

ECOWOMANIST REFLECTIONS: DEEP SEEING BEAUTY AS EARTH

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Ecowomanism begins with the contemplative step of noticing Earth, the Earth within ourselves, our sacred bodies, minds, and spirits—and also the sacredness of Earth in each other as interconnected beings. How we relate to Earth and to one another matters. So, the gleaning process for developing Earth-honoring faiths, ethical systems, and ecowomanist spiritual practices that honor Earth—and thus reshape our worldviews, cosmologies, and theologies—are important, and many times transformative.

Ecowomanism works to glean Earth wisdom for the sake of environmental justice by honoring the theories and methods of climate science research and by studying the spiritual practices and religious orientations of Indigenous women and women of African descent. Ecowomanism observes how these women understand climate justice work, strategize, and practice communal care to enhance environmental justice work globally. For example, consider the work of Wangari Maathai and the Green Belt Movement, the ecowomanist writings of Alice Walker, or the intersectional environmentalism of Leah Thomas. The ethical models these and other women offer us through their life work and spiritual activism informs the work and practice of ecowomanism. Gleaning ways

of relating and working collaboratively, and studying the ways that collectives move mirrors the ways we notice ecosystems organize and relate to each other. This too is a part of the goal of ecowomanism—to shape Earth-honoring ethical ways of being that are highly relational, and that take seriously a recognition that Earth is sacred. Birthed through the awareness of our oneness and interbeing, ecowomanist scholarship is interdisciplinary. It crosses channels of theory, practice, environmental science, life work, scholarship, spirituality, religious orientation, collaborative leadership, and community organizing practiced by women of African descent together for the sake of Earth justice.



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Key companions in a time of climate change include ecowomanist scholarship, conceptualization, and praxis that foregrounds the lives, voices, and perspectives of Indigenous women and women of African descent. This work also weaves together the art of contemplative noticing, intersectional analysis, climate science, and ecowomanist methods in ways that invite vital conversations in religion and ecology, and specifically Christian environmental ethics.

Foregrounding the voices of women of color, Indigenous women, and women of African descent is a key part of ecowomanism. This inherently brings a corrective lens to the normative claims and categories used within environmental ethics that tend to silence women of color and the impact that climate injustice has on their bodies, minds, spirits, communities, and connections with Earth. All

beings carry the sacredness of Earth within them, and this principle is expressed through a number of Indigenous religions and spiritualities. As an approach to environmental ethics that applies anti-racist, anti-colonial lenses, non-hierarchical and non-dual and interreligious approaches, ecowomanist theory and praxis is liberating. It points to the freedom of all beings from the impact of environmental degradation, exploitative practices against Earth, and theories that negate the worth and value of living beings. Rather, ecowomanism points to ways of knowing that celebrate connection, promote understanding within the web of biodiversity, and slow us down long enough to notice spiritualities and religious orientations that, together with scientific research, help provide guidance on how to live justly in a time of climate change.

By recognizing the wisdom of Earth embedded within the spiritual and religious practices of many Indigenous women and women of African descent, as they honor their eco-memory and Earth experiences, we see more clearly a path into the first step of ecowomanist method—to honor experience. This method consists of seven steps, namely: 1) honoring experience and eco-memory, 2) critical reflection on experience and eco-memory, 3) conducting womanist intersectional analysis, 4) critically examining African and African American history and tradition, 5) engaging transformation, 6) sharing dialogue, and 7) taking action for Earth justice.

For the field of religion and ecology, ecowomanism is a breath of fresh air. It interrupts the normative categories of Christian environmental ethics, specifically by shaking up hierarchical patterns and constructing new methods and non-dual approaches that invite a plethora of approaches to climate justice. Noting the silencing of women—and especially women of African descent—ecowomanism insists on intersectional analysis in its method. That is, in addition to using a race-class-gender analytical lens when examining examples of environmental racism, ecowomanist intersectional analysis incorporates a climate justice lens that includes exploration into the root causes of ecocide and ecological suffering. It critiques the logics of domination that can show up through practices of white supremacy and hinder the work of Earth justice, even as we strive to come together cross-culturally and interracially to practice environmental justice. If, for example, most of the scholars writing about Christian environmental ethics are white, Christian, cis-gendered men emerging from a particular school of thought, and seeking even if unconsciously to protect the racial, cultural, and gender privilege of their voices in the field, then the future of the field of religion and ecology will likely look the same as it has in the past.

Ecowomanism interrupts this with a spirit of fierce compassion, recalling the words of Audre Lorde, that “The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s

house.”¹ In an age of anthropocentrism, wherein violence is used as a tool of oppression and religious ideas reinforce hierarchies, ecowomanism stands and speaks boldly, calling for these practices to be shed for the sake of Earth justice and social justice. Instead, we must take up collaborative tools to recast a vision for ecological and racial reparations. We must act on this vision so that through this blessed work can emerge a sense of living justly in Earth community, with freedom and ecological hope becoming possible.

¹ Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," in *Sister Outsider* (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1984), 110.