e-ISSN: 2656-7997
p-ISSN: 2775-3425

JOURNAL of ASIAN ORIENTATION in THEOLOGY
Vol. 05, No. 02, August 2023 : 183-200

Reading The Bible, Ecologically: Re-Imagining Our Theological Hermeneutics

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Submitted: 24-04-2023 | Accepted: 19-05-2023

Abstract:

Commencing with a personal prelude to ecological biblical hermeneutics and inspired by a prophetic call of Pope Francis, the present paper outlines how in times of profound crisis, the need to choose what counts is urgent. With recourse to the same model of crisis and choice, a brief overview of some of the salient eco-biblical proposals is presented which then sets the stage for the author's eco-hermeneutical reading of Isaiah 34-35, which brings to the fore the prophetic portrayal wherein otherwise marginal/ized earth-companions meaningfully show similarity with the cherished Israelite traditions and theological visions.

Keywords:

Ecological biblical hermeneutics (EBH), Isaiah and its unity, Pope Francis, crisis and choice

DOI: https://doi.org/10.24071/jaot.v5i2.6280
Web: http://e-journal.usd.ac.id/index.php/JAOT| E: jaot@usd.ac.id

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A Personal Prelude

Thank you, dear organizers of the Theo-iCon conference at the Theology Faculty of Sanata Dharma University. Thank you for the kind invitation to share my emergent thoughts on ecological biblical hermeneutics. Permit me to begin with a personal prelude—a prelude that recounts how a conversation over a cup of tea turned out to be the starting point of my eco-biblical journey.

It was the summer of 2019. The Pontifical Biblical Institute and the Pontifical Gregorian University co-hosted the International SBL conference. During one of the conference breaks, Jean- François Racine, then a New Testament Professor at the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley, California, invited me for a cup of tea. As we know too well, in any conference ambience, such invitations do not limit themselves to just a coffee or tea. We began our conversation with the typical exchange of pleasantries and then shared with each other our research projects and course commitments. It is in the context of the latter, Prof. Racine asked me, "Dominic, why don't we think of a co-taught seminar on *The Bible and Ecology*?" and he added, "Such a seminar can be availed by the students at both institutes – Biblicum and the JST." The proposal definitely sounded novel to me. True, before that conversation, I was aware of some of the major contours of ecological crisis.

Further, given my mission at the Biblicum, a major part of the commitment involved teaching biblical exegesis. As such, until that tea moment with Prof. Racine, both the areas – ecology and biblical exegesis – remained fairly far apart. But the proposal from the professor invited me to a novelty, which is, to view the two in juxtaposition. Even as I was wondering what such a juxtaposition might involve, Prof. Racine kindly went on to share some key trends in this emerging field,[1] indicating at the same time some significant scholarly literature in the eco-biblical area. What I heard that day was both promising and appealing. In short, that morning, over a cup of tea, the plan to put together a co-taught seminar on *The Bible and Ecology* was born!

Soon after the SBL conference, I began to familiarize myself with the basic literature of this field. And the seminar plans began to take shape slowly but progressively. As things would turn out, the seminar attracted a sizable number of students from both the institutes. And there was more. (i) Given

[1] On the challenges as well as the promises of this field, see Hilary Marlow and Mark Harris, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of the Bible and Ecology* (NewYork: Oxford University Press, 2022), ix.

the urgency of the ecological crisis and therefore the pertinence of eco-biblical readings, a continued student interest resulted in further research in this area as amply attested in a number of *lavoro scritto*, Licentiate *tesinae* and even a Doctoral thesis, while at the same time (ii) I found myself investing my own research energies in reading an Isaiah text eco-theologically.[2]

My presentation today is informed by these experiences. All the same, it has a modest, three- fold aim. (i) inspired by a prophetic call from our Pope, I begin by noting how choices are crucial in times of crisis, (ii) that such choices also include how we read our Sacred Scripture and (iii) an illustration in order to highlight the pertinence and need for reading the bible ecologically.

We begin with the Pope's prophetic call.

Our Crises and So the Need for Choices

This year marks the tenth anniversary of our beloved Holy Father, Pope Francis. All along, his Petrine ministry has been marked by a compassionate heart that feels for the people at the peripheries[3] and his indefatigable efforts to broker peace between estranged, even warring, people.[4] In fact his ministerial outreach is so expansive that it includes even the non-human minorities, of which the exploited Mother Earth features prominently—and rightly so. In this context, the Pope's TED Talk[5] needs mentioning. On 10 October 2020, when the world was still suffocating under the firm grips of

[2] The initial fruits of which was presented at SBL 2020. See Dominic S. Irudayaraj, "Destruction-Restoration Dichotomy in Isaiah 34–35: An Ecological Reappraisal," in *Ecological Hermeneutics* (SBL Annual Meeting, Boston, MA: SBL, 2020). Then it went through the usual peer-review process and became a journal article. See Dominic S. Irudayaraj, "Destruction-Restoration Dichotomy in Isaiah 34–35: An Ecological Reappraisal," *Biblica* 103, no. 3 (2022): 325–44, https://doi.org/10.2143/BIB.103.3.3291154.

[3] Pope Francis, *A Stranger and You Welcomed Me:A Call to Mercy and Solidarity with Migrants and Refugees* (New York: Orbis Books, 2018).

[4] Philip Pullella, "Pope Kisses Feet of South Sudan Leaders, Urging Them to Keep the Peace," *Reuters*, April 11, 2019, sec. World News, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-pope-southsudan-idUSKCN1RN27G.

[5] The talk was "livestreamed … during the closing session of the Global Launch of TED's climate initiative, Countdown." See TED Staff, "The Making of His Holiness Pope Francis's Second TED Talk | TED Blog," accessed December 10, 2020, https://blog.ted.com/the-making-of-his-holiness-pope-franciss-second-ted-talk/.

the Pandemic, the Holy Father, with his characteristic grit,[6] addressed the issue at hand: "We are living during a historic moment, marked by difficult challenges, as we all know. The world is shaken by the *crisis* caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.... And this requires us, all of us, to face a *choice*. The choice between what matters, and what does not."[7] The talk then goes beyond the pandemic as the Holy Father addresses a related global challenge: the socio-environmental crisis.[8] In the Pope's call, there are two key terms that are particularly relevant for our purpose today: *crisis* and *choice*. In other words, when faced with profound crises, we are called to make urgent choices! We commence with the crises at hand.

Crises

A warming world has irreversible implications for every inhabitant of the common home called the Earth, of which we humans form but a part. There is an abundance of data on how stifling our ecological crises are. David Wallace-Wells, in his concise but well-researched work *The Uninhabitable Earth,* catalogues several raging ecological issues. From heat death to wildfire to dying oceans to plagues to politics, the book is filled with data that would stagger even a cursory reader. Included here are some references to issues that Indonesia is facing.[9] Let me cite one of them: the coral bleaching or coral dying. The author here outlines both the issue and its consequences.

[6] For a compelling account, see Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, *The Pope and the Pandemic: Lessons in Leadership in a Time of Crisis* (New York: Orbis Books, 2021).

[7] *Pope Francis: "Our Moral Imperative to Act on Climate Change -- and 3 Steps We Can Take,"* TED Talks, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KHuwaKrHuR0. (emphasis, added). Elsewhere I have used these key terms to read a book from Wisdom Literature in the Bible. See Dominic S. Irudayaraj, "Pandemic and the Bible: A Papal Prelude and Some Job-an Ruminations," *Hekima Review* 62 (December 2020): 24–38.

[8] The theme is treated in length in *Laudato Si' and Fratelli Tutti*. See Pope Francis, "Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home," May 24, 2015, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html. See also Pope Francis, "Fratelli Tutti: On Fraternity and Social Friendship," October 3, 2020, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa- francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html.

[9] David Wallace-Wells, *The Uninhabitable Earth: A Story of the Future* (New York: The Duggan Books, 2019), 82, 105, 114, 180.

"Each [coral] reef is an ecosystem as complex as a modern city, and when [they are deprived of protozoa which is their food supply], they die, [in fact] the whole complex is starved with military efficiency, a city under siege or blockade."[10] Wallace-Wells then lays out its shocking effects. "According to the World Resources Institute, by 2030 ocean warming and acidification will threaten 90 percent of all reefs.... [We are aware that the reefs] are the natural protection against flooding from storm surges... [So] when they are gone, their devastating impacts are at once obvious. In monetary terms, for example, it will be a devastating loss of "$400 million [USD] annually to Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Cuba, and Mexico—$400 million annually to each."[11] Behind these huge monetary figures, we are painfully aware that there are hundreds of thousands of lives that are at peril, particularly lives of those at the periphery of the society. This data, though, accounts for just one crisis and its impact on 5 countries. Should we dare zoom out, try and behold the global picture, the proverbial *writing on the wall* becomes at once clear. We are in the very midst of destabilizing, devastating crises. Such profound crises, as noted earlier, call for urgent choices. To this end, we turn to our Holy Father, yet again.

Choices

In September 2021, Pope Francis invited the "Catholics around the world to pray ... that the world makes 'courageous choices' to protect the environment.... [To cite Pope's own words:] 'We pray that we all will make courageous choices for a simple and environmentally sustainable lifestyle.'"[12] Obviously, the call to a sustainable lifestyle has immediate implications not merely for individuals but also for communities, nations, and the world at large. Stating the same differently, the Pope's invitation is a call for a radical change in how we think, act, interact, and live. This includes how we read our Sacred texts. It is therefore an invitation to reimagine our interpretive

[10] Wallace-Wells, 105.

[11] Wallace-Wells, 105.

[12] CNA Staff, "Pope Francis Asks Catholics to Pray That World Makes 'Courageous Choices' to Protect Environment," Catholic News Agency, accessed March 21, 2023, https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/248845/pope-francis-asks-catholics-to-pray-that-world-makes-courageous- choices-to-protect-environment.

dispositions and hermeneutical presuppositions. Thankfully, in the last few decades, scholars with pronounced ecological commitment have charted some useful roadmaps. We shall briefly look at some of the salient ones, shortly. But first, a historical prelude is appropriate.

Ecology and the Bible:

Varieties of Interpretive Dispositions

Nearly every discussion on the Bible and Ecology invariably makes reference to Lynn White Jr.'s article in the journal *Science*. Published in 1967, the article is over half-a-century old, and runs a total of just 5 pages. Nonetheless, its impact is enviable. For instance, in the recently published Oxford Handbook on the Bible and Ecology, White is cited in no less than 35 pages! Hence, it is worth our while to begin with the core of White's argument. The author is forthright in pointing his accusing finger at the Judeo-Christian tradition for the current ecological crisis.[13] White declared that the manner in which these two faith traditions read and interpreted the biblical texts has been the root cause for an uncontrolled exploitation of the earth, leading to the current ecological crises. For example, biblical texts such as Gen 1:26, which speak of the divine mandate to the humans to have dominion over other creatures, have on the one hand contributed to the exponential growth in science and technology but on the other hand led to unbridled exploitation of the Earth and earth creatures.

Of course, not everyone nods in agreement to White's accusation. There are others who argue back, in fact, express firm confidence that the Bible contains rich and relevant data that not only facilitates an ecologically integral worldview but also serves as an antidote to current ecological crisis. For example, the project "Green Bible" begins with two provocative questions: "Is God green? Did Jesus have anything to say about the environment?"[14] In response,

[13] He observed that "although environmental stresses begin to be seen in the mid-nineteenth century, the roots … lie far earlier than this… [namely] the presence of Christian values caused medieval Europe to become technologically enhanced at a more accelerated pace than other civilizations." Jeremy H. Kidwell, "The Historical Roots of The Ecological Crisis," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Bible and Ecology*, ed. Hilary Marlow and Mark Harris (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022), 10. Cf. Lynn White, Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," *Science* 155, no. 3767 (March 10, 1967): 1203–7, https://doi.org/10.1126/science.155.3767.1203.

[14] See Michael G. Maudlin and Marlene Baer, eds., *The Green Bible: New Revised Standard Version*

the contributors note that the Bible contains over 1,000 references to the earth. So, they are emphatic in their declaration: "the message is clear. All of God's creation—nature, animals, and humanity—are inextricably linked to one another. [Therefore] As creation cares for us, we too are called to care for creation and engage in the work of healing and sustaining it."[15]

White's outright accusation and Green Bible's confident declaration are merely two representative voices in the eco-biblical arena. For our heuristic purpose, we can choose to view them as two extreme positions on the eco-biblical spectrum. There are of course several other voices that can be plotted along the said spectrum. In the interest of time, we shall briefly indicate three significant ones.

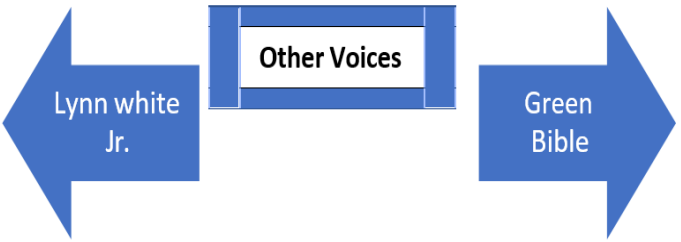


Fig 1. Eco-Biblical Spectrum

Three Significant Models

Habel and Earth Bible Project

Established by Norman Habel and companions in 1990s, the Earth Bible Project began from an Australian context. The project was a fruitful result of continued conversations between ecologists, Indigenous people, and their marginal siblings (such as "Dalits, women, people with disabilities or some other category").[16] The project is characterized by three reading

[Foreword by Desmond Tutu] (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2008).

[15] See Maudlin and Baer.

[16] Norman C. Habel, ed., *Readings from the Perspective of Earth*, vol. 1, The Earth Bible (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 52. See also Anne Elvey, "Ecological Feminist Hermeneutics," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Bible and Ecology*, ed. Hilary Marlow and Mark Harris (New York: Oxford

dispositions: suspicion, identification, and retrieval. Further, in order to aid these reading dispositions, six ecojustice principles are outlined: Intrinsic worth, interconnectedness, voice, purpose, mutual custodianship, and resistance.[17]

The second volume of the project, titled *Earth Story in Genesis,* engages the first book of the Bible ecologically. The chapters in the volume "uncover how Earth may be valued or de-valued, given a voice or denied a voice, dominated or served, depending on the orientation of the text. In Genesis 1, for example, the intrinsic worth of Earth is highlighted in the 'revealing' of Earth's presence but negated when humans are given the right to 'subdue' it."[18]

Horrell and University of Exeter

With an aim to keep the ecological conversation open to even the non-believers, the Earth Bible Project avoids terms such as God, creation, etc. In contradistinction, the scholars at the university of Exeter, led by David Horrell, bring to the discussion table the very ideas and concepts that the Earth Bible Project eschews. Horrell therefore pleads that as Christians our readings are not so much hindered as helped by our doctrines. As such, he calls for a need to tread the delicate line between faithfulness to the text and creativity in the use of our reading lenses.[19]

For example, following the lead of Horrell, Rogerson comments on the Noah story as follows: "the world in which Noah and his meat-eating, conflict-ready descendants live is a 'compromised world,' formed and marked by human violence and exploitation of the non-human creation which was never intended. Genesis 1 thus functions biblically as a prophetic critique of

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University Press, 2022), 38.

[17] Norman C. Habel, ed., *Earth Story in the Psalms and the Prophets*, The Earth Bible 4 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001), 22.

[18] See Norman C. Habel and Shirley Wurst, eds., *Earth Story in Genesis*, The Earth Bible 2 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic, 2000).

[19] David G. Horrell, "Introduction," in *Ecological Hermeneutics: Biblical, Historical and Theological Perspectives*, ed. David G. Horrell et al. (London: T & T Clark International, 2010), 8.

the actual state of the human behavior."[20]

Marlow and Ecological Triangle (Interrelationship)

Our third representative voice is that of Marlow. With a keen exegetical eye and, informed by the triangle Model of Wright,[21] Marlow's reading pays particular attention to the interrelationship between God, humanity and non-human creation. Such a reading disposition helps her to "uncover hitherto neglected ideas and motifs"[22] in the biblical texts. Marlow's reading of the book of Isaiah, for instance, takes note of "themes and images of the natural world and how significant they are for the prophetic messages of the book. Throughout Isaiah the natural world acts as a barometer of Israel's relationship with YHWH, evocatively expressed in terms of the earth's working against its human inhabitants, and of nature mourning and rejoicing."[23]

The three voices – of Habel, Horrell, and Marlow and their companions – have immensely informed my reading of Isaiah 34-35.[24] In the remaining few minutes, I wish to present some select results of my eco-journey with a hope that it would give us a few leads for our discussion after the presentation.

[20] Francesca Stavrakopoulou, "Introduction to Part I," in *Ecological Hermeneutics: Biblical, Historical and Theological Perspectives*, ed. David G. Horrell et al. (London:T &T Clark International, 2010), 16. Cf. John W. Rogerson, "The Creation Stories:Their Ecological Potential and Problems," in *Ecological Hermeneutics: Biblical, Historical and Theological Perspectives*, ed. David G. Horrell et al. (London:T &T Clark International, 2010), 21–31.

[21] Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Wheaton, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2004), 103.

[22] Hilary Marlow, *Biblical Prophets and Contemporary Environmental Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 110–11.

[23] Hilary Marlow, "Reading from the Ground Up: Nature in the Book of Isaiah," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Bible and Ecology*, ed. Hilary Marlow and Mark Harris (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022), 133.

[24] Irudayaraj, "Destruction-Restoration Dichotomy in Isaiah 34–35: An Ecological Reappraisal," 2022.

An Eco-Hermeneutical Reading of Isaiah 34-35

The book of Isaiah, with its appealing images, arresting prophetic rhetoric, exceptional poetic finesse, and therefore compelling theological messages, continues to elicit readerly interest—both academic and otherwise. The rich reception history of this prophetic mega corpus further attests to its continued appeal.[25]

Isaiah and Its Unity

Its compelling and continued appeal notwithstanding, Isaian scholarship has been wrestling with a number of exegetical and interpretive questions. One of the lingering queries is the unity – or the lack thereof – of the book. Is it a book or, two or three books? Does it connect with a single prophet of 8th century BCE or more than one prophetic person? Further, the book betrays links to multiple historical contexts – Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian (perhaps, even Hellenistic) periods. So, the question of *Isaiah and Its Unity* is at once a lingering challenge but also a promising possibility. The topic is beyond the scope of my presentation today. For those interested in it, let me limit myself by pointing to a forthcoming collected volume, that Rossi, Hens-Piazza, and I have co-edited.[26]

The Isaiah research in the past, particularly those with a pronounced diachronic thrust, resorted to finding various layers in the book. There is no doubt that such meticulous endeavours brought to the fore immense research output. At the same time, such attempts at dissection left the book atomized. Today, there is a growing scholarly sensitivity to perceive the book as a meaningful whole, while not denying its composite nature.[27]

Isaiah 34-35 as A Meaningful Diptych

One such compelling proposal relates to how we view the middle of

[25] The generous citations of Isaiah in NT in the lectionary readings are attestations to this fact.

[26] Benedetta Rossi, Dominic S. Irudayaraj, and Gina Hens-Piazza, eds., *Unity in the Book of Isaiah*, LHBOTS 732 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2023).

[27] Dominic S. Irudayaraj, *Violence, Otherness and Identity in Isaiah 63:1-6: The Trampling One Coming from Edom*, LHBOTS 633 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 11.

the book, that is chaps. 34-35. For example, on the one hand, destruction, devastation, and desolation dominate Isaiah 34. Details such as scrolled-up skies (v.4), blood-sated and fat-satiated slaughters (v.6) and threat to the land (vv.6-7, 9) fill a reader's sight, hearing and smell to the full. The following chapter (Isaiah 35), on the other hand, is marked by dramatic transformation in the people and the land (35:1, 4-6), paving the way for a joyful march of the redeemed to the cherished Zion (v.10). The dichotomous tones in these two adjacent chapters are hard to miss. Interestingly, such a dichotomy seems to mirror a thematic shift that transpires in the whole book of Isaiah.

Isaian scholarship has long observed that a notable tone of judgment dominates the first part of Isaiah (chaps. 1-33) whereas endearing themes such as salvation and redemption are predominant in the second section (chaps. 40-66). So, right in the middle of the book, our two chapters with their respective tones of judgment (in chap. 34) and salvation (in chap. 35) seem to summarize the entire book of Isaiah succinctly (cf. Figure 2). In his monumental, single volume commentary, Childs captures this dynamic with an appealing imagery: "The two major themes of the chapters, namely, *the divine judgment of the nations* [in chap. 34] and *the return of the redeemed to Zion* [in chap. 35], point both backward to earlier Isaianic prophecies as well as to the ensuing chapters,"[28] [and thus] constituting a meaningful diptych in the near center of the book of Isaiah (cf. Figure 3).



Figure 2. Chapters 34-35 and the Dichotomous Themes



[28] Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah: A Commentary*, 1st ed., OTL (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 523. (emphases added).

Figure 3. Diptych at the near center of the book

True, there is an unmistakable tone of destruction in chap. 34—destruction of both the land and the animals in the first ten verses (vv.1-10). The remaining verses (vv. 11-15) present a catalog of animals and plants that carry an obvious bad reputation in the biblical tradition.[29] So, scholars have tended to divide the chapters along a simple binary of destruction vs. restoration, with vv.16-17 as marking a transition.[30]

Destruction 34:1-15

Transition 34:16-17

Restoration 35:1-10

Sadly, such an interpretive decision comes with a cost of bypassing the flora and the fauna that fill this text. Instead, may I suggest that we pause to listen to these marginalized entities, as eco-hermeneutical scholars would want us to? When we do so, it elicits an adaptation in the literary structure. As shown in Figures 4 and 5, the proposed adaptation treats 34:11-17 as one unit, surrounded by two text units of same length (34:1-10 and 35:1-10). The benefit is that such a change in our perception results in an appealing ecological edifice right in the middle of these two chapters.[31] Let us take note of some of the salient ecological themes in this edifice.

Description of desolation 34:1-10

An ecological "edifice" 34:11-17

Transformation of place and people 35:1-10

[29] These are "all the unclean and ominous animals which are forbidden by the relevant canon in the Law." Willem A. M. Beuken, *Isaiah II*, vol. 2: Isaiah 28-39, Historical Commentary on the Old Testament (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 300–301.

[30] See, for example, Peter D. Miscall, *Isaiah 34-35: A Nightmare/A Dream*, JSOTSup 281 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic, 1999), 89.

[31] Further, a disjunctive *waw* in v.11 signals a thematic transition.

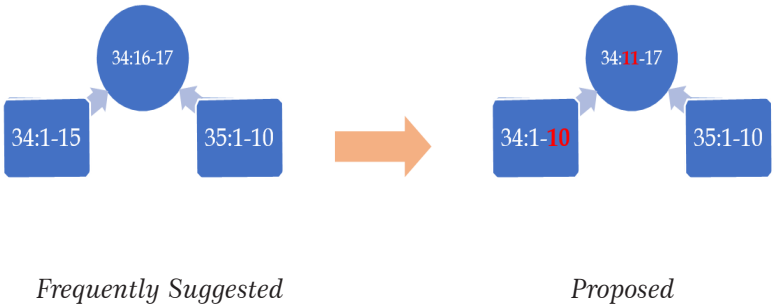


Figure 5. An Ecologically Informed Literary Structure of Isaiah 34-35

A possess and live (v. 11a)
B line and plummet (v. 11b)
C no, nothing (v. 12)
D flora's growth; fauna's abode (v. 13)
E meet, call, REPOSE and REST (v. 14)
D' birds' growth and gathering with mate (v. 15)
C' no one, none (v. 16)
B' lot and portion (v. 17a)
A' possess and live (v. 17b)

Figure 6. Inclusio, Chiasm in and literary structure of vv. 11-17

Inheritance and portion: The verbs "to possess and to live" in OT often denotes the Israelite possession or inheritance of the land."[32] The verbs' appearance both at the beginning and at the end of our ecological edifice (in vv.11, 17) constitute a meaningful inclusio (A-A'). Going further, a number of construction-related nouns feature in the same verses ("line," "plummet," "lot," and "portion"). Commenting on these theologically rich vocabulary, Roberts in his *Hermeneia* commentary notes, "Using traditional Israelite terminology for the communal distribution of property, the prophet

[32] See Marlow, *Biblical Prophets and Contemporary Environmental Ethics*, 232 n.128. See also John F. A. Sawyer, *Isaiah*, vol. 2, The Daily Study Bible Series (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1986), 14.

claims that Yahweh has legally given to these wild creatures … the … territory forever."[33] In short, through these rich terminologies, the author underscores how the earth companions share in the Israelite legacy of land possession and distribution!

Vision and voice: In v. 15, the description takes pains to delineate the birth process of a bird's little ones. Starting with a reference to nest, the depiction gives an account of laying [of egg],[34] hatching, and brooding! Even as our ecological eyes are invited to behold such a meticulous portrayal, our environmentally attuned ears will hear the wild creatures calling to each other (v.14). Seitz perceptively compares this vision of birds in pairs to that of Noah's ark (Gen 6:19-7:3).[35] If this interpretation can be granted, this depiction of animals shares commonality with the Israelite cherished traditions.

Rest and Repose: Right in the middle, v.14 names Lilith and her posture as resting and reposing. Both descriptions—rest and repose—in OT typically feature in texts where Canaan is described as Israel's dwelling place.[36] As such, Marlow's comment is appropriate: calling to one's mate and finding rest are "both typical bird activities that suggest a level of security and lack of disturbance [which is] necessary for breeding."[37] So, Lilith too, like the flora and fauna earlier, seem to be sharing in Israel's covenantal blessings such as repose and rest! In sum, the ecological edifice in 34:11-17 houses several aspects wherein the cherished Israelite traditions and theological visions are shared by the earth creatures.

In short, as soon as our reading dispositions are generous enough to stay with, listen to and take note of the marginal ones, namely the earth-companions, the Isaiah text grants us a reasonable amount of ecologically

[33] See J. J. M. Roberts, *First Isaiah:A Commentary*, Hermeneia - A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015), 437.

[34] The word מלט can mean "both to save or rescue (31:5) and to give birth to (66:7)." See Miscall, *Isaiah 34-35*, 85.

[35] Christopher R. Seitz, *Isaiah 1-39*, Interpretation, a Biblical Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY:Westminster John Knox, 1993), 237

[36] HALOT 5309.

[37] Marlow, *Biblical Prophets and Contemporary Environmental Ethics*, 233.

relevant information and insights.

Conclusion

We began this presentation with a recourse to a prophetic call of our Pope. It might therefore be appropriate to close our ecological musings with reference to his *magnum opus*: *Laudato Si'*. In chapter 2, titled *The Gospel of Creation*, the Pope "begins with the Biblical wisdom (65-75), pauses to contemplate the mystery of the universe (76-83) for the divine message encoded in each creature (84-88). [Then he notes that] The creatures are in communion (89-92) and share a common destination (93-95) towards which the humans, inspired by the gaze of Christ (96-100), are to guide it."[38]

How wonderfully outlined here are the revelatory nature of all creatures, their intrinsic worth, and their interconnectedness! It is not just a utopian, feel-good vision of a green and connected world where our ecological commitment is content with planting trees and caring for the animals—although both of them are valuable and commendable. In the same encyclical, the Pope is forthright in linking ecology to peace and justice as the Pope insists "peace, justice and the preservation of creation are three absolutely interconnected themes, which cannot be separated and treated individually."[39] Following this pertinent call of our Pontiff, may I dare say that implicated by an unprecedented ecological crises, whose unfortunate victims are often those who are at the peripheries and margins— which include the Mother Earth, our choices need to be—in fact ought to be—urgent, creative, and compassionate.[40] Such an urgent, compassionate creativity necessarily includes our choice to read the Sacred Scripture, ecologically!

[38] Dominic S. Irudayaraj, "The Gospel of Creation," in *Laudato Si': Made Simple*, ed. Ingrid Vorner, Wilfred Sumani, and Peter Knox (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2017), 15.

[39] Irudayaraj, 16.

[40] See Robin Gomes, "Pope: Contemplation, Compassion Indispensable for Integral Ecology - Vatican News," September 12, 2020, https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2020-09/pope-francis-laudatosi-communities-justice- environment.html. An excellent illustration to this effect is the communal discernment on the universal apostolic preferences by the Jesuits which resulted in the inclusion of "Caring for our Common Home." See "Apostolic Preferences | The Society of Jesus," accessed March 26, 2023, https://www.jesuits.global/uap/.

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