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**THE TRIPLE CRIES OF POOR, WOMEN,
AND THE EARTH:
INTERLOCKING OPPRESSIONS IN THE
ASIAN CONTEXT**

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Abstract

This article presents how feminist theology and ecological theology converge with liberation theology. Taking an Asian context, it shows how in the diminishment of women, the exploitation of the poor, and the plundering of the earth, we hear triple cries. Listening to the triple cries and contemplating the rich and profound wisdom of the encyclical letter of the Holy Father Francis: *Laudato si'*: On Care For Our Common Home, the article develops a three-fold faith vision in response to the three cries: prophetic lament, gender resistance, and ecological kinship. Amidst the cry of the poor, prophetic lament gives rise to a deep sense of compassion; the cry of women is heard, but in the end it must be women that must let their cry be heard, as they reclaim their agency in gender resistance — the ability to limit, nullify, or overturn structures

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of power; and the cry of the earth is the cry for a new order of relationship, envisioned by Pope Francis as ecological kinship.

Keywords: Cry of the Poor, Cry of the Earth, Cry of Women, Ecology, Ecological Kinship, Gender Resistance, *Laudato Sí*, Prophetic Lament, Triple Cries

The connection between the social domination of women and the ecological domination of the earth is as deep as the connection between the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth. Leonardo Boff writes: “The logic that exploits classes and subjects peoples to the interests of the few rich and powerful countries is the same as the logic that devastates the earth and plunders its wealth, showing no solidarity with the rest of humankind and future generations.”¹ It is the logic of “being over” rather than “being with”² — the logic of domination and subjugation that is operative in the interlocking oppressions of poor, women, and earth. The ultimate root of this logic is the destruction of the universal relatedness and connectedness at the heart of all creation.

Feminist theology and ecological theology converge with liberation theology, whose epistemological focus is the preferential option for the poor and their liberation from the degradation and dehumanization of poverty. “The same logic of the prevailing system of accumulation and social organization that leads to the exploitation of workers also leads to the pillaging of the earth, of whole nations, and ultimately to the plundering of nature.”³ In the diminishment of women, the exploitation of the poor, and the plundering of the earth, we hear triple cries.

Asia is a huge continent divided into East Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, Western Asia, and Central Asia. Covering wide land boundaries, a rich multiplicity of cultures and religions, and an entire range of socio-economic-political contexts of its various countries, Asia cannot be referred to as one monolithic universal reality. Depending on studies made on Asia, the first part of the paper presents the triple cries and how these cries interlock in the same logic of domination and subjugation.

The second part of the paper offers a three-fold faith vision — prophetic lament, gender resistance, and ecological kinship — in

¹Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, trans. Phillip Berryman, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997, xi.

²Boff, *Cry of the Earth*, xii.

³Boff, *Cry of the Earth*, 110-111.

response to the triple cries. This alternative vision is drawn from the wealth of faith and cultural praxis, as women and men strive to pursue a way of being human in relation to one another, and in relation to the earth. It breaks the death-dealing logic of oppression and transforms it into a logic that liberates and gives life.

In listening to the triple cries and in reflecting on the three-fold faith vision, we contemplate the rich and profound wisdom of the encyclical letter of the Holy Father Francis: *Laudato sí: On Care for Our Common Home*.

1. Triple Cries: Poor, Women, and Earth

The triple cries of poor, women, and earth resound in our collective heart, and until these cries are heeded, all of life will continue to groan from the depths. These cries interlock in the one and same logic of oppression that operates through them, as all that exists are connected and interconnected. We begin by listening to the cry of the Asian poor, and then to the cry of Asian women, specifically the Filipina migrants and the women victims of India, and finally the cry of the earth where multinationals are plundering the natural resources of Asian cities and rural areas.

1.1. Cry of the Poor

When I see throngs of poor families in front of the trash bins of McDonalds or Jollibee at night, scavenging for the only food that they have for the entire day, my heart breaks. I weep. In the Philippines, they call this “pagpag,” which means “to shake.” Whatever people could get from the trash bins, they simply shake and eat, or recook if needed. There is something terribly wrong in a world where the poor are practically eating from the garbage bins, while the rich live in wanton extravagance. The cry of the poor resounds in a world where the assets of the three richest people are more than the combined GNP of the 48 least developed countries!⁴

It is difficult to accurately scan the poverty landscape in Asia because of the enormous differences between countries like China, India, South Japan, Philippines, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan. These do not constitute the whole of Asia, but they represent how the poverty terrains are so different in each country, that one can only speak of poverty in Asia in bold strokes, and with caveats. Any Asia-wide statistics on poverty should be seen only as

⁴United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 1999*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001, 37.

indicators and not as absolute data, because the region is just too diverse to be neatly summed up in statistics.

Of a growing concern is the phenomenon of urban poverty in Asia that is severely pervasive. Unlike rural poverty, urban poverty is complex and multi-dimensional. With poverty more and more urbanized, many people are living with inadequate access to land and housing, physical structure and services, economic and livelihood sources, health and education facilities, social security networks and voice and empowerment. Asia has 60 percent of the world's total slum population, as China is the world's largest nation of over 600 million urban dwellers.⁵ In the slums, millions of urban poor live in overcrowded spaces, where there is hardly any protection from harmful elements nor from forced eviction. Exposed to the filth and stench of poverty, and with no access to clean water and sanitation, the poor are perpetually within the grips of illness and disease. Pope Francis calls this water poverty — a poverty that is depriving the poor one of the most basic of rights. "Access to safe drinking water is a basic and universal human right, since it is essential to human survival and, as such, is a condition for the exercise of other human rights."⁶

Majority of Asia's urban poor work under highly vulnerable conditions. They are without any protection of the law, and are excluded from social security and health benefits. Not only are they rendered vulnerable by the precariousness of jobs, they often are the victims of the destruction and devastation unleashed by extreme weather and climate. The destruction, for instance, caused by Typhoon Haiyan, one of the world's most powerful storms, was a severe setback to economic recovery and poverty reduction in the Philippines. The typhoon left four million people homeless, and their sources of livelihood completely wiped out.

The cry of the Asian poor is the cry of those who live at the margins of life, within the unbroken chain of poverty, extremely deprived of the most basic of necessities to live a human life worthy of persons with rights and dignity.

1.2. The Cry of Women

The feminization of migration has increased recently; women constitute about 50 percent of the estimated 244 million migrants

⁵Om Prakash Mathur, "Urban Poverty in Asia," *Study Prepared for the Asian Development Bank* (August 2013) 1-121, at 2-3.

⁶Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 30.

worldwide.⁷ In Asia, women have surpassed the number of men working abroad, with 65 percent of Sri Lankan and 70 percent of Philippine migrant workers overseas.⁸ Why do women migrate? In the Philippines, about 40 percent live below the poverty line, with 30 percent living on a P 50.00 (US \$ 0.90 cents) on a daily basis. Women are forced to leave their homes and families to seek jobs beyond their national borders. They often become the primary earners for their families. The demand in more industrially prosperous countries for cheap labour seems insatiable. This labour falls under the “3Ds” of employment: dirty, dangerous, and demeaning. Women migrants predominantly work these jobs.⁹

Gemma Tulud Cruz’s article on Filipina domestic workers (DH) in Hong Kong exposes how they are abused and exploited. Many become victims of physical and sexual abuse in the hands of their employers. Slapped, spit at, kicked, hit with objects, and beaten, they realize to their horror that they are trapped in a hellish situation. Turned into 24 hour in-house masseuse, or in some cases “substitute wives,” and worse, into sex slaves, they are abused and exploited beyond relief.¹⁰ Stories of oppression of Filipina DH are revolting, but as revolting are stories of Indian women as victims of violence. These are stories that show how gender inequity festers in cultures and societies. The power dynamics that construct the meaning of body and gender create hierarchies. And such hierarchies result in oppression and injustice which, in many cases, end in violence. Violence is nurtured by gender inequity. Gender inequity breeds violence.

Kochurani Abraham writes about the agonizing increase of violence against women in India. Many are trapped in violent marriages.¹¹

⁷See UN Report: “Trends in International Migrant Stock: The 2015 Revision.”

⁸UNESCO/UNAIDS Project, “Women Migrants and HIV/AIDS: An Anthropological Approach,” *Studies and Reports, Special Issues no. 22, Division of Cultural Policies and Intercultural Dialogue* (2005) 2. See also CARAM-ASIA, “AIDS and Migration are Global Issues: Coordination of Action Research on AIDS and Mobility,” *IAC Newsletter*14 (2004) 1. The feminization of migration is only true in certain Asian countries— Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Indonesia, and only on certain years.

⁹CARAM-ASIA, “AIDS and Migration are Global Issues,” 16.

¹⁰Gemma Tulud Cruz, “Em-body-ing Theology: Theological Reflections on the Experience of Filipina Domestic Workers in Hong Kong,” Agnes M. Brazal and Andrea Lizares, ed., *Body and Sexuality: Theological-Pastoral Perspectives of Women in Asia*, Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University, 2007, 60-70, at 66-67.

¹¹Kochurani Abraham, “Resistance: A Liberative Key in Feminist Ethics,” Linda Hogan and A.E. Orobator, eds., *Feminist Catholic Theological Ethics: Conversations in the World Church*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2014, 97-107, at 98.

Abraham indicates that as high as 62.5 percent of her respondents acknowledge that they remain in abusive marriages, and tolerate the violence of their husbands for the sake of children and family. "When women take an uncritical stance toward abusive and exploitative situations under the mask of 'virtue' they collude with oppressive situations without searching for alternatives," writes Abraham.¹² The violence against Indian women is also perpetuated by social structures and systems that legitimize death-dealing cultural practices. Shaji George Kochuthara wrote a powerful article, entitled, "Dowry as a Social-Structural Sin" in which he showed the unabated social evil of dowry in India.¹³ The estimated number of dowry-related deaths in India is 25,000 a year.¹⁴ Extreme and brutal forms of violence are committed, like dousing women in kerosene and burning them.

Dowry creates a cycle of violence that traps women and their families. It is the leading cause of the cultural devaluation of women as inferior and burdensome to the family. The abortion of female fetuses is the pernicious consequence of dowry as a social menace on families. According to some studies, up to 35 to 40 million female feticides have taken place in India. The unceasing claim of the dowry on families impoverishes them as they have to sell their properties or incur huge amounts of debt. Often they are never able to pay the debt and many of these families see the only way in mass suicides.¹⁵

The cry of Asian women as oppressed and denigrated and as victims of aggression and violence must provoke our collective righteous rage against power, the kind that exploits the body and kills the soul.

1.3. The Cry of the Earth

The phenomenal growth of China and India has been written about in recent times. Economic growth, however, is not an unmitigated blessing. It comes with a high cost. China's spectacular economic

¹²Abraham, "Resistance: A Key to Liberative Politics," 98.

¹³Shaji George Kochuthara, "Dowry as a Social-Structural Sin," Linda Hogan and A.E. Orobator, ed., *Feminist Catholic Theological Ethics: Conversation in the World Church*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2014, 108-122.

¹⁴"According to official records, more than 2,500 bride-burning deaths are recorded every year. Unofficial sources estimate more than 25,000 cases of bride-burning every year. Many are left maimed and scarred as a result of attempts on their lives. In spite of the prohibition of dowry by law, in recent decades there has been a steady increase of dowry-related violence—10 to 15 percent every year." Kochuthara, "Dowry as Social-Structural Sin," 120.

¹⁵Kochuthara, "Dowry as Social-Structural Sin," 120.

growth — averaging 8% or more annually over the past two decades has lifted to impressive heights the standard of living for hundreds of millions of Chinese citizens.¹⁶ At the same time, however, this economic growth had severe consequences for the natural environment. In an article in *New York Times*, “As China Roars, Pollution Reaches Deadly Extremes,” China’s economy is said to be on a historic run but it is choking on its success. “No country in history has emerged as a major industrial power without creating a legacy of environmental damage that can take decades and big dollops of public wealth to undo.”¹⁷ Its pollution problem has shattered all precedents and pushed public health to the edge. Pollution has made cancer China’s leading cause of death. Air pollution is blamed for hundreds and thousands of deaths each year.¹⁸ The article states that

environmental woes that might be considered catastrophic in some countries can seem commonplace in China: industrial cities where people rarely see the sun; children killed or sickened by lead poisoning or other types of local pollution; a coastline so swamped by algae red tides that large sections of the ocean no longer sustain marine life.¹⁹

In dealing with the cry of the earth in the Asian context, we ask what role do multinational corporations play in the degradation of the environment. Some of the sharpest words of Pope Francis in *Laudato Sí* were reserved for multinationals — the damage they cause by their export of solid waste and toxic liquids to developing countries, and by the pollution produced by companies which operate in less developed countries what they could never do at home.

We note that often the businesses which operate this way are multinationals. They do here what they would never do in developed countries or the so-called first world. Generally, after ceasing their activity and withdrawing, they leave behind great human and environmental liabilities such as unemployment, abandoned towns, the depletion of natural reserves, deforestation, the impoverishment

¹⁶Elizabeth C. Economy, “China’s Environmental Challenge: Political, Social, and Economic Implications,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, (January 27, 2003) <http://www.cfr.org/china/chinas-environmental-challenge-political-social-economic-implications/p5573>

¹⁷Joseph Kahn and Jim Yardley, “As China Roars, Pollution Reaches Deadly Extremes,” *The New York Times*, (August 26, 2007) <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/08/26/world/asia/26china.html>.

¹⁸Kahn and Yardley, “As China Roars.”

¹⁹Kahn and Jim Yardley, “As China Roars.”

of agriculture and local stock breeding, open pits, riven hills, polluted rivers and a handful of social works which are no longer sustainable.²⁰

As the world economy has been growing — fuelled by investment and trade — the global environment has been rapidly deteriorating.²¹ It has been the assertion of policy makers that economic growth and environmental quality are compatible in the long term, but that environmental and social costs have first to be paid to ensure a long term prosperity.²² “This assertion that environmental degradation increases up to a certain level of income, after which it begins to improve, is known as the ‘Environmental Kuznets Curve’” (EKC). However, as growth continues unabated and the accelerated rate of environmental degradation seems unstoppable, the hope that economic growth and environmental quality will coalesce seems too long delayed.²³ As Keynes famously said, “in the long run we are all dead,”²⁴ and this is particularly true for environment.

The cry of the earth, in a world that is on speed for economic growth, and particularly in Asia where this speed has been accelerated, is a cry for release and freedom from the rapacious plundering of its richness and bounty.

2. A Three-Fold Faith Vision: Prophetic Lament, Gender Resistance, and Ecological Kinship

The exploitation of the poor, the diminishment of women, and the pillaging of the earth interlock in the same logic of subjugation and oppression. How do we respond in faith to the triple cries of the poor, women, and earth? What does our faith evoke in our collective hearts

²⁰Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, 51. http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html

²¹Nick Mabey and Richard McNally, “Foreign Direct Investment and the Environment: From Pollution Havens to Sustainable Development,” *Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development A WWW-UK Report*, August 1999, 1-101, at 11. <http://www.oecd.org/investment/mne/2089912.pdf>

²²Nick Mabey and Richard McNally, “Foreign Direct Investment and the Environment,” 19.

²³Mabey and McNally, “Foreign Direct Investment and the Environment.”

²⁴Mabey and McNally, “Foreign Direct Investment and the Environment,” 18. “The cost of pollution and other damage to the natural environment caused by the world’s biggest companies would wipe out more than one-third of their profits if they were financially accountable, a major unpublished study for the United Nations has found.” Juliette Jowit, “World’s top firms cause \$2.2 trillion of environmental damage, report estimates,” *The Guardian* (February 18, 2010) <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2010/feb/18/worlds-top-firms-environmental-damage>

in the face of these cries? How can we break the logic of subjugation and oppression with a vision rooted in faith? I propose a three-fold faith vision in response to the triple cries: prophetic lament, gender resistance, and ecological kinship.

2.1. Prophetic Lament

Prophetic lament begins with grief, with mourning. In the face of extreme poverty where people are feeding from thrash bins, the only food they could have for the day, or where they are diving into a mountain of garbage at the outskirts of the city, to scavenge through the filth and decay, whatever they could sell for a piece of bread, we must weep. The cry of the poor must be our cry. For only then can the numbness of our indifference be pierced and the callousness of our insensitivity be broken.

We grieve because we see things as they are. We see the pain and horror of the suffering of others. "Lamentation is a cry of utter anguish and passionate protest at the state of the world and its brokenness."²⁵ When people define reality as it is, and proclaim that all is not well, then things begin to change. "The lamenter's voice becomes subversive."²⁶ It is lament, but it is prophetic lament, because it is rooted in the paradox of protest and praise, complaint and hope, for God will listen compassionately to the cry of the afflicted and will heed to their need. In the midst of pain and loss, hope comes from another word — the word of God.²⁷

It is prophetic lament not only because it gives hope to the afflicted, the victims of injustice, but it also holds the power to bring those who benefit from injustice to penitence and conversion. The lament of the victims is revelatory, as it exposes the harsh truth of injustice to others. Those who benefit from injustice can be moved to join in the lament. But they have first to fearlessly face the truth that they have benefited from another's suffering, and that their social privilege has been purchased at the cost of someone else's burden. Here lament takes a forthright confession of their complicity, veiled or unveiled, in the injustices that have been inflicted on many, and the sorrow that comes with their conversion.²⁸

²⁵Bryan N. Massingale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church*, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2010, 105.

²⁶Denise M. Ackerman, *After the Locusts: Letters from a Landscape of Faith*, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm B. Eerdmans, 2003, 116.

²⁷Massingale, *Racial Justice*, 107.

²⁸Massingale, *Racial Justice*, 111.

Prophetic lament gives rise to a deep sense of compassion. The Greek word for compassion is *splanchnizesthai* that connotes a feeling and emotion that emanates from one's bowel or guts.²⁹ A person is stirred from his or her innards. It arises from the very depths of a person, where he or she is most deeply human, when confronted with human agony or need. The Gospel is a testimony of Jesus' compassion, as he enters into the pain of others, and makes their pain his own. In this light, compassion is distinguished from sympathy, which is a feeling for the plight of another, and empathy, which is identifying with the other in need.³⁰ Compassion is more than feeling for or identifying with another, but it is entering into the pain of another and making it as one's own, that one may act together with the other to alleviate and transform the pain. "This is what the story of the Good Samaritan is all about — to see oneself in the experience of the other and move into action to change the circumstances, and not just limit one's efforts to a mere sympathy or empathetic."³¹ It is compassion that does justice.

2.2. Gender Resistance

The cry of women, especially the cry of Asian women, must not be silenced, until it is heeded. In the end, however, it must be women who must let their cry be heard, and reclaim their agency in what is called gender resistance. It is the "ability to limit, nullify, or overturn structures of power. As such, women's resistance is conscious act and is characterized by intention arising within conditions of unequal relations of power within society, and is often generated (although not exclusively) by the imbalance of power between sexes."³²

Resistance is rooted in our faith tradition. At the heart of resistance is an alternative vision to a hegemonic belief system that claims the minds and hearts of men and women. It is this vision that propels one to challenge this system, at a great cost, sometimes at the cost of one's own life. Biblical portrayals show that Jesus' ministry resisted and subverted institutionalized power relationships. Turning upside down the common standards of worthiness and acceptability, Jesus

²⁹See Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX*, New York: Doubleday, 1981, 658-59. Also Maureen H. O'Connell, *Compassion: Loving Our Neighbor in an Age of Globalization*, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2009, 68.

³⁰Massingale, *Racial Justice*, 115.

³¹Massingale, *Racial Justice*, 115.

³²Padma Anagol, "From the Symbolic to the Open: Women's Resistance in Colonial Maharashtra," Anindita Ghosh, ed., *Behind the Veil: Resistance, Women, and the Everyday in Colonial South Asia*, Basinsgtoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, 21-57, at 27.

shared meals with the social underclass, like tax collectors, who were reviled because they were perceived as opportunists and grafters. Defying norms and laws of social relationships, Jesus' table fellowship was iconoclastic. It destroyed the boundaries that separated the pure and the impure, and it instituted a whole new and inclusive communal ethos rather than one that was exclusive, discriminatory, and hierarchical.

In the same spirit of Jesus' iconoclastic resistance to the hegemonic power of his time, women must cast away the robe of victimhood, and reclaim their agency and dignity, refusing to remain "inert and passive objects of defining discourses as people without any control over their lives."³³ Indian feminist scholars are increasingly unearthing stories of resistance by ordinary Indian women. These are narratives of "subterranean resistance" offered by women in their daily lives, and "stories of silent but staunch resistance to the dominating regimes."³⁴ Far too often Indian women are portrayed "as a silent shadow, veil and mute before her oppressors, and unquestioningly accepting a discourse that endorses her subordination."³⁵ Contrary to this image, the narratives unearthed are testimonies of their "voiced struggle and dissent which portrays an emerging consciousness that is liberative."³⁶

Resistance is waged not in one but in multiple sites. In Bengali, in the nineteenth century, Indian women waged their discreet battles, wielding a variety of strategies. Because power relations prevented most women from speaking in male-dominated spaces, they confined their voices to the *antahpur*, a gendered space where they sang basar songs and recited proverbs that expressed their mockery, discontent, and defiance.³⁷ "It is through such 'hidden transcripts' that keep alive ideas of social rebellion until they actually manifest themselves in overt action."³⁸ Within the safety of the *antahpur*, women did their regular clandestine reading of epics and religious texts, disruptive novels and plays. It is a rich "subculture of restrained but resolute subversion of patriarchal codes — drew women together in tight circles of mutual empathy and solidarity."³⁹

³³Anindita Ghosh, "Introduction" in Ghosh, ed. *Behind the Veil*, 1-20, at 2.

³⁴Abraham, "Resistance: A Key to Liberative Politics," 104.

³⁵Ghosh, "Introduction," *Behind the Veil*, 1.

³⁶Abraham, "Resistance: A Key to Liberative Politics," 104.

³⁷Anindita Ghosh, "A World of Their Very Own: Religion, Pain, and Subversion in Bengali Homes in the Nineteenth Century," Ghosh, ed. *Beyond the Veil*, 191-221, at 193-205.

³⁸Ghosh, "Introduction," 12.

³⁹Ghosh, "A World of their Own," 221.

Resistance offered by women in their everyday life may not have the force of wider and organized movements of women, but the claim of subjugation and dominance is ultimately refused in the hidden domains of the mind and heart. It is there where it is fractured by daily struggle and dissent, until it is subverted. The stories unearthed from tradition and history of women in India should find new frameworks in our contemporary times, in new contexts and places, where women are conscious and autonomous agents of resistance.

2.3. Ecological Kinship

The cry of the earth is the cry for a new order of relationship, where it can flourish in its full abundance. In the rapacious exploitation of the earth that one sees most closely the interlocking oppression of poor, women, and earth.

The social dualism in the relationship of man and woman has ecological consequences, for earth is matter, which is seen as antithetical to spirit. The sovereignty of man over woman extends to nature, most often symbolized as female. Within this system of dualism, women and the natural world have no intrinsic worth and value; they have only instrumental value, with reference to man whose needs and desires they fulfil. The earth, which is not regarded with reverence as the mysterious source and matrix of life but as dead and lifeless, is instrumentalized in a similar way.⁴⁰

And the scourge of the earth is the scourge of the poor. For wherever the earth is ravaged, the poor are ravaged as well, deprived of their daily bread and sustenance. This intimate relationship between the poor and the fragility of the earth is a central theme in *Laudato Si'*: "The deterioration of the environment and of society affects the most vulnerable people on the planet: Both everyday experience and scientific research show that the gravest of all attacks on the environment are suffered by the poorest."⁴¹

Elizabeth Johnson further reflects on the interlocking of the oppression of women and earth:

...the much used phrase "rape of the earth" reveals the extent to which the exploitation of nature is identified with violent conquest of women. Our language speaks of "virgin forest," as yet untouched by man but awaiting his exploration and conquest. Symbolized as female, earth can be made to yield up her secrets; she can be penetrated, conquered, and possessed. She

⁴⁰Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Women, Earth, and Creator Spirit*, New York: Paulist Press, 1983, 12.

⁴¹Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 48.

is given to man for mastering and as a resource for his pleasure and need.⁴²

We search for a way to undercut the dualism by going back to the heart of the creation accounts. If relationship and love are at the heart of the universe, then we must have a new view of wholeness that unifies rather than stratifies, that reconciles rather than divides — a view where our eyes see the sacredness of all of humankind and all of creation loved unto fullness. Where there is interconnectedness, in reciprocity and mutuality — in love — there the Creator God is most present and active in the world.

The view of wholeness, founded on interconnectedness, is at the core of ecological kinship, by which we must conceive our relationship with the earth. This is different from ecological kingship, based on the hierarchical dualism that drives a wedge between humanity and earth and places human beings in absolute dominion over all creatures. Again in the words of Pope Francis:

We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will. The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the air, and in all forms of life. This is why the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she “groans in travail” (Rom 8:22).⁴³

Pope Francis envisions ecological kinship as the rightful order of our relationships with the earth, and all of creation.

If we approach nature and the environment without this openness to awe and wonder, if we no longer speak the language of fraternity and beauty in our relationship with the world, our attitude will be that of masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits on their immediate needs. By contrast, if we feel intimately united with all that exists, then sobriety and care will well up spontaneously.⁴⁴ “Because all creatures are connected, each one must be cherished with love and respect, for all of us as living creatures are dependent on one another.”⁴⁵

In imaging ecological kinship, Rosemary Radford Ruether uses the metaphor of dance. “We must start thinking of reality as the connecting links of a dance in which each part is equally vital to the

⁴²Johnson, *Women, Earth, and Creator Spirit*, 16.

⁴³Francis, *Laudato Sí*, 2.

⁴⁴Francis, *Laudato Sí*, 11.

⁴⁵Francis, *Laudato Sí*, 42.

whole, rather than the linear competitive model in which the above prospers by defeating and suppressing what is below."⁴⁶ From a religious perspective, we view the world as sustained and nurtured by the life-giving action of Creator Spirit. The earth, thus, is a sacred space where the Creator Spirit is present, and every created being and every form of life in that space must be treated with reverence, because each and every one is a manifestation of the creative power and energy of the Creator Spirit.

3. Conclusion

We listened to the triple cries of poor, women, and earth in the context of Asia. These cries are interlocked in the same logic of subjugation and domination. These cries should not be silenced but should be heeded. But to heed these cries, the logic of subjugation and domination in which they are interlocked must be shattered. The three-fold faith vision of prophetic lament, gender resistance, and ecological kinship offers an alternative logic that liberates and gives new life.

⁴⁶Rosemary Radford Ruether, *To Change the World: Christology and Cultural Criticism*, New York: Crossroad, 1981, 61.