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Deborah Zawislan  
*John Carroll University, dzawislan@jcu.edu*

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# WISDOM AS LOVING JUSTICE: AN INTERFAITH PERSPECTIVE

An Essay Submitted to  
The Office of Graduate Studies  
College of Arts and Sciences  
John Carroll University  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

By  
Deborah Gries Zawislan, Ph.D.  
2020

## Wisdom as Loving Justice: An Interfaith Perspective

This essay employs both ethnography and autoethnography as methodological research tools to explore the construct of wisdom within the Abrahamic traditions. Autoethnography refers to instances when the autobiographical material of the researcher is woven into the sharing of the research.<sup>1</sup> It emphasizes cultural analysis and interpretation of the author's thoughts and experiences in relationship to others in the research field. The research field in which this essay is grounded is an interfaith, ethnographic inquiry project that seeks to understand wisdom through the lens of eco/feminist theologians and scholar-practitioners.<sup>2</sup> The ethnographic inquiry relies on Grant McCracken's *Long Interview* process, which uses both analytic categories from the literature and the cultural categories of the researcher. "The method can take us into the mental world of the individual, to glimpse the categories and logic by which he or she sees the world."<sup>3</sup> In this paper, I draw on my personal experiences teaching theology and religious studies courses that include a service learning component.

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<sup>1</sup> "Autoethnography is affirmed as an ethnographic research method that focuses on cultural analysis and interpretation." Heewon Chang, *Autoethnography as Method* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 10.

<sup>2</sup> The word eco/feminist/eco/feminism) is my identification to denote both self-identified eco-feminists and feminists who might not identify as eco-feminists but are writing in the area of ecology, environmental justice, or eco-theology. This seems more appropriate for this inquiry than switching between eco-feminist and feminist.

<sup>3</sup> Grant McCracken, *Qualitative Research Methods: The Long Interview* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1988), 9.

*Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*, Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical, woven throughout, grounds this essay in Catholic Social Teaching.

This essay has three movements, beginning with a mini exegesis of Wisdom/Word (*Sophia/Logos*) to introduce the soil in which the seeds of wisdom were planted. Next it examines the way in which the category of wisdom is used throughout *Laudato Si'*, with responses from Abrahamic communities and comments and criticisms from two prominent eco/feminist theologians: Elizabeth Johnson and Anne Clifford. The final movement offers an introduction to wisdom as loving justice that is emerging from this ethnographic inquiry project and identifies next steps.

### Placing Myself in the Text

As co-creators with God, I believe we are responsible both to the community of our fellow persons and to the larger community of creation that God also loves and befriends. I acknowledge that for most eco/feminists, the name God carries excessive patriarchal baggage. In Jewish and Christian traditions, God is frequently imaged as a Father with long white hair and a beard. I believe that God is not contained by such images, that God is beyond definition, neither male nor female, transcendent as well as immanent, and can be found above as well as below. Poets, prophets, and priests since the beginning of time have given names to describe mystical experiences: Yahweh, Lord, God, Allah, Holy Mystery, Holy Wisdom, and so on. In this essay, I use the word "God" to represent that which is beyond naming, because it is the name used most

frequently in the literature and the one used most often by participants in the interviews I conducted.

As a cradle Catholic, a lover of God, and a seeker of truth, I continue to be drawn to a deeper faith and understanding of Catholic scripture, tradition, theology, and ethics. As a spiritual director formed in the Ignatian tradition, I seek to find God in all things.<sup>4</sup> My curiosity about the science of evolution within an evolving universe, which Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme call “the universe story,”<sup>5</sup> both affirms and challenges traditional Catholic beliefs and motivates me to continue seeking wisdom at work in the world today. As a woman who came of age in the 1970s, I witnessed environmental and feminist movements and experienced the tension and confusion as women began to speak truth to power at home, in the marketplace, and in the church. That tension and confusion continues as I search to find my authentic voice and identity as an eco/feminist scholar-practitioner at a Jesuit institution in a time of cost cutting measures involving the reduction of adjunct faculty and in a Catholic Church that still refuses to include women in the priesthood.

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<sup>4</sup> Ignatian spirituality is summed up in this phrase which invites us to search for and find God in every circumstance of life, not just in explicitly religious situations or activities such as communal or private prayer. It recognizes that God is present everywhere and, though invisible, can be found in any and all of the creatures God has made. Creatures reveal a trace of what their Maker is like—often by arousing wonder in those who are able to look with the eyes of faith. See George W. Traub, *Do You Speak Ignatian? A Glossary of Terms Used in Ignatian and Jesuit Circles* (Cincinnati: Xavier University, 2004), 4.

<sup>5</sup> 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: HarperCollins, 1992), 1.

## First Movement: In the Beginning . . . Wisdom/Word

My search to understand wisdom began while writing a biblical exegesis paper that explored the prologue to the Gospel of John. Following the suggestion of my professor, I read Raymond Brown, a noted biblical scholar, and began hearing Lady Wisdom calling me deeper into the mystery of creation<sup>6</sup>.

In the beginning was the Word; the Word was in God's presence, and the Word was God. He was present with God in the beginning. Through him all things came into being, and apart from him not a thing came to be. That which had come to be in him was life, and this life was the light of men. The light shines on in the darkness, for the darkness did not overcome it. . . .

The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.  
(John 1:1-5, 14)

John 1:1, echoing Genesis 1:1, the start of the Judeo-Christian creation story, reminds us that God spoke a Word into the void and created the heavens and the earth. "The Word [*Logos*] was in God's presence and the Word was God" (John 1:1b). *Logos* is a Greek term which means word, discourse, or reason.

As I began reading early Church Fathers and biblical scholars, I met *Sophia*, the wisdom dimension of *Logos*. I learned about Philo of Alexandria, a Jewish exegete, who lived in Alexandria from approximately 15 B.C.E. to 50 C.E. In his writings, Philo referred to *Logos* as both Word and Wisdom, writing that we "can talk about God or

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<sup>6</sup> Following feminist methodology, feminist theologians bring questions "of the moment"—questions rising in contemporary women's lives—to specific biblical texts and church teachings, the primary sources of Christian faith. Anne Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2001), 1.

Wisdom (*Sophia*)/the Word (*Logos*) as the archetype of light.”<sup>7</sup> Philo “spells out the female aspect of Wisdom, *Sophia*, and the synonymous feminine Greek word *epistême* (knowledge) and goes on to describe God as the Father of creation, *Sophia* as the Mother, and creation itself as the birth of the visible world, the only begotten son.”<sup>8</sup> Origen (b. 185), one of the first to write a commentary on the Gospel of John, also saw the Wisdom-Word meaning contained in the Greek word *Logos*:

In the beginning was the Word. . . . God commanded and they were created. For Christ is perhaps the creator to whom the Father says, “Let there be light” and “let there be a firmament.” But it is as the beginning that Christ is Creator, according to which he is wisdom. Therefore, as wisdom he is called in the beginning. . . . We must understand that the Word is always in the beginning, that is, in wisdom.<sup>9</sup>

Writing about wisdom two hundred years later, Augustine (354–432), adds, “‘That, which was made in him is life,’ and if we read it this way, everything is life. For what is there that was not made in him? For he is the wisdom of God, and it is said in the psalm, ‘In Wisdom you have made all things.’”<sup>10</sup> In addition to *Logos*, significant words in John 1:1–5, 14 include *zoê* (living/life/spirit), *gignomai* (came into a new state of being), *anthropôs* (human), and *sarx* (flesh).

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<sup>7</sup> Peter Borgen, “The Gospel of John and Philo of Alexandria,” in *Light in a Spotless Mirror*, ed. James H. Charlesworth and Michael A. Daise (New York: Trinity Press International, 2003), 46.

<sup>8</sup> Borgen, “The Gospel of John and Philo of Alexandria,” 49.

<sup>9</sup> Joel C. Elowsky, ed., *John 1–10: Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 4.

<sup>10</sup> Elowsky, *John 1–10*, 4.

St. Hildegard of Bingen, named a Doctor of the Church by Pope Benedict in 2012, also wrote about Wisdom/Word in creation. Hildegard's *Book of Divine Works* (1163–1173), contains descriptions of ten visions and interpretations, one of which focuses on the Prologue to John's Gospel. Hildegard's visionary texts are linked in one way or another to flesh (*sarx*) and to the human form (*anthropôs*). Echoing John 1:14, "And the word became flesh and made his dwelling among us," Hildegard writes "human form is the essential nature of humanity as composed of both body and soul."<sup>11</sup> In Hildegard's visions and theological reflections, "she sees the shape or appearance of human figures as representing, besides the essentially composite—microcosmic—human entity, a yet larger composite—macrocosmic—entity. That is to say, such figures frequently symbolize aspects of the creation and workings of the whole divine cosmos."<sup>12</sup> Hildegard saw the human body as already the pattern of divine Incarnation. She views "flesh" as the visible revelation of the invisible divine and is to be revered and celebrated because it belongs to the divine cosmos.

The revelation of the Word . . . belongs to the traditional remit of *Sapientia*/Wisdom, the feminine divine. . . . Rather than concentrating narrowly upon the face of Christ, Hildegard sees Incarnation in the broadest possible terms as divine Wisdom expressed in cosmic creation and every aspect of human existence as indicative of God's plan.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Alison Jasper, *The Shining Garment of the Text* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 64.

<sup>12</sup> Jasper, *Shining Garment*, 64.

<sup>13</sup> Jasper, *Shining Garment*, 72.



Reading these diverse sources, I began to ask myself how to think about Wisdom as the feminine divine within a cosmic view of Christ, especially today, in a church that has reified the Trinity as “two men and a bird!”<sup>14</sup> Enter Elizabeth Johnson.

Like Hildegard, the feminist Catholic theologian Elizabeth Johnson focuses on the distinction between *anthropôs* and *sarx* in John 1:14, “The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth.” Johnson notes that John does not speak of the Word becoming human (*anthropôs*) but flesh (*sarx*), a broader reality in which “the flesh is not identified with sinfulness and contrasted with a spiritual mode of being, as in the older flesh-spirit theology of Paul, but rather *sarx* in John signifies what is ‘material, perishable, and poignantly transient, in a word, finite.’”<sup>15</sup> Citing John Paul II’s encyclical, *Lord and Giver of Life (Dominum et Vivificantem, §50)*, Johnson writes:

The Incarnation of God the Son signifies the taking up into unity with God not only of human nature, but in this human nature, in a sense, of everything that is “flesh”: the whole of humanity, the entire visible and material world. The incarnation, then, also has a cosmic significance, a cosmic dimension. The “first-born of all creation,” becoming incarnate in the individual humanity of Christ, unites himself in some way with the entire reality of humanity—which is also “flesh”—and in this reality with all ‘flesh,’ with the whole of creation.<sup>16</sup>

Johnson reminds us that today “the human race itself is being repositioned as an intrinsic part of the evolutionary network of life on our planet, which in turn is a part of

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<sup>14</sup>Sandra Schneider, “God is more than two men and a bird,” *U.S. Catholic* 55/5 (May 1990): 20.

<sup>15</sup> Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 13.

<sup>16</sup> Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 198.

the solar system, which came into being as a later chapter of cosmic history. . . . We evolved relationally; we exist symbiotically; our existence depends on interaction with the rest of the natural world.”<sup>17</sup> Like Hildegard, Johnson expands the narrower notion of

*Logos as anthropôs*, thereby

repositioning the human species with regard to our relationship to planetary and cosmic matter [which] places Christ in close connection with the natural world; for the flesh that the Word became is part of the vast body of the cosmos. . . . The *sarx* of John’s Prologue reaches beyond Jesus and beyond all other human beings to encompass the whole biological world of living creatures and the cosmic dust of which we are composed.<sup>18</sup>

Johnson argues, “A moral universe limited to the human community no longer serves the future of life. Countering the sins of ecocide, biocide, genocide, we must include the natural world in our vision of faith, and act with care, protection, restoration, and healing, even if these go counter to powerful economic and political interests (and they do).”<sup>19</sup> She goes on to state, “We owe love and justice not only to humankind but to other kind . . . the great commandment to love your neighbor as yourself to include all members of the life community.”<sup>20</sup> Johnson quotes Brian Patrick who asks, “Who is my neighbor?” He answers, “The Samaritan? The Outcast? The Enemy? Yes, yes of course. But it is also the whale, the dolphin, and the rain forest. Our neighbor is the entire community of life, the entire universe. We must love it all as our very self.”<sup>21</sup> In

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<sup>17</sup> Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 13.

<sup>18</sup> Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 13.

<sup>19</sup> Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 258.

<sup>20</sup> Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 257.

<sup>21</sup> Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 281.

this approach, the common good of Catholic Social Teaching now includes the earth and all other species.

In summary, eco/feminist scholars hear John's Prologue sung in a new key, in a key that resonates with the cosmic nature of Christ pulsating in all of creation. They continue to broaden the definition of *Logos* by recognizing the salvific birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ *and* by offering broader interpretations of "the Word" that restore *Sophia* (the Wisdom/creation dimension) to *Logos* (the Word/salvation dimension), thereby viewing salvation and creation not as "either/or" but as "both/and." As I completed this exegesis, I continued to ask myself, where is the wisdom of God found today, especially in relationship to all of creation? I wondered how other religious traditions view wisdom, and more importantly, whether we can work across religious and political boundaries to harness that wisdom in ways that care for our common home? This movement looked at wisdom through an eco/feminist theological lens. The next movement looks at wisdom found in *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*.

#### Second Movement: Wisdom of *Laudato Si*

"Does not wisdom call out? Does not understanding raise her voice?" The opening lines of Proverbs 8 could be the sound bite for Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical, *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*. Francis evokes the voice of Wisdom and

calls *all* of humanity “to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor” (§47).<sup>22</sup> Bob Pennington calls *Laudato Si’* “perhaps the most heralded piece of Catholic Social Teaching since *Rerum Novarum*.”<sup>23</sup> In *Laudato Si’*, Pope Francis appropriates the See-Judge-Act method, widely used in Catholic social thought, in order to foster transformative social action and justice. He challenges us to acknowledge that the poor are those most affected by environmental damage from economic systems that favor the wealthy and political systems that lack the courage to look beyond short-term rewards (§177). He believes that an ecological conversion is urgently needed to address the current and most pressing eco-crises: climate change, loss of biodiversity, deforestation, water scarcity, and food insecurity (§10). *Laudato Si’* engages ecology and spirituality in dialogue, bringing together religion and environmental activism. This section explores Francis’ appeal to the category of wisdom in *Laudato Si’*, and examines select responses by Jews and Muslims, who together with Christianity constitute the three Abrahamic faiths. The second movement of this paper then ends with comments and critiques from two prominent, Christian eco/feminist scholars: Elizabeth Johnson and Anne Clifford.

The word “wisdom” in biblical and in contemporary religious discourses has a double meaning, and “can either refer to a quality of life and of a people and/or it can

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<sup>22</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’: Encyclical Letter On Care for Our Common Home*, June 18, 2015. At <http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/click-here-for-the-full-text-of-the-popes-new-encyclical-75582>, accessed June 20, 2015.

<sup>23</sup> Bob Pennington, “See-Judge-Act: The Foundational Pastoral Method of *Laudato Si’*,” *Charities USA* 47/1 (2002): 7-8.

refer to a figuration of the Divine. Wisdom in both senses of the word is not a prerogative of the biblical traditions but it is found in the imagination and writings of all known religions.”<sup>24</sup> Wisdom in *Laudato Si'* reminds us to embrace the sacredness of nature and to recognize that we are all part of one living organism—Earth. Pope Francis quotes the Book of Wisdom 11:26, “For they are yours, O LORD, who love the living” (§89). This grounds the conviction that we are called into being by one Creator and are therefore “linked by unseen bonds that together form a kind of universal family, a sublime communion which fills us with a sacred, affectionate, and humble respect” (§89). Addressing a decline in the quality of human life and the breakdown of society, the pope writes, “True wisdom, as the fruit of self-examination, dialogue and generous encounter between persons, is not acquired by a mere accumulation of data which eventually leads to overload and confusion, a sort of mental pollution” (§47). In describing the light offered by faith, he says, “If we are truly concerned to develop an ecology capable of remedying the damage we have done, no branch of the sciences and no form of wisdom can be left out, and that includes religion and the language particular to it” (§63). Pointing to the Wisdom of biblical accounts, he states, “Each creature possesses its own particular goodness and perfection. . . . Each of the various creatures, willed in its own being, reflects in its own way a ray of God’s infinite wisdom and goodness” (§69). When discussing the sometimes troubling history of interaction

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<sup>24</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “Towards a Feminist Wisdom Spirituality of Justice and Well-being,” in *Lieve Troch Felicitation Volume* (San Bernardo do Campo, Brazil: Nhanduti, 2009), 3–4.

between religion and science, Francis points out, “If a mistaken understanding of our own principles has at times led us to justify mistreating nature, to exercise tyranny over creation, to engage in war, injustice and acts of violence, we believers should acknowledge that by doing so we were not faithful to the treasures of wisdom which we have been called to protect and preserve” (§200).

The Wisdom motifs that are presented in *Laudato Si’*—all creation called into being by one creator, forming one universal family; the fruits of the spirit that come from self-reflection, dialogue, and generous encounter between persons; willingness to dialogue with sciences and other religions in the language particular to it; and honoring the intrinsic value of all creation—are not unique to Christianity. These themes can also be recognized in the responses to *Laudato Si’*, which happened to be released on the first day of Ramadan. I look first at the Jewish and then Muslim responses.

*Laudato Si’* inspired a group of 300 rabbis from around the world to sign a letter on climate change. Led by Rabbi Arthur Waskow, author, political activist in the Jewish Renewal movement, and founder of the Shalom Centre based in Philadelphia, the group felt compelled to call for vigorous action to prevent worsening climate disruption and to seek eco-social justice.<sup>25</sup> Waskow said he believes the pope’s encyclical will have an immense effect. This is crucial since scientists say that, even though there is still time to avert the worst conceivable disasters, time is running short. Waskow agrees

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<sup>25</sup> Arthur Waskow, “Pope Francis inspires 300+ rabbis to sign rabbinic letter on climate,” *EarthBeat: Stories of Climate Crisis, Faith and Action*. Published at <https://www.ncronline.org/print/blogs/earthbeat/eco-catholic/pope-francis-inspires-300-rabbis-sign-rabbinic-letter-climate>, accessed August 2016.

with the connection Pope Francis draws between worldwide ecological abuse and the abuse inflicted by economic poverty, "Many of the poor live in areas particularly affected by phenomena related to warming and their means of subsistence are largely dependent on natural reserves and ecosystemic services such as agriculture, fishing and forestry."<sup>26</sup> Changes in climate have a direct impact on the poor because animals and plants cannot adapt at the time scale at which climate change is occurring:

which leads them to migrate which in turn affects the livelihood of the poor, who are then forced to leave their homes, with great uncertainty for their future and that of their children. The poor have no other financial activities or resources which can enable them to adapt to climate change or to face natural disasters, and their access to social services and protection is very limited."<sup>27</sup>

There has been, and continues to be, a rise in the number of migrants seeking to flee from the growing poverty caused by environmental degradation as well as an increase in deaths in the most vulnerable communities.

To illustrate this point, Waskow describes the most powerful typhoon ever to hit the Philippines, where thousands of people were living marginally. When the typhoon hit, the poorest people in the Philippines were those who died. For an example closer to home, Waskow cites Hurricane Sandy, which hit the northeast coast of the United States. The people who struggled the most to get their homes back and get the

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<sup>26</sup> Vinnie Rotondaro, "Francis' encyclical is a step in the right direction, those outside the church say," *National Catholic Reporter*, June 18, 2015, at <https://www.ncronline.org/print/news/world/francis-encyclical-step-right-direction-those-outside-church-say>, accessed August 2016.

<sup>27</sup> Rotondare, "Francis' encyclical."

insurance to make themselves whole from the damage were the poor.<sup>28</sup> The connection that *Laudato Si'* makes between poverty and the environment is "right on target," Waskow said, "and I'm happy to say that the rabbinic letter says more or less the same thing."<sup>29</sup> He predicted that "through the papal visit, and the Paris global climate negotiations (both scheduled for Fall 2015), these teachings will remain in the news."<sup>30</sup> Wasko concludes, "With the Catholic Church offering remarkably parallel teachings to ours, we now link Jewish insights with those in *Laudato Si'*."<sup>31</sup>

In a study guide titled "Judaism, Climate Change and *Laudato Si'*," prepared for the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life (COEJL) and Shomeibreishit, Rabbi Fred Sherlinder Dobb invites Jews to "Please read, even study, this document—and then, please do something with this message! Take the implications of these teachings seriously" and apply them to your life and to your community, with the "fierce urgency of now and with the power of *tshuvah* (introspection-repentance) behind your sacred efforts."<sup>32</sup> Similar calls to attend to *Laudato Si'* can be heard within the Muslim community as well.

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<sup>28</sup> I would add that many of the poor who lost their homes and business in Hurricane Katrina never recovered.

<sup>29</sup> Rotondare, "Francis' encyclical."

<sup>30</sup> Rotondare, "Francis' encyclical." Unfortunately, Waskow's prediction for remaining in the news occurred for the wrong reasons! On June 1, 2017, the Trump administration began the formal withdrawal of the United States from the Paris Agreement "because of the unfair economic burden imposed on American workers, businesses, and taxpayers by U.S. pledges made under the Agreement."

<sup>31</sup> Rotondare, "Francis' encyclical."

<sup>32</sup> Fred Sherlinder Dobb, "Judaism, Climate Change and *Laudato Si'*," *Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life*, August, 2015, at



Xavier University associate professor of political science Anas Malik notes that *Laudato Si'* was released on Thursday, June 18, the first day of Ramadan for many Muslims. "I have been devoting time to reading *Laudato Si'* and find much there that fills me with great hope."<sup>33</sup> He acknowledges that, although Pope Francis leads the world's Roman Catholics, his message is meant for all people. While the trends in ecological destruction are grim, "the document resounds with a positive ethic of compassion, justice, and spiritual awakening."<sup>34</sup> Since "praise is central to how nature and the cosmos are presented in the Islamic tradition, with humanity as part of nature's fabric in a position of stewardship," Malik believes important themes of *Laudato Si'* will resonate with many Muslims.<sup>35</sup>

Another Muslim scholar, Joseph Lumbard of the American University of Sharjah, sees in the papal encyclical an "unprecedented opportunity for the people of the world's faith traditions to turn away from the corruption we have wrought and open our hearts to one another and to the plea of Mother Nature" whose fate will be determined by the decisions of our generation.<sup>36</sup> He believes if humankind can draw on shared teachings

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<https://www.jewishpublicaffairs.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2015/09/Judaism-Climate-Laudato-Si-4-pages-9-2-15.pdf>, accessed August 11, 2016.

<sup>33</sup> Anas Malik, "Towards Muslim Engagement with Pope Francis' Encyclical *Laudato Si'*," *Arc of the Universe: Ethics and Global Justice*, at <http://arcoftheuniverse.info/towards-muslim-engagement-with-pope-francis-encyclical-laudato-si>, accessed 11 August 2016.

<sup>34</sup> Malik, "Towards Muslim Engagement."

<sup>35</sup> Malik, "Towards Muslim Engagement."

<sup>36</sup> Joseph E. B. Lumbard, "An Islamic Response to Pope Francis's Encyclical," *Huffington Post*, June 18, 2015, revised June 2016, at

of our various religious traditions, “humanity can again learn to honor the immutable rights of rivers, animals and trees, as well as human beings suffering inhumane working conditions.”<sup>37</sup>

A. Rashied Omar, a research scholar of Islamic Studies and Peacebuilding at the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame, also serves as imam at the Claremont Main Road Mosque in Cape Town, South Africa. In his assessment of Pope Francis’ ecological vision, Omar identifies two important themes. “[O]ne of the most significant aspects of *Laudato Si’* is a document about justice with a focus on the environment rather than the other way around. Pope Francis sees the issue of climate change through the eyes of the poor and this is the key hermeneutic or interpretive lens.”<sup>38</sup> Francis wants the economic, social, and environmental world orders to be fairer to the poorest of humanity. He criticizes consumerism, profit-seeking economies, inequity and poverty, and then suggests different responsibilities based on wealth and ability. A second theme highlighted by Omar is the way in which the encyclical acknowledges the existential rights of those with whom we share the planet—namely animals and plants—“and more importantly, it

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[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/joseph-e-b-lumbard/an-islamic-response-to-pope-francis-encyclical\\_b\\_7616762.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/joseph-e-b-lumbard/an-islamic-response-to-pope-francis-encyclical_b_7616762.html), accessed August 11, 2016.

<sup>37</sup> Lumbard, “An Islamic Response.”

<sup>38</sup> A. Rashied Omar, “A Muslim Response to Pope Francis’s Environmental Encyclical: *Laudato Si’*,” at <https://sites.nd.edu/contendingmodernities/2015/12/17/a-muslim-response-to-pope-franciss-environmental-encyclical-laudato-si/>, accessed August 2016.

recognizes their spiritual essence.”<sup>39</sup> The response of the Jewish and Muslim communities to *Laudato Si’*— especially around the themes of justice for the poor, the existential rights of all creatures, and spiritual essence of animals and plants—reveals that the pope’s emphasis on responsible care for the earth is neither unique to Christianity nor new.

In *Laudato Si’*, Pope Francis calls for a host of institutional and structural changes that eco/feminist activists and theologians have been calling for since the early 1970s.<sup>40</sup> Just as Wisdom took her stand at the entrance beside the city gate calling for all to listen, early eco/feminist voices echoed Proverbs 8:3-4 by crying out: “Listen, for I have trustworthy things to say; I open my lips to speak what is right.” Like Lady Wisdom, they were often ignored and continue to be ignored! *Laudato Si’* contains no references to these eco/feminist theologians, even though there are many whom Francis could have cited. As Anne Clifford pointed out in her keynote address at the 2017 meeting of the Catholic Theological Society of America, only two women are mentioned: Teresa Lisieux, named in a footnote, and Mary, the mother of Jesus, whom Francis asks “to enable us to look at this world with eyes of wisdom” (§241).<sup>41</sup> More will be said about Clifford’s critique of *Laudato Si’* following a brief overview of ecofeminism.

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<sup>39</sup> Omar, “A Muslim Response.”

<sup>40</sup> For review of ecofeminist movement, see Heather Eaton, *Introducing Ecofeminist Theologies* (New York: T & T Clark, 2005).

<sup>41</sup> Anne Clifford, “Pope Francis’ *Laudato Si’*: On Care for Our Common Home: An Ecofeminist Response,” *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 72 (2017): 35.

Ecofeminism is a concept first proposed by Françoise d'Eaubonne in 1974 to identify patriarchal subjugation of women and the destruction of nature. "Women who identify themselves as ecofeminists call for an end to all forms of oppression, especially the exploitation of the Earth, the home that human and nonhuman forms of life share."<sup>42</sup> It developed into a movement in the 1980s in the context of self-identified feminists protesting against environmental destruction.<sup>43</sup> Observations by Karen Warren, an early voice, highlight ecofeminist principles. In the introduction to *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature*, Warren asserts, "What makes ecofeminism distinct is its insistence that nonhuman nature and naturism (i.e. the unjustified domination of nature) are feminist issues. Ecofeminist philosophy extends familiar feminist critiques of social isms of domination to nature."<sup>44</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruther, in one of the first ecofeminist books, *New Woman/New Earth*, makes clear "a central tenant of ecofeminism: Earth and the other-than-human experience the tyranny of patriarchy along with women. Classism, racism, sexism, heterosexism, naturism (a term coined by Warren) and speciesism are all intertwined."<sup>45</sup> Ruther states:

Women must see that there can be no liberation for them and no solution to the ecological crisis within a society whose fundamental model of relationships continues to be one of domination. They must unite the demands of the woman's movement with those of the ecological

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<sup>42</sup> Anne Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2001), 27.

<sup>43</sup> Clifford, "Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'*," 32.

<sup>44</sup> Laura Hobgood-Oster, "Ecofeminism—Historic and International Evolution," 533-539, in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, ed. Bron Taylor (New York: Continuum, 2005, 2008), 533.

<sup>45</sup> Hobgood-Oster, "Ecofeminism," 533.

movement to envision a radical reshaping of the basic socioeconomic relations and the underlying values of this [modern industrial] society.<sup>46</sup>

What follows are comments about *Laudato Si'* by two prominent Christian eco/feminist scholars, both accomplished authors and recognized theologians. They are wisdom figure whom Francis could have invited into the conversation on integral ecology and the preferential option for the poor: Elizabeth Johnson and Anne Clifford.

Until her retirement, Sister Elizabeth Johnson, C.S.J., was the Distinguished Professor of Theology at Fordham University and former president of both the Catholic Theological Society of America and the American Theological Society. She is the author or editor of 10 books, including *Ask the Beasts*, *Quest for the Living Good*, and *She Who Is*, all classics in college courses. In a 2016 talk at the Catholic Worker House in New York's East Village, Johnson argued that Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'* "offers a religious vision of environmental coexistence that is different from the traditional picture" in that it "calls for a new way of being human that will enhance and not diminish those with whom the planet is shared."<sup>47</sup> As a theological extension of the option for the poor, "nature becomes the new poor, our love of a neighbor needs to extend to include the poor natural world diminished by an elite group of humans."<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Hobgood-Oster, "Ecofeminism," 533.

<sup>47</sup> Beth Griffin, "At Catholic Worker house, Sr. Elizabeth Johnson explores human kinship with God's creation," February 29, 2016, at <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/eco-catholic/catholic-worker-house-sr-elizabeth-johnson-explores-human-kinship-god-s-creation>, accessed August 11, 2016.

<sup>48</sup> Griffin, "Johnson explores human kinship."

In the traditional Catholic model, developed in the context of an ancient Greek philosophy that valued spirit over matter, humans were placed at the pinnacle of the pyramid that is God's creation. She describes this model as a hierarchy over which humans reign supreme, with all other creatures meant only for our use. As an alternative to this pyramid of privilege, Johnson proposed a different metaphor, a "circle of life that embraces evolution and a biological history shared among all creatures on the planet."<sup>49</sup> She went on to say that the living breath in us comes from the same source as the living breath in animals because we are all created by God. As creatures, we have more in common than what separates us. Johnson believes Pope Francis is contributing to the conversation by emphasizing "the community of creation" in which there is "no justification for domination over other creatures," because all creatures "have intrinsic value and share in the love of God."<sup>50</sup>

While Francis calls for ecological conversion in *Laudato Si'*, he does not offer concrete suggestions beyond the broad headings of dialogue and education. Johnson, however, offers four specific components that are necessary for "conversion to the earth." These components include the intellectual, the emotional, the ethical, and the spiritual. *Intellectually*, the shift away from a human-centered view of life honors the presence of God "in, with and under the ecological community of all species." *Emotionally*, there is a need to turn from the delusion of the separate human self and isolated human species to a "felt kinship and affiliation with all creatures." She offers

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<sup>49</sup> Griffin, "Johnson explores human kinship."

<sup>50</sup> Griffin, "Johnson explores human kinship."

images from St. Francis of Assisi's "Canticle of Creatures," also cited by Pope Francis, which sees Brother Sun and Sister Moon as central characters in the community of life. *Ethically*, Johnson believes a conversion to the earth will require society to "relate to the earth with respect, not rapaciousness" and that "a moral universe limited to the human person is no longer adequate" because our "attention must re-center on the whole communion of life."<sup>51</sup> Finally, on the *spiritual* level, our challenge, as Johnson sees it, is to develop a "spirituality that makes loving the earth and its creatures an intrinsic part of faith in God, rather than an add-on," one that "leads us to weave the natural world back into our religious imagination with prayer, art, music, justice and charity."<sup>52</sup>

While Johnson's assessment of *Laudato Si'* is generally positive, her colleague Anne Clifford, C.S.J, is more critical. Sister Anne Clifford C.S.J. holds the Msgr. James A. Supple Chair in Catholic Studies at Iowa State University and has published more than 40 articles on feminist spirituality, theology, and the relationship between the doctrine of creation and the natural sciences. Her first book, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, is widely used in colleges and universities. In her 2017 keynote presentation at the meeting of the Catholic Theological Society of America, Clifford asked: Is ecofeminism relevant today? She notes that while there have been few ecofeminist theology publications in the previous ten years, the 2015 United Nations' statistical report, "The World's Women 2015," documents that in every nation of the world it is women who are the majority of the poor. It is these women and their children who live

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<sup>51</sup> Griffin, "Johnson explores human kinship."

<sup>52</sup> Griffin, "Johnson explores human kinship."

primarily in the southern hemisphere, where ecological fragility is highest. Clifford notes that, of the seventeen 2015 United Nations Development Goals, one gives specific attention to women and girls and thirteen are related to ecology—goals have been long been proposed by ecofeminists.<sup>53</sup>

After acknowledging the way in which Francis calls attention to the loss of biodiversity and the importance of global diversity in the first chapter of *Laudato Si'*, she applies an ecofeminist lens to the document, beginning with a critique of its “earth as mother” language. This image is problematic because of the romanticism it tends to generate about nature’s endless bounty. According to Clifford, this works against Francis’ intent to evoke a commitment to care for the earth by “safeguarding species heading towards extinction” (§ 44) caused by “valuing profit more than preservation of at risk-species” (§ 36), thereby wantonly weakening the biodiversity required for a healthy planet.<sup>54</sup> She asks if “mother earth” symbolism is too weighted down by the legacy of matter/spirit dualism. Traceable to the ancient Greek worldview, in which nature is depicted as feminine and spirit/soul-life, including the intellect, is depicted as masculine. She acknowledges “While at times Pope Francis’ conception of integral ecology calls for respect for creatures in ways that recognize their inherent value,” she notes “the apex of creation in *Laudato Si'* is clearly man.” She states, “I am deliberately refraining from using the gender-inclusive ‘human’ because, although the word ‘woman’ appears in

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<sup>53</sup> Clifford, “Pope Francis’ *Laudato Si'*,” 32.

<sup>54</sup> Clifford, “Pope Francis’ *Laudato Si'*,” 32.



*Laudato Si'* eleven times, it occurs only in the context of speaking of both 'men and women.'"<sup>55</sup>

Clifford agrees with Pope Francis in emphasizing that environmental issues cannot be separated from promotion of social justice, especially care for the poor, and the necessity of monitoring global economics. She acknowledges that he gives substantive attention to the need for a truly integral ecology, describing it as a call for "openness to categories which transcend the language of mathematics and biology, and to the heart of what it is to be human" (§ 11). However, her second major critique begins here.

If *Laudato Si'* is to be attuned to all chambers of the heart of humanity, then what is needed is deeper listening to the heart-felt hopes and desires of women, with accompanying attention both to the problems that leave them vulnerable and to their contributions that sustain life. She illustrates the need for deeper listening to women by calling attention to sources Pope Francis draws on for his proposed integral ecology: medieval male saints, former Popes, noteworthy non-Catholic men, Eastern Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, French Protestant philosopher Paul Ricoeur, and a ninth-century Muslim mystic. In contrast, only two women are mentioned: Mary, the mother of Jesus, and Therese of Lisieux. Clifford asks, "what existential meaning does Pope Francis invest in the term 'integral' and why are contemporary women's concerns about and contributions to earth care not given at least some attention . . . especially

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<sup>55</sup> Clifford, "Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'*," 32.

since . . . the encyclical invites its readers to become open to categories that take one 'to the heart of what it is to be human' (§ 11). Surely women are integral to that heart!"<sup>56</sup> To support her argument, she cites Leonard Boff's 1997 "Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor," in which Boff associates integral ecology with "women and ecofeminist thinking."<sup>57</sup>

Clifford introduces the work of Wangari Muta Maathai of Kenya and Ivone Gebara of Brazil to illustrate how women could have been included in *Laudato Si'*. Both Gebara and Maathai have had significant impact both on the environment and on the lives of the women with whom they work. For example, Gebara was instrumental in founding the "*Con-spirando* collective" in 1991 with a focus on ecofeminist theology, spirituality, and ethics. Clifford remarks that it is extraordinary that *Con-spirando* even exists. Because the culture of Brazil is strongly patriarchal, it is difficult for a woman to be a feminist, and even more difficult to self-identify as an ecofeminist. Moreover, the Roman Catholic Church of Brazil "subscribes to a tradition that endorses the dependence of women on men and rarely questions the anthropological superiority of human beings over earth's other species, thereby ignoring their inherent value as creatures of God."<sup>58</sup>

According to Clifford, Gebara's writings "bring together concerns about the plight of the poor, especially women, and the degradation of ecosystems, while proposing a

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<sup>56</sup> Clifford, "Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'*," 36.

<sup>57</sup> Clifford, "Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'*," 36-37

<sup>58</sup> Clifford, "Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'*," 38.

holistic feminism” that “casts a critical eye on the theology usually presented to Brazil’s poor, which depicts God as above all things as ‘their (heavenly) Father’” and notes “when God is presented to the poor, in order to placate them, they are told that God is ‘in essence always good,’ while God’s creatures (meaning them) are always in need.” Gebara sees this approach as the “wrong message for the poor” because it keeps them “locked into a patriarchal political and economic system” that benefits from the uneducated poor persons’ subjugation.<sup>59</sup> She proposes instead “a panentheism that does not conceive of God as being unto himself above humans” and suggests that “surely God and the world are closely interrelated with the world being in God and God being in the world.”<sup>60</sup> Gebara rejects conceiving of God as analogous to a human person “in that the traditional presentation of the one God of Christianity is not only masculine, but also is presented in ways that make him ‘an entirely political God, a God whose main job is to *dominate* and *control*’ his creatures” which in her opinion “not only reflects a radical divide that separates the greatness of God, the smallness of humanity and the unimportance of non-human creatures, but it also provides no challenge to the patriarchal status quo in which women are second rate and the goods of the earth are at the disposal of the male-controlled market place.”<sup>61</sup>

After noting “there may be elements of *Laudato Si*’s presentation of God that are not antithetical to Gebara’s eco-feminist panentheism, especially where God as Creator

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<sup>59</sup> Clifford, “Pope Francis’ *Laudato Si*,” 38-39.

<sup>60</sup> Clifford, “Pope Francis’ *Laudato Si*,” 39.

<sup>61</sup> Clifford, “Pope Francis’ *Laudato Si*,” 39.

is concerned,” Clifford goes on to argue that the encyclical’s pattern of a Creator-Father does exemplify what Gebara refers to as “limited and partial . . . exclusionary knowledge that begs for a remedy.” For Clifford, it is unfortunate that *Laudato Si* and the Catholic Church tradition as a whole, has ignored the role of the female wisdom figure “Sophia” in biblical passages that speak of creation such as Wisdom 7:22-24, which praises “Wisdom [*Sophia*], (as) the fashioner of all things” (v. 22) and affirms that “Wisdom [*Sophia*] is more mobile than any motion; (sic) because of her pureness she pervades and penetrates all things” (v.24).<sup>62</sup>

Clifford reminds us that “this trajectory of thought is found also in the Gospel of John 1:1-4a, 14, which presents “Wisdom” (*Sophia*) as existing before the creation that She had a role in creating. As Elizabeth Johnson proposed twenty-five years ago in her ground-breaking work, *She Who is*, Wisdom-Sophia’s activity is (surely) none other than the activity of God.”<sup>63</sup>

This section identified wisdom motifs presented in *Laudato Si*, including the notion that all creation is called into being by one Creator and therefore exists as one universal family; an emphasis on the fruits of the spirit that come from self-reflection, dialogue, and generous encounter between persons; a willingness to dialogue with sciences and other religions in the language particular to them; and honor for the intrinsic value of all creation. We then turned to a consideration of select positive responses to the encyclical by Jews and Muslims. Finally, comments by Elizabeth

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<sup>62</sup> Clifford, “Pope Francis’ *Laudato Si*,” 40.

<sup>63</sup> Clifford, “Pope Francis’ *Laudato Si*,” 40.

Johnson and Anne Clifford both affirm and critique the encyclical, especially the absence of eco/feminist voices. It is to those voices, heard during my ethnographic inquiry, that I now turn.

### Third Movement: Wisdom at Work in the World

I would like to see responsibility for the earth become something that feminists teach the whole community. What I'm most concerned about is people assuming responsibility by checking irresponsible legislators, by trying to be watchful about their own wastefulness.

The opening quote, by the Jewish Theologian/Ethicist participating in this inquiry, sets up this final section, which continues to explore wisdom through the lens of eco/feminist theologians and scholar-practitioners and concludes by foreshadowing possible application for the service-learning classroom. The interviewee cited above goes on to add, "in Jewish law it is forbidden to wantonly destroy anything. You're allowed to use natural resources, but you have to be responsible about what you do. If you think others are going to feel the impact of your choice, you have to make choices in a meaningful way. That's what I would like people to understand." Responsibility, care for others, and purposeful action are three themes emerging from this qualitative inquiry.<sup>64</sup> This section continues exploring wisdom as viewed through the lens of eco/feminist theologians and scholar-practitioners. It begins with a brief introduction to

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<sup>64</sup> Other beginning themes include Creator Spirit, Deep Incarnation, Three P's (poems, prayers, practices), Eco-spirituality, and Interreligious Dialogue.

Grant McCracken's *Qualitative Research Methods: The Long Interview*. Then, findings from a small sample of my ethnographic inquiry illustrates the emerging concept of wisdom as loving justice.<sup>65</sup> Autoethnography is woven throughout and draws on my reflection about teaching theology and religious studies courses containing a service-learning component.

Methodology used for this inquiry is based on McCracken's *The Long Interview*. The ethnographic long interview is designed to give the investigator a highly efficient, productive, stream-lined instrument of inquiry. It calls for special kinds of preparation and structure, including the use of an open-ended questionnaire and special patterns of analysis that maximize the value of the time spent analyzing the data. "The long interview has a special place in qualitative methodology" and can be distinguished from the "unstructured 'ethnographic' interview, participant observation, the focus group, and the depth interview."<sup>66</sup> The process begins by identifying analytic categories, primarily from the literature, and cultural categories, primarily from beliefs and assumptions the researcher is bringing into the inquiry. The inquiry has two general phases: a review process and a discovery process.

The review process starts with a literature review that is used to identify analytic categories, develop the interview protocol, and collect the data. In this inquiry, the process started with submitting the John Carroll University Internal Review Board

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<sup>65</sup> Complete findings from the ethnographic inquiry is beyond the scope of this essay and will continue to be developed and shared.

<sup>66</sup> Grant McCracken, *Qualitative Research Methods: The Long Interview* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1988), 7.

application, in which I identified the questions I would be asking. The process continued throughout coursework in Jewish theology, Islamic spirituality, Islam and the environment, and systematic theology. Beginning analytic categories for the inquiry emerged—otherness,<sup>67</sup> Creator Spirit,<sup>68</sup> and oneness (or unity)<sup>69</sup>—and were shared in a paper presentation at the 2017 Celebration of Scholarship at John Carroll (See Appendix A). Specific topics treated during interviews included defining key terms (e.g., eco-spirituality, ecofeminism, wisdom, interfaith dialogue); current eco-crisis causes and solutions; poems, prayers and practices to heal the earth; wisdom as understood within the interviewee’s faith tradition; creation stories; and experience with interfaith dialogue. In addition to analytic categories, cultural categories had to be identified.

Identifying cultural categories “is where the investigator begins the process of using the self as an instrument of inquiry.”<sup>70</sup> The introspective process of identifying cultural categories aligns nicely with autoethnography, where the researcher’s story

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<sup>67</sup> Judith Plaskow, *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective* (San Francisco: Harper, 1990).

<sup>68</sup> Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1993); id., *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God* (New York: Continuum, 2007); id., *Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014). id., *Woman, Earth, and Creator Spirit* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1993).

<sup>69</sup> Nawal J. Ammar, “Islam and Deep Ecology” in *Deep Ecology and World Religions*, eds. David Landis Barnhill and Roger S. Gottlieb (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2008); Saadia Khawar Khan Chishti, “Fitra: An Islamic Model for Humans and the Environment,” in *Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust*, eds. Richard C. Foltz, Frederick M. Denny, and Azizan Baharuddin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

<sup>70</sup> McCracken, *The Long Interview*, 32.

becomes a part of the methodology. Cultural categories for this study include my beliefs about God and/in creation; my personal mystical experiences; Catholic dogma and doctrine; the relationship between humans and God's creation; belief about my role as co-creator of God's *kindom*<sup>71</sup> on earth, and my search to understand what it means to be an eco/feminist in a time of political hostility towards the environment and insensitivity towards those most impacted by climate change: women, children, and refugees.

Six semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants identified using conference proceedings from Yale University's Forum on Religion and Ecology, particularly the sections dedicated to Judaism and Ecology, Christianity and Ecology, and Islam and Ecology. Other participants were identified from course readings and from literature reviews for course papers. Sixteen participants were initially invited during the Spring 2017 semester. Six accepted.<sup>72</sup> The six participants were asked "how would you identify yourself?" Responses included a Jewish feminist narrative theologian/ethicist, (who will be referred to as a Jewish Theologian/Ethicist), a Jewish

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<sup>71</sup> Kindom emphasizes relationships which is different from kingdom which emphasizes patriarchal hierarchy. Johnson, *Woman, Earth, and Creator Spirit*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 29-40.

<sup>72</sup> A limitation of the sample is that the Islamic tradition is underrepresented, and the Catholic tradition is overrepresented. Initially four invitations were extended to scholars within each of the Abrahamic traditions. Of the four invitations to Christian/Catholic ecofeminists, three accepted; of the four invitations to Jewish feminists/ecofeminists, two accepted. Of the four invitations to Islamic feminists/ecofeminist, one accepted. A second round of invitations to three Islamic scholars was extended with none accepting. A third round of invitations to two Islamic scholars was extended in 2018 with no success.



Historian, and a Professor of Religion in Islam (who identified herself as an outsider regarding Islam religious tradition). The three Catholic participants identified themselves as a Religious Environmental Leader, a Chair in Catholic Studies, and a College Professor. While not intentional on my part, all participants were affiliated with colleges or universities and most had self-identified as feminists and/or ecofeminists. All have written and/or spoken publicly about the natural world and ecology, eco-justice, or social justice.

The *Long Interview* discovery process begins during the interviews, where new cultural categories may emerge, and continues throughout the data analysis process. Analytic categories may also emerge during data analysis.<sup>73</sup> There was a break in this part of the process as I was unable to find practicing Muslims to participate despite my repeated attempts. During the interview with the Professor of Religion in Islam, she helped me understand why this might have happened when she shared:

There is an Islamic feminism. Some people would prefer to say "womanism." You are probably aware of those controversies in feminism overall, but there's definitely an Islamic feminism and of course counter currents. I'm not sure how familiar people in that tradition would be with ecofeminism. As I look at ecological thought in Islam and the languages that are accessible to me, I don't see it proceeding to ecofeminism. It's congenial to everyone to talk about Islam protecting the environment and having resources for ecological thought, but to speak about patriarchy and to put the blame on patriarchal structures would be a lot more controversial.

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<sup>73</sup> McCracken, *The Long Interview*, 29-30.

The cultural category of care emerged gradually but consistently during all of the interviews where I sensed a deep respect for creation, as well as a sadness, when they talked about what they saw as the greatest eco-crisis.

When we begin to unpack this notion of ecological crisis, we're talking about a catastrophic loss in species in the fullness of wisdom. From a religious point, this universe is the uttering forth of the deep mystery and love and play and terror in some ways of God. Extinguishing life forms, to be bringing so many species to extinction by cutting back on habitat by the pollution of the magnificent creatures of water, that the radically necessary creature of air itself, of land, of earth, topsoils, seeds, all of that makes the crisis is so complex. It's a very dark diamond....It's still a lump of coal which would make it an incredibly apt metaphor with so many facets. (Religious Environmental Leader)

When the final interview was completed, I went back and reread all of the interviews in one sitting and experienced an overwhelming sense of love for all of creation and was reminded of the contemplation on God's love, the *Contemplatio*, which occurs near the end of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. This part of the Spiritual Exercises has two reflections. The first describes love as a mutual gifting and the second shows that love is more present in deeds than in words. The reflections are followed by a fourfold contemplation on the gifts of God and the human response to those gifts.<sup>74</sup> This *loving care and concern* for all creation seems to have resonance across traditions as seen in another example from the Jewish historian.

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<sup>74</sup> Jacqueline Syrup Bergan and Maria Schwan, CSJ. *Loved and Loving: Contemplation to Attain God's Love*, (Scotts Valley, CA: CreateSpace, 2018), xxvi-xxvii. The following is Bergan and Schwan's interpretation of the *Contemplatio*. In the first point, the retreatant is invited to contemplate the mystery that God gives and brings to memory the many gifts of God, gifts of life, family, opportunities, and so on. Next, the retreatant deepens the awareness that God inhabits all creatures, giving them being,

Rising water levels affect primarily poor countries more than rich countries. So the ecological crisis is multifaceted. It touches every system. It touches the entire world and that includes even Antarctica. [Climate change] is going to really transform the quality of life, not just for human life. Human life sure, but also for all species. The problem we have right now is that all species are affected by and impacted by human activity. The fact that we over fish. We created the situation in which we simply mismanaged the resources of our oceans and our rivers and eventually we will not have enough to feed on. There is a kind of pervasive imbalance across all systems.

In addition to the new cultural category of loving care, a new analytic category emerged: *action*. The importance of action was mentioned by most of the participants at one point or another, even in response to the question about interfaith dialogue.

Start with what drew people there, their concerns, and try to also make visible their shared hopes and desires. I am continually attracted to the Catholic social thought dynamic, See, Judge, Act. It can be easily, I would think, implemented. And I think if you could invite people, especially if they're living in a similar ecosystem in one area, to say "Okay, what do we see? What's calling us out the loudest in terms of making some good judgements about what we can do and then try to discern the best way to do that to get people to develop the action plans and carry them out." (Catholic Studies Chair)

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coming to us as a sacrament, making of us a dwelling place. In the third point, the retreatant considers how God labors for me—like a mother giving birth, like a potter, a bread maker, a farmer. Finally, with an awareness of God as both giver and gift, lavishing love upon me, like the sun pouring down its life-giving light and warmth and energy, God descends. Ignatius would remind his retreatants to keep their eyes and their hearts open . . . [for] they would see what they had never really seen before—the majesty of the mountains, the strength of the winds, the beauty of the flowers. . . . These . . . they would now see as God's gifts to them. I acknowledge that the steps need to be modified to make them more acceptable to other than Christian believers.

Any theology that doesn't result in obligations that have to be performed out in the world, is nothing but hot air! (Jewish Theologian/Ethicist)

... put theology aside and talk about action and take action. (Professor of Religion in Islam)

It's not so much dialoguing with them as maybe with taking action and giving them opportunities to come together around doing something. (College Professor)

There is so much more to be learned from the interviews! I remain firm in my conviction that understanding wisdom as *loving justice* leads to action benefitting the poor, women and Earth. Two metaphors often used to describe the interviewer are miner and traveler. In the miner metaphor, knowledge is understood as buried metal that needs to be detected and uncovered. The interviewer is the one who unearths the valuable metal by asking the right question(s).<sup>75</sup> In the traveler metaphor, the interviewer is a traveler on a journey to a distant country that leads to a tale to be told upon returning home. Knowing consists of stories collected and interpreted by the traveler.<sup>76</sup> Both metaphors apply in this study.

I began this inquiry project as a miner, thinking that if I asked the right question of the right participants, I would be able to create meaning about wisdom across the Abrahamic traditions. Not having any practicing Muslims in my inquiry led me to set aside the wonderful stories and personal insights I had been gifted during the

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<sup>75</sup> A perfect example of *power over* is taking something that does not belong to you. This violates the eco/feminist principle of *power with*.

<sup>76</sup> Steinar Kvale and Svend Brinkmann, *Interviews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Interviewing* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2009), 48-50.]

interviews. What has been shared here is just a small sample of the rich narratives and personal reflections collected during the inquiry process. I am excited about returning to the interviews and trust more will be revealed. I believe that what I am learning about wisdom as loving justice might find its way into service-learning classroom to offer a more wholistic, embodied See-Judge-Act methodology.<sup>77</sup>

The courses I teach are steeped in Ignatian pedagogy and employ the See-Judge-Act method for promoting social justice. “The See-Judge-Act method of discernment is as old as the Bible itself,” used whenever anyone noticed a problem and asked the Lord for help.<sup>78</sup> It was Cardinal Joseph Cardijn who gave this method its name, using it with his workers’ Catholic Action groups in Belgium in the decades leading up to the Second Vatican Council. “[R]oots for this method can be found in Thomas Aquinas’ description of the intellectual virtue of prudence. Cardijn’s method was later developed by the Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM) and liberation theologians.” In *Laudato Si’* Pope Francis appropriates this method for theological reflection with the goal being transformative social action and justice.<sup>79</sup> Cardijn, however, was rather directive in its use as he “*told* his people what they should observe, he *told* them how to evaluate the situation and he *told* them what to do about it.”<sup>80</sup> As I

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<sup>77</sup> This suggested enhancement to See-Judge-Act will be developed in a proposed autoethnographic article for AAR.

<sup>78</sup> Jim Sheppard, “See, Judge, Act and Ignatian Spirituality,” *The Way* 56/1 (January 2017): 102.

<sup>79</sup> Pennington, “See-Judge-Act,” 10.

<sup>80</sup> Sheppard, “See, Judge, Act,” 103 (emphasis in original).

read this about Cardijn, I remembered an incident in one of my classes in which students who had finished their assigned groupwork were talking amongst themselves about immersion experiences.

Two of the students, who were on the same trip, shared with the group that the experience seemed to be designed “to make us realize how much we have and how little they have.” There was no mention of service they provided, no sense of compassion for those visited, and no questioning about why there was such inequity. A student who had been on a previous trip stated, “I don’t know why they even schedule these trips. It was a waste of my time.” I was shocked! Why the disconnect between what I imagined an immersion experience would be like and what the students were experiencing? Could what I am learning about wisdom as loving justice enhance the traditional, masculine<sup>81</sup> See-Judge-Act method? Would including Gilligan’s ethic of caring *alongside* an ethic of justice enhance the current model in a way that would resonate with college students?

As psychologist Carol Gilligan advanced in her influential hypothesis, “women speak in a different voice,” a voice that traditional ethical theory had drowned out, a voice that stresses empathic association with others.<sup>82</sup> This ethic is based not on the

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<sup>81</sup> The See-Judge-Act method originated in the white, male, European Catholic church. It was further developed in Latin America, primarily by priests. Therefore, I consider the model to be steeped in men’s experiences and thinking. This does not diminish the effectiveness of the method. However, I believe it could be enhanced and embodied with the addition of wisdom as loving justice.

<sup>82</sup> Carol Gilligan appears in Britannica online encyclopedia as an American developmental psychologist best known for her research into the moral development of girls and women. While teaching at Harvard, Gilligan worked with renowned development psychologists Erik Erikson and Lawrence Kohlberg and became interested

primacy and universality of individual rights but rather on a strong sense of being responsible to and for others. Gilligan identifies two modes of moral thinking: a morality of rights and an ethic of care.<sup>83</sup> The two modalities do not strictly correlate with gender, but male subjects tend to embrace a morality of rights whereas female subjects tend to affirm an ethic of care. Nell Noddings, feminist philosopher and professor emerita at Stanford University, writing around the same time as Gilligan, focused on the relational aspects of ethics and argued that caring is rooted in receptivity, relatedness, and responsiveness. Noddings acknowledges that while caring has been expressed as a feminine view, it “does not imply that all women will accept it or that men will reject it; indeed, there is no reason why men should not embrace it.”<sup>84</sup> Noddings sees the structure of caring as existing on a continuum from *natural* caring, in which people experience a powerful unconscious obligation to care and act, to *ethical* caring, which involves increasing uncertainty of action and increasing choice. In ethical caring, the obligation and intensity to act decreases until the imperative to act is reduced to the

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in Kohlberg’s research on the moral development of children, which happened to use only boys as subjects. Gilligan undertook similar research on girls which she published in 1982 as *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development*. Gilligan argued girls exhibit distinct patterns of moral development based on relationships and on feelings of care and responsibility for others. Her work inspired and informed a feminist movement known as the ethics of care. It should be noted that the ethics of care is an area of tension within the eco/feminist movement because of its association with essentialist thinking about the role of women.

<sup>83</sup> Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 136.

<sup>84</sup> Nell Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 2.

suggestion that “someone (else) ought to do something.”<sup>85</sup> For Noddings, “When we see the other’s reality as a possibility for us, we must act to eliminate the intolerable, to reduce the pain, to fill the need, to actualize the dream. When I am in this sort of relationship with another, when the other’s reality becomes a real possibility for me, I care.”<sup>86</sup>

As this essay comes to a close, I am re-energized to return to this inquiry that began so long ago when I first conceived of this master’s essay. As with most qualitative research, it evolved as more was learned, as time passed, as new questions emerged or as life simply got in the way! This essay provided me an opportunity to capture the evolution of my thinking about God and/in creation. It began with my search for Wisdom as she began calling me to share her original meaning in the *Logos*, in the Word as written in the Prologue to John’s Gospel. As I began my graduate studies in theology and religious studies, *Laudato Si’* was promulgated. It continues to be a cornerstone in all of the classes I have taught over the five past semesters: Contemporary Catholic Theology, Globalization, Theology and Justice, and Ecology, Religion, and Justice. As a lay associate with the Sisters of the Humility of Mary, I entered the Theology and Religious Studies program with a curiosity about “the new cosmology” because of the passion many of the sisters have for this topic as well as for their commitment to caring for all creation. This cosmology is often referred to as eco-spirituality. Eco-spirituality is an area I still hope to pursue.

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<sup>85</sup> Noddings, *Caring*, 14.

<sup>86</sup> Noddings, *Caring*, 14.



The immediate next steps for this inquiry include diving deeper into the wisdom stories and insights that were shared with me during this inquiry project to further develop both the theological aspect of interfaith wisdom and the practical aspect, the focus of this section, Wisdom as loving justice. Following that, I will flesh out an embodied and renewed See-Judge-Act method that began to emerge in this project and submit as an paper on autoethnography to be presented at the American Academy of Religion. While the world pushes and rewards accomplishing goals in a specified timeframe, *kiaros* means “the appointed time in the purpose of God,”<sup>87</sup> which gives us another way to think about time. I’ve also heard it referred to as God’s time. I do believe that Holy Wisdom is alive and well and at work in the world today which gives me great hope! While I wish I could have completed this requirement for the Master of Arts degree sooner, I trust that it is being completed *at the appointed time*.

The mystical poetry of Rūmī, one of the most influential and beloved of all the Sufi poets, who writes about the sacred relationship between humans and Allah, seems like a fitting end to this project. In Rūmī’s vision, the entire universe is alive; humans are but one part of the Divine Creation, all of which worships Allah. Rūmī’s mystical worldview embraces the whole universe as seen in the title of his poem “The Meaning of All Things” (*Masnavi-ye ma ‘navi*).

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<sup>87</sup> Wikipedia, “Kiaros”, last modified February 12, 2020, at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kairos#:~:text=the%20entire%20rhetoric%20in%20Christian%20theology,of%20God%20is%20at%20hand>), accessed July 25, 2020.

Everything you see has its roots in the unseen world.  
The forms may change yet the essence remains the same.  
Every wondrous sight will vanish, every sweet word will fade,  
But do not be disheartened,  
The Source they come from is Eternal.  
Growing, branching out, giving new life and new joy.  
Why do you weep?  
That Source is within you  
And this whole world springs up from it.  
The Source is full; its waters are ever-flowing;  
Do not grieve, Drink your fill!  
Don't think it will ever run dry, this is the endless ocean.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Lynda Clarke. "The Universe Alive: Nature in the *Masnavī* of Jalal al-Din Rumi," 39-66 in Richard C. Foltz, Frederick M. Denny, and Azizan Baharuddin. eds., *Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 39–40.

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## APPENDIX:

### John Carroll University 2017 Celebration of Scholarship

#### Ecofeminist-Ecospirituality: An Interfaith Perspective

The Earth's identity as a dwelling place for life is being compromised. According to Elizabeth Johnson, an ecofeminist, Catholic theologian, "humankind is wasting many of the Earth's natural resources and inflicting deadly damage to the planet with their overconsumption, unbridled reproduction, exploitative use of resources, and efflorescing pollution."<sup>89</sup> She goes on to report that every year approximately 20% of Earth's people in rich nations use 75% of the world's resources and produce 80% of the world's waste.<sup>90</sup> As a result, the capacity of our Earth is being exhausted faster than Earth's power to replenish itself. Ecofeminism, a philosophical and political movement combines ecological concerns with feminist ones. It regards both the exploitation of earth and the exploitation of woman as resulting from male domination of society and provides a holistic perspective on care for the Earth. This paper suggests that to understand contemporary ecofeminism, you must understand women's otherness and how that otherness is perpetuated through androcentric, patriarchal God-language which images God as immutable, distant and disconnected from the natural world as well as the Islamic Unity Principle, *tawhid*, the oneness of God. OR

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<sup>89</sup> Elizabeth A. Johnson. *Quest for a Living God*, (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2007) 185.

<sup>90</sup> Johnson, *Quest*, 186.

This paper suggests that to understand contemporary ecofeminism, you must understand women's otherness, Creator Spirit, and the oneness of God.

*Laudato Si*, Pope Francis's 2015 encyclical, echoes the concerns of ecofeminists stating, "the environment is in crisis—cities to oceans, forests to farmland" and emphasizes that "the poor are most affected" by damage from what he describes as "economic systems that favor the wealthy and political systems that lack the courage to look beyond short term rewards. He challenges all of humanity "to heed the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor" and calls for a new spirituality, an ecospirituality bringing together religion and environmental activism.<sup>91</sup>

Ecospirituality relates to the Mystery we call God, living and acting in creation. Environmentalist Sister Virginia Jones believes "Eco-spirituality is about helping people experience 'the holy' in the natural world and to realize their relationship as human beings to all creation."<sup>92</sup> Ecotheologian Thomas Berry, one of the most influential recent figures in Earth-based spirituality sees the Earth as the primal source of our spirituality stating, "If there is no spirituality in the earth, then there is no spirituality in ourselves."<sup>93</sup> Berry believes that "we have forgotten that the revelation found in the natural world and in the wider universe around us is the primary divine revelation," and "we need to regain the sense of wonder that comes from being deeply interconnected in a sacred way."<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Pope Francis. *Ladauto Si*. Encyclical letter on care for our common home. <http://vatican.com>.

<sup>92</sup> Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee. *Spiritual Ecology*. Point Reyes, CA: The Golden Sufi Center. 2013.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>94</sup> Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee. "Eco-spirituality: towards a values-based economic structure." *The Guardian*, May 17, 2013



The Western world's materialism and consumerism, which Berry calls as a "crisis of cosmology," regards the environment as a set of material resources with primarily instrumental value. The root of our present paradigm and our sense of separation from our environment is the lack of awareness that we are all a part of one interdependent living organism that is our planet. We have lost and entirely forgotten any spiritual relationship to life and to the planet, a relationship that has been a central reality to other cultures for millennia.<sup>95</sup>

Used as an umbrella term, ecospirituality covers the feminist theology called ecofeminism which is a term coined by the French writer Françoise D'Eaubonne in 1974 to name the connection between patriarchal subjugation of women and the destruction of nature.<sup>96</sup> Observations by Karen Warren and Rosemary Radford Ruether, two early Christian voices in ecofeminism, form the foundation for ecofeminism. In the introduction to *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature* Warren asserts, "What makes ecofeminism distinct is its insistence that nonhuman nature and naturism (i.e. the unjustified domination of nature) are feminist issues. Ecofeminist philosophy extends familiar feminist critiques of social isms of domination to nature."<sup>97</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, in one of the first ecofeminist books, *New Woman/New Earth*, makes clear "a central tenant of ecofeminism: Earth and the other-than-human experience the tyranny

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<sup>95</sup> Vaughan-Lee. *Spiritual Ecology*, xx

<sup>96</sup> Anne Clifford. *Introducing Feminist Theology*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books. 2001.

<sup>97</sup> Hobgood-Oster. *Ecofeminism*, 533.

of patriarchy along with women. Classism, racism, sexism, heterosexism, naturism (a term coined by Warren) and speciesism are all intertwined.”<sup>98</sup> Ruther states:

Women must see that there can be no liberation for them and no solution to the ecological crisis within a society whose fundamental model of relationships continues to be one of domination. They must unite the demands of the woman’s movement with those of the ecological movement to envision a radical reshaping of the basic socioeconomic relations and the underlying values of this [modern industrial] society.<sup>99</sup>

Judith Plaskow, one of the first feminist Jewish theologians, another early voice in the ecofeminist movement, argues male language forces women into being the “other” and turns God into an idol when God’s “maleness” is worshipped instead of God’s “God-ness.”<sup>100</sup> Male-centered language dominates the Jewish tradition and therefore leads to the devaluation of women across Jewish culture<sup>101</sup>. Plaskow voices a particular concern with two images of God, God as exclusively male and God as an all-powerful ruler and points to “the destructiveness of hierarchical images of God such as Lord and King, images that draw upon and in turn justify oppression in society.”<sup>102</sup> She identifies two types of naming-giving that together produce a picture of God she believes better reflect the experiences of the entire Jewish community of both men AND

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<sup>98</sup> Hobgood-Oster. *Ecofeminism*, 533.

<sup>99</sup> Hobgood-Oster. *Ecofeminism*, 533.

<sup>100</sup> Rifat Sonsina and Daniel B. Syme. *Finding God*, (New York: UAHC, 2002) 163.

<sup>101</sup> Rifat Sonsina. *The Many Faces of God*, (New York: UAHC) 228.

<sup>102</sup> Sonsina. *Faces of God*, 226.

women. The first type of language is anthropomorphic and the second type involves images that view God as the creative and sustaining power of creation.<sup>103</sup>

Anthropomorphic language emphasizes a lived relationship with God in which feminists seek to find communal structures that do not involve hierarchy and that do not invoke metaphors of domination. This kind of imagery would include a wide range of metaphors that express intimacy, partnership, and mutuality between humans and God. More enduring images will try to combine female metaphors with a changed conception of God or use nongendered language drawn from human community like lover, friend, companion and cocreator. The image of cocreator is especially appropriate when talking about ecospirituality. It suggests the shared responsibility of God and Israel and is an image in accord with Jewish mystical tradition which has human beings “responsible for fulfilling the work of creation, uniting the separate aspects of divinity through the power of the deed,”<sup>104</sup>

Cocreator evokes the sense of personal empowerment and mutual responsibility emerging out of speaking and acting in community with others and envisioning a life beyond them which fosters a sense of participation in the larger project of world-creation, a project that God and human beings share. “As cocreators with God for the brief span of our lives, we are responsible not just to the community of our fellow persons with whom we especially share the sense of God’s presence, but to the larger community of creation that God also loves and befriends.”<sup>105</sup> Creation is not viewed as a

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<sup>103</sup> Sonsina. *Faces of God*, 230-231.

<sup>104</sup> Sonsina. *Faces of God*, 234.

<sup>105</sup> *Faces of God*, 235.

discrete event, completed by God in six days, but as a process that continues in dialogue with human beings who can carry forward or destroy the world that “God has bought to be.”<sup>106</sup> By defining God’s power not as domination but empowerment, relational images evoke a God who is with us instead of over us, a partner in dialogue who ever and again summons us to responsible action.

Anthropomorphic images, Plaskow says, must be supplemented by a second kind of language that can evoke the creative and sustaining power of God present throughout the world by using language from natural and impersonal metaphors express God’s relation to all. Images of God as fountain, source, wellspring, or ground of life and being remind us God loves and befriends us as one who brings forth all being and sustains it in existence. Metaphors that shift our sense of direction from a God in the high heavens who creates through the magical world to the very ground beneath our feet that nourishes and sustains us can be seen in images of God as rock, tree of life, light, and darkness. Using the metaphor of a tree drawing sustenance from the soil, illustrates how we are “rooted in the source of our being that bears and maintains us even as it enables us to respond to it freely.”<sup>107</sup> Metaphors that draw from nature teach us the intrinsic value of this wider web of being in which we dwell. “The God who is the ground of being is present and imaged forth in all beings, so that every aspect of creation shows us another face of God.”<sup>108</sup> Catholic theologian Elizabeth Johnson agrees with Plaskow that God-language needs to image a relational God who embraces

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<sup>106</sup> Sonsina. *Faces of God*, 234.

<sup>107</sup> Sonsina. *Faces of God*, 235.

<sup>108</sup> Sonsina. *Faces of God*, 235.

all of creation and offers a model of the living God as Holy Wisdom with an emphasis on Creator Spirit.

Johnson proposes an ecological theology in which the Creator Spirit, the giver of life, *vivificantem*<sup>109</sup> in Latin, “dwells at the heart of the natural world, graciously energizing its evolution from within, compassionately holding all creatures in their finitude and death, and drawing the world forward toward an unimaginable future.”<sup>110</sup> Johnson argues, as does Plaskow, for language, symbols, and metaphors that are grounded in women’s lived experiences and thereby revealing a relational God who is both transcendent and imminent: a God who saves and a God who walks beside us. To that end, she offers a theology of Creator Spirit and an image of Holy Wisdom who is present throughout the universe, embracing everything in Her inclusive freedom and compassionate love. Creator Spirit, “who creates, indwells, compassionately loves, and empowers the world on its great adventure,”<sup>111</sup> has implications for all of theology and especially for ecological theology. Johnson reminds us that a more equitable image of God is presented in Hebrew and New Testament scriptures, especially in wisdom literature in which “a more explicit way of speaking about the mystery of God in female symbol”<sup>112</sup> can be found.

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<sup>109</sup> Elizabeth A. Johnson. *Quest for a Living God*, (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2007) 182.

<sup>110</sup> Johnson. *Quest for a Living God*, 191.

<sup>111</sup> Elizabeth A. Johnson. *She Who Is*, (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1993) 18.

<sup>112</sup> Johnson. *She Who Is*, 86.

In the biblical figure of Wisdom in the Book of Job, Proverbs, Book of Sirach, Wisdom of Solomon and in the Gospels, especially Matthew and John, we see a feminine image of God. Wisdom is present in the Hebrew scripture as *Hokman*, in Greek as *Sophia*, and *Sapientia* in Latin. Wisdom pervades all the world, both nature and human beings, interacting with them all to lure them along the right path to life; Wisdom is consistently female, being cast as sister, mother, female beloved, chef and hostess, preacher, judge, liberator, establisher of justice, and a myriad of other “female roles wherein she symbolizes transcendent power ordering and delighting in the world.”<sup>113</sup> First-century Christians would assign these roles, traits and characteristics to Jesus. Christian hymn makers and epistle writers came to say of Jesus what Judaism said of *Sophia*. Among the synoptic Gospels Matthew’s in particular “depicts Jesus as Sophia’s child who communicates her gracious goodness by befriending the outcast, who communicates her prophetic message, and who proves her right or justifies her though he is severely criticized by others.”<sup>114</sup> In the Wisdom literature found in both the Hebrew Bible and New Testament, J sees an alternative to dominant patriarchal language in which all of God’s children, male and female, can flourish.

The one God who is Holy Wisdom herself; is the unoriginated source of all, “Wisdom incarnate, amid the suffering of history, and the mobile, gracious presence throughout the world.” For Johnson, “a sense of the Holy One from whom, by whom, and in whom all things exist, thrive, struggle towards freedom, and are gathered in” is a

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<sup>113</sup> Johnson. *She Who Is*, 87.

<sup>114</sup> Johnson. *She Who Is*, 95.

return to the living God. By emphasizing the Creator Spirit dynamic of Holy Wisdom the “universe has relationship as its fundamental code” and the historical world exists “in mutual, if asymmetrical, relation.”<sup>115</sup> “God in the world and the world in God”<sup>116</sup> which is different than classical theism in which “the world exists always and everywhere outside” divine being; God is pure act, intrinsically incapable of being affected by anything created and from pantheism in which God and the world are identical and so intertwined that the divine being is the substance of everything.<sup>117</sup> Johnson’s model of Holy Wisdom is panentheism, all in God; the belief that the Being of God includes and penetrates the whole universe so that every part of it exists in God but that God’s Being is more than, and is not exhausted by the universe.”<sup>118</sup>

This way of speaking of God as Holy Wisdom also provides new language for the classical theological belief in *De Deo Uno*, the one God, in which the transcendent God of creation is the embodied God found in all of creation. “A relational God who loves in freedom”, and from a perspective of women’s experience grounded in affiliation and mutuality and valuing a “genuine dialectic between God and the world that safeguards difference while preserving connection.”<sup>119</sup> She believes the emphasis on freedom is critical when speaking about God and the world because Holy Wisdom is forever unfurling “as distinct self-bestowing Spirit” as seen in the spiraling movement of

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<sup>115</sup> Johnson. *She Who Is*, 228.

<sup>116</sup> Johnson. *She Who Is*, 65.

<sup>117</sup> Johnson. *She Who Is*, 230.

<sup>118</sup> Johnson. *She Who Is*, 231.

<sup>119</sup> Johnson. *She Who Is*, 226.

liberating love “freely and inclusively given.”<sup>120</sup> Holy Wisdom moves us from talking about God as distant and removed to talking about God fully present and with us in all of creation. She safeguards difference while preserving connection, a concern raised by Aquinas. The belief in *De Deo Uno*, the one God, has much in common with the Islamic teaching of *tawhid*, the Unity Principle.

Nawal Ammar, an Islamic feminist scholar, presents Islam’s teachings about *Tawhid* and how they translate into an ecological ethic and action of humans, the universe, and their relationship to God. *Tawhid*, the Oneness of God, allows for only one sacred entity, Allah. *Tawhid* represents respect for nature and earth and views humans as part of this creation and not superior to it. Creation itself is not viewed as sacred, “rather it is respected as a reflection of sacredness, because it is the creation of God.” The rest of the entities are created by God and reflect His sacredness, thereby placing them within the realm of respect and devotion. “Yet, this devotion is not of nature itself but of the source of nature, God the Almighty” (208). Humans are appointed as *Khalifahs*, or vice-regents, of God on earth to protect it because “they can distinguish between good and evil (91:7-8) and are capable of knowing and judging good from evil (90:8-9), and can control harm and corruption (79:40)” and because they were the only ones who accepted such a role. “In addition to their appointment as protectors of the earth, humans are asked to use the bounties of the earth as part of their devotion to God’s creation” and are “asked to balance the role of use and protection of the earth as a test of their devotional abilities” (209). *Tawhid*, the Unity Principle, affirms the

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<sup>120</sup> Johnson. *She Who Is*, 215-216.



interconnectedness of the natural order. It is the “foundation of Islamic monotheism and its essence is contained in the declaration (*Shahada*<sup>121</sup>) which every Muslim makes and is a constant reminder of faith” and the bedrock of “the Unity of the Creator from which everything else flows.”<sup>122</sup> It is connected to the unity of all creation and to the fabric of the natural order of which humankind is an intrinsic part: “What is in the heavens and the earth belongs to Allah: He encompasses everything” (Q 4:125).<sup>123</sup>

The principle of *tawhid* can be heard in the poetry of Jalal al-Din Rumi (1207-1273), one of the most influential and beloved of all the Sufi poets, whose poetry evokes the sacred seen in creation. In Rumi’s vision, the entire universe is alive; humans are but one part of the Divine Creation, all of which who worship Allah. His mystical worldview is holistic and embraces the whole universe as can be seen in the title of his poem “The Meaning of All Things” (*Masnavi-ye ma ‘navi*).<sup>124</sup> The *Masnavi* tells us to “regard nature as full of hidden potential, and to know that discovery of this potential is part of the process of our own enlightenment.”<sup>125</sup>

Everything you see has its roots in the unseen world.  
The forms may change yet the essence remains the same.  
Every wondrous sight will vanish, every sweet word will fade,  
But do not be disheartened,  
The Source they come from is Eternal.  
Growing, branching out, giving new life and new joy.  
Why do you weep?  
That Source is within you

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<sup>121</sup> “There is no God but God (*la ilaha illal-lah*).

<sup>122</sup> Khalid, “Islam and the Environment,” 4.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> L. Clarke. “The Universe Alive: Nature in the *Masnavi* of Jalal al-Din Rumi,” in *Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust*. Eds. Richard C. Foltz, Frederick M. Denny, and Azizan Baharuddin. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 39-40.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 62.

And this whole world is spring up from it.  
The Source is full; its waters are ever-flowing;  
Do not grieve, Drink your fill!  
Don't think it will ever run dry, this is the endless ocean.<sup>126</sup>

In Conclusion, Pope Francis's encyclical, *Laudato Si*, challenges all of humanity to heed the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor and reminds us of the sacredness of creation and of our responsibility to care for all of God's creation. For ecofeminist scholars, the maleness of God is not arbitrary nor simply a matter of pronouns. It leads to the central question of the otherness of women <sup>127</sup> and the otherness of earth [fn Johnson]. The feminist slogan "the personal is the political" means that seemingly personal problems are often rooted in the wider social context; social change must bring changes in daily life. Ecofeminism demands a new understanding of God which expands our images of God beyond androcentric, patriarchal God-language in which no one is seen as "other," and in which all of creation is included. [Creator Spirit] *Tawhid*, the Unity Principle, affirms the interconnectedness of the natural order will preserving the oneness of God. Once we can contemplate the sacred, interconnectedness of all of God's creation, and see that we are only one small part in the web of life, perhaps then we can work together across religious differences "to heed the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor."

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<sup>126</sup> VaughanpLee. *Spiritual Ecology*, 47.

<sup>127</sup> Judith Plaskow, "The Right Question is Theological," in *On Being a Jewish Feminist*, ed. Susannah Heschel (New York: Schocken Books) 227.