



Descriptions of Nature as Images of Moral Decline in the Letter of Jude

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Abstract

In the Letter of Jude, the author uses images from the environment to demonstrate the moral decline of the faith community. The environment is portrayed *inter alia* as dark, clouds without rain, trees without fruit, and trees uprooted. The author uses provocative or insulting language to describe the opponents of Jude as men whose appearance, behaviour or speech is typically associated with women. By linking the men with immoral women, they are effeminated. This paper examines the language used for the environment and women to depict the moral decline of the opponents in the Letter of Jude. The aim of the paper is to challenge a worldview based on the inferior status of the environment and of women, and to promote a view of the environment and women as subjects rather than substances. Ecofeminists suggest a worldview that places a high value on connection and relationship, instead of the androcentric worldview of contrast and separation.

Keywords: Letter of Jude, moral decline, nature images, Earth, women, sexuality.

Introduction¹

Who can be blamed for the environmental crisis? Several perpetrators can be held responsible for Earth's crisis, including industrial development, politicians, the Industrial Revolution, the Enlightenment, classical Greek traditions, and even Christianity itself. Christianity, its sacred texts and traditions have been identified as an important contributor to the environmental crisis (Nortje-Meyer, 2022a:129). Lynn White (1967:1203-1207) has accused Christianity of introducing and proclaiming an anthropocentric interpretation of the biblical texts and held Christianity responsible for the influence these interpretations have had on the environment. Christian theological thinking on salvation and redemptive history, as documented in the Bible, is seen as the basis for the approach of Christians to the relationship between humans and Earth (animals) (Linzey 1995:13).² It might not be a single movement, theology, or ideology that is responsible for Earth's crisis, but a combination of multiple and diverse influences (Bouma-Prediger, 1995:5-7).

Resistance to the environmental crisis came from one of the early ecofeminists, Rosemary Radford Ruether (1971:13), who has linked "the domination of nature and the domination of women", and "made insightful and passionate accounts of this interrelationship" (Bouma-Prediger, 1995:25). Ruether identifies the underlying hierarchical dualisms of Western thought as being responsible for the oppression of women and Earth (animals) (Ruether, 1971:261).

¹ These introductory notes are also reflected in my other publications Nortjé-Meyer 2022a, 2022b.

² I'm using the combination of Earth (animals) to indicate the broader concern for nature.



Hierarchical Dualisms as Theoretical Framework

Hierarchical dualisms are the idea that the whole universe is a composite of binary opposites (cf. Nortje-Meyer, 2022a:130-132). These opposites are relative dualisms organized as having an intrinsic hierarchical principle, where there is a primary principle, with a secondary principle derived from it. Ohnuki-Tierney (1981:454) says that “all these domains, whether direction, space, time, people, colour, or value, may be broadly classified by a binary opposition.” Researchers have concluded that in many cultures binary oppositions are a leading method of organization. We must keep in mind that cultures are not using only binary oppositions as a mode of classification; “trinary and other more complex modes of classification, as well as a simultaneous presence of more than one mode of classification”, may also be used (Ohnuki-Tierney, 1981:454).

Binary opposites were established in classical Greek thought, and subsequently employed by Christian and Western thought. Dualism involves the “assumption that androcentricity (male as central, female as peripheral), exclusivity (male as the focal point, female as marginal), isolation (male as self, female as other), and subjectification (male as agent and subject, female as passive object) are universal structures of language and representation” (Schüssler-Fiorenza, 1992:41-42). These androcentric binary systems are also expressed in hierarchical socio-cultural patterns and practices in especially western cultures. In this binary way of normative and essentialist thinking, the principles stay the same; the first principle is primary, dominant, and preferable and the second principle is secondary, subservient, and inferior. This has been called the “master paradigm” and is not a contemporary hermeneutical lens, but one that has been utilized since antiquity (Wainwright, 2002:83).

The broader religious dualisms involve two opposite powers that were responsible for the creation of the world (universe). God (the primary principle) is the powerful one (in heaven/above) who created the world (below), including beginning/ life, day/ light, good, the sacred, etc. The male (also as a primary principle) represents God, as the image of God, in terms of being spiritual, active, powerful, having rationality, control, reason, honour, production, being a subject, etc. Satan is perceived as the opposite force involved in the creation and represents evil, end/ death, night/ darkness, the profane, powerlessness, etc. (Augustyn 2022). The binary opposite of the male, namely the female, signifies darkness, evil (temptress), shame, being penetrated, cold, powerless, passive, reproductive, emotional, body/ flesh, uncontrolled, being an object, etc. Women and Earth are from below, so Earth (animals) share the secondary principles with women by being a necessity, nature, uncontrolled (animality), primitive, reproductive, material/ matter, etc. (Nortje-Meyer, 2022a:130-131).

Ruether argues that the primary and implicit assumption of this historical development is “the male ideology of transcendent dualism” (1975:195). This means that reality and also the Christian community are seen in terms of “a whole chain of dualistic relations, namely male/ female, soul/ body, spirit/ matter—in which the second half of each pair is seen as alien and subject to the first” (Bouma-Prediger, 1995:34). Ruether says further that the “alien” or “other” includes women dominated by men, the exploitation of nonhumans by humans, the soul controlling the body, etc. This whole set of dualisms can be reflected in the socio-economic patterns of society, including “work/ leisure, public/ private, competition/ nurture, business and politics/ morality and religion, immoral society/ moral man” (Bouma-Prediger, 1995:34).

The Earth Bible principle of interconnectedness will be used to demonstrate the interconnectedness of women and nature as assigned in the master paradigm of dualisms. Interconnectedness is expressed as “The Earth is a community of interconnected living things



which are mutually dependent on each other for life and survival” (Habel, Earth Bible Project, 2000:38-53).

Although all the principles of the Earth Bible Project are important in reading biblical texts, I particularly acknowledge the principle of intrinsic worth, namely that “the universe, the Earth, and all its components have intrinsic value”.

The interconnectedness between Women and Nature

Mary Daly (1990:89) summarises this interconnectedness as follows:

- (1) The oppression of women and the oppression of nature are interconnected;
- (2) these connections must be uncovered in order to understand both the oppression of women and the oppression of nature;
- (3) feminist analysis must include ecological insights;
- (4) a feminist perspective must be part of any proposed ecological solutions.

As indicated above, we acknowledge the interconnectedness between nature and women as secondary binary principles: women and Earth (animals) not only share oppression, but also share in being bodies consisting of matter, material, and flesh (cf. Nortje-Meyer, 2022a:135-136). Besides these binary principles that women and Earth (animals) are sharing, the use of language also provides evidence of this interconnectedness. Warren (1994:52), for example, mentions that scholars have provided critiques of the images applied to women and nature (Adams, 1990). To subordinate women, images and language from the natural world are used to describe them: they are termed as bitches, cows, sows, chicks, serpents, old bats, shrews (Collins, 1990:487)³, pussycats, etc. However, language which feminizes nature is also used. For example, we say that “‘Mother Nature’ is raped, mastered, conquered, mined; her secrets are ‘penetrated’ and her ‘womb’ is to be put into service of the ‘man of science’. Virgin timber is felled and cut down; fertile soil is tilled and land that lies ‘fallow’ is ‘barren’, useless” (Warren, 1994:52). In this way the exploitation of Earth (animals) is vindicated by feminizing them; in tandem, the exploitation of women is vindicated by naturalizing them. Carol Adams also argues that “language which feminizes nature and naturalizes women describes, reflects, and perpetuates patriarchal oppression by failing to see the extent to which the twin dominations of women and nature, especially of animals, are, in fact, culturally analogous and not simply metaphorically analogous” (Adams, 1990:61). Richlin reports a male academic who said that “... women, like dogs, are somehow outside history, doing nothing that could make a mark on the historical record...” (2013:146).

The following discussion of Jude’s use of images to humiliate his opponents demonstrate the interconnectedness of women and Earth (animals). The use of negative sexual images related to women and negative images imposed upon nature confirm the master paradigm of dualisms, where women and Earth (animals) share the lower status of the secondary principle.

Jude’s use of sexual depravity as a rhetorical strategy⁴

The rhetorical strategy used by the author of Jude to humiliate his opponents is by accusing them of sexual depravity and comparing them to nature. He uses the most destructive vilification

³ According to Collins GEM English Dictionary (1990: 487), a shrew is an animal like a mouse or a bad-tempered woman.

⁴ This theme was discussed extensively in a previous publication (Nortje-Meyer 2014:1-9) and will only be mentioned briefly here.



to defend his honour and the Christian tradition that was challenged by the opponents in order to dishonour them. Although there were men in antiquity who displayed characteristics such as “being soft, effeminate, sexually passive, weak, deceitful, cowardly, and incapable of virtue”, none of these characteristics of the intruders have been mentioned and used in Jude’s letter (Hester, 2005:24-25). Instead, moral decline was profoundly associated with women’s sexual behaviour and the female body. Jude’s accusations of sexual depravity have a strong female connotation: the opponents are described in terms of “licentious” (v.4), “fornication and unnatural lusts” (v.7), “defiling the flesh” (v.8), “own lusts” (v.16) “ungodly lusts” (v.18), “following natural instincts” (v.19), and “clothing stained by corrupted flesh” (v.23) (cf. Du Toit, 1994:404). In antiquity and even today, men have sexual freedom and are exempted from adultery and unfaithfulness to their wives. Instead, it is women who are labelled as temptresses because they cannot control themselves sexually (cf. John 8:1-11; Romans 7:23).

This is not a unique rhetorical technique, because members of the Christian community who upset the peace, apostates and syncretists, were also effeminated by charges of immorality, such as sexual immorality and adultery (cf. Rosenblatt, 1994:396). Prophetic literature in the HB also uses this technique to discredit opponents (e.g. Jeremiah 3:1-10 and Ezekiel 16) (Nortje-Meyer, 2014:5).

Jude’s rhetorical onslaught includes implicit vilification:⁵ he uses examples from canonical and non-canonical literature to demonstrate his opponents’ moral decline and corruption (cf. Brosend, 2006:298). It can be argued that not all the biblical examples indicate the same degree of sexual immorality, but Wolthuis (1987:32) says that “Jewish tradition would interpret most of the examples” in a sensual way. The following are examples from Jewish tradition: verse 6 indicates that the angels had intercourse with earthly women and were punished for their sin; in verse 11 “the way of Cain” refers to an evil life that is sensual, selfish, and hateful; verse 7 refers to Sodom and Gomorrah and the sin of “pursuing unnatural lust” (Jude 7; cf. Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Romans 1:26-27); and in verse 24 “without blemish” is a sexual image of purity (cf. Ephesians 5:27, Revelation 21:2, Isaiah 37:22, Jeremiah 18:13; & 31:4, 21).

This demonstrates patriarchal ideology excluding explicit references to women⁶ in the text, while using images of female sexual depravity to humiliate the opponents. These opponents were considered identical with everything negative associated with female sexuality and a woman’s body (Van der Watt & Kok, 2008:1820).

Jude’s use of images from nature as a rhetorical strategy

Jude also uses metaphors taken from nature to demonstrate the sinful character of his opponents. The descriptions of the “waterless clouds” and the “trees without fruit” (Jud 12) have female connotations of barrenness, whereas beloved and valued woman are often symbolised by fruit-bearing trees (for example in Song of Songs 4:13; 7:8-9; and Psalm 128:3). Water is perceived as the ultimate life-giver; without water, there is no life on earth. This is a clear reference to women, because women are the ultimate life-givers. The same applies to the image of the fruit trees without fruit. Both metaphors indicate barrenness and complete worthlessness. The wind has blown away the promises of rain that would have watered the fruit-bearing trees, and now the trees without fruit have been uprooted (v.12). Ancient patriarchal culture (and still in many parts of the world today) regarded barren women as worthless. If she

⁵ Boonzaaier (2003:1281) says that implicit vilification is not always obvious.

⁶ The exclusion of women in the use of these images for the opponents is confirmed by the references to “these men” in Jud 4,8,10,12,16.



could also not bear a son to her husband, she was perceived as a burden to the household and could be rejected, isolated in the family, or even divorced (cf. Malina, 2001:47).⁷ It is to demonize nature.

Jude's rhetoric not only demonstrates androcentrism but also anthropocentrism, signifying the domination of humans over nature. Ecofeminists like Warren (1994:42) see domination as a sort of dictatorship in the sense that humans rule over the natural environment and have the right to manage this environment as they wish, perceiving the value of nature as solely "instrumental" or "extrinsic". With this attitude of superiority, humans not only are allowed to exploit Earth (animals) and its "natural resources", but also assume that it is "our legitimate right as superior agents, heirs, and controllers of God's creation" to dominate the less valuable, less prestigious, and lower status in nature (Warren, 1994:42).

Darkness

Jude vv. 6 & 13 indicate that the blackest darkness has been reserved for the sinners and that they will be "bound with everlasting chains for judgement on the Great day", that is Judgement Day. The theological connotation, especially in the HB and NT, is that darkness contrasts with light and has the connotation of evil and condemnation. Light signifies God, life, joy, and blessings. Darkness indicates evil, sin, grief, misfortune, pain, and death (e.g. Job 10:22; 18:5-6; Matthew 8:12, 25:30. John 3:19; Colossians 1:13; 1 Thess 5:5 "for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness"). Darkness is associated with evil deeds (e.g. Ephesians 5:11 "the fruitless deeds of darkness"), indicating bad conduct (Ephesians 5:8, 11) and spiritual deadness (Ephesians 4:18-19) (Stenschke, 2014:128).

From an ecological perspective, however, darkness is part of the life circle on Earth. Some organisms and animals are nocturnal. They require dark conditions for reproductive, defensive, and communication purposes (Gerrish et al., 2009:526). Therefore "darkness is an important resource and an environmental condition for all living creatures and organisms. Just as there are day creatures, there are also nocturnal creatures, including mammals, birds, and insects. The leopard, aardvark, pangolin, caracal, and porcupine *inter alia* are nocturnal mammals; nocturnal birds include the owl, nightjar, nightingale. Insects such as moths and most frogs are nocturnal. These creatures do their hunting and eating at night. They are well equipped to see and live in dark conditions.

Plants or organisms that are unprotected from ultraviolet radiation during daylight need periods of darkness to provide "time for photorepair, allowing over-stimulated cells to recover and heal". Gerrish et al (2009:525) say that "without a period of darkness, these plants and organisms experience reduced growth and lower reproductive success". Cycles of darkness and natural light had significant influences on the evolution process, and many organisms have developed behaviours that are "marked by or are dependent upon darkness". In both plant and marine systems, the hatching of eggs and the germination of seeds depend on "photoperiod hints, that means that they are linked to several seasonal developmental processes to initiate reproductive and vegetative organs" (Gerrish et al., 2009:525).

⁷ Cf. Ps 127:3-4: "Sons are indeed a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the sons of one's youth." NRSV.



Fire

In Jude v.7 the punishment for the sinners is to suffer the eternal fire. In the HB and the NT, fire is used as an indication of destructive judgement (Macchia, 2018:2). Since the Flood, God has promised never to destroy the Earth with water again (Genesis 8:21), but the final judgement will be by fire (Luke 3:16-17; 2 Peter 3:5-6, 7, 10).

Nobody can escape the blazing heat of a fire. For the unremorseful, it would mean total inescapable destruction. But fire was also used to indicate a process of purification. For those who repent, it would mean a refining or purification “which would result in salvation” (Dunn, 1970:13–14). Fire is therefore a means to holiness.

Fire is also used in the HB to characterize Yahweh. Grant (2015:139) says that “Israel’s old poetry and prophetic literature portray divine fire as Yahweh’s breath, mouth, and tongue. The Bible’s narrative texts portray Yahweh using fire as a means to eat, transport, travel, speak, and see”. It indicates how Yahweh interacts physically with the people and the world. Yahweh speaks to Moses from the burning bush (Exodus 3:3-5); Yahweh descends on Mount Sinai in fire (Exodus 19:18); He travels with Israel in the desert in a column of fire (Exodus 13:21-22). There are many more examples. Similar to Mesopotamian gods and kings, Yahweh’s body is associated with fire (Grant 2015:145). People of Israel were not allowed to see him directly or to approach him (Exodus 19:16-18), because the “divine fire is a rhetorical sign of Yahweh’s presence and power” (Grant, 2015:153). In the NT the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the early believers was visible as “tongues of fire” (Acts 2:3).

Earth, nature, and humans cannot escape the ecological importance and benefits of fire. “Earth is a unique fire planet”, humans are unique fire creatures, “and the ecology of their interactions is both ancient and profound” (Pyne, 2010:30). “Fire on Earth is a feature of the living world”, and it “emerged out of the nature of life on Earth”.⁸ Life provides the oxygen that ignites fire and provides the hydrocarbon fuels that feed and sustain it. Since the early humans or hominins discovered how to make and control fire, the evolution process escalated: they could cook grains to make them more eatable and consumable⁹; humans could move into the uninhabitable cold places and use fire to keep warm; they could keep predators away, clear land, and they could also use fire as light in the darkness (Dartnell, 2020:15).¹⁰ Fire had transformative influences and brought about changes in human existence (Pyne, 2010:36).

Pyne (2010:32) further says that “fire plays an important role in nutrient cycling, diversity maintenance, and habitat structure”. The restraining of fire can lead to “unforeseen changes in ecosystems that often adversely affect the plants, animals, and humans that depend upon that habitat”.

Many ecosystems benefit from sporadic fires because the fires clean up dead organic material to make space for new growth. Some plants and animals require the benefits that fire brings to survive and reproduce. Certain types of lilies or the fynbos in the Western Cape require fire for seed germination. Even smoke can trigger flowering in some species (Pyne, 2010:32).

⁸ This was only possible after the so-called Oxidation Event 2.42 billion years ago (Dartnell 2020:173).

⁹ The chemically transformative power of heat and fire breaks down the complex plant and grain compounds so that humans can better absorb the nutrition (Dartnell 2020:69). The heat also destroys toxic elements in food such as potatoes

¹⁰ Fire enabled hunters to make better tools for more effective hunting, (Dartnell 2020:17), and fired clay was used for making more effective cooking pots and bricks for building structures (Dartnell 2020:131).



Pollution

In Jude v.8 the author says that the opponents pollute their own bodies with their behaviour. Referring to the discussion above on sexual behaviour, this means that they are morally corrupt. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:18 that to commit adultery is to sin against your own body. But believers could be purified (meaning cleansed and made holy) by the ritual of the washing of water or baptism or through fire (Mark 9:49).

Today humans are responsible for polluting the environment. The air we breathe is polluted with toxic gasses and smoke. Carbon dioxide (CO₂) in the atmosphere contributes to global warming, and plastic is polluting the soil, water sources, and the sea, affecting all natural life. Recently it was discovered by scientists that there is microplastic in the lung tissue of living humans: "Polypropylene, used for packaging and pipes, and PET, commonly used for beverage bottles, were the two most common types of plastic found" (Rosane, 2022). If it is found in humans, it will also be in the lung tissue of animals. Polluting the environment on this scale means that humans pollute their own living bodies as well as the cosmos.

Trees

Jude v.12 compares the opponents with autumn trees without fruits and uprooted. This refers to fruit trees that produced no fruits to be harvested and were useless for their owners and considered dead. Even though trees (for whatever reason) do not bear fruit, they are never "useless" because they can still provide protection for humans and especially animals, firewood for cooking, and warmth that are essential to living creatures.

Plants and especially trees are frequently used either as metaphors or as references to real plants in the HB and NT. The first humans started their lives in the garden of Eden, and the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" plays a significant theological role in the history of biblical humans (Genesis 2:15-17; 3:16-24). The cedars of Lebanon were frequently mentioned in the HB in a figurative sense (Psalms 92:12); they were also used for purification (Leviticus 14:4,6) and building material (1 Kings 5:6-10). The story of the two lovers in the Song of Songs is situated in a garden (4:11-14) surrounded by fruit trees (1:6; 2:3), flowers (2:1, 6:2-3), and herbs (1:13-14). In the NT fruit trees and their fruits are often used to indicate the good or bad deeds of people, resulting in destruction of the bad tree (Matthew 7:16-19; Matthew 21:18-19; John 15:1-17)

Plants were the first forms of life on Earth. Without plants human and animal existence is not possible: plants provide *inter alia* oxygen, food, medicine, and shelter. They influence the land formation, climate change, forest ecology (Brendel, 2021:1), water consumption and availability, and living space for all creatures. Plants are responsible for absorbing water from the ground and evaporating it through their leaves into the atmosphere (Brendel, 2021:7). Plants (like humans and animals) have a limited lifetime and will eventually die. Plants, animals, and humans are incontestably interconnected.

Water

The opponents of Jude are described as "clouds without rain, blown along by the wind" (v.12), and "wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame" (v.13). In regions where people (especially farmers) depend on rains, "clouds that come but do not have rain" are signs of destruction and hopelessness (Reese, 2007:61). However, cycles of drought and rainy seasons contributed to the evolution of Earth and life.



Wild waves are interpreted by Reese (2007:60) as a storm that seems out of control, and “has the sense of danger”. The danger of a sea storm is only relevant to humans, and not to the sea itself – it is a natural phenomenon in the way the sea functions.

No life on Earth is possible without water. The earliest forms of life emerged in the seas, and from there evolved onto land. There are mainly two explanations given for the origin of water on Earth. A large quantity of water would have been in the material which formed the Earth, and asteroids up to a few hundred kilometres across that collided with the Earth seem the most likely sources of Earth’s water (Alexander, 2021).

When Genesis 1 is read closely, it does not record that Yahweh created water. It seems that the water was already existing, and that Yahweh only separated the waters: “Let there be an expanse between the waters to separate water from water” (v.6). “So God made the expanse and separated the water under the expanse from the water above it” (v.7).

In Jude 13 the opponents are compared with “wandering stars”. Stars were used as a point of reference for land and sea travellers to direct them to their destination. Wandering or moving stars would lead travellers astray and they would get lost (Reese, 2007:62). Frey says that the elliptical orbits of the planets “were perceived in the ancient world as irregular [and], according to the explanation of the Enoch tradition, are a sign that the order of the cosmos is crumbling ‘in the days of sinners’” (2018:116-117). “Moving stars” is an illusion because it is not the stars that move but the rotation of Earth that gives the impression that the stars are moving. The biblical text doesn’t make a distinction between stars and planets that “revolve around a star, in a definite path or orbit” (Surbhi, 2019). The term “star” is used in the Bible for any “luminous non-terrestrial body, other than sun and moon” (Douglas, 1978:1214).¹¹

Unreasonable animals and Balaam’s donkey

In verse 10 Jude accuses his opponents of not understanding the things they are speaking abusively against, and says that they only understand these things by instinct, like unreasoning animals. However, in v.11 he refers to the “error” of Balaam, and by implication to the donkey of Balaam who demonstrated better “reasoning” than Balaam himself.

Balaam’s error in v.11, refers to his counselling of Balak the king of Moab to entice the Israelites to practice lewdness (Wolthuis, 1987:35). Jewish traditional exegeses criticize Balaam for accepting the invitation of Balak motivated by his greed and the large rewards promised to him, namely large fees for divination (Numbers 22:7) and promises of great honour (22:17). In these traditions, Balaam embodies a type of hatred, greed, recalcitrance, villainy, and a lack of understanding and discernment of the will of God (Wolthuis, 1987:36-37).

Although the donkey plays an important part in Numbers 22, she is not mentioned in Jude. But the story of Balaam has little significance without the story of his accompanying donkey.

In Numbers 22 the donkey is used as a kind of divine agent (Viviers, 2019:1). In contrast with Balaam, his donkey displays insight and knowledge of the will of God. Three times the angel tried to prevent Balaam from continuing his journey to Balak, but each time it was only the donkey who saw the angel and tried to abandon the journey. In his anger, greed, and lack of understanding, Balaam struck the donkey each time forcing the animal back onto the road. When the Lord opened the mouth of the donkey and she complained about the abuse, it is only then that Balaam saw the angel who said to him: “I have come out as an adversary because

¹¹ A few star constellations are mentioned in Job.



your way is perverse before me” (v.32). The donkey noticed the angel and turned away three times, preventing the angel from killing Balaam.

The purpose of the story is to ridicule the “prophet” Balaam. The donkey becomes the true prophet, in the sense that the donkey is on a higher spiritual level than Balaam because she wants to protect him from his evil and unacceptable intention to curse Israel for monetary gain (Frisch, 2015:111). Balaam was disgraced by his donkey (Revelation 2:14).

In a recent report, it is said that 4.8 million donkeys worldwide are slaughtered for their skins. Collagen extracted from the skin of donkeys is used in traditional Chinese medicine. According to the report, ten million communities worldwide are depending on donkeys as a workforce. When the donkeys are stolen, women and girls have to do the “donkey work”.¹² In the hierarchy of dualisms, “animals are seen as inferior to humans” and of lesser worth (Viviers, 2019:4). Therefore, from an anthropocentric perspective, humans can treat animals as they wish because animals are purely instrumental for human purposes and are to be mastered. This is demonstrated by Balaam who struck the donkey (who saved his life) three times out of anger, and would even have killed the animal if he’d had a sword in his hand (Numbers 22:21).

In the Jewish tradition, Balaam stands for “a greedy, selfish life that set aside morality for immorality, misused the power of God, and was destined for eternal punishment”. Jude “emphasizes the aspect of punishment, but he also points to the parallels between the traditions on Balaam and the errors of his opponents” (Wolthuis, 1987:36).

Conclusion

The Letter of Jude is highly problematic for feminists and ecofeminists: the author demonstrates androcentrism and anthropocentrism by using negative images of woman's sexuality and negative images of nature to humiliate his opponents. In the master paradigm of dualisms, the dominant male exercises authority and mastery over women and Earth (animals), which is clearly demonstrated in the Letter of Jude.

Earth (animals) has intrinsic value. Earth (nature) does not need humans to exist, but humans cannot live without nature. McFague views the world as “interdependent, and all bodies (living and non-living) as interconnected, interdependent, and valuable” (1993:140-141). Hadebe (2017:2) also emphasizes the “core values of interconnectedness, relatedness, and justice”.

Woman and nature metaphors demonstrating the androcentric and anthropocentric ideologies of authoritative texts need to be de-demonized to enable nature and humans to live in harmony. They should be exposed and criticized to alert faith communities to the harmful effect these ideologies have on the human female, on the Earth (animals), and on justice.

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