



Divine Lover of Life

Reflecting on Wisdom 11:22–12:2 ELAINE WAINWRIGHT suggests that by contemplating creation we will develop love to care of the Earth community.

Wisdom 11:22 In your sight, O God, the whole world is like a grain of dust that tips the scale, like a drop of morning dew falling on the ground. ²³ Yet you are merciful to all, because you are almighty, you overlook people's sins, so that they can repent. ²⁴ Yes, you love everything that exists, and nothing that you have made disgusts you, since, if you had hated something, you would not have made it. ²⁵ And how could a thing subsist, had you not willed it? Or how be preserved, if not called forth by you? ²⁶ No, you spare all, since all is yours, O God, lover of life!

12:1 For your imperishable spirit is in everything! ² And thus, gradually, you correct those who offend; you admonish and remind them of how they have sinned, so that they may abstain from evil and trust in you, O God.

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This extract from the Book of Wisdom 11:22–12:2, written in the second or first century BCE, belongs to the biblical Wisdom Literature which includes psalms and proverbs, poetry and prose. A key characteristic of the collection, distinguishing it from the more “historical” literature of the Hebrew Bible, is its reflection on life. For the sages responsible for the texts life includes the relationships of the ordinary human community, with the Divine and with the cosmos.

The poem in Wis 11:22–6 begins with a cosmic vision: “In your sight, O God, the whole world is like a grain of dust that tips the scale, like a drop of morning dew falling on the ground.” Two metaphors expand our consciousness providing a “God’s eye” view: the world is like a “grain of dust” and it is also like a “drop of morning dew”. Each is so small and transient: the grain of dust tips the scales and the morning dew falls to the earth. Yet, each is significant, the sage announces, and is held in the sight of God.

We can imagine just how attentive to and appreciative of the “whole world” the sage was in order for such metaphors to emerge. In our time, separated from the world of the sage by centuries and with our ever-expanding knowledge of the cosmos, we, too, can allow new metaphors to come to the fore to nurture our love of all creation. We can think of the way the first astronauts were stunned at seeing Earth from

their spaceship and how they spoke with reverence for the planet as a jewel in the vastness of space.

Even as the wise one attends to the wonder of the cosmos, they are aware of “sin” within the Earth community, sin that sunders relationships. We know the breakdown is not confined to human relationships but to the relationships of the whole community of Earth — human and other-than-human. From the Wisdom perspective it is possible to repent, to restore the relationships. We hear in Wis 11:23 the urgent call to repent, to change our way of living, not just for ourselves but for the good of the Earth community and for the cosmos.

The sage shares insights with the listener about the Divine’s relationship with creation: “Yes, you love everything that exists, and nothing that you have made disgusts you, since, if you had hated something, you would not have made it. 25 And how could a thing subsist, had you not willed it? Or how be preserved, if not called forth by you? 26 No, you spare all, since all is yours, O God, lover of life.”

The sage names the Divine as “lover of life” — the creative one who loves the universe, loves all that exists, loves life. Love binds the Divine to and within all of creation. It is a loving relationship that is broken by what the sage calls “sin”.

This song of the sage can invite us, as the contemporary wisdom community, to engage in similar reflection. What new names and characteristics of the Divine One might arise from our own contemplation of the Earth community and the cosmos in which we live? How might these names colour our relationships with one another and with the other-than-human?

We know we need a theology — a way of speaking of the Divine — that is attuned to the complexities of life around us, that will assist us in our time. For this, we can engage in a reflection process which will lead to a new vision and also a new praxis — a new way of being in and contributing to the universe in this time.

A first step is to engage with others to be alert to and to understand more accurately the crisis that we are facing as the planet warms bringing with it dire consequences. In her book *On Fire: The Burning Case for a Green New Deal*, Naomi Klein provides resources that can inform us and suggest how to respond to the ecological crisis that confronts the entire planet. As Greta Thunburg says, we can call on the world’s governments and large companies to take the crisis seriously and urgently halt activities that damage Earth.

As the sage understood in his time, ultimately we too want to be motivated by love for all creation. We want to understand more of the complex matrix of relationships that keep the world, including ourselves, alive. We want insight into creative love that will influence our praxis to restore relationships in Earth. By pondering Wisdom’s insights and articulating our own, we will have new interpretations to serve us spiritually and theologically and inspire our praxis as we face the ecological crisis of our day.

The last two verses of the extract are appropriate for us as they prompt us from reflecting on the biblical text to working towards a new ethical praxis day by day.

“For your imperishable spirit is in everything! And thus, gradually, you correct those who offend; you admonish and remind them of how they have sinned, so that they may abstain from evil and trust in you, O God” (Wis 12:1-2). 🕊️

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