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Hope for the Suffering Ecosystems of Our Planet

The Contextualization of Christological
Perichoresis for the Ecological Crisis



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EDITION

Chapter One

Is there Hope for my City of Athens?

The Ecological Problem

All earthly beings are grounded; even if they travel, they stop in a specific place to build their nest, eat, and feed their offspring, sleep.¹ These fundamentals form the fabric of our lives, structure our memories, and determine our attitudes.² At the same time, suffering and destruction are intimately associated with existence itself.³ The story of the cosmos is one of majesty as well as of disruption. Disasters are present at every level of existence: the elemental, geological, organic, cosmic and human. Disruption marks every cosmic era, whether we speak of a fireball, a galactic emergence, or the formation of the planet earth. Yet we may see in this very maelstrom, the presence of an emerging future beauty. The catastrophe at the end of the Mesozoic era was overcome by the richness of life on the planet earth that surpassed that of any previous era.⁴

Today, earth faces an environmental crisis that threatens the life of the planet. The atmosphere is polluted; the forests that generate the oxygen that all earthly beings need to survive are being depleted. Salt and pesticides poison the fertile soils that provide food. Waste and chemicals pollute waters that are home to organisms essential to life; global warming is becoming a frightening threat. The future of life appears threatened.⁵ The planet earth is struggling against unprecedented assaults

1 Cetin Militello, 'Women, Citizenship, Church', in Sabine Bieberstein et al (eds), *Journal of the European Society of Women in Theological Research, Becoming Living Communities* (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 2008), p. 25.

2 T. J. Goringe, *A Theology of the Built Environment, Justice, Empowerment, Redemption* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 1.

3 Many natural disasters are described in the biblical texts. Jose Pepito M. Cunanan, *A Bible Scan of Ecological and Environmental Disasters: Genesis to Revelation* (Kyoto: WWC, 1997).

4 Brian Swimme & Thomas Berry, *The Universe Story* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), pp. 54–9.

5 The Earth Bible Team introduces the ecological approach and ecojustice principles; they work on ecotheological biblical issues having decided the hermeneutical approach of the principles. They show how a reading of a biblical text from the perspective of earth needs fresh insights. Norman C. Habel, 'Introducing the Earth

of population explosion, industrial growth, technological manipulation, and military proliferation. The basic elements that sustain life such as sufficient, clean water, clean air and arable land, are at risk. The crisis has many irreversible economic, political, ecological and social dimensions, compounding the world's most perplexing socio-economic problems. By formulating plans to deal with the large-scale problems, we lay the foundations for peace and justice. However if we do not address these problems, we would be courting disaster.⁶ Humans think they are the rulers of the cosmos and treat earth and its beings as 'objects' to exploit.⁷ Disaster and recovery as part of the natural phenomena is different than disaster caused by human intervention; for human-caused disaster, recovery may be impossible and irreversible.

As the ecological problem of our planet becomes catastrophic, ecotheologians, feminist and ecofeminist theologians respond by evaluating the Christian traditions, mandates, and attitudes that perhaps contributed to the eco-crisis in the first place. They discern and reclaim the values of wonder and awe towards the earth and its beings. We received the blessing of a healthy world and an abundance of life. We must pass on this heritage intact to the next generations of human or non human beings.⁸ Yet there is no place on our planet untouched by humans. Even problems as universal as climate change, are localized in a specific place, time, context. In every generation, every community exists in its own specific context: historical, geographical, social, ecological that shapes its faith, practices, theology, and its worldview.

Athens, my own city, and capital of Greece, suffers from great eco-social problems. In this first chapter, I review the social and environmental history and the current situation of Athens, with regards to women and the land.

My Personal Religious Journey

In this section, I present my growing engagement with theological issues concerning the environment and women? I decided to complete a theological thesis

Bible', 'Editorial Preface', in Norman C. Habel (ed.), *Readings from the Perspective of Earth* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), pp. 9–10, 25.

6 Mary Evelyn Tucker, John Grim, 'Series Forward' in Dieter Hessel, Rosemary Radford Ruether (eds), *Christianity and Ecology* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2000), pp. xv–xvi.

7 Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1997), pp. xi–xii.

8 Sean McDonagh, *The Greening of the Church* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1990), p. 6.

while doing volunteer work with church women. I began to consider how in our wider οἶκος-the cosmos, humans are one species among many other species, and women constitute almost one-half of humanity. Yet the domination of a group of people over other groups could be known as a social dimension of exploitation of our οἶκος-planet earth and our wider οἶκος-the cosmos. We speak of the ‘domination of nature including the oppression of women and of other subordinated groups of people’.⁹ An analysis of the theological constructs that justify the oppression of women and nature view¹⁰ the oppression of women as part of nature’s exploitation. In the first chapter, I try to explain my broad view, aware of the complexity of issues such as ‘domination’ and ‘exploitation.’ I will examine these issues with proof in the following chapters, but in this first chapter I am presenting my perspective. I ask for the indulgence of the reader, acknowledging that I discuss the issues without supporting them at this moment, as I explain my own trajectory.

My feminism began to develop in 1984 after attending a meeting of the Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women (EFECW) in the Netherlands. It was there where women demanded that all jobs be considered as creditable, whether or not paid, voluntary, domestic, public or private.¹¹ From 1995 to 2000, I did foundational work in Athens to create an ecumenical group of women as National Coordinator of EFECW, which tries to strengthen the ecumenical women’s network, to support women in their search for a common European identity, to link them together in the liberating biblical message, and to call for action.¹² Its goals will be fulfilled if we accept the ‘other,’ respecting her differences, and if instead of building walls, we build bridges to reach the others.

In the European Society of Women in Theological Research, I met female theologians and church women, devoted to the re-thinking of theology and human sciences from a feminist view. As a result, I became the contact person with the Department of Partnership of Women and Men of the World Community of Reformed Churches. A challenging experience was my participation as an international guest in the Women’s Gathering of the Presbyterian Church of USA

9 Rosemary Radford Ruether, ‘Ecofeminism, Symbolic and Social Connections of the Oppression of Women and the Domination of Nature’, in Carol J. Adams (ed.), *Ecofeminism and the Sacred* (New York: Continuum, 1993), pp. 13–23.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 2.

11 Chung Hyun Kyung, ‘Ecology, Feminism and African and Asian Spirituality’, in David G. Hallman (ed.), *Ecotheology* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1995), p. 178.

12 Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women EFECW www.efecw.net

in the summer of 1997. Dr Jane Douglas, then President of WCRC,¹³ gave an address that was on Christ's mother, who after her encounter with the angel and troubled by his words, hurried to share her experiences with Elizabeth, the expectant mother of John the Baptist. Forsaking her home, relatives, friends, and fiancée, Mary made this long, dangerous trip, as she was alone and pregnant. During their meeting, Elizabeth made a Christological confession calling Mary, her Lord's mother and Mary gave a speech full of proclamation.¹⁴ Those women uttered prophetic words for realities they experienced in their own beings. Douglas said to us that women need to cultivate solidarity in order to be released from what society imposes on us as cultural expectations and behaviour, so that the prophetic voice of women may be freely articulated. She ended her speech with the words: 'All women need our own Elizabeth.'¹⁵ Following Douglas, an African American university professor gave a speech on racism. She discovered that her child was repeating racism learned in school as well as her parents' racism against whites. She went on to describe how her daughter's problem became an opportunity for the family to address the issue of reconciliation.¹⁶ Granting justice to those to whom we owe it, is a legal obligation. Repenting for sins we committed against others is to grant justice to them. To forgive those who exploit us is the core of the biblical message.

Since 2001, I have represented the Greek Evangelical Church in the European Christian Environmental Network (ECEN). From its inauguration in 1998, it is enabling the European churches and Christian groups involved in environmental work to share information and common experiences; engage in a broad range of ecological work; and encourage each other to be a united witness to caring for God's creation. It is through my work in the church and my involvement with ecumenical European women's groups concerned about the environment that I came to write this theological thesis.

13 Jane Douglas was the Hazel Thomson McCord Professor of Historical Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary and President of WARC for seven years.

14 Luke 1: 26–60, Carol A. Newson and Sharon H. Ringe (eds), *The Women's Bible Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), pp. 282–3.

15 1997 Churchwide Gathering of Presbyterian Women, *Surrounded by a Cloud of Witnesses* (Louisville: Louisville Commonwealth Convention Centre, 1997), p. 57.

16 Dr. Thelma C. Davidson Adair, Keynote speaker for the opening of the 1997 Churchwide Gathering (Wednesday, July 9), of Presbyterian Women, *Surrounded by a Cloud of Witnesses*, p. 56.

An Analysis of Athenian History from an Ecofeminist Perspective

I briefly present the history of Athens from an ecofeminist view.¹⁷ I discuss the Athenian environment from within the social dimensions of human life and history, as they are interrelated and also because humans are those who exploit the ecosystems. The theme of my thesis is open and wide; I will always have to choose what issue I open up, and what not.

The Athenian Landscape

The geographic location of Athens is unique, and the surrounding landscape special. Mountains enclose the Attica basin, while its southern aspect is open to the sea. The climate is compelling; most of the days are sunny. Attica is known as treeless; yet there are forests of fir, pine trees as well as areas of aromatic shrubs, of Mediterranean Mackie that occur on the lower slopes of mountains bordering the Mediterranean Sea, and thriving in areas where the soil is thin or rocky. Phrygana characterise the Mediterranean ecosystems as the result of forest degradation. They grow on poor and rocky limestone, or in areas repeatedly burnt by fires.¹⁸ The Kesariani forest on the slopes of Mount Hymettus is made up of a species of conifers that resulted from reforestation. Within the forest boundaries, two natural springs still exist.¹⁹ In Attica, despite the physical challenges of the landscape, thousands of different species exist, some of them not found elsewhere. Some believe that protection came late. A vivacious species used to grow only on the Acropolis rock; however, it has not been seen for a hundred years.²⁰

Pre-historic Athens and Attica

Earthquakes and a receding sea formed Attica. Natural forces shaped the landscape and favoured the location of the ancient city of Athens. Plato described Attica's prehistoric landscape as consisting of mountains covered with soil, an abundance

17 Pieter N. Holtop et al, 'Witnessing together in Context', in *Reformed World*, 45/4(1995), 161.

18 Gregory Tsounis, George Sfikas, *Ecotourist Guide of Greece* (Athens: General Secretariat of Youth-Hell. Society for the Protection of Nature, 1993), p. 60.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 180.

20 Θεοφάνης Κωνσταντινίδης, 'Ακριβοθώρητα αγριολούλουδα της Αττικής γης', σε *Η Καθημερινή*, (Κυριακή 11 Αυγούστου 2003), σελ. 15.

of trees, fertile plains and pastures supporting many forms of husbandry. Over time, flooding and erosion stripped the soil from the hills. Plato refers to natural disasters. But perhaps part of Attica was denuded, by human intervention.²¹

Athena was the Protector goddess of Athens, daughter of Zeus, king of the Olympian gods. Zeus swallowed his wife Mitis, a goddess of wisdom and prudence while pregnant with Athena, trying to minimize her power, not to be inherited by their children. Zeus gave birth to Athena through his head. Athena is depicted wearing a helmet and holding a spear and shield. We can see Athena from a feminist view as the symbol of a woman-warrior working for peace via war. She was wise like her mother, but inherited the ruling mind of her father. Philosopher Anaxagoras extended the works of Mind into a cosmic governing principle, immanent to the entire cosmos. Anaxagoras' 'mind'²² in my view is met in Zeus' ruling mind that Athena inherited from her father; yet she was 'ruled' by her father. Later on, according to Aristotle, mind and reason rule human desires.²³ Mitis lost her freedom existing within her husband as part of him.²⁴ The father of the gods has internalized the female nature to some extent. I can discern in the Greek myths related to Athena, traces of the idea of domination of the mind over the senses and that men were thought to be superior to women because of their naturally ruling mind.

For thousands of years, olive trees were a main source for Athenians to earn their living. Olives were also a staple in the Athenian diet. The olive tree becomes the symbol of Athena who planted an olive tree to claim the land.²⁵ In Greek mythology, King Theseus centralized the government of Attica at Athens, which passed through the phases of development representing the political evolution of the Greek city-state. The process of the transition from areas full of villages to the classic city-states during the 6th century BC appears in the myths of Athena as a gathering of her worshippers who absorbed the Athenian surrounding communities.²⁶

21 A. E. Taylor, *Πλάτων. Ο άνθρωπος και το έργο του*, translation Ιορδάνη Αρζόγλου (Αθήνα: 1990), σελ. 522, 683.

22 Anaxagorae, *Fragmenta* 12, (Lipsiae: Suptlibus Hartmanni, 1827), pp. 100–1.

23 «ἄρχεσθαι τῷ σώματι ὑπὸ τῆς ψυχῆς, καὶ τῷ παθητικῷ μορίῳ ὑπὸ τοῦ νοῦ καὶ τοῦ μορίου τοῦ λόγον ἔχοντος» Αριστοτέλης, *Ἄπαντα, Τόμος 1, Πολιτικά 1*, 1254b, 7–10, (Αθήνα: Κάκτος, 1992), σελ. 64–5.

24 Ησιόδος, *Ἄπαντα Θεογονία*, (Αθήνα: Κάκτος, 1992), σελ. 84–5.

25 *Herodoti Historiarum Libri v. viii.*, Cap. 55 (Typis B. G. Trubneet B. G. Ted.), In aedibus B. G. Teubneri, Lipsiae, 1884, p. 245.

26 Francois de Polignac, *Η Γέννηση της Αρχαίας Ελληνικής Πόλης*, Μετάφραση: Νάσος Κυριαζόπουλος (Αθήνα: Μορφωτικό Ίδρυμα Εθνικής Τραπέζης, 2000), σελ. 218–9.

Classic Athenian Democracy: a kind of Male Aristocracy

According to Aristotle, (384–322 B.C.) the private or family property was only what was needed and could be stored for the life of the household and the city. Cities originate in villages that join together for the basic needs of life, the common pursuit of justice and a good life, thus making a community. The desire for community is basic to human nature; to live outside the community means to live an unnatural life. The city as community²⁷ offers the framework for learning the laws of the city without which humans are the most savage of animals.²⁸ In addition, the citizens had to study philosophy²⁹ and exercise rationality. Yet both the Athenian achievements and the background to Aristotle's philosophizing, depended on cruel treatment of slaves and on the homemaking of women, who were not considered as citizens.³⁰ Community as a line of building blocks starts with the family, supplying everyday needs.³¹ The agora, an open space at the heart of the city, became a political, religious, social and economic focal point, from which slaves, women, and strangers were excluded.³² Thus Athenian democracy created a system of discrimination against the poor and among communities of different classes.

Gradually the Athenian state transitioned from agriculture to commerce as the basis of their national economy; this led to the emergence of a class of wealthy merchants. Around 594 BC Solon, a merchant, became an elected official or archon.³³ Later on the social and political units, whose cohesion was based on locality took the place of units held together by bonds of kinship; they no longer shared worship of divine ancestors but of national heroes.³⁴ Pericles' law in 451 B.C. restricted the citizenship to people of Athenian parentage on both sides. Initially, the election of archons was done by throwing of lots, but after 487 B.C. formal elections were held. Democracy in Athens was a kind of aristocracy. The citizens of the surrounding

27 Gorringer, *A Theology of the Built Environment*, p. 147

28 Αριστοτέλης, *Άπαντα, Τόμος 1, Πολιτικά 1*, 1253a, 35 (Αθήνα: Κάκτος, 1993), σελ. 56–7.

29 *Ibid.*, 1267a, 10, σελ. 144–5.

30 Gorringer, *A Theology of the Built Environment*, pp. 147–8.

31 Αριστοτέλης, *Τόμος 1, Πολιτικά 1*, 1251a, σελ. 48–9.

32 Gorringer, *A Theology of the Built Environment*, p. 171.

33 Αριστοτέλης, *Άπαντα Τ5 Αθηναίων Πολιτεία Αποσπάσματα* 20.1,3,4, (Αθήνα: Κάκτος, 1993), σελ. 90–7.

34 Αριστοτέλης, *Άπαντα, Τόμος 3, Πολιτικά 3*, 1319b (Αθήνα: Κάκτος, 1993), σελ. 32–3.

Attica were slaves and an equal number of metics.³⁵ People worshiped their gods in caves, fields, mountaintops, springs, and hillsides, stones, by erecting temples or altars. Acropolis was a fortified citadel, home for religious buildings, such as the temple to Athena.³⁶

According to Anaxagoras, the infinite, self-ruled mind began to evolve from a small beginning; the revolution extended over a larger still.³⁷ This idea gained a political meaning: if Greece might govern the barbarians, one city must be the head of all the others. In that city, one man must be the head of all people. The Athenian democracy was subjugated to ‘the moral dictatorship of genius.’³⁸ In classical Athens, goddesses were symbols of the source and sustenance of life. Women assumed responsibility for agriculture, pottery and weaving. Involved in these vital processes, they must have held religious and social positions in Neolithic societies.³⁹ Solon organized Athens as a male centric society. Women were banished to the house in a division of the public and private, not appearing in public forums for political and cultural life. Hesiod’s Pandora myth makes Zeus’s gift of woman as wife, a punishment for Prometheus’s sin. Pandora brings evil into the world.⁴⁰ In Aeschylus’ tragedies, Athena casts the deciding vote for the priority of the father over the mother, as her father swallowed her mother.⁴¹

The free Greek male citizen establishes his identity by subduing his excluded opposites: the non-Greek, non-male, non-human. Plato and Aristotle’s hierarchical metaphor depicted the female, the alien, and the animal as ‘natural’ inferiors in a ‘chain’ extending from the divine Logos to matter.⁴² Slavery became the Greek

35 The immigrants in ancient Athens, were called metics, they were living in Athens but without civil rights as the citizens.

36 Susan E. Alcock, ‘Chapter 2 Environment’, in Paul Cartledge (ed.), *The Cambridge Illustrated History of Ancient Greece* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 13–34.

37 Anaxagorae Clazomenii, *Fragmenta*, 8, *Fragmenta*.13 (Lipsiae: Sumptibus Hartmanni, 1827), pp. 100–1.

38 G. Glotz, *The Greek City and its Institutions* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trumber and Co., 1929), pp. 135–40.

39 Carol Christ visits the artifacts in the Knossos-Cretan museum dated from 6000 to 3000 B.C.E. Carol P. Christ, *Odyssey with the Goddess* (New York: Continuum, 1995), p. 85.

40 Ησίοδος, ‘Έργα και ημέραι’ σε *Άπαντα-Θεογονία, Έργα και Ημέραι, Ασπίς Ηρακλέους, Αποσπάσματα* (Αθήνα: Κάκτος, 1993), σελ. 103–7.

41 Αισχύλος, *Ευμενίδες*, 840 (Αθήνα: Κάκτος, 1992), σελ. 88–9.

42 Πλάτωνος, *Τίμαιος*, Αρχαίον κείμενον, XLIV 91, 92, (Εν Αθήναις: Ελληνική Εταιρεία των Ελληνικών Γραμμάτων Πάπυρος, 1956), σελ. 180–184. See also: Αριστοτέλους

model of all relationships of dominant Greek males to ‘others.’ The ruling ‘mind’ uses other bodies as ‘tools.’ Greek-male reason and the capacity to rule predominate. Women, slaves, barbarians and animals have no rational capacity, but are servile tools of Greek male sovereignty.⁴³ Femininity is thought to be a natural disability.⁴⁴ Procreative generative power is appropriated in a male capacity. The female is the passive recipient and ‘incubator’ of the male seed.⁴⁵ According to Aeschylus,⁴⁶ proof was the birth of Athena from Zeus’ head. On this belief, ancient Greeks based their view of the relationship between men and women. The medieval viewpoint for several centuries was still an interpretation of Aristotle, for whom it is by its ‘nature’ that anything rules.⁴⁷ The Greeks questioned the role of women in society. The restriction of women to domesticity and the systematization of poetic and philosophical misogynist thought were catastrophic creations of the Greek classic era.⁴⁸

The central area of the Athenian basin is now over 30,000 hectares. The ancient town around the Agora was only 200 hectares, yet 50,000 habitants lived there. When the Romans occupied Athens, the hills to the western area of the Acropolis were part of the city. Villas were located there, because of the view and the good climatic conditions.⁴⁹ During the Roman period, Apostle Paul preached the Christian gospel to the Athenians. His message declared a new Christian reality: of reconciled relations between God and creation; of restoring the relations of men and women, and of people of different nations and races; and of reconciling humanity with nature through Christ.⁵⁰

Πολιτικά Α, κεφ. Ε 13, 260^α 5–15 (Εν Αθήναις: Επιστημονική Εταιρεία Γραμμάτων Πάπυρος, 1939), σελ. 55–8.

43 Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God, An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (London: HarperCollins, 1994), p. 184.

44 Αριστοτέλης, *Απαντα τ. 22, Περί ζώων γενέσεως Δ*, 75a10 (Αθήνα: Κάκτος, 1994), σελ. 172–3.

45 *Ibid.*, 763b30, σελ. 98–9.

46 *Ibid.*, Σχόλια 2, σελ. 273.

47 Αριστοτέλους, *Πολιτικά Α*, κεφ. Ε 13, 1260^α 5–15 (Εν Αθήναις: Επιστημονική Εταιρεία Γραμμάτων Πάπυρος, 1939), σελ. 55–8.

48 Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Θεές, Πόρνες, Σύζυγοι και Δούλες*, Μετάφραση: Μάριος Μπλέτας (Αθήνα: Ινστιτούτο του Βιβλίου-Α. Καρδαμίτσα, 2008), σελ. 318–9.

49 Αλέξανδρος Παπαγεωργίου-Βενέτας, *Αθηνών Αγίασμα* (Αθήνα: Ερμής, 1999), σελ. 17–20.

50 David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2005), p. 178.