolterstorff, it is conceivable that the outcome would be consistent with his control-beliefs. In the matter of control-beliefs, one thing in particular distinguishes Wolterstorff from Boff, namely the former’s stronger commitment to metaphysical realism.

¹⁹⁶ Wolterstorff, “Theology and Science: Listening to Each Other,” 103-104.

¹⁹⁷ See chapter 4, pages 162-164.

¹⁹⁸ Nicholas Wolterstorff, “Theology and Science: Listening to Each Other,” 104.

A Fundamental Distinction: Wolterstorff's Commitment to Metaphysical Realism

Wolterstorff's rejection of strong foundationalism should not be understood as his choice for anti-realism. The wide-spread assumption that anti-foundationalism in epistemology demands anti-realism in metaphysics is rejected by Wolterstorff in rather strong terms:

It is widely assumed nowadays that anti-foundationalism in epistemology requires anti-realism in metaphysics—requires embracing the view that there is no way the world is except relative to some conceptual scheme. I remain a thorough-going metaphysical realist who is also an anti-foundationalist.¹⁹⁹

With regard to physical realities, Wolterstorff claims that we have direct awareness of the objects standing before us. Against Kant he stresses that we do not have “awareness of some input produced in us” by a given object, but “awareness of the object itself.”²⁰⁰ For instance, when one sees an eagle one does not get in touch with the mental representation of an eagle, but with the eagle itself. Following Thomas Reid, Wolterstorff stresses:

To perceive an eagle under the concept of eagle is to perceive what it is. Concepts are not barriers between mind and reality but links. The concept of *eagle* is at one and the same time one of the concepts that I possess and one of the concepts that is satisfied by the thing I perceive, namely, an eagle.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁹ *John Locke and the Ethics of Belief*, xii. As I have mentioned above, what Wolterstorff is ultimately rejecting is not foundationalism but its stronger version.

²⁰⁰ Wolterstorff, “Is It Possible and Desirable to Recover from Kant?,” 17. Wolterstorff adds: “we might think of perceptual awareness not as input but as action—as the actualization of one of our human powers.” (17)

²⁰¹ Wolterstorff, “Is It Possible and Desirable to Recover from Kant?,” 18.

By quoting Wolterstorff's rejection of Kant I do not mean to suggest that either Bohr or Boff is Kantian, even though some have suggested such kind of connection.²⁰² My only claim is that Wolterstorff distances himself from Kant as well as from Bohr and Boff, in that the observer is distinct from the reality he observes, and, usually, has a perception of physical reality as it exists in itself.

Wolterstorff's commitment to realism goes beyond a mere defense of the human ability to know *physical* realities. The human noetic apparatus is so constituted as to allow human beings to achieve some true knowledge of spiritual, and I would add, moral realities. This grasp of reality in these realms is possible because we are endowed with faculties and processes that grant us the possibility of immediate truthful belief-formation. Wolterstorff's argument concerning the attainability of immediate knowledge of spiritual truths is the following:

It has even been argued—cogently, in my judgment—that we might well have faculties and practices which give us better access to certain facts *about God* than does the Lockian practice. The basic point is the same in all these cases: we human beings are endowed with a variety of processes for immediate belief-formation which gives us more reliable access to facts of various sorts than does the Lockian evidentialist practice with its base consisting exclusively of beliefs evoked by episodes of direct awareness.²⁰³

²⁰² See Honner, *The Description of Nature*, 9,73-74.

²⁰³ *John Locke and the Ethics of Belief*, 178. The cogent argument Wolterstorff refers to is that developed by Alvin Plantinga in his trilogy, *Warrant: The Current Debate; Warrant and Proper Function* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); *Warranted Christian Belief*, as well as "Reason and Belief in God," Plantinga, Wolterstorff, eds. *Faith and Rationality* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983). In this context, Wolterstorff also refers to the William P. Alston's *Perceiving God* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992).

We do have knowledge of reality. Not all knowledge of course. But at least enough knowledge to make universal, warranted claims on several religious and moral issues. Of course, on some difficult subjects, we may not be able to come to a final conclusion. The hope of rational consensus raised by the Enlightenment has failed. Yet, Wolterstorff urges, “we must live together.” Where should we turn to in the context of this fractured tradition in which we find ourselves? It is not to epistemology that we should look for help. Rather, it is to liberal politics that we have to turn our attention:

The thinkers of the Enlightenment hoped to bring about a rational consensus in place of fractured tradition. That hope has failed. In my opinion it was bound to fail, it could not succeed. Yet we must live together. *It is to politics and not to epistemology that we shall have to look for an answer as to how to do that.* ‘Liberal’ politics have fallen on bad days recently. But to its animating vision of a society in which persons of diverse traditions live together in justice and friendship, conversing with each other and slowly altering their traditions in response to their conversation—to that, there is no viable alternative.²⁰⁴

It is to politics, or if you will, to a specific segment of it—socio-economics to which we must now turn our attention. Boff’s commitment to the principle of complementarity demands that he at least consider an alternative to his own socio-economic ethics, such as Wolterstorff’s revised neo-Calvinism.

Conclusion

An analysis of Leonardo Boff’s epistemology has revealed that he adopts a version of weak realism that could be called participatory-perspectival realism. While Boff is not a total skeptic, he clearly tends to think that physical as well as spiritual and moral reality is partially dependent upon the observer. Reality’s domain, he claims,

²⁰⁴ Wolterstorff, *John Locke and the Ethics of Belief*, 246.

transcends the physical, spiritual, and moral realms, to also include the imaginary and the fantastic.

Boff's ontological scheme stresses both the cosmos' evolutionary ascending process toward God and complexity—the spacial-temporal pan-relatedness of all beings in the universe as a consequence of his panentheism. These two factors as well as his understanding of the human observer as part of this ongoing process and network, make impossible a purely detached, objective observation. As a result, human beings are limited in their ability to know reality. These limits are clearly set forth in the epistemological principles Boff spells out in his *O Rosto Materno de Deus*. In other words, while reality, to some degree, is accessible to human knowledge, ultimate truth is not. We may be able to grasp much truth, but not ultimate truth. Therefore, what the human agent observes is always partial and dependent on the agent's perspective and participation.

Given these ontological-epistemological presuppositions, Boff concludes that one must appeal to the principle of complementarity to grasp as much reality as possible. Reality, he believes, always presents itself as dual in nature. In practical terms, the adoption of the principle of complementarity implies that apparent oppositions must be assumed to be but different sides of a single, plural reality. Several complementary epistemological resources are available to allow a true, yet partial, knowledge of reality; *pathos*, openness to the feminine, myths and legends, utopia, dialogical logic, mysticism, and the privileged epistemological standpoint of the poor are counted among them.

Boff's ontological-epistemological proposal has implications for both his religion and theology, and for his social-ethics. With respect to his theology, Boff ends up somewhere between Christian inclusivism and pluralism. With respect to his social-ethics, one would expect that his adoption of the principle of complementarity would require him to accept the contributions of different social-economical systems. The next chapter will investigate whether Boff is consistent in the development of his social ethics in accordance with this epistemological principle.

An alternative epistemological proposal, such as the one proposed by Nicholas Wolterstorff, would avoid this tension. Wolterstorff's suspicion of reason as ultimately necessary to provide justified beliefs, his appreciation of perspectival learning, and even several points of his own social-economic ethics that I will consider in the next chapter, all have points of resemblance to Boff's proposal. Nevertheless, what distinguishes Wolterstorff's project from that of Boff is the former's commitment to metaphysical realism. The human noetic apparatus is such that human beings are able to achieve true knowledge on physical, spiritual, and moral matters; in fact, they are able to have enough knowledge to make universal, warranted claims on several relevant religious and moral issues.

Finally, even if Boff is not willing to change his epistemological presuppositions, Wolterstorff's project on social-economic ethics represents an important contribution from which Boff might well be able to benefit. Boff's principle of complementarity demands that this alternative be considered. It is to this dialogue between Boff's and Wolterstorff's social-economic ethics that we now turn our attention.

CHAPTER FIVE

BOFF'S LIBERATIONIST ETHICS AND WOLTERSTORFF'S REVISED NEO-CALVINIST ECONOMICS

Introduction

Two major issues lie at the core of Leonardo Boff's liberationist socio-economic ethics, namely, the scandal of poverty and ecology. Both the poor and the earth have to be liberated from their oppression. In fact, poverty and ecology are not presented as isolated realities; they stem from a common root: the anthropocentric paradigm that has prevailed in the last three centuries and has led human beings to exercise a usurped right over nature. Boff's depiction of this social-ecological crisis will be followed by an examination of its causal factors. These factors will be investigated under three interconnected areas: social-cultural, economic, and religious. These same basic areas will be used in the analysis of Boff's proposal for methodological purposes. It should be clear to the reader that these divisions are not Boff's but mine, and aim at helping us to comprehend Boff's diagnosis of the current condition as well as his proposal to fix the problems he identifies. From this investigation I expect to make clear that Boff's moral judgment of capitalism as intrinsically evil derives ultimately from his sympathy for Marxist axioms as well as from his adoption of panentheism that ultimately leads him to

reject the mastery over creation strongly accomplished by capitalism. These same two points are the basis of Boff's proposal of a cosmic-planetary-social-democracy.

It is reasonable to claim, given the complexity of the issues involved in the discussion, that Wolterstorff's revised neo-Calvinism has sufficient merit to be considered a feasible alternative by Boff, were he to pursue consistently his ontological-epistemological project with a strong emphasis on complementarity and dialogical logic. Following this insight, an analogous grid will be used to discuss Wolterstorff's contribution in socio-economic ethics. Although Boff never addresses Wolterstorff's contribution, it is reasonable to suppose that the former would inevitably discard the latter's more nuanced appraisal of capitalism as well as his suggestions to fix its flaws, given Boff's complete rejection of capitalism as an intrinsically immoral system. Wolterstorff's neo-Calvinist approach, I will show, would help to correct the distortions of Boff's analysis and proposal while still giving him the basis he needs for a legitimate critique of capitalism's flaws.

Leonardo Boff's Socio-Economic Ethics

Sick Societies on a Threatened Planet

A planet plunged into a critical social-ecological crisis: this is how Leonardo Boff pictures the world in which we live. The desperate cry for help of an immense mass of miserable people echoes the clamor of earth itself which not only sees its natural resources depleted but also sees the existence of man, the climax of its evolutionary

journey, and the stage of earth's *self-awareness* threatened.¹ These two victims of a single crisis, graphically depicted by Boff as bleeding wounds, reveal that his broadened project, with its strong concern for ecological issues is in continuity with its original concern whose main focus was the poor. Boff even claims that this enlargement of perspective is not merely a personal trend, but a tendency of liberation theology in general since the end of the 1980's. He states:

At the end of the 1980's, an enlargement of liberation theology's horizon started [to happen]. An encounter [of liberation theology] with ecological concern occurred. Both [liberation theology and ecological concern] arise from two bleeding wounds. The former is the wound of poverty and misery which tears apart the social fabric of millions of the poor in the whole world. The latter is the systematic attack on the Earth that affects the planet's balance, [a balance that is] threatened by contemporary globalized societies.²

The figures cited by Boff are indisputably troublesome. According to U.N.'s statistics, 15 million children die every year before reaching their fifth day of life, either because of hunger or because of sicknesses that are hunger-related. Moreover, 150 million people in today's world are ill-nourished, and 802.3 million are permanently hungry.³ These figures lead Boff to conclude that "the most threatened being in creation

¹ "The human being," says Boff, "more than a being on the earth is a being from the earth. He/she is, up to now, the most complex and singular expression of Earth and of the known cosmos. Man and woman are the earth who thinks, expects, loves and has entered into a new state of decision, no longer instinctive, but now self-aware ." Boff, *A Teologia da Libertação: Balanço e Perspectivas*, 118.

² Boff, *Teologia da Libertação: Balanços e Perspectivas*, 114, 125. See also *Igreja: Entre Norte e Sul*, 14.

³ Boff, *Teologia da Libertação: Balanços e Perspectivas*, 124.

are not the whales, but the poor who are condemned to die prematurely.”⁴ With respect to the earth, argues Boff, the situation is not better. Appealing to the annual report of the Worldwatch Institute, Boff points out that between 1975 and 2000, 20% of all living species will have been eliminated from the earth. In addition, each year since 1950, 25 millions tons of humus are lost because of erosion, salinization and desertification. The forests of the world are disappearing at the rate of 20 million hectares per year.⁵ Acid rain, the global warming of the atmosphere, the destruction of the ozone layer, and the overpopulation of the world⁶ are also counted as evidences leading to a simple conclusion: “Gaia (the name the Greeks gave to the Earth, understood as an immense living being) is sick and wounded.”⁷

Boff does not hesitate to point out who must be held accountable for this situation: the human being who, especially from the Industrial revolution onward, has revealed himself as “an exterminator angel, a true satan of the Earth.”⁸ He reacts against the idea that the biblical account may offer a reason for man’s rights over the earth. For instance, in *O Despertar da Águia (The Awakening of the Eagle)*, he writes:

Behind this enormous cultural-scientific-technical process hides the figure of the biblical Adam who, according to the sacred text, *feels* the calling to subdue the Earth and all that it contains. Hidden [in the text] is the

⁴ Boff, *Teologia da Libertação: Balanços e Perspectivas*, 124. See also *Ecologia: Grito da Terra, Grito dos Pobres*, 15.

⁵ See Boff, *Ecologia, Mundialização, Espiritualidade*, 22-23.

⁶ See Boff, *Ecologia, Mundialização, Espiritualidade*, 23-24.

⁷ Boff, *Ecologia, Mundialização, Espiritualidade*, 25.

⁸ Boff, *Ecologia, Mundialização, Espiritualidade*, 25.

mythical figure of Prometheus, the deity who steals fire from heaven and gives it to humans, thus making himself the inspirer of the civilizational process, that is based on the power-domination. The will of power and domination is the prevailing anthropological project since the neolithic [age].⁹

Behind this portrayal of the social-ecological crisis, therefore, lies an anthropocentric paradigm based on a reductionist presupposition, namely, “understanding, spirit, and the creation and the construction of relations are considered exclusively to belong to the *homo-sapiens* species.”¹⁰ If, according to Boff, all things in creation must have their status exalted, since they share a common spirit, the human being, on the other hand, is harshly criticized. He is dialectically characterized by Boff as *sapiens* and *demens*, and blamed for his lack of wisdom and his immense capacity for dementia.¹¹ He is also censured for a mode-of-being in the world which stresses work over care, thus standing over things and disposing of them according to personal and collective interests.¹²

⁹ Boff, *O Despertar da Águia*, 29,30 [emphasis mine]. Obviously, Boff does not recognize Scripture’s authority. The biblical narrative does not present Adam’s calling to subdue the earth as a mere *feeling*, but as God’s own command (Genesis 1:26-28).

¹⁰ Boff, *O Despertar da Águia*, 83. For more on Boff’s panpsychism see chapter 3, pages 75 ff.

¹¹ Boff, *O Despertar da Águia*, 20.

¹² Boff, *Saber Cuidar*, 94.

In summary, we watch the growth of a massive oppression, says Boff, both on a social and on a planetary level.¹³ Our planet is threatened.¹⁴ Almost all societies are sick.¹⁵ “They produce a poor quality of life for all, human beings as well as the other beings of nature.”¹⁶

Boff goes beyond simply blaming the human being for this horrible picture. Throughout his works, specially some of his most recent ones, he presents the factors which, in his judgment, have contributed to our chaotic situation. They will be the object of our analysis in what follows.

Causal Factors of the Current Social-Ecological Crisis

The factors Boff identifies as responsible for the social-ecological crisis of our planet may be summed up under three interconnected headings: the prevailing social-cultural model, the prevailing economic model, and the prevailing religious model. While I am aware that these three areas overlap, I will try to examine each one separately in order to show how Boff envisions their specific contributions to the overall situation.

Social-Cultural Model

Our present crisis in its social and ecological dimensions reflects a deeper dilemma, a crisis of identity that humanity is undergoing. Human beings, created for a

¹³ Boff, *Teologia da Libertação: Balanços e Perspectivas*, 115.

¹⁴ Boff, *Ecologia: Grito da Terra, Grito dos Pobres*, 15.

¹⁵ The exceptions pointed out by Boff are the aboriginal societies of the indigenous people and some other minorities in Asia's southeast, in Oceania, and in the Arctic Pole. See *Saber Cuidar*, 137.

¹⁶ Boff, *Saber Cuidar*, 136, 137.

transcendental purpose, to dream, to actualize the utopia God has put in their hearts, to reach the heights as eagles, have been kept captives like chickens in a coop, have had the awareness of their purpose stifled. Boff blames the process of globalization and the consequent homogenization of cultural tendencies, preferences, ideas, consumption, values, productive model, and mode of development for the crisis of identity humanity is undergoing.¹⁷ “World-wide powers have an interest in keeping the human being in the chicken-condition. They want to erase from his conscience the eagle-vocation.”¹⁸ These powers, identified by Boff elsewhere, are the developed countries of the world that have excluded the large majority of the inhabitants of the planet from living a humane life.¹⁹

In parallel with the globalization process, technological development is also responsible for deeply affecting the relation between human beings and nature, human social relations, and even human spirituality.²⁰ Indeed, so Boff writes, technology, insofar as it dominates, subdues, and manipulates irresponsibly, represents a threat to the human condition itself.²¹ According to Boff, four axes comprise the human condition in the

¹⁷ Boff, *A Águia e a Galinha*, 175. See also *Nova Era: Civilização Planetária*, 65.

¹⁸ Boff, *A Águia e a Galinha*, 175.

¹⁹ “The summit meeting of global economy (IMF, G7, World Bank, etc) promises salvation to the whole world and later excludes the majority from the system.” Boff, *A Teologia da Libertação: Balanços e Perspectivas*, 48.

²⁰ “The technical jumps represent only the little rock which rolls down [creating] a motion that contaminates everything: the relations between human beings as well as nature and production, the social and institutional relations, linguistic, mental, emotional, and spiritual schemes with which human beings interpret and value their life and their function in the universe.” *O Despertar da Águia*, 86.

²¹ Boff points out some potential outcomes of man’s uncritical bowing to technology: pollution, ecological mutations derived from industrialization which in the long run may reveal themselves not as signs of freedom but of irresponsible planning and manipulation. “Technology,” says Boff, “may even make man to lose his global vision.” See *O Destino do Homem e do Mundo*, 55. I believe that by “global vision” Boff

world: (1) *adaptation/interaction*, which refers to the relationship between the human being and the environment; (2) *association/cooperation*, which concerns the life in community of human beings; (3) *symbolism/meaning*, which refers to the meaning human beings give to their acts, as well as to their personal, collective, and cosmic history; (4) *spirituality/re-ligion*, which regards human capacity, both personal and collective, to become part of a whole, to bind, and re-bind everything, to see totalities and to unfold the Mystery that inhabits the universe and shines in every being. These four axes, mutually related to each other, are also called “the wheels that cause the socio-cultural-bio-cosmic history of humanity to evolve.”²² In his 1998 work, *Nova Era: A Civilização Planetária* (*New Age: The Planetary Civilization*), Boff once more stresses the effects civilization has upon the relationship between societies and the world as well as upon the relationships among societies as a result of the introduction of new technologies.²³ Among the effects brought about by technology on labor relations, Boff mentions “the continuous and irreversible dismissal of work-power, and the growing exclusion of human participation in the process of production.”²⁴ Consequently, work, earlier an inalienable human right and a means through which the human being identifies himself as creator, is now withheld from a large mass of human beings as a result of an economic

here means man’s real identity or vocation.

²² *O Despertar da Águia*, 89. For Boff’s discussion of the four axes, see pp. 87-89.

²³ Boff, *Nova Era: A Civilização Planetária*, 11.

²⁴ Boff, *Nova Era: A Civilização Planetária*, 12. ‘Informatization,’ he adds, “brings about great growth without generating jobs, and even worse, eliminating jobs in important segments in industry, agriculture, and services.” *Nova Era: A Civilização Planetária*, 13.

model that aims at an ever growing production not linked to real needs but to artificial ones induced in the market by the media.²⁵ The high percentage of unemployment, even in the developed countries, is a structural and permanent reality.²⁶ If one agrees with Boff that “social ostracism and a feeling of uselessness and even of shame” are the inevitable consequences of lacking the right to work, then the structural causes—technological development included—behind the growth of unemployment should be objects of one’s concern. High technology, Boff adds, is also responsible for an unbalanced competition in the international market, since the rich countries have a clear advantage over the underdeveloped countries. The outcome of this picture is obvious: rich countries becoming even richer, while the poorest countries remain in their miserable condition, unable to reverse their fate.²⁷ In fact, Boff claims, there is a direct connection between these two opposite conditions, as I will show in the next section.

Economic Model

In his *Igreja: Entre Norte e Sul (Church: Between North and South)*, Leonardo Boff explicitly claims the existence of a causal relation between the wealth of the developed countries, mostly located in the Northern hemisphere (the core), and the poverty of the undeveloped ones, mostly located in the Southern hemisphere (the periphery). In his own words:

²⁵ Boff, *Nova Era: A Civilização Planetária*, 13.

²⁶ Boff, *Nova Era: A Civilização Planetária*, 14.

²⁷ Boff mentions that in the last thirty years Europe tripled its wealth while it simultaneously decreased its labor-journey by twenty five percent. See *Nova Era: A Civilização Planetária*, 15.

There is no future for the rich countries insofar as they will, contrary to justice, multiply their fortune *at the expenses* of the poor countries. There will likewise be no future for the oppressed countries as they will conform to oppression and dependency without looking for new alternatives. There will absolutely be no future if, with the help of all, a new order will not be created and the prevailing injustice at an international level be removed.²⁸

As the rich countries grow continually, providing an increasing level of material comfort to their people, the underdeveloped countries have become increasingly dependent both technologically and economically upon the developed countries. They also have seen their foreign debt escalate to a level far beyond their ability to pay.²⁹ This process of impoverishment of the underdeveloped nations, with the consequent enrichment of the wealthy nations, is explained by Boff in terms of the monetary manipulation and accounting transactions of multinational corporations that transfer their profits from their branches located in the peripheral countries to the main office located in the core countries, either in the form of royalties or in that of other types of reimbursement.³⁰ His conclusion is clear: “the sub-development of one side promotes the

²⁸ Boff, *Igreja: Entre Norte e Sul*, 21 (emphasis mine). The same claims are rephrased elsewhere: “There is, therefore, a causal relation between the wealth of the developed countries of the First World and the poverty of the less developed countries of the Third World. One who is not willing to see that [reality] transfers [sic] the shameful dynamics of the system of production in which we live and which generates centers increasingly prosperous and opulent, at the expenses of peripheral regions increasingly impoverished.” *Igreja: Entre Norte e Sul*, 9, 10 (emphasis mine). Perhaps, what Boff means by “transfer” is endorse. See also *América Latina: Da Conquista à Evangelização*, where Boff refers to the “irrefutable dependence of the Latin American countries on the decisions of the opulent countries concerning the destiny of the world.” There is, he concludes, “a center and a immense periphery.” *América Latina: Da Conquista à Evangelização*, 30. Perhaps, what Boff means by “transfers” is “endorses.”

²⁹ Boff, *Igreja: Entre Norte e Sul*, 8.

³⁰ Boff, *Igreja: Entre Norte e Sul*, 9. Boff is not clear on what kinds of monetary manipulation he is referring to. In *América Latina: Da Conquista à Evangelização*, Boff adds: “Earlier [we] exported raw materials, later semi-manufactured materials, and today we directly send capital to guarantee the pleasure logic of the opulent countries.” (31)

development of the other side, i.e, the poor produce the well-being of the rich.”³¹ Or, in an even blunter way: “the prosperity of the wealthy countries is paid with the blood and life of our poor.”³² These blunt statements of Boff’s most recent works seem to contrast with his more cautious evaluation of dependency theory in earlier works, as Father McGovern notes:

[Dependency theory] is only a theory, not an established truth. It is one stage in an ongoing investigation and has its own intrinsic limitations. It offers a good diagnosis of the structure of underdevelopment, but it does not do much to offer any viable way out.³³

As a matter of fact, Boff is not alone in his adoption of dependency theory that posits a causal connection between the development of some nations at the expense of the underdevelopment of others. Several other theologians committed to liberation theology adopt an analogous standpoint on this matter. For instance, Boff refers to Julio de Santa Ana, a protestant pastor and theologian who says that “the popular segments from the South assume the expiatory role *that makes possible* the well-being of the minorities who live in opulence.”³⁴ A similar position was expressed by the bishops gathered in Puebla,

³¹ Boff, *Igreja: Entre Norte e Sul*, 9.

³² Boff, *Igreja: Entre Norte e Sul*, 9. The causal connection between development and underdevelopment is also expressed in *Trinity and Society*, where Boff argues: “Development and underdevelopment are, in truth, two sides of the same coin. Both are produced by the same world-wide system of capitalist structures, which produces major inequalities in every sphere.... The rich minority becomes steadily richer at the expense of the increasingly poor majority.” *Trinity and Society*, 12-13.

³³ Boff, *Liberating Grace*, trans. John Drury (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1979), 65, according to Arthur F. McGovern, S.J., “Latin America and ‘Dependency’ Theory,” in *Liberation Theology and the Liberal Society*, ed. Michael Novak (Washington: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1987), 115.

³⁴ Julio de Santa Ana, *La Práctica Económica como Religión* (San José, Costa Rica: DEI, 1991), 46, according to Boff: *A Teologia da Libertação: Balanços e Perspectivas*, 47 (emphasis added).

Mexico, for the III Latin American Episcopal Conference, held between January 27 and February 12, 1979.³⁵ It would be mistaken, however, to assume that adoption of the dependency theory is confined to those geographically linked to Latin America or other underdeveloped regions of the world. Norbert Greinacher, for instance, is counted among those who, while coming from developed countries, still support the theory of dependency. "The Christians of the First World," posits Greinacher, "should not close themselves to the bitter knowledge of the dependency theory, already adopted by liberation theologians long ago."³⁶ Nicholas Wolterstorff also expresses a clear sympathy for the dependency theory in his *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, but I will leave the treatment of his view for a later section.

The alternative thesis that all economies in the world are interdependent, as suggested by the North-American Roman Catholic bishops,³⁷ Boff altogether rejects.

³⁵ "Our poverty," the bishops wrote, "does not constitute a casual step of [our] development, but is the product of specific situations and social, economical, and political structures that, on the international scene, make the rich increasingly richer at the expenses of the poor increasingly poorer." *Igreja: Entre Norte e Sul*, 9. We should heed the warning Father McGovern issues in his essay "Latin America and 'Dependency' Theory:" "At one level, reliance on dependency theory, or at least on the 'fact' of dependency, appears integral to the development and message of liberation theology.... At another level, however, the centrality of dependency theory can be exaggerated. Many works of liberation theologians (for example, Jon Sobrino, Juan Luis Segundo, and Segundo Galilea) make little or no reference to dependency." Arthur F. McGovern, S.J., "Latin America and 'Dependency' Theory," 113-114.

³⁶ Norbert Greinacher, "Teologia da Libertação no 'Primeiro Mundo'," *Igreja: Entre Norte e Sul*, 55. See also *The Poor and the Church*, eds. Greinacher and Alois Muller (New York: Seabury Press, 1977).

³⁷ Boff is referring to the pastoral letter issued by the Roman Catholic bishops on November 13, 1986 which, he says, "never speaks of dependence but of interdependence between rich and poor countries. Inequalities and discriminations are censured, but as something that does not have a causal connection with the wealth of those who possess control over the global market." The theory of interdependence, counterclaims Boff, is purely descriptive and does not point to the prevailing state of iniquity. "The expression 'interdependence' only dissimulates the economic exploitation, the political domination, and the cultural marginalization of our [Third World] countries by the nations of the First World." See *Igreja: Entre Norte e Sul*, 10-11.

According to him, the alleged interdependence among all economies as a consequence of the globalization process in fact veils the “true dependence of the peripheral countries upon the central [core] countries, since the relationships between these two groups are neither symmetric nor equitable.”³⁸ Conversely, Boff points to the deep dependence of the countries that have not yet reached a self-sustained development, a dependence which expresses itself at several levels, technological, financial, political, and even ideological.³⁹

In fairness to Boff, one must admit that, at given points, he softens his strong defense of the dependency theory, seemingly embracing a more nuanced version of the theory.⁴⁰ In those cases he recognizes that a unilateral explanation for the development/underdevelopment correlation is neither possible nor accurate. The adoption of the Western economic order⁴¹ by Latin American countries presupposes the existence of “sectors within Latin American societies that are congenial with European population segments (among which earlier colonial powers) that politically desire that [adoption] at any price.”⁴² I will return to this point later in my evaluation of Boff’s commitment to the dependency theory. Now, however, I will proceed with portraying his understanding of

³⁸ Boff, *Nova Era: A Civilização Planetária*, 31.

³⁹ Boff, *Nova Era: A Civilização Planetária*, 31.

⁴⁰ In *Nova Era: A Civilização Planetária*, after emphasizing that the idea of interdependence veils the true dependence of peripheral countries, Boff adds: “Nevertheless, one notes that no country today is self-sufficient and has in its internal boundaries the key to solve its own problems.” (31).

⁴¹ This perspective sounds very reductionist insofar as it includes under one single perspective a whole spectrum of multifarious political-economical tendencies.

⁴² “They [those sectors] want,” adds Boff, “a developed Latin America, but within the framework of capitalism which will be naturally modern, civilized, and generative of plenty of goods.” Boff, *América Latina: Da Conquista à Nova Evangelização*, 25.

the economic factors behind the contemporary social-ecological crisis, by focusing on his view of two concurrent economic systems, namely, socialism, and capitalism. Following this portrayal, the debt of the underdeveloped countries will also be discussed briefly.

Socialism

Boff repeatedly expresses his positive appraisal of socialism despite his recognition of the failures of some historical versions of the system. In *O Despertar da Águia* (*The Awakening of the Eagle*), for instance, he says:

Socialism, in its original ideology, presented itself and continues to present itself as a viable historical alternative to the [proposed] social class struggle. Its dream is democracy's complete development. Such democracy must actualize itself in politics, in economy, in culture, and in all realms of human fellowship. A society of classes by its own nature produces inequalities... [and] will never be a truly democratic society.⁴³

At the heart of Boff's endorsement of socialism lies his concept of justice as equality. After 200 years of political experiments on the left, it has become clear, Boff says, that "human beings are not, either by origin or by destiny, unequal. They are different."⁴⁴ Human beings are different, not insofar as their "origin or destiny" is concerned. Rather, they are different in their earthly vocations, while sharing a common transcendental and eschatological vocation.⁴⁵ Socialism, therefore, is a superior socio-

⁴³ Boff, *O Despertar da Águia*, 100. Elsewhere, Boff shows his appreciation of Karl Marx's diagnosis of the capitalist system as expressed in *Capital: A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production* by declaring: "The problem is not the book *Capital*; rather it is the transnational capital which is spoliating the people and dismantling our social relations. This real capital must be analyzed and unfolded with the help of Marx's analysis in the book *Capital*." *Mística e Espiritualidade*, 69.

⁴⁴ Boff, *O Despertar da Águia*, 106.

⁴⁵ Boff, "A Vocação Transcendental e Escatológica do Homem e as Vocações Terrenas," *O Destino do Homem e do Mundo*, 35-36. For Boff it is the transcendental, eschatological vocation that gauges earthly vocations. As he puts it: "[A]ny earthly vocation is good, insofar it is open to the transcendental and

economic system since by its very nature it is “generous, stemming from a feeling of compassion for social misery in the face of *injustice* and from a willingness to change so as to overcome this unhuman context.”⁴⁶ According to Boff, the left strives for the equality of all citizens, both before the law and before the right.⁴⁷

The recognition of “radicalism and historical excesses” perpetrated by the left is not sufficient, Boff argues echoing a Kantian maxim, to compromise its ongoing recognition of the inherent dignity of every human being “as an end in itself and never as a means toward any other interests.”⁴⁸ Nevertheless, Boff recognizes that historically the public powers (the State) “did not appear to be good providers of social services because in almost all countries they have been undermined by corruption and wastefulness.”⁴⁹ Despite his appreciation of socialism as a socio-economic system, Boff acknowledges

eschatological vocation.” Boff, “The Absolute Character of the Transcendental and Eschatological Vocation, and the Relative [Character] of the Earthly Vocations,” *O Destino do Homem e do Mundo*, 37.

⁴⁶ Boff, *O Despertar da Águia*, 106 (emphasis mine). Boff comes back to the same point in *Mística e Espiritualidade*: “For million of people, socialism and marxism were a stream of generosity and a source of inspiration for true love toward the oppressed, as well as for revolutionary and practical visions in all segments of society. Socialism’s ideology remains a mobilizing alternative for social engagement. Socialism was born both out of a deep indignation toward the misery and out of an act of political and revolutionary love toward the oppressed of the societies marked by social inequalities.” Boff, *Mística e Espiritualidade*, 10.

⁴⁷ Boff, *O Despertar da Águia*, 106. What right has Boff in mind? It does not seem obvious that he means legal rights, in which case his statement would be redundant. Perhaps “right” refers to a more ontological feature, something that intrinsically belongs to human beings as a consequence of what Boff would call their transcendental-eschatological vocation. As all human beings share this common vocation they are equal. Consequently, a society built on the inequality of classes is in principle not acceptable. Socialism, says Boff, has the merit of identifying and struggling against the actualization of this iniquitous system, namely, capitalism.

⁴⁸ Boff, *O Despertar da Águia*, 107.

⁴⁹ Boff, *Nova Era: A Civilização Planetária*, 22.

that the judgment of history does not allow any other conclusion: “Real socialism failed.”⁵⁰ Boff diagnoses the main reason behind this failure in this way: while socialism had the merit of socializing goods, it privatized dreams. Only the dreams dreamed by the single party were legitimate. “By forbidding the dreams, [socialism] forbid freedom, creativity, and thus it destroyed the humanitarian ethos.”⁵¹

In conclusion, Boff seems to suggest that had socialism not committed the mistake of suppressing freedom, it would be a viable political system, since it rests on a correct socio-economic, the equality of all human beings.⁵² It is not difficult to understand why Boff has basic dislike for capitalism, as we will show next.

Capitalism

In *Teologia da Libertação: Balanço e Perspectivas (Theology of Liberation: Balance and Perspectives)*, José Ramos Regidor develops an historical survey of liberation theology. In this survey Regidor points out what he considers a common theme in liberation theology, namely, denunciation of the idolatrous character of capitalism.⁵³ According to Regidor, “liberation theology is called to identify and unmask the

⁵⁰ Boff, *Nova Era: A Civilização Planetária*, 67.

⁵¹ Boff, *Nova Era: A Civilização Planetária*, 67.

⁵² I am aware that the equality of all human beings is primarily a moral-metaphysical reality. Boff claims that the socio-economic system which best expresses such equality is socialism.

⁵³ Regidor appeals to the studies developed by DEI (Department of Ecumenical Investigations), in San Jose, Costa Rica, more specifically to Franz Hinkelammert and Hugo Assmann who investigated the relationship between economy and theology. Both Hinkelammert and Assmann analyzed the idolatrous nature of capitalism in its present forms, pointing to its pretentiousness of presenting itself as the only salvation for the contemporary world. See José Ramos Regidor, “Vinte e Cinco Anos de Teologia da Libertação,” *Teologia da Libertação: Balanço e Perspectivas*, 47.

sacralization and ravaging violence of the Capital-idol, of the contemporary model of development with all its mechanisms of both excluding and hiding its victims.”⁵⁴ Regidor definitely is not alone in his appraisal. Equally critical of capitalism, Leonardo Boff argues in the same book that liberation theology, in its analysis of the causes for the impoverishment of the majority of the world’s population, has become aware of a “perverse logic.” “The same logic of the prevailing system of accumulation and social organization that leads to the exploitation of workers also leads to the plunder of whole nations and to the despoiling of nature.”⁵⁵ This perverse logic originates from the anthropocentric standing point mentioned above.⁵⁶

I observed in chapter 3 how Boff’s emphasis on panentheism fits both his critique of the mode-of-being-*work* and his stress on the mode-of-being-*care*. His understanding that all things are animated by a common spirit and symbiotically related to God lays an

⁵⁴ José Ramos Regidor, “Vinte e Cinco Anos de Teologia da Libertação,” *Teologia da Libertação: Balanço e Perspectivas*, 47. A similar claim is made by Jon Sobrino who, referring to Dom Romero, Roman Catholic bishop in El Salvador, states that the latter “had the courage to name concretely the Salvadorian idols of this age: the absolutized capitalism and the National Safety doctrine...” See *Teologia da Libertação: Balanço e Perspectivas*, 46.

⁵⁵ Boff, *Teologia da Libertação: Balanço e Perspectivas*, 124. In *Nova Era: a Civilização Planetária*, Boff makes a similar claim by noting the changes introduced in society by the new nature of technological development: “The worker, fearing to lose his job, prefers to accept, to struggle for his company, even unwillingly, even though the company exploits him, because it at least guarantees a job and [professional] activity, and so, a place in the sun in society.” Boff, *Nova Era: A Civilização Planetária*, 17.

⁵⁶ Boff, *Saber Cuidar*, 94. This rupture between *work* and *care* is not a recent reality. Boff traces its origins to the neolithic age. However, according to him, such process degenerated with the Industrial Revolution of the Eighteenth century. Since then, work “is no longer related to nature (re-modelation), but to capital (struggle capital-work, as analyzed by Marx and Engels). Work is now salary-based rather than an activity of modeling nature. People live enslaved by the structures of productive work, a work rationalized, objective, depersonalized, subject to the logic of the machine.” *Saber Cuidar*, 97.

ontological-spiritual foundation to justify a new approach and a new relation to other beings of creation in general, and to human beings in particular.

Given the seriousness of the current situation, neither technological adjustments nor superficial social re-definitions are fruitful, as they do not touch the heart of the problem. A real solution comes by overcoming that “logic and the meaning human beings gave themselves during the last three centuries in the industrial era.”⁵⁷ As I noted above, according to Boff, modern societies are sick. Their sickness is intrinsic to their structure.

They are societies of classes rather than of communities. In the latter, says Boff,

the members of the community have equal access to the means of production, to an equitable division of the working force (all produce according to their own ways and abilities), and all have an impartial share in the final product of work (varying according to the needs of health and age of each person).⁵⁸

Conversely, contemporary societies of classes have a mode of production that is “asymmetric.” “Only a small, permanent minority has control of the means of production. [These societies] unequally distribute both the work-power and the benefits of the development.”⁵⁹ It is this asymmetry, Boff concludes, that “gives birth to social classes.”⁶⁰ This antagonistic relation between working-class and owners of capital, earlier operative on only a national level, is now operative on a global scale as a result of the globalization

⁵⁷ Boff, *Teologia da Libertação: Balanços e Perspectivas*, 124.

⁵⁸ Boff, *O Despertar da Águia*, 99.

⁵⁹ Boff, *O Despertar da Águia*, 99.

⁶⁰ Boff, *O Despertar da Águia*, 99.

process.⁶¹ In the world market, the tension between those who possess technological knowledge and those who are excluded from it is nothing but an enlarged version of the primary tension between capital and labor.⁶² Socialism, as I observed above, in its original form “presented and continues to present itself as the viable historical alternative” to a society of classes in continuous struggle. A society of classes, I repeat, is the kind of society that “due to its nature to produce inequalities... will never be a truly democratic society.”⁶³

Besides the exploitation of workers by those who control the means of production, Boff presents some additional arguments for his claim that capitalism is based on a perverse logic. He substantiates this claim as follows:

[Capitalism] stresses the supremacy of the quantitative over the qualitative; the privilege of capital and of the new means of production over the human worker; the predominance of material [values] over humanistic, ethical, and spiritual [values].⁶⁴

⁶¹ This relation is characterized, Boff says, by a permanent tension and true struggle for incomes, profits, forms of participation in the companies’ decision-making processes, among other factors. See *O Despertar da Águia*, 99.

⁶² In this context, Boff explicitly mentions Karl Marx, stressing that it was the latter’s merit to have recognized the importance of class struggle as the, or at least one, engine driving modern history forward, Boff, *O Despertar da Águia*, 100. Boff’s more qualified statement probably is probably due to his acceptance of Teilhard de Chardin’s evolutionary perspective as *a*, perhaps *the*, most pervasive category in his ontological-epistemological proposal.

⁶³ Boff, *O Despertar da Águia*, 100.

⁶⁴ Boff, *Nova Era: A Civilização Planetária*, 15. In *Igreja: Entre Norte e Sul*, Boff makes a parallel claim, stating that the Western social-economic system has led to “the impoverishment of relations and emotions, attested to by the high rate of suicide, numerous clients of therapy, incapacity for developing relationships both within the family and society.” *Igreja: entre Norte e Sul*, 21. Other evidences of the failure of capitalism are, according to Boff, dependence on drugs, alcohol, anonymous sex, consumerism, and marginalization. See *Igreja: Entre Norte e Sul*, 21.

Neo-liberalism, “the contemporary expression of capitalistic accumulation [of wealth],”⁶⁵ is not exempt from criticism either. Here there is a difference of degree, not of philosophy. The production, which before was national or trans-national, now has become world-wide. But the intrinsic problem of capitalism—the exploitation of the work force—remains unresolved. Competition in a free-market, another key feature of neo-liberalism, is also rejected since “it entails the denial of the other, the refusal both to share and to love.”⁶⁶ Moreover, Boff presents some additional justifications for his rejection of neo-liberalism. Privatization, a core belief of neo-liberalism, is responsible for the promotion of individualism as well as for the exaltation of property.⁶⁷ Even worse, privatization entails the reduction of the role of the State. And for the countries of the Southern hemisphere, which still have not gone through a “social revolution” and are totally dependent on the State for public health, education, housing policies, and other basic services, this will “condemn to death multitudes of poor.”⁶⁸

The predominance and expansion of capitalism in today’s world is not explained by Boff on the basis of either religious or moral superiority, as argued by Michael

⁶⁵ Boff, *Nova Era: a Civilização Planetária*, 63.

⁶⁶ Boff, *Saber Cuidar*, 111. The inevitable outcome is an excluding and inhuman society that victimizes many people.

⁶⁷ Boff, *Nova Era: a Civilização Planetária*, 63. Similar criticism is repeated in *Saber Cuidar*, where Boff states: “There is a carelessness and abandonment of the dreams, aggravated by neoliberalism’s hegemony with its inherent individualism and exaltation of [private] property.” Boff, *Saber Cuidar*, 18.

⁶⁸ Boff, *Nova Era: A Civilização Planetária*, 63.

Novak.⁶⁹ The explanation he offers is primarily psycho-sociological. While capitalism privatized goods, it socialized dreams by an extensive use of mass-communication media. These dreams, Boff says, “though fallacious, sustain hope and prolong life.”⁷⁰ Still, they are no more than dreams. They remain purely imaginary. Therefore, Boff concludes, “capitalism did not solve any problem that socialism proposed to solve.”⁷¹ This is not an isolated, incidental statement. Boff insists on his claim, making sure the reader fully grasps it, as this rather lengthy quotation shows:

The order of capital, presently globalized, did not solve any problem left by nominal socialism (real socialism still remains a project to be actualized). On the contrary, it [capitalism] made the world-wide situation worse. Abandoned to its own logic without opposition by an alternative [since the fall of socialism], this hegemonic order rendered even more dramatic the situation of the poor in the world. The acceleration of the process of accumulation made the poor even poorer—and, what is worse, even less hopeful—and aggravated the quality of life of the rich through consumerism. Capitalism is now inexcusable. It is barely able to hide its voracity and its perverse face, since it does not operate anymore under the pretext of combating socialism, and of forbidding communism’s ideals. It is eroding the two pillars by which it has always sustained itself: nature and the work force. Nature suffers a barbaric spoliation. The work force is largely being dismissed without any compensation.⁷²

It is clear therefore, according to Boff, that nothing else but capitalism should be held responsible for both dimensions—ecological and social—of the crisis that afflicts the planet and human societies.

⁶⁹ Michael Novak, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* (New York: An American Enterprise Institute/Simon & Schuster Publications, 1982).

⁷⁰ Boff, *Nova Era: A Civilização Planetária*, 67.

⁷¹ Boff, *Nova Era: A Civilização Planetária*, 67.

⁷² Boff, *Nova Era: A Civilização Planetária*, 83-84.

Considering all previous criticisms, it is not surprising that Boff concludes his evaluation with the following claim: “*Capitalism is always more or less immoral, but never more or less moral.*”⁷³

Boff’s analysis of the foreign debt of the underdeveloped nations still remains to be considered. I will briefly show Boff’s understanding of this topic before moving on to a consideration of the prevailing religious model.

External Debt

In what concerns the foreign debt of Latin American countries, Boff establishes a causal relation between this debt and the relation between the European colonizers and the colony they created.⁷⁴ Latin America, Boff argues, was initially confiscated of its natural richness. Later, it witnessed an exportation of capital to pay the interest on debts incurred by governments that adopted policies clearly beneficial to the colonizers. In the last years, Boff argues, but without presenting any concrete data, the transfer of capital from the peripheral countries to the “metropolitan” countries was five times the amount of the principal of their debt. Therefore, this debt “has already been paid many times.”⁷⁵ Latin America’s foreign debt, estimated by Boff to be 300 billion U.S. dollars, is

⁷³ Boff, *Igreja: Entre Norte e Sul*, 11 (emphasis mine).

⁷⁴ Leonardo Boff, I believe, would extend his reasoning to other continents that underwent the same colonization process, such as Africa, for example.

⁷⁵ Boff, *América Latina: Da Conquista à Evangelização*, 62.

“unpayable,” and its basic purpose is to keep Latin American countries in bondage to capitalism. It has, therefore, primarily a political purpose rather than an economic one.⁷⁶

Nevertheless, the financial debt of the colonized countries should not be our only object of attention. The colonizing countries are not only debtors in a socio-economic sense, they also are debtors in several other areas: political-military, ecological, cultural, and religious.⁷⁷ In what concerns the economic debt owed by the developed countries, Boff writes:

We [Latin American countries] supported in the past the primitive accumulation which is the foundation for the qualitative leap toward industrialization and its inherent accumulation of riches on the one hand, and impoverishment on the other, at the expenses of our gold, our raw materials, the enslavement of our black people... as well as the dismantling of the ‘testimony-cultures’.⁷⁸

Speaking of paying the debt owed by the developed countries, Boff appeals to the “most basic morality” and to “minimal ethical justice.” A pre-condition for this payment, he adds, is a radical shift of the *current paradigm of development* built on robbery, pillage, and the exploitation of other classes, peoples, and whole continents.⁷⁹ The rescue

⁷⁶ Boff, *América Latina: Da Conquista à Evangelização*, 21. Later in his work, he adds: “[O]ne fact is irrefutable: the dependence of Latin-American countries on the decisions rich countries make concerning the world’s destiny, as well as the inclusion of certain regions in world-wide politics. There is undeniably a center and an immense periphery.” *América Latina: Da Conquista à Evangelização*, 30. Indeed, according to Boff, this dependence is not only economic, but also political, technological, religious, anthropological, and ecological. (See *América Latina: Da Conquista à Evangelização*, 63.

⁷⁷ Boff, *Teologia da Libertação: Balanço e Perspectivas*, 50.

⁷⁸ Boff, *América Latina: Da Conquista à Evangelização*, 63.

⁷⁹ Boff, *América Latina: Da Conquista à Evangelização*, 66. Those countries historically despoiled and consequently deprived of the possibility of an autochthonous development, deserve privileged conditions for their development. “As Israel and other nations received war reimbursement, Latin America also is creditor of analogous compensation.” *América Latina: Da Conquista à Evangelização*, 66.

of the poor, therefore, demands another system, one characterized by the participation of all through a “just and effective distribution of goods.”⁸⁰ Before examining what this new system should look like, according to Boff, we must first consider the influence of the prevailing religious model on the social-ecological crisis that afflicts the earth.

Religious Model

According to Boff, each of the revolutions that occurred in human history has had an impact on civilizational processes as well as on linguistic, economic, social, cultural, scientific, symbolic, and religious configurations.⁸¹ The current socio-economic model is not an exception. It has neglected both the experience of the sacred and the development of a true spirituality that by its very nature should be inclusive, open to *alterity*.⁸²

Therefore, as I mentioned in chapter 4, Western Christianity with its pretentiousness of being the only way to God does not meet the requirements. Christianity has also failed in imposing limits on the prevailing socio-economic model. A potential reason for such failure, according to Boff, lies in Christianity’s emphasis on God’s transcendence that ends up by limiting His experience. “Without the cultivation of the experience of the sacred,” Boff urges, “we will not be able either to impose limits to the ravaging voracity

⁸⁰ Boff, *Igreja: Entre Norte e Sul*, 11.

⁸¹ Boff, *O Despertar da Águia*, 87. Boff mentions the agricultural, urban, ‘irrigation’, mercantile, industrial, thermonuclear, ‘knowledge-information,’ and the most recent planetary revolutions as historical evidences for his claim.

⁸² See *Mística e Espiritualidade*, 7; “[W]e need a spirituality, a new meeting with the central meaning of life and of history... What is necessary is a new religion in the etymological sense of the word.” *Nova Era: A Civilização Planetária*, 70. This new religion must effectively bind the contributions of different spiritual traditions. It is not difficult to see how Boff’s proposal conflicts with Christianity’s claims of exclusivity. The word *alterity* derives from the Greek *alter*, to refer to one’s openness to the other who, while different, still has the same substance.

of the dominating type of development or to save the ecosystem and living species threatened by extinction.”⁸³ A new religion should be pursued, one that would appeal especially to the trinitarian communication as the model to shape a society where one sees how the divine persons, though distinct, still are united by *perichoretic* love, thus mutually indwelling each other.⁸⁴ I will discuss in more detail Boff’s proposal of a religious model later. For now it is important to note that Boff’s Christian-panentheism provides a solid, though not a healthy, foundation for his project of deepening the experience of the sacred in all realms of human life, thus developing a holistic spirituality.

Crisis: Risk plus Opportunity

Many years ago I learned from a missionary in Brazil that the Chinese word for *crisis* is composed of two distinct characters meaning respectively *danger* and *opportunity*.⁸⁵ Behind any crisis, according to Chinese culture, lies not only an inherent risk but also a potential opportunity for a new, richer development. Leonardo Boff certainly embraces this Eastern concept. Behind the risks of globalization he clearly sees the potential for a new stage in man’s evolutionary journey. It is true that globalization within the contemporary model of development has caused the neo-liberal economic

⁸³ Boff, *O Despertar da Águia*, 35.

⁸⁴ Boff, *Igreja: entre Norte e Sul*, 15. José Ramos Regidor, following Boff, refers to San Francis of Assisi as the paradigm of a proper experience of the sacred. San Francis has “a special sensitivity toward all created beings, forgetting neither their likeness nor their irreducible differences, but trying to live with them, knowing and respecting each of their function in a common interdependence within a social and ecological democracy.” Regidor, *A Teologia da Libertação*, 64.

⁸⁵ I am referring to Ken Kudo, missionary for a missionary organization called *Avante* in Brazil, who has worked for many years to develop a missionary vision in the Brazilian evangelical church.

program to expand, but it has also opened the door to the possibility of a new planetary vision, one committed to universal values, which respects the differences and stresses the interdependence of all human beings, particularly in the relationship between North and South.⁸⁶ The contemporary suffering, Boff suggests, while a reflex of the civilizational crisis, also reveals a labor process that humanity is undergoing. We are at the point of taking a new step in the human evolutionary process, of reaching a new level of *hominization*.⁸⁷ The first signs of a new social covenant between all people, as well as of a covenant of peace and cooperation with earth, come in sight.⁸⁸ It is possible to discern the dawn of a new civilization within the globalization process; a civilization where the distinction between State-nations will be done away with and where a single global society will arise. This process, Boff says, is “irreversible.”⁸⁹ We are moving toward a planetary democracy, one that not only is human and social but also cosmic, and in which all beings will interact as fellow-citizens.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Boff, *A Teologia da Libertação: Balanços e Perspectivas*, 62.

⁸⁷ “We are at the threshold of a new birth, with all the labor pains involved in a birth. Undeniably, an interdependent cultural system, with a network of complex information and communication in all directions, is being generated. This phenomenon means, in fact, a collective intelligence, a planetary awareness.” *O Despertar da Águia*, 118 (see also page 27). Boff calls this new more developed stage of the evolutionary process *noosphere*, from the Greek *nous*, which means mind, intelligence. *Noosphere* is the “fellowship of human minds and hearts among themselves, with the Earth, with the whole universe, and with the Creator and Attractor of all things.” *O Despertar da Águia*, 119. See also *Mística e Espiritualidade*, 7. Boff’s idea of noosphere reveals once more his indebtedness to Teilhard (see chapter 2, pages 39 ff).

⁸⁸ Boff, *O Despertar da Águia*, 27.

⁸⁹ Boff, *O Despertar da Águia*, 38.

⁹⁰ Boff, *Nova Era: A Civilização Planetária*, 73. Boff specifically names the beings he has in mind. He refers not only to living beings, like trees, but also to inanimate ones, like crystal water, pure air, and the glow of stars. A similar statement is found in *A Teologia da Libertação Balanço e Perspectivas*, where Boff says: “The [planetary] democracy must be socio-cosmic; this means that the elements of nature, such as

In his 1994 *Mística e Espiritualidade (Mystic and Spirituality)*, Boff confesses that, while he refuses to accept the position that capitalism may prevail as the “dominant ideology,” he does not know what the alternatives will be.⁹¹ Still, that recognition does not mean that Boff does not have any guidelines to offer at this point. It is already clear to him that mere reformism of certain institutions or programs would not be efficacious, since it would leave the basic paradigm unchallenged.⁹² He seems to identify himself with the group he calls the *libertarians* who also want changes, but structural ones rather than superficial ones. As he puts it, “they aim at another type of society, and at a different social paradigm that generates new ideas, new practices, new social relations and a new horizon of hope for the future.” The libertarians, he concludes, are revolutionaries; they try to introduce qualitative leaps that produce a new history and give human society a new direction.⁹³ This expectation explains not only Boff’s rejection of mere reformism but also his disapproval of both paternalism and *assistentialism*.⁹⁴ A purely superficial help,

mountains, plants, waters, animals, atmosphere, and landscapes are new citizens participating in human fellowship, and that human beings participate in the cosmic fellowship.” (126)

⁹¹ He literally says, “even though we may not know where the ways out are, we do not accept history’s verdict that capital won out, that history evolves toward the domination of the richer and the stronger, with the consequent marginalization of 2/3 of humanity. We do not believe that. We will keep [our] ideas and purpose of living, associating our destiny with those condemned of the Earth.” *Mística e Espiritualidade*, 52.

⁹² Reformism, Boff claims, usually is the “ideology of the middle class, of intellectuals of the prevailing systems.” While reformists are critical concerning the *establishment*, and sufficiently open to introduce changes, they are still conservative by not proposing a radical change of the prevailing paradigm. See *O Despertar da Águia*, 105.

⁹³ Boff, *O Despertar da Águia*, 105. Boff’s “libertarians” should not be confused with those who adopt libertarianism in the U.S., i.e., with those who strive for a limited role of the government together with maxim individual freedom.

⁹⁴ This is a common theme of liberation theologians. A similar claim is made by Jon Sobrino in *Teologia da Libertação: Balanço e Perspectivas*, 46.

Boff adds, will not be effective in overcoming the condition of poverty that has structural causes.⁹⁵ What is required to construe a new society is a new social, political, cultural, economic, and religious model. Next we will consider Boff's conception of this new society.

A Cosmic-Planetary-Social-Democratic Society

For didactic purposes, the same models that were used to portray Boff's evaluation of contemporary human society will be used in presenting his proposal. The social-cultural model will now include politics. So far this was intentionally avoided due to the heterogeneity of the actual political systems.

Social-Political-Cultural Model

One of the foundations of Boff's proposal is his vision of the social order, not as isolated but as dialectically integrated within a larger order: the order of life, of the earth, of the cosmos.⁹⁶ This integration Boff argues on the basis of his panentheist-evolutionary cosmology.⁹⁷ Understanding, spirit, and the creation and construction of relations are not unique to human beings. All beings share a common spirit. All are co-participants in the same evolutionary process.⁹⁸ This new society, therefore, must be *cosmic*. It must be

⁹⁵ Boff, *América Latina: Da Conquista à Nova Evangelização*, 85

⁹⁶ *O Despertar da Águia*, 83.

⁹⁷ See chapter 3, page 81 ff.

⁹⁸ While *auto-poiese* and the self-organization of energy and matter happen in a peculiar way within the social realm, they are not an exclusively human experience. "The social process," argues Boff, "as an advanced expression of life is deeply dynamic and interactive. It flows continually from order to chaos and back to order, thus creating social flexibility and distinct socio-historical forms which, while permanently aiming at cohesion and stability, are always fragile since they are submitted to chaos' generative force." Boff, *O Despertar da Águia*, 84.

“construed from the bottom up,” and not only including the poor but also the inanimate elements of nature. All are “brothers and sisters in the house of the maternal Father and the paternal Mother of infinite tenderness.”⁹⁹

This *cosmic* society will not be confined to specific nations. Indeed, as I have mentioned, the State-nations will be overcome and yield their place to a single planetary society. Boff expresses his conviction as follows:

We are advancing from national societies to a unique world-wide society. The interdependence at all levels, the communication networks, and the planetary consciousness provide us with the perception of a unique destiny. The need is felt for a pluralistic direction giving center (which is not the earlier totalitarian socialist plan) that will manage the questions of collective interest, such as food, water, health, habitation, communication, education, and preservation of the Earth’s patrimony.¹⁰⁰

This new planetary vision will accentuate what is universal, while acknowledging and promoting the differences, and while stressing the interdependence of all beings, especially in the relation North-South.¹⁰¹ In this planetary society the conviction will prevail that there is but one human family from which arises a “feeling of solidarity, of co-responsibility, of familiarity, of intimacy, of subjectivity.”¹⁰² The basic axis of this

⁹⁹ Boff, *América Latina: Da Conquista à Nova Evangelização*, 87.

¹⁰⁰ Boff, *O Despertar da Águia*, 115. Elsewhere he reinforces this same point: “The human house today is no longer the State-nation, but the earth as humanity’s common *pátria/mátria* [a play on words in Portuguese that shows Boff’s inclusive language for gender]. This homeland was in the exile, divided into nation-States, isolated in regional cultures, limited by countless languages. Now... it is coming back as a unified planet. This planet will have a single history, the history of the *homo* species, and a unique and colorful global society with the conscience of a common destiny and of an equal origin.” *Saber Cuidar*, 27.

¹⁰¹ Boff, *A Teologia da Libertação: Balanço e Perspectivas*, 62.

¹⁰² Boff, *O Despertar da Águia*, 22. In this planetary society, Boff adds, there will reign the consciousness that we are but one species. It is this consciousness that justifies a unique world-wide society. (*O Despertar da Águia*, 22).

society will no longer be the “power or striving after accumulation [or wealth], but life, its excellence, the right of all beings to exist...”¹⁰³ Or, as Boff puts it in *Saber Cuidar*

(*Knowing How to Care*):

We dream of a global society in our great common house, the earth, where the core values will center in care toward people, especially those culturally different, the penalized either by nature or history; care for the despoiled and excluded, the children, the elderly, the dying; care for plants, animals, and loved landscapes; and care especially for our great and generous Mother Earth.¹⁰⁴

The planetary society Boff aims at is, as may logically be expected, one of plurality. The subjects of the new civilization come from all cultures, all social classes, and all spiritual traditions.¹⁰⁵ It is a society attuned to the universe’s fundamental laws, namely, *pan*-relatedness, synergy, complementarity.¹⁰⁶ This pluralism will bring out the richness of the society of Boff’s dreaming, a reality so comprehensive that it cannot be reduced to “a unique symbol, a unique discourse, or a unique institution.”¹⁰⁷

What does Boff propose regarding the political structure of this cosmic-planetary-plural society? Faithful to his historical appreciation of socialism, he advocates one

¹⁰³ Boff, *América Latina: Da Conquista à Evangelização*, 69. In *A Teologia da Libertação: Balanço e Perspectivas*, Boff makes a similar claim, declaring that it is necessary to move from “the logic of the means at the service of accumulation to the logic of ends aiming for the common well-being of the Earth, both of human and of all other beings, through the exercise of freedom and the cooperation among all people.” (127)

¹⁰⁴ Boff, *Saber Cuidar*, 13.

¹⁰⁵ Boff, *O Despertar da Águia*, 33.

¹⁰⁶ Boff, *O Despertar da Águia*, 34. See chapter 4, page 126.

¹⁰⁷ Boff, *América Latina: Da Conquista à Evangelização*, 137. In Christian terms, adds Boff, we would say that the Kingdom is so global and omnipresent that no single individual/institution can translate or actualize it in history. Rather, it is “anticipated by all and all give it some historical configuration.” (*América Latina: Da Conquista à Evangelização*, 137)

central global government, a “strong geo-political organization” that would be able to implement a new economic model in a globalized economy, thus overcoming the law of competition and free-market.¹⁰⁸ This world-wide State power would be the indispensable instrument responsible for defining the “rules of the game,” exercising a general juridical and ethical control.¹⁰⁹ Both the need for guaranteeing a minimal socio-economic standard for all the inhabitants of the earth and the duty to look after nature’s well-being require the introduction of a socialist regime, “a more adequate political form” to achieve those ends.¹¹⁰ We lack precedents, Boff complains, “for a global management of the earth’s problems.”¹¹¹ Moreover, without socializing the earth’s scarce resources, it is not possible to guarantee life for either the majority of human beings or the biosphere in general.¹¹² Nevertheless, Boff claims, my socialist experiment will not repeat the errors of earlier historical versions of the system; it will not be a totalitarian regime, but a democratic one, a social-democracy characterized by participation, equal of opportunities, respect of differences, and fellowship.¹¹³ A social-democracy founded on a social contract that assures “the respectful participation of the largest possible number, the valorization of the

¹⁰⁸ Boff, *Nova Era: A Civilização Planetária*, 20.

¹⁰⁹ Boff, *Nova Era: A Civilização Planetária*, 22. “All legal apparatus,” Boff adds, “as well as all exercise of authority must retain the nature of functionality, i.e., it has to be functional to man.” *O Destino do Homem e do Mundo*, 74.

¹¹⁰ Boff, *Nova Era: A Civilização Planetária*, 34.

¹¹¹ Boff, *Saber Cuidar*, 133-134.

¹¹² Boff, *Nova Era: A Civilização Planetária*, 34.

¹¹³ Boff, *Nova Era: a Civilização Planetária*, 72.

differences, the sheltering of the complementary, and the convergence of cultural diversities as well as of modes of production, traditions, and [different] meanings of life.”¹¹⁴ Boff’s social-democracy apparently has room for civil societies that have played an important role in the current economic model of fighting abuses and raising relevant proposals for a safer and cleaner environment.¹¹⁵

This social-planetary democracy will not fall into the trap of prioritizing work to the extent that it will cause alienation between human beings, and between humans and nature.¹¹⁶ Work will allow humans to transform the natural landscape according to their own needs, but it will be developed with care and always respect people’s vocation insofar as it is compatible with their human transcendental-eschatological vocation.¹¹⁷

In summary, Boff’s envisioned society radically differs from the current capitalist societies. Rather than being based on competition and class war,¹¹⁸ this society is based on a new paradigm of re-ligion, re-enchantment, com-passion for those who suffer, as

¹¹⁴ Boff, *Saber Cuidar*, 26. See also *O Despertar da Águia*, pages 38-39, where Boff speaks of “re-construing the relations of power, no longer in terms of domination/exploration over people and nature, but in terms of biophilic mutuality (reciprocity among all living beings), and of cooperation between people. These will provide the basis for a collective life in justice, peace, and for a fraternal/sororal covenant with nature.”

¹¹⁵ See *Nova Era: a Civilização Planetária*, 27, where Boff mentions the important role played by several representatives of the global civil society, such as labor forces, churches, and ecologists.

¹¹⁶ Boff, *O Destino do Homem e do Mundo*, 51.

¹¹⁷ Boff, *O Destino do Homem e do Mundo*, 51, and 37.

¹¹⁸ “Competition,” urges Boff appealing to Maturana, “is anti-social, today as in the past, for it entails the negation of the other, the refusal to partake and to love. Neo-liberalism, especially the market, is based on competition. This is why it excludes, is non-human, and makes so many victims.” Boff, *Saber Cuidar*, 111.

well as on a new tenderness towards life and the earth.¹¹⁹ It replaces love with domination as the very foundation of the social structure. As Boff puts it:

In other words, it is love that gives birth to society; society exists because there is love, and not vice-versa as is usually believed. If love is lacking (the foundation) society is destroyed. Or, if it still exists, it takes the form of compulsive collectivity, of domination, and of violence toward others, forcing them to fit [into the social fabric].¹²⁰

This dream is not far away. We may witness its coming, Boff encourages us to believe. Nor it is a false hope. The means for healing our sick societies lie within the human beings themselves:

Human beings must turn to themselves and re-discover their essence as consisting in *care* [rather than in work]. Care will save life, it will bring justice to the impoverished, and will rescue the earth, everybody's *pátria* and *mátria*.¹²¹

Economic Model

What Boff is striving for in his cosmic-planetary-social-democratic economy has already been anticipated to some degree. Sick societies that are characterized by inequality and the exclusion of the majority on our threatened planet must yield to an alternative world-wide society that is distinguished by a more balanced and righteous

¹¹⁹ Boff, *Saber Cuidar*, 25.

¹²⁰ Boff, *Saber Cuidar*, 110. The perfect model of the loving society is the fellowship of the Triune God. Writes Boff: "In the light of the trinitarian communication, of the trinitarian fellowship among the divine three, distinct in persons, but united by love and reciprocal communion, we must found a human society, where each person's differences are respected and where the goal is the well-being of all, through bonds of solidarity and cooperation in work." Boff, *Igreja: Entre Norte e Sul*, 15.

¹²¹ Boff, *Saber Cuidar*, 191.

division of the earth's global riches,¹²² and by a sustainable development.¹²³ Boff, however, is not optimistic about the transition toward this new social-economic order. In order to reach this new level, he claims, humanity "will probably face a sinister holy Friday that will drop into the abyss the dictatorship of the mode-of-being-work-material production." Only then, he adds, "will the resurrection-Sunday, the reconstruction of a world-wide society based on care be possible."¹²⁴ Boff refers to this process in rather dramatic language. Even though he does not spell out the circumstances, he seems to suggest that some sort of fatal, perhaps cosmic, event or events will take place from which only "the surviving peoples" will emerge.¹²⁵ In this context a new social covenant will be signed whose very first paragraph will define "the sacred establishment of self-limitation and the obligation of living under the fair rule, to care for the inheritance we have received from the universe, and to demonstrate basic tenderness toward human beings, and respect toward all other created beings."¹²⁶

It is also possible to identify some of the means by which Boff expects to implement his proposal. A more equitable division of goods should not take place through increase of production, as this could affect the other element of the equation, namely, the sustaining power of the earth. Rather, he suggests a "political economy at the

¹²² This entails the creation of new forms of sustainable development in the countries of the Southern hemisphere. See *A Teologia da Libertação: Balanço e Perspectivas*, 50.

¹²³ See *A Teologia da Libertação*, 114, 126-127; *O Despertar da Águia*, 26; *Saber Cuidar*, 112, 137.

¹²⁴ Boff, *Saber Cuidar*, 125. Boff does not offer a biblical foundation for his prediction.

¹²⁵ Boff, *Saber Cuidar*, 125.

¹²⁶ Boff, *Saber Cuidar*, 125.

service of society's and nature's well-being, an economy producing enough for all instead of an economy that produces limlessly."¹²⁷ As far as I can tell, Boff does not spell out who will determine how much is sufficient. It seems logical to suppose that such a decision would either be incorporated into the social covenant he refers to or be simply made by those responsible for the government of his cosmic planetary social-democracy, since a free market solution is clearly distrusted. In Boff's global society with a regulated economy there would be some degree of professional activity for all and a guaranteed minimum living wage.¹²⁸ In *Nova Era: A Civilização Planetária (New Age: The Planetary Civilization)* he states his proposal as follows:

Essential changes aiming for a co-division of work are striven for, a minimum wage is guaranteed for all, and the role of the economy and the function of democracy is redefined. It is essential to pass from a society of full employment toward a society of full activity.¹²⁹

Apparently, there would be flexibility within an unspecified range for allowing some variation in the average-salary to be paid to the citizens of Boff's cosmic-planetary social-democracy. In this multidimensional economy oriented toward distributive justice, all would be paid according to their needs, talents, and work.¹³⁰ Boff suggests that all

¹²⁷ Boff, *Nova Era: A Civilização Planetária*, 21. Later, in the same work, Boff reinforces his claim: "We must pass from an economy of unlimited growth to one that produces enough for all." (78)

¹²⁸ José Ramos Regidor, *A Teologia da Libertação: Balanço e Perspectivas*, 51. In *Nova Era: A Civilização Planetária*, Boff also refers to this minimum wage as the salary of citizenship.

¹²⁹ Boff, *Nova Era: A Civilização Planetária*, 19.

¹³⁰ Boff, *Nova Era: A Civilização Planetária*, 21. In *A Teologia da Libertação: Balanço e Perspectivas*, Regidor mentions Boff's proposal approvingly by stating: "Boff refers to a new paradigm of economy, a multi-dimensional economy, having as goal distributive justice which consists in giving to each one, according to his/her talents and work, thus relativizing the market economy." (51)

profits should go to a public organ that would pay a *technological wage*, a salary dissociated from a fixed job, but resulting from the technological development of society as a whole.¹³¹ How this suggestion fits Boff's claim that "we must develop our own resources [in our social life] in order to be autonomous on our journey, and not a burden for the others," remains to be explained.¹³²

Furthermore, and probably during the transitional process toward the cosmic-planetary social-democracy, Boff raises the possibility of paying what he calls a wage of subsistence to those billions of abandoned people all over the world. This initiative, an "ethical duty," should be demanded from the rich-colonizing countries as their moral obligation in face of previous exploitation of their colonies.¹³³

Apparently, in Boff's cosmic-planetary-social democracy there would be no room for private property. The appreciative tone Boff strikes toward Seattle, the red-skin native-American, in his perplexed answer to governor Steven's offer to buy lands from the Indians, seems to corroborate this conclusion. It is worthy paying attention to Boff's own report of that historical fact:

In 1856, the Native American chief Seattle wrote fittingly to governor Stevens from Washington state, when the latter forced the Native Americans to sell land to Europeans colonizers. The chief, *with reason*, failed to understand why he should sell land and the Europeans buy it. Is it

¹³¹ Boff, *Nova Era: A Civilização Planetária*, 19-20.

¹³² Boff, *A Águia e a Galinha*, 119.

¹³³ Boff, *Nova Era: A Civilização Planetária*, 20.

the breeze, the green of plants, the transparency of water, and the splendor of a landscape?¹³⁴

Boff's cosmic-planetary-social democracy does not rest solely on socio-political and economical foundations. Religion too is part of its infrastructure, as the next section will show.

Religious Model

Boff's dreamed society is deeply religious. Because all of life is sacramental the experience of the sacred permeates all realms of life.¹³⁵ Cultivation of this sacred experience, according to Boff, is fundamental in imposing limits to the voracity of the prevailing model of development and in preserving the ecosystems and the endangered species."¹³⁶ A new spirituality arising from a new meeting with God, conceived as the Mystery of the world and the Reason behind the universe's evolution,¹³⁷ and a new inclusive religion are at the core of Boff's proposal:

A new religion in the deep and etymological sense of this word is necessary... It is necessary for something to link [from *religare* in Latin] everything, like a connecting cable by which to tie together all experiences, all knowledge, all spiritual traditions, all politics, all forms of hominization, and [thus] to form a planetary society, single and diverse, dynamic and inclusive. To that end, it is necessary to add dialectically all various contributions and to envision complementarity, thus building up the new, in a convergent push forward.¹³⁸

¹³⁴ Boff, *O Despertar da Águia*, 33.

¹³⁵ See chapter 3, page 93 ff.

¹³⁶ Boff, *O Despertar da Águia*, 35.

¹³⁷ Boff, *Nova Era: A Civilização Planetária*, 70.

¹³⁸ Boff, *Nova Era: A Civilização Planetária*, 70.

A new religious paradigm of compassion and relating everything is basic for the development of an appropriate response to those who suffer and to the poor and oppressed of the earth.¹³⁹

Saint Francis of Assisi, or at least Boff's reading of Francis of Assisi's spiritual journey, embodies that deep spirituality that integrates a deep concern for the poor with a mystical relation to nature.¹⁴⁰

At the end of chapter 4 I argued that Boff's adoption of the principle of complementarity demands a consideration of alternatives to his liberationist socio-economic ethics. Nicholas Wolterstorff's project, I believe, is an important contribution from which Boff can benefit for reasons that I will make clear in my exposition.

Nicholas Wolterstorff's Revised Neo-Calvinism

Nicholas Wolterstorff: A Valid Option on Socio-Economic Issues?

Wolterstorff has written on a wide spectrum of subjects. Aesthetics, education, epistemology, theology of revelation may be counted among the topics that he has covered. Some of his works, such as *Religion in the Public Square: The Place of*

¹³⁹ Boff, *Saber Cuidar*, 25.

¹⁴⁰ A perspective also shared by Regidor, as one may see in *A Teologia da Libertação: Balanço e Perspectivas*, 64. Saint Francis of Assisi, states Regidor, "reveals a special sensitivity toward all created beings, "[a sensitivity] that does not forget his [Francis'] likeness and his irreducible difference [from the created beings], but tries to live with them, respecting each one's function and their common interdependence at the bosom of a social-ecological democracy." (64) For Boff's detailed evaluation of Francis of Assisi's answers to five key questions—the system in which we live, the fracture of modern society (the division between poor and rich), the need for an integral liberation, the permanent genesis of the Church (ecclesiogenesis), and the integration of the negative within life (or stating it positively, the holy walk toward God), see his *São Francisco de Assis: Ternura e Vigor*.

*Religious Convictions in Political Debate*¹⁴¹ and the series of lectures entitled *Why do Religious People Feel They Are Losing their Voice in American Political Affairs?* delivered at Calvin College in Grand Rapids in 1998 focus on social-political themes. But as far I can tell, only a single work has concentrated specifically on socio-economic issues, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*,¹⁴² the so-called Kuyper lectures delivered at the Free University of Amsterdam in 1981. Other authors have offered more extensive contributions to the field of socio-economic ethics, either among those who Craig Gay identifies as the evangelical right which basically claim “that capitalism offers the only hope for solving these [the world’s] problems,”¹⁴³ or those who join Wolterstorff in the so-called evangelical-center and whose “appraisal of capitalism is neither wholly negative nor entirely positive” but who see “capitalism as a cause for concern.”¹⁴⁴ Nevertheless, I have chosen Wolterstorff because of the significant commonality of interests he shares with Leonardo Boff. While coming from different backgrounds and representing distinct perspectives, both are concerned with similar issues within epistemology and social-economic ethics. In order to examine Wolterstorff’s socio-economic ethics, I will use

¹⁴¹ Wolterstorff co-authored this book with Robert Audi. See *Religion in the Public Square: The Place of Religious Convictions in Political Debate* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1997).

¹⁴² Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1983).

¹⁴³ Craig M. Gay, *With Liberty and Justice for Whom?*, 64. Names from the evangelical right include Harold Lindsell, Jerry Falwell, Ronald H. Nash, John Jefferson Davis, Franky Schaeffer, Herbert Schlossberg, and E. Calvin Beisner. See *With Liberty and Justice for Whom?*, 64, 65 (footnote 2).

¹⁴⁴ Craig M. Gay, *With Liberty and Justice for Whom?*, 116. Names of those belonging to the evangelical center include Carl F. H. Henry, Robin Kendrick Klay, Jim Halteman, Hermann Dooyeweerd, and Robert Goudzwaard.

basically the same basic grid as adopted before in this chapter to evaluate Boff's proposal. The diagnosis of the contemporary situation as well as Wolterstorff's proposal will follow the same structure, that of the social-cultural, the economic, and the religious model.

Human Societies: Fallen Structures in Need of Reform

Social-Cultural Model

Wolterstorff, while agreeing with Boff that social structures are not simply part of the order of nature but a result of human decision,¹⁴⁵ and recognizing many of the problems that beset Boff himself, uses different categories to diagnose them. Rather than referring to societies as sick, Wolterstorff employs a Christian diagnosis: the structure of the social world is a "*fallen* structure, in need of reform."¹⁴⁶ In slightly different words he elaborates:

The structures of the world are fallen. They are alienated from the will of God. Instead of providing authentic fulfillment to us who live within them, they spread misery and injustice, squelching the realization of what human life was meant to be.¹⁴⁷

This judgment, Wolterstorff argues, is not an isolated one; indeed, it is consistent with the historic Calvinist-Puritan tradition.¹⁴⁸ Moreover, it is a judgment not substantially

¹⁴⁵ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 3.

¹⁴⁶ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 3 (emphasis mine).

¹⁴⁷ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 23. Later, Wolterstorff refers approvingly to Goudzwaard's evaluation of Western society, declaring: "That something has gone wrong, *profoundly* wrong, he has no doubt." *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 59.

¹⁴⁸ "[H]ere," argues Wolterstorff, "we come to perhaps the most profound of all breaches between the Calvinist and the medieval vision—we live in a fallen, corrupted society: the structures of our social world are structures which in good measure do not serve the common good." *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 16. Earlier, Wolterstorff appealed to Thomas Case's (a puritan minister) attack on social structures. Case's assumption says Wolterstorff, was that "social structures are not something natural. They are not the

different from the one issued by both liberation theology, especially in its South American version, and neo-Calvinism, two “of the most penetrating contemporary articulations of world-formative Christianity” from which we can learn, so Wolterstorff writes.¹⁴⁹

In summary, it is hard to imagine that Leonardo Boff would disagree with Wolterstorff’s basic view of society, which the following rather lengthy quotation vividly illustrates:

Our modern world is a world of striking triumphs.... But this world of ours is also a world of deep sorrows. There are, for one thing, the *sorrows of injustice*. Those who enjoy a vast range of choice coexist in our world-system with nearly a billion others who live in a state of perpetual poverty, and with hundreds of millions for whom political terror, torture, and tyranny are the ever-present context of their lives... There are also the *sorrows of misplaced values*.... Hundreds of billions of dollars are spent each year on armaments to terrorize and kill our fellow human beings.... In addition there are all those miseries that result from our social order—call them the *sorrows of undesired consequences*: the destruction of traditions, the loss of a sense of rootage and support and belongingness resulting from the destruction of concrete communities... the boredom resulting from work utterly lacking in intrinsic satisfaction and performed merely as a means to acquire the money to support one’s family... the elimination of our inner selves resulting from the pervasive rationalization of our lives.¹⁵⁰

reflection of true human nature. They are the result of human decision, and being made by us they can be altered by us. Indeed, they must be altered, for they are fallen, corrupt.” *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 9.

¹⁴⁹ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 44. For Wolterstorff’s discussion of the similarities between liberation theology and neo-Calvinism, see page 65 of *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, where the author points out ten common characteristics of both movements, while also recognizing some basic differences (see *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 66).

¹⁵⁰ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 42.

Economic Model

The similarities between Nicholas Wolterstorff and Leonardo Boff also include several aspects from the economic realm. Wolterstorff likewise rejects what he calls “modernization theories” as satisfactory to explain the various degrees of development among the nations and to formulate appropriate answers to the underdevelopment of the so-called Third World. Two beliefs are at the core of modernization (development) theories, Wolterstorff observes: (1) it is in principle possible for *all* societies to reach a point of modernization without any basic change in the already modernized societies; (2) the causes of the lack of modernization (development) of a given society must be explained by factors intrinsic to that society—lack of money for investment or wrong kind of character formation, for instance—rather than by the impact of the modernized (developed) nations on it.¹⁵¹ Wolterstorff’s rejection of the modernization theory he clearly states as follows:

It is my judgment, along with that of a good many others, that in face of these facts [the increase in the gap between the least-and the most-developed societies, the worsening of the standard of living of many people in underdeveloped societies, after the Second World War] it is time for us to cease inventing excuses and start admitting that modernization theory is *bankrupt*. It simply provides no plausible, adequate account for these phenomena—nor indeed for similar phenomena going back five centuries. The lack of development among the underdeveloped cannot be explained without taking note of the impact of the highly developed areas on the underdeveloped.¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 25. “Modernization theorists,” therefore, “see our world as containing a large number of distinct societies, each at a certain point in the process of modernization.” *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 24.

¹⁵² Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 25 (Emphasis mine).

More satisfactory, Wolterstorff claims, is the world-system theory that envisions the world as containing a single society or a single integrated economy blending distinct nations.¹⁵³ Wolterstorff's approval of world-system theory could not be more evident. "Surely," he affirms, "the world-system thesis is correct: there is no area in the world today that is not significantly influenced in its 'development' by other areas."¹⁵⁴ Consequently, Wolterstorff does not hesitate to endorse liberation theology's view that the underdevelopment of the Third World is primarily "rooted in the exploitative domination of the periphery by the core."¹⁵⁵

Wolterstorff explains the notions of core and periphery as follows. Our world-system, he says in words resembling those of Boff, has a "horizontal structure of *core* and *periphery*, with a buffer zone between these two which may be called *semi-periphery*."¹⁵⁶ What characterizes certain areas as *core* is mainly the preponderance of their economic voice and power in the whole system, as a consequence of their concentration of

¹⁵³ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 26.

¹⁵⁴ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 26. Later he repeats: "I have made clear my conviction that we must see ourselves as living today in a global society that combines an integrated capitalist economy with a multiplicity of states and diversity of peoples. I have argued that we must prefer the basic picture offered by world-system theorists over that offered by the modernization theorists." *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 33.

¹⁵⁵ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 44. "It is important for us in the West," argues Wolterstorff, "to let these words [liberation theology's claim concerning the exploitative domination of the periphery by the core] sink in. Most of us are still in the thrall of development (modernization) theory. We believe that a bit of economic aid scattered here and there around the globe will get things moving... From what I have said in the preceding chapter, it will be evident that my own conviction is that the Third World is largely right on this issue and that we are wrong." *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 45.

¹⁵⁶ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 31. In fact, while Boff also distinguishes between *core* and *periphery*, he does not suggest, as far as I can tell, the existence of the *semi-peripheral* zone.

wealth.¹⁵⁷ This structure, therefore, Wolterstorff believes, significantly explains the reason behind the massive asymmetry in the distribution of capital in the world, namely, the fact that laborers in the periphery have been grossly exploited by the owners of capital.¹⁵⁸ Moreover, adds Wolterstorff, once more reminding us of Boff, the history behind the accumulation of capital in Europe and the United States cannot be forgotten. “It was guns that induced South American Indians to mine cheap gold for the Spaniards. It was guns that induced Indians to produce cheap textiles for the British.” In summary, “[b]ehind the concentration of capital in Europe and the United States is the use of much gunpowder, elaborate torture, and many prisons.”¹⁵⁹

Wolterstorff’s critique of the contemporary economic model is not only derived from the inputs of liberation theology. Indeed, despite his appreciation of the contribution provided by liberation theology, he also acknowledges the value of neo-Calvinist analysis of economics that he considers to provide a superior account of humanity’s relation to creation.

It is the calling of humanity to bring to realization the potential stored in creation. I think we should see in this neo-Calvinist vision an advance over that of liberation theology, which indeed was struggling toward the same point but hindered from attaining it by its acceptance of the contemporary theological dictum that God’s creation is of merely salvific significance.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 31.

¹⁵⁸ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 32.

¹⁵⁹ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 32.

¹⁶⁰ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 55. In Boff’s case, he has also been kept from embracing the idea of bringing to realization the potential stored in creation by his panentheist perspective.

Among those who endorse neo-Calvinist economics, Wolterstorff appeals mostly to Herman Dooyeweerd and to Bob Goudzwaard. Dooyeweerd, notes Wolterstorff seemingly with sympathy, does not see any tension in the process of mastering nature. In fact, says Dooyeweerd, “mastery is good; only its misuse is bad.”¹⁶¹ A proper process of mastering, according to Dooyeweerd, will stimulate a flowering of culture in such realms as science, art, church, industry, trade, the school, and voluntary organizations.¹⁶² This process of social differentiation, therefore, has an ontological basis for neo-Calvinists: the *abiding* types of social formation—the State, the Family, the School, the Production-Enterprise, etc.—represent a flourishing of creation’s potentials and should be developed by human beings.¹⁶³ Neo-Calvinists propose that each of these types of social formation has a specific nature, indeed, a *normative* one.¹⁶⁴ Dooyeweerd suggests that three goals should be pursued by humanity in developing this cultural-historical process:

(1) We should see to it that each social formation realizes the normative nature of its particular type, or structure.... (2) We should see to it that the institutions belonging to one sphere do not dominate those belonging to another, because when one sphere is dominated by another, life in the former is distorted and cannot flower in its own unique but normed manner. We are to work for the *sovereignty of the spheres*.... (3) We must seek what may be called *disclosure*. Life within each sphere of activity, though it must find its own fulfillment free from domination by other

¹⁶¹ Herman Dooyeweerd, *Roots of Western Culture: Pagan, Secular, and Christian Options*, trans. John Kraay (Toronto: Wedge Pub. Foundation, 1979), 67; quoted in Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 55.

¹⁶² Dooyeweerd, *Roots of Western Culture: Pagan, Secular, and Christian Options*, 79; quoted in Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 56.

¹⁶³ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 57.

¹⁶⁴ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 58.

spheres, must at the same time be *open* to the norms of the other spheres.¹⁶⁵

While Wolterstorff is generally appreciative of Dooyeweerd's proposal, he still considers it inadequate in explaining why the development of creation's potentials has occurred primarily in the Western world and suggests the rise of capitalist economy as a possible explanation.¹⁶⁶

Dooyeweerd's ambiguities—with their potential for being misappropriated by social conservatives to justify their own positions¹⁶⁷—are left aside by Wolterstorff who also appeals to Bob Goudzwaard's diagnosis of Western society. The fundamental problem of what has gone wrong in the West, Goudzwaard says, is that we "have accepted economic growth and technological advance as the ultimate social good." He adds:

In the private sphere we subordinate everything to the production of ever more surplus by making profit the sole decisive goal of our enterprises and the using of this profit to obtain more capital goods—which are then used to produce yet more surplus, and so on. On the national level, we subordinate everything to growth in the Gross National Product. Economic growth, technological innovation, and scientific advance supersede all other values, and are in turn raised above all normative appraisal.¹⁶⁸

The unrestricted commitment to the production of ever more surplus has brought about three undesirable consequences, according to Goudzwaard. First, the economic

¹⁶⁵ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 58-59.

¹⁶⁶ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 57.

¹⁶⁷ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 59.

¹⁶⁸ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 59-60.

sphere has dominated all others. Second, economic life has not followed its own appropriate norms.¹⁶⁹ Third, the economic sphere has not been opened to the norms of other spheres, thus preventing its due disclosure.¹⁷⁰ Wolterstorff is explicitly appreciative of Goudzwaard's analysis, which he qualifies as "profoundly insightful."¹⁷¹ The capitalist's unceasing striving after economic growth Goudzwaard identifies as a sort of contemporary idolatry.¹⁷² This idolatrous practice has been followed by a theoretical justification, Wolterstorff adds. "A whole ideology," he says, "a framework of justifying beliefs has arisen within the society shaped by this practice, and this too must be seen as a component of our idolatry."¹⁷³ We are dealing with a "faith, a "social idolatry,"

Wolterstorff claims:

I myself think that what we find of fundamental worth in our modern world-system is less accurately described as *increased production* than as *increased mastery of nature and society so as to satisfy our desires...*¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁹ Goudzwaard's conviction is that the notion of stewardship best captures the norm of life in the economic realm.

¹⁷⁰ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 61.

¹⁷¹ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 62.

¹⁷² "Insofar as Western man attributes divine status to the forces of progress, we might well be confronted with a situation parallel to that of idol worship in primitive cultures. These forces are given divine prerogatives as soon as man puts an unconditional *trust* in them; that is, as soon as economic and technological progress are depended upon as guides to the good life and as mediators of our happiness." Bob Goudzwaard, *Capitalism and Progress: A Diagnosis of Western Society*, trans. and ed. Josina van Nuis Zylstra (Grand Rapids, Eedrmans, 1979), 152.

¹⁷³ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 64. Whether this is Wolterstorff's own conclusion or Goudzwaard's is not totally clear from the text.

¹⁷⁴ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 65.

Two basic dynamics, therefore, summarize neo-Calvinist analysis of society, the dynamic of *differentiation*—the disclosure of creation’s potentialities, as formulated by Dooyeweerd—and the dynamic of *faith/idolatry*, as formulated by Goodzwaard.¹⁷⁵

Where does Wolterstorff locate himself between these two trends in social ethics, that is, between liberation theology and Neo-Calvinist economics? Wolterstorff’s clear intention is to benefit from both. “Each vision,” he states, “has insights that we should incorporate into a larger picture and each has limitations that the other helps to correct.”¹⁷⁶ I will examine later what synthesis Wolterstorff aims to accomplish, when dealing with his proposal for the economic model. Before doing so, however, it is important to reinforce Wolterstorff’s conviction that the economic dimension of our modern social world has profoundly shaped the whole of it, with several negative consequences. The most important among them, “the great issue that supersedes all others in importance,” is the “issue of poverty.”¹⁷⁷ In a statement resembling those by liberation theologians, Wolterstorff urges:

Of course, it is not the sheer fact of massive world poverty that is a scandal to the church and all humanity; the scandal lies in the fact that this abject poverty is today not an unavoidable feature of our human situation, and even more so in the fact that *the impoverished coexist in our world-system with an equal number who live in unprecedented affluence. Poverty amidst plenty with the gap becoming greater: this the scandal.*¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁵ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 54.

¹⁷⁶ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 67.

¹⁷⁷ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 74.

¹⁷⁸ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 74.

There is no doubt that Wolterstorff commits himself to the dependence theory as formulated by Leonardo Boff and other liberation theologians, and consequently rejects the explanations proposed by development-theories such as Michael Novak's.¹⁷⁹ Rather, says Wolterstorff, "the mass poverty of the Third World is for the *most part* not some sort of natural condition that exists independently of us [the First-World]; quite the contrary," he adds, "*a good deal of it is the result of the interaction of the core of the world-system with the periphery over the course of centuries.*"¹⁸⁰ It is important to note that Wolterstorff does not deny the existence of other factors, such as character formation and religious attitudes intertwined with it, behind the Third-World poverty.¹⁸¹ However, these factors *per-se* do not constitute the whole picture, and Wolterstorff would probably argue that they are even to some degree, a social consequence of the First World's economic impositions on the Third World. An unrestricted commitment to economic growth, lack of regulation of market economy, as well as the absence of the voice from those who provide labor in the entrepreneurial activity are counted by Wolterstorff among the root causes of poverty. In his own words,

¹⁷⁹ Father Arthur McGovern summarizes Novak's position as follows: "The real problem, says Novak, is that Latin America lacked the system, ethos, virtues, and institutions needed to create the kind of wealth that could eradicate or minimize poverty. He blames, in part, the Catholic Latin Culture for failing to inculcate the work ethic and creativity esteemed by the North, though he also recognizes, as an internal obstacle, extreme concentration of economic and political power in the hands of a few." Arthur F. McGovern, S.J., "Latin America and 'Dependency' Theory." Novak's thesis has at least two fatal flaws, argues Wolterstorff: (1) it ignores how the great impoverished areas of the modern world became impoverished; (2) it fails to face up to what is necessary to escape from impoverishment. Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 92.

¹⁸⁰ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 86 (emphasis mine).

¹⁸¹ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 92.

We have studied mass poverty and discovered that prominent among its roots is a complex of economic practices and legal prescriptions whereby growth is taken as the ultimate economic and social good, whereby the production and merchandising of goods for sale on the market for profit is only minimally regulated, and whereby the person who provides capital to an enterprise is thereby entitled to a voice in the enterprise while the person who provides labor is not.¹⁸²

It seems that Wolterstorff's proposal for a social-economic ethics would lean toward the regulation of a market economy, and a larger participation of employees in the decisions of the entrepreneurial process. Nevertheless, before we discuss his proposal, we must first consider Wolterstorff's analysis of the contemporary religious model.

Religious Model

Certainly the charge Boff directs against those theologians who, by emphasizing God's transcendence detach him from the world he created, would not apply to Nicholas Wolterstorff. According to the latter, God is deeply involved with his creation. In fact, claims Wolterstorff,¹⁸³ referring to the fallen structure of our world that has spread misery and injustice instead of providing the proper conditions for human life's flourishing, God is "deeply disturbed by our human condition." While perhaps *the* basic category for liberation theology is sin viewed as a social reality from which follows the concept of salvation as liberation from oppressive structures, Wolterstorff seems more concerned with the idolatry into which he sees Western society plunging. Wolterstorff himself does not directly mention the causal factor(s) behind this idolatry. However, I

¹⁸² Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 141.

¹⁸³ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 23. Obviously, a discussion of Wolterstorff's view of God's passibility is beyond the scope of the present work.

think it is possible to learn his possible answer from his exploration of what should be the Christian's way of being-in-the-world, namely, worship. Worship, Wolterstorff asserts, should not be understood in terms of either a denigration of or an isolation from the world in which we live. Rather, it should be understood as "the response to one's understanding of the ultimate meaning and nature of *this* world, not of some other world." It should be "the response to one's apprehension of *this* world as the epiphany of God."¹⁸⁴ What is the foundation of this recommended view of worship? The comprehension that this world is "a sacrament of God," Wolterstorff answers, appealing to Alexander Schmemmann. The same Schmemmann acknowledges that a fall has occurred, bringing about an awful consequence, namely, the world has become opaque to man and is no longer perceived as sacramental.¹⁸⁵ This blindness to the sacramental nature of the world would explain, as I understand Wolterstorff, the idolatry of Western's society. Since the world in general, and human beings in particular, are not perceived as God's sacraments, both are disposed of and misused by an economic system that gives priority to profit at the cost of higher values. While expressing some hesitations, Wolterstorff is in general agreement with Schmemmann, to whom he refers as a "fine theologian of the Orthodox Church."¹⁸⁶ Among Wolterstorff's hesitations, one or two points deserve our attention. First, he disagrees with Schmemmann's tendency to run together our activity of worshiping God and our grateful recognition of the world as a sacrament of God. Wolterstorff notes that

¹⁸⁴ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 150.

¹⁸⁵ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 15.

¹⁸⁶ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 149.

worshiping God is but one manifestation of that recognition. Another manifestation, a fundamental one according to neo-Calvinist economics, would be “our responsible development of the potentials of the world.”¹⁸⁷ Second, Schmemmann does not spell out what Wolterstorff calls the pain associated with losing of sight the world’s sacramental character. As Wolterstorff puts it:

Not all who see the world as nothing but world are happy in that. Some there are who long to find the world expressive of God, but whose longing goes unsatisfied. They long to find the world an epiphany of the wisdom and power and handiwork of a creator, but they do not find it so. They long to find the Bible a sacrament of the Word of God, but they hear nothing. And some there are whose experience of the world is so painful... that though they continue to cry out for deliverance, they cannot apprehend the world as his sacrament. Their tears blur their vision and their cries obscure their hearing. They cannot worship.¹⁸⁸

Two important observations must be made in connection with Wolterstorff’s hesitation regarding Schmemmann’s proposal. Wolterstorff’s base of his sacramental view of the world is not panentheist. In other words, while he is willing to endorse that the world must be considered God’s sacrament, a special means of revealing himself, and as such must be the object of an appropriate attitude of stewardship by human beings, he nevertheless does not suggest any form of ontological identification between God and the

¹⁸⁷ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 150.

¹⁸⁸ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 151. Wolterstorff’s notion of the world as God’s sacrament distances itself from the traditional Reformed view of the two sacraments. See, for instance, The Heidelberg Catechism, question 68, which says: “How many sacraments did Christ institute in the New Testament?” The answer reads: “Two: baptism and the Lord’s Supper.” *Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions* (Grand Rapids: CRC Publications, 1988), 41. The Belgic Confession states: “Moreover, we are satisfied with the number of sacraments that Christ our Master has ordained for us. There are only two: the sacrament of baptism and the Holy Supper of Jesus Christ.” *Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions*, 113. The Westminster Confession of Faith affirms: “There be only two sacraments ordained by Christ our Lord in the gospel; that is to say, Baptism and the Supper of the Lord.” (Chapter XXVII, Section IV) A. A. Hodge, *The Confession of Faith*, repr. (Carlisle: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1998), 334.

world. Wolterstorff's position has the advantage of upholding a sacramental view of the world that stems from a strong view of God's immanence without adopting Leonardo Boff's Christian panentheism with all its problems. Second, Wolterstorff's last statement also challenges other of Boff's major beliefs, namely, that the standpoint of the poor invariably conveys a privileged grasp of reality. Wolterstorff's objection seems irrefutable: it is possible that the suffering of the poor is so intense, and that the poor are forced to live under such desperate circumstances, that their grasp both of the world as God's sacrament and of reality in a broader sense becomes blurred. But even if this be true, there still is hope. May be solution does not depend on a unilateral adoption of the cause of the poor, but on a social-economic system that would make them thrive. Does this thriving require a complete rejection of capitalism as morally evil and the adoption of socialism, as Boff claims? We will consider Wolterstorff's answer to this question next.

Shalom: A Reality for All Countries

Wolterstorff strongly believes that Christians have their role, indeed, a fundamental role in the reform of the social order. "The saints," he says, adopting a position that contradicts Craig Gay's timid proposal,¹⁸⁹ "are responsible for the structure of the social world in which they find themselves."¹⁹⁰ Such a belief, he argues, is deeply rooted in the Puritan tradition, as political theorist Michael Walzer has shown in his

¹⁸⁹ See chapter 1, pages 3-4.

¹⁹⁰ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 3.

work, *The Revolution of the Saints*.¹⁹¹ While the medieval vision of human life was primarily otherworldly,¹⁹² the English Puritans had the conviction that “*the saints* are responsible for altering England’s social structure.”¹⁹³ In fact, Wolterstorff traces the roots of the Puritans’ commitment back to their spiritual ancestor, John Calvin. In Calvin, Wolterstorff says, knowledge of God is no longer understood as mere contemplation of God’s essence; rather, it consists in an “appropriate *response* to his *works*.”¹⁹⁴ This response, arising out of gratitude, must be exercised by all occupations in society, rather than apart from it. This is a true possibility, according to Calvinism, for all occupations in society are fundamentally of equal in value in God’s sight. In other words, “a career turned toward this world with God behind one’s back [should not be considered] inferior to a career turned toward God.”¹⁹⁵ However, the early Calvinists’ conviction of God’s calling them to work in society as a way to show their gratitude to God does not mean that they failed to recognize that the “occupational structures [of society] as presented to us are corrupted and would not serve that goal.”¹⁹⁶ On the contrary, they were conscious of the need of a radical social critique, a critique based primarily on Scripture.¹⁹⁷ What

¹⁹¹ Michael Walzer, *The Revolution of the Saints* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965). See Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 3.

¹⁹² Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 3.

¹⁹³ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 9.

¹⁹⁴ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 13.

¹⁹⁵ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 17.

¹⁹⁶ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 17.

¹⁹⁷ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 18.

then is the root of the Calvinist's radical social critique? "The answer is clear,"

Wolterstorff says:

It is the Word of God, presented to us in the Bible, that shows for us the corruption of our social order. And it is the same Word of God that provides us with our fundamental pattern for reform. The reformation of society according to the Word of God: this was the Calvinist goal.¹⁹⁸

While very appreciative of Calvinism's "passionate desire to reshape the social world,"¹⁹⁹ Wolterstorff acknowledges two major failures in the realization of that goal, namely, intolerance and triumphalism.²⁰⁰

I noticed above that Wolterstorff aims to benefit, "to learn," as he puts it, from two of the "most penetrating contemporary articulations of world-formative Christianity: *liberation theology*, especially in its South American, mainly Catholic form; and the *neo-Calvinism* which has its sources in the Netherlands of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries."²⁰¹ He is convinced that it is possible to enlist both into a superior synthesis that would incorporate the insights of both as well as correct the limitations of both.²⁰² What would this synthesis, and let us call it Wolterstorff's revised neo-Calvinism (WRNC), look like? From liberation theology, WRNC would adopt one its main thesis:

¹⁹⁸ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 18. To develop the critique of the social order, we should appeal not to an inner voice. To this end, urges Wolterstorff, "we have a word from *outside*—a word from God." *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 18.

¹⁹⁹ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 21.

²⁰⁰ Wolterstorff does not use the word *intolerance*, but says that Calvinists, while speaking of justice, "failed to think through how they could live together in a just society with those with whom they disagreed." That, he adds, was "their great and tragic failing." *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 22.

²⁰¹ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 43.

²⁰² Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 67.

the *dependency theory*. This means that WRNC would recognize that our situation cannot simply be described as admitting that ‘we are all dominated by the idol of growth.’ What is also necessary is to admit that “certain groups of persons are exploitatively dominated by other group of persons.”²⁰³ Then, from the neo-Calvinist school, WRNC would embrace its emphasis on the disclosure of creation’s potentials, or, in other words, “the importance of freedom by mastery.”²⁰⁴ There is, Wolterstorff argues, a comprehensive biblical vision that blends into a single image the positive elements of both liberation theology and neo-Calvinism: the vision of *shalom*, first articulated in Old Testament literature but also expressed in the New Testament.²⁰⁵ *Shalom*, while intertwined with justice, goes beyond justice. *Shalom*, so Wolterstorff defines, is “the human being dwelling at peace in all his or her relationships: with God, with self, with fellows, with nature.”²⁰⁶ Or as he phrases it elsewhere:

Shalom in the first place incorporates right, harmonious relationship to *God* and delight in his service.... Secondly, shalom incorporates right harmonious relationships to other *human beings* and delight in human community.... Thirdly, shalom incorporates right harmonious relationships to *nature* and delight in our physical surroundings.²⁰⁷

The peace of shalom is not “merely the absence of hostility; not merely being in right

²⁰³ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 67.

²⁰⁴ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 69. “Liberation theology,” Wolterstorff notes accurately, while affirming the importance of freedom of self-determination, “never succeeds in incorporating in its vision, in any satisfactory way, freedom by mastery.” *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 69.

²⁰⁵ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 69.

²⁰⁶ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 69.

²⁰⁷ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 70.

relationship. Shalom at its highest is *enjoyment* in one's relationships."²⁰⁸ Shalom, therefore, is nothing less than God's own cause and, consequently, the cause in which all who believe in Jesus, all who want to do God's will, are called to be engaged.²⁰⁹

In summary, Lima and Amsterdam²¹⁰ have to walk side by side, hand in hand. A synthesis of liberation theology and neo-Calvinist economics is not only possible, it is mandatory. Such synthesis will guarantee that "[o]ur work will always have the two dimensions of struggle for justice and the pursuit of increased mastery of the world so as to enrich human life."²¹¹

How does such a society aiming at shalom look like in Wolterstorff's proposal?

Socio-Cultural-Political Model

Wolterstorff's society, as I mentioned above, will be one in which God's glory will be pursued out of gratitude and through the various occupations of its citizens.²¹² Each occupational role will aim at the common good. Activities that do not meet this criterion will be "discarded."²¹³ As far as I can tell, Wolterstorff does not spell out what

²⁰⁸ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 69.

²⁰⁹ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 72. "Can the conclusion be avoided that not only is shalom God's cause in the world but that all who believe in Jesus will, along with him, engage in the works of shalom? Shalom is both God's cause in the world and our human calling."

²¹⁰ Wolterstorff refers to two key-cities for the development of liberation theology and neo-Calvinism, respectively. Lima, home city of Gustavo Gutierrez, one of the fathers of liberation theology, and Amsterdam, neo-Calvinism's crib.

²¹¹ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 72.

²¹² Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 15.

²¹³ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 16.

sort of social-political structure will guarantee the fulfillment of this criterion. The socio-political model to be chosen by individual countries will allow some flexibility. The condition to be met will be that the adopted model will promote the development of creation's potentialities, thus allowing the dynamics of cultural differentiation to evolve.²¹⁴ Any socio-political system that creates room for culture to flourish in such areas as "power-spheres of science, art, state, industry, trade, school, voluntary organizations,"²¹⁵ to use some of Dooyeweerd's examples, will be acceptable. It seems reasonable to conclude that all political systems that actually or potentially prevent the existence of power-spheres, or blur their distinction, must be ruled out. For this reason, regimes that suppress religious freedom, voluntary associations, and free trade will be judged inadequate in contributing toward the achievement of shalom. Regimes that oppose the development of an harmonious relationship with nature will be subject to the same criticism.²¹⁶

Society, Wolterstorff adds, should not be seen as a "heap of souls on a piece of ground," but as a "God-willed community, as a living organism."²¹⁷ This perspective will be the only hope for providing a "cure to the misery of poverty."²¹⁸ Such a perspective,

²¹⁴ See Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 54-57.

²¹⁵ Herman Dooyeweerd, *Roots of Western Culture*, 79; see Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 56.

²¹⁶ See Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 70 where he argues that shalom incorporates harmonious relationship to, and delight in God, to/in other human beings, to/in nature.

²¹⁷ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 81.

²¹⁸ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 81.

Wolterstorff argues appealing to Abraham Kuyper, will require the adoption of “the socialist path.”²¹⁹ Still, in *Until Justice and Peace Embrace* this embryonic idea is not developed, except to the extent that extreme totalitarian versions of socialism are rejected for the reasons already mentioned.²²⁰

Wolterstorff urges that cities, buildings and, by extension, countries are moral agents.²²¹ No matter how awkward one may judge this claim to be, one conclusion Wolterstorff derives from it seems beyond dispute: our experience of a city, of the aesthetic excellence of its public space will reveal whether shalom there is a reality or not, whether the potentials of creation are properly being developed or not, whether harmonious relationships to God and human beings and nature are being enjoyed or not.

Economic Model

Wolterstorff’s envisioned model as shaped by the neo-Calvinist tradition is one in which there is room for mastering creation and unfolding its potentials. Therefore, industrial activity, free trade and, more broadly, the production enterprise are counted among the obligations human beings have toward God.²²² These economic formations

²¹⁹ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 81. Wolterstorff’s appeal to Kuyper does not take into proper consideration the latter’s nuanced appraisal of socialism, as well as his emphasis on the Christian’s social responsibility toward the poor, which may be summarized in the exercise of deeds of love (see Abraham Kuyper, *The Problem of Poverty*, ed. and trans. James W. Skillen (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991), 55-57, 77 ff.

²²⁰ Wolterstorff’s rejection of totalitarian socialism may be observed when he compares the problems of West and East in the 1983-context of the Berlin Wall: “The West grasps freedom at the cost of inequality, thereby consigning the economically impoverished to all the constraints of poverty. The East grasps equality at the cost of freedom, thereby consigning the politically powerless to all the inequities of tyranny.” *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 39.

²²¹ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 128.

²²² Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 57.

must differentiate themselves from political, educational, family, and ecclesiastical formations.²²³ In other words, while economic activity must be given freedom to develop its potential, enough attention should be paid to prevent the economic sphere from dominating all other spheres.²²⁴ Following Goudzwaard, Wolterstorff's economic model is one in which two main principles prevail. First, the economic sphere is "genuinely open to the norms of other spheres;" second, all economic activity follows the principle of stewardship.²²⁵ As far as I can tell, Wolterstorff does not draw detailed conclusions from these general principles. But it seems clear that his economic model pursuing and preserving *shalom* is one in which there is an appropriate combination of enough freedom to allow for the development of creation's potentials and sufficient regulation to avoid that economic tenets would be superimposed on other spheres of life. As he puts it:

To release ourselves from this idol [treating economic growth as a social good of autonomous and ultimate worth] (without succumbing to another) we must once again bring normative considerations to bear on economic life, no longer letting ourselves be tyrannized by something placed above all normative appraisal.²²⁶

Would any systems in principle be ruled out of the picture, given Wolterstorff's neo-Calvinist approach? There seems to be no doubt that a *laissez-faire* capitalism in which the market has a final voice would be unacceptable, since it would allow the economic sphere to step into such other spheres of life as the family and the State. On the

²²³ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 57.

²²⁴ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 61.

²²⁵ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 61.

²²⁶ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 64-65.

other hand, any socialist system in which regulation of the economic sphere would entail the risk of misusing or abusing the government's power, thus threatening freedom, would also be inappropriate.

Wolterstorff's vision is that of a society whose institutions "serve best the cause of justice and shalom."²²⁷ It is a vision of society that is characterized by harmonious relationships with other human beings and with nature,²²⁸ and by a strong concern for the poor. In such a society the rich play a voluntary role in fighting poverty. This is the conclusion I draw from the following claim:

It is against his [God's] will that there be a society in which some are poor; in his perfected kingdom there will be none at all. It is even more against his will that there be a society in which some are poor while other are rich.²²⁹

If a strong political system that imposes equality by simply taking from the rich and giving to the poor is ruled out because it would infringe upon the economic sphere of government, and if a *laissez-faire* capitalism is disregarded because it would lack the moral foundation to keep the capital idol from compromising other spheres of creation, then the solution seems to point to an economic model whose legislation would guarantee the poor their minimum rights, rights they possess by virtue of bearing God's image.²³⁰ In language that strikingly resembles Boff's, Wolterstorff argues that "we as human beings

²²⁷ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 63.

²²⁸ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 70.

²²⁹ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 76.

²³⁰ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 77, 78.

have sustenance rights.”²³¹ Such rights, he adds, are *basic* ones “in the sense that they essay to guarantee life itself—without which, of course, all other rights are meaningless.”²³² The rich, Wolterstorff insists, appealing to Calvin,²³³ have a fundamental role in shaping a social structure striving for shalom:

I want to say, as emphatically as I can, that our concern with poverty is not an issue of generosity, but of rights. If a rich man knows of someone who is starving and has the power to help that person but chooses not to do so, then he violates the starving person’s rights as surely and reprehensibly as if he had physically assaulted the sufferer. Acknowledging this truth may make us uncomfortable, but it is a conclusion we must draw from our reflections on shalom and the solidarity of all humanity in the image of God.²³⁴

Social economic arrangements should necessarily ensure that “our fellow human beings” are “adequately sustained in [their] existence.”²³⁵ Wolterstorff obviously does not rely only on piety and charity to deal with the issue of poverty. These “are not sufficient,” he claims.²³⁶ Then, would socialism be the answer, as Wolterstorff seems to suggest? If so, what kind of socialism would Wolterstorff have in mind? He does not explore these

²³¹ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 81.

²³² Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 82.

²³³ It is “no surprise,” Wolterstorff states, “to hear Calvin thundering against the rich in his sermons.... It is our duty, he [Calvin] insists, not only to avoid the evil but to seek the good: ‘those who have riches, whether inherited or won by their own industry and labor, are to remember that what is left over is not meant for intemperance and luxury, but for relieving the needs of the brethren.’”, Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 79. See John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistles to the Corinthians*, vol. 20, John Pringle, trans. (Grand Rapids: BakerBook House, repr. 1979), 2:296, 297.

²³⁴ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 82.

²³⁵ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 81.

²³⁶ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 81.

issues, but limits himself to making a vague reference to Kuyper's endorsement of socialism mentioned above. In any case, the adopted socio-economic regime must guarantee that people will be protected from deprivation of sustenance and must simultaneously avoid building oppressive structures.²³⁷ It is for this reason that Wolterstorff does not hesitate to cry out against the United States 1981-fiscal budget in which 160.4 billion U.S. dollars were allocated for the military and only 6.2 billion for economic aid to other countries. This situation Wolterstorff describes as "a violation of the sustenance rights of such enormous proportions as to cry out to heaven for recompense."²³⁸ Would Wolterstorff's apparent sympathy for socialism lead him to embrace Boff's social-planetary democracy? While he does not address this question directly, it seems legitimate to conclude that on the basis of his neo-Calvinist convictions he would reject such a possibility as it might lead the political sphere to control and stifle other realms of social development. Wolterstorff seems to suggest that a moral capitalist system not dominated by the idol of economic performance but aiming at the welfare of the entire world would be potentially more beneficial and less threatening. A particular application of this proposal to Third World reality may be heard in his following observation:

Does not the ultimate solution to the problem of the Third World poverty lie in the introduction of more industry so that this huge labor force can be drawn away from the land? To this the answer is yes—provided that the

²³⁷ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 84-85.

²³⁸ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 85.

industrialization is of the right sort and provided that it draws enough laborers away.²³⁹

In summary, Wolterstorff's embryonic answer to the problem is some sort of regulated capitalism that avoids the impoverishment of the people.²⁴⁰

Religious Model

As mentioned above, Wolterstorff's concept of shalom includes not only a harmonious relationship to other human beings, to nature, and to God but also delight in his service.²⁴¹ This perspective, rather than withdraw us from our physical environment, "incorporates our right relationship to—and more than that, *our delight in*—the physical."²⁴² Therefore, the physical world is "fit for our fulfillment,"²⁴³ and "sensory delight is not to be repudiated, but disciplined, as to be a component within gratitude."²⁴⁴ The Christian's way-of-being-in-the world is the appropriate response embodying both gratitude to God and a responsible care of nature, envisioned as God's creation. A life of worship, based on the understanding of the world as God's sacrament,²⁴⁵ and expressed

²³⁹ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 93. Nevertheless, Wolterstorff explicitly blames the form of industrialization that has been growing in the Third World for not fitting into this context, but rather for being concerned about making quick profits without benefitting those in "greatest need." (94)

²⁴⁰ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 142.

²⁴¹ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 70.

²⁴² Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 130.

²⁴³ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 130.

²⁴⁴ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 133.

²⁴⁵ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 151.

in a rhythmic alternation of work and praise,²⁴⁶ is at the core of Wolterstorff's religious model for a society that strives after shalom.

It is easy to see that for the individual [and for the society, I would add] who apprehends the world as a sacrament of God, *work and worship* are fundamentally connected. *Both are expressions of gratitude*; together they constitute the two phases of the manifestations of the devotion.²⁴⁷

It is important to remember, once more, that while he sees the world as God's sacrament, Wolterstorff nowhere bases this position on a panentheist position and thus avoids the theological problems discussed in chapter 3. Whereas the cosmos is considered a means of God's revelation, presence, and power, it still is ontologically distinct from its creator. Whereas the cosmos and its history reveal God "who is engaged in a history that is both his and ours," it cannot be forgotten that such a history is one of which "he is Lord and we are not."²⁴⁸

An historical actualization of work and worship performed in rhythmic alternation can be observed in Israel's history as recorded in the Old Testament. In that historical context, a six-plus-one alternation of labor and rest, with worship occurring in the context of rest, represents the alternation "of mastery of the natural and social world with thankful enjoyment of the world."²⁴⁹

²⁴⁶ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 147.

²⁴⁷ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 151. Work and worship as expressions of gratitude are not necessarily connected to seeing the world as God's sacrament. As far as I can tell, Wolterstorff discusses neither how work was affected by the Fall, nor how work can be an expression of gratitude for God's redemption.

²⁴⁸ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 151-152.

²⁴⁹ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 153.

Similarly, in the Christian's way-of-being-in-the world work and rest/worship are linked not only as an expression of gratitude but also as an anticipatory celebration of God's new creation and our future redemption.²⁵⁰ Such worship, more than mere liturgical activity, must be followed by works of mercy and justice in order to be indisputably authenticated.²⁵¹

Gratitude to God, expressed through work and worship, constitutes the essence of Wolterstorff's religious model. Work must treat the world as God's sacrament and still leave room to exercise mastery over it. Worship must express itself in a liturgical life validated by works of mercy and justice, without confusing the creation with the Creator. This is Wolterstorff's proposal for sick societies and a threatened planet. This proposal, different from Boff's, remains within the boundaries of Christian orthodoxy.²⁵²

A Cosmic-Planetary-Social-Democracy or Nations Cooperatively

Striving after Shalom?

No one of good sense can disagree with Leonardo Boff's concern for the poor and the planet. To evaluate whether Boff is eventually mistaken in some of the environmental claims he makes, as Calvin Beisner has argued to be true of other theologians,²⁵³ would

²⁵⁰ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 153.

²⁵¹ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 156.

²⁵² Except for Wolterstorff's view of the world as God's sacrament.

²⁵³ E. Calvin Beisner's helpful chapter entitled "The Problem of Environmental Misinformation," has shown how environmentalists in general, and evangelical environmentalists in particular, frequently make statements about environmental issues "uncritically." See E. Calvin Beisner, *Where Garden Meets Wilderness: Evangelical Entry into the Environmental Debate* (Grand Rapids: Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty & William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997).

demand a scientific analysis that is beyond the scope of the present work. Important to question at this point is whether Boff's socio-economic ethics, including his moral judgment of capitalism as intrinsically evil, as well as his appreciation of socialism, are fundamentally linked to his environmental concern or whether such a concern only corroborates a perspective he previously held. It seems legitimate to claim that, even if one or several countries with a capitalist orientation succeeded in contributing toward a clean environment, Boff still would judge capitalism to be morally evil. The reason is simple: capitalism necessarily generates a society of classes and promotes inequality. Hence, it is unjust. In other words, the social dimension of the current crisis seems to be at the very foundation of Boff's socio-economic ethics.

Nobody would disagree, I believe, that Boff's consternation at the situation of the poor is legitimate. However, whether the globalization process and the technological development are to be blamed for being the villain behind the dilemma of the poor remains to be proven. It is true that technological development at first caused unemployment in some industrial sectors as new equipment substituted for human labor, with the advantage of increasing productivity. Nevertheless, as Kaufman and Hotchkiss have shown, this is only a partial picture.²⁵⁴

²⁵⁴ "Although the initial impact of productivity growth is to reduce the demand for labor, it also leads to greater employment because lower product prices and higher real incomes stimulate additional sales in the economy. Rather than destroying jobs, therefore, productivity growth is actually the wellspring of higher per capital incomes and more jobs in the economy." Bruce E. Kaufman and Julie L. Hotchkiss, *The Economics of Labor Market*, 5th ed. (Fort Worth: The Dryden Press, 1999), 247. Besides, the same technological development Boff blames for unemployment has created new jobs in the market for qualified professionals. For instance, the revolution of information mentioned by Boff has generated the demand for qualified manual work: workers who produce daily changing hardware; technicians who maintain computer hardware; computer-science majors who create, develop, and keep operative software(s) necessary to keep equipments running are only a few examples of this reality. Rather than merely emphasizing the "structural

Furthermore, Boff's stringent adoption of the dependency theory deserves some criticism. As I have noted, while Boff eventually admits that other factors besides First World development must be blamed to explain the underdevelopment of the Third World, he usually disregards a more nuanced version of the dependency theory. The specification of these factors as well as an analysis of their weight in Latin America's underdevelopment is an important aspect that is lacking in Boff's work. Among the more nuanced versions from which Boff could benefit is Fernando Henrique Cardoso's approach, published in *Dependencia y Desarrollo em America Latina*:²⁵⁵

In common with all dependency theorists, Cardoso believes that external factors are important, that one cannot understand Latin America development without considering its dependent position in relation to advanced capitalist nations. But his primary focus is internal, on the social process through which, under the impact of external forces, different classes, alliances, and conflicts are formed.... Cardoso's work is distinctive in that he avoids general theorizing and insists on studying 'situations of dependency' in their specifics. Even within a given country he finds very different dynamics at work in 'enclave economies' (formed with foreign capital and producing goods for external markets), nationally-owned economies, and multinational economies.²⁵⁶

unemployment" caused by technological progress, it would probably be more accurate to point out the demand for better qualified manual work that such progress has brought about. Analogous claims can be made for the globalization process. Without ever being supportive or justifying the exploitation that multinational companies have occasionally imposed upon the labor force in underdeveloped countries, Boff would do well to concede that several of these entrepreneurial enterprises have generated jobs, wealth, and development for the countries where they have established themselves, even when sending their profits, totally or partially, to their central offices.

²⁵⁵ Fernando Henrique Cardoso has a Ph.D in Sociology from the University of São Paulo and is the current president of Brazil.

²⁵⁶ Arthur F. McGovern, S.J., "Latin America and 'Dependency' Theory," 113. "We conceive," says Cardoso, "the relationship between external and internal forces as forming a complex whose structural links are not based on mere external forms of exploitation and coercion, but are rooted in coincidences of interests between local dominant classes and international ones, and on the other side, are challenged by local dominated groups and classes." Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Elzo Faletto, *Dependency and Development in Latin America*, trans. Marjory Mattingly Urquidi (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA:

Besides sociological factors, other considerations should be the object of investigation, such as character formation and the formative role of Latin America's religious tradition as pointed out by Michael Novak.²⁵⁷ In any case, Boff would do well to pay attention to Father McGovern's advice regarding dependency theory. "I am skeptical," he says, "of theories that claim to offer *the* explanation of complex social situations, but I also believe," he adds, "that most theories that rise to prominence have *some* important insights to contribute to our understanding."²⁵⁸ What McGovern suggests sounds reasonable; the complexity of the picture makes it hard to grasp all the factors involved. Indeed, the complexity of the situation seems to require the use of Boff's dialogical logic and his principle of complementary. The simplistic form generally adopted by Boff should be rejected, so McGovern recommends, in favor of a more nuanced form that "recognizes the external factors as significantly affecting and conditioning Latin American development and acknowledges and studies the internal factors involved."²⁵⁹ In addition, an emphasis upon dependency theory, especially in its less nuanced form, has another serious disadvantage. It tends to cause people to think of themselves as victims, thus generating a negative self-image and a crisis of hope. As

University of California Press, 1979), xvi. "It cannot be conceived as if considerations of external factors or foreign domination were enough to explain the dynamics of societies." (xviii). See also pages 15, 21, 22, 27

²⁵⁷ McGovern suggests that among the obstacles to Latin America's development the most significant one has been the concentration of ownership, particularly land ownership (See Arthur F. McGovern, S.J., "Latin America and 'Dependency' Theory," 118). It is not my intention to pursue the investigation of this issue here. However, I point this out to show that other factors play a role in Latin America's underdevelopment besides the mere interference of the First World's economy.

²⁵⁸ Arthur F. McGovern, S.J., "Latin America and 'Dependency' Theory," 116.

²⁵⁹ Arthur F. McGovern, S.J., "Latin America and 'Dependency' Theory," 116-117.

Novak rightly stresses: “It is hard to become responsible and autonomous and creative if you think of yourself as a victim who can do nothing.”²⁶⁰

Boff’s proposal of a cosmic-planetary-social-democracy, as well as his analysis of the current social-cultural and economic model, unquestionably reveal his rejection of capitalism and his acceptance of socialism. Two fundamental beliefs lie at the core of this option: first, his understanding that a society of classes is necessarily unjust, since, according to him, justice presupposes equality; second, a strong rejection of the right to private property. These two beliefs deserve careful consideration.

First of all, I believe that Boff’s conception of justice, probably as a consequence of his sympathy toward Marxism, is flawed and compromises his judgment. Justice does not presuppose equality. While the term justice may assume different senses in theological discussion, as pointed out by Werpehowski, our primary concern is with “the normative ordering and distribution of social benefits and burdens among citizens of a commonwealth.”²⁶¹ Justice, says Plato in his *Republic*, “is having and doing what is properly yours.”²⁶² According to Augustine, for instance, justice has a basic task: “to see that to each is given what belongs to each.”²⁶³ Augustine’s definition, therefore, does not

²⁶⁰ Michael Novak, ed. *Liberation Theology and The Liberal Society*, 138.

²⁶¹ William Werpehowski, “Justice,” in *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, ed. James F. Childress and John Macquarrie (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986), 330.

²⁶² Plato, *The Republic*, Raymond Larson, trans. and ed. (Arlington: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 1979), 101.

²⁶³ Augustine, *The City of God*, Vernon J. Bourke, ed. (New York: Image Books, Doubleday, 1958), 438.

entail equality.²⁶⁴ Had Boff adopted this Augustinian notion of justice, he would perhaps have avoided both a total rejection of capitalism and an uncritical commitment to socialism, and still be able to defend the inherent rights of the poor who as God's image and likeness deserve to be treated with dignity.

Second, Boff's denial of private property has no foundation in Scripture or the Christian tradition²⁶⁵ but seems to derive from his sympathy for Marxist ideology.

Smedes, following the Calvinist tradition, refers to the eight commandment, 'Thou shall not steal,' as a commandment to respect property. He writes:

Between persons and things is a bond we call ownership, and God tells all people to respect that bond. Behind 'Thou shall not steal' must lie a permission to keep things. Respect for persons, the common thread we see running through all the commandments, here requires a particular attention to persons in their relationship to things which are truly their own and therefore bound up with their very selves. There is a wrong of taking because there is a right of keeping.²⁶⁶

²⁶⁴ Scripture's idea of justice does not entail equality either. For instance, in the parable of the workers in the vineyard recorded in Matthew 20:1-15, the biblical concept of justice is presented. A first glance, it may appear that justice entails equality since all workers in the end receive equal payment, even though they have been hired at different times of the day. However, when the workers hired earlier question the justice of their payment, the landlord's answer is: "Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don't I have the right to do what I want with my money? Or are you envious because I am generous?" (Matthew 20:13b-15). Even though he did not pay all the same hourly wages, the landlord was just, since he gave each what was due to him.

²⁶⁵ Calvin says, explaining the 8th commandment: "[I]n order that we may not be condemned as thieves by God, we must endeavor, as far as possible, that everyone should safely keep what he possesses, and that our neighbor's advantage should be promoted no less than our own." John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Last Four Books of Moses Arranged in the Form of a Harmony*, trans. Charles William Bingham (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, repr. 1979), 3:111.

²⁶⁶ Lewis B. Smedes, *Mere Morality: What God Expects from Ordinary People* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, Pub. Co., 1983), 183.

In addition, granted Boff's admission of the historical failures of historical socialism as a political system, it seems that his proposal for a planetary social-democracy would not be the best alternative to guaranteeing the poor their rights. Socialism has historically demonstrated its intrinsic potentiality for misuse or abuse of authority. This recognition, however, does not invalidate several criticisms Boff raises concerning the idolatrous character of some versions of capitalism, as well as its inefficacy so far to address satisfactorily the problem of poverty in the world. Nor does it challenge the excesses committed in the colonization process by the current developed nations. It seems hard to disagree with Boff on this issue. The developed countries have a debt to pay to their former colonies, a moral debt. An economic assessment of this debt, however, is still a challenging, if not an impossible task.

On the other hand, Wolterstorff's diagnosis of the current situation, in particular his appeal to neo-Calvinist economics, is insightful and provides some of the elements missing in Boff's analysis. Besides adopting what seems to be a more nuanced version of dependency theory, Wolterstorff also benefits from embracing a neo-Calvinist view of the relation between human beings and creation. Human beings, in this view, are called to master nature and develop its potentials. This activity is best captured by the notion of stewardship which makes clear that human beings are called to rule over creation while being aware that creation is not their own but belongs to God. Such rule is to comprise all areas of life in which human beings must express their gratitude to God through earthly vocations that ultimately aim at bringing glory to God. Neo-Calvinism's emphasis on the flourishing of different spheres of power, each with its own set of norms, and none

crossing the boundaries of the other, seems to provide a framework that allows sufficient freedom in the economic realm to safeguard a market economy and private property. How much regulation would be required is probably an empirical question and would allow different answers in different contexts. Nevertheless, Wolterstorff's proposal of a larger participation of the employees in the entrepreneurial enterprise in terms of both strategic planning and its profits—eventually as shareholders— should be one of the general principles deserving close attention.

Conclusion

Leonardo Boff's liberationist socio-economic ethics seriously addresses the urgent problems of poverty and ecological crisis. These two problems are the visible manifestations of a single crisis that is rooted in the adoption of an anthropocentric and reductionist paradigm. Anthropocentric, because it sees man as possessing the right to master all creation. Reductionist, because it fails to see that understanding, spirit, and relationships do not belong exclusively to human beings. Boff's panentheism, therefore, provides him with a base for criticizing the current model as well as for proposing a new one. On the one hand, panentheism allows Boff to strongly question the current social-cultural, economic, and even religious model that has been responsible for exploiting the poor and the planet. On the other hand, panentheism provides the ground for proposing a new social model in which all beings are valued and cared for, given their ontological relation with God. The ideal socialist society envisioned by Boff is one in which equality prevails and all created beings are considered brothers and sisters.

While the merit of Boff's cause is indisputable, his social ethics suffers from additional problems other than those connected with the adoption of panentheism already discussed in chapter 3. First, his view of justice as presupposing equality leads him to categorically reject capitalism because of its class structure. Second, his antipathy for private property. Both aspects show up Boff's ongoing appreciation for Marxist principles.

Wolterstorff's proposal regarding social-economic ethics has sufficient merit to be at least considered by Boff as a feasible alternative, were he consistently to blend his ontological-epistemological project with a strong emphasis on complementarity and dialogical logic. While Boff never addresses Wolterstorff's contribution, it is reasonable to suppose that the former would drop both Wolterstorff's more nuanced appraisal of capitalism and his suggestion for fixing its flaws.

Wolterstorff's analysis is insightful; it corrects and complements some of the elements lacking in Boff's. Besides adopting a more nuanced version of dependency theory in economics, Wolterstorff appeals to a neo-Calvinist theology of creation and emphasizes the importance of stewardship in his effort to address the very same issues raised by Boff, namely, poverty and the ecological crisis. While human beings have the right and even the responsibility to subdue the earth, a truth denied by Boff because of his commitment to panentheism, this task must be developed in the awareness that the earth is not ours but God's. Wolterstorff's neo-Calvinist emphasis on the existence of different spheres of sovereignty is an important contribution insofar as it provides the proper environment to guarantee the legitimacy of market economy and private property, while

allowing for an appropriate degree of government regulation. The final goal of Wolterstorff's proposal is shalom, human beings in harmonious relationships among themselves, with creation, and with God.

Wolterstorff's proposal of nations cooperatively striving for shalom seems a more promising picture than Boff's cosmic-planetary-social democracy. However, the detailing of the former's socio-economic ethics in order to meaningfully address current issues and to implement policies that may effectively lead to shalom, remains to be done.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

Leonardo Boff's commitment to liberation is a pervasive feature of his work. The original focus, the poor, has gradually been enlarged to include the whole earth. Boff's liberationist project is far more than an intellectual enterprise. It reveals a passion deeply rooted in Boff's own life. The liberationist tone pervades his work from the early texts to the most recent writings on ecology where Boff's project has reached maturity. The continuity of Boff's project becomes discernible once we pay attention to his ontological and epistemological tenets that he not only continues to subscribe to, but also fully develops.

The socio-economic data from the World Bank's 2000-2001 report, presented at the introduction of this dissertation, hardly leaves a margin of doubt as to the relevance of Boff's effort. In a world where 1.5 billion people live on less than one U.S. dollar per day, and around 2.8 billion people on two dollars per day, Boff's attempt to address both the causes and the potential solutions of this alarming situation seems not only legitimate, but mandatory. A similar claim can be made when considering the wide range of important ecological issues raised by Boff, including the disappearance of species, deforestation, global warming, ozone depletion, and acid rain.

If the importance of Boff's project cannot be questioned, the same cannot be said about its methodology and foundations. In his methodology Boff's sensitivity to the condition of the poor led him to adopt *praxis*, rather than Scripture, as the center of gravity of his theological re-construction, thus exposing his project to theological problems that otherwise could have been either avoided or minimized while keeping the focus of his concern intact. Regarding its foundation, Boff's project has three cornerstones: first, Marxist axioms upon which his social analysis is based; second, an ontology borrowed from Teilhard de Chardin, with a strong emphasis on the evolution of the universe; third, an epistemological suspicion of the human ability to know reality in itself, initially based on his Teilhardian ontology, and later derived also from his borrowing of Niels Bohr's epistemological principles.

Two major events in the 1980's brought about a major change in Boff's career: first, the ecclesiastical discipline imposed by the Roman Catholic Church that culminated in his voluntary resignation from the priesthood; second, the fall of Socialism in Eastern Europe that demanded a revision of his project. It is in this context that the enlargement of Boff's original liberationist effort, from the poor to the whole earth took place. This enlargement, however, should not be seen as a rupture with the overall project. As observed above, a basic cornerstone of Boff's project, his Teilhardian ontology, explicitly or implicitly present in early works,²⁶⁷ was not only preserved but was also given full expression. Indeed, in the 1990's this Teilhardian perspective became the very backbone of Boff's present ecological studies. While one may question whether or not Teilhard de

²⁶⁷ See chapter 2, page 35.

Chardin departed from classical theism by adopting a panentheist cosmology, this is not the case with respect to Leonardo Boff. In chapter 3 I have demonstrated Boff's commitment to panentheism. His defense of the universe's pan-relatedness is based on the belief that spirit/Spirit is a pervasive presence in creation and the very cause of the universe's evolutionary ascension toward God. At the very end of this cosmogenic process, Boff believes, the symbiotic relation that God and the universe already have will be fully actualized. The advantages Boff envisions as resulting from his adoption of panentheism are primarily related to his social-ethics.¹ These advantages, however, are superseded by the theological problems that this commitment to panentheism causes, both with respect to God's being and to the cosmos itself. On the one hand, God's being becomes subject to a form of reductionism as well as to an ontological change as a consequence of his symbiotic relation with the cosmos. This same symbiotic relation also brings about complex issues in what concerns the relation of evil to God's being, making the development of a theodicy a task even more complex than it already is. On the other hand, as far as the cosmos is concerned, the symbiotic relationship proposed by panentheism entails that the universe becomes an object of veneration, which is contrary to the teaching of Scripture. Another theological problem arising from Boff's panentheism is a soteriological development that tends toward universalism.

¹ As I have argued in chapter 3, Boff points to two advantages. First, panentheism would be more effective in discouraging, if not in preventing, the exploitation of the world. Second, panentheism would provide an appropriate framework for proposing an organic social system based on equality rather than equity.

I have argued in chapter 2 that, while Teilhard de Chardin is a major influence on Boff's ontology, Niels Bohr plays an important role in the development of Boff's epistemology. One should not expect to find any mention of Bohr in Boff's early works, although some brief discussion of epistemological principles may eventually be found in *O Rosto Materno de Deus (The Maternal Face of God)*. The reason for this is that epistemological issues were not Boff's main focus early on in his theological career. Even though Boff still does not have a specific work dealing with epistemology, he has increasingly paid more attention to it in some of his books published in the last four years but not yet translated into English.² I have suggested in my assessment of Boff's latest epistemological development that, while he may sound like an anti-realist in some of his statements by making reality dependent on the observer, he probably only intends to emphasize the subjective character of our apprehension of reality. Such subjectivity derives from the intrinsic connection, the interdependence existing between reality and the observer that impose limits on a detached observation. Moreover, I have argued that these limits on the human ability to know reality, either physical, moral, or spiritual, also derive from two other correlated factors related to Boff's ontology. The first is the evolutionary process in which the universe is involved. Since the true nature of things has not yet been fully actualized, truth does not consist in what is but mainly in what will be. The second is the pan-relatedness of the universe. Boff's panentheist cosmology leads him to see reality as a network of entities and events that are interconnected. Everything

² Particularly, *A Águia e Galinha: Uma Metáfora da Condição Humana* (1997) and *Saber Cuidar: Ética do Humano - Compaixão pela Terra* (1999).

is linked to everything else by a common bond, spirit/Spirit. The epistemological consequence of this ontological view is clear: entities and events are part of a universal network whose laws of interaction are far beyond our ability to fully grasp. These factors, Boff suggests, combine to make our apprehension of reality always dual in nature or bipolar. One pole points to necessity, history, facts, roots, body, power, and closed system. The other pole points to desire, utopia, idea, openness, soul, charisma, and open system. An adequate grasp of reality requires the adoption of an appropriate epistemological principle, that of complementarity. According to this principle, Boff claims, the contraries must be seen as expressions of the same and complex reality in order to allow, given our epistemological limits, the best possible grasp of reality. Boff proposes several epistemological resources to which we must appeal to achieve a true, yet partial knowledge of reality, namely, pathos, openness to the feminine, myths and legends, utopia, the dialogical logic, mysticism, and the identification with the poor since, consistent with his early claims, Boff believes that there is an epistemological privilege that is associated with their position.

The uncritical incorporation of Bohr's principle of complementarity, I argued in chapter 2, is the source of tension for Boff's overall project, given his Teilhardian ontology with emphasis upon evolution through dialectical synthesis. As I noted there, Bohr's defense of complementarity presupposes the impossibility of further synthesis and is not consistent with Boff's ontology. A potential solution for Boff would be to argue that complementarity must be used until the evolution of the universe makes clear the form that synthesis will take. However, as far as I can tell, Boff does not discuss this

potential difficulty in his works. More importantly, Boff's adoption of the principle of complementarity has serious implications for his religion and theology as well as for his social ethics. With respect to religion and theology, the adoption of the principle of complementarity leads Boff to a standpoint located somewhere between Christian inclusivism and sheer pluralism, thus compelling him to welcome the contributions of all spiritual traditions as genuine sources of truth. All religions are seen as nothing but expressions of a meeting with God by different cultures. All religions share a common spirituality, and the construal of a planetary society, Boff's actual goal, requires a new religion composed from the contributions of diverse spiritual traditions. Christianity's claims of possessing the revealed truth, and of being the only way to God, are dismissed by Boff as "pretentiousness" and "illusion," and hence reveal his divorce from Christian orthodoxy on these fundamental issues. If Boff does not show much confidence in achieving a final answer on religious issues, the same is not true of social ethics, or more specifically, of socio-economic ethics. It is true that the universal ethical principle he identifies, the duty of preserving the planet, may actualize itself in different concrete moralities respectful of the various cultural and spiritual traditions. It is also true that these concrete moralities may even complement each other in their effort to translate into practice the most fundamental ethical principle. However, when the focus is socio-economic ethics, there seems to be little room for contributions that reveal appreciation for capitalism, as indicated in chapter 5.

In chapter 4 I have argued that Boff's project would benefit from the adoption of an alternative epistemological proposal, a Reformed epistemology such as developed by

Nicholas Wolterstorff. The scope of Wolterstorff's epistemology reveals a significant degree of commonality with Boff's. Wolterstorff too is suspicious of reason as a necessary resource for providing justified beliefs about reality, or at least some aspects of it. Moreover, Wolterstorff has an explicit sympathy for the idea of perspectival learning, and reveals a real interest in multi-disciplinary theological dialogue, especially with science, as an important resource for gaining a wider grasp of reality. Even more importantly, Wolterstorff argues that human beings are capable of achieving true knowledge in spiritual and moral matters through a variety of reliable processes for the purpose of immediate belief-formation. This argument is based on Wolterstorff's conviction that human beings have been endowed by God with this ability, a conclusion that Boff's evolutionary ontology does not guarantee. I have suggested that Boff would benefit from Wolterstorff's commitment to metaphysical realism. Nevertheless, even if this suggestion is rejected, the adoption of the principle of complementarity demands that Boff consider alternatives to his own socio-economic ethics, including Wolterstorff's neo-Calvinism.

Boff's liberationist social-ethics and Wolterstorff's neo-Calvinism have been analyzed in chapter 5. In the development of his socio-economic ethics, Boff reveals his concern for our planet that he portrays as plunged into a serious crisis. Poverty and ecological problems are two visible dimensions of this crisis, whose root cause lies in the adoption of an anthropocentric paradigm by human civilization. This paradigm is reductionist since it fails to see that understanding, spirit, and relationships are not exclusive of humanity. Boff not only blames the adoption of this anthropocentric

paradigm, but also identifies the prevailing socio-cultural³, economic⁴, and religious⁵ models as specific factors behind the contemporary crisis. It is worth noting that in his description of the economic model, Boff generally adopts a unnuanced version of the dependency theory on order to explain the poverty and the lack of development in underdeveloped nations as causal consequences of both the wealth and the development of the so-called first-world nations. Boff's uncritical adoption of the dependence theory is an example of how he does not benefit from his own epistemology, or more specifically, from the principle of complementarity. Given the complexity of the issues involved, one would expect Boff to use dialogical logic and to be open to the plurality of voices raised in the discussion; however, this expectation disappoints. Boff's harsh criticism of the contemporary picture must not be understood as pessimism. Indeed, he does not lack hope for change. Behind the contemporary globalization process he envisions an extraordinary opportunity for a leap into a new stage of man's evolutionary journey. If it is true that globalization has opened the doors to the propagation of neo-liberalism, it has also brought about the possibility of a new planetary vision, one that is committed to universal values and to respect of differences and that stresses the interdependence of all human beings.

³ The tendency toward a homogenization of cultural tendencies, preferences, and ideas.

⁴ The tendency to see neo-liberalism as the ideal socio-economic model for all the nations, despite the different stages of their development

⁵ The neglect of both an experience of the sacred and the development of a inclusive spirituality open to alterity. Christianity has also failed in imposing limits upon the prevailing socio-economic model, primarily because of its emphasis upon God's transcendence.

Boff's proposal is quite clear. He envisions a new cosmic-planetary society in which all beings are seen as brothers and sisters, under a central global government. Such a proposal rests upon a twofold foundation. The first one is Boff's panentheist cosmology. All beings belong to this cosmic society as co-participants in a single evolutionary process and as bearers of a common spirit. Panentheism, therefore, fits Boff's socio-political system better than does classical theism. On the one hand, classical theism puts a strong emphasis on God's transcendence and sovereignty and develops a theology of creation that assures human beings their rights over the earth. On the other hand, panentheism stresses the interdependence of all beings based on the spirit/Spirit's pervasive presence in creation, a belief that works nicely in the development of Boff's ecology. The second foundation is socialism that Boff considers as the ideal social-political-economic system to be adopted in a world-wide scale. Rather than a society based on competition and class struggle, Boff's proposes a planetary democracy ruled by a central government and based on love and respect for the other's identity, thus mirroring the inner fellowship of the Triune God. Boff's planetary society, consistent with the epistemological principles explained in the fourth chapter, is plural and open to the contributions of all cultures, social classes, and spiritual traditions. With regard to economics, Boff's planetary socialism proposes a (more) equitable division of goods as well as a sustainable development. This equitable division is not to be achieved through the increase of production but through the distribution of the rich countries' available wealth, apparently implemented by a central government. Whether this is to be implemented voluntarily or by exercising some type of coercion it is not entirely clear. What is clear is

that the transition to this new level of the evolutionary process will not be smooth, but will be achieved after some sort of worldwide crisis. Boff's endorsement of socialism contains two elements. The first is Boff's concept of justice as equality rather than equity, a concept alien to the Christian-Platonic tradition. The second is Boff's antipathy for private property. Both elements reveal Boff's appreciation of Marxist ideology, to which he has shown indebtedness throughout his theological career. With regard to religion, Boff envisions a deeply religious planetary society. Panentheism is the basis to which he appeals for making spirituality an integral part of everyday life, a spirituality marked by effective compassion to those who suffer.

I have claimed that Boff's epistemology requires him to consider and benefit from alternative socio-economic ethics. While, in view of Boff's emphasis on complementarity, I could have appealed to such contributions as that of Michael Novak, I have instead introduced a closer dialogue-partner, namely, Nicholas Wolterstorff. Wolterstorff's analysis is insightful and complements some of the elements missing in Boff's. On the one hand, Wolterstorff agrees with Boff that social structures are the result of human decision. On the other hand, Wolterstorff appeals to a theological category to diagnose contemporary societies' status, designating them as "fallen and in need of reform," rather than "sick." Wolterstorff's adoption of a more nuanced version of the dependency theory, a theory he confessedly borrowed from liberation theology, as well as his neo-Calvinist view on the relation between human beings and creation, both point in a promising direction, namely, a superior synthesis between these two theological schools. This is an insight from which Boff's project could benefit. In other words, Wolterstorff

shows that it is not necessary to dismiss classical theism and instead appeal to a panentheist cosmology in order to strive for social justice and fight against the exploitation of creation. It is possible, following neo-Calvinism, to preserve a classical theology of creation and to ascribe to human beings the right to develop creation's potentials. A necessary condition of this process is to highlight the notion of stewardship. While human beings have the right, and even the responsibility of subduing creation, this enterprise must be developed in the awareness that the earth is not our possession but belongs to God. Following a Calvinist framework, Wolterstorff argues that all earthly vocations are to aim at glorifying God. The neo-Calvinist emphasis on the flourishing of different spheres of power, each one with its own norms, also provides the appropriate environment to guarantee market economy and private property along with an appropriate degree of government regulation.

Wolterstorff not only differs from Boff by not adopting panentheism; he also differs from him by not appealing to different spiritual traditions in connection with his social-ethics. Instead, he appeals to Christianity and argues that Christians have a fundamental role to play in the reform of the social order.

In summary, Wolterstorff is convinced that a synthesis between liberation theology and neo-Calvinism is not only possible, but that it is a promising strategy to accomplish what he envisions as the goal for all nations, shalom. Shalom means that human beings dwell at peace in all their relationships, with God, with self, with fellows, and with nature. In fact, shalom means far more than a right relationship; it also means *enjoyment* of these relationships.

It is true that when it comes to a specific proposal, Wolterstorff is vague in laying out what a society striving for shalom would look like, especially in regard to its socio-political and economic models. Perhaps, we can only go so far as to say that any political system that actually or potentially prevents the spheres of power to develop to their full potential should be ruled out. In other words, any political regime in which the suppression of religious freedom, voluntary associations, or even free trade would be threatened should be considered inadequate, since these areas are seen as fundamental spheres of human development. With regard to economics, the mastering of creation leaves room for industrial activity, free trade, and other forms of economic activity. Nevertheless, Wolterstorff's proposal makes clear that the economic sphere should not be allowed to dominate over other such other spheres as politics, education, family, and ecclesiastical formations. In a society striving for shalom, human beings should be able to form proper relationships with fellow human beings, thus showing a strong concern for the poor. They should also be able to have an harmonious relationship with creation. The principle of stewardship should be the chief guideline that focuses these two relationships. If the adoption of neo-Calvinism seems to lead Wolterstorff to rule out *laissez-faire* capitalism as well as any political system that would make equality an imposition forced from above, it is not clear what exactly his constructive proposal would look like. What he has in mind is perhaps some form of regulated capitalist system, one not dominated by the idol of economic performance. The degree and forms of such regulation are not discussed by him, and are gaps which a further study should pursue. In spite of these gaps, Wolterstorff's socio-economic proposal has undeniable merits. It is

sensitive to the very same issues raised by Leonardo Boff and struggles to articulate an answer that has the advantage of staying within the boundaries of Christian orthodoxy.

It is my conviction that Boff, by following his own epistemology and applying the principle of complementarity, will benefit from a dialogue with Wolterstorff. It is true that such a dialogue may require that Boff revise some of his presuppositions, such as the notion of justice as equality, the indiscriminate appreciation of some socialist axioms, his panentheism, and his epistemological suspicion. But it may also enable him to keep his commendable concern with the poor and our planet alive, while avoiding some undesirable theological traps.

After all, Craig Gay is right on his concern. The emphasis on social-ethics may lead Christian theologians to fall into the “immanentization” trap. Boff’s example alerts us to the seriousness of Gay’s warning. However, even if Gay is right, his unwillingness to offer a contribution to the serious issues we as Christian have to face is not justifiable. The risk, I believe, has to be faced, and the challenge must be met. Wolterstorff’s project offers interesting guidelines on how to face these issues, while remaining committed to Christian orthodoxy. To implement this project, the job of filling the gaps that have been identified, remains waiting to be done.

APPENDIX

Dissertation Propositions

- (1) Poverty demands a Christian answer that may accurately address its causes and identify legitimate means to overcome it.
- (2) Leonardo Boff's dismissal of classical theism and his adoption of panentheism have serious implications that must be weighed against the advantages gained. The claimed advantages, from both a social and religious-theological standpoint, are superseded by the serious theological problems regarding God's being, the cosmos and humanity, and soteriology.
- (3) There is a tension between Leonardo Boff's epistemology and his social ethics. While he suggests that, given the human limits to grasp reality, one should be open to benefit from the dialogue with various, even opposing contributions, he does not follow this criterion when it comes to his socio-economic ethics.
- (4) Leonardo Boff is clearly indebted to Teilhard de Chardin and to Niels Bohr in developing, respectively, his ontology and his epistemology.
- (5) The adoption of the epistemological principle of complementarity places Boff somewhere between Christian inclusivism and sheer pluralism.
- (6) Given Leonardo Boff's adoption of the principle of complementarity, Nicholas Wolterstorff's project is a legitimate alternative for both Boff's epistemology and his social-ethics.
- (7) Nicholas Wolterstorff's revised neo-Calvinism represents a better alternative than Boff's liberationist ethics. The former wrestles seriously with the very same issues and proposes a solution that not only avoids the risks of Boff's proposal, but also preserves the integrity of classical theism, thus avoiding the theological problems resulting from the adoption of panentheism.

Course Work Propositions

(1) Richard Baxter's *A Holy Commonwealth* must be considered an answer to James Harrington's *Oceana* despite William Lamont's statement that Baxter's own claim should not 'be taken so seriously'.

(2) A society S is just if and only if:

- (a) S assures religious freedom, thus guaranteeing the exercise of Christianity;
- (b) S preserves its natural resources, and it has proper laws regulating the relation between employers and employees;
- (c) S respects and preserves the family as an institution;
- (d) S shows respect for human life, punishing actions which attempt to harm it;
- (e) S struggles against immorality in its several expressions;
- (f) S provides opportunities for professional development and a sufficient income for a worthy life;
- (g) S preserves the truth through an appropriate judicial system;
- (h) S shows respect for the right of ownership, punishing the misappropriation of other's properties.

(3) James Gustafson's *Theocentric Ethics* claims that, as God is the ground of everything, we can get some analogical knowledge of him from our interpretation of human experience. Gustafson's claim leads to at least three consequences, namely, relativism, subjectivism, and anthropocentrism.

(4) In James Gustafson's project, Scripture, while having its ground in God, does not have more divine authority than anything else in the world.

(5) Epistemic virtue theory, such as proposed by Linda Zagzebski and James Montmarquet, does not provide a superior account of responsibility for belief than Alvin Plantinga's Reformed epistemology.

(6) Contrary to what has been argued by Eugene TeSelle, it is love rather than justice that is preeminent in Augustine's writings, as it is revealed in *The City of God*.

General Propositions

- (1) North American society's emphasis upon independence at an early stage of life is responsible for developing an early sense of responsibility at the expense of hazarding the lives of young adults and their families.
- (2) According to my son, four years in Grand Rapids have shown that '*I am more Dutch than the Dutch*', [whatever this means].
- (3) After four years living in another culture, my wife and I discovered that we are ready for heaven, since we do not fit anywhere anymore.

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