

Ecumenical '*Asian Women Theological Educators and Women in Theological Movements Conference*'

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'UNITY IN DIVERSITY, DIVERSITY IN UNITY'

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This Reflection was written and shared in the opening liturgy of the Conference - as inspired by 'LAUDATO SI'—Encyclical Letter of Pope Francis on Care for our Common Home)

'Bahay kubo , kahit munti, ang halaman doon ay sari-sari, singkamas at talong, sigerilyas at mani, sitaw, bataw, patani. Kundol, patola, upo't kalabasa at saka mayroon pa, labanos, mustasa, sibuyas, kamatis, bawang at luya, sa paligid-ligid ay puno ng linga. . .' So our favorite Filipino rhyme song goes. It is a song capturing diversity, differentiation, a variety of vegetables in a backyard of a local home community. A garden, or as we translate it in our language *'halamanan'* is a parcel of land teeming with life. It depicts of 'diversity or differentiation' that becomes a source sustenance for each and every one. A life of abundant blessings shared in community. This is a nourishing reality in the Philippines until the onslaught of Neoliberal Globalization, an economic system which imposed itself in the global market and made everything look the same. From an indigenous principle of sharing and *'sapat'* or living with just enough to a 'globalized' culture of 'eat-all-you-can' restos, 'bottomless' thirsts and 'unlimited' freebies.

From the Book of Genesis 2: 4 – 17, 'In the Day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up- for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth and there was no one to till the ground; but a stream would rise from the earth and water the whole face of the ground- then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. Out of the ground, the Lord made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.¹

¹ NRSV Bible. Genesis 2: 4 – 17.

And so we learned the conclusion of this creation story- that the 'curious woman, the seeker of knowledge, the tester of limits – is to be quintessentially human.'²

The Genesis, the 'beginning', any beginning is about 'a movement from a fixed and unchanging world to a new non-static order. The second chapter of Genesis describes the way in which a sterile world is replaced by one teeming with life. The world after Eden, (where woman initiated and actively participated in bringing it about), is clearly one of birth and death, whereas the garden had been an in-between world, in which no human had eaten from the tree of life but in which no one had yet given birth. Woman the one who will house life within her, helps to generate this new, active, challenging life beyond Eden.'³

So, women who possess the womb which generates and bears life have a very important part in sustaining these movements toward diversity and differentiation. From the womb of the earth is a potentiality for differentiation and biodiversity which sustains life and enhances the beauty and wonder of our world. 'The first Trinitarian Principle of the Universe is diversity or differentiation. It is the primordial manifestation of the Universe. From the cosmic egg to the elements, it manifest an astounding variety of qualities. From the vast galactic systems to our solar system, we find our planet Earth as the most highly differentiated being in the entire Universe. Life has an overflowing variety of expressions. Thomas Berry and Brianne Swimme wrote, 'We know of no other place in the universe with such gorgeous self-expression as exists on Earth. The exuberance of life we see especially in the tropical rainforest with its unnumbered species of flowering plants and colorful insects and the full spectrum of living creatures of every kind.' Indeed, we are so blessed and privileged to live in a tropical country like the Philippines.'⁴

From the latest findings, there are new marine species found in this country particularly in Verde Island Passage between Batangas and Mindoro, declared by Marine Scientists as the 'center of the center of marine shorefish biodiversity in the world.'⁵ 'During a recent seven-week expedition to the Philippines, researchers from the California Academy of Sciences uncovered more than 100 new species of marine life lurking in the coral reef of the Passage. The Philippines is jam-packed with diverse and threatened species--it's one of the most astounding regions of biodiversity on Earth,' remarked Terry Gosliner, PhD, who led the

² Carol Newsom and Sharon Ringe, *The Women's Bible Commentary* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 13.

³ Newsom, *The Women's Bible Commentary*, 14.

⁴ Luz Bantilan, RGS, *Earth Literacy Modules Toward Ecological Spirituality and Ethics* (Manila: ProQuest Publishing, 2004), 36.

⁵ <http://www.businessmirror.com.ph/protecting-verde-island-passage/>

expedition.⁶ However, this biodiversity is threatened as Verde Island Passage is considered a marine-biodiversity hotspot due to pollution, overfishing, illegal and destructive fishing, etc.

In a Unity Statement issued in 2014 by *Peasants and Scientists in Forging A Strong Partnership towards Genuine Rural Development*, they declared that ‘corporate agriculture has taken over Philippine agriculture and the food industry. Developing countries such as ours have become exporters of high-value cash crops like pineapples, bananas and cut flowers, replacing the domestic production of rice, vegetables, and root crops. Food processing and manufacturing are now concentrated in the hands of a few big foreign and local corporations, while the storage and distribution of rice, which is traditionally the role of government, has become privatized. The takeover of Third World farming by First World corporate agriculture is a clear illustration of the onslaught of imperialism on backward economies, jeopardizing the food security of developing nations’.⁷

A garden is an in-between world. It is a sacred space where we shall plant new seeds, tend new ideas and experiences, water new passions and commitments, celebrate and feast on new harvests which hopes to provide nourishment to a still hungry world of 795 million people.⁸ The Church in the world is our garden which commits to support and promote advocacies and transformative actions in behalf of millions who are impoverished and vulnerable, hungry for food, security, health, education, peace and justice. Our gardens are interior spaces of communion as well public arena for discussion, deliberation and solidarity, where our spirits are nourished and refreshed by abundant harvests of love, compassion, mercy and justice. The unity of the Church ‘finds its highest exemplar and source in the unity of the Persons of the Trinity’⁹ : The Source of All Being and the Eternal Word in the Holy Spirit, one God’. From this Trinitarian relationship, we draw the life giving energies of mercy and compassion which is our unity in diversity, our diversity in unity. With the recent encyclical letter of Pope Francis addressed to All of Humanity on the issue of the environment entitled ‘LAUDATO SI’ – On Care for our Common Home, the global community becomes our garden. A garden to challenge the culture of ‘disconnectedness’ and to inspire a compassionate solidarity with our groaning planet earth. The time to act in global solidarity is NOW!

Our Living God loves gardens. Gardens tell the story of our faith and salvation. From the Garden of Eden. The Garden of Olives. The Garden of Gethsemane. The Garden of the Resurrection. ‘The earth and its goods will thus be a permanent reminder to it of the love of

⁶ <http://www.discovery.com/dscovrd/wildlife/new-marine-species-discovered/>

⁷ Conference Proceedings of the 2nd National Peasants-Scientists Conference: *RESIST AGROCHEM TNCs* (2014) , 21.

⁸ United Nations 2015 data from www.wfp.org.

⁹ *Unitatis Redintegratio (Decree on Ecumenism)* No.2, Vatican II Documents.

God and of His fidelity to His covenant. He or she who possesses land also possesses God.¹⁰ Genesis 2:15 call us to 'keep' the garden. We are the gardeners given the task of ensuring diversity. Locally, we shall cultivate a garden of FAITH (Food Available In The Home). Collectively we resist and say: No to mono-cropping! No to GMOs! No to Monsanto's! No Landgrabbing! No to demolitions! No to wars and displacements! No to Large Scale Mining! No to Human Rights Violations! Only New Life!

Jesus' resurrection has taken place in a garden. Mary Magdalene is the first witness and disciple of the Risen Christ who becomes the apostle to the apostles. We celebrate this good news for all of us women who are called to be missionaries of mercy and compassion for the sake of our common home.

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¹⁰ Xavier Leon-Dufour, S.J. ed., *Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1967), 106.