

Gender, ecology and religions: A queer proposal for climate justice and gender justice

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How does the story of who the Triune God is and what this God does relate to the story of life on Earth? Is the Christian story part of the earth's story or is the earth's story part of God's story, from creation to consummation? In response to these overarching almost overwhelming questions, in drawing from my social-cultural context, I ask what these stories mean from an Asian perspective where the Christian story of creation finds expression in and through the creation stories or more pointedly, ecological responses of other world religions and spiritualities of Asia. I also interrogate these questions from a feminist perspective as the Christian story of creation is intrinsically not only an anthropocentric but also androcentric one; the domination of (hu)man over nature and man over woman, respectively.

I begin with locating the Christian story in Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'* (henceforth *LS*) not because it is the first response but that it is arguably, the fullest theological response (from the Catholic tradition) to our ecological crisis.¹ I take this opportunity to revisit and potentially, review an argument that I have made on other occasions—de-centering the human in creation—in recognizing even embracing the end of the Anthropocene. Is this endeavor that unseats or de-privileges the human in creation, necessarily a post-Christian one? In the second section of this paper, from a Southeast Asian context, I turn to fecund intersections of the materiality of the body vis-à-vis hunger—the Filipino '*kumakalam na sikhura*' (literally, 'gnawing of the stomach')²—is a poignant reminder of the urgency of effecting climate justice and gender justice. Yet how does one theologize from the bowels of Asia without re-colonizing the poor of Asia? Postcolonial liberation ethics point the way in the form of a Shamanic theology of sacred sustainability with church and shamans as interlocutors in dialogue³ and the intersection of contemporary ecofeminism with Confucian cosmology.⁴ I offer critical reflections, as an Asian feminist, on what these conversational threads mean for the Christian story of creation.

The Christian story in *Laudato Si'*

The 'groundbreaking vision' that permeates Pope Francis' encyclical entirely devoted to climate change in the age of the Anthropocene, courageously critiques neo-liberalist development models that are unjust and unsustainable.⁵ *LS* goes beyond 'a purely religious relevance'.⁶ The publication of *LS* on 18 June 2015 was strategic as '2015 [was] a critical year for humanity'⁷ which witnessed three landmark assemblies of global experts and policy makers to address climate change. These high-level and high-impact gatherings include: the Addis Ababa Action Agenda which serves as a 'global framework for financing development post-2015',⁸ the UN General Assembly's own 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), 2015–2030 that build on and extend the largely unrealized eight Millennium Development Goals, 2000–2015,⁹ and in particular, COP21, the Paris Agreement on climate change.¹⁰ The 'monumental triumph for people and our planet' of COP21, was the pledge of all 195 nations to support the 2030 Agenda, the year of the expiration of the SDGs.¹¹

Against this backdrop of UN instruments that are operationalized within human rights albeit secular frameworks, the *LS* holds its own in adding spiritual gravitas that not only holds the age of the Anthropocene accountable for the ecological crisis but more importantly, sanctifies the integrity of creation through its Christian story. The encyclical letter comprises six Chapters and 246 Articles. The preamble¹² starts off with Saint Francis of Assisi's canticle, '*Laudato Si'*' meaning 'Praise be to you'.

¹ Pope Francis, "*Laudato Si'*."

² Peracullo, "*Kumakalam na sikhura*."

³ Fung, *Shamanic Theology*.

⁴ Duncan and Brasovan, "Contemporary Ecofeminism and Confucian Cosmology."

⁵ Montini and Volpe, "The Need for an 'Integral Ecology'," 65.

⁶ Montini and Volpe, "The Need for an 'Integral Ecology'," 56.

⁷ King, "Cardinal hints."

⁸ United Nations, "Addis Ababa Action Agenda."

⁹ United Nations, "Sustainable Development Goals."

¹⁰ UN News, "COP21."

¹¹ UN News, "COP21."

¹² Pope Francis, *LS*, 1–16.

Pope Francis implores us all ‘to acknowledge the appeal, immensity and urgency of the challenge we face’.¹³ Thematically, the first three chapters systematically outline the problem and underlying causes which to some extent, find resonance with the church’s anthropocentric ‘theology of creation’. Chapter 1 ‘What is Happening to Our Common Home’¹⁴ mirrors the 17 SDGs in its expansive sweep of harm to the ecosystem, from land, sea to sky and the need for partnership among multi-level and multi-sectoral stakeholders. The interplay between *LS* and the UN SDGs firstly lies in the universal turn in exhorting the global community indeed, the ‘whole of humanity to action’.¹⁵ Both documents are also a ‘sign of the times’ in recognizing the urgency of redressing the ecological crisis and the emphasis on ‘common but differentiated responsibilities’ among the developed and developing nations in terms of disparities in consumption and carbon emissions.¹⁶ Chapter 2 ‘The Gospel of Creation’¹⁷ presents the Christian story of creation. And Chapter 3 ‘The Human Roots of the Ecological Crisis’¹⁸ articulates the Pope’s underlying assumption to his knowledge claim of the near irreversibility of the ecological crisis and that is—humankind’s misuse of its gifts in harnessing the gift of creation.

The last three chapters, offer the solution and methods in arriving at these solutions, chiefly through dialogue and education. In Chapter 4 ‘Integral Ecology’,¹⁹ he emphasizes an integrative account of the ecological crisis, in all its multi-dimensional and intergenerational facets. In Chapter 5 ‘Lines of Approach and Action’²⁰ he returns to multi-sectoral, multi-level and multi-disciplinary responses among key stakeholders that are meaningful and coordinated. *LS* culminates in Chapter 6 ‘Ecological Education and Spirituality’ that spiritualizes the call to action where others have politicized it. He exhorts a Christian praxis for all as a call to ‘ecological conversion’.²¹ This divine covenant complements UN-sponsored international treaties as humanity’s pledge, beyond a pledge of nations, to recognize the sacramental nature of nature premised on the covenant between God-human-nature. This final chapter includes sections on ecological conversion, and the Trinity and the relationship between creatures. The encyclical letter ends, as it starts with a eulogy to creation vis-à-vis its Creator.

The Triune God as Creator starts off the Christian story of creation. The main takeaway of the Christian story is order. The first principle of creation is *order from chaos*: ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the word was with God, and the Word was God’ (John 1:1).²² From a watery womb where ‘the earth was formless and empty, [and] darkness was over the surface of the deep’ (Gen. 1:1), God created light to distinguish it from darkness leading to the ordered temporality of day and night, and as ‘signs to mark sacred times, and days and years’ (Gen. 1:14). The creation of ‘the vault’ or sky spatially demarcate waters from the sky and land (Gen. 1: 8–10). The incremental acts of creation from the first day to the sixth day in populating the earth with the great diversity of ‘living creatures’ of the ecosystem (Gen. 1:20) culminate in the prime creation; ‘mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them’ (Gen. 1:27). The mastery of time-space is effectively bequeathed to ‘mankind’ who are fashioned in the likeness of God and this mastery is extended to the rest of creation; that ‘they may rule over’ (Gen. 1:26) creatures not fashioned in the likeness of God. The scope of that ‘rule’ bears a similar sequencing of the spatial ordering of sea-sky-land (‘ground’): ‘the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground’ (Gen. 1:26). It is a complete ‘rule’; the green light to domesticate the wild across sea-sky-land, in the sense that no creature is above ‘rule’ or off-limits to ‘mankind’. This in turn, confers on ‘mankind’ the Creator’s prerogative indeed power to create order vis-à-vis mastery of that which is not ‘in his own image’.

What is apparent from the logic of creation—the ‘Word’ (*logos*) as God—evidenced through the mastery of time-space, is the creation of mutually exclusive entities. Light is not darkness as day is not night. Land is neither water nor sky, water is neither land nor sky, and sky is neither water nor land.

¹³ Pope Francis, *LS*, 15.

¹⁴ Pope Francis, *LS*, 17–61.

¹⁵ Montini and Volpe, “The Need for an ‘Integral Ecology’,” 62.

¹⁶ Montini and Volpe, “The Need for an ‘Integral Ecology’,” 62–63.

¹⁷ Pope Francis, *LS*, 62–100.

¹⁸ Pope Francis, *LS*, 101–136.

¹⁹ Pope Francis, *LS*, 137–162.

²⁰ Pope Francis, *LS*, 163–201.

²¹ Pope Francis, *LS*, 202–246.

²² New International Version. Also cited in Pope Francis, *LS*, 99.

Livestock, fish and birds are differentiated based on their singular habitats (amphibians notwithstanding), e.g. livestock cannot live in the sea and sky, fish cannot live on land and in the sky, etc. Male is not female. And ‘mankind’ is not God. This leads us to the concomitant second principle of creation which is *order as hierarchy*. These mutually exclusive entities are not only opposites but ordered hierarchically, e.g. light/darkness, male/female (Gen. 2:20–24) and God/‘mankind’ where the first term is dominant and the second term, secondary to and derivative from the first term. ‘We are not God’, as Pope Francis forcefully reminds us.²³ He takes ‘mankind’ to task for following through the original charge to ‘rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground’ along with ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it’ (Gen. 1:28). On the one hand, Pope Francis alludes to the church’s near atonement for ‘incorrectly [interpreting] the Scriptures’ that has inadvertently ‘encouraged the unbridled exploitation of nature by painting [man] as domineering and destructive by nature’.²⁴ On the other hand, Pope Francis defends ‘Judaean-Christian thinking’—the roots of the Christian story—by positing that, ‘*nowadays* we must forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God’s image and given dominion over the earth justifies absolute domination over other creatures’ (italics mine).²⁵ So whilst nothing which has ‘the breath of life in it’ (Gen. 1:30) still remains off-limits, limits are ‘nowadays’—in the Age of the Anthropocene—placed on mankind’s ‘absolute dominion’ of not just sentient beings (all that have ‘the breath of life’ in them except humans) but also the ecosystem in its entirety (land, sea and sky).

To buttress the instrumentality of nature designed to literally feed ‘mankind’ where, as God decrees, ‘They will be yours for food’ (Gen. 1:29), those who eat rather than are eaten are ‘nowadays’ exhorted to recognize that ‘*each creature bears in itself a specifically Trinitarian structure*’.²⁶ What does this mean for meat-eaters, including exotic animal consumers, vegetarians, vegans, those who have too much to eat, those who go hungry of their own volition and those who are hungry because they are poor or those who eat last and the least? What does this mean with regard to consuming genetically modified livestock and birds (e.g. poultry), and fish that choke on our plastic-ridden seas? Pope Francis in citing Saint Bonaventure, that Franciscan saint, explains that ‘human beings, before sin, were able to see how each creature “testifies that God is three”’.²⁷ This leads to the third principle of creation which is *order as divine*; the ‘world was created by the three Persons acting as a single divine principle’.²⁸ ‘The Father’ as the ‘ultimate source of everything’ is the ‘loving and self-communicating foundation of all that exists’. ‘The Son’ born of woman, who reflects ‘the Father’ through the Incarnation, ‘united himself to this earth’. ‘The Spirit’ as the ‘infinite bond of love, is intimately present at the very heart of the universe’.²⁹ One creates it, the second once walked the earth, and the third, sustains it. Here is no counterpoint or co-mingling of opposites but rather a fusion of mutually inclusive ‘three Persons’ acting as one, as ‘a single (albeit masculinized) divine principle’ and acting with singularity of purpose. The inter-relationality of the Triune God, lays its indelible albeit differentiated mark on creation; ‘each of them performed this common work in accordance with his own personal property’³⁰ far removed from nature’s own creative-destructive life forces. The Triune God, as ‘subsistent relations’ is mutually supportive hence complementary. This ‘divine model’ of creation renders the world, ‘a web of relationships’.³¹ The ‘challenge’ therefore ‘of trying to read reality in a Trinitarian key’³² is to recognize that as everything is ordered, ‘Everything is interconnected’³³ but not necessarily equal. It is a call to ‘go out from [ourselves] to live in communion with God, with others and with all creatures’.³⁴

²³ Pope Francis, *LS*, 67.

²⁴ Pope Francis, *LS*, 67.

²⁵ Pope Francis, *LS*, 67.

²⁶ Pope Francis, *LS*, 239.

²⁷ Pope Francis, *LS*, 239.

²⁸ Pope Francis, *LS*, 238.

²⁹ Pope Francis, *LS*, 238.

³⁰ Pope Francis, *LS*, 238.

³¹ Pope Francis, *LS*, 240.

³² Pope Francis, *LS*, 239.

³³ Pope Francis, *LS*, 240.

³⁴ Pope Francis, *LS*, 240.

Yet is the failure to constantly ‘live in communion with God, with others and with all creatures’, simply a consequence of the ‘human gaze’ that purportedly remains ‘partial, dark and fragile’?³⁵ What exactly does it mean to ‘live in communion’ with a world that is already overpopulated; where there has been a faithful adherence to ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth’ but not to ‘subdue it’ (Gen. 1:28)? Would turning to the ‘gaze of Jesus’ in turn, lift our gaze?³⁶ The ‘mystery of Christ’ offers a relatable moral compass as Christ embodies the creative tension between transcendence and immanence, as the ‘Divine Word (*Logos*)’ that ‘became flesh’.³⁷ The human condition as ‘partial, dark and fragile’ becomes through the Incarnated Christ, grounded, messy and transient. Where the ‘One Person of the Trinity entered into the created cosmos, throwing in his lot with it, even to the cross’,³⁸ humankind likewise throws in their lot with the cosmos and have throughout its existence, impinged on the natural world, carbon footprint and all, where Christ ‘is at work in a hidden manner’.³⁹ In the like manner that Jesus harnessed natural energies, where ‘even the winds and the sea obey him’ (Mt 8:27),⁴⁰ humankind has built wind turbines, dams and solar panels in near ‘full harmony with creation’. As Jesus, son of a carpenter ‘worked with his hands’, he ‘sanctified human labour and endowed it with a special significance for our development’.⁴¹ What kinds of human-driven technological advances are viewed as humankind’s collaboration ‘with the Son of God for the redemption of humanity’?⁴² This Second Person of the Trinity, the human-God who embraced the sensuality of ‘body, matter and the things of the world’ calls to question the second principle of creation which is order as hierarchy where such ‘unhealthy dualisms (e.g. mind/body, spirit/matter)...[have] disfigured the Gospel’.⁴³

Disfiguring nature, as Pope Benedict instructs, also harms humankind’s own nature; ‘Man does not create himself. He is spirit and will, but also nature’.⁴⁴ The baser nature of ‘Man’ that perceives and treats nature, both the ‘natural environment’ and ‘social environment’ as ‘simply [Man’s] property’ is tantamount to a ‘misuse of creation’; this alienation with nature is an alienation of the self, and an alienation of the self with its Creator, the Triune God.⁴⁵ It is in effect, to not recognize the gentle promptings of the Holy Spirit coursing through creation and all in it. Humankind is called upon to collaborate not only ‘with the Son of God for the redemption of humanity’ but also the Spirit of God which ‘can be said to possess an infinite creativity, proper to the divine mind’.⁴⁶ Some semblance of feminization of the Spirit is discernible as ‘the things we think of as evils, dangers or sources of suffering’ which are intrinsically part of the human condition and aspiration for development, are likened to ‘the pains of childbirth’. A gestation and birthing of free will, ‘the autonomy of [God’s] creature’ in turn, ‘gives rise to the rightful autonomy of earthly affairs’ in continuing the ‘work of creation’.⁴⁷

Yet it is precisely the human labor entailed in exercising this autonomy, in continuing the ‘work of creation’ that ‘mankind’ is taken to task for in Chapter 3’s ‘The human roots of the ecological crisis’.⁴⁸ Why? Because ‘mankind’ has overreached their potential by usurping God’s mastery of the universe and needs to be put in place within the order of creation. Let’s review this through the prism of what constitutes ‘mankind’s’ creative prowess read as transgressions. ‘Mankind’ has not only inherited but also magnified the first principle of creation; order from chaos—where in the ‘presence of something formless, completely open to manipulation’, ‘men and women’ (one of the rare occasions that ‘mankind’ is not used generically) have ‘constantly intervened in nature’.⁴⁹ The technological and

³⁵ Pope Francis, *LS*, 239.

³⁶ Pope Francis, *LS*, 96–100.

³⁷ Pope Francis, *LS*, 99.

³⁸ Pope Francis, *LS*, 99.

³⁹ Pope Francis, *LS*, 99.

⁴⁰ Pope Francis, *LS*, 98.

⁴¹ Pope Francis, *LS*, 98.

⁴² Pope Francis, *LS*, 98.

⁴³ Pope Francis, *LS*, 98.

⁴⁴ Pope Francis, *LS*, 6.

⁴⁵ Pope Francis, *LS*, 6.

⁴⁶ Pope Francis, *LS*, 98 and 80.

⁴⁷ Pope Francis, *LS*, 80.

⁴⁸ Pope Francis, *LS*, 101–136.

⁴⁹ Pope Francis, *LS*, 106.

scientific breakthroughs in a vast array of fields—from art, architecture, agriculture, biomedicine, communications, weaponry, travel to space—traverse staggering achievements on land, sea and sky. These achievements evidence ‘a ‘technique of possession, mastery and transformation’⁵⁰ over microorganisms to natural (and unnatural or nuclear) sources of energy and exceed the boundaries of earth, this ‘common home’ to other planetary systems. Pope Francis attributes the fruits of this human labor, disparagingly, as a ‘technological paradigm’; as the dominant order of human society and way of life that has ravaged nature.⁵¹ The ordering from chaos is also evidenced in the creation of civilizations of, for and by humans that are founded on institutions which include, among others; familial, educational, political, finance, legal, juridical, cultural and religious. Pope Francis assesses these as driven by a ‘technocratic paradigm’ that ‘tends to dominate economic and political life’ in compelling most societies most of the time to unnecessarily privilege profits over people and necessarily, the human over nature.⁵²

Should this phenomenon be merely branded as a ‘modern anthropocentrism’ where ‘mankind’ ‘[prizes] technical thought over reality’ in perceiving and treating nature as ‘an insensate order, as a cold body of facts, as a mere “given”, as an object of utility, as raw material to be hammered into useful shape?’⁵³ ‘Mankind’ has faithfully followed through a Biblical anthropocentrism where creatures of the land, sea and sky are created to feed the human who by virtue of being created in the likeness and image of God in turn, invests in nature its intrinsic value in relation to its use to the human. ‘Modern anthropocentrism’ is the execution of a Biblical anthropocentrism par excellence where ‘mankind’ has proliferated the uses of nature beyond consuming it, i.e. beyond its original utility value as food for man. In this regard, ‘mankind’ recreates, in exercising their God-given free will and autonomy, as a collaborative partner of the Triune God, the second principle of creation; order as hierarchy. Yet, where some humans confer dignity to nature in the form of embracing its bountiful biodiversity, arguing for ecological sustainability for its own sake rather than as a means to the end of sustaining the human and championing the rights of animals, such ‘biocentrism’ is unceremoniously labelled as a ‘misguided anthropocentrism’.⁵⁴ Thou shalt know thy place! Biocentrism unseats anthropocentrism; the former is deemed inimical to the latter as it is framed in oppositional terms to the latter. Humankind now errs in not upholding its place in the food chain, in not recognizing and valuing their ‘unique capacities of knowledge, will, freedom and responsibility’—the very qualities that humankind are, in the same breath of life, admonished for in overreaching itself. In straddling ‘modern anthropocentrism’ and its corollary ‘misguided’ variant, humankind is damned when it does and damned when it does not, i.e. recognize and value its superiority as created in the image and likeness of the Triune God, as enshrined in Biblical anthropocentrism. It is to not disavow human beings ‘as possessing a particular dignity above other creatures’. It is to not deny the ‘source of our nobility as human persons’.⁵⁵ But when dignity and nobility of humankind are claimed, does this not leave nature as ‘an insensate order’ or at best, imbued with less dignity and nobility?⁵⁶

The most fallible misrecognition of its worth lies in humankind’s potentiality to appropriate the third principle of creation—order as divine, i.e. to extend and prevent life through animal and human experimentation, and the use of abortifacients, respectively. In breaking down the barriers of life/death, ‘man sets himself in place of God’ rather than carry out ‘his role as a cooperator with God in the work of creation’.⁵⁷ Respecting the ‘integrity of creation’ through ‘experimentation on animals’ can still be realized when it is done moderately, is done for the sake of man, and with recognition that ‘human power has limits’.⁵⁸ That is the extent of what is ‘morally acceptable’ in terms of animal ethics that does not transgress to biocentrism: the loss of life or limb of animals is justified ‘within reasonable limits [and] contributes to caring for or saving human lives’.⁵⁹ It is needful rather than needless suffering or

⁵⁰ Pope Francis, *LS*, 106.

⁵¹ Pope Francis, *LS*, 108.

⁵² Pope Francis, *LS*, 109.

⁵³ Pope Francis, *LS*, 115.

⁵⁴ Pope Francis, *LS*, 118.

⁵⁵ Pope Francis, *LS*, 119.

⁵⁶ Pope Francis, *LS*, 115.

⁵⁷ Pope Francis, *LS*, 117.

⁵⁸ Pope Francis, *LS*, 130.

⁵⁹ Pope Francis, *LS*, 130.

death that is consonant with ‘human dignity’ where the human person is ‘endowed with reason and knowledge’ and the plant or animal is bereft of reason and knowledge.⁶⁰ Experimentation on humans, on ‘living human embryos’ therefore, is illicit and tantamount to ‘transgressing all boundaries’ because ‘human embryos’ are ‘endowed with reason and knowledge? A ‘technology severed from ethics’, blurs the lines differentiating a subject from an object of experimentation, and ‘will not easily be able to limit its own power’⁶¹ where unbridled potential of (un)becoming is in fact, the catalyst to human advancement.

Even more transgressive is the purposeful ending of life or potentiality of life through abortion or use of contraceptives.⁶² The church’s teaching is resolute and reinforced in *LS*: ‘Since everything is interrelated, concern for the protection of nature is also incompatible with the justification of abortion’.⁶³ Studies drawn from the lived realities of those most affected who are the least, the last and the lost among us, show that best practices work on the intersection of ‘climate justice’, ‘gender justice’ and ‘reproductive justice’ for those seeking linkages between climate change and population reduction.⁶⁴ Addressing the climate change crisis values the interrelatedness among: a ‘common but differentiated responsibilities’ (‘climate justice’); a feminist framework that calls not only for an ‘equitable share in the existing power system’ but also a deconstruction of that male-dominated system (‘gender justice’); women and girls’ universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights services (‘reproductive justice’).⁶⁵ Hence, the silence of euphemism⁶⁶ in referring to the overpopulation of the earth as mere ‘demographic growth [that] is fully compatible with an integral and shared development’⁶⁷ is dangerously myopic. It is also a dishonest claim and exposes the church’s lack of accountability in ‘refusing to face the issues’⁶⁸ of climate change and population reduction. Humans have been ‘fruitful’ and increased so exponentially that they have not only filled the earth but unsustainably subdued it (Gen 1:28). The excesses of a ‘throwaway culture’,⁶⁹ consumerism⁷⁰ and social injustices⁷¹ are justifiable laments but these, far from being disconnected from the overpopulation of the human species are in fact, its consequences in a desperate fight for a fast depleting bounty of the earth’s resources. Where there is not enough to go around and food and resources are not equitably distributed, hunger can only precede greed; one cannot have or want more if one has nothing (to eat or live on).

In sum, the Christian story of creation in *LS* maintains that, ‘There can be no ecology without an adequate anthropology’.⁷² Interrelatedness which lies at the heart of an ‘*integral ecology*’⁷³ must not flatten out differences among species: the harm in not seeing an ‘intrinsic value in lesser beings’ (non-human) is overshadowed by the greater harm or misgiving of not seeing a ‘special value in human beings’ as the latter is created in the image and likeness of the Triune God.⁷⁴ Upholding the ‘intrinsic value’ in all of creation need not be a zero-sum game where beings are locked in a dichotomous relationality of ‘special’/‘lesser’ which is in fact, reductionist. What is the potentiality of realizing the vision of *LS*’s ‘*integral ecology*’ when we can see that ‘the human person is considered as simply one being among others’.⁷⁵ When the human person is thus de-centred, does it necessarily mean that their ‘overall sense of responsibility wanes’⁷⁶ in realizing climate justice for all? There is concession in following the science, so to speak, when Pope Francis grants that ‘living species are part of a network

⁶⁰ Pope Francis, *LS*, 130.

⁶¹ Pope Francis, *LS*, 136.

⁶² Pope Francis, *LS*, 120.

⁶³ Pope Francis, *LS*, 120.

⁶⁴ Silliman, “In Search of Climate Justice,” 1–3.

⁶⁵ Definitions,” 11.

⁶⁶ Pittaway, “Silenced by euphemism.”

⁶⁷ Pope Francis, *LS*, 50.

⁶⁸ Pope Francis, *LS*, 50.

⁶⁹ Pope Francis, *LS*, 16 and 22.

⁷⁰ Pope Francis, *LS*, 34, 50, 184, 203, 210, 215, 219 and 232.

⁷¹ Pope Francis, *LS*, 36, 70, 74, 82, 142, 158, 170 and 200.

⁷² Pope Francis, *LS*, 118.

⁷³ Pope Francis, *LS*, 137.

⁷⁴ Pope Francis, *LS*, 118.

⁷⁵ Pope Francis, *LS*, 118.

⁷⁶ Pope Francis, *LS*, 118.

which we will never fully explore and understand'.⁷⁷ The grandeur of creation and the mystery of the Triune God made manifest in that creation is surely not dimmed but rather, glorified with the revelation of interrelatedness that, 'A good part of our genetic code is shared by many living beings'. A genetic commonality for inhabitants, large and small of a 'common home' from land to sea and sky⁷⁸—where 'common' is a buzzword in *LS*—enables us to contemplate the Triune God in the 'beauty of the universe/for all things speak of you'.⁷⁹ It is fitting to now turn to other stories that start off from that premise of interrelatedness that positions the human person 'as simply one being among others'.

Other stories

In the second section of this paper, the stories about creation that are contextualized in Asia offer different takeaways. Where the Christian story foregrounds creation as order from chaos, order as hierarchy and order as divine, these stories privilege creation as materiality, creation as proliferation and creation as interrelated.

I turn firstly to *creation as materiality*, specifically, the materiality of the body vis-à-vis hunger—the Filipino '*kumakalam na sikmura*' (literally, 'gnawing of the stomach')⁸⁰—as a poignant reminder of the urgency of effecting climate justice, gender justice and reproductive justice. Jeane Peracullo, an Asian-Catholic ecofeminist philosopher from the Philippines theologizes from the lived realities of the poor and hungry Filipino women. Hunger, as she posits, 'is an embodied experience [that] exposes the human body as sexed and gendered; biological yet also social, political, and cultural; material yet metaphorical and symbolic; and a site of not only varied oppressions but also liberation'.⁸¹ Her starting thought or theology from poor and hungry women's suffering and pain stems from her awareness that women are differently and disproportionately affected by the systemic structures of domination/subjugation that cut across these multiple sites. Hunger is as such, symptomatic of the pervasive oppression that these women know because they have come to own the embodied experience of hunger for food, land and justice and yearn for liberation from dispossession and essentially, a life of dignity. In this regard, '*kumakalam na sikmura*' refers 'both to the physiological aspect of hunger as well as the state when the stomach "communicates" its needs to the person' through demanding and insistent cries.⁸² The body is neither inferiorized nor dichotomously positioned in contrast to the mind or rationality or knowledge as it is by Western thought; the body is 'material and biological—that is, "it is flesh"'.⁸³ We are mindful in this instance, of both the Eucharist where we are nourished by the body of Christ and the Incarnate Jesus who knew hunger and satisfied it—'The Son of Man came eating and drinking'.⁸⁴ The body also provides a 'sense of historicity', e.g. hunger for land rights, food security and legal reform to better address gender-and-sexual-based violence and discrimination faced by women. The body through indigenous spirituality also provides a 'sense of continuity with nonhuman bodies', connected yet distinct.⁸⁵ '*Kumakalam na sikmura*' thus frames an 'ecofeminist praxis' which is marked by 'a community of care ethics' that accords epistemic privilege to the dispossessed.⁸⁶

An 'ecofeminist praxis' that remembers without romanticizing a body in pain recognizes that poor and hungry women's bodies—not in a monolithic sense—become sites of contestation of climate justice, gender justice and reproductive justice, as 'there can be no climate justice without reproductive justice'.⁸⁷ On the question of the intersection of climate change and population reduction, the Philippines leads the way in navigating the intricacies and sensitivities of universalism (e.g. women's rights) and cultural relativism (e.g. religious conservatism among policy makers, health providers whose rights as conscientious objectors are preserved in the RH Act). The RH Act or 2012 Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Act is a groundbreaking piece of legislation that provides a state-

⁷⁷ Pope Francis, *LS*, 138.

⁷⁸ Pope Francis, *LS*, 1, 3, 13, 17, 53, 61, 155, 164, 232 and 243.

⁷⁹ Pope Francis, *LS*, 246.

⁸⁰ Peracullo, "*Kumakalam na sikmura*," 26.

⁸¹ Peracullo, "*Kumakalam na sikmura*," 26.

⁸² Peracullo, "*Kumakalam na sikmura*," 37.

⁸³ Peracullo, "*Kumakalam na sikmura*," 37.

⁸⁴ Pope Francis, *LS*, 98.

⁸⁵ Peracullo, "*Kumakalam na sikmura*," 38.

⁸⁶ Peracullo, "*Kumakalam na sikmura*," 43.

⁸⁷ Silliman, "In search of climate justice," 3.

sponsored sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) framework in Catholic-majority Philippines. It is aimed at tackling unplanned pregnancies, the consequences of unprotected sex, high infant and maternal mortality rates, and ‘the second highest population growth rate in Asia’ through family planning and comprehensive sexuality education.⁸⁸ It is hailed as a ‘very promising first step in reducing the cycle of poverty, improving the national economy, and bettering the chances for both Filipino men and women’—essentially, in tasting a life of dignity.⁸⁹ A gender-sensitive document on climate change, as opposed to a gender-neutral or worse, gender-blind one, is potentially transformative. It recognizes the intersectionality of poverty (and the hunger that results from that), the shift from a morally imperialistic approach in policy and SRHR programming by developed nations imposing population control on poor communities (which includes forced sterilization) to ‘multifaceted, rights-respecting, environmentally sound and equitable development models’⁹⁰ that empower women in particular to make healthy and informed decisions about their bodies.

With the materiality of bodies in creation in mind and heart, we now turn to the principle of *creation as proliferation* through a shamanic theology of sacred sustainability that flows from Malaysian Jesuit, Jojo M. Fung’s long-term affinity with indigenous peoples’ struggles for self-determination culminating in his initiation as a shaman in the *Murut* (indigenous from Sarawak, East Malaysia) tradition. Among his post-initiation reflections, having taken the plunge, is his contrasting the ‘scientific logic’ or ‘modern logic’ of ‘collapsing **many worlds into the one** world or neoliberal global capitalism’—resonant with LS’s much maligned ‘technocratic paradigm’⁹¹—with the ‘shamanic logic that the human world is but **one of many** worlds’.⁹² Where the former has the propensity to ‘desecrate the visible world by hollowing it of its transcendental presence’ resulting in the dehumanization of the human person, an ‘indigenous logic’ advocates that ‘the sacred is in all of life’.⁹³ As such, sacredness is attributed not only to the ‘seen world’ but also ‘the unseen world’ where spirits abound. In both these worlds, the sacredness of desecrated spaces and humanity of persons are reclaimed. The human and non-human worlds, i.e. ‘spirits in the unseen world’, are one. Neither is ‘special’ nor ‘lesser’ in relation to the other. Embedded in the ‘indigenous logic’ is the experience that the indwelling presence of the divine being and shamanic spirits in our world has made sacred all things...that all are “**sacredly alive**”.⁹⁴

This generative spirit is further manifest in Fung’s articulation of a ‘spirituality of sacred sustainability for the local churches of Asia’ wherein spirituality is understood and profoundly experienced as the ‘opening of one’s body space’ until it becomes ‘increasingly borderless and porous’ and when touched by the ‘God-who-descends unto God’s people’, it ‘transforms the web of relationships with all things, all beings and all spaces’.⁹⁵ That time and space ‘are not independent of one another’ is made tangible.⁹⁶ Through his initiation into indigenous shamanism, a religious tradition that predates Christianity in Asia, Fung’s journey to ‘liberative engagement’ in climate justice, in partnership with the *Murut* peoples, is in turn, sustained by his being a disciple of a shaman guru (elder and teacher).⁹⁷ The figure of the shaman is paradigmatic of porous borders and interlocking journeys into realms that are worldly and otherworldly, worldviews that are Christian and indigenous, and existences that are grounded in the body and spirit. His ‘discipling’⁹⁸ imitates the spirit of Jesus, as a Galilean shamanic figure in early Palestine tradition who wondered and wandered, where the shaman’s sacred place is ‘not restricted to “one holy place but is connected to the shaman’s bodily presence and immediate communication with the divine”’.⁹⁹ The body becomes not only a conduit for ‘spirits in the unseen world’ but is spirit in connectivity with other bodies and spirits.

⁸⁸ Nazareno, “Responsible Parenthood,” 95.

⁸⁹ Nazareno, “Responsible Parenthood,” 122.

⁹⁰ Silliman, “In Search of Climate Justice,” 1.

⁹¹ Pope Francis, *LS*, 101, 109, 111–112 and 122.

⁹² Fung, *Shamanic Theology*, 26–27.

⁹³ Fung, *Shamanic Theology*, 27.

⁹⁴ Fung, *Shamanic Theology*, 109.

⁹⁵ Fung, *Shamanic Theology*, 120.

⁹⁶ Pope Francis, *LS*, 138.

⁹⁷ Fung, *Shamanic Theology*, 168.

⁹⁸ Fung, *Shamanic Theology*, 168.

⁹⁹ Fung, *Shamanic Theology*, 180.

The third principle of *creation as interrelatedness* finds expression not only in the figures of the poor and hungry woman negotiating the intersectionality of poverty, climate change and SRHR but also shamans coursing through time and space. We turn now to forest or ecology monks within the Theravada Buddhist tradition in Thailand who espouse “eco-dhammic” ethics’ as activists-ascetics in engendering ‘transformative environmental adult education’ as well as a Buddhist environmental movement.¹⁰⁰ An “eco-dhammic” ethics’ is ‘caring for nature’ (*anurak thammachāt*) in the ‘dhammic sense’ which is understood as: ‘the active expression of our empathetic identification with all life-forms: sentient and nonsentient, human beings and nature’.¹⁰¹ Beyond their well-publicized acts of ordaining trees, or standing up to loggers at risk of life and limb even to their revered Thai monarch who is sometimes ambivalent about the conservation of nature, forest monks empty themselves to achieve this ‘ingrained selfless, empathetic response’.¹⁰² Quite significantly, an “eco-dhammic” ethics’ cares ‘for all things in the world in their natural conditions’ which translates in everyday praxis as differentiated from common (global) motivations of conserving nature for our own pleasure, physical and spiritual well-being even ‘benefit of future generations’.¹⁰³ Their ‘eco-dhammic’ praxis stems from the ‘realization that I do not and cannot exist independently of my total environment’.¹⁰⁴ This interrelatedness that calls forth a selflessness borne from humility follows through a truth claim that is eschewed in *LS*, that; ‘the human person is considered as simply one being among others’.¹⁰⁵ It brings in unison the otherworldly (asceticism) and worldly (activism) *dhamma* of forest monks as they engender consciousness-raising among lay communities based on Buddhist principles such as: ‘the interdependence of society, culture and nature’; ‘restraint (from greed), social equity and generosity; and ‘loving-kindness and respect for the community’.¹⁰⁶

How does an “eco-dhammic” ethics’ and praxis within Buddhist cosmology speak to an ‘integral ecology’ as envisioned in *LS*? Where an ‘integral ecology’ intimates a consideration of intersectionality, we therefore ask to what extent is the intersection of climate justice, gender justice and reproductive justice manifest in an “eco-dhammic” ethics’ and praxis? A feminist analysis of the institutionalized androcentric ordering of Buddhist religious and lay communities would inform a more faithful interrogation of ‘the structures, processes and effects of patriarchy, the male-dominance of [green] movement leadership, [or] the gendered impacts of deforestation, and how these interact with each other’.¹⁰⁷ The denial of women’s access to the Sangha—the order of fully ordained male (*bhikkus*) and female (*bhikkhunis*) monks leading to the ambivalent status of *mae chiis* (i.e. crossover between female nuns and laywomen who are at the base of the hierarchical social structure),¹⁰⁸ adds to the gender-discriminatory prohibition of women from teaching not only Buddhist scriptures to the laity but also “eco-dhammic” ethics’ in the ‘educative-activism’ of Environmental Adult Education. Whilst women are not at liberty to adopt an ascetic life indwelling the forests, burdened as they generally are by their productive and reproductive functions, a spotlight on the ‘gendered impacts of deforestation’ would show that Thai rural and indigenous women are more greatly impacted as they are the ‘principal users of forest, land and other water resources’.¹⁰⁹ Where there is conflict over resources, often precipitated by capitalist greed (e.g. resulting in the killings and disappearances of forest monks),¹¹⁰ displacement ensues which limits women’s access to SRH services which in extreme cases of neglect, could lead to malnutrition and increase their risks of morbidity and mortality. Women’s ‘work burden increases’ and they are made more vulnerable to sexual harassment which is a part of the continuum of sexual-and-gender-based violence during ‘climate change extreme events’, e.g. walking further to fetch water or being resettled in temporary camps.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁰ Walter, “Activist Forest Monks,” 336 and 343.

¹⁰¹ Walter, “Activist Forest Monks,” 335.

¹⁰² Walter, “Activist Forest Monks,” 335.

¹⁰³ Walter, “Activist Forest Monks,” 335.

¹⁰⁴ Walter, “Activist Forest Monks,” 336.

¹⁰⁵ Pope Francis, *LS*, 118.

¹⁰⁶ Walter, “Activist Forest Monks,” 336.

¹⁰⁷ Walter, “Activist Forest Monks,” 343.

¹⁰⁸ Falk, *Fields of Merit*, 43–45.

¹⁰⁹ Walter, “Activist Forest Monks,” 342–43.

¹¹⁰ Walter, “Activist Forest Monks,” 340.

¹¹¹ Lim, “Why Prioritise SRHR,” 19.

Appreciating the cogency of the third principle of creation as interrelatedness is to turn finally to the intersection of ecofeminism and Confucian cosmology. Confucianism is lauded as the bulwark of Singapore's progress and development in nation-building discourses. The late Lee Kuan Yew and former Prime Minister, modeled Singapore, the most affluent postcolonial nation-state in Southeast Asia, home to diasporic Chinese, on the economic success of the Asian tigers of East Asia, e.g. China, Hong Kong, Japan, etc. In looking to Eastern philosophies rather than Western Enlightenment, he became a proponent of 'Asian values' that run counter to a western model of divisive, atomistic individualism in embracing (societal) cohesion, compliance, and communitarianism. 'Asian values' is undergirded by Confucian-grounded virtues of 'thrift, hard work, filial piety and loyalty in the extended family, and, most of all, the respect for scholarship and learning' towards self-cultivation.¹¹² The androcentric leanings of such self-cultivation, there and then, based on the classical model of the masculine Confucian sage shape shifts through 'redemptive imagination' (of neo-Confucianism), here and now. As such, an ethos of inclusion, regardless of one's 'social and biological inheritance' takes shape and form where 'becoming persons' is open to all through the 'hard work of edification and cultural contributions' to the community.¹¹³ Becoming community through the achievement of harmony among persons finds expression in the complementary doctrines of the 'rectification of names' (*zhengming*) and 'ritual propriety' (*li*).¹¹⁴ Problematically, from a feminist lens, these form and sustain 'hierarchical power relationships—relationships between subordinating and subordinated persons';¹¹⁵ where the ruler rules over his subjects, the father over his family and son over his (elderly and widowed) mother. The flourishing of persons within communities founded on 'hierarchical harmony' is not glossed over but rather acknowledged to be susceptible to 'the slippery slope' that relativizes harm; that predisposes one to 'unjust chauvinistic anthropocentric views and practices'.¹¹⁶

Yet hope prevails. Within the planetary model of becoming, '*Qi*' is the 'material force' or 'vital force' or 'vital power'.¹¹⁷ A '*qi*-cosmology' eschews traditional accounts of matter as an 'inherently inert substance' as well as the 'bifurcation of matter and mind inherited from the European Enlightenment',¹¹⁸ which is the metaphysical equivalent of an anthropogenic climate crisis. Rather, a '*qi*-based materialism' provides 'a resource for formulating a kind of naturalistic religious experience, which values persons and their environmental relata as participatory and interactive constituents of a unified field of *qi*'.¹¹⁹ As an energy that fuels the 'incessant transformations (becoming) of the world', '*qi*' is likened to 'sublime vacuity (*taixu*)' where 'there is neither "matter," nor "causes," nor "architect,"' contrary to what was taught by the first Jesuits who arrived in China around 1600. The universe is sublime 'energy in incessant and invisible activity'.¹²⁰ It does not require 'an external cause (let alone an agency) to create the world and imbue it with a coherent order of things (*wuzhili*)' because matter is 'intelligent'.¹²¹ It is procreative. It proliferates. The '*continuity* of nature and persons' is 'a continuity of energy (*yiqi*) and a continuity of pattern (*yili*)'¹²² rather than order and hierarchy.

We now turn the spotlight to the 'procreative harmony' of the inter-relationality of *yin* and *yang*.¹²³ It is easy to characterize this inter-relationality as a 'dualistic metaphysics' until one realizes that 'neither *yin* nor *yang* are given ontological or axiological priority'.¹²⁴ Instead, they 'mutually imply one another' as correlative and reciprocal. The traditional pictographs for *yin* and *yang* illustrate 'a shady side of a hill' and the 'sunny side of a hill'. These of course 'change places over the course of a day' which render categories that define *yin* and *yang* as '[provisional] and relative to one another'.¹²⁵

¹¹² Zakaria, "Culture is Destiny," 114.

¹¹³ Duncan and Brasovan, "Contemporary Ecofeminism," 233–34.

¹¹⁴ Duncan and Brasovan, "Contemporary Ecofeminism," 234.

¹¹⁵ Duncan and Brasovan, "Contemporary Ecofeminism," 234.

¹¹⁶ Duncan and Brasovan, "Contemporary Ecofeminism," 235.

¹¹⁷ Duncan and Brasovan, "Contemporary Ecofeminism," 239.

¹¹⁸ Duncan and Brasovan, "Contemporary Ecofeminism," 239.

¹¹⁹ Duncan and Brasovan, "Contemporary Ecofeminism," 240.

¹²⁰ Duncan and Brasovan, "Contemporary Ecofeminism," 240.

¹²¹ Duncan and Brasovan, "Contemporary Ecofeminism," 241.

¹²² Duncan and Brasovan, "Contemporary Ecofeminism," 241.

¹²³ Duncan and Brasovan, "Contemporary Ecofeminism," 246.

¹²⁴ Duncan and Brasovan, "Contemporary Ecofeminism," 247.

¹²⁵ Duncan and Brasovan, "Contemporary Ecofeminism," 247.

In terms of gender relations, *LS* posits that, ‘It is not a healthy attitude which would seek “to cancel out sexual difference because it no longer knows how to confront it”’.¹²⁶ Whereas, a ‘qi-cosmology’ offers an alternative and fluid ways of becoming masculine and feminine beyond characteristics that are contrastive and worse, hierarchized. As ‘day is day-becoming-night, and night is night-becoming-day’ so all beings in a ‘qi-cosmology’ are radically understood, in a departure from dichotomous couplings, as ‘becomings’.¹²⁷ Persons in harmony with the world, become ‘active participants in a shared vital materiality’ of a vision of what may be. This is a ‘vision of a trinity of the heavens, earth and persons’.¹²⁸ Whilst it is acknowledged that ‘persons are the most valued amongst the heavens, earth, and myriad things’, it is incumbent on persons to value harmony, as it is but one force among others, as engendering ‘a prerequisite, a productive and developmental power’.¹²⁹

Conclusion: The Christian story revisited

How does the story of who the Triune God is and what this God does relate to the story of life on Earth? The Christian story that is narrated in *Laudato Si’*, is a noteworthy reference, as it forms the basis of an ‘integral ecology’ that celebrates the profound relationality of Creator and creation. The story of who the Triune God is, in that compression of time-space, has unwaveringly been: God the Father as the absolute Source of All, incarnated as the Son, and lives on through the breath of the Spirit permeating all creation. The three-person God that starts off and sustains the Christian story of creation begets a three-faceted sense of order: order from chaos, that primordial vacuity; order as hierarchy where differences in creation are not only proliferated but also hierarchized; and order as divine where the ‘Trinitarian structure’ that suffuses each creature, reflects the glory of the inter-relationality albeit differently-ordered ‘three Persons’.

Yet this particular Christian story is only part of the earth’s story. Catherine Keller’s ‘tehomitic theology’ reframes that oft-told Christian story by recuperating ‘tehom’, the ‘divine womb [that] remains neither God nor not-God but the depth of “God”’.¹³⁰ A ‘radical interdependence’ that arises ‘not from a prior nothing’, between Creator and creature would potentially designate ‘creation as incarnation’.¹³¹ And ‘*ruach*’, despite two centuries of clerical misogyny, groans with creation in ‘labor pains’.¹³² The Triune God as we know it, is made fuzzy, dis-ordered and out-of-place. Creation becomes radicalized as chaotic, co-extensive (with the Creator) and immanent. The fecund wellsprings of Asian-feminist ecotheologies and spiritualities, resonate with Keller’s ‘tehomitic theology’ in offering transformative counter-narratives to the indefatigably anthropocentric but also androcentric worldview of the Christian story in *Laudato Si’*. Privileging creation as materiality vis-à-vis the hungry body of the Filipino poor, creation as proliferation through the ecotheology of a Malaysian Jesuit priest-shaman and ‘eco-dhammic ethics’ of Thai forest monks, and creation as interrelated through a ‘qi cosmology’ of Confucianism that fuels Singapore’s neo-liberalist pursuit of the ‘technocratic paradigm’, serve to impregnate the Christian story of creation with differences that matter and matter that is different. And in this other queer beginning that goes beyond God the Father, Son and Spirit, lies integral hope.

¹²⁶ Pope Francis, *LS*, 155.

¹²⁷ Duncan and Brasovan, “Contemporary Ecofeminism,” 248.

¹²⁸ Duncan and Brasovan, “Contemporary Ecofeminism,” 248.

¹²⁹ Duncan and Brasovan, “Contemporary Ecofeminism,” 248.

¹³⁰ Keller, *Face of the Deep*, 217 and 227. Sigmund Bergmann’s musings in this edited anthology, on going beyond the Anthropocene, inspired by Keller’s ‘inter-carnation’, resonates with the queer intent of this paper, in opening up possibilities of becoming and doing ecotheologies.

¹³¹ Keller, *Face of the Deep*, 218–19.

¹³² Keller, *Face of the Deep*, 228.

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