
ECOLOGY AND MARY: AN ECOLOGICAL THEOLOGY OF MARY AS THE NEW EVE IN RESPONSE TO THE CHURCH'S CHALLENGE FOR A FAITH-BASED EDUCATION IN ECOLOGICAL RESPONSIBILITY

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The Church's interpretation of the current ecological crisis as a moral crisis is the catalyst for this essay, which proposes a newly constructed faith-based model for ecological dialogue and education. The exploration and reinterpretation of the traditional Church doctrine of the Virgin Mary as the new Eve provides a theme from which an ecological theology of Mary is constructed.

Papal and episcopal statements that call for a moral concern and response to the growing urgency of the ecological crisis are discussed in order to promote awareness of the involvement of the Church's leadership in this issue. Analyses and interpretations by scholars in the second century Church on the doctrine of Mary as the new Eve are presented and reinterpreted to create a viable model with the potential to nurture ecological awareness and responsibility in the contemporary Church.

*The construction of an ecological Marian theology is approached through review and analysis of the 1974 visionary pastoral letter of Pope Paul VI, *Marialis Cultus (To Honor Mary)*, the writings of Catholic feminist theologian and Sister of St. Joseph Elizabeth Johnson, Catholic Ecuadorian-American theologian Jeanette Rodriguez, and those of other major feminist, womanist, and liberationist theologians.*

This essay will discuss five themes: (a) The Moral Challenge of the Ecological Crisis; (b) Mary, The New Eve, the Source of God's New Creation; (c) Mary, All Have Called Her Blessed; (d) The Challenge of Mary as the New Eve to the Third Millennial Church; and (e) Constructing an Ecological Marian Theology.

THE MORAL CHALLENGE OF THE ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

The commitment of the leadership of the post-Vatican II Roman Catholic Church to the “duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the gospel” (Vatican Council II, 1966a, §4) has been actively demonstrated during the last 15 years by the leadership’s focus on public ecological concerns in light of Catholic social teaching, its appeal to all people of faith to bring a faith-based voice to the public ecological dialogue, and by its interpretation of the ecological crisis as a moral crisis. Beginning in 1990, pastoral statements on the moral nature of the escalating ecological crisis were issued by Pope John Paul II and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Pope John Paul II, in his January 1, 1990, message for the celebration of the World Day of Peace, stated that,

Many ethical values, fundamental to the development of a peaceful society, are *particularly relevant* to the ecological question. The fact that many challenges facing the world today are interdependent confirms the need for carefully coordinated solutions based on a morally coherent world view. (§2)

[Further], the seriousness of the ecological issue lays bare the depth of man’s moral crisis. If an appreciation of the value of the human person and of human life is lacking, we will also lose interest in others and in the earth itself....An education in ecological responsibility is urgent: responsibility for oneself, for others, and for the earth....Churches and religious bodies ...indeed all members of society, have a precise role to play in such an education. (§13)

In its pastoral statement *Renewing the Earth*, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) issued a call to “theologians, scripture scholars, and ethicists to help explore, deepen, and advance the insights of our Catholic tradition and its relation to the environment” (1998, §5). The bishops affirm that,

Above all, we seek to explore the links between concern for the person and the earth, between natural ecology and social ecology....The web of life is one. Our mistreatment of the natural world diminishes our own dignity and sacredness, not only because we are destroying resources that future generations of humans need, but because we are engaging in actions that contradict what it means to be human. Our tradition calls us to protect the life and dignity of the human person, and it is increasingly clear that this task cannot be separated from the care and defense of all creation. (§1)

This concern is not unique to Catholic circles. The Protestant scholar and

author Nash (1995), known for work in Christian ecological ethics and association with the Churches' Center for Theology and Public Policy in Washington, DC, has stated that

an ecologically reformed faith will probe deeply into all of its doctrinal themes in search of their ecological potential, and reinterpret these themes, as necessary, in ways that both preserve the historic identity of the doctrines and yet integrate ecological knowledge and values. (p. 13)

American eco-theologian Berry (1990) has made the pragmatic observation that "something more than the practical need for fresh water must be evoked if we are ever to have water with the purity required for our survival" (p. 33). Berry suggests that a commitment to ecological responsibility and integrity must be rooted in the Christian virtue of love, molded around Christian doctrinal teachings, and must demonstrate an ethic that accepts a belief in God's all-inclusive love for creation.

The concern and call of the Church's leadership has provided the Church with a rare and exciting opportunity to respond to its contemporary ecological concern through a creative re-envisioning of its most ancient story—the creation story. In a commentary on the Yahwist second creation account, Kselman (1988) states,

The water from the earth transforms the desert into a garden filled with the bounty of the earth; in the center of the Garden stands the tree of life, and the tree of knowledge. In Genesis 2:7 the human being is connected to the ground or soil from which he was formed. The human being's responsibility in Eden is to cultivate the garden and to obey the divine prohibition of eating from the tree of knowledge.

The naming of the animals by the human being (vv. 19-20) is indicative of human dominion over the created world (as in Gen. 1:28-30); it recalls the divine name giving in Genesis 1. The creation account reaches its climax in the creation of woman as a helping counterpart to the man: the creation of woman from man does not imply subordination, any more than the creation of man from the earth implies subordination. The subordination of woman to man is effected by the frustration of the divine intention of equality. (p. 88)

The Church's ancient story of creation and redemption contains within its truth a potential for a deeply ecological understanding. The biblical story of Adam and Eve as God's keepers of the garden and caretakers of the life in the garden is recapitulated in the Christian story of redemption through the new Adam and new Eve. The new Adam imagery is elucidated in 1 Corinthians 15:45:

Thus it is written, the first man Adam, became a living being; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit....The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven.

This teaching by the apostle Paul is a refutation against an assertion by the first century Jewish writer Philo who argued that,

The first Adam was made in the image of God (Gen. 1:27), while the second was made of dust and endowed with a “living soul” (Gen. 2:7). Paul corrects this sequence by stating that the “spiritual” Adam, Christ, did not come first but the one of dust....Just as we participate in the nature and image of the first Adam made of dust, so will we share in the nature and image of the final Adam, the life-giving Spirit. (Fiorenza, 1988, p. 1188)

MARY, THE NEW EVE, THE SOURCE OF GOD’S NEW CREATION

As early as the second century, the Church Fathers reasoned that since there was a new Adam, there also must be a new Eve. The new Eve, they concluded, is the Virgin Mary who, with Jesus Christ, the new Adam, participates in the work of God’s redemption of creation. In response to Eve’s transgression, the divine pronouncement is that “I [God] will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed” (Genesis 3:15).

In *Mary—The Second Eve*, Cardinal John Henry Newman wrote,

The Seed of the woman is the Word Incarnate, and the Woman, whose seed or son He is, is His mother Mary. This interpretation and the parallelism it involves seem to me undeniable; but at all events (and this is my point) the parallelism is the doctrine of the Fathers, from the earliest times; and, this being established, we are able, by the position and office of Eve in our fall, to determine the position and office of Mary in our restoration. (1982, p. 2)

By adducing passages from both Eastern and Western patristic writings, Cardinal Newman sought to prove the historical authenticity and integrity of the doctrine of Mary as the new Eve.

Recognized as the oldest reflection on the Virgin Mary outside of the New Testament writings, the rudimental teaching on the Virgin Mary as the second Eve, or new Eve, has its origins in writings of the second century Christian apologist Justin Martyr. Newman writes,

First, then, St. Justin Martyr (A.D. 120-165), St. Irenaeus (120-200), and Tertullian (160-240). Of these Tertullian represents Africa and Rome; St. Justin represents Palestine; and St. Irenaeus Asia Minor and Gaul;—or rather he represents St. John the Evangelist, for he had been taught by the Martyr St. Polycarp, who was the intimate associate as of St. John, so of the other Apostles. (1982, p. 3)

The parallelism that involves the images of the virgin Eve and the Virgin Mary was first concluded by St. Justin and he articulated it in the following way:

For Eve, being a virgin and undefiled, conceiving the word that was from the serpent, brought forth disobedience and death; but the Virgin Mary, taking faith and joy, when the Angel told her the good tidings, that the Spirit of the Lord should come upon her and the power of the Highest overshadow her, and therefore the Holy One that was born of her was Son of God, answered, “Be it to me according to Thy word.” (as cited by Newman, 1982, p. 3)

When Tertullian gives credence to the idea that death initiated by a virgin also would be reversed by a virgin, he echoes Justin’s conclusion:

For into Eve, as yet a virgin, had crept the word, which was the framer of death. Equally into a virgin was to be introduced the Word of God which was the builder-up of life; that, what by that sex had gone into perdition, by the same sex might be brought back to salvation. Eve had believed the serpent; Mary believed Gabriel; the fault, which the one committed by believing, the other by believing has blotted out. (as cited by Newman, 1982, p. 3)

Of the three early Church Fathers referenced by Cardinal Newman, St. Irenaeus is the one identified as having a direct link to the Apostles. This link is established through the “School of St. John the Evangelist in Asia Minor” (Newman, 1982, p. 6). Newman connects the ante-Nicene School of St. John the Evangelist with the source and widespread promulgation of the doctrine of Mary as the new Eve. Newman asks,

What length of time would it take for such a doctrine to have extended, and to be received, in the second century over so wide an area; that is, to be received before the year 200 in Palestine, Africa, and Rome. Can we refer the common source of these local traditions to a date later than that of the Apostles, St. John dying within thirty or forty years of St. Justin’s conversion and Tertullian’s birth?...Add to the concordant testimony of these two Fathers the evidence of St. Irenaeus, which is so close upon the School of St. John himself in Asia Minor. (1982, p. 6)

In his treatise *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus writes,

Mary the Virgin is found obedient, saying, "Behold Thy handmaid, O Lord; be it to me according to Thy word." But Eve was disobedient; for she obeyed not, while she was yet a virgin. As she, having indeed Adam for a husband but as yet being a virgin...becoming disobedient, became the cause of death both to herself and to the whole human race, so also Mary, having the predestined man, and being yet a Virgin, being obedient, became both to herself and to the whole human race the cause of salvation....For, whereas the Lord, when born, was the first-begotten of the dead, and received into His bosom the primitive fathers, He regenerated them into the life of God, He Himself becoming the beginning of the living, since Adam became the beginning of the dying. Therefore also Luke, commencing the line of generations from the Lord, referred it back to Adam, signifying that He regenerated the old fathers, not they Him, into the Gospel of life. And so the knot of Eve's disobedience received its unloosing through the obedience of Mary; for what Eve, a virgin, bound by incredulity, that Mary, a virgin, unloosed by faith. (as cited in Newman, 1982, p. 4)

Irenaeus stated further:

As Eve by the speech of an Angel was seduced, so as to flee God, transgressing His word, so also Mary received the good tidings by means of the Angel's speech, so as to bear God within her, being obedient to His word. And, though the one had disobeyed God, yet the other was drawn to obey God; that of the virgin Eve the Virgin Mary might become the advocate. And, as by a virgin the human race had been bound to death, by a virgin it is saved, the balance being preserved, a virgin's disobedience by a virgin's obedience. (as cited in Newman, 1982, p. 4)

With the strength of Irenaeus' testimony, Cardinal Newman argues that the strong witness of Justin, Tertullian, and Irenaeus is "'A three-fold cord' which as the wise man says 'is not quickly broken'" (Newman, 1982, p. 6).

The preceding extracts from the patristic writings represent that which Newman refers to as the "rudimental teaching" (1982, p. 2) of the Fathers on Mary as the new Eve, the Mother of all living. The essential theme as codified by St. Jerome, "by a woman death, by a woman life" (as cited in Newman, p. 8), was transmitted and enlarged upon by subsequent early Church leaders, and it has been reaffirmed in the modern Church by its inclusion in the Vatican Council II document, *Lumen Gentium*, which states the following:

[By] the grace of almighty God, [Mary] served the mystery of redemption. Rightly, therefore the holy Fathers see her as used by God not merely in a passive obedience. For, as St. Irenaeus says, she, “being obedient, became the cause of salvation for herself and for the whole human race.” Hence in their preaching not a few of the early Fathers gladly assert with him: “The knot of Eve’s disobedience was untied by Mary’s obedience. What the virgin Eve bound through her unbelief, Mary loosened by her faith.” Comparing Mary with Eve, they call her “the mother of the living,” and still more often they say: “death through Eve, life through Mary.” (1966b, §56)

Pope John Paul II, affirming his own deep devotion to Mary, adopted as his papal motto *Totus Tuus* (translated as, I am completely yours, O Mary). He writes,

Each of us must understand that such devotion not only addresses a need of the heart, a sentimental inclination, but that it also corresponds to the objective truth about the Mother of God. Mary is the new Eve, placed by God in close relation to Christ, the new Adam. (1994, p. 213)

It is Mary’s mystical motherhood of God and her partnership with Christ, the new Adam, that gives birth to God’s new creation.

MARY—ALL HAVE CALLED HER BLESSED

PATRIARCHAL MARIOLOGIES AND THE SUBORDINATION OF WOMEN

In *Truly Our Sister, A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints*, Catholic feminist theologian Johnson (2003) presents a strong critical view of the early Church’s hierarchal patriarchy and its perception of women. Specifically, Johnson’s work engages and dialogues with the dogma, the attitudes, and the resulting practices of the early Church whereby women were marginalized and deemed to be of lesser significance than men within the scheme of creation. In Johnson’s view, “patriarchal mariologies function to subordinate women” (2003, p. xvi). The sharp parallelism between Eve and the Virgin Mary has served to fragment and objectify all women, and to project onto their lives an overlay that lacks the depth, complexity, and the reality of all that it means to be fully human.

Identifying the patristic Eve-Mary parallelism as the source of the problem, Johnson makes the observation that the patriarchal assessment of Mary’s perfection as a woman “functions paradoxically to disparage all other women” (2003, p. 23). An example of this fact is provided in an excerpt from Tertullian’s *De Cultu Feminarum*:

Do you not realize that you are each an Eve? The curse of God on this sex of yours lives on even in our times. Guilty, you must bear its hardships. You are the gateway of the devil; you desecrated the fatal tree; you were the first to betray the law of God; you softened up with your cajoling words the one against whom the devil could not prevail by force. All too easily you destroyed the image of God, Adam. You are the one who deserved death; because of you the Son of God had to die. (as cited in Johnson, 2003, p. 24)

Since in the view of the patriarchal dogma Mary stands alone and above the others of her sex, Tertullian's use of the images of Eve and Mary in his invective against women demonstrates an active nurturing of the misogynist seeds, which were already present in the larger socio-cultural context in which the very early Church was planted. Sawyer (1996) states that the belief in Eve's responsibility for introducing sin into the world can be found in Christian writing dating from the New Testament period and writes,

The first evidence we find...is in Paul's letter to the Corinthians: "But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ" (2 Cor. 11.3). This observation of Eve's vulnerability later becomes a pronouncement of her guilt: "Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor" (1 Tim. 2.14). The argument for female subordination based on the order of creation is now overtaken by the belief that woman is the originator of sin. This one passage from a short epistle became the foundation text in Christian theology about women and their role and status in the church. In it the figure of Eve is of central importance: she is the first sinner and she is also the embodiment of all womankind. (p. 153)

A woman was objectified either as a "symbol of virtue or...as the originator of sin" (Johnson, 2003, p. 50)—not as a person in her own right. Shaped in the minds of the Fathers, Mary not only becomes "an extremely useful means of domesticating women and others" (p. 9), but the model of a passive, submissive, virginal Mary also cultivates and affirms a pervasive attitude of male superiority, which extends to the earth itself.

In *Women, Earth, and Creator Spirit*, Johnson (1993) opines,

I propose to explore the thesis that the exploitation of the earth, which has reached crisis proportions in our day, is intimately linked to the marginalization of women...Within a sexist system the true identity of both women and the earth are skewed. Both are commonly excluded from the sphere of the sacred; both are routinely taken for granted and ignored, used and discarded, even battered and "raped," while nevertheless they do not cease to give birth and sustain life. (p. 2)

OTHER FEMINIST, WOMANIST, AND LIBERATIONIST MARIAN VOICES

Johnson and other feminist theologians have joined their voices with liberationist theologians and others of the global community in a powerful crescendo that claims their right to speak with their own voices reflecting their own existential reality. Their voices reflect the reality of people who have experienced marginalization within a society which compromises those who are perceived as inferior and as lacking significant moral and intellectual resources through which to contribute to and participate in the leadership and decision-making process of the governing establishment.

The term womanist, borrowed from the African American author, Walker, as used in her book *In Search of Our Mothers' Garden*, informs a "theology rooted in the experiences of women of African descent" (Ross, 1998, p. 43). Womanist theology is distinguished from feminist theology in its primary concern with the effects and expressions of global racism and economic disadvantage among African American, African, and other poor women of color. It connects with the work of Black (male) liberation theology in its task to forge theological understanding from the sidelines of racism. It disassociates itself from Black (male) liberation theology in its inclusive focus on gender (female) liberation within the African American church, family, community, and the society at large (Thomas, 1998).

When speaking about a primary aspect of the patriarchy's model of Mary that constitutes its ideal of womanhood—that of the submissive handmaid—the importance of speaking with one's own voice and choosing one's own words to convey an existential reality is highlighted by observations made by African American womanist theologians Martin, Williams, Copeland, and Grant.

Martin (1990) considers the use of the word "handmaid" in the Gospel of Luke (1:38) to be problematic in that the word *doulos/doule*, which is translated as "servant," or "handmaid," literally means "slave." With a supportive view, Williams (1993) argues that African American slave women, used as plantation mammies, were commonly subjected to sexual exploitation by the plantation slave masters. Consequently, it is difficult to believe that slave women would have relished the use of the term "handmaid" as descriptive of a relationship with God. Copeland's view is that Christianity, as taught on the plantation to slaves, gave rise to a dispirited resignation among the slaves "by inculcating caricatures of the cardinal virtues of patience, long-suffering, forbearance, love" (Copeland, 1993, p. 122). In response to Copeland's view, Johnson observes that "the more compliant the woman, the better" (2003, p. 27).

The symbol of the servant, as a Christian model is, even when applied to Jesus, a motif that contains ambivalence, according to Grant (1993). Because servanthood generally has been socially devalued and degraded, as a Christian model, it becomes a moral and spiritual liability, according to Grant. Instead of servanthood, Grant offers discipleship as a model of spiritual integrity for African American women. Feminist theologian Ross (1998) expresses a similar view, stating that the “servanthood of Christ as a model can serve an important purpose for those in positions of power” (p. 83), but, with womanist theologians, agrees that it is a model fraught with moral ambiguity for African American women and for other groups whose histories include societal marginalization.

Creating and presenting new ways of thinking and speaking about Mary has been the work of liberation theologians in Latin America, Africa, and in other global communities where political, economic, and social justice issues have been compromised. The model of a liberation Mariology is the text of Mary’s prophetic song, the *Magnificat* (Luke 1:46-55). Johnson credits Catholic feminist theologian Ruether with “one of the most significant interpretations” of the *Magnificat* and writes,

Here with her declaration that God casts down the mighty from their thrones and lifts up the lowly, Mary proclaims the saving power that enters history to reverse the present order of power and powerlessness. As a woman from among the poorer classes of a colonized people, she herself “represents the oppressed community that is to be lifted up and filled with good things in the messianic revolution.” Her story embodies God’s preferential option for the poor and challenges economically advantaged people to be converted to their cause. (2003, p. 36)

Mary as a liberation model is a principal actor and participant in the envisioned new paradigm and a recipient of its socially radical benefits. She is “allied with the struggle of poor people, especially women, for justice and peace” (Johnson, 2003, p. 41). The *mujerista* theology of Aquino and Isasi-Díaz explores Mary’s image not only as liberated, but also as liberating for Hispanic/Latina women who struggle against gender, ethnic, and class bias (Johnson, 2003). The perspective of Isasi-Díaz also has been a focal point in Ross’s (1998) book *Extravagant Affections: A Feminist Sacramental Theology*. Isasi-Díaz,

who stresses the centrality of family (*la familia*) for Latina women, is concerned to understand the family within its social, cultural, and historical context. Women have found *la familia* to be the place where *Latina* women are “agents of our own history,” where “we can claim a historical role within space

and time.” Similarly, for womanist theologians, family emerges as central. Because many African-American families have suffered from the disastrous and lingering effects of slavery, family is not a romanticized ideal, as it tends to be in so many treatments of “the family,” especially by the religious right. Rather, it stands as both a source of strength and as an arena of struggle. (Ross, 1998, p. 128)

As a result of lay leadership work with Mexican Americans in the Roman Catholic community of Oakland, California, Ecuadorian-American theologian Rodriguez encountered and documented the empowering spiritual presence of Our Lady of Guadalupe within the community, and, in scholarly research, “discovered a theological and psychosocial implication—Our Lady of Guadalupe provides them with a spiritual form of resistance to the sociopolitical negation of Mexican-American women” (1994, p. xxi). As a cross-cultural figure, Our Lady of Guadalupe is ambiguous in her representation, and, according to Rodriguez, she presents “polemic difficulties” (p. xxi). However, the gift of empowerment that Guadalupe brings to Mexican Americans is not that of overt political activism, but that of self-acceptance and self-value. Rodriguez asks, “What could be more empowering to a people who have been systematically and repeatedly negated than acceptance of their dignity and humanity?” (p. xxi).

Mexican and Mexican-American women, as in other Western societies, have been cast in two feminine images that are reflective of the “disobedient Eve” or the “virginal Mary” models. Through literature that records the historical events surrounding the colonial conquest of Mexico, two female types emerge:

traitor and mistress of Cortés in the person of Malinche, or that of Our Lady of Guadalupe, pure and passive, who prepares the way for humankind salvation. [Typically,] women are viewed as unworthy of confidence, and as violated, submissive, passive, and even masochistic. This degradation of the feminine image in Mexican culture, and the view of women as untrustworthy and traitorous, can be traced back to the story of Malinche....Many writers, both Mexican and foreign, have made this one woman, Dona Marina (La Malinche) the symbolic object of all their negative feelings about the Conquest and mestizaje. (Rodriguez, 1994, p. 73)

During the 16th century, Our Lady of Guadalupe visited the marginalized and oppressed native people of Mexico, as one who was compassionately aware of their vulnerability. As Mary of Nazareth proclaimed in her prophetic song, “God has lifted up the lowly” (Luke 1:52), and writes Rodriguez, “embraces [and reclaims] that which the world has rejected.

Guadalupe...offers God's loving embrace, not just for Mexicans and Mexican-Americans alone, but for [all] the rejected people of the Americas" (1994, p. xxii).

In addition to the feminist, womanist/mujerista, and liberationist perspectives of Mary's image, Johnson's (2003) research in *Truly Our Sister* offers several other creative, multicultural, feminist typologies of Mary, which also more adequately convey the experiential reality of the religio/spiritual lives of women. These typologies include the work of "Asian theologians Chung Hyun Kyung and Marianne Katoppo," whose perspectives render Mary "as a prophetic woman and fully liberated human being in Korean and Indonesian contexts, respectively" (Johnson, 2003, p. 42). Other feminist typologies include the views of Jegen, Grey, and Noone. Johnson notes that,

Carol Frances Jegen edits a book of essays, *Mary According to Women*, which presents the fruit of an entire festival built around Marian themes, including her significance for the afflicted and those who work for justice and peace. Mary Grey calls for a new discourse of motherhood that would honor the birthing energies in Mary and the rest of women, while Patricia Noone pens a beautiful literary reflection on Mary's relations to herself and others that culminates in claiming her as our sister. (2003, p. 42)

THE DIVERSE EXPERIENCES AND THE CONFLICTING REALITIES OF WOMEN IN THE FIRST CHRISTIAN CENTURIES

A critical view of women's lives within the first century Greco-Roman socio-cultural context also provides valuable insight toward a reconstruction of the experiential reality of Mary of Nazareth as a poor, first century Jewish woman. While the patriarchal polarization of the female image into either the Eve or Mary model has its origins in the way women were viewed, as related through biblical literature and non-biblical literature dating from the Greco-Roman period, an analysis of the socio-cultural attitudes surrounding the identity and place of women during the first century will disclose an intricate web of diverse experiences.

Sawyer (1996) brings a broad, interdisciplinary approach to the study of women and religion of the Greco-Roman period in a book entitled *Women and Religion in the First Christian Centuries*. Analyzing the religious lives and experiences of the ancient women, Sawyer seeks to reveal the inherent social and political implications as they are reflected in the gender roles and expectations within the societal context. Sawyer's approach to the topical research challenges the position of the patriarchy from which the critical

analyses of women's lives and experiences tend to be fabricated in such a way as to become mere reflections that appear through male writings. By challenging this traditional methodology, Sawyer makes a contribution to the more fluid process of the issue of contemporary gender theory.

Contemporary debate stipulates the development of "gender roles in relation to one another either complementarily or hierarchically" (Sawyer, 1996, p. 3). Therefore, any study of women and religion has to be a study of gender and religion, and inclusive of male factors that impact the expression and experience of women. The creation of a spectrum, bounded by the male and female factors, provides contemporary gender theorists with an instrument that allows for a flexibility that accommodates divergence and categorical fluidity.

The relative academic disciplines of anthropology, psychology, philosophy, history, sociology, and biological sciences formulate contemporary gender theory by considering the Aristotelian notion of a gender specific "essential nature" versus the Platonian idea of social and cultural construction: shaped by a combination of "conscious and unconscious" external elements. By synthesizing the concepts of "essential nature" and "social construction," Sawyer (1996, p. 7) promotes the spectrum idea whereby the diversity and complexities of the experience of gender, and with its inclusion of the two polarities allows for the existence of difference without prescriptions for behavior.

Sawyer (1996) reconstructs the religious and social contexts within which women lived in the first century. Within the broader Roman society, women within the Greek, Hellenistic, Roman, Judaic, and Christian communities were "at the heart of domestic life, overseeing male servants and slaves, and responsible for the education of their sons and daughters" (p. 17). The dissatisfaction of Roman women with older forms of marriage in which total subjection to the husband was expected led to the "general abandonment of these types of union by the third century BCE in favor of 'free marriage'" (p. 21). This type of female emancipation enabled women of the late Republic and Empire to "cultivate and develop interests outside the home, although, they always operated from that context" (p. 21).

Religious identity and practice for women in Judaism involved the observance of rituals associated with the home, "practices that made a home a Jewish home, and which instilled in children from their youngest years their own Jewish identity" (Sawyer, 1996, p. 36). Lacking the autonomy of their Roman counterpart, Jewish women belonged either to their fathers or their husbands, as did their dowries. Virginity was highly prized; separation and seclusion of women during menstruation and after childbirth was practiced both in Hellenistic society and in Judaism. Presenting supportive argu-

ments from the writings of Sirach, Philo, and Josephus, Sawyer makes the observation that “both Hellenism and Judaism were essentially patriarchal in theory and practice, and both shared similar fears and assumptions concerning women’s nature, and in particular their sexuality” (p. 40).

Sawyer turns to the work of Fiorenza (1983) in order to frame the questions that would help to uncover information regarding women’s functions and roles within the early Christian communities. The area of Fiorenza’s work that is deemed invaluable to this study is the contribution toward the understanding of the “the long-standing traditions of the Hellenistic world, and the evolving situation of Roman society” (Sawyer, 1996, p. 45). It is through the analysis of this information that Sawyer is able to identify and distinguish the currents of variance within the Jewish and Christian communities—currents which ultimately become strong enough to produce diversity and plurality in the actual lives and experiences of women and in the societal concept of womanhood.

Describing the place of women within Judaism, Sawyer (1996) states that

it would seem that Judaism, unlike the majority of the cults of the Greco-Roman world, excluded women not only from being active in the rituals of sacrifice and duties relating to the cult, but actually segregated them from the men observing the ritual, and the male priests performing it. (p. 74)

However, this assumption, writes Sawyer, might be called into question through an archeological find—an inscription from Tell el-Yahudiyyeh in Egypt, the ancient city of Leontopolis. “On the inscription, dated 7 June 28 BCE, is written, ‘Marin, priestess [*hierissa*]’” (p. 74). Brooten (1982) suggests:

Could it be that the Jews of Leontopolis, living in a country in which there were women priests, had come, over the course of time, to accept as natural the cultic participation of Jewish women who claimed to be descendants of Aaron? (p. 88)

Shaped and reshaped by the impact of its diaspora experiences, Judaism’s acquired open nature became attractive to many Gentiles. Questions regarding the mingling of Gentiles and women among Jews in diaspora synagogues yield much speculation in the study, especially in light of references by Philo of Alexandria to a monastic type of Judaism practiced in Egypt by the *Therapeutae* (male) and the *Therapeutrides* (females). Further, there is reference to certain inscriptions, dating from circa 27 BCE to “as late as sixth century CE” in which women are given such titles as “head of the synagogue, leader, elder, mother of the synagogue, priestess”

(Brooten, 1982, pp. 73–74). Sawyer mentions that this is not new knowledge and that, in fact, it has been known for some time; however, not everyone interprets it in the same way. Other views are that the titles may have been honorific, reflective of some contribution from a wealthy woman.

That which Sawyer (1996) states as a certainty is the fact that the Jewish home was “considered to be the nucleus of the religion and primarily the domain of women” (p. 81). It was the religious practices that were centered within the home that actively involved the participation of women. These practices situated under the domestic domain of women also provided the earliest religious teaching to the children within the domestic setting.

The experiences and expectations of Jewish women of the first century may be described in terms of conflicting realities. Judaism’s encounter with Hellenism carried a different set of implications than Judaism’s encounter with Roman culture. “Here women can be wealthy in their own right, use their wealth to support their synagogues, and take up powerful positions within them” (Sawyer, 1996, p. 90). However, as Sawyer notes, it is the restrictive Greek attitudes toward women that seem to be the overriding influence on Jewish attitudes toward women. Sawyer suggests that this

may be due in part to the more frequent periods of open hostility that existed between the Jews and Rome, e.g., the expulsion of the Jews from Rome in the first half of the first century CE, the war against Rome in Palestine in 66-70 CE, and the final revolt in 135 CE. (p. 90)

Sawyer (1996) observes that,

The contemporary scholar of early rabbinic Judaism Judith Wegner [notes] that after 70 CE when Judaism was creating a new identity for itself out of the ashes of the devastation of the temple...the rabbis did not produce a different type of Judaism....They could have created a utopia that abolished gender-based distinctions, like Plato in his Grove of Academe or Paul in his vision of the Kingdom of Christ in Galatians 3:28. (p. 90)

The emergence of Christianity as a religious movement having its roots in one of the expressions of rabbinic Judaism is thoroughly analyzed for its historical, social, and political implications for society in general and for women and other marginalized people in particular. The new egalitarian community that was founded by Jesus was made possible within the realm of Spirit. As the Spirit was bestowed upon Jesus at his baptism, so it was bestowed upon all who accepted his teaching and followed his way. As an egalitarian community, the followers of Jesus were challenged to let go of the rigid codes of the patriarchy and to reverse their perception of hierarchy:

“whoever wishes to be first among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all” (Sawyer, 1996, p. 93).

Sawyer’s historical, socio-cultural analysis and utilization of a contemporary gender theory methodology allow for the fluidity of categories regarding gender roles, thus making it possible to accommodate the many differing religious roles assumed by ancient women in their religious expressions and practices. Reflecting on this study of “divergent images of women and their experiences in the context of ancient religion” (1996, p. 158), Sawyer says “a similar diversity is being encountered and engaged by contemporary women.” Her thought is that women are “shaping” their own religious experiences, and that “their symbols reflect what is distinctive to their varied experience of what constitutes being female on the fluid spectrum of gender” (p. 158).

THE CHALLENGE OF MARY AS THE NEW EVE TO THE THIRD MILLENNIAL CHURCH

The challenge of Church leaders to find a traditional doctrinal theme capable of being reinterpreted ecologically can be answered by the second century Church dogmatic teaching that identifies the Virgin Mary as the new (second) Eve. When the Church identifies Mary as the new Eve, it gives recognition to the presence of the same attributes and responsibilities given the first Eve.

As Adam’s helpmate, Eve also had a part in Adam’s responsibility for the upkeep and care of the garden. Their task as caretakers was that of nurturing, maintaining, and sustaining the harmonic balance of the life communities within the garden. In *Eco-Spirituality*, Cummings (1991) wrote:

In the caretaker interpretation of “subdue the earth” (Gen. 1:27), human beings are people who care about the earth and its resources, and care for the whole network of interdependent beings. For a caretaker the issue is not mastery or control but harmony. A caretaker does not impose order from outside but from within, guarding the existing integrity of the whole interdependent system. (p. 69)

According to Genesis 3:20, “the man named his wife Eve, because she was the mother of all living.” Biblically, Adam’s recognition of his wife as Eve, which in Hebrew means elemental source and nurturer of life, occurs prior to the conception of their first child. Through an intuitive knowledge, Adam was able to recognize and understand the natural role of his helpmate as that of life source. Also recognizing that that which brought forth life was also responsible for its nurture, Adam called his wife Eve, “because she was the mother of all living” (Genesis 3:20).

With Adam, Eve has the specific role and responsibility of bringing forth life, and nurturing all life communities of the garden. Eve's role as elemental life source implies a universal relationship between all life communities and her nurturing responsibility may be understood as that of providing sustenance and harmonizing balance between the diverse life communities within the garden.

Relationship, responsibility, redemption, and renewal are the essential qualities of which the Virgin Mary's image as the new Eve is composed. When ecologically re-envisioned, the image of the Virgin Mary as the new Eve has the potential to inspire and nurture a deep ecological sensitivity and to motivate the practice of ecological responsibility. Just as Eve was recognized by Adam as the mother of all living, the source and nurturer of all life, so was Mary recognized by the early Church Fathers as the new Eve, the source and nurturer of God's new creation.

An ecological reading of Luke 1:38 and 1:46-55 reveals and supports a natural and social ecological sensitivity, as called for in the pastoral letter by the U.S. Bishops.

When Mary said "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word" (Luke 1:38), she made herself totally available to God. Her acceptance of God's word into her mind and heart made it possible for it to receive flesh through her body. Mary's uncompromising "yes" to God is critical in the Church's recognition of Mary as its most excellent model of faithful discipleship. Her action demonstrates the required surrender of the hearts and minds of those who would participate in God's work of redemption and renewal in the world. When God's word is accepted into the hearts and minds of the people of God, it finds expression in the world through their moral and ethical sensitivity and practice. In the preface of the liturgy of *Holy Mary, the New Eve*, Mary is celebrated as the "first fruits of your [God's] new people, [and] the first disciple of the New Law" (NCCB, 1992a, p. 125).

The knowledge that the "Word" and seed of God's new creation was to be incarnated through her flesh inspired great reverence and devotion in Mary. She proclaimed, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior" (Luke 1:46-47). John Paul II, in his 1990 World Day of Peace message, encouraged the new people of God to be open to the inspiration of God also when he said,

The aesthetic value of creation cannot be overlooked....The commitment of believers to a healthy environment for everyone stems directly from their belief in God the Creator....Respect for life and for the dignity of the human person extends also to the rest of creation, which is called to join man in praising God. (§14)

As the new Eve, the mother of all living, Mary's motherhood encompasses all creation, connecting all life in a relationship of interdependence and mutuality. Ecologically, this image provides sacred and warm ties of universal kinship between all of earth's life communities.

Liturgically celebrated as "the new earth, in whom justice dwells" (NCCB, 1992b, p. 98), Mary heralds the arrival of God's new creation when she envisions and affirms the coming transformation characterized by a restorative balance to the natural and social ecology of creation's communities through the incarnation of God's Son. She proclaims, "He has scattered the proud in their conceit...He has brought down the mighty from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty" (Luke 1:52-53).

Mary's universal motherhood permits the new people of God to recognize and affirm solidarity with all human communities. Catholic social teaching makes the assertion that

our faith calls us to work for justice; to serve those in need; to pursue peace; and to defend all the life, dignity, and rights of all our sisters and brothers. This is the call of Jesus, the challenge of the prophets, and the living tradition of our Church. (NCCB, 1990, p. 1)

The science of ecology is concerned with the maintenance of the natural relationship between all of earth's communities of life and their environment. Berry (1990) understands ecology to mean not only "the relation of an organism to its environment, but also as an indication of the interdependence of all the living and non-living systems of the earth" (p. 41). Mary's image as the New Eve, the mother of all living, provides a very powerful sacred and warm image that is supportive of the scientific and ethical concerns of ecology. It should follow that reverence for Mary, as the mother of all living, must also inspire a respect for all life.

CONSTRUCTING AN ECOLOGICAL MARIAN THEOLOGY

In an address given at the Los Angeles Religious Education Congress during the year 2000, Johnson made the observation that "the image of Mary has allowed the Christian imagination to think very creatively and very differently about understanding Mary" (2001, p. 1). Johnson challenges her listeners by stating that "it's now our turn, i.e., we the generation today. How should we consider Mary in the 21st century?" (p. 1). To seek an answer to this question, Johnson framed her address around the February 2, 1974, pastoral let-

ter *Marialis Cultus* (To Honor Mary) by Pope Paul VI (2000), simultaneously leading the Religious Education Congress participants on a journey of reflection through Marian spirituality, while providing them with a framework for constructing a millennial Marian theology.

Paul VI wrote:

Certain practices of piety that not long ago seemed suitable for expressing the religious sentiment of individuals and of Christian communities seem today inadequate or unsuitable because they are linked with social and cultural patterns of the past....Thus our own time, faithfully attentive to tradition and to the progress of theology and the sciences, will make its contribution of praise to her whom according to her own prophetic words, all generations will call blessed (cf. Lk 1:48). (2000, Introduction)

As is well known, the piety of the faithful and their veneration of the Mother of God has taken on many forms according to circumstances of time and place, the different sensibilities of peoples and their different cultural traditions. Hence it is that the forms in which this devotion is expressed, being subject to the ravages of time, show the need for a renewal...to emphasize the elements that are ever new and to incorporate the doctrinal data obtained from theological reflection and the proposals of the Church's magisterium. (2000, §24)

Paul VI determined that a re-envisioned theology of Mary would need to have five features in order to qualify as good Marian theology. Such a theology would need to be biblical, liturgical, ecumenical, anthropological, and theological.

Rooted in the testimony of Scripture, an ecological theology of Mary is biblical in that it draws from the ancient biblical story of creation and redemption. By consenting to give birth to God's Son, through whom redemption would be accomplished, Mary is rightly recognized as the mother through whom God would begin a new creation. Recapitulating the ancient story of biblical creation, the Fathers of the emerging Church developed a view of Mary that helped them to articulate her role in God's work of redemption of creation. Mary, through her incarnation of the new Adam, becomes the new Eve, the source of life for God's new creation and, therefore, the mother of all living.

Ecology, the branch of science concerned with the interrelationship of organisms and their environments, has a correlation with Mary's motherhood; through the universal motherhood of Mary, the new Eve, there is an interrelationship that exists between all life communities. All life communities, therefore, are interdependent—each needing to sustain the other and to be sustained by the other.

“A creative Marian theology should be in tune with the liturgical sea-

sons. Of special importance is Advent, where Mary joins the Church in expecting the Messiah, and Pentecost, the coming of the Spirit to the Church” (Johnson, 2001, p. 3). An ecological theology of Mary has liturgical integrity because of Mary’s motherhood to Jesus Christ, the founder of the Church. The seasons of Advent and Pentecost are seasons of birth and new beginnings. During Advent, the Church awaits, with joyful expectation, the anticipated birth of Jesus. Born of Mary, Jesus Christ will bring redemption and healing to the earth. Because she participates in God’s work of redemption, Mary not only is the mother of Jesus Christ, creation’s redeemer, but she also is the mother of the redeemed, new creation. As the mother of God’s new creation, she is God’s new Eve, the mother of all living.

Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit to the Church, also celebrates the birth of the Church. Through the presence and witness of Mary and Jesus’ disciples, the Holy Spirit gave birth to the Church. Thus, God’s work of redemption was begun through Mary with the birth of Jesus Christ, and it continues through the Church, given birth by the Spirit through the life and witness of Mary and the disciples.

Mary’s pre-eminent motherhood is celebrated in the penitential rite of the liturgy of *Holy Mary, the New Eve* with the opening prayer, “Lord our God, you chose the Blessed Virgin, formed by the Holy Spirit, as the first fruits of the new creation; grant that we may reject the old ways of sin, embrace wholeheartedly the new life of the Gospel, and honor faithfully the new commandment of love” (NCCB, 1992a, p. 196; Vatican Council II, 1966a, §56).

“A creative Marian theology should [be ecumenical, having] the potential to unify Christian Churches rather than being a source of division between Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and Protestantism” (Johnson, 2001, p. 3). Motherhood, in Jungian psychology, is understood

as a force that feeds and protects all humans, is the most important of all the “archetypes” that lurk in humanity’s collective unconscious; [consequently], any religious practice that fails to answer this need [for motherhood] will fail to satisfy its followers. (“A Mary for All,” 2003, p. 26)

Barker, a Hebrew scholar whose work involves establishing links between Judaism and early Christian practices, has observed that

much of the poetry dedicated to Mary, comes from...the “wisdom tradition” of the Jewish religion. This takes the form of passages in which wisdom is perceived as a form of feminine divinity....Barker cites a passage in the book of Jeremiah where Jewish exiles in Egypt are scolded for continuing to offer cakes, libations, and incense to the “queen of heaven.” (“A Mary for All,” 2003, p. 26)

Further, not only does Christianity grant the Virgin Mary a unique relationship with God, but Islam does so as well. Muslims consider Mary to be the “most honored woman in Islam...the only one to have an entire chapter named after her in the Koran” (“A Mary for All,” 2003, p. 25).

An ecological theology of Mary, therefore, has both ecumenical and interfaith potential. Primarily, as history’s foremost Jewish mother, Mary’s unique relationship with God is acknowledged and revered cross-culturally; secondly, the desire for a healthy environment, economic and social justice is cross-cultural and at the foundation of every religious tradition. A God-centered understanding of creation and of the environment makes possible a respect and reverence for creation. Ultimately, the respect and reverence for creation will lead to the revelation that human societies are not separate from creation, but are situated within creation, mutually interdependent one with the other, as with all life.

Oikos, the Greek root of such words as ecology, economics, and ecumenical (*eco* reflects the Latin translation of the Greek *oikos*) is translated as household, vicinity, habitat, or environment. On its most basic level, the organized effort to raise ecological questions may be understood as an effort to address the ecological crisis with the household of creation, transcending cultural and religious categories. As the new Eve, Mary’s motherhood connects all life communities—natural, biological, and the human—as members of one household, where the health and survival of each is dependent upon the other.

Anthropologically, “a creative Marian theology must take into consideration the changing role of women in society” (Johnson, 2001, p. 3). Johnson notes that the call for a creative Marian theology by Paul VI takes into account his observation that

as a consequence of woman’s equality and co-responsibility with man in the legal, political, social, and cultural spheres, some people are becoming disenchanted with devotion to the Blessed Virgin...[They] are finding it difficult to take as an example Mary of Nazareth because the horizons of her life...seem rather restricted in comparison with the vast spheres of activity open to mankind today (2000, §34).

It is noteworthy that Gabriel does not leave Mary until she responds to his divine news, thus providing her with the options available through choice. Far from being subservient or passive in character, Mary decisively chooses to become an active participant in God’s work of redemption. An ecological theology of Mary would give recognition to Mary as the new Eve, through whose offspring right relationship and balance would be restored to the

world of creation. From “the first fruits of God’s new creation” (NCCB, 1992a, p. 196; Vatican Council II, 1966b, §56) comes forth a child through whom all creation would be renewed.

Feminist, womanist, and liberationist theologians have spoken of Mary’s perpetual virginity as a symbol for the autonomy, integrity, independence, and self-determination of a woman whose identity is not defined with reference to a man. Through the force of her presence as virgin and mother according to Cuneen (1996), Mary is rendered as a “woman of power, undeniable beauty and compassion” (p. 14).

Through the powerful combination of woman and Spirit, new possibilities are always conceived and born into the world of experience. Situated within the integrity of her virgin-motherhood, Mary provides a dynamic model which contains anthropological merit and toward which women and men can aspire.

“A theologically re-envisioned Marian theology would continue to have God at the center [of creation,] with Mary placed in relation to Christ and to the Church” (Johnson, 2001, p. 3). Devotion to Mary as the mother of God’s new creation and, in the words of the Fathers, mother of all living, should result in a faith-based respect on the part of the human community for all the living things that share Earth’s biosphere and which, for the most part, are at the mercy of the human community. Ecologically, Mary’s new Eve image symbolizes the one source from which all life flows and through which all life is linked.

As Mary rejoiced in God’s new creation growing within her womb, so too should the new people of God rejoice in the natural goodness, balance, and beauty of the Earth’s habitats. Given the ecological signs of the times, guarding and preserving the natural balance of Earth’s ecosystems are part of their discipleship commitment and their devotion to Mary as the mother of all living.

Since the time of the early Church Fathers, the writings of solitary visionaries and visionary scholarly religious communities have celebrated the power and beauty of Mary’s image as the new Eve. Twelfth century mystic Hildegard of Bingen celebrated Mary’s primal motherhood in a chant entitled *O Viridissima Virga* (O Greenest Branch):

Hail, o greenest branch
who sprang forth in the airy breeze
of the prayers of the saints.

So the time has come that
you flourished
in your boughs,
hail, hail to you,

because the heat of the sun radiated
 in you like the aroma of balm.
 For in you bloomed the beautiful
 flower which scented all parched
 perfumes.

And all things have been manifested
 in their full verdure.
 Whence the skies set down dew on the
 pasture, and all the earth was made
 more joyful because her womb produced
 grain, and because the birds of Heaven
 built their nests in her.
 Then the harvest was made ready for
 Man, and a great rejoicing of
 banqueters, because in you,
 o sweet Virgin, no joy is lacking.

All these things Eve rejected.
 Now let there be praise to you in the Highest.
 (as cited in Wright, 2000, p. 67)

In the choral refrain of an anonymous song from the 15th century, Eve's original sin is transformed into Gabriel's salutation.

Nova, Nova 'Ave' fit ex 'Eva' –
 News, news, "Hail" is made from "Eve." ("Nova, nova," 1968, p. 66)

The text of a contemporary Marian hymn, "Mary, Woman of the Promise," by Fleischaker (1995) captures and conveys several ecological themes of the re-envisioned new Eve and was selected as the winner in a regional Hymn Society competition seeking contemporary Marian hymns.

Mary, woman of the promise; vessel of your people's dreams:
 Through your open, willing spirit waters of God's goodness streamed.

Mary, song of holy wisdom sung before the world began:
 Faithful to the Word within you, as you bore God's wondrous plan.

Mary, morning star of justice; mirror of the Radiant Light:
 In the shadows of life's journey, be a beacon for our sight.

Mary, model of compassion; wounded by your offspring's pain:
 When our hearts are torn by sorrow, teach us how to love again.

Mary, woman of the gospel; humble home for treasured seed:
 Help us to be true disciples, bearing fruit in word and deed. (Fleischaker, 1995,
 p. 123)

Perhaps the answer to Johnson's (2001) question—"how should we consider Mary in the twenty-first century" (p. 1)—can be sought through the proposal of a second question: can the gift and legacy of the second century Church's image of Mary as the new Eve become a meaningful contemporary Marian model?

Given the critical assessment of the ecological crisis as a moral dilemma by the Church's present leadership, an ecologically re-envisioned new Eve is a model that third millennium people of faith cannot afford to ignore. It is a model that communicates connection and relationship, teaches and nurtures ecological sensitivity and responsibility toward all life communities, and it has the capacity to revitalize Marian connection and devotion.

An ecologically re-envisioned Mary as the new Eve breathes new life and new meaning into this powerful and beautiful image. Reverence for Mary as the new Eve can inspire an openness to the presence of the Holy Spirit, nurture a respect for all living things, and motivate a compassionate response to the needs of life wherever present.

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