

The Noteworthiness of Leonardo Boff's Integral Ecology for Contemporary Ethical Guidance

Albert Wijaya Kusuma, Dimas Rakhmat Sasmita, Bintang Ryan Ananta, Anindya Thalita Salsabila,
Rommel Utungga Pasopati, Kusuma Wijaya

Universitas Dr. Soetomo, Surabaya, Indonesia.

Corresponding author*

editor@sunankalijaga.org

Abstract: This article examines the ethical significance of Leonardo Boff's ecocriticism for guiding contemporary thought and practice in an age of ecological and social crisis. Emerging from his liberation theology, Boff's ecological vision insists on the profound interconnection between humanity, the Earth, and the sacred. His concept of "integral ecology" highlights the inseparability of environmental sustainability and social justice, arguing that ecological destruction and human oppression stem from the same anthropocentric and exploitative systems. Against such paradigms, Boff advances an ethic of care, solidarity, and responsibility that extends moral concern to both the poor and the planet. Through qualitative method, this paper accentuates that Boff's ecocriticism is thus doubly significant: as critique, it unmasks the unsustainable logic of consumerism, profit-driven economies, and technological domination; as constructive proposal, it offers a spiritually grounded, holistic ethics that nurtures compassion, cooperation, and reverence for life. By reframing ecological responsibility as inseparable from human dignity and justice, Boff provides a distinctive voice in global discussions of ecological ethics. This article argues that his perspective remains especially noteworthy today, offering a comprehensive and transformative framework capable of orienting societies toward more just, sustainable, and ethically grounded futures.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, Ethics, Integral Ecology, Leonardo Boff.

Introduction

Liberation theology started in Latin America in the late 1960s as a way for people in the Church to respond to poverty and injustice. It was influenced by Jesus' message of love, justice, and care for the poor. Thinkers like Gustavo Gutiérrez, Leonardo Boff, and Jon Sobrino said that faith should not only be about belief but also about helping those who suffer. They spoke about a "preferential option for the poor," meaning the Church should stand beside people in need. In simple terms, liberation theology connects faith with action to bring hope, fairness, and human dignity to everyone (Boff, 2014; Mickey, 2021; Pasopati et al., 2025). Liberation theology also encouraged people to read the Bible from the perspective of the poor and oppressed. It reminded the Church that faith must be lived out in real life, especially through service and compassion. Over time, its message

spread beyond Latin America, inspiring movements for justice and peace in many parts of the world.

The idea of liberation theology is clear, that is to bring any divine teaching on earth by taking sides with the oppressed ones. One thinker of such theology is named Leonardo Boff. He wrote various books to criticize capitalism and its capitalism as juggernaut that destroys everything, including environment. Then, he proposed such perspective indicated as integral ecology. Boff's idea of integral ecology comes from his background as a theologian and environmental thinker. He believes that ecological problems cannot be separated from social, cultural, and spiritual issues (Boff, 2014; Mickey, 2021; Pasopati et al., 2025). For Boff, caring for the Earth means caring for people, especially the poor and marginalized, because environmental harm and social injustice are deeply connected. Integral

ecology calls for a holistic view of life, where humans are part of nature and not above it. He intentionally emphasizes that true ecological balance requires a change in values, moving from domination and exploitation toward respect, harmony, and solidarity with all forms of life. He also connects this with spirituality, suggesting that caring for the planet is a sacred duty and an act of love. Boff's integral ecology invites people to live in a way that unites environmental care, social justice, and inner transformation for the well-being of the entire Earth community.

Indeed, Boff's understanding is nothing but such compassion for contemporary ethical guidance. It is ethics since it speaks about conscience. Boff tried to evoke people's awareness of environment degraded by capitalism and spoke that everyone should do better and be responsible for future earth. That is why Boff's ethics is also indicated as environmental ethics since it shifts the idea of humans as the center of the earth, or anthropocentrism, into ecocentrism in which nature beings become the focal points of people's everyday life (Boff, 2014; Mickey, 2021; Pasopati et al., 2025). Boff does not speak much about biology, but he emphasizes more about ecology in which human beings are integral part of this nature living the planet earth.

Method

By using qualitative methods, certain concepts and written data are analyzed to answer the question in this paper. Written through description in explorative approach, online and offline scripts are used to explain correlations between Leonardo Boff's ideas and ethical guidance in the sense of cultural studies. Online and offline scripts are derived from books and journals to understand shown matters. The data analysis includes attaining sources, reading sources carefully, comparing with other issues, quoting into paper, and writing down in references lists. The research data comes from Boff's ideas and ethical guidance discourses. Each of them is read then broken down into its every particular element. More elaborations

related to deepened analysis are also provided in addition furthermore.

Results And Discussion

Leonardo Boff's Vital Ideas of Integral Ecology

Leonardo Boff in his book published in 1997 entitled *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* starts with a profound yet accessible claim. It is the environmental crisis and the social crisis are two aspects of the same systemic problem. The "cry of the Earth" (ecological degradation, pollution, deforestation, and species extinction) is deeply connected to the "cry of the poor," the suffering of marginalized people who are trapped in systems of inequality and exploitation. This is interesting since environmental degradation is used to be spoken in the matter of economic matters rather than social issues (Boff, 1997; Linzey, 2021; Bethari & Pasopati, 2024). Boff emphasizes more that both forms of suffering share a common root: a civilization built on domination, accumulation, and the instrumental use of life. In other words, capitalism is not the solution, but the main problem and should be resisted by societies enhanced by existential meanings of human beings.

Boff underscores that neither the poor nor the Earth are merely passive victims; they are both capable of transformation of everyday ecology where everydayness comes to real yet lived life or even Husserlian *lebenswelt*. Drawing on liberation theology's "preferential option for the poor," he extends this principle to include the natural world. In Boff's view, God's love encompasses all creation, especially what is most wounded. Such a genuine theology of liberation must also include care for the environment. This is what Boff describes as eco-justice, or the liberation of both humanity and nature (Boff, 1997; Linzey, 2021; Bethari & Pasopati, 2024). This is also Boff's specialty in finding the intersections between theology and modern degradation. He would like to push people that having faith to God is not only believing heaven and celestial beings above, but also how to realize it down here on earth where exploitation always happens.

Ecocriticism of Boff's understanding criticizes modern ways of thinking that separate spirit from matter, humans from nature, and heaven from Earth. These dualisms, he argues, have justified exploitation by alienating humanity from the natural world. Instead, he proposes a holistic cosmology in which humans are part of an interconnected web of life. Drawing on James Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis, Boff envisions the planet as "Mother Earth," a living organism crying out under the strain of human greed (Boff, 1997; Linzey, 2021; Bethari & Pasopati, 2024). For Boff, Gaia theory is not a concept, but such contexts need to be apprehended realistically. It is always necessary since everyone stays on land and should always care for it.

In his book, Boff remains confident; social transformation without ecological awareness remains incomplete. It is when Boff underlines his integral ecology. He cautions that efforts to reduce poverty without addressing environmental degradation will only recreate systems of domination in new forms. To counter this, Boff calls for a new kind of consciousness grounded in compassion and solidarity with both the poor and the planet. He insists that theology must "listen to the cry that comes from the depths of the Earth and the depths of human suffering" and respond through empathy and structural change (Chen, 2024; Fadiyah et al., 2023; Rozzi, 2023; Sadowski, 2016). That is why Boff's writing establishes his eco-liberation framework. It is explicitly understood that ecological integrity and social justice are not separate concerns but part of a single moral calling. Indeed, the fate of the poor and the fate of the Earth are one and the same fate.

Capitalism and Its Roles in Environmental Degradation

The contemporary global crisis of environmental degradation cannot be understood without examining the underlying systems that shape modern life of the unsustainable logic of consumerism, profit-driven economic structures, and the domination of technology. Together, these forces constitute an interconnected web that drives relentless exploitation of natural resources, deepens social inequalities, and undermines

ecological balance (Chen, 2024; Fadiyah et al., 2023; Rozzi, 2023; Sadowski, 2016). What appears as progress and prosperity on the surface often conceals a deeper systemic harm to the planet and to the moral fabric of human existence.

Consumerism, at its core, is not merely a pattern of excessive consumption but a cultural ideology that equates human happiness and success with material acquisition. Modern societies, particularly industrial and post-industrial economies, are built upon the constant stimulation of desire that is encouraging individuals to buy, discard, and replace goods at ever-increasing rates (Boff, 2014; Chen, 2024; Fadiyah et al., 2023; Rozzi, 2023; Sadowski, 2016). This cycle of consumption depends on the continuous extraction of natural resources, such as minerals, fossil fuels, and timber, which are finite and ecologically costly. The production, transportation, and disposal of consumer goods contribute to pollution, deforestation, and greenhouse gas emissions. Moreover, consumerism reshapes human identity around possessions rather than relationships or ethics, alienating people from nature and from the intrinsic value of simplicity and sustainability.

Then, profit-driven logic underpins capitalist economies. The primary goal of profit maximization often conflicts with environmental preservation, as corporations seek to minimize costs and maximize output regardless of ecological consequences. Economic growth is commonly treated as an unquestioned measure of progress, leading to the exploitation of both human labor and natural ecosystems. This "growth imperative" compels industries to expand production indefinitely, even when such expansion undermines planetary boundaries. Environmental regulations are frequently weakened or circumvented in the name of competitiveness, while the true ecological costs of production are externalized, meaning they are borne by society and future generations rather than by those who profit (Chen, 2024; Fadiyah et al., 2023; Rozzi, 2023; Sadowski, 2016). Thus, the economic system itself sustains an unsustainable relationship between human prosperity and environmental health.

Technological domination intensifies this imbalance. While technology has the potential to

mitigate environmental damage through innovation and efficiency, it has often been wielded as a tool of control and exploitation. Modern technological systems tend to prioritize productivity, speed, and convenience over ecological harmony. The industrial and digital revolutions, for instance, have dramatically increased humanity's capacity to extract, process, and consume resources at scales unimaginable in earlier eras (Castro, 2025; Djanarko & Pasopati, 2017; Marques & Andrade, 2025). Yet this power has also detached people from the natural world, creating a false sense of mastery over ecological processes. Technologies that promise to "fix" environmental problems risk reproducing the same mindset of domination that caused those problems in the first place.

Therefore, such capitalism shapes not solution but further enemies towards environmental issues. Such sentence expresses a critique of the capitalist system and its relationship with environmental degradation. It argues that capitalism, instead of fostering solutions to ecological problems, tends to intensify them. This occurs because capitalism prioritizes profit, economic growth, and market expansion over ecological balance and sustainability. As a result, industries and corporations often exploit natural resources and disregard the environmental consequences of their actions in the pursuit of financial gain (Boff, 2014; Castro, 2025; Djanarko & Pasopati, 2017; Marques & Andrade, 2025). The phrase "shapes not solution" highlights capitalism's inability to produce genuine remedies for environmental crises, while "further enemies" suggests that it creates new obstacles, such as pollution, deforestation, and resistance to environmental regulations.

Capitalist systems may even transform environmental protection into another opportunity for profit, turning sustainability into a marketable product rather than a moral or ecological necessity. In this way, capitalism perpetuates behaviors and institutions that harm the planet, making it a driving force behind environmental decline rather than a means of recovery (Castro, 2025; Djanarko & Pasopati, 2017; Marques & Andrade, 2025). By stating so, it is conveyed that capitalism's

structural focus on profit and competition inherently conflicts with the principles of conservation, cooperation, and ecological responsibility required to address environmental issues effectively. They hide behind idea of objectivity by slowly degrading subjectivity through generalized experience of everyday life.

In post-structuralism's point of view, it is an illusion of how human progress can exist apart from the health of the Earth. To address environmental degradation, societies must move beyond this logic toward a more ethical, ecological, and humane worldview that values sufficiency over excess, cooperation over competition, and harmony with nature over control of it (Andrade, 2022; Ibrahim et al., 2023; Noble, 2021; Wald, 2025). In this case, such environmental degradation is inevitable and must be shifted in its philosophical basis, that is moving towards ecocentrism and biocentrism.

This shift requires recognizing that humanity is not separate from nature but deeply embedded within it. By understanding this interdependence, societies can cultivate a sense of moral responsibility toward all living beings. Ecocentrism and biocentrism encourage policies and practices that sustain ecosystems of mother-like rather than exploit them for short-term gain (Andrade, 2022; Ibrahim et al., 2023; Noble, 2021; Wald, 2025). Such a transformation also demands reimagining education, economics, and politics to reflect ecological balance as a core value. By stating so, embracing these perspectives offers a path toward genuine sustainability and the renewal of both the planet and human civilization.

Boff's Ideas and Its Roles for Ethical Guidance

Boff's indication comes from his idea in liberation theology. He presumed that anything related to divine beings should be earthy as well. it gives meaning that religion should liberate people's minds. It should bring forward indication of criticism to modernity in which it has been polluted this earth so far. Modernism has made this planet goes into further destruction by pushing out progress that in the sense is deliberating nothingness but capitalism (Andrade, 2022; Boff, 2014; Ibrahim et al., 2023; Noble, 2021;

Wald, 2025). Therefore, Boff's understanding of ecocriticism is his way to resist capitalistic point of view that never thinks otherwise than capital accumulation.

There are at least three foundations why Boff's ideas of criticism matters. They are such shifts from anthropocentrism to ecocentrism, cultivation of ecological empathy and justice, and focus on sustainability and cultural reconnection. First, it is a clear shift from anthropocentrism to ecocentrism as a radical ethical reorientation. Anthropocentrism positions humans as the dominant species and the measure of all value while ecocentrism situates humanity within a broader web of life (Boff, 2014; Calista & Pasopati, 2024; Peet, 2021; Peixoto & Rocha, 2022). Ecocriticism aligns with ecological holism and process philosophy, affirming that all beings possess intrinsic worth independent of human utility. This view echoes deep ecological thought. It becomes an ethical discourse that dismantles hierarchies of being, advocating relational ontology over possessive individualism. It also guides moral reasoning toward humility, reciprocity, and coexistence rather than domination. Harming the environment is equivalent to self-harm so that moral agency as ecological participation is needed by replacing mastery with mutualism and knowledge with interdependence.

Second, as cultivation of ecological empathy and justice, ecocriticism focuses on experience of non-human entities and ecosystems. Philosophically, this expands upon post-humanist thought, which dissolves rigid subject-object boundaries and invites the interconnectedness of life (Boff, 2014; Calista & Pasopati, 2024; Peet, 2021; Peixoto & Rocha, 2022). Ecological empathy is not mere sentimentality of weakened feelings. It is an ontological recognition that all beings share a continuum of existence. This empathic orientation leads to ecological justice.

Moreover, ecocriticism insists that environmental degradation cannot be separated from issues of inequality, colonialism, and exploitation. In this sense, it reveals how systems of domination reign over nature parallel oppression of marginalized peoples. The ethical task, then, is to cultivate sensitivity not only

toward nature's suffering but also toward those human communities most vulnerable to ecological harm. Empathy becomes a moral method that transforms perception into responsibility (Calista & Pasopati, 2024; Peet, 2021; Peixoto & Rocha, 2022). Through this lens, justice is not confined to human legal or moral systems but extends to the moral imagination that perceives all forms of life as participants in a shared moral universe.

Third, it is such focus on sustainability and cultural reconnection. By criticizing modern alienation of humans from the natural world, ecocriticism argues that sustainability is not simply a matter of resource management but of moral and spiritual renewal. It envisions human culture as an ecological process rather than an external imposition upon nature. This view aligns with the ethics of care and virtue ethics, suggesting that sustainable living emerges from cultivating virtues such as moderation, reverence, and responsibility (Calista & Pasopati, 2024; Peet, 2021; Peixoto & Rocha, 2022). By reimagining culture as an expression of ecological belonging, ecocriticism helps restore a sense of moral coherence between human creativity and planetary limits.

Furthermore, in a world dominated by technological acceleration and consumerist detachment, ecocriticism calls for a re-grounding of ethics in the cyclical rhythms of the Earth. It urges a transformation of collective imagination toward long-term thinking and intergenerational care. Ecocriticism is even also deontological by following what Kant means with imperative categories (Calista & Pasopati, 2024; Peet, 2021; Peixoto & Rocha, 2022). Humans are part of this earth and it is a must to protect it at all cost. People should never abandon their own kinds, that are the nature beings itself. It goes on and on to destruction and it should be ended. Therefore, moral guidance should come from criticism to ethical sense like what Boff does in his ideas.

Those three aspects above underline how Boff sees living beings. Humans are living beings and so do nature beings. Humans are not separated with this world (Boff, 2014; Gallego, 2024; Ibrahim & Pasopati, 2024; Onyazonwu & Josiah, 2024). They live with care, respect, and love and those should be spread towards otherness. From that

perspective, humans are not masters of nature but part of a single yet interconnected community of life. This challenges the human-centered mindset that has led to ecological destruction. Life is equal for both humans and even non-human beings.

By stating so, Boff's idea is a moral guidance for contemporary era. Indeed, by reframing ecological responsibility as inseparable from human dignity and justice, Boff provides a distinctive voice in global discussions of ecological ethics (Gallego, 2024; Ibrahim & Pasopati, 2024; Onyazonwu & Josiah, 2024). His perspective remains crucial and especially noteworthy today. It is offering a comprehensive and transformative framework capable of orienting societies toward more just, sustainable, and ethically grounded futures. Boff speaks not in grand factors as he denies grand narratives as well. He speaks ecocriticism in everyday life. It should be usual and being done though sustainable mention of daily indications.

Boff's moral guidance is also seen in integral ecology that highlights the inseparability of environmental sustainability and social justice. He is strictly arguing that ecological destruction and human oppression stem from the same anthropocentric and exploitative systems. Through this sense, Boff's ecocriticism is significant. It works as a critique as it unmasks the unsustainable logic of consumerism, profit-driven economies, and technological domination (Boff, 1997; Gallego, 2024; Ibrahim & Pasopati, 2024; Onyazonwu & Josiah, 2024). Then, it also underlines a constructive proposal by offering a holistic ethics that nurtures compassion, cooperation, and further indications of reverence for life.

Boff also emphasizes the ethics of care. This is in line with Levinas' ethics that speaks about how human beings call to responsibility of the existence of the otherness. Ecocriticism, by reflecting on how culture and language shape view of nature, can awaken compassion and responsibility toward the environment. For Boff, the cries of the Earth and the cries of the poor are the same; social injustice and environmental damage come from the same attitude of exploitation (Boff, 2014; Gallego, 2024; Ibrahim & Pasopati, 2024; Onyazonwu & Josiah, 2024). Indeed, nature is sacred and that protecting it is both a moral and spiritual duty. In today's

world of climate crisis and materialism, Boff's ideas may always guide humanity toward living with humility, harmony, and respect for all creation.

Conclusion

Leonardo Boff's idea of integral ecology presents a compassionate way of thinking about the relationship between people, society, and the environment. His perspective, rooted in liberation theology, reminds humanity that faith and ethics must be lived out through care for both the Earth and one another. Boff sees the suffering of the poor and the destruction of nature as two sides of the same problem. Both are restrained through such systems built on domination, greed, and exploitation. For Boff, responding to these crises requires not only technical solutions but also a deep change in human values and attitudes.

Boff encourages a shift from seeing humans as masters of creation to recognizing that they are part of an interconnected community of life. This move from anthropocentrism to ecocentrism invites people to act with humility, empathy, and respect for all beings. He believes that true liberation cannot happen while the planet continues to suffer, because human well-being depends on the well-being of the Earth. By linking Catholic spirituality with ecology, Boff calls for a renewed sense of moral responsibility that unites social justice and environmental care. Ecocentrism is the deontological ethics that demand full care to any nature being ever lived.

His thoughts also serve as a critique of modern capitalism, which often values profit over life itself. Boff reminds society that progress should not come at the cost of exploitation or destruction. Instead, he offers an ethical path grounded in simplicity, cooperation, and reverence for creation. In this way, Boff's integral ecology provides moral guidance for the present age. It is a call of awareness to rebuild harmony between people and nature. It is not a grand theory but an invitation to live with conscience and compassion in daily life, remembering that caring for the Earth is, ultimately, caring for one another.

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