

12

Feminist Ecologies in Religious Interpretation: Australian Influences

Anne Elvey

As this volume attests, internationally significant Australian publication in ecological philosophy can be traced to at least as early as 1973 with Val and Richard Routley's (later Val Plumwood and Richard Sylvan) book *Fight for the Forests*. By the 1990s, Australian ecological and ecological feminist philosophy was at the forefront of international scholarship in this area, with Plumwood offering a careful and incisive analysis of dualism (or hyper-separation) as a logic of colonization (1993: 41–68). Although the term *écoféminisme* was likely coined by French feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne in 1974 to express the interconnectedness between oppression of women and ecological destruction, I suggest that ecological feminism did not appear explicitly in biblical interpretation until the 1990s, and remains marginal in the field of biblical studies (see also Elvey forthcoming a, b).

This chapter charts a recent history of feminist interpretation of biblical religion and an evolving, but uneven, relationship between feminist

A. Elvey (✉)

Monash University, Clayton, VIC, Australia

University of Divinity, Melbourne, VIC, Australia

and ecological thinking in biblical studies. While ecological thinking in biblical religion was expressly manifest in Australia in the 1990s (Byrne 1990; Kelly 1993; Edwards 1995), a feminist influence in ecological biblical interpretation was less evident until the emergence of the Earth Bible Project in Adelaide, South Australia, with its first major publications appearing in 2000. This Project was also influenced by indigenous cultures particularly in Australia. The active work and publications of Elaine Wainwright, a contributor to the Earth Bible Project, also demonstrate the influence of indigenous perspectives from Australia, Aotearoa (also called New Zealand), and Oceania, on the development of ecological feminist hermeneutics in biblical religion. The first half of this chapter describes the early history, and the second part explores Wainwright's writings as indicative of how the postcolonial contexts in Australian and New Zealand have evolved some complex intersections of religion, race, and ecological thought.

Feminism and the Bible

First-wave feminism in North America gave rise to *The Woman's Bible*, a feminist rereading of biblical texts, under the editorship of Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1993 [1895–1898]), who saw biblical criticism as essential for women's liberation and argued that the Bible reflected the words of *men* as much or more than it did any divine word. While recognizing that Christian women within the Abolitionist struggle became, through the movement, aware of their own oppression under patriarchy, Stanton was critical of the exclusion of women from 'universal' suffrage. She acknowledged support for women's suffrage from Abolitionist and former slave Frederick Douglass (Stanton 1897). Such tensions and connections between women's suffrage and antislavery movements resonate in twentieth-century engagements between liberal feminist and other liberationist and justice movements. Similar tensions appear in critical conversations between Jewish and Christian feminist biblical scholars and in postcolonial biblical studies. For feminist biblical scholars, complexity surrounds not only the exclusion of women's voices and experiences beyond a dominant white, liberal majority in the Northern

Hemisphere, but also the ambiguity of reception and use of that collection (or book) of books, the Bible, that has sometimes inspired emancipation.

While many feminists rejected biblical religion as irredeemably patriarchal (Daly 1985; Hampson and Ruether 1987), second-wave feminism in North America also gave rise to now classic texts such as Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (1983), Rosemary Radford Ruether's *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (1983), and Phyllis Trible's *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (1978). These publications were concerned with rethinking the maleness of the divine, the construction of women, and the recovery and reconstruction of elided female histories in biblical religion. The wider context involved feminist reclamation of female deities (e.g., Starhawk 1989 [1979]; Gimbutas 1974) and the concept of a divine becoming in the feminine (Irigaray 1986). The reconstructive reclamation of the Goddess was a recovery of a woman-nature affiliation counter to the patriarchal denigration of both, but potentially reinscribing the problems of identifying women with nature, and continuing to leave men outside nature (see Rigby 1998: 151, 2001). In biblical religion, feminist reclamation of female divinities raised interest in goddesses such as Asherah and the figure of divine Wisdom (in Hebrew, Hokmah; in Greek, Sophia) (e.g., Brenner 1992; Hadley 1997).

Trible writes, '[b]y feminist I do not mean a narrow focus upon women, but rather a critique of culture in the light of misogyny' (1978: 7). Trible (1984) also critiques what she calls 'texts of terror'—biblical narratives of violence toward women—addressing the stories of Hagar (Gen 16:1–16; 21:9–21); Tamar (2 Sam 13:1–22); an unnamed woman raped, tortured, murdered, and dismembered (Judg 19:1–30); and the daughter of Jephthah, sacrificed because of her father's vow (Judg 11:29–40). Later, Norman Habel (2009, 2012) extends this notion to ecological texts of terror (e.g., Gen 6:11–13) and to a memorialization of contemporary scorched places. These critical interpretations become modes of memorial that both wound the interpreter and open to a shift in culture. Both cultural critique and an orientation to cultural change are crucial in ecological feminist work (Plumwood 2002).

Around the time Plumwood's *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (1993) appeared, Schüssler Fiorenza published her critical analysis of kyriarchy, a term she coined to express 'a different understanding of patriarchy, one which does not limit it to the sex/gender system but conceptualizes it in terms of interlocking structures of domination [i.e., kyriarchal, elite male, relations of ruling (*Herr-schaft*)]' (1992: 7–8). The term kyriarchy had an explicit link to biblical literature through the word *kyrios* (lord), both paterfamilias and master of slaves, also used as a title for the divine. Also published in 1992, Radford Ruether's *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* linked human violence, religious symbols, and ecological destruction, so that patriarchy and biblical religion were reexamined not only for their domination of women but equally for their Earth-destroying impacts, with a focus on healing Earth.

Schüssler Fiorenza's (1983) influential early work in biblical studies argued that all representations of Christian origins are constructions, so that feminists need to reconstruct such origins in ways that are empowering for women. In contrast to Plumwood, Schüssler Fiorenza's (1992) focus on kyriarchy did not extend beyond human dominance of other humans. Feminist reconstructive projects listened for the voices, experiences, and agencies of women. Similarly, current ecological reconstructive projects harken to the voices, experience, and modes of being and behaving of other than humans. But the difference is immense, in that human languages themselves are unsettled by the otherness of the communications of other than humans. In an ecological frame, Deborah Bird Rose and her coauthors explain that it is important, 'to resituate the human within the environment, and to resituate nonhumans within cultural and ethical domains' (2012: 3).

The Earth Bible Project

Twentieth-century Christian writing in response to ecological destruction can be traced at least as early as American Lutheran theological Joseph Sittler's *The Care of the Earth* (2004 [1964]). The question of relationship between biblical religion and environmental crisis came to prominence with the publication of Lynn White's 1967 essay, 'The

Historical Roots of the Ecological Crisis', which identified the attitudes and worldviews of biblical religion, particularly in its traditions of interpretation, as a root cause of ecological destruction. As I discuss elsewhere, a majority of biblical scholars ignored the critique; for them contextual approaches to the biblical text which focused on patriarchy, ecological destruction, or colonial oppression were of secondary importance to the study of the meaning of the biblical text itself. Some scholars, however, adopted and expanded White's criticism even to the extent of seeing the Bible as effectively toxic to Earth. More often, however, the response was apologetic, and scholars were at pains to highlight eco-friendly parts of the biblical corpus (Elvey 2005: 15–16).

By the 1990s, several Australian biblical scholars and theologians were beginning to hear an Earth 'cry' so to speak, and were writing on occasion with an ecological focus (see Byrne 1990; Kelly 1993; Edwards 1995). As the decade neared a close, the first major international collaborative research project in ecological hermeneutics in biblical studies, the Earth Bible Project, took shape in Adelaide, South Australia, under the chief editorship of Norman Habel. The project team was in conversation with feminists, ecologists, and a number of indigenous peoples from Australia and overseas, and produced a succession of key publications in the field. First, they developed six ecojustice principles: intrinsic worth, interconnectedness, purpose, voice, mutual custodianship, and resistance, and then three further ecological hermeneutics—suspicion, identification, and retrieval (Habel 2000, 2001; Habel and Wurst 2000, 2001; Habel and Balabanski 2002; Habel and Trudinger 2008).

In the context of the Earth Bible Project, Heather Eaton warns that '[f]or many, to read the Bible from an anti-woman and anti-Earth perspective is to enjoy a comfortable read' (2000: 70). In the third Earth Bible volume, Laura Hobgood-Oster highlights the ambiguous promise of biblical Wisdom traditions for women or Earth; then in counterpoint she emphasizes the agency of Earth and its capacity to 'subvert' and 'recontextualize' readings of the biblical texts themselves (2001: 45–46). The Earth Bible principles of voice—'Earth is a subject capable of raising its voice in celebration and against injustice'—and resistance—'Earth and its components not only suffer from injustices at the hands of humans, but actively resist them in the struggle for justice'—affirm

Earth's agency (Habel 2000: 24). Scholars applied these principles to readings that recovered or reconstructed biblical texts from Earth perspectives (Habel 2000; Habel and Trudinger 2008).

Vicky Balabanski, an Adelaide-based biblical scholar and member of the Earth Bible Team, sees the Earth Bible Project as 'a trajectory of feminist scholarship' (2007: 146). She writes: 'My own trajectory of feminist/post-patriarchal scholarship has found expression by means of the "Earth Bible" project' (146). The project had a collaborative strategy, she recalls, and aimed at reading 'the Bible in solidarity with the Earth, which is defined as an inclusive term encompassing the whole web of life, the total ecosystem, of which humanity is a part' (146).

Over the first decade of the twenty-first century, the Earth Bible eco-justice principles were refined especially through the Ecological Hermeneutics Program Unit of the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) Annual Meeting, a major conference of biblical scholars from the United States and across the world, held over four days in November each year in the US. SBL also holds an annual International Meeting in July-August outside the US, and for several years the international meeting also had an Ecological Hermeneutics Program Unit, but no longer does. This chapter turns now to one of the key members of the Ecological Hermeneutics Program Unit, to explore the way her feminist and ecological interpretive practices have developed over 25 years.

Wainwright: Feminism and Ecology to Multidimensionality

In 1991, Elaine Wainwright, an Australian biblical scholar, feminist theologian, and Sister of Mercy, published an article, 'A Metaphorical Walk through Scripture in an Ecological Age' (1991b), although for many years her feminist work was more prominent than her ecological work. She admits that feminism is 'a relative newcomer' to the scholarly world especially in biblical studies (Wainwright 1991a: 9). Over the next two decades, Wainwright's published work assisted not only with the consolidation of ecological interpretations within biblical studies, but she was able to bring these into dialogue with postcolonial implications.

Crucial for any ecological reading praxis in colonized spaces such as Australia or New Zealand has been (and continues to be) a postcolonial—or, better, decolonizing—ethic. This possibility subsequently emerged for Wainwright in the context of her professional work and appointment as inaugural head of school and professor of theology at the University of Auckland. She held this role from 2002 to 2014 where she worked with Maori and Pacific Islander colleagues. Their exchanges were formalized in the Oceanic Biblical Studies Association which first gathered in 2010 in Auckland. Wainwright has been active in solidarity with women theologians of the Pacific and, in addition, as president of the Society for Asian Biblical Studies. This cross-cultural collegial praxis across Asia and the Pacific has shaped the multidimensional nature of her hermeneutics (Wainwright 2005).

Wainwright became part of the global academy of feminist and biblical scholars, in which she is both a mentor and conversation partner to many, and actively responsive to postcolonial and other critiques of her work. For example, African biblical scholar Musa Dube comments on Wainwright's first book that her 'gender inclusive reading is a remarkable feminist achievement in its clarity, its creativeness, and its persuasiveness, for it foregrounds the centrality of women to Matthew's story without underplaying the patriarchal and androcentric cores that contain them' (2000: 177). In Australia, Anne Pattel-Gray (1995, 1999) has challenged non-indigenous feminist theologians to recognize their own colonial 'social location' and privilege (Wainwright 1998: 9).

The origins of Wainwright's dialogue with representatives from disenfranchised communities who are particularly affected by environmental problems are evident in her publications from 'A Metaphorical Walk' in 1991. It opens with a poem by Australian Aboriginal poet, Oodgeroo, called 'Time is Running Out' which refers to the violence of mining as rape of the Earth (Wainwright 1991b: 273). Wainwright then reflects on the 'rate of extinction of species' and speaks of an 'urgent call coming from the earth itself' (274). The article develops an ecological context in relation to the cosmological focus of Thomas Berry, whose exposition of a New Story in contrast to the Old Stories of biblical religion and modernist mechanistic science remains popular today, especially among Roman Catholic religious, female and male.¹ Wainwright's article goes on to

suggest a mode of ecological reading of texts modeled on feminist and liberationist approaches, appealing in particular to Schüssler Fiorenza's feminist hermeneutics of suspicion and reclamation. In a feminist frame the former applies to biblical texts a suspicion of androcentric perspectives and language and patriarchal interests; the latter, using creative imagination, shapes a 'new' story in dialogue with metaphors and images recovered from the biblical text. Wainwright's 1991 'Walk' is wide-ranging, critiquing progress and authority, separateness and territoriality and championing interconnectedness and interrelatedness. Drawing on Carolyn Merchant (1990 [1980]), Wainwright comments that 'at the heart of ecofeminism lies the principle of *inclusion*' (1991b: 281, emphasis in original; see also, 1991a: esp. 30–32).²

The second part of Wainwright's 'Walk' applies hermeneutics of suspicion and reclamation across a range of biblical texts and symbols, picking up on the anthropocentrism of Genesis 1; the possibilities in the practices of Sabbath for resting the land; the centrality of the land in the Hebrew Bible; the creative spirit of the female figure of Wisdom; the table companionship of Jesus; and the central symbols of cross and resurrection as critiquing 'any understanding of God or humanity in hierarchical or dominant terms' (1991b: 292). She then suggests the work of a diverse range of thinkers such as: Hildegard of Bingen; Daly River theologian, teacher, and artist Miriam Rose Ungunmerr; poet Judith Wright; and curator Rosemary Crumlin, as other sources, in conjunction with contemporary ecological and cosmological science, for subverting anti-ecological thinking and practice. Wainwright's article concludes: 'we must engage in revolutionary praxis to stem the tide of time which is running out and shape a future yet to be imagined' (294).

While Wainwright's work in the 1990s had an occasional reference to ecological reading (e.g., 1997), it retained a predominantly feminist focus, with a sense of the possibilities for transformative reading inhering in the plurality of any text. Wainwright considered patriarchy as 'a multidimensional system' including 'humanity's domination of [with some hyperbole] the universe' (1998: 2). Describing a poetics, rhetorics, and politics of engendered reading, Wainwright (1998) occasionally brought ecological concerns into conversation with readings of the text that focused on genre, gender, and engendering new meaning. Noting that

the opening to the Gospel of Matthew recalls the Book of Genesis, and its genealogy of Earth and cosmos, Wainwright suggests that the rupturing of the patrilineage may also be an opening to an ecological kinship in response to ecological crisis (1998: 58).

Within the Earth Bible Project publications, Wainwright (2000, 2002) contributed essays to the first and fifth volumes, where she applied her deconstructive and reconstructive hermeneutics learned from feminism, together with a focus on voices of Earth and cosmos as voices resistant to the anthropocentrism of most biblical texts. She continued to read eco-feminist possibilities in the intertextual echoes of the feminine biblical figure of divine Wisdom. In the opening decades of the twenty-first century, Wainwright has been a leading contributor to the Ecological Hermeneutics Section of the Society of Biblical Literature Annual and International Meetings where the Earth Bible ecojustice principles were nuanced by the development of ecological hermeneutics of suspicion, identification, and retrieval, echoing but extending earlier feminist hermeneutics.

A Material Turn

In my ecological feminist reading of the Gospel of Luke, I draw on Gayatri Spivak's description of the pregnant body as 'prepropriative', and in Jacques Derrida's (1994) terms 'aneconomic', to explore critically in the biblical text a logic of gestation (Elvey 2005; Spivak 1993: 148; Derrida 1994: 7). This interpretation does not equate women with nature or Earth, rather it points to where the pregnant body, like the Earth, is necessary for many forms of animal life (Elvey 2003). At this point of similarity, pregnant bodies and Earth share a logic, and a mode, of being (a material givenness) that, already relational, unsettles distinctions between self and other and potentially resist problematic economies of exchange, especially such as occur within systems of capitalist consumerism (Elvey 2003, 2005). My subsequent work dovetails with new materialisms and also focuses on the materiality of texts as an important aspect of the ecological embeddedness of texts, their interpreters and their interpretations (Elvey 2004, 2010, 2011a, b). Wainwright and I have been in

dialogue in relation to this emerging focus on materiality which also informs her work (2006, 2012, 2016).

Wainwright (2006) incorporates an ecological hermeneutic when she traces the work of women as healers and subjects of healing in antiquity and applies this to her reading of women and healing in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. She develops a multidimensional hermeneutic in which feminist, postcolonial, and ecological aspects are intertwined. She builds on the work of philosophers such as Plumwood, feminist biblical scholars such as Schüssler Fiorenza, and her own earlier insights into the interrelatedness of patriarchal, kyriarchal, and hyper-separatist systems of oppression. For the ecological aspect of her multidimensional hermeneutic, Wainwright highlights attention to the material, 'to the actualities and the shifts and changes in the physical realities of women's lives in antiquity', including attention to the herbs, ointments, and oils used in healing practices; attentiveness to Earth as supplier of these material resources for healing; attentiveness to the body; and a consideration of space, particularly its colonization and gendering (2006: 18–23, see also 2003).

The focus on the materiality of healing is most pronounced in Wainwright's treatments of the various gospel versions of the woman anointing Jesus. Unlike most gospel stories apart from the narratives of Jesus' death, there are four versions of the story of a woman anointing Jesus, one in each of the canonical gospels (Matt 26:6–13; Mark 14:3–9; Luke 7:36–50; John 12:1–8). While the four stories carry significant differences of detail and emphasis, they share many commonalities, in particular the key elements of a woman, an anointing, ointment, and Jesus as the one who is anointed, as well as critical onlookers. To highlight the materiality and material agency of the ointment, Wainwright titles one paper, 'Unbound Hair and *Ointmented Feet*' (2008b; emphasis added). Moreover, in this article on Luke 7:36–50, a new thread enters the weave with an ecological focus on the woman's erotic actions as transgressive and both expressive of the principle of interconnectedness and potentially unsettling of the hyper-separations Plumwood (2002) describes (Wainwright 2008b: esp. 182–184, see also 2015).

An article on the anointing in Mark 14:3–9 focuses on the hermeneutic of identification—‘not [to] collapse difference but [to] allow for it within relationship’ through a ‘strong sympathetic or imaginative bond’ (Wainwright 2008a: 132). She proposes to identify with the *muron*, the ointment of healing, in its materiality, its being identified as a commodity, and the multiple interdependencies that lie behind its characterization in the text as ‘waste’. Drawing on British feminist ecotheologian Anne Primavesi’s notion of gift, Wainwright depicts the narrative of healing as a ‘gift event’, in excess of the economies that commodify and waste, rendering some poor and others rich. Primavesi’s (2000, 2003) conception of gift lacks the deconstructive edge of Derrida’s ‘aneconomic’ gift but offers a Gaia systems-oriented focus on gift as event. This might be extrapolated toward a material ‘grace’, or a gracious materiality (cf. Plumwood 2002; Rigby 2014). In Wainwright’s (2008a) article, the material agency of the *muron* is not yet fully articulated.

Attention to materiality and material space, noted above, however, becomes subtler in Wainwright’s later work where she takes up the notion of habitat (2009, 2012, 2013). ‘Habitat and in-habitants (the more-than-human)’, writes Wainwright, ‘are inseparable such that “habitat” can function as a key interpretive lens for reading ecologically’ (2012: 293). Habitat includes place but is more than place. Lorraine Code focuses on ‘habitat as a place to know’; she includes ‘the social-political, cultural, and psychological elements ... alongside physical and (other) environmental contributors to the “nature” of a habitat and its inhabitants, at any historical moment’ (Code 2006: 37; see also Wainwright 2012: 298). The linking of habitat and knowledge is particularly important. Humans and other creatures come to know what is sustaining, for example, in relation to the environment in which they live; this environ, or habitat, is not simply the geographic place but complex relationships of climate, sources of food, clothing and shelter, the power relations that affect these factors, and much more. Moreover, habitat both shapes and is shaped by humans (Wainwright 2012: 298). Habitat itself exercises material effect, indeed agency.

The exploration of ‘habitat’ in the reading of biblical texts is at least threefold: (1) the text encodes a habitat or habitats, often ignored by interpreters, which can be brought to the fore in ecological readings; (2)

the reader is always already embedded in a habitat or habitats; (3) a focus on habitat suggests an orientation toward ‘co-*habitat*-ion’ as ecological praxis (Wainwright 2012: 293). Wainwright (2013) employs this concept of habitat in the first of these three ways, in a reading of Matthew 15:21–28. In this text a Canaanite woman approaches Jesus asking for healing for her daughter, and a verbal contest ensues between the woman and Jesus with reference to dogs. Wainwright explores ways in which the agency and power of the hinterland of Tyre, the bread, and the dogs ‘push up’ (borrowing a thought from Rigby 2004) through the narrative, its setting, and its ‘metaphoric referent[s]’ (2013: 116). In a later work, while suspicious of the use of animals as metaphors, and drawing on Donna Haraway (2008), Wainwright (2016) evokes an intersection of respect and artistry, when other beings are used as symbols in a text. She describes the ‘carnal intertwining of sheep and people’ (2016: 119). Reading the story of the Canaanite woman, she writes: ‘Here, both Jesus and the woman have voice, bread links Tyrian and Jew and comes to represent the power to heal and *dogs, in their leaning toward their own materiality*, can enable Jesus to negotiate his own internal struggle to determine what is “word of God” and what is “human tradition” (15.6–9)’ (162, emphasis added).

Wainwright (2016) adopts a global or planetary understanding of Earth as habitat for humans, where Earth has its origins in the cosmos and humans live in (not on), are nurtured, mentored, and transformed by Earth in all its complex and diverse interrelatedness of presences, beings, and voices. Her aim is to read as an Earth being from within the habitat of Earth and to invite other biblical scholars and interested readers to undertake similar readings on her model. Local or given habitats, in their variety of aspects, influence readers’ identities before and as they come to read a text. Moreover, the multiplicity of habitats that influence reading and the complexity of the human cultures and histories that shape the situations of readers imply that ecological and postcolonial understandings of relationship to/in place are entwined. Further, habitat has more-than-human connotations; in relation to the text, the task is not only to identify, but more particularly to identify with, the other-

than-human creature and/in its habitat; it is this habitat which could be said to shape the 'voice' of the other creature much as human habitats shape human voices.

Such identification is at best an imaginative approximation to the experience of the other, given the potential for recolonizing the other. It is what Mark Brett describes (in another context) as 'kenotic hospitality' (2008: 197). For Rigby, engaging with the biblical flood narratives and Noah's ark—in a Derridean frame of 'unconditional hospitality' that extends to the other animal—such hospitality might be understood as counter-utopian (2008: 173; Derrida 2000: 25). In this frame, the ark (that uncanny and perhaps paradigmatic post-utopian habitat) 'models a form of "ecstatic dwelling", dwelling, that is, in exile in the company of more-than-human strangers, which is fast becoming the only kind of dwelling available on an increasingly uninhabitable earth, where ever more beings, human and otherwise, are destined to be rendered homeless' (Rigby 2008: 174).

The potential impact on the communities of the majority (sometimes called third) world makes this issue urgent. As Dube asks of Wainwright, have the imperialist aspects of the interpretation of the biblical text been recognized and critiqued sufficiently (2000: 179)? More generally, is a feminism focused on gender sufficient for a postcolonial feminist project of decolonization of imperial biblical ideologies? Following earlier critiques of Christian feminist anti-Judaism (e.g., Plaskow 1991), Jewish feminist New Testament scholar, Amy-Jill Levine (2004a, b), critiques aspects of Christian feminist and postcolonial biblical scholarship, for its unconscious reinscription of a Christian supersessionism, that is, the view that Christianity is superior to and has superseded or replaced Judaism, especially problematic in light of the violent history of anti-Judaism. In response to Jewish, indigenous, and postcolonial critiques, Wainwright has redeveloped her feminist hermeneutics beyond its liberal beginnings toward the multidimensional approach that interweaves feminist with postcolonial and ecological hermeneutics, and which privileges a form of ecological thinking (e.g., 1995, 1998: 122 n. 8, 2016: 37).

Conclusion

For Wainwright, ecological reading, like feminist reading, is oriented toward culturally transformative praxis. She writes:

Situating ecological reading within the context of ecological citizenship as a way of being in the world, of being a participating Earth-being, means that the end of this theoretical consideration is not an end nor a beginning but participates in the ongoing praxis of living ecologically responsible lives. Images, words, and stories can be transformative; they can arise from the Earth's body, but they will do so within the web of emerging ecological thinking as a new way of in-habiting Earth. (Wainwright 2012: 304)

Given Christian discourse of the 'new', especially in the notion of 'New' Testament and the eschatological hope of a 'new' or renewed creation, it is unsurprising that as a Christian feminist biblical scholar, Wainwright also refers to the 'new': a new story, a new way, for responding to the current moment. The appeal to the 'new' is commonplace in ecological spirituality broadly understood. Drawing on the biblical notion of *kairos*—a critical season, also the proper time—and on ecotheological applications of this notion to our own time, Rigby is wary of the 'idealist illusion that all we need is a "new story" to budge the entrenched socioeconomic and power-political interests that are keeping us on the path to catastrophe' (2015: 177). As Rigby writes, narratives alone are insufficient for forming attitudes and catalyzing actions; rather 'narratives and practices coconstitute one another' (2015: 177). For Wainwright the work of reinterpreting ancient texts is part of a commitment to contemporary more-than-human communities and their habitats.

Wainwright critiques theologies that focus on the 'truths of the past' and argues for context-based work, by communities of interpretation, where practices of interpretation shape communities (2005: 125–26). She writes that the 'complexity of our "being in the world" is recognized when one begins to examine the varieties of interpretive worlds constructed through memories, feelings, imaginations, thinking and action ...' (125). In her work, especially through her scholarly engagement with colleagues, students and movements of women in and beyond the

churches, especially in Australia, Aotearoa (New Zealand), and Oceania, Wainwright has developed her hermeneutic practice from a predominantly feminist ethic with occasional forays into ecological thinking to a genuine multidimensional approach (with entwined feminist, ecological, materialist, and postcolonial ethics), recognizing that ecological thinking is not simply an extrapolation of feminist or liberationist thinking but requires a shift of perspective (2016: 73).³ The current volume's focus on feminist ecologies rather than ecological feminism makes a strong claim for the feminist roots of, and in, ecological thinking and practice. As I have shown in relation to Wainwright's work, this link is evident in ecological biblical studies—both her own and the Earth Bible Project. But there are tensions, and ecological thinking and practice require a more-than-human frame of reference that challenges feminists to resist our own anthropocentrism.

Notes

1. In Melbourne such interest is represented by groups such as Earthsong (<http://earthsong.org.au/>) and the Ecology and Spirituality Centre, Glenburn (<http://www.edmundrice.org/glenburn.html>). In some respects, there is a gap between popular movements in ecological spirituality and academic work in ecological theology and biblical studies, similar to the gap between grassroots feminist theology and feminist theologians in Australia.
2. This principle, developed by Wainwright in a feminist context, is later taken up by Mercy sisters and biblical scholars Elizabeth Dowling and Veronica Lawson (2013) to suggest that women's inclusion as Eucharistic leaders is implied in the inclusive principle of creation presented at the end of the Gospel of Mark.
3. In 2015 Wainwright took up a position as Executive Director of Mission and Ministry, Institute of Sisters of Mercy Australia and Papua New Guinea, a position with a strong social and ecological justice focus. My chapter deals only with a selection of Wainwright's work. For a recent curriculum vitae and selected publications list, see [http://www.mercyworld.org/_uploads/projects/119-a30eaf1/user-assets/files/CV/CV_MIRP_E-Wainwright\(1\).pdf](http://www.mercyworld.org/_uploads/projects/119-a30eaf1/user-assets/files/CV/CV_MIRP_E-Wainwright(1).pdf)

Bibliography

- Balabanski, Vicky. 2007. Ecological Hermeneutics as a Daughter of Feminism: Reflections on the Earth Bible Project. *Women-Church: An Australian Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 40: 145–149.
- Brenner, Athalya. 1992. The Hebrew God and His Female Complements. In *The Feminist Companion to Mythology*, ed. C. Larrington, 48–62. London: Pandora Press.
- Brett, Mark G. 2008. *Decolonizing God: The Bible in the Tides of Empire*. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press.
- Byrne, Brendan. 1990. *Inheriting the Earth: The Pauline Basis of a Spirituality for Our Time*. Homebush, NSW: St. Paul Publications.
- Code, Loraine L. 2006. *Ecological Thinking: The Politics of Epistemic Location*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Daly, Mary. (1973) 1985. *Beyond God the Father: A Philosophy of Women's Liberation*. With an Original Reintroduction by the Author. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1994. *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*. Trans. P. Kamuf. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . 2000. *Of Hospitality. Anne Dufourmantelle Invites Jacques Derrida to Respond*. Trans. R. Bowlby. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Dowling, Elizabeth, and Veronica Lawson. 2013. Women, Eucharist, and Good News to All Creation in Mark. In *Reinterpreting the Eucharist: Explorations in Feminist Theology and Ethics*, ed. A. Elvey, C. Hogan, K. Power, and C. Renkin, 78–90. Sheffield: Equinox Press.
- Dube, Musa W. 2000. *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*. Danvers, MA: Chalice Press.
- Eaton, Heather. 2000. Ecofeminist Contributions to an Ecojustice Hermeneutics. In *Readings from the Perspective of Earth*, ed. N. C. Habel, 54–71. Earth Bible, 1. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.
- Edwards, Denis. 1995. *Jesus the Wisdom of God: An Ecological Theology*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.
- Elvey, Anne F. 2003. The Material Given: Bodies, Pregnant Bodies and Earth. *Australian Feminist Studies* 18 (4, July): 199–209.
- . 2004. Earthing the Text? On the Status of the Biblical Text in Ecological Perspective. *Australian Biblical Review* 52: 64–79.
- . 2005. *An Ecological Feminist Reading of the Gospel of Luke: A Gestational Paradigm*. Studies in Women and Religion 45. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press.

- . 2010. The Bible and the Earth: Toward a Materialist Ecohermeneutics. *Colloquium: The Australian and New Zealand Theological Review* 42 (2, Nov.): 131–150.
- . 2011a. *The Matter of the Text: Material Engagements Between Luke and the Five Senses*. The Bible in the Modern World 37. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press.
- . 2011b. The Matter of Texts: A Material Intertextuality and Ecocritical Engagements with the Bible. In *Ecocritical Theory: New European Approaches*, ed. A. Goodbody and K. Rigby, 181–193. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press.
- . forthcoming a. Ecological Feminist Hermeneutics. In *The Oxford Handbook of the Bible and Ecology*, ed. H. Marlow and M. Harris. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . forthcoming b. Some Possibilities and Tensions of Feminism and Ecological Criticism. In *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Approaches to the Hebrew Bible*, ed. S. Scholz. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gimbutas, Marija. 1974. *The Gods and Goddesses of Old Europe, 7000 to 3500 B.C.: Myths, Legends and Cult Images*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Habel, Norman C., ed. 2000. *Reading the Bible from the Perspective of the Earth*. The Earth Bible, 1. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.
- , ed. 2001. *The Earth Story in the Psalms and Prophets*. The Earth Bible, 4. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.
- , ed. 2009. *An Inconvenient Text: Is a Green Reading of the Bible Possible?* Hindmarsh, SA: ATF Press.
- , ed. 2012. *Rainbow of Mysteries: Meeting the Sacred in Nature*. Kelowna, BC: Copper House.
- Habel, Norman C., and Vicky Balabanski, eds. 2002. *The Earth Story in the New Testament*. The Earth Bible, 5. London: Sheffield Academic Press.
- Habel, Norman C., and Peter Trudinger, eds. 2008. *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics*. SBL Symposium Series 46. Atlanta: SBL.
- Habel, Norman C., and Shirley Wurst, eds. 2000. *The Earth Story in Genesis*. The Earth Bible, 2. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.
- , eds. 2001. *The Earth Story in Wisdom Traditions*. The Earth Bible, 3. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.
- Hadley, Judith M. 1997. From Goddess to Literary Construct: The Transformation of Asherah into Hokmah. In *A Feminist Companion to Reading the Bible: Approaches, Methods and Strategies*, ed. A. Brenner and C. Fontaine, 360–399. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.

- Hampson, Daphne, and Rosemary Radford Ruether. 1987. Is There a Place for Feminists in a Christian Church? *New Blackfriars* 68 (801, Jan.): 7–24.
- Haraway, Donna. 2008. *When Species Meet*. Posthumanities, 3. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Hobgood-Oster, Laura. 2001. Wisdom Literature and Ecofeminism. In *The Earth Story in Wisdom Traditions*, ed. N. C. Habel and S. Wurst, 35–47. The Earth Bible, 3. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.
- Irigaray, Luce. 1986. *Divine Women*. Trans. S. Muecke. Sydney: Local Consumption.
- Kelly, Anthony. 1993. *An Expanding Theology: Faith in a World of Connections*. Sydney: E. J. Dwyer.
- Levine, Amy-Jill. 2004a. Response. *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 20 (1): 125–132.
- . 2004b. The Disease of Postcolonial New Testament Studies and the Hermeneutics of Healing. *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 20 (1): 91–99.
- Merchant, Carolyn. 1990 [1980]. *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution*. Republished with New Preface. San Francisco: Harper and Row.
- Pattel-Gray, Anne. 1995. Not Yet Tiddas: An Aboriginal Womanist Critique of Australian Church Feminism. In *Freedom and Entrapment: Women Thinking Theology*, ed. M. Confoy, D. Lee, and J. Nowotny, 165–192. Melbourne: Dove.
- . 1999. The Hard Truth: White Secrets, Black Realities. *Australian Feminist Studies* 14 (30): 259–266.
- Plaskow, Judith. 1991. Feminist Anti-Judaism and the Christian God. *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 7 (2, Fall): 99–108.
- Plumwood, Val. 1993. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. London: Routledge.
- . 2002. *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason*. London: Routledge.
- Primavesi, Anne. 2000. *Sacred Gaia: Holistic Theology and Earth System Science*. London: Routledge.
- . 2003. *Gaia's Gift: Earth, Ourselves and God after Copernicus*. London: Routledge.
- Rigby, Kate. 1998. Woman and Nature Revisited: Ecofeminist Reconfigurations of an Old Association. *Arena Journal* 12: 143–169.
- . 2001. The Goddess Returns: Ecofeminist Reconfigurations of Gender, Nature and the Sacred. In *Feminist Poetics of the Sacred: Creative Suspicions*,

- ed. F. D. Glass and L. McCreddin, 23–54. New York: Oxford University Press.
- . 2004. Earth, World, Text: On the (Im)Possibility of Ecopoiesis. *New Literary History* 35: 427–442.
- . 2008. Noah's Ark Revisited: (Counter-)Utopianism and (Eco-)Catastrophe. *Arena Journal* 31: 163–177.
- . 2014. 'Come Forth into the Light of Things': Material Spirit as Negative Poetics. In *Material Spirit: Religion and Literature Intranscendent*, ed. G. C. Stallings, M. Asensi, and C. Good, 111–128. New York: Fordham University Press.
- . 2015. *Dancing with Disaster: Environmental Histories, Narratives, and Ethics for Perilous Times*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press.
- Rose, Deborah Bird, Thom van Dooren, Matthew Chrulew, Stuart Cooke, Matthew Kearnes, and Emily O'Gorman. 2012. Thinking through the Environment: Unsettling the Humanities. *Environmental Humanities* 1 (1): 1–5. <http://environmentalhumanities.org/arch/vol1/EH1.1.pdf>
- Routley, Richard, and Val Routley. 1973. *The Fight for the Forests: The Takeover of Australian Forests for Pine, Wood Chips, and Intensive Forestry*. Canberra: Australian Research School of Social Sciences.
- Ruether, Rosemary Radford. 1983. *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology*. London: SCM Press.
- . 1992. *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing*. San Francisco: HarperCollins.
- Schüssler Fiorenza, Elisabeth. 1983. In *Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*. London: SCM Press.
- . 1992. *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Sittler, Joseph. 2004 [1964]. *The Care of the Earth*. Adapted from *The Care of the Earth and Other University Sermons*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. 1993. French Feminism Revisited. In *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, 141–172. London: Routledge.
- Stanton, Elizabeth Cady. 1897. Letter from Elizabeth Cady Stanton. In *Memoriam: Frederick Douglass*, ed. H. Douglass, 44–45. Philadelphia: J.C. Yorston & Co. <http://antislavery.eserver.org/legacies/frederick-douglass-elizabeth-cady-stanton/frederick-douglass-elizabeth-cady-stanton-pdf>
- . ed. 1993. *The Woman's Bible*. 2 vols. First published New York: European Publishing Co., 1895–1898. Republished with a forward by Maureen Fitzgerald. Boston: Northeastern University Press.

- Starhawk. 1989 [1979]. *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess. 10th Anniversary Edition*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco.
- Trible, Phyllis. 1978. *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.
- . 1984. *Texts of Terror*. London: SCM Press.
- Wainwright, Elaine M. 1991a. *Towards a Feminist Critical Reading of the Gospel According to Matthew*. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- . 1991b. A Metaphorical Walk through Scripture in an Ecological Age. *Pacifica* 4 (3): 273–294.
- . 1995. A Voice from the Margin: Reading Matthew 15:21–28 in an Australian Feminist Key. In *Reading from this Place, Vol. 2: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in Global Perspective*, ed. F. S. Segovia and M. A. Tolbert, 132–154. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress.
- . 1997. Rachel Weeping for Her Children: Intertextuality and the Biblical Testaments—A Feminist Approach. In *A Feminist Companion to Reading the Bible: Approaches, Methods and Strategies*, ed. A. Brenner and C. Fontaine, 452–469. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.
- . 1998. *Shall We Look for Another? A Feminist Rereading of the Matthean Jesus*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books.
- . 2000. A Transformative Struggle towards the Divine Dream: An Ecofeminist Reading of Matthew 11. In *Reading the Bible from the Perspective of the Earth*, ed. N. C. Habel, 162–173. The Earth Bible, 1. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.
- . 2002. Which Intertext? A Response to an Ecojustice Challenge: Is Earth Valued in John 1? In *The Earth Story in the New Testament*, ed. N. Habel and V. Balabanski, 83–88. The Earth Bible, 5. London: Sheffield Academic Press.
- . 2003. The Pouring Out of Healing Ointment: Rereading Mark 14:3–9. In *Toward a New Heaven and a New Earth: Essays in Honor of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza*, ed. F. F. Segovia, 157–178. Maryknoll: Orbis Books.
- . 2005. Looking Both Ways or in Multiple Directions: Doing/teaching Theology in Context into the Twenty-first Century. *Pacifica* 18 (2): 123–140.
- . 2006. *Women Healing/Healing Women: The Genderization of Healing in Early Christianity*. London: Equinox.
- . 2008a. Healing Ointment/Healing Bodies: Gift and Identification in an Ecofeminist Reading of Mark 14:3–9. In *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics*, ed. N. C. Habel and P. Trudinger, 131–140. SBL Symposium Series, 46. Atlanta: SBL.

- . 2008b. Unbound Hair and Ointmented Feet: An Ecofeminist Reading of Luke 7.36–50. In *Exchanges of Grace. Festschrift for Ann Loades*, ed. N. K. Watson and S. Burns, 178–189. London: SCM Press.
- . 2009. The Book of the Genealogy: How Shall We Read It? *Concilium* 3. In *Eco-Theology* (themed issue), ed. E. Wainwright, L. C. Susin and F. Wilfred, 13–23.
- . 2012. Images, Words, Stories: Exploring Their Transformative Power in Reading Biblical Texts Ecologically. *Biblical Interpretation* 20: 280–304.
- . 2013. Of Borders, Bread, Dogs and Demons: Reading Matthew 15.21–28 Ecologically. In *Where the Wild Ox Roams: Biblical Essays in Honour of Norman C. Habel*, ed. A. H. Cadwallader and P. Trudinger, 114–128. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press.
- . 2015. Queer[y]ing the Sermon on the Mount. In *Sexuality, Ideology and the Bible Antipodean Engagements*, ed. R. J. Myles and C. Blyth, 115–131. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix.
- . 2016. *Habitat, Human, and Holy: An Eco-Rhetorical Reading of the Gospel of Matthew*. The Earth Bible Commentary Series. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix.
- White, Lynn. 1967. The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis. *Science* 155 (3767, Mar.): 1203–1207.

Anne Elvey is an adjunct research fellow, School of Languages, Literatures, Cultures and Linguistics, Monash University; Honorary Research Associate, Trinity College Theological School; and a member of the Centre for Research in Religion and Social Policy, University of Divinity, Melbourne. Her publications include: *Ecological Aspects of War: Engagements with Biblical Texts* (coedited with Keith Dyer and Deborah Guess, 2017). Anne is managing editor of *Plumwood Mountain: An Australian Journal of Eco-poetry and Eco-poetics*.