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# Disciples of the Green Spirit: Eco-Justice Spirituality in the Critical Asian Context

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## Abstract

This essay pursues the subject of eco-justice spirituality by offering a critique of our ecological crisis in the context of predatory capitalism. Predatory capitalism is the socioeconomic and political system that is driving this rapacious pursuit of profits at the expense of people and the ecosystem. But our ecological crisis is also a matter of faith, particularly of toxic theologies and spiritualities. It is for this reason that we must detoxify toxic theologies and spiritualities. Beyond the call for detoxification, we must articulate theologies or ways of knowing and pursue spiritual practices that promote ecological sensibility. Central to this articulation is the reclaiming of the identity of the church as an embodiment of the green spirit and as followers of the green Christ. Finally, it calls us to action by practicing green spirituality.

## Keywords

spirituality, ecology, Asian context, contextualization, green pneumatology

The hurrying tumbling waves, quick-broken crests, slapping, /The strata of color'd clouds, the long bar of maroon-tint, away /solitary by itself—the spread of purity it lies motionless in, /The horizon's edge, the flying sea-crow, the fragrance of salt /marsh and shore mud; /These became part of that child who went forth every day, and /who now goes, and will always go forth every day.<sup>1</sup>

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1 Walt Whitman, "There Was a Child Went Forth," in *Leaves of Grass* (Philadelphia: Sherman & Company, 1990), 234–236.

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Walt Whitman's poem "There Was a Child Went Forth" speaks to me and my relationship to my hometown. I am that child "who went forth every day" and the place "became part" of me. My geographical distance has only made me realize that I belong to my hometown as the hometown is in me. I still live with the nostalgia of a childhood home in Southern Leyte, Philippines—a place where the ocean and the river kiss and embrace. In the month of June, especially around St. John the Baptist Day (June 24), the high ocean tide would cause the river to flood our yard. Our house had a bamboo floor high enough so that the water could not reach it. I remember the times when I fished from our back porch and caught a few big ones—usually mudfish. I also learned how to watch for signs of freshwater clams by observing the water ripples that their breathing made, especially with the first rush of the rising tide.

With the ocean just fifty meters or so away, it was easy to switch from the river to the ocean. The ocean, of course, had much to offer—fish, shrimp, and prawns, crabs, squid, and octopus. I did not have to go deep to catch fish and crabs. There were times when a fish would accidentally land on the shore while trying to elude a bigger fish. I still remember the times when schools of small fish, mostly *bulinaw* or *dilis* (anchovies), would visit the ocean of my childhood in such miraculously great numbers that even non-regular fisherfolks would join fishing. Without fishing equipment, they had to use their mosquito nets to catch fish while standing waist deep. It seemed unbelievable but it happened several times. During those times, the ocean was like a fiesta.

My hometown was also rich in flora and fauna. Our swampy backyard had what we called *milyapi* trees and vines that connected one tree to another and on which I used to play Tarzan. Early in the morning I could see the *uwak* (crows) making their daily journey from their resting place (among the trees near the town cemetery) toward the northern mountains and back at dusk. Hawk (*banog*) soared freely. I had to watch out for the hawk and *bayawak* (monitor lizard), predators of our hens and chicks. There was also the *tikling* (*Gallirallus philippensis*) and the little *tamsi* (*Arachnothera longirostra*), which I hunted with my slingshot. With such abundant flora and fauna, it was not a surprise that there were times when we had unexpected guests such as snakes and centipedes.

Such was the idyllic place of my childhood. The rivers and ocean sustained us with the food we needed. We fished for food and for livelihood, not for sport. I still remember the days when my companion and I had to wake up at 2 o'clock in the morning and paddle our canoes to reach the fisherfolks to buy their catch for the market. Our lives had a different rhythm, but it was not a lackadaisical life. To be sure, even as marine life was abundant, there were seasons when we had little catch. The time when *amihan* (northeasterly wind) and *dumagsa* (easterly wind) would strike was one of those lean seasons. Consistent strong winds and waves could last for several days before a respite, enabling the people from the islands of San Pablo and San Pedro to come to the mainland of Leyte for provision. Typhoons were also frequent visitors.

I have carried this once-upon-a-time place wherever the diaspora wind brought me. I wanted to share my childhood place with my children, so one time we went for a visit. Maybe, I thought, they could still experience what I experienced as a boy. The visit was not fun; there was family tension. My hometown had, of course, changed, and I had too. There were welcome changes, but some were alarming. There were hardly any fish in the nearby ocean. I could no longer see from the shore the ocean of light coming from the kerosene lamps of the fisherfolk. Fisherfolk had to sail far away to the open Pacific Ocean to catch fish. Also, the ocean had claimed several meters of shoreline, and even the seawall that my late father helped build as a construction foreman could not protect it. The rising ocean had claimed the huge tree that the barrio inhabitants called *hambabago* or *maribago* (*Hibiscus tiliaceus*).

The ocean and marine life were not the only ones that had suffered ecological destruction. Two landslides in my home province (Southern Leyte) had claimed the lives of people. A couple of weeks of continuous heavy rain would be more than enough to soften the bald mountaintop that was once a tropical forest. In recent years the island of Leyte had suffered serious ecological disasters: a flashflood in Ormoc City (1991) and a landslide in Guinsaugon, St. Bernard (2006). It wiped out the whole village and buried children at a nearby elementary school. Then came the better-known super typhoon Yolanda or Haiyan (2013) that unleashed its fury without mercy.

## PREDATORY GLOBALIZATION AND ECOLOGICAL DESTRUCTION

I assume there are those who are nostalgic of a once-upon-a-time ecologically idyllic, diverse, and abundant hometown. For years I thought that I would be able to return home to an ecologically healthy place. I was wrong. The hometown that I knew has suffered ecological disasters. The ones that hit the headlines were the landslides. The common default explanation for those was to call them, as insurance companies do, “acts of God.” But are they?

It took me years to understand that what seemed like purely “natural” catastrophic events that my hometown had suffered were not that purely natural, that the natural was intertwined with the socioeconomic and political, and that they were not isolated cases. The rising tide that claimed our beautiful shores and the stronger typhoons that lashed our neighborhood are some of the “fingerprints” and “harbingers” of a major ecological tragedy for which human beings are greatly responsible—global warming. Global warming’s fingerprints include record-breaking warm weather, severe heat waves, ocean warming, rising sea levels, melting glaciers, and the warming of the Arctic and Antarctic. With these fingerprints come the harbingers: the spread of diseases through animals (such as malaria and dengue by mosquitoes), coral reef bleaching, movement and death of animal populations, heavy rain and stronger storms, drought, and wildfires.<sup>2</sup>

It is against this wider backdrop of ecological and sociopolitical connections that I am now viewing the catastrophic events of my hometown and the inhabitants’ contribution to the unfolding of these events. Certainly, the population growth in my hometown has led to overfishing to keep up with the increasing demand for food. But there are other causes, including destructive fishing practices of various sorts—dynamite, *sahid* (nets with small holes drawn by people from the shore), poison, and fish trawlers. The death of the mangrove plants has also destroyed the breeding place of various forms of marine life. Agricultural chemicals that flow from the rice fields to the rivers and finally to the

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2 Sheila Watt-Cloutier, “Climate Change in the Arctic,” in *Paradigm Wars: Indigenous Peoples’ Resistance to Globalization*, ed. Jerry Mander and Victoria Tauli-Corpus (San Francisco: Sierra Club, 2006), 97–99.

ocean have killed various forms of marine life. And many years of *kaingin* (slash and burn) and logging have denuded the forests of Leyte, making the ground more vulnerable to landslides, especially during rainy season.

We cannot continue blaming our ecologically destructive practices on God. We all have participated in varying ways in the ecological destruction. Even as a young farmer I contributed to the ecological imbalance through our use of agricultural chemicals in our rice field, especially since the introduction of new breeds of rice. I was captivated by the magical power of the chemical fertilizer. In a couple of weeks, the fertilizer could turn the brown field green. With our use of *lagtang* seed (*Anamirta cocculus*) and *tubli* (*Derris elliptica*) root to poison the fish, I contributed to the ecological disaster.

Without doubt the common people of my hometown have contributed to the ecological destruction by the way they live, but what is their share compared to the global imperial market's waste? This ecologically destructive imperial market mess has reached even to the bottom of the Philippine Deep. Below the ocean surface is a mountain of global market trash. Liberalized trade conditions have increased the volume of trade, thus accelerating the depletion of natural resources and the destruction of the natural environment. Around the world, forests are being cleared for timber, agriculture, and grazing, and they are flooded for dams and hydroelectric power. Rivers, lakes, and oceans have become dumpsites for booming industries. And the ocean has been overfished to support ever-increasing demands both domestic and international.

An encounter that I had with fisherfolk in Laguna de Bay in the Philippines points to the ecological challenge we are facing. One evening, after a modest meal of rice and fish in the fisherfolk's hut somewhere in the middle of the lake where my immersion group rested for the night, one of the fisherfolk tearfully shared his fears as he thought about the death of the lake, a source of his livelihood and the future of his children, due to pollution coming from the nearby factories. With a deep sigh, he asked: "How will I support my children and what will happen to them?" Deep inside, I knew that he was not asking for a quick answer from my group, because we did not have any. His question was his way of sharing his precarious future with my immersion group.

The much-sought progress of produce and profit could become a nightmare. It already is a nightmare for many people. We are putting the whole ecosystem at risk and, with it, the whole of humanity. While the risk belongs to the whole ecosystem, ecological destruction is more acutely felt in poor neighborhoods and developing nations. Oddly, the ones with light ecological footprints suffer disproportionately. General statements about shared suffering and general responsibility only add insult to the injury of the most vulnerable. It is indeed true, as Thomas Berry puts it, that “when nature goes into deficit, then we go into deficit. . . . Neither economic viability nor improvement in the life conditions of the poor can be realized in such circumstances.” But what appears unequivocally clean at an abstracted and generalized level has flaws when analyzed closely through the lens of the interlocking forms of oppression. I hope we have not forgotten that the poor have been living in deficit long before the elites have realized that when nature goes into deficit, a worse catastrophe is going to happen and affect all.<sup>3</sup>

Powerful nations have dumped hazardous and toxic wastes on the poor. Nations of the Global South, indigenous peoples around the world, and poor communities have been the target of “environmental terrorism” by powerful nations. Arguments have been made that many poor and racial minorities choose to settle in dumpsite areas. Well, what is the choice: die slowly of toxic contamination or die quickly of hunger? Besides, dumpsites, like the Smokey Mountain in Manila (mountain of trash), have become a source of livelihood for many of the world’s urban poor.

### THE ECOLOGICAL CRISIS IS A SPIRITUAL MATTER

The ecological crisis poses a challenge to the communities of faith. It is a challenge not only because its members are a part of a world facing ecological crisis, but also because the ecological issue is at heart a matter of faith. It is theological/spiritual because ecology is about our understanding of who we are in the scheme of things: it is about knowing who we are and our role in the whole; it is about finding and practicing our rightful place in the overall scheme of things; it is about how we dwell and treat

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<sup>3</sup> Eleazar Fernandez, *Reimagining the Human: Theological Anthropology in Response to Systemic Evil* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2004), 161.

others. The ecological crisis is at heart a matter of faith because it is about our covenant with the rest of creation; it is about common dwelling and common flourishing. Since the ecological crisis is a matter of faith, our theologies must address this anguish of creation, which is causing God's heartache. As the Asian theologian C. S. Song puts it, "Theology begins with God's heartache on account of the world."<sup>4</sup> When we see and relate the anguish of creation and the heartache of God, we see the beginning of theology/spirituality.

Our failure to live in right relation with one another and with the whole of creation is what we call sin. The ecological crisis is an expression of sin. It is a form of "living a lie": it is living a lie in relation to other human beings (us versus us), living a lie in relation to animals (us versus them), and living a lie in relation to nature (us versus it).<sup>5</sup> All three dimensions of sin point to the interconnection of life. The life and well-being of human beings, animals, and nature depend on this interconnection. We may call this interconnection the web of life. Sin is an act of breaking the web of life.

Calling our ecological crisis sin points to the depth and gravity of this crisis and, hence, the need for appropriate responses. What is involved in the crisis is not simply a lack of understanding or a matter of the intellect but, as Mark Wallace argues, a matter of the heart. By this he means that "[t]he problem is not that we do not know how to avoid our current plight, but rather we no longer experience our co-belonging with nature in such a way that we are willing to alter our lifestyles in order to build a more sustainable future."<sup>6</sup>

If the ecological crisis is comprehensive and radical, then our response must be comprehensive and radical as well. We must be speaking of a *metanoia*, that is, a radical conversion of our ways of thinking, dwelling, and acting. A necessary step in this direction involves detoxifying our churches of habits of thinking that are manifest in doctrines, liturgies, worship, ministries, and various practices.

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4 C. S. Song, *Third Eye Theology: Theology in Formation in Asian Settings* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979), 56.

5 Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 112–129.

6 Mark Wallace, *Finding God in the Singing River: Christianity, Spirit, Nature* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 27.

## DETOXIFYING TOXIC THEOLOGICAL HABITS

I cannot be exhaustive here, but I will name some major theological toxins that we need to confess to detoxify ourselves. Ian Barbour identifies four dysfunctional theological habits from which to start. First is the separation of God from nature. God is understood as a being outside of nature even as God acts in nature. Acting from the outside, God relates to the world primarily in terms of saving acts in history. Second is the separation of humanity from nature, which is modernity's primary mindset. Human beings stand apart from and above other beings. All other living creatures have instrumental value in relation to humanity. Third is the separation of the doctrine of redemption from the doctrine of creation. Salvation history is primarily about the one God who acts in history to redeem humanity, with creation as a backdrop or a stage in the drama of salvation. Salvation is primarily one of personal fulfillment rather than the fulfillment of the whole of creation. The fourth is hierarchical dualism: human beings and nature, men and women, mind, and spirit, and so forth.<sup>7</sup>

These four theological habits have a common point: the separation of God, humanity, and nature as well as the separation of creation and redemption and the corresponding move of hierarchization. Separation goes along with hierarchization. Dualistic and binary thinking is hierarchical thinking. As in other forms of dualism, the dualized categories are also hierarchized. Karen Warren noted this point: "Oftentimes . . . hierarchical thinking has been applied to conceptual dualisms, so that one side of the dualism is valued 'up' and the other 'down'"<sup>8</sup> And that which is valued up, or that which is at the higher scale of the hierarchy, establishes itself as the norm in relation to that which is at the bottom of the hierarchy. This norm has the "power to oppress," Elizabeth Dodson Gray rightly points out, "because it is an expression of a social hierarchy or pyramid of status

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7 Ian Barbour, cited in Dieter Hessel, "The Church Ecologically Reformed," in *Earth Habitat: Eco-justice and the Church's Response*, ed. Dieter Hessel and Larry Rasmussen (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 187–188.

8 Karen Warren, "Feminism and Ecology: Making Connections," *Environmental Ethics* 9 (1987):3–20, cited in Jay B. McDaniel, *Of God and Pelicans: A Theology of Reverence for Life* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), 116.



or power.”<sup>9</sup> The norm is a creation of power; power produces norm; it is a creation of the power-knowledge nexus. The “valuing up” and “valuing down” also acquires the status of the sacred because it is seen as part of the natural order created by God; thus, it becomes more difficult to change. Anyone who attempts to change this hierarchical dualism or holy order is going against the natural order and is, therefore, an enemy of the Creator.<sup>10</sup>

This dualistic hierarchical thinking is the overarching worldview that undergirds various expressions of ecologically toxic theological thinking and spirituality. It finds expression in anthropocentrism, which elevates human beings above other beings and instrumentalizes other creatures; in patriarchalism, which puts the male species over females, who are more closely identified with nature; in the assault against the poor and indigenous people, who are considered earthier. Dualistic hierarchical thinking finds expression in an understanding of God as an interventionist who comes to act only in historical events. It leads to a failure to recognize God in creation. It finds expression in the elevation of the spirit over the material, which neglects the material condition and leaves it to the control of the powerful; in the focus on redemption in another life beyond at the expense of creation; in the treating of the earth as a hotel that will be abandoned for another true home. Dualistic hierarchical thinking finds expression in the separation or breaking of interconnections. It comes to expression in our view of sin and, therefore, of forgiveness. Moreover, it fails to understand that sin is a sin against God, because it is a sin against God’s earth and God’s people.

Now the challenge is to articulate alternative ways of thinking, dwelling, and acting vis-à-vis destructive theologies and spiritualities. Asia has unlimited resources that can help us articulate a theology that promotes ecological sensibility, which is only limited by our imagination and creativity. We can learn from the wealth of Asia’s religiously diverse resources and from Asia’s indigenous ways of knowing and dwelling, such as its cosmocentric and place-based perspective and notions of intrinsic relationality, land as part of being a family, everything as animated, and more.

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9 Elizabeth Dodson Gray, *Green Paradise Lost* (Wellesley, MA: Roundtable Press, 1981), 131.

10 Gray, *Green Paradise Lost*, 7.

## THE CHURCH: COMMUNITY BIRTHED BY THE GREEN SPIRIT/SOPHIA

When we think of the birth of the church, we think of the Spirit and of Pentecost. When we think of Pentecost, what comes to mind is the Spirit appearing in tongues of fire. Not surprisingly, the liturgical color of the season is red. It has become automatic to associate the Spirit of Pentecost with red, but suppose we also think of the Spirit of Pentecost as green? It may at first appear jarring, but red (fire) and green (plants) complement each other perfectly well, for they both are symbolic of the life-giving, nourishing, empowering, and transforming Spirit. Red and green are among the colors that can represent the four primal elements associated with the earthy Spirit—earth, wind, water, and fire.<sup>11</sup> Certainly fire kills, but fire also cooks, warms, and makes some plants grow. After a forest fire, the pinecone that has been dormant for years responds to the enormous heat and opens its hard cone. The dreaded fire that destroys gives way to the green vegetation.

The Christian tradition is rich with images of the green Spirit. Rebecca Button Prichard's work makes this point: "If we dig more deeply into the ground of scripture, we will see that the Spirit's creative presence is portrayed . . . in vivid visual imagery, the imagery of greenness, of verdure, of viridity."<sup>12</sup> Her study reveals a cluster of words that support our claim: greenness and growth (*'arek/'orek*), verdure (*chatzir*), green growth (*desheh*), luxuriant growth (*ra'an/ra'anan*), herbage (*'esev*), and sprout (*tsmach/tsemech*).<sup>13</sup> Greenness is a symbol of God's creative and sustaining presence, of God's continuing care and blessings, and of God's renewing power. It is a symbol of God the Spirit nourishing the weary, refreshing the thirsty, and feeding the hungry through the green meadows, still waters, and luxuriant harvest. Greenness is a symbol of the Spirit that restores our souls—a symbol of our coming back to health and right relation. The green Spirit that brooded over the waters in the creation account is the same Spirit who is actively present in the renewing of creation—making streams flow and

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11 Wallace, *Finding God in the Singing River*, 9.

12 Rebecca Button Prichard, *Sensing the Spirit: The Holy Spirit in Feminist Perspective* (St. Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 1999), 33.

13 Prichard, *Sensing the Spirit*, 33.

sending rain to water dry and parched lands, allowing flowers to bloom and trees to bear fruit as well as providing food for the animals.

The green pneumatology (doctrine of the Spirit) that I am trying to take account of found early articulations in the work of Hildegard of Bingen. Hildegard offered a nature-based model of the Spirit in contrast to the prevailing cultural metaphors, particularly linking the Spirit with *viriditas* (greening). In relation to the other two members of the Godhead, she spoke of the Spirit as “eager freshness” proceeding from both and sanctifying the “waters by moving over their face in the likeness of an innocent bird, and streamed with ardent heat over the apostles.”<sup>14</sup> Hildegard linked, according to Elizabeth Dreyer, the Spirit to the “flow of water on the crops with the love of God that renews the face of the earth, and by extension the souls of believers.”<sup>15</sup>

This green Spirit of creation is the red Spirit of Pentecost, the event commonly associated with the birth of the church. The red fire of the Pentecostal Spirit is an activity of the green Spirit renewing life and communities. If the Pentecostal event is the work of the green Spirit in the form of renewing and empowering fire (red), then the church is an event of the green Spirit. If the green Spirit has given birth to the church, then it thoroughly makes sense to imagine its offspring (the church) as having a green DNA. We can say, then, that the church is a community of the green Spirit, or the church is a community of the Earth-Spirit.

### **THE CHURCH: THE BODY OF THE GREEN SPIRIT, FOLLOWER OF JESUS**

If the Spirit is green and the church to which it has given birth is a community of the green Spirit, how shall we articulate a Christology that moves along with green pneumatology? For many years I had difficulty imagining how to link ecology and Christology, particularly in relation

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14 Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans. Mother Columbia Hart and Jane Bishop (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), 3.7.9: 418.

15 Elizabeth Dreyer, “An Advent of the Spirit: Medieval Mystics and Saints,” in *Advents of the Spirit: An Introduction to the Current Study of Pneumatology*, ed. Bradford Hinze and D. Lyle Dabney (Marquette, WI: Marquette University Press, 2001), 134. Also, see Mark Wallace, “Crum Creek Spirituality: Earth as a Living Sacrament,” in *Theology That Matters: Ecology, Economy, and God*, ed. Darby Kathleen Ray (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 127.

to the person of Jesus of Nazareth. I could easily connect Jesus's option for the poor and radical message of the reign of God but had difficulty relating it to ecology. As I recall, part of my difficulty was my predisposition to look for specific narratives in the life of Jesus that dealt directly with ecological matters. I am grateful for the works of scholars who have helped me acquire a theological lens for reading Christology ecologically. There are two theological moves involved in this christological reading.

The first move constitutes a pneumatological reading of Christology. Christology is the shape of the Spirit in Christ. The presence of Christ is the presence of the Spirit. The Christ in Jesus is the Spirit embodied in a specific gestalt. The New Testament portrays Jesus as one not only anointed by the Spirit but also porous and obedient to the leading of the Spirit. He became an embodiment of the Spirit. If the Spirit as we know it—the green Spirit present in creation and at Pentecost—is the same Spirit that found embodiment in Jesus, then what we have is a Jesus who embodied the green Spirit—the green Christ. The christic gestalt that Jesus embodied is the green sensibility. Jesus is the green Spirit enfleshed, bearing the consciousness of ecological sensibility and committed to the mission of restoring viridity to the earth.

The second move demands that we enlarge the coverage of the green Spirit's incarnation. The cosmos and the whole inhabited earth are the green Spirit's incarnation; it is Christ's incarnation. God the green Spirit is incarnate in the web of life. Incarnation (becoming flesh), argues Dennis Edwards, is not "restricted to humanity. The flesh that is embraced by God is not limited to the human. It includes the whole interconnected world of fleshly life and, in some way, includes the whole universe to which flesh is related and on which it depends."<sup>16</sup> So, if incarnation is not restricted to humanity, it cannot be restricted to one expression of humanity—Jesus of Nazareth. This is the christological point here: Jesus is significant not because he is the sole incarnation but because, as Christians, we see in him a God who "becomes a vital part of an ecosystem and a part of the interconnected systems that support life on Earth."<sup>17</sup>

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16 Dennis Edwards, *Ecology at the Heart of Faith: The Change of Heart that Leads to a New Way of Living on Earth* (Maryknoll, NY: 2006), 58.

17 Edwards, *Ecology at the Heart of Faith*, 59.

When we see incarnation in this way, and particularly Jesus of Nazareth, our apertures are prepared for a more radical and extensive way of reading Christology ecologically. The struggle and suffering of Jesus mirror the struggle and suffering of the green Spirit—the Spirit intrinsically connected to the earth. The Jesus who bore the mark of human sin mirrors the estrangement of humanity and the rest of creation. As Jesus bore the cross, so now the green Spirit bears the cross of our ecological sin.

If the whole inhabited earth is the context of our interpretation of the crucifixion, it is also the case with our interpretation of the resurrection. Resurrection symbolizes the resurrection of all flesh—the whole of creation, not only human flesh. If, in the crucifixion of Jesus, the whole earth is crucified, so Jesus’s resurrection mirrors the resurrection of the whole earth—the whole web of life. The resurrection of Jesus, the new Adam, or the firstborn of creation in the likeness of human being (Philippians 2:7) points to the deep longings of all earthlings (including humans) and the assurance that creation will experience redemption. Redemption is the resurrection promise for the whole of creation, not just for humanity. Sallie McFague puts it this way: “creation is not one thing and salvation something else; rather, they are revealed as scope and shape, as space and form, as place and pattern. Salvation is for all creation.”<sup>18</sup> Creation is the scope of salvation and the direction of salvation.

If the green Spirit is incarnate in creation in general and in Jesus of Nazareth in particular, what does this mean for the church, a follower of Jesus? As Jesus was fully porous and obedient to the green or earth Spirit, so must the church be a community birthed by the green Spirit and follower of the Spirit-led Jesus. If Jesus embodied green sensibility, so must the church. The church as the Body of Christ assumes an embodiment that reflects that of Jesus—an embodiment of the green Christ. Christian discipleship must then be evaluated considering how we live out the green Christ-gestalt.

### PRACTICING ECO-JUSTICE SPIRITUALITY

I started this essay by sharing my childhood memories of living near the river and ocean. The ocean has been formative to my identity. Now I am beginning to understand why, in my travels to some coastal towns and

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18 McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology*, 182.

cities of the world, I have been drawn to bodies of water. I cannot, however, enjoy my life in the diaspora with the continuing nostalgia of the ocean of my childhood. Diaspora life has taught me to find new geographies to nourish my soul. The wide expanse of Lake Superior (U.S. and Canada) has helped nourish my ecological sensibility—my connection to the vast expanse of water. Also, I cannot continue to live with the nostalgia of a once-upon-a-time rural place with abundant flora and fauna. It took me more than a decade to understand that diaspora—though an experience of uprooting—is not simply about being rootless; it is also about becoming “rooted” to the place where our journeys take us. With this realization I began to be connected to the world in my new neighborhood. I started to recognize and learn the names of some flowers, distinguishing the annuals from the perennials. What a delight! They lift my spirits when I am down. What a glorious morning it becomes when I am greeted by the morning glory! And there is the crocus that restores my focus while the ranunculus lures me away from the frenetic pursuit of the ridiculous. With this new attentiveness I learned to distinguish not only a peony from a daisy but also a coreopsis from a heliopsis. To my astonishment, I have become an amateur (French for “one who loves” or “for the love of”) gardener. A migrant like me has become connected to the place.

Yes, I have become native because I am seeing my rootedness and connection to my new place. This is happening because I have learned to be porous; I have learned to listen deeply. It was something I dreaded at first, so I tried to avoid deep listening by immersing myself in my work. Sensing what is present, feeling what is inside and around us, seeing what is unfolding before our eyes, smelling the aroma of the changing season, savoring the fruits of the earth, and listening to the manifold sounds of the universe all require opening ourselves to the world around us and in us. They require opening our hearts—our center—so we can hear, smell, feel, taste, and see the enfleshed Spirit. Opening our hearts is at the core of cultivating spirituality in general and an ecologically attuned spirituality in particular. It is about our willingness to be touched, to be vulnerable, to learn, and to be changed. In this spirituality of opening our hearts, says Joan Chittister, “all of life becomes a teacher and we its students. The listener can always learn and turn and begin again. The open can always be filled.”<sup>19</sup> And we can be changed and transformed.

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19 Joan Chittister, cited in J. B. McDaniel, “In the Beginning is Listening,” in *Theology That Matters: Ecology, Economy, and God*, 26.

Deep listening is transforming. It has transformed my life, and it has nourished my day-to-day life. In deep listening we are changed ontologically—we realize our ontological identity. As Jay McDaniel puts it, “In moments when we truly listen to others, the sharp dichotomy between subject and object falls away, and we realize that we are more connected to others than we might otherwise have imagined.”<sup>20</sup> This is true with my new understanding of the ocean. Beyond conventional interpretation, ocean does not separate but connects us. The ocean is a great connector. I am connected to the Pacific Ocean of my childhood even as I take a dip or fish in the Atlantic. We may not easily see this connection, but I am connected to the Pacific Ocean as I wade in the Mississippi River in Minnesota because its water flows to the Gulf of Mexico and joins with other oceans, including the Pacific. The ocean of my childhood is our ocean; it belongs to the world.

Historical geographer Epeli Hau’ofa puts it well: “The ocean unites us, and is our common heritage. . . . The sea is constantly flowing. No boundary can contain it, or stop its movement within a confine. The same body of water washes all shores. . . . The ocean is our supreme metaphor.”<sup>21</sup> Indeed, the ocean is our supreme metaphor, a metaphor for connection and interdependence. It circulates the Spirit-enfleshed body—the earth; it circulates in our bodies and in our cells. It is a metaphor for life, a metaphor for God. The strong waves of the ocean can be unforgiving, especially for the sailors caught in the eye of a storm. But, like the fisherfolk of my hometown, I continue to affirm with them, saying, “*Ang kalooy sa Dyos sama ka lapad sa dagat*” (God’s mercy is as wide as the ocean). Even if God’s mercy does not always bring us to safety, we know that in death or in life, we belong to God—the ocean. And, as a saying goes, “If God were an ocean, what is a shipwreck?”

Moreover, listening—deep listening—does not only lead us to the realization of our deep connections, but also to the task of transformation. Knowing our deep connections, we can embrace the pain of the earth and engage in transformative acts. Listening is not just wishing that something

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20 McDaniel, “In the Beginning is Listening”: 30.

21 Epeli Hau’ofa, “A Beginning,” *A New Oceania*, 131, cited in Nancy Victorin-Vangerud, “From Metaphors and Models to Maps: Thinking Theology with an Archipelagic Imagination,” in McDaniel, *Theology That Matters: Ecology, Economy, and God*, 82.

terrible would go away. A life of listening, as McDaniel puts it, “includes attunement to actuality and possibility: *to the way things are* and *to the way things can be in the future*, given the way things are.”<sup>22</sup> Ecocide is the prevalent way things are, but it is not the way of the future, and it should not be. We must muster courage to prevent our march toward ecological destruction.

### SEEDS OF GREEN, SEEDS OF HOPE

Ecocide is everywhere. The green Spirit’s enfleshed earthly presence is undergoing crucifixion; it is flowing with the blood of ecological violence. The green ecology is red in the blood of destruction; it is also red in the blood of those killed because of their commitment to a green tomorrow. The destructive power of predatory globalization has crushed those who have opposed its ecologically destructive projects. But out of the red blood of destruction a green seed of hope is rising. Out of the bloody cross has evolved a green cross. Like the blood of the early martyrs, the blood of the ecological martyrs of our times is like a seed—seed of a green tomorrow. Seeds of green tomorrow are sprouting and growing everywhere.

The ministries of various faith communities on ecological care are seeds of the green Spirit, and they are seeds of hope. The green Spirit is at work. Only the green Spirit can make the plants grow and bear fruits, but we have a role to play. We must align ourselves with the work of the green Spirit in planting and nurturing seeds of green spiritual praxis. Let us do our part and trust that the green Spirit will bless our efforts. We are not called to do everything but called to do something, which is to sew our piece into the larger quilt of our ecological agenda. Alone, we are powerless. But together, we can make a difference. In the words of Thich Nhat Han, “if we are a drop of water trying to reach to the ocean as an individual drop, we will surely evaporate along the way. To arrive at the ocean, we must go as a river.” Our faith communities are our rivers to arrive at the ocean of our green tomorrow.

#### About author

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<sup>22</sup> McDaniel, “In the Beginning is Listening”: 31.