



Desire,  
Darkness,  
*and* HOPE

*Theology in a Time of Impasse*

Engaging the Thought of Constance FitzGerald, OCD

Edited by Laurie Cassidy and M. Shawn Copeland

nature of God, and our understanding of God is what affects the character and quality of our human living.<sup>58</sup>

When Wall Kimmerer invited her students to consider what it might mean to let the Earth and its inhabitants love them mutually, as subjects, it was an invitation to the decentering and unsaying that mark humility, a prompt to listen to the subtle signs of Sophia in the rhythms of creation, to learn about the Beloved and to be transformed as lovers. “Sophia is secret; she dwells in secret and has an affinity for darkness. . . . Sophia is loving knowledge of God, both the teacher and what is learned. Sophia is on the side of continual learning.”<sup>59</sup> As humans seek to discover as much as possible about a beloved person when falling in love, Sophia Wisdom opens space in the heart so that humans can come to know God’s creation as revelatory, drawing us in and through what and who we love, into Love, God. In this way, FitzGerald indicates, Sophia educates human desire over the course of the soul’s journey, effecting “a gradual transference of desire to Jesus Christ, the Beloved!”<sup>60</sup>

**The human learning required** in the Anthropocene both springs from and nurtures the mutual love relationship of all members of creation. The collective impasse of climate change presents hu-manity with an opportunity to move through and past self-knowl-edge to the necessary implication of creaturely interdependence: reciprocity in love with all God’s creation. “The deepening pres-ence of Holy Wisdom pervading one’s whole life and environment gradually educates desire and in that process eventually fulfills it.”<sup>61</sup>

Sophia’s secret, silent music resounds in all creation, John sings in *The Spiritual Canticle*:

My Beloved, the mountains,  
and lonely wooded valleys,  
strange islands,  
and resounding rivers,

58. FitzGerald, “Transformation in Wisdom,” 284.

59. *Ibid.*, 288.

60. *Ibid.*, 291.

61. *Ibid.*, 292.

the whistling of love-stirring breezes,  
 the tranquil night  
 at the time of the rising dawn,  
 silent music,  
 sounding solitude,  
 the supper that refreshes, deepens love.<sup>62</sup>

Commenting synthetically, FitzGerald offers this insight: “[I]n the last part of both *The Spiritual Canticle* and *The Living Flame*, one of the astounding graces of transformation in wisdom, or union with the divine, is that one actually *experiences* the harmony, mutuality, and diversity of all creation *moving in God* in a unified, interdependent connectedness and enjoys this as a mirror or image of Sophia-God.”<sup>63</sup> In the process, John writes, all members of creation become “for the soul a harmonious symphony of sublime music surpassing all concerts and melodies of the world.”<sup>64</sup>

The contemplative holds all the joy and pain of that symphony together as one whole. Awakened, the soul transformed in Sophia Wisdom desires to go “deep into the thicket” with Jesus crucified:

[I]t will be a singular comfort and happiness for her to enter all the afflictions and trials of the world and everything, however difficult and painful, that might be a means to this knowledge, even the anguish and agony of death, all in order to see herself further within her God. . . . Suffering is the means of her penetrating further, deep into the thicket of the delectable wisdom of God.<sup>65</sup>

In the interconnectedness of God’s creation, as in Jesus’ cross, suffering and joy meet. In the experience of awakening, FitzGerald writes, “one *sees and knows* it is a delusion to perceive ourselves as separate from the earth, from one another, and from all other species of life, superior and unaccountable to the earth and other forms of life. The vision of Divine Sophia enables contemplative

62. *Spiritual Canticle* 14 and 15.

63. FitzGerald, “Transformation in Wisdom,” 297, commenting on *Spiritual Canticle Commentary* 14, 15.10, and 25; 36.6-7; 39.11; *Living Flame of Love* 4.4-7, emphasis in the original. See also “Desire for God,” 219.

64. *Spiritual Canticle Commentary* 14 and 15.25.

65. *Spiritual Canticle* 36.11-12; cf. *Living Flame of Love* 4.

people to be keepers of the earth and of beauty because they experience the connectedness of it all in *the Beauty*.”<sup>66</sup> Likewise, the vulnerability and suffering of Earth and all our relations, understood contemplatively, become part of one’s experience of God, suffering Sophia, Jesus crucified.

The Carteret Islanders, following the wisdom of their Council of Elders, ultimately rejected the government’s relocation plans and formed their own nonprofit, Tulele Peisa, which means “sailing the waves on our own” in the Halia language. Seeking creative approaches to relocation, Tulele Peisa embraces the values of “active promotion of community self-reliance, environmental awareness and sustainability, and cultural survival.”<sup>67</sup> With little financial support and significant governmental obstacles, they built an indigenous climate response plan that received the United Nations Development Programme’s 2014 Equator Prize.

Ursula Rakova, executive director of Tulele Peisa, faces into the climate impasse: “I love my islands, we live by the sea and they provide for us every day, but we have to move now.”<sup>68</sup> Going deep into the thicket, she is well aware that while her community is suffering the first and most drastic effects of the climate crisis, this reality encompasses the whole, interconnected planet, all our relations.

## Conclusion

FitzGerald’s realization that Sophia Wisdom subverts and transforms human understanding of God in a life-changing way provides an important hermeneutical key in relating the dark night experience to the collective impasse of climate crisis. In and through Sophia Wisdom, each and every member of creation

66. FitzGerald, “Transformation in Wisdom,” 337, emphasis in the original.

67. UN Development Programme, “Tulele Peisa,” 6.

68. Mark Bowling, “‘We Have to Move Now,’ Islanders Watch as Their Home Disappears into the Sea,” *Catholic Leader* (April 20, 2016), available at <http://catholicleader.com.au/news/we-have-to-move-now-islanders-watch-as-their-home-disappears-in-the-sea>.