This study begins by outlining the ecofeminism movement and the Christology of Rosemary Radford Ruether. To provide an example of the connection between the domination over nature and over women, the plight of women working in factories at the Texas-Mexico border will be explored. This paper will also analyze Ruether’s claim that her Christology provides a new theological framework for fostering a conversion of human consciousness within the praxis of ecofeminist ideology. The paper concludes with an exploration of how religious educators can build upon Ruether’s theological methodology in educating for peace and justice.

**Ecofeminism**

The term ecofeminism first appears in the 1970’s. This movement combined the ideologies of the ecological and feminist movements. Although there are differences among ecofeminist groups, they share certain commonalities: a reverence for the relationality among all created beings; a rejection of nature as an entity to be dominated; support for democratic relationships between men, women, nations, ethnic groups, social classes, and cultures; and, the use of knowledge to better understand and sustain creation (Ruether 1995, 123).

One of the earliest voices of the ecofeminism movement was that of Rosemary Radford Ruether. Ruether made connections between ecology, feminism, and religion. She called for a “…prophetic vision to shape a new world on earth, one that was not defined by domination” (Ruether 1985b, 20). In the following decades, Ruether and other theologians identified patriarchal Christianity’s domination over women and compared it with its domination over nature. This would prove to be a complicated, difficult task.
Theologians approached ecofeminist spirituality in various ways: from historical Christian views of women and nature; by adding ecological concerns to the dialogue; and, by speaking mostly to/from Western cultural perspectives (Ruether 1985b, 74). In addition, numerous ideological principles were added to the spiritual dimension of ecofeminism, such as justice, peace, spirituality, ethics, and globalization. Regardless of the entry point and the various layers, Johnson’s summary of ecofeminist thought coincides with Ruether’s vision:

I am persuaded of the truth of ecofeminism’s insight that analysis of the ecological crisis does not get to the heart of the matter until it sees the connection between exploitation of the earth and the sexist definition and treatment of women. (Johnson 1993b, 19)

Domination Over Nature and Women

Ecofeminism sees the natural world as under threat. Many theologians link this threat to the structures of social domination that continue to exploit women, noting that it is through women that abuse of the earth is so often brought about. Ruether, in particular, sees forms of domination over women as inextricably linked to ecological degradation.

Western culture has traditionally identified women with nature, and nature is often seen as an object of domination by men (Ruether 1995, 186-187). Among people influenced by Western patriarchal mentalities, domination over women and nature are often connected. This connection has persisted for centuries. The Judaeo-Christian ethic emphasized the authority of humankind over all other living beings in the cosmos. Two separate spheres of existence – spirit and matter that were borrowed from Greek philosophy – became accepted belief. Eventually, the spheres were graded, with the
spiritual becoming superior to matter. A dichotomy would develop from this dualistic thinking. All things related to the spiritual became equated with masculine characteristics, and anything earthly was associated with the feminine. Since the spiritual was superior to the material, the superiority of male over female was thought to be justified (Johnson 1993b, 11-12).

Christian tradition came to uphold a hierarchical dualism in which the male species was so named as the dominant lord (Ruether 1985b, 62). Christianity imaged human life and the world as a pyramid – a one-way, top-down, unilateral exercise of power: man was at the pinnacle, woman in a separate sphere beneath him, earth and all of nature at the bottom as a stage upon which to walk. This duality became the pattern of life for families, parish life, the modern corporation, schools, and ecclesiology. Hierarchical dualism became a rationalization for the powerful to subjugate those without privilege.

The connection between women and the earth lies in their abilities to generate life. A reference to the world as Mother Earth comes from a long tradition dating back to the beginning of human civilization (Ruether 1985b, 38). Mother Earth and other goddesses pervaded non-biblical religions of the Near East, deities who were seen as holding great power because of their ability to bring forth life. In the first millennia of Greek culture, however, a change in ideology prompted men to entertain the possibility of being free of nature. Specifically, men wanted to master nature by making it subordinate to them. Male deities began to develop as patriarchy became the normative perspective.
The Judaic-Christian biblical stories of creation were written from a similar patriarchal perspective. The ancient Mother in the Hebrew creation story, from ancient Near Eastern and Greek creation stories, disappeared. The world was not created out of chaos but by a specific act of God: a God who was male (Ruether 1995, 13-14). Nature was now controlled by the masculine. Augustine and the Church fathers appropriated Aristotelian biology to further support this patriarchal superiority over women, a biology that asserted that the male alone provided the genetic form of the child. The woman’s body was considered to be just a housing unit for what would be a fully-formed male offspring. The blood in her womb would be shaped by the male’s active power, with the male being thought of as representing the fullness of human nature (Ruether 1985b, 65). If a girl was born, this was seen as the result of a deformity during gestation. From this perspective, Aquinas concluded that in order for Christ to represent the fullness of human nature, Jesus had to be male (Ruether 1985a, 119). Although the Roman Church has accepted the fact that Aristotelian biology is false, the androcentric biases against women were held as normative through the centuries: even into the present day, as the ordained priesthood remains limited to men.

As women were to be under the control of men in the realm of hierarchical dualism, so, too, was the earth. Ruether claims that the roots of this domination over nature can be found in the missionizing spirit of Christianity. Jesus’ commissioning in Matthew’s Gospel to go and make disciples of all nations was coupled with the doctrine of *terra nullius*. By the authority of this doctrine, lands belonging to non-Christians were appropriated by invading Christian armies with the intent of converting the indigenous peoples to Catholicism – all legitimized by papal decree (Ruether 2005, 77). These acts
of genocidal violence and expropriation of lands provide but one example of the domination/subordination belief of man [in this case, more specifically, the Christian man] to control the earth.

This patriarchal perspective from which the Church developed its doctrine of creation has become dangerous for all the earth’s inhabitants. It promulgates a single-minded viewpoint that recognizes God’s revelation only through the male mind. Women are used as the support structure, and the earth as the scene upon which the male-run Church is made to flourish. Chittister sees this pyramidal structure as a means to subcategorize all created beings, which presupposes that God intended a doctrine of inequality to be built into creation. Even human beings are divided into groups that are human, more human, most human (Chittister 2004, 182).

From this patriarchal perspective, Genesis maintains that the male – the apex of creation – is allowed to do anything he wants with creation. Ruether, however, points out that the dualism of modern European history and nature is a distortion of the Hebraic understanding of the God of Israel. God was not against nature. Rather, the Creator was viewed as Lord of heaven and earth (Ruether 1992, 207). Although the God of Israel was androcentric, anthropocentric, and ethnocentric, Ruether believes this “does not preclude…a God who also relates lovingly to other people, a God who related directly to women without intermediaries, and a God who relates to nature apart from human intervention” (1992, 208). Despite the dominance of a patriarchal perspective delineated in Genesis, Christianity continued to support the view that the natural world remains autonomous, a sphere of God’s dominion to be used as God pleased (Ruether 1995, 188-90).
Ruether supports this thesis by referring to the doctrine of the Abrahamic covenant. The covenant between God and Israel was grounded in the gift of the land with the understanding that Israel would take care of the land in righteousness (Leviticus 18:28). The land was so important in Jewish theology that laws were developed to recognize the relationship between the gift of the land and its people. A day of rest was established each week. A year of rest was also instituted every seven years in order for the land to lay fallow and for animals to rest. These laws would also recognize the need for a restoration of society whereby slaves would be set free. This was more about renewing bonds between humans, animals, and the earth – of righting unjust relationships (Ruether 1992, 211-213). In this way, Hebraic society modeled redemptive eco-justice, not the patriarchal imperialism established in the Christian church.

In later centuries, Catholic traditions followed a distorted view of the covenant, claiming that males were given rule over the earth. The stories of the Judaeo-Christian tradition were turned “…into a license for rapacious proprietorship rather than a covenant of care” (Chittister 1998, 161-162).

Today, ecofeminism is a two-sided ideology that shows how the domination of the earth and the domination of women are interconnected. Ruether, in particular, points to the reversal of understandings of birth: a movement away from the belief formulated in pre-exilic religions that all created beings emanate from the female mother goddess, to an embrace of the male God of Judaism as seminal, with the female located as a secondary being, auxiliary to men (Ruether 1985b, 62-63). The story of creation in the second chapter of Genesis pairs the male and female as God’s representatives on earth. Ruether argues this is an egalitarian view with no hierarchy among humans. She cites Trible.
Trible claims that the language within the second chapter of Genesis is in no way indicative of the subordination of Eve. She is a partner, signifying companionship. Ruether claims it was the later rabbinic and Christian commentaries that were misogynistic, not the Hebrew scriptural text. She suggests that the purpose of contextualizing the story in later commentaries was to “prove” that the subordination of women was “natural” (Ruether 1985b, 42, 62-64).

Women have been identified by patriarchal culture with the body, sex, the flesh, weakness, earth; men have been equated with spirit, mind, sovereignty, and power over women. Today, violence toward women continues to be a worldwide problem, indicative of the historical subordination of women. This brutality against women takes many forms, including trafficking in women for sexual and other exploitation; female genital mutilation/cutting; prenatal sex selection and neglect of infant girls; forced marriage; early marriage; acid throwing, dowry or “honour” related violence; stalking; sexual harassment and violence in custody, workplaces and educational settings; and economic violence. At least one out of every three women around the world has been beaten, forced to perform sexual acts, or otherwise victimized in her lifetime, with the abuser often someone known to her (General Secretary of the United Nations 2006, A/61/122/Add.1). According to UNIFEM’s annual report, millions of women are still outnumbered four to one in legislatures around the world, and are still paid wages below that of men (UNFEM 2009-2010, 4-5). Without access to education and job training, women are disproportionately categorized in the lowest of lower classes. These abuses against women’s human rights have far-reaching consequences not only for women, but for their families, local communities, and countries.
Denying women access to education is a primary means of continuing domination. Worldwide, one in five adults is illiterate; approximately two-thirds are women (UNESCO 2010). Without the benefit of an education, many women are forced to work in low-paying jobs. For example, women at the Texas-Mexico border are the overwhelming majority of employees in maquiladoras, factories that ship their products into the United States without payment of import tariffs (de Cosio and Boadella 1999, 4). Without an education, jobs on assembly lines that require unskilled labor are among the very few available to them. People from Central and South America came to the U.S. border in search of jobs in the maquiladoras after the passing of the North American Free Trade Agreement [NAFTA] in 1994 between the U.S., Canada, and Mexico. NAFTA seemed a profitable agreement, but not for the poor – only for those in power. The agreement did not guarantee fair wages for the Mexican employees in the border factories.

As an advocate for worker justice both in the United States and around the world, Ruether researched sweatshops. She found that women, like the Mexican maquiladoras’ employees, work in factories because they have very limited choices in providing sustenance for their families. They work long hours, and are exposed to physical and verbal abuse. They suffer, not just from stress due to these abuses, but also from respiratory problems caused by the inhaling of toxins in the factories in which they work (Ruether 2005, 147). Most horrifically, they are victims of rape and murder. Between July 2008 and August 2009, eighteen girls, many looking for work in maquiladoras in
Juarez, Mexico, were reported missing (Sarria 2009). These statistics coincide with the 2003 report published by Amnesty International, *Intolerable Killings: 10 years of Abductions and Murders of Women in Ciudad Juárez and Chihuahua* (Amnesty International 2003). This report concluded that 370 women had been murdered in Juárez, with about a third having suffering sexual violence before being murdered. Many of these women were looking for employment, or were on their way to jobs, in the maquiladoras. Approximately half of the cases have remained unresolved.

Manufacturing wages in Mexico border factories brought workers only $2.64 per hour (United States Department of Labor 2008). Finding jobs that paid far below a living wage, or finding no jobs at all, prompted families to find shelter that cost them little or no money. These families would settle on abandoned lands, such as filled garbage dumps. As more families settled in an area, a *colonia* would form: an unincorporated village lacking services such as potable water, adequate sewage systems, drainage, sanitation, streets and utilities (Loustauanau and Sanchez-Bane 1999, 23).

Enforcement by the Mexican government of laws prohibiting toxic waste dumping by border industries was virtually nonexistent (Barry and Sims 1994, 27).

Border communities are not just scarred by this environmental nightmare. They are

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1 From personal experience working with an Ursuline mission in Matamoros, Mexico from 2003 to 2007, I witnessed settlers squatting on abandoned garbage dumps. They fashioned shelters out of scraps of wood and corrugated steel. The poor of these communities lived on top of and amongst trash, which included chemical waste products from the maquiladoras. As a result of these economic disparities, the border residents were embroiled in a circle of poverty that imperiled their personal and social rights, and physical well-being. –Ed.

2 Chemical wastes were disposed of in the Matamoros canal bordering the community and dumped directly onto the unpaved streets. Animals drank from the chemically-polluted canal, as it was their only source of water. Dogs, goats, and donkeys walked about with open, cancerous sores that developed because of the waste products in the water. Like the animals noted above, the Matamoros colonia residents had no source of potable drinking water. Their water came from one of two municipal services they received. Each home had a spigot in the ground from which water was pumped by the city. The water was infested with e-coli bacteria, amoebas, and pollutants. Families in the colonia considered themselves lucky if they could afford bleach to “decontaminate” their water. The other city service present in the colonia was electricity. However, it was not affordable to each family; hence, there was almost no refrigeration. –Ed.
deeply wounded by the injustices perpetrated by the maquiladoras and the Mexican government. The poisonous side effects of toxic-waste dumping harm, not just the earth, but also those who work or live in the border communities. Johnson labels this a disrespect for creation “…due to placing economic profit for a few ahead of the common good of all peoples on the earth, to ignoring the interconnectedness of all processes and to ignoring the well-being of future generations” (2001). NAFTA became what Holland and Henriot call a political paradigm, or model of dependency. According to this model, the “…improvement in the lives of the majority of the people is blocked – both internally and externally – by individuals and groups who benefit from the present concentration of power” (Holland and Henriot SJ 1983, 50-51). It is not just the Mexican government, however, that benefited from NAFTA. Although common in Asian and Mexican firms are common, the vast majority of maquiladoras are owned by U.S. corporations (Kourous 1998). All the countries that established factories on the U.S.-Mexico border are complicit in this injustice against women and the earth.

In its work to safeguard human rights, Amnesty International has documented how environmental disregard affects women. Their report indicates that the impact of pollution disproportionately affects women and girls and is a violation of their human rights (Amnesty International 2010, 28). Since those who live in these border communities are poor, and women are disproportionately part of the poor of the earth, women are linked to this environmental degradation.

In addition to this desecration of the earth, the colonia women are also belittled within their families. Few men have steady employment. They leave the colonia during the day in the hope of bringing home some money for their families by selling water,
cactus, fruit, or souvenirs to cars at the border crossing; washing car windows; or simply begging for spare change. As a result, husbands and fathers experience humiliation, shame, depression, and anxiety. Infidelity, domestic abuse, alcoholism, and substance abuse are rampant (Amnesty International 2010, 31). The only place where men regain their sense of pride is in their homes. Too often, this translates into abusive and degrading behavior toward women. Ferreira-Pinto, et. al. write, “Men turn to external justifications, especially those related to…financial strains…to explain their violent actions” (Ferreira-Pinto, Ramos and Mata Jr. 1999, 65). It was not unusual for a mother to be afraid of her own son. Sons who witness their fathers abusing their mothers often become abusive toward their mothers.

The wives and mothers of the colonias are left to support each other emotionally as their experiences, both good and bad, are all too similar to the stories of subjugated women of many cultures throughout history. Language used today to describe violence to women is likened to violence against creation, i.e., the rape of the earth. More and more voices, however, are calling for a new cosmology, a new doctrine of creation that does not rely on the development of the powerful through the repression of the weak (Ruether 1995, 11). What is needed, as advocated by ecofeminism, is a greater awareness of humanity’s need to reconnect our understanding of the sacred with the cosmos. What is indispensable is a theology of ecological justice for the earth and all its inhabitants.

*New Theologies of Creation Within Christianity*

Ruether and other theologians have made contributions toward developing a prophetic vision of ecological justice. Each builds on the other. White was the first to critically analyze Christianity in light of the ecological crisis (Nash 1991, 69-71). He
posited that Christian tradition, rooted in the mandate of the Hebrew Scriptures for man to subdue the earth, was to blame. Those involved in the environmental movement heartily agreed that Christianity played a major role in the exploitation of nature. However, they were reluctant to uphold White’s other strand: that the solution to the crisis would be found in religion. White had little faith that science and technology alone could solve ecological problems. Specifically, he believed that an alternate strand of Christianity would support a genuine regard for nature. He looked to the life of St. Francis of Assisi, who sought to depose man’s monarchy over creation in lieu of a democracy of all created beings (Ruether 2005, 45). Although White’s position was greatly criticized, it nevertheless sparked Christian theologians to try to articulate a defense of Christian tradition.

Berry agreed with White’s assessment and called for a new religious worldview from the perspective of ecology. He proposed a spirituality of intimacy as opposed to alienation. He contrasted a spirituality of justice that is concerned solely with humans to one that is inclusive of all life. Berry wrote, “To preserve this sacred world of our origins from destruction, our great need is for the renewal of the entire Western religious-spiritual tradition in relation to the integral functioning of the biosystems of planet Earth” (2000, 128).

Dreyer suggests that human beings need to envision themselves as one species among many – men, women, plants, animals – as all imago Dei sharing the same earth. Humanity has the power to destroy the planet, not just through nuclear weaponry, but by ecological neglect. Polluted rivers, the fractured ozone layer, extinct animal species, global warming, destruction of forests, and fossil fuel emissions are some of the many
ways humankind has contaminated the earth, soon to make it unsuitable for life of any kind. Dreyer argues, “[a] renewed theology of creation will reflect these concerns and function as a catalyst for…ecologically responsible behavior” (1994, 62).

Johnson invites all to hearken to women’s wisdom in calling for “…a new way of being in the world that holds a blessing for all of life – women, men, their children…the earth included” (1993b, 23-24). From the perspective of feminist theology, she describes both a stewardship and a kinship model in analyzing humanity’s relationship to the earth through the tenets of feminine theology. Although the stewardship model calls for humans to be the earth’s custodians, thereby offering a respectful attitude toward the earth, it maintains the pyramid paradigm in which humans are in a position superior to the rest of the natural world. Johnson’s preferred model is kinship – a paradigm that brings humanity and the earth with all its creatures into a mutual relationship of companionship (1993b, 30). There are no levels or scales, but a mutual acceptance of each being as an essential element of the whole of creation.

Ruether envisions a “good society” in which relationships and organic systems are restructured according to a principle of equity. She calls this biophilic mutuality. This restructuring ensures that no exploitation would take place between any members of the biotic community: of this generation and for generations to come (Ruether 1992, 258-274). For this to be realized, Ruether calls for a conversion of human consciousness concerning the earth, and the creation of an ecological culture in which the intellect is used to understand better the web of life and how to sustain it. According to Ruether, intelligence is a privilege. However, it is not to be used to dominate and/or alienate without concern for the welfare of other forms of life (Ruether 1983, 87-91). Human
intelligence needs to be used to make right the distortions created by society’s domination over the earth in order to convert intelligence into an instrument that can bring balance to the ecological community.

**Ruether’s Christology**

Ruether’s Christology supports her arguments for encouraging a reverence for the relationality among all created beings from within the Christian tradition. This can be shown by a systematic investigation of Ruether’s Christology within the context of a theology of creation.

Throughout her writings on ecofeminism, Ruether claims that a new context for theology is needed in order to respond to the ecological crisis, as well as the mistreatment of women, in Christian tradition. She calls for humanity’s conversion from patriarchal domination to an ecological ethic of reciprocity and equality. Such a conversion, she postulates, can lead to the development of a new theological framework that has the possibility of creating a new humanity and a new earth. She presents a methodology that is both dialectical and biblical. In developing her Christology, Ruether discusses the following themes:

- **Prophetic-Messianic Tradition**
- **The Christ-Event**
- **Models of Conversion**

*Prophetic-Messianic Tradition*

Ruether’s dialectical approach is clear in her research of the prophetic-messianic tradition. She contends that the Scriptures have much to offer in the development of an
Once theologians look beyond the patriarchal dimensions of Scripture, they can discover strengths within the history of the Hebrew people that exemplify the peaceful, reciprocal relationship between humanity and nature for which ecofeminist theorists advocate. Ruether also claims that seminal events – such as recalling the liberation of Israel from slavery, the giving of the Law, and receiving the promised land – offer an historical paradigm for a people living in community over and against imperialism, and in favor of protecting the weakest of its members (1986, 11).

According to Ruether, it is the vision of the prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures that provide the most important paradigm for confronting imperialism. The prophets spoke of an idealized future, one filled with the hope that a renewed social order would come to fulfillment. Moreover, a review of the role of the prophet in the Judaeo-Christian tradition supports Ruether’s vision of a renewed human consciousness and a new theological framework for understanding and respecting the natural environment.

The prophetic mindset in any age begins with a recognition that the past does not create permanency. God is not a fixed deity. Prophets believe in ongoing revelation, making adjustments to established theologies by incorporating new life experiences and events. A prophetic tradition cannot be liberating if ideas remain static. Yet, the popular piety of the Jewish religion circa the eighth century made no room for changes in the world. Brueggemann referred to this as remnants of the Solomonic empire, where a controlled, static religion was established in which God and the temple became the instruments of the king to be used at his discretion and for his royal interests (2001, 28). In looking at the world today, Ruether is critical of how elders of religious sects use the tenets of their tradition to exploit advantage over others (1983, 27-28).
God was, and is, dynamic, and calls throughout time for changes that create a just, social order. Dominant ideologies of any age need to be intellectually critiqued in light of God’s ongoing revelation in the world, not accepted because of fixed traditions or practices. For instance, messianic nationalism has usurped a huge percentage of the U.S. budget for the military, especially since September 11, 2001. Ruether challenges today’s prophets to be critical of the present ideologies of corporate and military dominance, and to be ready to repudiate these and other false theological claims that further military violence, social injustice, and environmental degradation (2005, 166-168). She contends that only then can the renewed social order spoken of by the Hebrew Prophets come to fulfillment.

Great religious diversity exists in today’s world. Today’s prophets must develop new models for thinking about God, church, religion, and faith that celebrate and embrace differences, while simultaneously looking for shared commonalities. Although world religions differ considerably in ideology, Ruether argues for encouraging them to promote praxis that prevents abuse and restores harmony to the way humanity and all created beings live together within the natural world (1995, 79-80). Today’s prophets must seek common ground with others with the understanding that the common good of the planet is paramount. Being pluralistic is even more important in today’s world where globalization has become a daily catch phrase.

The prime focus for the prophet must always be to seek justice and equity for all while distributing resources in a fair manner. The prophet must provide a consciousness that can “…energize the community to fresh forms of faithfulness and vitality” (Brueggemann 2001, 59). This ideal of equitably distributing the earth’s resources is a
basic tenet of ecofeminism. Ruether expands on this in *New Woman, New Earth*, where she posits that the resources of the earth may still be capable of supporting and sustaining an ecologically balanced society. Yet, she points out that this cannot happen by the “infinite expansion of the present patterns based on unjust social relations between sexes, classes, and nations, and a destructive relation to the earth” (Ruether 1995, 202).

The prophet must seek to keep religion honest, believing that religious conviction has great potential for good as long as that conviction is rooted in social concern. The prophet Isaiah explains that Yahweh does not want endless animal sacrifices, but a cessation of evil and violence while caring for the widow and orphan (Miller 1987, 108). Justice in the Hebrew Scriptures was very clear: protect the widowed and orphaned, fulfill obligations, pay debts (Isaiah 10, Psalm 72). The prophets were advocates for radical change: they called for a move away from a religion of imperialism to one of justice for all people where all would be brought to full human stature.

This value system involved a radical redefinition of religion. No longer was religion to be used to acquire money and power for the individual. Instead, the focus was on each person’s moral and ethical behavior. The world today has forgotten this tenet of long-ago Hebraic religion. Moreover, Ruether notes that ecological disaster resulted from the effort of humanity to satisfy its ever-growing appetites for goods and resources. In citing the 19th century concept of progress, she admonishes males for using God’s transcendent Spirit to justify the usurpation of finite natural resources to fill the demand of infinite material progress (Ruether 1995, 194). She calls for an ecologically balanced society, which today has become a practical necessity, as well as continuing to be a moral and spiritual ideal.
Brueggemann, in referring to the royal consciousness of the House of Israel, writes of the need to recognize that the royal fantasy that upholds a society of oppression must die and be mourned. He contends that it is the role of the prophetic imagination to cut through this royal mindset. It is the role of the prophet to bring to public consciousness the need for peace and justice for all (Brueggemann 2001, 45). Ruether, too, is critical of unjust and oppressive powers, especially those who used religion to create privileged priestly orders at the Jewish temple, and more modern movements that used nature to justify slavery (1986, 12).

For Ruether, it was Amos, in particular, that exemplified the ideal of negating the royal mindset. He called for the ruling class of Israel to repent in order for peace and prosperity to come to all its people.

Seek the Lord and live, you who turn justice into bitterness. You trample on the poor and force him to give you grain. Therefore, though you have built stone mansions, you will not live in them; though you have planted lush vineyards, you will not drink their wine. (Amos 5: 6, 7, 11)

Ruether uses Amos’ prophetic text as a parallel to the rulers of today’s world. She points out that there is no justice when the wealthy few reap so many benefits while the many who are poor have trouble finding food just to survive from day to day. She also notes that fulfilling the covenant with God will bring equity and justice to all people. This is a prophetic vision of fulfillment, the Word of God spoken on behalf of the marginalized.

Along with utilizing the prophetic tradition in her methodology, Ruether also looks to the messianic tradition. She writes of the messianic paradigm as being one of radial social transformation, which offered the people of Israel a new way to live
according to the fundamental precepts of their faith (Ruether 1986, 12). This meant fulfilling Yahweh’s demands for righteousness and justice for all. Those standing within the messianic tradition criticized oppressive power, censured the use of religion to create privileged social classes, and aimed at renewal of religious practices. The paradigm is directed at hope, where present wrongs are righted.

The historical Jesus is interpreted as the manifestation of the Logos, of divine Wisdom. In the Hebrew Scriptures, the immanence of God in creation, divine Wisdom, is imaged as female. The patriarchal Christian church, however, elevated Jesus’ maleness into a universal principle. Jesus was the incarnation of divine Wisdom and the offspring of God. From there, Christianity fostered an understanding of maleness as normative and women as derivative (Johnson 1993a, 118).

For Christians, Jesus is the Messiah, but there have been great misunderstandings regarding Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies of a coming messiah. There is no mention of a messiah in the Old Testament, nor did the Old Testament speak about the historical Jesus. Yet, there were forecasts of someone to come. Sirach referred to a sage, but does not label him a messiah. Daniel used the allegory “Son of Man” (Daniel 7:13). This Son of Man would come on clouds from heaven, but he was a human figure (Ruether 1985a, 120). Daniel did not use the term messiah, but the passage generated another idea that some individual, prepared in heaven, would come to earth to judge, casting down kings. He would be a savior-figure. It is in the Psalms of Solomon that a messiah-figure was first mentioned, but this figure was didactic and polemical, not liturgical. Still, others believed a new David would rise in the future, a king-warrior who would restore peace and renew the dynasty. The Christian church inferred Jesus to be the
messiah after his resurrection from the dead and then related the Old Testament texts to their claim.

Regardless of these images, the historical Jesus did not take on the mantle of sage, king, or warrior. Jesus rejected chauvinistic understandings of the Messiah, taking on the role, instead, of servant. Ruether expounds on this imagery. Jesus as prophet-messiah “does not validate the existing social and religious hierarchy but speaks on behalf of the marginalized” (Ruether 1983, 136-137). By taking on this role, Jesus changes humanity’s relation to God. No longer is God, as modeled in Jesus, envisioned as a dominator/king. In Jesus, God is made known as one who came to give service, even to the point of giving his own life.

There are four passages in second Isaiah that depict a messiah figure as a servant who is to suffer the effects of others’ sins, bearing their guilt. Christians have taken second Isaiah to be a precursor of Jesus as servant, or some other messianic figure. These servant passages in Isaiah are actually poems, depicting Israel as the servant of God, suffering in order to bring about a just social order for all. These have long been used to refer to a messiah, but these passages do not refer to the historical Jesus. Nevertheless, Brueggemann posits that the healing-feeding-casting out-forgiving ministry of Jesus fulfills the vision of the servant-messiah of second Isaiah. Brueggemann writes, “The vulnerable solidarity of Jesus with the poor… was found to have an authenticity and a power unlike what [Israel] had known” (2001, 112). Thus, Jesus was interpreted as faithful to the spirit of second Isaiah in teaching that we must be servants in bringing God’s salvation to the world.
The prophetic-messianic paradigm offers the present age a new way to live, according to fundamental precepts of a just and responsible social ethic. In understanding God as servant, Jesus liberates us from hierarchal relations, making all mutually empowered and each in service to the other. Ruether’s use of this imagery is important to ecofeminism. Its basic precepts include a reverence for the relationality among all created beings, and a rejection of nature as an entity to be dominated. She calls for humanity to recognize the kinship we share with all other created beings.

The prophetic-messianic tradition offers insight to those seeking new ways to embrace the conversion of consciousness needed for a theology of eco-justice. The prophets of the Scriptures model for prophets today how to speak on behalf of the poor and marginalized, instead of favoring those in power as they continue raping the earth of its resources and widening the chasm between rich and poor. Jesus as prophet-messiah did not validate existing social and religious hierarchies. Rather, he spoke of a new way of being via a transformation of values. His life serves as the prime example for Jesus’ followers to follow in order to foster kinship with all other created beings. The royal mindset must continue to be negated. The earth’s resources need to be equitably distributed, and prophets need to encourage the world toward concrete actions to restore to nature a more harmonious way for humanity and all created beings to live.

*The Christ-Event*

For Ruether, Jesus as the messianic prophet embodies hope for the world. His life and teachings point to a vision of community for God’s people in harmonious relationship with nature (Ruether 1981, 68-69). A commitment to social justice, which is
particularly relevant in constructing an ethic of ecological justice, is an especially important component of this relationship.

Jesus’ kenosis presented a new image of the Divine (Ruether 1985b, 108). By coming into the world, Christ positioned himself on the side of the poor and marginalized. The term servant is used by Jesus in the prophetic sense, one that presupposes a relationship with God, who comes to liberate the oppressed. When one is a servant of God, one becomes free of bondage to all human masters and is able to live freely in service to others. He speaks, not in the past, but in the present. God continues to speak throughout the ages. No longer should God be thought of as a fossil of past revelations.

The importance of right relations with nature, as one aspect of the covenant between God and Israel, becomes important for Jesus’ ministry. However, Ruether indicates that this aspect of the covenantal relationship is largely lost in the New Testament (1992, 214). Jesus’ understanding of the coming of the Kingdom is indicated most dominantly in the Lord’s Prayer and the Isaiah text he recites in the temple to inaugurate his ministry. What are most significant in the Lord’s Prayer are two phrases: God’s will be done on earth, to indicate a spiritual renewal; and, the forgiveness of debts, to indicate the righting of unjust relations between those who have more over those who have less (Ruether 1992, 214). The Isaiah passage, as retold by Jesus in Luke’s Gospel, indicates Jesus’ understanding of the coming of the Kingdom in which the oppressed are relieved of their bonds so that a congruous relationship can thrive between Creator and the created.
The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. (Luke 4: 18-19)

Both of these readings are important for the development of Ruether’s Christology. Both the human and natural world indicate concern for the other, affirming and supporting an ecological ethic for God’s creation.

The liberation of the poor and the oppressed advocated by Jesus becomes especially important for Ruether when interpreted in the context of women’s oppression and hope for liberation. Within the context of the historical age of Jesus’ life on earth, it is unclear how this teaching would have been adopted for women within patriarchal family structures. More readily apparent is how it provides a framework of understanding for women today. As Ruether indicates, Jesus had relationships with women in his ministry, thus illustrating the equality of all and breaking stereotypes of the day. They included Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna, who were Jesus’ followers. Women were the first to evince the resurrection, indicating Jesus’ belief that they were credible witnesses.

Jesus also used women to illustrate his new social ethic:

- He spoke of the faith of the poor and outcast women as opposed to the faithlessness of the religious establishments of the day – Luke 21: 1-4; 7: 36-50.
• He violated the law that forbade him to speak alone with a woman who is not his wife – John 4:27. (Ruether 1995, 64-65)

Women were deeply oppressed in Jesus’ world, as they carried the “double burden of low class and low gender status.” By bringing women into his inner circle, and - in the process - violating Judaic laws, Jesus made a profound statement, indicating his role as liberator of the oppressed. He was calling for the dissolution of “the web of status relationships by which societies have defined privilege and deprivation” (Ruether 1983, 137). In essence, he was letting the societal elites of the day know that their degradation of any of God’s created beings finds disfavor with God. Today, Jesus’ teaching about women provides a framework for understanding who women are in our contemporary age. Ruether expounds on this aspect of her Christology, not just considering the liberation of women in modern times, but extending this to include the natural world as well. This aspect of Ruether’s Christology is foundational for an ethic of justice for the cosmos.

Ruether, however, takes this one step further and claims that the historical Jesus’ gender has no real significance. It has social symbolic significance within patriarchal societies, but in a new creation, a new theology, God would not be pleased with an identification of one gender over another in order for one to gain privilege and rank (Ruether 1983, 137). Jesus’ biological particularities should not be emphasized over his message anymore than his identification as a Jew in first-century Galilee. Ruether calls for the rejection of any anthropology that is androcentric (1985a, 127). She argues what is needed is a fuller understanding of the person of Jesus as representing all humanity, not just one component. In this way, humanity – men and women – can carry on the
substance of Jesus’ spirit, imitating his love for all, in a world whose ruling patriarchal structures presently work to subordinate the poor and marginalized.

As inspiring and sanguine as this vision must have been, the inclusive praxis of Jesus and early Christianity vanished by the end of the first century. Ruether asks the question: “Why do all four gospel traditions tell the story of Jesus in this way, if not to make the point…that those who are last in the present social order are the faithful ones who will be first in the Kingdom…?” (1985a, 121). She posits that for early Christians, Jesus’ coming as servant was considered a transcendent way of being. Patriarchal domination was something so inherent within existing societal structures that they could not envision the present world as changing. Ruether claims that eventually Christianity splits into two sects: one that reverted to a patriarchal ruling structure, and a mystical faction that advocated an austere alternative in which women were enabled to participate in public teaching (1985a, 122-123). This second sect would not yield to a male imperialistic Christology, instead choosing to “cultivate a Christ that freed one from the oppressive power of the world.” These groups took seriously the belief that women and men were made equal (Ruether 1985b, 110).

Paul was among the first to negate the status attributed to women by Jesus to “create revolutionary changes in social roles in ordinary society” (Ruether 1995, 64-65). He admonished women to cover their heads as a sign of their subjugation.

A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.

(1 Corinthians 11: 7-9)
Ruether claims that when Paul talks about the order of creation, he is a patriarchal conservative. Still, Paul’s statements are somewhat understandable once the social, political, and religious society in which he lived are elucidated. Most damaging was the effect Paul’s statements had when taken out of context in future centuries. They were used by American theologians to justify slavery, and are still used today to reinforce the subjugation of women (Ruether 1995, 68-69).

The mystical millennialist groups that attempted to live free from the oppressive powers of the world would not survive in any large numbers in Christian history. A patriarchal magisterium would come to rule a patriarchal Christianity. It is disheartening how the very essence of Jesus’ teachings of love and relationality were relinquished in order for a few to maintain their control over God’s creation.

*Ruether’s Alternative Model of Conversion*

What is lacking in solving social injustices are not the knowledge and skill but the will to change. What is needed is conversion. (Hellwig, 1999, 29)

In *Integrating Ecofeminism, Globalization and World Religions*, Ruether ponders whether it is possible to create a new world system that is not based on global corporations representing a wealthy elite. She asks if it is possible to create an equitable and sustainable world system in which all benefit, including the earth itself (Ruether 2005, 131). Ruether posits that fostering healed relations among people, and between people and the earth, could lead to the development of a new way of living, of relationality between humans and the earth. She believes that a new theological vision of ecological justice can be developed if people of faith form a new inner consciousness that considers the interrelations of humans, the earth, and the Divine. She notes to believe in
God means to believe in what lies beyond the biological, to respond to that which gave life to the cosmos. She argues that to foster an authentic faith today, people must move beyond the stagnant relationship of patriarchy and develop a new ecological model of creation (Ruether 1992, 4-5).

In surveying traditional models of creation, Ruether rejects both the chain-of-being model and progressivism. The former utilizes levels of superiority in which a hierarchy of created beings have power over others. The latter is modeled on evolution resulting in a completion of history in some kind of perfected state with a chosen group leading the way over others (Ruether 1984, 18-20). Both models advocate the domination of one or more groups over others. Instead of developing a balanced society, they foster elite groups who feel justified in defeating their rivals and subjugating to their will all those they deem to be inferior.

Christian theology must have a new context if theologians are to respond adequately to the ecological crisis, as well as the mistreatment of women. A new theological framework has the possibility of fulfilling the teachings of Jesus, specifically: respect for creation, the refusal to exploit anyone/thing, and justice overcoming oppression. Key to this context is the call for an ongoing conversion from self-centeredness to Christian praxis, leading to healing, both covenantal and sacramental. Ruether urges humanity to build relations with all created beings in a model of mutuality and service. She calls for an intentional working toward social action: toward actively changing the power structures that allow injustices against the environment and women to continue. This conversion toward an ecological ethic must recognize the interconnection of social domination and the domination over nature, especially in
accepting the relationship between the exploitation of the earth and the exploitation of women.

In an effort to cultivate a sense of reverence, love, and empathy for the earth, Ruether calls humanity to respect the way in which the natural world sustains its own life (2005, 79-80). She suggests that such respect can be thought of, or even symbolized, as a dance during which human consciousness and energy organizes in unified ways until humanity becomes aware of its kinship with the rest of creation (Ruether 1992, 250-251). The dance advocates the interdependency of all living beings, including interdependence in transience. Once humans can accept the idea of their own mortality, Ruether believes humanity can become more aware of the kinship humans share with the rest of the cosmos. As our bodies decay into organic matter, we human beings enter into the composition of future life. We become linked to past matter, as well as to life that is to come.

Ruether calls for a conversion, a transformation, and the development of a worldview that no longer adheres to systems of domination, and which values reciprocity. She writes, “[T]here can be…no solution to the ecological crisis within a society whose fundamental model of relationships continues to be one of domination” (Ruether 1995, 204). The democratization of decision-making structures and policies, according to the principle of subsidiarity, calls for participation by people in economic, political, and social decision-making that affects their lives (Bianchi and Ruether 1993, 250). To foster conversion, Ruether calls for the uniting of women’s movements with ecological movements, collaborative efforts restructuring corporations and the military, developing
new sources of energy, empowering women (1995, 204-205), and developing global institutions under the auspices of the United Nations (2005, 162-163).

Methodically, Ruether develops her alternative model of conversion. In fostering healed relations between humans and the earth, she calls people to focus on possibilities that will enable respect and kinship to flourish. She notes this could lead to a transformation of consciousness that, in turn, could lead to opportunities for making a place at the table of social and economic life for the poor and marginalized. She argues that once the poor and marginalized become involved in social decision-making, current power structures can be challenged and a more egalitarian world view could emerge. Overall, once conversion takes place, patriarchy and domination can become antiquated historical images as heinous as slavery and the Holocaust.

**Ruether and Religious Education**

The Christology of Rosemary Radford Ruether presents a new theological framework for envisioning a new humanity and a new earth. She hopes this will come to fruition as the result of humanity’s conversion from patriarchal domination to an ecological ethic of reciprocity and equality. Her methodology is prophetic itself. It envisions a way for the world to be liberated from patriarchal domination as modeled by Jesus in both his praxis and teachings. Her approach is a biblical dialectic, conceptualizing the Jewish prophetic vision of righteousness and justice as both a mirror and an archetype for the modern world. The reflection of that mirror would enable humanity to see the continuous, distorting efforts of patriarchal domination; the archetype would provide ways to develop new, more involved social structures and ways of being.
She also relies heavily on both testaments, beginning with the Hebrew prophets. Isaiah and Amos, especially, present the Hebraic vision of a glorified future of a renewed social order, one of justice and equity for all.

Ruether traces the prophetic-messianic tradition in the Hebrew Scriptures. It exemplifies the peaceful, reciprocal relationship advocated by ecofeminist thought between humanity and nature. She also traces the interpretation of Jesus as the messiah, from the foreshadowing of One to come by the Prophets to Christianity’s understanding of Jesus as the incarnated Logos. Evolving from Hebraic beliefs, Jesus presents a model of the messiah as a servant to all. Jesus revered relationality among all created beings and rejected social classes that marginalized many. This model of equality and justice includes a responsible social ethic of mutual empowerment and service to others. It rejects domination of all kinds, including the oppression of women. Jesus’ relationships with women are examples of his teachings about relationality and liberation.

Building on her dialectical approach, Ruether develops a theology of conversion. This model incorporates the components of her Christology as based on the biblical prophetic-messianic tradition of liberation, justice, and relationality. The interrelatedness of all creation, in relating Christian doctrine with an ethical care for the earth, is imperative. She calls for humanity to work hard at developing a kinship with the earth in order for a conversion of heart and mind to take place. The prophetic-messianic tradition can then be incorporated into a developing ecological theology.

As it stands, Ruether calls for humanity to accomplish tremendous things: the restructuring of corporations; the downsizing of the military; the development of new sources of energy; the establishment of global institutions; the reconsideration of human
beings’ relationships to one another; the rethinking of humanity’s relationship to the earth. These tasks include much with which the few in power may not, or will not, readily agree. Ruether suggests creating grassroots movements to implement these kinds of changes. Although this is an honorable technique, these groups have a history of losing momentum after initial gains are made. Moreover, it is not the task of a theologian to offer praxis within a theological treatise. That is the task of religious educators.

Developing a praxis-is as important as developing an ideology. Ruether’s Christological methodology may provide the direction needed for the conversion of human consciousness. Unless theology and the call to conversion are linked to pastoral praxis, contemporary Christians are likely to have difficulty connecting with her thought. There is brilliance in Ruether’s theology, and in other eco-feminist thought. What is needed are ways for theological methodology to become a concrete and realistic guide for the faithful. Theology must be connected to religious education. Stated differently, methodology must be made accessible to the faithful if it is to become part of religious educational efforts that foster a new ecological ethic within the broader Church.

Moran states, “Religious education has to do with the religious life of the human race and with bringing people within the influence of that life” (1989, 218). Moran defines religious education as the reshaping of life’s forms with end and without end. With end means life is reshaped from birth to death so it has richer meaning, deeper purpose, and a more profound significance. This is the process of inspiration, wherein life is a revelatory process of purpose. Without end means without termination, that education is a life-long process; again, from birth to death (Moran 1989, 49). Education becomes an
ongoing process of reshaping human lives, integral in the realization of what it means to be human.

Integral to this meaning of life-long learning is upholding the double meaning of end. The tension between the two forms of end makes education religious because through the interplay of these two meanings, fruitful discussions of education can occur. When the double meaning collapses and education becomes a thing to be possessed, education becomes idolatrous. It becomes what Freire called banking. He argued too much education involves banking of facts and figures by the educator into the learner, as a person makes deposits into a bank (Freire 1998, 32-33). Once the learner engages in a dialectic regarding how the world can be reshaped for the better, religious questions emerge (Moran 1989, 58). It brings the learner to participation in a greater realm of meaning; in this instance, into exploring Ruether’s vision of ecological reciprocity and equality. Being engaged in the process of inquiry is what leads to critical knowledge of the world. Ruether is calling for the conversion of human consciousness in order for her vision to be made real. If this is to occur within the broader Church, the faithful must engage in this educative process.

Education is a mode of human activity that directs us toward a better and enriching life utilizing an educational approach to things and to content. It is the critical reflection of one’s own personal convictions and beliefs, being open to other viewpoints, and the willingness to entertain distinctions that could alter one’s views. Overall, the call for ongoing conversion from self-centeredness to mutuality and service must be at the center of ecological ministry within the life of the Church. Religious educators can utilize Ruether’s prophetic-messianic tradition by bringing the Hebrew prophets and Jesus into
classrooms, homilies, RCIA classes, and diocesan workshops as archetypes for conversion from patriarchal domination to a relationality that seeks justice and equity for all. Conversion can then lead to action.

Ruether calls for humanity to accomplish tremendous feats, including the call to raise public consciousness regarding the need for peace and justice for all. Perhaps then, this new cosmology will be realized: a vision of creation that never again relies on the development of the powerful few through the repression of the weak. Specifically, no longer will women and the earth serve as expendable commodities to enrich those in power and bolster false ideological claims that further violence, social injustice, and environmental degradation.

This era in history is ripe for the theological worldview Ruether and ecofeminist theologians advocate. For many, the election of the United States’ first black president serves as a sign of the eventual dissolution of the web of status relationships defined by privilege. Ecological crises are spurring myriad reforms, including the adoption of more car technologies and alternative sources of energy. Even pop culture has read the signs of the times, as demonstrated by the cable show, “Planet Green.”

Nevertheless, more direction is needed for metanoia to occur. There is need for more concrete guidance on how to foster the conversion of human consciousness called for by Ruether and other eco-feminists. One way may be to reassess Catholicism’s environmental ethic so this ethic mutually addresses a concern for both humanity and all created beings, thereby opening the way for ongoing conversion from self-centeredness to Christian praxis.
From a theological stance, the destruction of the earth bears the mark of deep sinfulness (Johnson 1996, 9). If God created all matter, it would insult the Divine to degrade any part of creation. It stands to reason that polluting the earth and mistreating others means we have lost all sense of God’s presence in nature. In his first encyclical as pope, Benedict XIV links the created world with the immanence of God in creation. He wrote, “[T]he universe in which we live has its source in God… Consequently, his creation is dear to him, for it was willed by him and ‘made’ by him” (Benedict XIV 2005, 9). Benedict invites the faithful to respect the earth because it comes from God. If reverence for God is interpreted as respect for the earth, perhaps then, a reversal of the injustice and disfigurement of God’s created earth may emerge.

The Texas-Mexico colonias are one of many compelling examples of how humanity has lost the sense of God’s presence in nature. Here are people suffering from social, economical, and ecological injustices. As people of faith stand with the people of the colonias, they can begin to see the world in new ways and begin to experience a new inner consciousness which enables them to consider, with a greater depth of insight, the interrelations of humans, the earth, and the Divine. They will be encouraged to find ways to call on governments and corporations to rethink policies that harm humanity and the earth. They will strive to prevent abuses against the marginalized and restore harmony between humanity and all created beings.

Specifically, much needs to be accomplished in the Catholic community to bring about a world of justice for all its inhabitants. The Church and all humanity must work hard at developing a kinship with the earth so a conversion of heart and mind can take place in developing a renewed ecological theology. This conversional process can take
place via religious education on a life-long continuum. “[L]ifelong formation is always needed and must be a priority in the Church’s catechetical ministry” (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops 1999, 13). If human learning about the ethical care of creation can become a single, fundamental human process from birth to death with no dichotomy of separate educational processes, it is proposed that an ethical care for the earth can become a reality for the Catholic Church and serve as a model for other faith traditions.

Educational strategies are necessary in developing a renewed sense of stewardship. Scott advocates for a community-based model of religious education. In utilizing this framework, Scott offers a choice other than that of many contemporary educational philosophies which dichotomize learners into distinct divisions (Scott 2002, 76). He suggests utilizing this community-based educational form which envisions the education of all, inclusive of all ages, with no separation of adults and children into learner categories. In this model, learners grow, not toward independence, but toward interdependence. Community-based learning coincides with Ruether’s vision of a world whereby the interrelatedness of all creation is paramount, where each strives to develop a kinship with the other, rather than a focus on individualism.

A goal of religious education is for a person to strive toward the richest and deepest form of human maturity. Religious formation becomes flawed, however, when one distances herself/himself so far from the practice of a religious life that its practice has nothing to do with intellect. Moran advocates a two-pronged process of religious education: teaching people religion and teaching people how to be religious (Moran 1989, 82-83, 218-219). He was concerned with the dilemma between these two
approaches that is perpetuated by many religious educators: dichotomizing the two components. It is important to distinguish between teaching about religion and teaching how to be religious. They are different. However, both components must live within the same person and the same faith community.

In order to reach a mature life of faith, learning about religion and learning to be religious are to be daily integrated both by the individual and their faith community. It takes it away from privatization and places the learner in a larger relational context. It is within this educational form and relational context that religious education regarding a renewed theology of creation is offered. Catholics must be taught about the Church’s history of anthropocentrism, about the interrelatedness of created beings, and about the social justice teachings of the Church in order to understand Ruether’s call for a transformational conversion of human consciousness toward an ecological care of the earth. In other words, what is needed now is making concrete and realistic the theological methodology in such a way that the teaching can be seen as a reality in the lives of the faithful as advocated by Scott’s community-based model of religious education. The means must be made accessible to individual Catholics and their faith communities in order for religious educators to carry the new ecological ethic, once developed, to the broader Church.

The community-based educational paradigm is a contextual approach to religious education ideally suited for exploring the theological kinship model of relationship as it pertains to a renewed sense of ecological care. Its basic precepts include a reverence for the relationality among all created beings and a rejection of nature as an entity to be
dominated, whereby humanity is called to recognize the kinship we share with all other created beings.

**Conclusion**

Ruether’s call for an alteration of human consciousness into an instrument that can bring balance to the ecological community presents a unique challenge to religious educators. This conversion model of ecological justice may not break down all the barriers that keep people from adhering to Christ’s admonition to protect the poor of the earth, but Ruether’s visionary work is sorely needed. It can help to foster greater respect for all created life. Further exploration will be needed in order for the implementation of a new theological framework for creating a new humanity and a new earth. A new theological framework has the possibility of engendering respect for creation, the refusal to exploit anyone/thing, and justice overcoming oppression.
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