

# My Deepest Learnings/Revelations

Sung-Hae Kim, S.C.

## 1. Elizabeth Seton's Vision of the Interconnectedness of all Creation

\* three major images: the Spider Web, the Coral in the ocean, the rotten Tree

In Emmitsburg Elizabeth was forming three communities simultaneously, one of apostolic religious life, one of family, and one of social and ecclesial ties. These three communities were interconnected, in her words, like a "**spider web of earthly weaving.**" (Letter 7.147, "To Rev. John Hickey, S.S.," [before 19 March 1818], *CW*, 2:536) Moreover, Elizabeth perceived these three communities through her innate ecological lens. I say this because her vision included the qualities of ecological community as described by Russian philosopher **Peter Kropotkin** (1842–1921), who was one of the first to promote the concept of "ecological community." He believed that a set of fundamental ecological principles can be derived from nature: mutual aid, solidarity, cooperation, self-governance, harmony, balance, and community. (Marius de Geus, *Ecological Utopias: Envisioning the Sustainable Society*, 88) These same principles repeatedly appear in Elizabeth's writings in reference to her threefold community life with the sisters, her children, and her social acquaintances.

---

"**The coral in the ocean** is a branch of pale green, it is almost a rock. Its tender color is changed to a brilliant red: so too we, submerged in the ocean of this world, subjected to the succession of the waves, ready to give up under the stress of each wave and temptation. But as soon as our soul rises, and it breathes toward heaven, the pale green of our sickly hopes is changed into that pure bright red of divine and constant love. Then we regard the disruptions of nature and the fall of worlds with an unshakable constancy and confidence." (*Collected Writings* 1:304. Dated 12 May 1804)

---

Elizabeth wanted to be purified by emptying herself completely. In her "Spiritual Journal to Cecilia Seton" she used the image of '**a rotten tree**' to portray the deep roots of our selfishness: "—imagining the corrupted heart in Thy hand, it begged Thee with all its strength to cut, pare, and remove from it, (whatever anguish it must undergo) whatever prevented the entrance of Thy Love—again it repeats the supplication and begs it as Thy greatest mercy—cut to the center, tear up every root, let it bleed, let it suffer anything, every thing, only fit it for Thyself, place only Thy Love there, and let Humility keep centinal and what shall I fear— ...Lord, I am dust—" (4.55, *CW* 1:476. Dated 18 September 1807)

## 2. Transformation of Elizabeth Seton into an Ecological Mystic

i) Her 'born-again' experience as an Anglican Protestant:

“My cup has indeed run over’ my darling Soul’s Sister—never would I have thought of such enjoyment in *this world* last night was sure a *foretaste* of the next —nor *pain* nor *weight* either of Soul or Body....*Our H[enry] H[obart]* was at St. Marks ... yesterday shall while I have any birth days to keep always be considered the *Birth day* of the *Soul* never mind the 28th.”(Letter 1.162, dated August 16, 1802, *Collected Writings*, 1:208–209) The effect of this born-again experience can be found in Elizabeth’s letter three months after her soul’s birthday, to Julia Scott: “dear Julia—then I will tell you the plain truth, that my habits both of Soul and Body are changed—that I feel all the habits of society and connections of *this* life have taken a new form and are only interesting or endearing as they point the view to the next.”(Letter 1.165, 16 November 1802, *Collected Writings* 1:212)

ii) The first paragraph of her journal in Lazaretto on December 1, 1803:

“Arose between 6 and 7, before the day had dawned the light of the Moon opposite our window was still strongest—not a breath of wind—the sea which before I had always seen in violent commotion now gently seemed to creep to the Rocks it had so long been beating over—everything around at rest except two little white gulls flying to the westward towards my Home ... the dear strain of praise in which I always seem to meet the Souls I love and “Our Father”—These two portions are the Union of love and Praise and in them I meet the Soul of my Soul.—at ten oclock [*sic*] read with W. and Anna—at twelve he was at rest—Ann playing in the next room—alone at the World, one of those sweet pauses in spirit when the Body seems to be forgotten came over me.” (*Collected Writings* 1:263–264)

iii) Her third mystical experience in her later life in Emmitsburg:

“Alone on a rock this afternoon, surrounded by the most beautiful scenery, adoring and praising Him for his magnificence and glory, ... ; the soul cried out, O God! O God! Give yourself. What is all the rest? A silent voice of love answered, *I am yours*. Then, dearest Lord! Keep me as I am while I live; for this is true content, — to hope for nothing, to desire nothing, expect nothing, fear nothing. Death! Eternity! OH, how small are all objects of busy, striving, restless, blind, mistaken beings, when at the foot of the cross these two prospects are viewed!” (Letter 7.324, “To an Unknown Person,” *Collected Writings*, 2:707–708)

---

### 3. The Shared Suffering and Death of Nature and Humans in the Presence of God

I propose to focus on the “presence of God” in the life of Elizabeth as the mystery that not only sustained her throughout her life but also united her vision of the entire universe of natural creation and humanity into one. Elizabeth was convinced that the divine presence is the very source of life, vitality, beauty, and harmony of all living material beings. Moreover, Elizabeth was in one accord with Vincent de Paul that the presence of God sustains life not only in its flourishing but also in its suffering and death.

“– oh! here below we can enjoy our peace ‘but in bitterness, *most bitter*’ the feelings of our misery, and the misery of others, often overpower bitterness; the temporal distresses and renting of hearts tear poor nature incessantly, and relief enough, but thy will and thy peace -...Oh! Mother of sorrows, ... but the Model of **our own bitter ‘peace’** -”(Document 9.18, “Advent and Christmas Meditations,” *CW*, 3a:352–53)

The most powerful weapon is the “joy of our heart in the Presence of God, for by this we carry our Paradise with us where ever [*sic*] we go, and rise above the clouds and illusions of our passions -” (Document 9.20, “Exercise of the *Presence of God*,” *CW*, 3a:401)

We must persevere “even *unto Death* not relaxing through temptations and sufferings but pushing on through all trials, like the thirsty *deer*; stop at nothing till it gets to its fountain.” (Document 9.20, “Exercise of the *Presence of God*,” *CW*, 3a:423) Cf. Psalm 42:1