

## World Day of Prayer International Committee Meeting

Foz do Iguaçu, Brazil, August 20-27, 2017

*Opening Celebration – Reflection Time – Genesis 1*

*Seeking Wisdom to Care for God's Creation*

*Silvia Regina de Lima Silva*

In the beginning...

To open this reflection, I invite you to revisit that place, the place of the beginning.

The beginning, which in the text appears as “the beginning of creation”, but which in the text itself, and in our lives, can be the search for meaning - the search for purpose. At any given time in our history, we stop to ask ourselves about the beginning, the meaning of life, as we will see as we study the text.

Sometimes, reflecting, placing our hearts beyond that beginning helps us understand or seek new ways to understand what we are experiencing at this particular moment in time. And every time we revisit the beginning, we find a different meaning, because our questions about life, about reality, are also different according to the different stages of our existence, and the various personal and social contexts in which we approach the text.

We will have two moments to work with this text from Genesis. First, at this celebratory time, and then tomorrow, during the Bible study.

At this time we will focus on a doorway, two important places, and three messages in the text:

**The lock and key to enter the text:** Let us enter slowly, in silence, and listen to the wisdom of those who speak in the text. The text dates back to the exile in Babylon. Behind such beautiful poetry, there are exiled people, people who have been deported, uprooted, far away from their land, their people, their culture and their religion. This is a well-known reality for many of those of you who are here today. They are people living in exile (Ezekiel 3.15), by the rivers (Psalms 137.1); they are called servants (Isaiah 42.1); peoples that have been massacred by Babylonian imperialism. In a context where the god of the Empire justifies slavery, it was important to recover and state the following: “our God is the creator of everything,” and that same God transforms chaos of oppression in a beautiful, inhabitable world, in a household that human beings inhabit.

**Reminders:** The questions and the standpoints from which we approach this text-

- We approach the text of the world's creation **amid the environmental crisis, the climate crisis**, and global warming. We stick our hands in a filthy world, filled with lots of waste, a world in a state of destruction. A creation that moans and groans: polluted water, contaminated land, appropriated in the hands of a few people who ruthlessly exploit it.

- We approach the text **from our own bodies**, the bodies of women of faith, who come together from all over the world to pray and be strengthened to transform. Let us not let

the text slip through our fingers, our lives. Let us let it sift through our bodies, our everyday experiences, our concerns, and into the joy, the happiness, and the hope that wakes us every morning. As women readers of the text, we want to be challenged about our responsibilities, and also about the role we have played in the created world –too often relegated to a role of aids and rescuers from the disasters caused by the patriarchy (the transforming strength of women).

**The text inspires us:**

**1- God’s creation is good – “And God saw that it was good.”**

(Let us repeat [this] with our sisters from Suriname), and now in our own language.

The hermeneutical perspective that runs through the text is [that of] hope. Hope proclaimed, affirmed, and experienced amid pain, the denial of life, and chaos. The beginning of creation is not evil or sin; creation is good. All beings created by God are good. Let us think and feel for a brief moment the prophetic and transforming strength in this statement: “[All] creation is good”. The goodness of creation as a whole and of human beings as a part of creation is one of the major contributions of the Jewish-Christian tradition. We get lost in a world of sin, prohibition and guilt, and we forget the beginning of goodness in creation. We as women, we are part of the goodness in creation. In every people, every culture, every religion, this goodness is manifested in colors, flavors, movements, customs, religions, cultures, stories; the diversity represented here is part of the goodness and the beauty of creation. Everything is so good that it does not seem real. And some religions, and even some churches, create (make up) a threatening god that we fear, that controls our lives and prevents us from enjoying the grace and goodness of creation.

“And God saw that it was good.” Like our brothers and sisters in exile in Babylon, we also affirm the goodness of creation amid evil, environmental destruction, and social injustice. We affirm [its] goodness as a word of hope, a prophetic word that poses a challenge; goodness we need to recover through our prophetic and transforming action.

**2. There was chaos, confusion and darkness, and “the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters”**

The chaos from the beginning connects us with the situation of injustice, exploitation, and deportation suffered by the people of Israel in Babylon. In the fashion of a poem that is almost like a song, the text leads us through each day during creation. But let us go back to chaos, to the chaos from the beginning, which is also our constant company in daily life. Environmental disorder, the degradation that turns the earth and the water into commodities owned by small groups that expel peasants, indigenous populations, and ancestral communities from their lands and jeopardize food security, uprooting [local] cultures and religions. Conflicts on the border that create the term “refugees”, refugees in a land that belongs to everyone, that prevents a large group of women, men, and children from becoming citizens of the world. Chaos - disorder in the injustices of not acknowledging the basic, minimum rights of workers. The unstoppable advances of

capital, which touches the bodies of girls, women, and young people who are the victims of different forms of violence and are subject to human trafficking and profiteering.

And a breath of God, the 'ruah', the 'giant-mother-bird', fluttered her wings and hovered over chaos. The spirit of God, the 'ruah', is feminine; chaos is transformed by the stimulating breath of the Divinity. It is the She-Spirit that transforms chaos, that invigorates, that from chaos gives life to creation, or a new creation. This same Spirit is the one that sustains the created world.

The experience of creation is something we can very easily relate to our bodies, to our lives as women. It is an experience that is not limited to those who have chosen motherhood. Creating, and being creators, has to do with our hands, with our common responsibility in the sustainability of the created world. The invisibility of women's work in patriarchal society demands that every woman assume her role as participant in the creating work of God, as possessor of the spirit, of the 'giant-mother-bird' that flutters over and goes into the deepest of the chaotic history we are living through, and from there it is capable of transforming it in a place of life, recovering the goodness of the created universe. This is how we recover our lives, in our communities of faith and love, in the lives of other women who have lost the joy of living with dignity and passion. This is where we recover the sovereignty of the breath of God that continues to create and keep us in its "unruly" and serene spirit.

### **3. Our accountability and involvement: conviviality as a path of wisdom to care for creation**

The third lesson to be learned from the Genesis text is the call to be accountable, to assume our involvement as we seek to care for creation.

The hegemonic version of modernity leads us to breaking with a more holistic, comprehensive thought that relates us with the universe, the cosmos. An individualistic thought has been imposed, so dominant that it prevents any other understanding of life and the universe. This individualistic thought is also imposed on our relationship with God. We are made in God's image and likeness, and we are part of the universe, but our individualistic thought has drawn us apart from the rest of the created beings and also from God by affirming the existence of a God that is outside and above us, and not the God that we bring along and all human beings bring along (we will look deeper into this tomorrow). An individualistic faith, that seeks personal salvation, is not enough. We are being challenged to rediscover meaning in life and meaning in our Christian faith based on a new understanding of our role as women and part of creation, and based on new images of God. Prayer, which is part of the principles of those of us present here, means listening to God through our neighbor and through the moans and groans of nature. It also means being part of the caring hands of the God who continues to create, from chaos, as Spirit that unsettles and transforms. Our relationship with the created world is a deep and intimate connection; it is one of partnership and interdependence. As we will see tomorrow, an anthropocentric and androcentric reading of Genesis has prevented us from feeling part of the creatures together with the creatures. We are being called to care for

and are cared for by the rest of the created beings. Human arrogance mistook stewardship for domination. And the dominion-depredation attitude in the man-nature relationship is what we find in colonialisms and neocolonialism's that expropriate lands and concentrate it in the hands of a few dominant groups; it is in the sexism that abuses the lives of women and girls. We will find it in other different forms of domination that have been interjected, and even reproduced among us, women.

This is the invitation for today: to recover our original creational relationship, our connection and interdependence with [all] created beings, our communion with the Divinity that inhabits us, of whom we are made in image and likeness; the Divinity that inhabits the other beings, born of the Divinity's word.

Our commitment and expressions of faith are as a community. We embrace the care for creation as part of our Jewish-Christian faith tradition. The environmental situation poses a challenge for us. From the environmental point of view, we cannot be saved in isolation; either all of us are saved together or together we will perish. The exiled, the migrants, the peasants deprived of their land find in us a role of commitment and solidarity.

Let care and love be part of our involvement and accountability in the search for new paths of conviviality.

**Silvia Regina de Lima Silva** (Brazil)

Silvia Silva, Brazilian Theologist, lives and works in Costa Rica, where she is the Head of the *Departamento Ecuménico de Investigación* (DEI) [Ecumenical Research Department] and Professor of the Ecumenical School of Religious Sciences at the National University of Costa Rica. Professor Silva has academic studies on Biblical Sciences, Theology and Gender, and Studies in Society and Culture. She has published works on Popular Bible Reading, Black Feminist Theology, and Afro-Latin American Theology.