Over the last thirty years or so, ecofeminist theologians have criticized the hierarchical dualism pervading Western Christian thought as the root of the oppression of both women and nonhuman nature. In order to overcome Christian dualism, these theologians have envisioned an incarnational theology that embraces women, nature, and the body not just as good but as revelatory of the sacred. This shift toward divine immanence is typically accompanied by a this-worldly account of redemption centering on fostering peaceful, just, and sustainable communities between women and men as well as between humans and the rest of nature. Not surprisingly, therefore, ecofeminist theology has not only made a significant contribution to both feminist and ecological theology but also importantly informed “green” religious grassroots women’s movements, such as that of the “Green Sisters” in the United States and the women’s collective Con-Spirando of Latin America.¹

Yet in spite of its critical, imaginative, and practical appeal, ecofeminist theology has itself been criticized by postmodern feminists and environmental ethicists. Postmodern feminists have argued that ecofeminist theology operates with an essentialist notion of gender in so far as it suggests that women are inherently “more natural” than men and that interdependence is a particularity of the feminine psyche.² In addition, environmental ethicist Lisa Sideris has blamed ecofeminist theologians for failing to take into account the insights of evolutionary theory. In her widely acclaimed study Environmental Ethics, Ecological Theology and Natural Selection, Sideris insists that ecofeminist theologians...
operate with a highly romanticized picture of nonhuman nature that downplays the violence and suffering intrinsic to evolutionary processes. In addition, Sideris claims that when ecofeminists acknowledge suffering as part of nature, they tend to extend a love ethic toward nonhuman nature that aims at eliminating suffering and resolving conflict. Unfortunately, such an ethics typically fails to fully appreciate the role of strife and conflict in maintaining the vitality of biotic communities.

Given that many of the green grassroots practices by religious women are inspired by ecofeminist theology, these criticisms are rather serious. After all, if it is the case that women are led by a wrongheaded communitarian ideal that extends love and compassion to nonhuman nature, much of the earth ministry by religious women might be ineffective at best and counterproductive at worst. Moreover, because ecofeminist theology seeks to articulate an earth-centered soteriology that takes physical, embodied existence seriously, accusations of selective use of evolutionary science hurt. In fact, as Heather Eaton has pointed out in her book *Introducing Eco-Feminist Theologies*, ecofeminist theologians themselves generally agree that much of the reluctance to address the ecological crisis stems from a prior reluctance among theologians to think about evolution. Such a refusal is symptomatic of Christianity’s struggle to accept the finite condition of life—epitomized by its otherworldly notion of redemption—which ecofeminists insist is at the basis of the domination of women and the earth. For this reason, they claim to ground their theology within the earth sciences, with evolutionary theory prominent among them.

This chapter explores the notions of nature, redemption, and ecological evil in ecofeminist theology against the background of these observations and conundrums. It is important to note at the outset, however, that notwithstanding the proclaimed importance of evolution for ecofeminist theology, I do not suggest that developing a theology of evolution or solving theological riddles raised by so called “natural evil” should be the main purpose of an ecofeminist theology. Ecofeminist theology seeks to address the myriad ways the exploitation of nature and women are interconnected. Its main focus, therefore, is with the cultural-symbolic and social-economic structures reproducing the dual oppression of nature and women. More specifically, ecofeminist theologians want to name the structural injustices of poverty, sexism, racism, colonialism, and environmental degradation as ecological evil.

Moreover, because ecofeminist theology writes itself as part of a cultural-symbolic tradition that has often denied nature ultimate significance—constructing nature in opposition to grace—and identified women and female sexuality with matter, ecofeminist theologians do not want to give up on their matter-affirming construct of nature in the name of evolution. Yet while