

NAGYPÁL Szabolcs

Integrity and Mutual Interdependence

For this issue of Student World (SW), we called for articles, among others, on gender perspectives in Christian faith and on human rights; on overcoming violence against women in family, society and Church, and in armed conflicts and war. Also, we expected contributions on trafficking in women, prostitution and HIV/AIDS; on cultural and socio-economic implications of imbalanced power constructions; on gender socialisation, roles, equality and discrimination. Finally, we encouraged essays on possibilities for reconciliation, cooperation, community and communion between women and men; and on a common culture of respect for human dignity and integrity.

I. Roles and Relations

1. Empowering Equality

The ecumenical movement is particularly responsible for making these topics real challenges to her constituency. She has to fulfil her aim of using student ministry to realise God's *Basileia*, where justice and peace reign. The ecumenical Student Christian Movement (SCM) should truly acknowledge her prophetic role of solidarity, justice and peace in the student ministry and in the Church. An excellent example for this was the interregional World Student Christian Federation (WSCF) conference on *Gender Roles and Power Relations*, in July 2005 in Manila, Philippines.

It is of a crucial importance that genuine human roles be given more space for imagination, dimension and respect for diversity. Women and men should be equal partners in our Church, in our family and in our society. Acknowledgment and understanding should serve for the empowerment of both women and men to work towards genuine gender equality, equity and justice.

The equality of all humanity, of women and men alike, is the most basic principle of human rights in the world today, which should affect the lives of billions of women and men in all communities and socio-economic situations, cutting across all forms of cultural and religious diversity. Equality is not only a formal principle of physical contacts. It should entail the right for equal chances in positions and in advancement opportunities in work, academia or Church.

Equality is a shining challenge for anyone who sees herself or himself

as superior or more significant, but also as inferior or even insignificant for whatever reasons. We should bear witness for equality in educational institutions, in social facilities, and in the neighbourhood as well.

The insights of equality can rewrite certain cultural practices which are unnecessarily binding us in the name of keeping traditions and cultures intact—especially when stereotypes, insensitive languages and ways of thinking are constantly reinforced. Equality should affect us physically (somatically), emotionally, psychologically, mentally and most of all spiritually. It should enable all of us to fully fulfil our lives with potential and dignity, and to fully participate in the Church and in society as co-creators.

The world should be a safe haven for everyone, women and men alike, where the culture of life constantly brings forth its fruits and blessings. Food and nutrition are so basic for human life, that they should be the first things to be provided for all. Another parallel need in the intellectual and spiritual field is the right to be able to read and write.

All of us have to try to raise each other's living and working conditions, in order to create a community of open dialogue and solidarity, providing protection and recognition for each other. Even though many societies have already narrowed the equality gap between human and human, in terms of certain rights, education and job opportunities, all of these problems are of course just the very tip of an enormous iceberg.

Not only sporadic, but also structural or systematic evil (in the political, economic and social strata) should be fought against, likewise in an institutionalised or systematic way. Global economic injustices affect us gravely when, for example, we are considered of a lesser or greater economic value than other workers in the power relations. This situation calls us to bear each other's most negative brunt of burdens in the pace of economic globalization, mostly co-ordinated and orchestrated by the profit-minded multinational companies and corporations.

Stereotyping dictated by narrow-mindedness, however, and one-dimensional societal roles are constructed on our singular characteristics. What it means to be ourselves is not only a naturally given or divinely ordained fact; these are also social and cultural constructs, which many times have become naturalised and legitimised as common sense. For example, the spiritual virtues of strength, endurance, assertiveness, softness, gentleness, and selflessness can and should be mastered by the same persons as well, maybe by all of us.

Equality should be the guiding principle, of course, also in the midst of the Church. The charisma and treasures of all of us should be used properly to preach, to minister, to become ordained or to assume leadership positions in our denominations. We are called to be the backbone of the Church, but also to be Her faithful servant by providing proper leadership. After all, the notion of the Reign of God humbly but powerfully challenges the way roles and relations are articulated in the Church and in society.

2. Healing Unity

Women and men of faith have always struggled with images of God that are almost exclusively dominated by masculine language, to find their *Scriptural Identities*. But there is ample material to have a dialogue about the feminine characteristics of and mother language about God. Through Bible Study, we discover that God is Mother as well as Father, and more importantly, God is a God Who transcends gender and foils the narrow construction of human expectations.

Hagar's story, as a good example, is about multiple oppressions in terms of class, gender and race, and of women surviving when finding themselves as single mothers abandoned by their families. It reveals how Hagar suffered not only as Abraham's concubine, but as an Egyptian slave woman, a foreigner, a refugee. Still, God does hear the cry of the poor and the oppressed. The components of the tapestry of liberation are perseverance, power to struggle for justice, hope and courage to defy violence by risking one's life.

The Tradition of WSCF has also constantly refreshed and enlarged the meaning of Christian unity and the Reign of God as central thrusts of our commitment and purpose. She has explored and tested out its meaning alike in the shape and procedures of her own movement, in the divisions and friendships between the many separate denominations of the one Body of Christ, the Church Universal; and also in the promise that the Universal Church can offer, *Healing our Brokenness*, in the struggles of communities, promising ways to discover and live out a single humanity.

Our question for all times remains: how will our encounters create an environment for genuine dialogue? In trying to answer this important question, we have to portray the joys and challenges of ecumenism, as perceived through our genuine and personal encounters in community. But the search for the true God remains; and the basic criteria to find the presence of the authentic God are love and truth; and compassion with the victims can serve as a hermeneutical path to evaluate reality. Indeed, the concrete and dynamic testimony of Christians is the ferment and seed of the future for a different society.

Still, the healing and purification of memories, which is the main prerequisite for an honest dialogue, so far has remained an ineffective ecumenical slogan and has not been put into significant practice. But what is as yet an individualistic psychological concept should be practiced ecclesiastically and concretely by Christian faithful around the world. We should live in constructive acceptance of the tensions between our own inheritances and wherever our friendships with people from different backgrounds point us, and centre ourselves in a lively belief in God the Holy Spirit, Who holds open the promise of a different and much better world for all God's creatures.

The universal concept of human rights is concerned mainly with the rights and claims of each human being, in an anthropocentric way. This notion is an indispensable instrument for the promotion of civil and social rights, but it needs to be balanced by a strong emphasis on responsible care for God's gift of Creation. *Sustaining Humanity* demands a new awareness of the limits imposed on human existence. Sustainability can only be achieved if the human race is prepared to respect scales in exploiting natural resources. The witness of the Church therefore cannot uncritically identify with a narrow human rights discourse: we are at the same time called to defend the rights of nature.

What distinguishes the message of the cross is life in situations of death; and HIV, as another mounting question mark, greatly challenges this very heart of our Christian faith. HIV forces us to reflect on death—maybe to die in peace and to accept the victory of death over human body, spirit and soul. A key focus is the underlying factors and a prophetic contextual theology fit to faithfully respond to this situation.

To be woman and man in society is a cultural and educational construct, so it can be deconstructed with new social patterns and paradigms. Today, globalization, HIV/AIDS and global poverty are challenging our traditional system, regarding the way it

has gendered women and men in society. The new models of relationship between women and men today are to be centred on *Partnership and Empowerment*.

Women in many parts of the world are not given equal chances and opportunities, especially in areas like education and skill-building, which could make them self-sufficient. The realities of women in society point out their living conditions, their major hope questions, and their contribution to the deconstruction of our societies.

Thus they never get a chance to come forward and bring about a change in their own lives and society at large. Many are longing after changes at the heart of faith communities, thus calling out to leaders and men to take into consideration the capabilities that those women have for the construction of more human and ambitious communities.

In examining the structures of society, we find that in many places the origin of the undervaluation of women lies in religion as well as in various socio-cultural elements. Gender-based violence is a universal reality for many women on a daily basis, including physical, psychological, emotional and sociological. The closed mindset, the insensitive governance and the lack of political will for empowerment, the lopsided developmental pattern, or even the religious sanctions against women and the commodification of women are just some of the challenges ahead of us.

It always offers unique insights into the culture of violence when a certain woman's personal encounter with aggression throughout her whole life is fully portrayed. Her reactions to hostility and her methods of coping during her whole life reveal the wisdom learnt through violence and identify the faith wrestled with along the journey. We find that it is always a deep struggle for survival and a continuing search for meaning and depth.

A political will on gender sensitisation, emancipation through legislation and policy changes in favour of women and a concerted effort from the government and the civil society is the road map to overcome violence against women and to establish *A Safer Haven* through gender justice.

II. A Glance at Ecumenical History

When now the ecumenical world comes together in Porto Alegre in Brazil to harvest and celebrate her achievements and to dream the brave dream of the future, it is well worth having a look at three important aspects, which the phenomenon of Student World can offer for further consideration.

1. Review: A Chain of Editors

The official history book of WSCF, *Seeking and Serving the Truth: The First Hundred Years of the World Student Christian Federation* (1997) by Philip POTTER and Thomas WIESER, enlists the officers (general secretaries, chairpersons and vice-chairpersons) of the Federation in Appendix B. It does not, however, enlist the editors-in-chief of one of the great WSCF contributions to the ecumenical movement, *Student World*.

Since this is the first and the oldest ecumenical review in the world, we have the duty to mention these masterminds at least here in the editorial. Indeed, since 1908, the ecumenical review *Student World* has been a respected voice and forum for

ecumenically-minded students and young intellectuals, creating a network of concerns and ideas.

So, the founding editor of SW is the person to whom the ecumenical movement as a whole is also attributed: *John R. MOTT*. From 1908 to 1926, first as general secretary, then as chairperson, he was the one responsible for the depth and intrepidity of the publication.

Francis P. MILLER served only for two years (1927–1929) in this position, even before he was elected chairperson. His role was to be a bridge between the first and second great ecumenical organisers and maintainers of many values.

This second great name is *Willem A. VISSER'T HOOFT*, who served as third editor for not less than ten years (1929–1939). He also started as general secretary and ended up as chairperson, while at the same time being the general secretary of the World Council of Churches (then under formation).

Robert C. MACKIE is enlisted as the fourth editor-in-chief (1939–1949), and he continued the tradition that the position is linked with that of the general secretary, and should be continued as a chairperson for one or more years.

The most tragic story is the one of *Philippe MAURY*, editor between 1950 and 1961, who could not follow this pattern, because he departed this Earth at a very young age, as a still-active general secretary.

To treasure his heritage, the Federation set up a *Philippe Maury Memorial Committee* (PhMMC). Its duty is, according to the WSCF Bye-Laws to the Constitution, is “to promote study and action on such themes concerning the relationship between *Christian faith, mission and politics*, as are of relevance to the WSCF.” A way of it can be “to hold Philippe Maury Memorial Events (PhMME)”.

Because in the recent decades there were no such official committees established and event hold, since 2003 it has been the Student World Editorial Board, which *de facto* exercised the duties of this Committee, and the Memorial Events were those of the publications of the ecumenical review itself.

The sixth editor (1961–1968), *Valdo GALLAND*, exercised this responsibility along with being general secretary. He was the one to introduce the red cover page of the review in 1961, after the original light brown.

The last general secretary to be an editor as well was *Risto LEHTONEN*, only for a year, in 1969. Then it was decided to discontinue the publication. No one expected Student World to resurrect and come to life again.

But, the new millennium was able to see this crucially important ecumenical review be resuscitated, in 2003, with a broader and more representative Editorial Board than ever. Its editor-in-chief has been the same since then, the eighth in the chain.

2. Intercession: The UDPS

The Universal Day of Prayer for Students (UDPS) was first celebrated on Sunday, 13 February 1898, at the second meeting of what was then known as the General Committee of the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF). The participants of the Federation’s then ten ecumenical member movements believed that intercessory prayer should be a vital ingredient in the life of a world-wide body of Christian students.

As a result, the early leaders of the Federation called on Christian youth and students around the world to join together in February each year for observance of the Universal

Day of Prayer for Students. This is the oldest tradition of ecumenical prayer in the whole Christian world. Its regular celebration paved the way to the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (WPCU) each year in January.

For more than a century students and friends of WSCF have observed this Day of Prayer as a way to express their common commitment as witnesses of our faith in God and in each other, to the world both inside and outside our academic communities. The first editor of SW, John R. MOTT, said this of the UDPS:

“Experience is demonstrating that the observance of UDPS exerts a truly wonderful influence. Through this means Christian students and others are reminded in the most vital way of the students of all other nations and of their relation to a worldwide community. Such reflections and exercises cannot but widen the horizon and expand the heart.

“The uniting influence of this day is likewise evident and beneficent. At such a time and by such a spiritual process the students of the entire world come to realise their true oneness. This is one of the wonder-works of prayer. It would be difficult to overstate the federative power of intercession. There is something inspiring in the thought that sincere and earnest bands of students in countless places will be drawn together by way of prayer to one Heavenly Father. Who can measure the energising influence of this Day of Prayer?”

“If it be true that there are added benefits from true agreement in prayer by even two or three followers of Jesus Christ: what limit can be placed on the united intercession of Christians throughout the student world? Potent as are the subjective influences of prayer, its largest significance is found in the realm of intercession for people and movements, for objects outside ourselves. This is prayer at its best. May students everywhere devote themselves to exploiting the undiscovered and unrealised possibilities of untried intercession.”¹

3. Illustration: Thematic Pinpointing

An ecumenical review would not be full without involving and channelling the contribution of arts to the ecumenical discourse. The re-established SW has always laid a great emphasis on treasuring the points the artists have to make for our topics. After a European and a North American artist, we have the pleasure to welcome an illustrator from the Middle East.

Nasser Rida AJAMI (nas_63@hotmail.com) is Lebanese, born in Liberia in 1963. He moved to Lebanon in 1974 and has been living in South Lebanon ever since. He has a B.A. in Social Sciences and a M.A. in Political Science from the Lebanese University. He was active in solidarity work between 1984 and 1989 as part of the Student Christian Movement (SCM).

He continued his work in community development, working as a social officer on community outreach, youth mobilization and action, public opinion surveys, participatory research and training in areas related to political participation among youth, education, health, family histories and community relations. He worked with both grassroots organizations as well as United Nations (UN) and international development

1 Adapted from John R. MOTT's Editorials on the UDPS in *Student World* 1910/1. and 1913/1.

organizations. Between 1990 and 2005, he organized as well as participated in more than ten painting exhibitions; further, he works as a freelance illustrator for local and regional newspapers, including *Al Nahar*, *Al Safir* and *Al Hayat*.

His main publications include: *History of Confectionery Families in Saida* (Beirut, 1988), *Political Participation Among Youth at the Lebanese University* (Beirut, 1998), *Impact of Sports and Cultural Initiatives on Youth Engagement and Participation in South Lebanon* (Beirut, 1998), *Impact of Migration and Family Relations on Local Development* (Beirut, 2000), *Evaluation of Healthy Villages Project in Syria* (Beirut, 2001). His major art exhibitions include: *Nahda Association* (Tyre, 1982), *Democratic Lebanese Youth Group* (Saida, 1986), *Cultural and Literature Association* (Saida, 1990), *Dar-El-Nadwa* (Beirut, 1995), *Paris Art Gallery* (1998), *JABAL Group* (Zouk Mkhail, 2001), *ADG* (Gemayzeh, 2002), and *Festival de la Francophonie* (Gemayzeh, 2003).

In 2004, he attempted to produce and direct his first real-TV documentary, *Jarjaara*, addressing the plight of the fisherman community in South Lebanon. He has also co-partnered to establish a production company, as well as the Alternatives Initiative Network (AIN) focusing on cultural arts. He is currently working on a fiction movie inspired by the lives of people who have lived and survived civil strife.

In summary, we should find ourselves in a harmonised environment when participating in the structures in workplace, academia, Church and community, and play the games on an equal footing, in order to be able to stay in competition. Such mindsets will give a sufficient basis for justification and solidarity.

Equality (in the sense of Galatians 3,26–28: there is no difference between women and men) here lays claims on notions of identity, of rights and responsibilities, of access and of inclusion into institutions and sites of decision making. Equality fuels the balance of power relations between women and men, as it assumes the advantage and favour of both genders.



Martin CONWAY

Dimensions of Christian Unity

The point of Christian unity was not, and is not, to deny what our separate churches have developed in their separation from one another, but to find ways of bringing all their contributions together into a seamless whole, which will always be a unity-in-diversity (if more of cultures, languages, generations – ie. of what the Creator has diversely given us – than of the various denominational quirks that human beings have developed to justify our divisions).

I. Unity Between Divided Christian Churches

The point where the new contribution enabled by the WSCF came prominently into view was at the World Mission Conference held in Edinburgh in 1910, where the WSCF supplied several key leaders, notably John R. MOTT as the chairman and Joseph H. OLDHAM as the secretary, and where the interdenominational approach enabled a significantly wider range of missionary societies and church leaders to participate in a conference whose predecessors in the XIXth century had gathered a narrower range of participants on an undenominational basis.

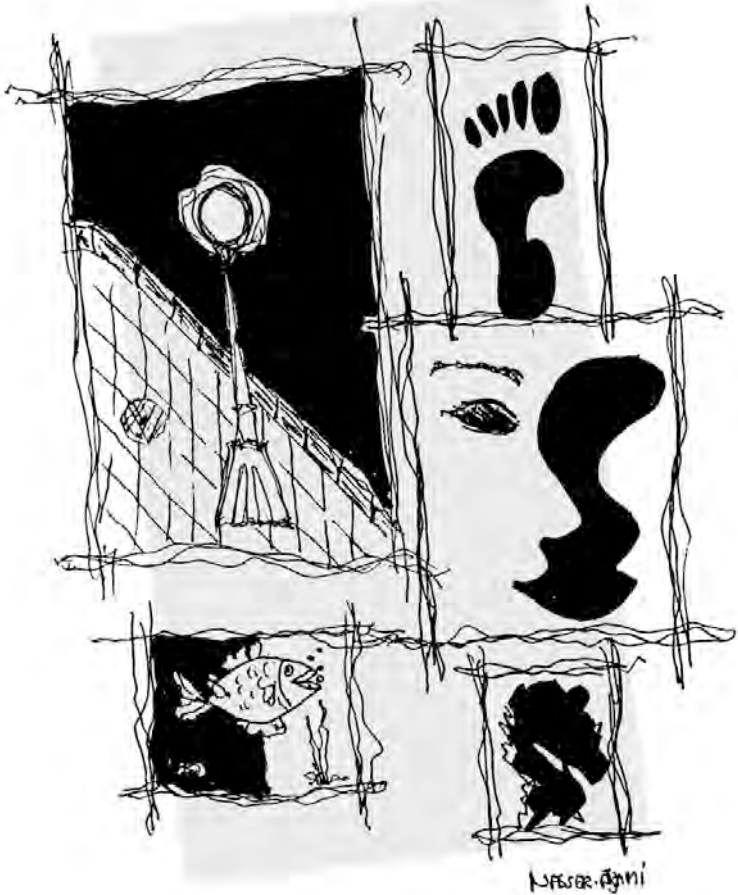
Nonetheless, there were such yawning gulfs between some of the participating bodies and their churches in terms of doctrine and church order, that this conference too gave itself a rule that these topics were not to be discussed; rather, discussion would focus on only the more “practical” matters of proclaiming the Gospel to those who had not yet heard and accepted it. Yet the Edinburgh conference is today remembered far more for its contribution to the movement for Christian unity than for any particular agreements about evangelism.

Two of the most memorable speeches were centrally focussed on aspects of the challenge to Christian – indeed *Church* unity – and both by people among the tiny number of “native Christians” at the conference: those by V. S. AZARIAH, the later Bishop of Dornakal in South India, and CHENG Ching-yi, later the first Chinese secretary of the National Christian Council of China.

What will also never be forgotten about the Edinburgh conference is the “conversion” received in a dream by the American bishop serving in the Philippines, Charles BRENT, which made him into one of the foremost apostles of Church unity and founder of the Faith and Order movement.¹

2 HOGG W. R., *Ecumenical Foundations: A History of the International Missionary Council and its Nineteenth-century Background*. New York, 1952. *World Missionary Conference, 1910*. Edinburgh, 1910.

Martin CONWAY is a lay member of the Church of England. He was a member of the Cambridge University Student Christian Movement between 1954 and 1958. He became the British SCM's International Secretary from 1958 to 1961, then WSCF Study and European Secretary from 1961 to 1967. Since then he has served his own church, the World Council of Churches and the British Council of Churches, before becoming president of the Selly Oak Colleges, an interchurch, interfaith and international training centre in Birmingham, UK, from 1986–1997. He now lives in Oxford. His email address is: martinconway@abelian.net.



LIFE OF A FISH

One year later the interdenominational approach was to be rigorously, and very successfully, tested when John R. MOTT led the WSCF into the surprising experiment of holding its 1911 world assembly in Constantinople, with the blessing of the Ecumenical Patriarch.

The WSCF had made good beginnings in Russia, Greece, Romania and Bulgaria, partly through sympathetic outsiders working with Orthodox university teachers and students, partly through contacts with student refugees from these countries, of which there were many, for example, in Swiss university cities. The experience of the 1911 conference was so encouraging that a resolution was passed as follows: "The General Committee puts on record its opinion that no student, to whatever branch of the Christian Church he may belong, should be excluded from full membership in any National Movement within the Federation if he is prepared to accept the basis of the Federation, or whatever equivalent is approved by the Federation."¹

It took rather longer to begin a comparable process with Roman Catholic students. Undoubtedly a good many individual Roman Catholics turned up here and there in SCM meetings. In H, Czechoslovakia and Austria, Roman Catholics were full and official members in the 1920s.

But it was not until the French SCM initiated a carefully confidential series of discussions in the 1930s with a few leading Roman Catholic theologians, among them Fr. Yves CONGAR OP, that WSCF began to find itself struggling with the distinctive difficulties of the Vatican's approach, eg. in their encyclical *Mortalium Animos* of 1928 on the ecumenical movement.

Although much happened between those meetings and Vatican II, including Fr. CONGAR's virtual silencing for a time, it is hardly accidental that he should have been one of the chief drafters of the Vatican II decree *De Œcumenismo (Unitatis Redintegratio)*, which so notably opened the way for the Roman Catholic church's commitment to the common ecumenical movement of our time.

The process of opening up new contacts, to enable people of an ever-wider range of Christian churches to share in the SCMs and WSCF, has continued. Hank CRANE, the American son of missionaries in the Kasai area of Zaïre, who served as Africa secretary of WSCF in the 1960s before his untimely but unforgettably life-sharing death of cancer in 1973, was for instance able to initiate the contacts with the "Church of Jesus Christ on Earth by the Prophet Simon KIMBANGU" that have been so fruitful for the entire constituency of African-instituted churches over the past twenty-five years.

It must be one of the best-known characteristics of WSCF that it has supplied a stream of leaders for the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the other organs of the ecumenical movement. John R. MOTT, Joseph OLDHAM and Willem VISSER T'HOOFTE have been the only three "honorary presidents" of WCC to date.

More WCC staff members than could at all be counted easily have made their first steps in understanding the worldwide catholicity of God's churches in WSCF; and the same must be true for the great majority of staff members in the many national councils of churches.

At the WCC Canberra Assembly in 1991, as at the earlier assemblies in that line, it

1 ROUSE Ruth, *The World's Student Christian Federation – A History of the First Thirty Years*. London, 1948. 156.

was true that while the people in the formal processions were chosen because they were leaders of the member denominations, most of the people who had imagined and arranged it all and who were drafting the reports were – as is often said – the “WSCF in long trousers”!

Over the century – the first since the Council of Chalcedon, I once heard Lesslie NEWBIGIN assert, in which more prayer and effort has been put into reconciling divided churches than into dividing them and keeping them safely divided! – this critical search for ways of discovering anew a health-giving integrity for previously divided churches has proved also dismayingly complex and slow.

This is no doubt primarily due to that feature of human sin that makes most of us quick to do what we want to and slow to accept suggestions from anyone else. It is also because in the nature of churches, recalling the wider dimensions of their central calling, their life and witness cannot be neatly encapsulated into manageable packets.

Reality again and again escapes the grasp of the would-be reformers! The Holy Spirit, Who works in mysterious ways anyway, can with hindsight be seen to have larger purposes than simply the overcoming of quarrels, ancient or modern, among Christians!

II. Unity in Christ as a Promise for the Unity of Humankind

Turning from experience so far to the challenges ahead, the key hypothesis that I discern in the WSCF tradition, and invite readers now to test out, is this: that the true meaning of Christian unity must be discerned and discovered primarily in this third and widest context, as a vital element in our world’s struggle for its proper basis and forms of harmony and community.

As our human family writhes and wrestles for a future that can realise what we all variously hope for, it is painfully evident that our different and often contradictory approaches to the key themes of identity, purpose, health and fulfilment are all too likely to go on condemning this world to the waste and cruelties of war and oppression. Until, that is, we can find both a basis for living together which can promise a true and reliable unity; and a discipline for facing the many puzzles and conflicts which are bound to arise.

Jose Miguez BONINO unforgettably recalled to the WCC Faith and Order Commission in Lima in 1982 the agonised appeals of Bartolome DE LAS CASAS to the Spanish monarchy in protest at the oppressive cruelty of the Spanish conquistadores, and against that background raised the decisive question: *whose oikoumene* is this world?¹

Whose powers, we may say today, are to be finally obeyed by the World Trade Organisation (WTO) our governments have recently established? *Whose* interests will finally be satisfied by the explosion in satellite communication? *Whose* wisdom and discipline will finally lead us beyond the menaces of the HIV/AIDS pandemic or of global warming?

It is to such questions that Christians have to offer, as what we believe to be the most adequate answer available, the hypothesis of unity in Jesus Christ, the person in history through Whom, we claim, are revealed the purposes and methods of the God Who both created this entire universe and is preparing its final fulfilment.

1 Jose Miguez BONINO, A “Third World” Perspective on the Ecumenical Movement. The Ecumenical Review 1982/2. 115–124.

It is in finding appropriate ways of bringing that hypothesis into public discourse and intercultural testing that Christians today and tomorrow will in this new time be freshly responding to the challenges alike of MOTT's "evangelisation of the world in this generation" and of WCC's "Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation" (JPIC).

For it is the human race whose divisions and hostilities God has reconciled by the suffering and atoning death of Jesus. If the Christian Church is called to unity, and is promised an effective unity for itself, it is in order that the Church may by that unity witness to and serve the promised and achievable unity of humankind. If the churches have to experiment and struggle with cultural diversities and devise complex patterns that allow different contributions to be taken equally seriously, it is in order that they may in some measure anticipate what humanity as a whole will one day find it possible to bring about through such organs as the UNO, or local commissions for racial harmony.

This, I judge, has perhaps been the most important, certainly the most exciting, discovery within the WSCF tradition in my generation about the goal of Christian unity – that what may be appropriate for the denominations and churches with which we have grown up is in no way for their own sake – though it will do them decisive good! – but rather for the sake of God's purpose with humanity as a whole. The Church of Christ is called, like Israel before it, to be a witness to the nations, and therefore constantly to shape and reshape its own life and patterns so that they may be a promise-offering anticipation of what God intends for humanity as a whole.

This is as true at the local level, in regard to the priorities and patterns of whatever grouping of congregations find themselves forming the Church in any one place in reference to the health and wholeness of its surrounding community, as it is at the universal level, with regard to the patterns of authority and decision-making, in critical reference to governments and intergovernmental organisations, that can authentically characterise a community seeking to embody the lordship of the crucified Christ as a persuasive hypothesis for a world that is still ensnared by the ruling powers it throws up in self-concerned refusal of the promise and call of God.¹

III. Four Strands for Handling the Tensions

In particular, the experience of SCM and WSCF would-be unifiers has revealed that there will almost always be some four strands in the quest for unity among churches, at local as well as at the wider levels, which in some way need to be distinctly attended to, and yet whose interaction is all-important for the eventual "result" (itself no more than a step on the way towards the world's health, let alone into God's Kingdom).

Moreover, each of these strands involves holding on to at least two "sides" of a tension best resolved by some variation on the "both-and" approach which is never easy to reach. (I state them in an order perhaps convenient for clarity of understanding, but one which in no way indicates how they are best put in priority or best discerned in any one place. One only has to try and think out how these might have impressed themselves on the heart and mind of a John R. MOTT to become aware just how complex human awareness can be.)

1 NEWBIGIN Lesslie, *What is a "Local Church Truly United"?* The Ecumenical Review 1977/2. 115–128.

1. The Classical and the Secular

Discussion in and around the World Council of Churches has long been accustomed to distinguishing-and-holding-together the two distinct but complementary dimensions of the search for Christian unity that have jockeyed with one another ever since the Stockholm and Lausanne conferences of the 1920s: the “*classical*”, that aims to resolve the splits and quarrels that gave rise to divided churches by working at the Biblical and other roots of those issues that originally proved divisive or have become so; and the “*secular*”, that aims at enabling churches to work together, despite their divisions, on the great questions of the contemporary world, of war and peace, of wealth and poverty, of freedom and oppression, etc., and thus to encourage them to take each other seriously as partners also in prayer and pastoral action.

From those early meetings in the aftermath of World War I, leaders of the ecumenical movement have frequently said that these two strands need each other and deserve to be seen as complementary. We have been slower to realise just how strongly they deserve to influence each other. And yet this peeps up again and again in practice if not so clearly in theology.

A recent example came in the 1990 “world convocation” on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation, held in Seoul, South Korea. This was very much a meeting dealing with the “*secular*”; it drew up a pointed list of affirmations and commitments about the threats to our world, from global warming to racial tensions.

In order to suggest a practicable framework for how the churches might work on this list it set its findings in a framework of “*covenanting*” – of God’s initial *covenant* with creation, then with the descendants of Abraham, then through Jesus Christ and the Spirit with all humanity, and so of *covenants* that Christians and churches can enter into with one another under God and with the entire body of Christ.¹

To explore the Biblical and contemporary implications of working within such a ‘covenant’ is also a key part of the “*classical*” approach to the whole matter of Church division and re-union. But this link has all too seldom been explored.

2. Scripture *and* Tradition

In the search for “*classical*” unity our churches have had to learn to take seriously, for instance, both Scripture and Tradition, indeed Scripture as the key element in shaping and releasing the Tradition.

The key sentence about this, from the Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order, in Montreal in 1963, was: “Thus we can say that we exist as Christians by the Tradition of the Gospel (the *paradosis* of the *kerygma*) testified in Scripture, transmitted in and by the Church through the power of the Holy Spirit.”²

So, in the search for an appropriate “*secular*” unity, churches have had to discover how to hold together a strong, even one-sided commitment to people in evident need – the famine-stricken or refugees, for instance – with a genuinely “*non-political*” position that keeps out of, while warmly encouraging, the necessary political negotiations, with

1 NILES D. Preman (ed.), *Between the Flood and the Rainbow. Interpreting the Conciliar Process of Mutual Commitment to Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation*. Genève, 1992.

2 RODGER Patrick C. – VISCHER Lukas, *The Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order*. London, 1964.

all their tensions and risks, involved in re-shaping the communities or nations so that hunger and flight need never occur again.

In Britain our local councils of churches have long understood that they need to be working on both these “fronts”, if their member congregations are to move into closer and more effective unity.

Christian Aid weeks on behalf of the world’s poor belong just as strongly to the calling to unity in Christ as the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity or as the gesture of convening a “neutral” forum addressed by all the candidates at a general election.

3. Particular Cultures and the Culture of the Universal Human Family

More recently a third strand has come into view, though the reality of it was there already one hundred years ago, as is witnessed by John R. MOTT’s third principle above, namely the “cultural” dimension. Unity cannot be imposed by any one participant; that could only lead to a false uniformity; a right way has to be found for each participating church to express her distinct, particular way of being a, indeed *the*, Christian Church in her own cultural setting, and not just for her own sake, but in order that she can most deeply and truly witness to the total community of that culture Who God is and what contribution God has prepared for her to offer into the overall human symphony.

On this I am particularly grateful for Lesslie NEWBIGIN’s discussion of the “complicated and unpredictable evolution” that always characterises the work of intercultural evangelism, when the culture of the outside missionary comes into dialogue with that of her or his hearers, around material from Scripture which brings yet a third culture into play. No wonder that the voice which finally carries conviction must be that of the Holy Spirit.¹

This is all being much studied and discussed at present, often under the title “Gospel and Culture.”² The 1996 World Mission Conference of WCC in Salvador de Bahia, Brazil, was chiefly devoted to this area of investigation. Roman Catholic mission circles are also giving it a great deal of attention, with “inculturation” being a favourite term.

One of the key balances that must be struck is that between particularity and universality. In my own experience I have been most deeply struck, knowing something of the long and painful history behind it, by the declaration to the WCC Canberra Assembly in 1991 of the China Christian Council:

“Important as it is for Chinese Christians to have a selfhood of their own, there cannot be a full selfhood of a church apart from its being a member of the Universal Church of Jesus Christ. The particularity of the Church can be developed only within the universality embodied in such an organisation as the World Council of Churches.”

Only in small part can that refer to specific statements drawn up by WCC or the member churches; far more it points to the human and interhuman qualities of communication and friendship that WCC enables, to the “adequacy or inadequacy of the ways by which a person/church is invited, welcomed, befriended, supported, encouraged, involved in conversation and also questioned and corrected, in a free and open setting where there is no external authority other than that which is recognised as the working of the Holy Spirit.”³

1 NEWBIGIN Lesslie, *The Open Secret. Sketches for a Missionary Theology*. London, 1979, pp. 157-180

2 See, for example, CONWAY Martin, “A Universal Faith in 1001 Contexts?” *International Review of Mission* 1995/4.

3 CONWAY Martin, *That’s When the Body Works. The Canberra Assembly of the WCC as a Foretaste of a Council of the Universal Church*. Birmingham, 1991. 58.

4. Different Authorities in Dialogue

Least clear of the four – here I am experimenting with a new category for something that has only taken form in my mind recently, though there may be something lurking in my Anglican background about ‘dispersed authorities’ – is a dimension that I shall call a *dialogue of authorities*.

Of course, questions of authority are constantly in view in all three dimensions I have already discussed, whether it be the proper authority of the Pope or of the local church in the “classical”, the respective authorities for the matter of justice and for good order in the second, or the clashing authority of tribal tradition and incoming missionaries in the third.

Yet as a fourth overarching “strand” I have in mind the frequent, often necessary, and in the end enriching tensions between the historic “institution” of a church embodied in a bishop or a synod and the exploratory “sense of being church” in a local group; or the never-ending dialectic between the emphases of the “professionals” in the Church (and other community enterprises) and those of the “ordinary people.”

The whole question of democracy is so vital, and yet also so entangled in today’s world, with many people virtually giving up belief that any real democracy is possible, that the Church of Christ would be achieving something of the highest importance if we could show that the hypothesis of God’s promised Kingdom can lead to genuine power-sharing and a lasting satisfactory balance of authorities within our ranks.

The *World Council of Churches* Struggles to Hold these Tensions together

Within the ecumenical movement, especially within the WCC, there has of course been a lot of work done on each and all of these strands over the years. Yet, as I can witness from my own involvements with that Council, what has by no means been achieved is the satisfactory demonstration of how these distinct strands are to be held together in a total obedience.

It has been easier for the WCC in effect to divide into distinct constituencies, the one (for the most part theological academics) to be concerned in the Faith and Order Commission with the “classical”; a second (also academics, but with a good dose of activists too) to devote themselves to the “secular” in the Church and Society Commission and those other programmes that have grown out of that (International Affairs, Development, Peace, etc.), and a third (grassroots leaders and those who support them) to give priority to the current questions of culture and subcultures in the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME).

There was a striking moment at the 1983 Assembly in Vancouver when an almost visible handful of people were able to pull the Assembly back from the brink of dividing into “classical” versus “secular.” The key paragraph in the report begins:

“At this Assembly we have sensed a tension between some of those who are concerned with the unity of the Church and others concerned with the desperate need for justice, peace and reconciliation in the human community. For some, the search for a unity in one faith and eucharistic fellowship seems, at best secondary, at worst irrelevant to the struggles for peace, justice and human dignity; for others the Church’s involvement against the evils of history seems at best secondary, at worst detrimental to its role as eucharistic community and witness to the Gospel.”

Their discussion of this tension and how it can be overcome led up to this paragraph: “As we have explored together the relation between God’s Church and God’s world we have been struck by the affirmation of the Uppsala Assembly (in 1968) that ‘the Church is bold in speaking of itself as the sign of the coming unity of humankind.’ At Vancouver we reaffirm this, and want to deepen our understanding of what we mean when we make such a bold claim. ... Our conviction that the Church is called to be a prophetic ‘sign’, a prophetic community through which and by which the transformation of the world can take place. It is only a Church which goes out from its Eucharistic centre, strengthened in its own identity, resolved to become what it is, that can take the world on to its agenda. There never will be a time when the world, with all its political, social and economic issues, ceases to be the agenda of the Church. At the same time the Church can go out to the edges of society, not fearing of being distorted or confused by the world’s agenda, but confident and capable of recognising that God is already there.”¹

IV. Tomorrow’s Great Questions

Finally, I should like to offer a brief view into tomorrow, in the belief that the WSCF tradition, even if likely to remain that of a minority of Christians, will continue to have a central role to play. It can hardly be in dispute that the XXIst century is presenting humanity with at least three vast challenges, none of which is entirely new, but which are going to require a lot more exploration and commitment than many of us have yet known how to give them.

1. The Economic Challenge

One is relatively familiar, though daily becoming more urgent. This is the growing gap between *rich and poor*, between the richer nations of the North and the poorer of the South, but which is also rapidly becoming a no less disturbing gap between those within any one country, in North or South, who can command an affluent and secure life and those who find themselves having to struggle against poverty, insecurity and the lack of self-worth to which both conditions condemn them.

A leading economic journalist in Britain, Will HUTTON, has put this in a memorable way² – that 40% of the population in the richer Western countries are increasingly affluent, at least in money terms, while there are also the lowest 30%, increasingly driven onto the margins and towards destitution, and a middle 30% who cling on to what meagre scraps they can, envious of their “betters,” while seeking above all to avoid the fate of their “inferiors.”

The numerical proportions do not work the same way on the world scale, but it is perhaps true that those who are increasingly affluent around the globe can be sure of wielding enough power to serve their own interests, over against those who are made to suffer the consequences, and so entrench the advantages of the richer in ways that the poorer will feel hopeless to challenge. If this is the way the world is going, then Christians need to mount a life-long campaign calling for justice as the only way to ensure lasting and genuine harmony and peace for the human race.

1 GILL David, *Gathered for Life: the Official Report of the 6th Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Vancouver 1983*. Genève, 1983. 49–50. CONWAY Martin, *Look Listen Care – One Man’s Experience and Interpretation of the WCC Vancouver Assembly*. London, 1983.

2 HUTTON Will, *The State We’re in*. London, 1995.

2. The Ecological Challenge

The second is increasingly spoken of, if hardly yet in ways that promise much improvement. I refer to the challenge of *environmental sustainability*. Will the human race be able to live on this planet in fifty, even twenty-five, years' time if we continue to damage its built-in balances and adjustments in the way we have done during the XXth century?¹

Already we are seeing the effects of global warming in terms of climate change and sea levels. Already we have evidence of the long-term and damaging after-effects of nuclear accidents such as the one at Chernobyl. The Rio UN Conference of 1992 addressed many of these problems, but is much actually being done to change our ways?²

Do the solutions there suggested add up to a sufficient change to permit a long-term optimism about the relations between humanity and the natural environment? If not, must not our faith in God as Creator as well as Redeemer and Perfecter be brought to bear in far more costly, sacrificial ways, to plead for radical reversal of current habits and for quite new lifestyles, so that our grandchildren may have lives worth living?³

3. The Interreligious Challenge

The third is now surely in view, if hardly yet addressed – namely the need for endlessly deeper mutual respect, understanding and transforming *dialogue* between the great world religious traditions: between Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Jews and Christians,¹ and whatever other traditions govern the hearts and minds of significant sectors of the human race.

Of course, each of these has to cope with all sorts of internal tensions and diversities in its own ranks. There is almost no way by which we can expect at all quickly to produce some representative “Parliament of Religions.” But we do urgently need many more personal friendships, much wider understanding and much deeper respect and dialogue between people in any and every walk of life.

No easy answers here either, but it must surely be seen as an unbearable contradiction within each of our faiths that we claim a “way of truth” valid for all people, while in practice we each use our faith to cut ourselves off from the others. Indeed, Wilfred Cantwell SMITH, one of the outstanding scholars and writers in this field, said in the introductory chapter of his great book *The Meaning and End of Religion*:

“Unless a Christian can contrive intelligently and spiritually to be a Christian not merely in a Christian society or a secular society but in the world; ... unless a Buddhist can carve a satisfactory place for himself as a Buddhist in a world in which other intelligent, sensitive, educated men are Christians and Muslims – unless, I say we can together solve the intellectual and spiritual problems caused by comparative religion, then I do not see how a man is to be a Christian or a Muslim or a Buddhist at all.”²

No Ready Answers – Yet Always Some First Steps

Christians must learn to trust far more deeply in God the Holy Spirit, Who can use friendship and a readiness for dialogue in ways that are endlessly surprising, but always for the ultimate good of humanity.

1 LAMB Christopher, *Belief in a Mixed Society*. Tring, 1985.; CRAGG Kenneth, *The Christ and the Faiths. Theology in Cross-Reference*. London, 1986.

2 SMITH Wilfred Cantwell, *The Meaning and End of Religion – A Revolutionary Approach to the Great Religious Traditions*. New York, 1962; London, 1978. 11.

Now it is of course very much easier to name these challenges than to see how to tackle them. In each case the bare phrase involves a huge and far-reaching complex, indeed tangle, of patterns of behaviour, thinking and underlying assumptions that it can take a lifetime to sort out conceptually, let alone to transform in the practice of millions of people and their institutions.

Each of these (no doubt like others you might wish to put alongside them) cannot but call for the most penetrating and costly discernment of what is truly health-giving, and what is in the end death-serving, in our inherited traditions, cultures and indeed faiths.

I dare not claim that there are any easy answers, but I can and do claim that there are in each case always some immediate and first steps which could be taken tomorrow by individuals, corporate bodies and, yes, governments, if only the will was there. For the WSCF tradition shows us that even the most gigantic tasks can be fruitfully, if sacrificially, faced by perfectly ordinary young people with the right sort of encouragement.

At the same time it must also be seen clearly that as things stand at the moment, one of the major obstructions to confronting these challenges, one of the major powers against which humanity has to find a way of working, is the *dominant Western and "modern" culture* which continues aggressively to shape this world and its common institutions, and which is understood, alike from within and without, as having sprung up in Christian Europe. For Europeans like me, our very birth and upbringing, let alone our education, puts us on the wrong side of the battle lines before we even start to try and face up to these challenges.

It is therefore far from straightforward to speak of Christians offering the hypothesis of unity in Christ as the best available way of discovering a basis upon which humanity can resolve its tensions and dilemmas. It will have to be done by the worldwide Christian community, in which – thank God – the “modern” West is no longer numerically or qualitatively predominant.

It will have to be done, moreover, as we have gradually and painfully learned about any true evangelism, not so much by what any of us *say* – however modest and careful – as by what Christians *do*; and not so much by anything we can do – however sacrificial – as by *the sort of people Christians are*, by the sorts of relationships we form, by our readiness to listen and receive from others.

Here WSCF can also give us the inestimable privilege of meeting and making friends with comparable people from the other side of those same “battle lines.” To start the task of facing up to these issues alongside friends from the other side makes the whole business both less frightening and very much more practicable.

It will be as we Christians are ourselves transformed, in ways both great and small, so as to live by the Spirit that was in Jesus, that God may be able to use us in the doing and speaking that can serve God’s purposes, and that others may be encouraged to take the initiatives that they also need to in order to open up the questioning and experimenting by which God the Holy Spirit can bring on a new and hopeful world.

Suggested Reading

- CRAIG Kenneth, *The Christ and the Faiths. Theology in Cross-Reference*. London, 1986.
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- MOTT John R., *The World's Student Christian Federation: Origin, Achievements, Forecast*. Genève, 1920.
- NEWBIGIN Lesslie, *What is a "Local Church Truly United"?* The Ecumenical Review 1977/2. 115-128.
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Martin CONWAY: Dimensions de l'Unité Chrétienne

Cette article fouille dans les diverses manières la tradition de la FUACE et de ses divers mouvements membres a constamment rafraîchi et élargi le sens de l'unité Chrétienne comme étant l'argumentation centrale de leur engagement et de leur dessein. Ils ont exploré et testé son sens aussi bien dans les forme et procédures de leur mouvement propre, dans les divisions et amitiés entre plusieurs dénominations du Corps du Christ, l'Eglise Universelle; que dans la promesse que l'Eglise Universelle peut offrir au cœur des luttes des communautés, tribus, fois, nations et blocs économiques, des voies encourageantes pour découvrir et vivre l'humanité une. Ce faisant, ils ont contribué aux dimensions d'espérance du XXIe siècle, même si cela a laissé au devant de nous des grands défis. L'article s'achève sur une note d'encouragement pour les étudiants de demain, de vivre dans une acceptation constructive des tensions issues de la confrontation entre leur propre héritage et celles des autres ayant des origines différentes, où que cela peut les mener. Avoir une ferme préoccupation pour des relations plus ouvertes avec des compagnons d'aventure, si difficile que cela peut être; et s'enraciner dans la croyance vitale en Dieu le Saint Esprit Qui garde ouvert la promesse d'un monde différent et meilleur pour toutes Ses créatures.

Martin CONWAY: Dimensiones de la Unidad Cristiana

Este artículo indaga en las formas en que la tradición de la FUMEC y sus miembros SCM han refrescado y aumentado constantemente el significado de unidad cristiana como un empuje central de su compromiso y su propósito. Han explorado y probado su significado similar en forma y procedimientos a su propio movimiento, en las divisiones y relaciones entre las muchas denominaciones separadas de un cuerpo de Cristo, la Iglesia Universal; y también en la promesa que la Iglesia Universal puede hacer en la lucha de las comunidades, tribus, fe, naciones y bloques económicos, con la promesa de vías para descubrir y materializar una sola humanidad. En este quehacer han contribuido enormemente a las dimensiones esperanzadoras del siglo XX, incluso si nos ha dejado muchos retos por delante. El artículo termina con un estímulo a los estudiantes del mañana a vivir en una aceptación constructiva de las tensiones entre sus herencias y dondequiera que su amistad con personas de antecedentes diferentes los guíe; aceptar una preocupación estable por las relaciones sin trabas con aventureros, sin importar cuan complicados se prueben; y centrarse a sí mismos en una vivida creencia en Dios el Espíritu Santo quien aun mantiene la promesa de un mundo diferente y mucho mejor para las criaturas de Dios.

Pablo Romo CEDANO

Los Retos de las Teologías en el Contexto Actual

El Newsweek, fechado el 12 de marzo del 2003, titula su número casi monográfico “BUSH y Dios” – en ese orden – y subtítulo: “Cómo la fe cambió su vida y determina su agenda”. Como esta publicación, y otras más trataron de convencer los estrategas de Washington en los últimos minutos antes de iniciar la guerra contra Irak que ésta también se hacía por defender a Dios y su nombre.

Que la decisión de la guerra era por el bien de la humanidad, luego entonces justa, luego entonces porque dios quería. La susodicha revista dice que “Aunque los presidentes del pasado han invocado el nombre de dios en público, BUSH lo ha hecho más que ningún otro, y ha pasado de declaraciones generales sobre la fe a referencias cristianas abiertas”. El dios de BUSH, está muy presente en la Casa Blanca.

De hecho, nos sigue refiriendo la revista, “la atmósfera dentro de la Casa Blanca, dicen los enterados, está cubierta por un aura de oración. Los grupos de estudio de la Biblia no son cosa nueva en la mansión ejecutiva, hasta en la época de CLINTON había uno, pero ahora están en todas partes”.

¿Cómo creer en Dios después de la última guerra? La pregunta no es banal. ¿Dónde está ese dios del que habla BUSH? ¿Cuál es el Dios que ahora tienen los torturados de Irak, de Guatemala, de México, los desaparecidos de Argentina? ¿Cómo acceder al Dios verdadero?

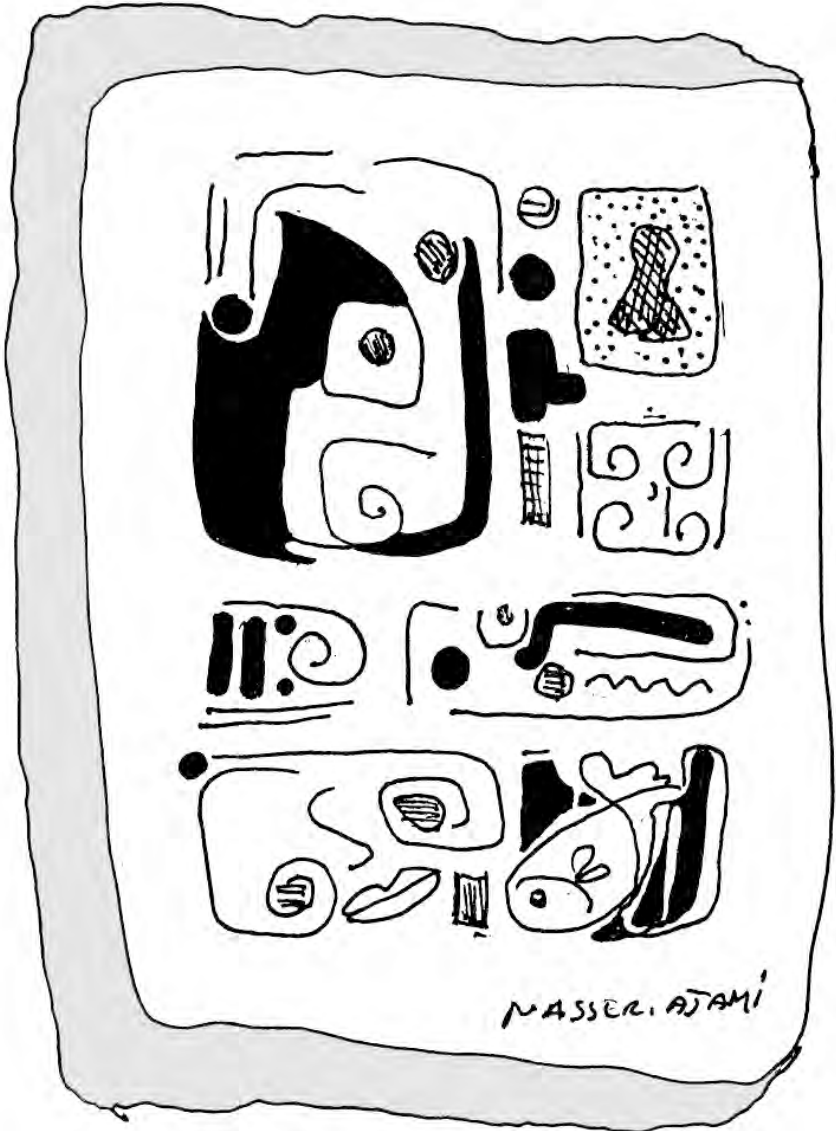
I. La Pluralidad y el Siglo XXI

La herencia de la ilustración para la parte del mundo que ha vivido el proceso de modernización ha significado ruptura entre las religiones y el estado, tolerancia para profesar la fe que se quiera, pluralidad y diversidad. También la propia ilustración generó con su proceso último de modernidad, sobre todo en las sociedades post-industriales, indiferencia y pérdida de sentido.

Las grandes guerras de fines del siglo XIX y todo el siglo XX se han hecho en el nombre de los valores que supuestamente nos da la modernidad: libertad, fraternidad, igualdad. En los últimos años, la crisis de la modernidad ha intentado despedir los meta-relatos, los grandes discursos, las grandes hazañas llenas de sangre y muerte.

Y con justa razón, los resultados en cuanto a igualdad son poco alentadores, conocemos bien las estadísticas mundiales; la libertad que ha prosperado individualmente no ha conseguido acabar con las dictaduras; la fraternidad está a la vista con el número de guerras que se desarrollaron en el siglo XX.

Pablo ROMO CEDANO participó con el Obispo Don Samuel RUIZ, en el equipo de mediación en la guerra entre el Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional y el Gobierno Federal Mexicano (1994–1998). Fue director del centro de la diócesis de derechos humanos en San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas (1993–1997), y más tarde presidente de la Dominicans for Justice and Peace, organización con sede en Ginebra, Suiza (1999–2000). Ahora es parte del SERAPAZ, una organización de trabajo por la paz en México. Su dirección electrónica es pabloloromo@hotmail.com.



Sin embargo, es difícil todavía hoy tomar distancia de esta modernidad y ubicar la proporción con el pasado estableciendo nuevos contenidos. Dirán algunos: “nuevas alternativas o paradigmas”. Ser hijas e hijos de la modernidad nos hace difícil asesinarla o quizá mejor dicho, guillotinarla. Edipo nos persigue y nos traiciona.

Como nunca la humanidad en su conjunto es capaz de destruirse a sí misma, no solamente en cuanto a las bombas y su capacidad bélica destructiva, sino en la crisis del medio ambiente que está generando por esta industrialización que vivimos y este llamado “desarrollo”. En las sociedades altamente desarrolladas hay un gran desgaste y una sensible pérdida de sentido en la población.

El optimismo en el desarrollo ha devenido opio para estas sociedades. La persona humana que ha producido esta modernidad en las partes desarrolladas es un mujer-hombre anónimo, útil en tanto productivo, absorbido por la ciencia, codificado, registrado (las listas de SARAMAGO), con frecuencia reducido a estadísticas; atónito en la computadora, no actor pero sí voyeurista con mucha frecuencia; asumiendo que es imposible cambiar las cosas que son ya y están establecidas.

Necesitado de consumir para valorarse. Con una ilimitada capacidad de información. El subproducto, es decir la otra parte del mundo: hambrienta, pobre, buscando la manera de sobrevivir, viviendo en la provisionalidad.

En ambas humanidades hay una gran sed de trascendencia, de compartir en comunidad, de sentir a Dios. Quizá también de orar. No hay una clara distinción entre sentirse bien y estar en contacto con la trascendencia. Por ello, probablemente, se da el culto al cuerpo en sectores desarrollados. Existe un despertar a lo bello en las clases sociales que pueden darse ese gusto y se sustituye a menudo la ética por la estética.

Los instrumentos de conocimientos están basados en lógicas débiles y se fomenta la desilusión ante los grandísimos retos que presenta el futuro. Las lógicas fuertes, rígidas y formales, han producido consecuencias horribles para la sociedad y se les califica inmediatamente como utópicas, “poco realistas”, “imposibles”, criminales, o simplemente ideologías.

Sabemos bien que es imposible que una sola filosofía, un solo pensamiento complejo, abarque toda la realidad y la pueda interpretar cabalmente, por ello aceptamos con facilidad lo ecléctico, lo simultáneo a pesar de contradictorio (lo barroco). La contradicción es parte de la propia lógica con la que interpretamos hoy el mundo y con frecuencia la vivimos.

‘Talamos árboles para publicar el buen manejo de los bosques.’ De igual manera conocemos que todos estamos ligados entre sí, usamos con frecuencia el adagio que ‘no vuela una mariposa en el Amazonas sin que tenga repercusiones en la India’.

Hablamos de la globalización con fluidez. La globalización tiene dimensiones que grupos cada vez mayores, unidos en redes de comunicación y de interés usan para canalizar sus inquietudes de cualquier tipo. Si bien la red es todavía para privilegiados con acceso a la línea telefónica, cada vez se extiende más y se usa de manera muy creativa.

Se establecen posibilidades de solidaridad virtual, por ejemplo, se hacen marchas, plantones, manifiestos y toda forma de protesta de manera virtual mediante Internet. Y, por supuesto, se traduce con frecuencia en acciones tangibles como la manifestación contra la guerra que se realizó en febrero¹. Vale la pena decir, que fue la primera movilización global masiva del milenio y quizá la más grande de la historia de la humanidad.

1 Quiero aquí rescatar la última carta de Don Samuel RUIZ sobre la solidaridad global. En esta nueva hora de Gracia.

Ante este mundo insurgente hay paradojas y grandes cuestionamientos. No sólo en esta parte del mundo, de residencia mayoritaria cristiana sino en todo él. Arundhati ROY, intelectual de la India, nos relató un hecho triste en el último Foro en Porto Alegre (2003) reflexionando sobre la configuración del nuevo orden mundial desde el país con el mayor mercado potencial:

Nos recuerda Arunhati Roy que el 27 de febrero del 2002, en el estado de Gujarat, en India, 2 mil de musulmanes fueron asesinados en un pogromo (etnocidio) patrocinado por el Estado y cerca de 150 mil musulmanes fueron expulsados de sus casas. Mientras Gujarat ardía, el primer ministro indio salía en MTV promocionando sus nuevos poemas. En diciembre del año pasado (2003), el gobierno que orquestó la matanza fue reelegido con una cómoda mayoría. Nadie ha sido castigado por el genocidio. Como el *mercado* indio está abierto a los inversionistas globales la masacre ni siquiera es un embarazoso inconveniente en las relaciones políticas internacionales”.

Todo esto para decir que es un mito que el libre mercado rompe las barreras nacionales. El libre mercado no amenaza la soberanía nacional, socava la democracia. Con la misma autora india afirmo que la globalización empresarial requiere de una confederación internacional de gobiernos leales, corruptos, autoritarios en países más pobres, para que pongan en práctica reformas impopulares y sofoquen los motines.

En la medida que se configura el nuevo orden mundial los retos para la humanidad van surgiendo. Claro que la manera de abordarlos va a ser diferente en tanto nos definamos en qué parte de la humanidad nos encontramos.

II. El Mercado de los Dioses y el Dios del Mercado

Fray BETTO¹ en los días de la última guerra escribió un artículo muy sugerente en el que hace una comparación entre el mercado como un dios: “Él es objeto de creencia de millones de mortales. Dotado como está de omnipresencia, omnipotencia y omnisciencia, trasciende a nuestra realidad fugaz. Sabe lo que nos conviene, aunque nuestra débil comprensión no capte sus misterios. Él gobierna nuestras vidas y hace que el feo sea bello, el viejo joven, lo caro barato. Transforma al bandido en autoridad venerable, al especulador en maestro sagaz, al agiotista en señor de derechos. (...) Sus misioneros fiscalizan minuciosamente las cuentas de los países, dictan medidas impopulares, cuadran las cuentas aún a costo del sacrificio de vidas humanas. Éstas son inmoladas en su altar de oro todas las veces que su poder es amenazado.”

La función profética en la tradición judeo-cristiana es el anuncio y la denuncia. Anuncio del proyecto de Dios y denuncia de aquello que se opone a tal proyecto. Lo mismo sucede en la Iglesia cristiana primitiva y en las iglesias posteriores. Declarar un Reino que viene y un Dios que reina una tierra nueva es algo constante en nuestra tradición. La oración del cristiano en todas las tradiciones es el “Padre Nuestro” que pide que venga a nosotros su “reino” o mejor traducido “su reinado”.

Las dificultades de este advenimiento radican en el mal o en términos teológicos en el pecado. El pecado es interpretado de acuerdo a la antropología que se use, pero es común denominador en todas ellas que el pecado obstaculiza “descubrir a Dios presente”. Denunciar el pecado, denunciar el mal social (términos morales) que afecta “el-no-advenimiento-del-reino” es acción profética.

1 Fray BETTO – Carlos Alberto LIBANIO – es un fraile dominico brasileño, encarcelado en la dictadura de su país, teólogo y escritor.

DESMOND TUTU, obispo anglicano en Sud-África en tiempos del Apartheid, al oponerse a éste y predicar y actuar en contra no sólo desempeñaba una acción política – como se calificó en la perspectiva liberal – sino fundamentalmente realizaba una acción profética – teológica: desenmascarando el mal.

George W. BUSH al denunciar el “eje del mal” y descubrir a los demonios en su teología cumple también con su acción profética. Elimina *su* mal y hace triunfar *su* bien. Elimina su pecado y *hace triunfar a su Dios*. Rinde tributo a su Dios al precio que conocemos.

El 27 de marzo del 2003 durante una protesta no violenta en Washington contra la invasión de Irak fueron arrestados un grupo de 68 personas entre ellos el obispo de la Iglesia a la que George W. BUSH pertenece. Junto con este obispo se encontraba el obispo católico Thomas Gumbleton y otros religiosos más. El obispo declaró que si ni a él, que era su propio pastor, lo respetaba, ¿qué se podría esperar con lo que sucedería en Irak?

George W. BUSH justifica la guerra en el nombre de defender su propio país de manera preventiva: hace un bien a su propio país, ante el mal que podía ocasionar el otro. Por su parte Aída vivía desde hacía mucho tiempo un mal como consecuencia del Embargo que ella no tenía control ni responsabilidad y se incrementó con los bombardeos y la invasión.

Ambos invocaban a su Dios para sobrevivir. ¿Cómo distinguir el Dios de Jesús del impostor? ¿Cómo se distinguían los profetas “verdaderos” en el pasado? ¿Cuál es el criterio de verdad?

III. El Dios de la Biblia

Jon SOBRINO, teólogo salvadoreño, quien acompañó por muchos años a Mons. ROMERO, escribió con un género de carta a Monseñor: “No te hicieron caso ayer ni te harían caso hoy, pero tus palabras no fueron en vano. Nos dejan la herencia de invocar, a Dios y al pueblo sufriente, como algo último, lo que no admite apelación. Y eso es muy necesario porque en nuestro mundo no existe un referente último para apelar sin apelación.”¹

El *criterio es el amor*. Es el descubrimiento del Dios de la Biblia que oye el clamor de su pueblo (Éxodo) y se pone del lado del cautivo, del esclavo en Egipto. El esclavo en el imperio. Es Aquél que se identifica con el huérfano y con la viuda: “la gloria de Dios es que el pobre viva”. Y ante ese Dios no hay apelación. Así el criterio para identificar está en los resultados que se obtienen y en la identificación de a quién se defiende. Monseñor ROMERO decía: “quienes cierran las vías pacíficas son los idólatras de la riqueza.”

Los judíos y cristianos coincidimos en las primeras leyes para aproximarnos a Dios. La primera de ellas establece que “no hay que tomar el nombre de Dios en vano”. Invocar a Dios para matar es contradecir en cualquier circunstancia la propia definición de nuestro Dios (“Dios es amor” 1Jn4,8), al menos del Dios que revela Jesús. Pero quizá este principio no basta del todo y es preciso constatarlo con los efectos, es decir, la práctica que verifica y corrige el principio.

Son miles de muertos y el reparto de las petroleras se está dando casualmente a los cercanos del Señor BUSH. El aeropuerto, las refinerías, los oleoductos las concesiones

1 SOBRINO Jan, *Carta a Monseñor Romero*. www.alai.org

de “reconstrucción”, las carreteras. La congruencia es inequívoca del vencedor con su dios y con los beneficios que le otorga. El dios que sirven y que otorga después de la invasión coinciden. Es un dios que rige el empoderamiento de los ya poderosos.

Jon SOBRINO continúa: “El modo como la CNN, por ejemplo, cubrió los primeros días de guerra. Era insultante para las víctimas. Se mencionaban números de soldados y armas, se hablaba de la lista de los “aliados”, de los portentosos avances de la tecnología de guerra. Pero no se comunicaba el sufrimiento de hombres, mujeres y niños.”

La *verdad* y la *compasión* son otros nuevos elementos y criterios de identificación, si se quiere, para avanzar en la respuesta por el Dios de Aída. Sin embargo, parece que este Dios es un perdedor. El Dios de Aída, el Dios de Jesús es verdaderamente impotente, ridículo y para nada “todopoderoso” como se acostumbra profesar.

Friedrich NIETZCHE se burlará de este Dios de los cristianos fracasado y colgado del madero: “fantástico dios que muere y que adoran los fracasados, no les queda mas remedio para consolarse.” Ante esta reflexión pudiéramos pensar inmediatamente en la negociación: ‘Negociemos con el Imperio, quizá tenga piedad y sólo nos esclavice, pero no nos mate.’

Ardeth PLATTE, Carole GILBERT y Jackie HUDSON de 66, 55 y 68 años respectivamente Están en la cárcel desde julio en Estados Unidos. Ellas están en prisión acusadas de dañar patrimonio federal y de conspirar contra el gobierno. Ellas son tres religiosas dominicas del estado de Colorado quienes irrumpieron en una base militar y a punta de martillazos golpearon por espacio de media hora un silo donde se albergaban varios misiles “patriot”.

¿Negociar con el Imperio? Estoy seguro que en todos sus años de vida religiosa nunca antes habían sido tan elocuentes en su testimonio de vida como ahora en el dolor de la prisión. Los primeros años de la vida de la Iglesia están marcados por el desarrollo de una espiritualidad hacia el martirio, protegiendo la vida siempre, pero si llegara el momento entregarla “al Dios por quien se vive”.

La dificultad hoy radica en las posturas extremas y los que pactan. La realidad no es negro y blanco y los matices y las contradicciones crean diversas posturas y establecer un programa casuístico sería imposible. ¿Entonces? Un reto más para las teologías insurgentes será la definición contextual sin traicionar lo básico. Sin incensar a otro dios que no sea al verdadero Dios de la Vida.

A pesar de ello, ante la crítica de Friedrich NIETZCHE, lo último es recurso fundamental, es decir la escatología: la vida después de esta. El término de la vida para un cristiano no está definido por la muerte como lo establecen aquellos que no creen. Para todos los cristianos sabemos bien que Cristo Resucitó. De una manera clara ahí está justo nuestra fuerza.

San Pablo se pregunta ¿quién podrá destruirnos? ¿A quien podemos temer? La fuerza de la resurrección no sólo anima y consuela, sino que desarrolla y ahonda los compromisos. Lo hemos visto en El Salvador tras la muerte de Monseñor ROMERO, “resucitaré en el pueblo salvadoreño”. Lo vemos en todos los ejemplos de los grandes cristianas y cristianos.

No hablo meramente de los muertos. Hablo de las vivas y vivos, y hablo en plural. Hablo de comunidades de fe que dan testimonio de la resurrección de Jesucristo, dando vida a su hermano. Hablo de los que profesan amor en tiempos de citas por Internet.

Viene a mi mente inmediatamente la comunidad de otras hermanas dominicas allá en Irak. El 14 de marzo del año pasado escribieron una carta a BUSH y al pueblo de Estados Unidos para que detuvieran la guerra. Ellas escribían:

“El presidente BUSH defiende los derechos de los animales. ¿Acaso tenemos nosotros menos valor que los animales? ¿Por qué el pueblo americano tiene el derecho a vivir en paz a salvo y en prosperidad? ¿Acaso su vida es más valiosa que la vida de otras personas, por ejemplo la del pueblo iraquí? No nos hemos repuesto todavía de la guerra del Golfo, ¿cómo podemos enfrentar los efectos de una nueva guerra?”

Este grupo de religiosas, junto con su pueblo – mayoritariamente no cristiano – vivieron los bombardeos recogiendo heridos en su hospital hasta que no hubo ya más espacio. Curaron a cuanto lesionado llegó, animaron a la vida y dieron el testimonio de aquellas que ven al crucificado y que no lo encuentran en la tumba vacía.

Amor, compasión, verdad. Criterios que distinguen al Dios de Jesucristo de los ídolos que no pueden salvar. Amor, compasión y verdad que florecieron insospechadamente en las redes de miles y millones que nos opusimos a la guerra de tantas maneras. Las mujeres de Australia y las de Nueva York, a pesar del tremendo frío de esos días, ofrecieron con sus cuerpos protestas elocuentes de repudio a la violencia.

Globos, marchas, paros, barriles embarrados de sangre, poesías, celebraciones y peregrinaciones. Prácticamente todas las iglesias cristianas históricas y sus jerarquías en Estados Unidos se pronunciaron contra la invasión en un ejemplo real y tangible de ecumenismo.

El Consejo Mundial de Iglesias, el parlamento de las religiones y el Papa de la Iglesia Católica también condenaron la guerra. Amor compasión y verdad son las primeras categorías con las que las teologías insurgentes de este siglo tendrán que iniciar su articulación de lenguaje.

IV. El Neoliberalismo

Este curso del planeta está definido globalmente por lo que se llama Neoliberalismo, que se caracteriza por: disciplina fiscal; priorizar del gasto público en educación y salud; reforma tributaria; tasas de interés positivas determinadas por el mercado; tipos de cambio competitivos; políticas comerciales liberales; apertura a la inversión extranjera; privatizaciones; desregulación y protección de la propiedad privada e intelectual¹.

Estos diez puntos representan grosso modo el modelo económico que *se impone* en todo el mundo y que hace que las distancias entre los ricos y los pobres se incrementen. A lo largo de los últimos años y sobre todo desde 1970 a la fecha ha habido un incremento muy notable en la producción a escala mundial.

En 1950, a pocos años de la Segunda Guerra Mundial el rendimiento mundial de la economía era de apenas 6.3 mil millones de dólares con una población de 2,520 millones de personas; en 1990 con una población de casi el doble, 5,000 millones de habitantes creció la economía a 31 mil millones de dólares y en el 2,000 con una población de cerca de 6,000 millones de habitantes en el planeta la economía creció aún mucho más: a 42 mil millones.

Es decir que hay un crecimiento anual promedio en los últimos años de cerca del 4.5%. Europa ha crecido en su producción desde 1970 a la fecha diez veces, es decir,

1 Consenso de Washington (1989).

tiene diez veces más riqueza que hace treinta años. Sin embargo, en el mundo hay 1.2 mil millones de personas que viven con menos de un dólar por día¹ y 2.8 mil millones de personas que sobreviven con menos de dos dólares diarios.

Es decir, que de los 6 mil millones de habitantes en el mundo que somos, dos terceras partes viven en la pobreza o en la miseria. Hay 830 millones de personas aquejadas por desnutrición crónica que no pueden disfrutar de una vida saludable y activa. En Europa también se ha incrementado el número de pobres. En 1975, había 38 millones de pobres (bajo el criterio señalado), en 1985 aumentaron a 44 millones y en 1995 se incrementaron hasta 50 millones.

Cuando hablo de Europa, hablo para las estadísticas de los países que conforman la Unión Europea². Así, vemos cómo, proporcionalmente a la población del mundo y de esta Europa, por un lado, crece la riqueza y por el otro el número de pobres. En el mundo, ocho de cada cien niños no ve su 5º cumpleaños a causa de esta situación.

Otro dato muy duro: Los ingresos de los 20 países más ricos del mundo es 37 veces superior al promedio de los 20 países más pobres y esto no es lo peor, lo peor es que se ha duplicado la cifra en los últimos 40 años, es decir, que los pobres se empobrecen³. En términos de consumo la cosa es aún más fuerte, pues 4,5 mil millones de personas en los países subdesarrollados consumen solamente el 14% de todo lo que se produce en el mundo.

La distancia que separa a los ricos de los pobres crece día a día más, como dicen los documentos de la Iglesia. Ya en 1979 los obispos reunidos en Puebla, México decían que la brecha que separa los ricos de los pobres es una afrenta para los cristianos⁴. Esta brecha ha crecido significativamente, y si bien hay algunos avances importantes en la macroeconomía para ciertos sectores; las inmensas mayorías de nuestro planeta están, desgraciadamente, peor.

Solamente en México en los tres años de Vicente FOX como presidente han aumentado 2 millones de pobres – ahora hay más de 54 millones de pobres en el país. Es difícil imaginar que 350 personas, las más ricas del mundo, posean una riqueza igual a la de 2,6 mil millones de personas (más del 40% de la población mundial). Esto ofende la imaginación simplemente.

Detrás de los países ricos y de las instituciones financieras internacionales están las corporaciones que están diseñando prácticamente la política económica del mundo y que lo hacen en su propio beneficio. Estos diseños se materializan en mi continente con los diferentes planes y proyectos económicos como son el Tratado de Libre Comercio de América del Norte (TLACAN), el Acuerdo de Libre Comercio de las Américas (ALCA), el Plan Puebla Panamá (PPP), entre otros.

Esta tendencia ciertamente afectará el futuro y de hecho ya lo está marcando. La concentración de patentes en los ricos generará a mediano plazo la dependencia total de los pobres, no sólo en tecnología clásica sino también en la alimentación. Hoy el 97% de todas las patentes mundiales están en manos de las grandes compañías multinacionales.

1 El criterio mundial de pobreza extrema.

2 Antes del mayo del 2004.

3 "The distribution of wealth is "extraordinarily unequal" with the average income in the richest 20 countries 37 times higher than the average in the poorest 20 – a gap that has doubled in the past 40 years. The report calls for international action to improve the prospects for poor countries and their people. Initiatives such as debt relief, expanding developing countries' access to markets and closing the digital and knowledge divides are recommended." Conferencia de prensa del 12 de septiembre del 2000.

4 CELAM, III Conferencia Episcopal Latinoamericana. 1979.

De las 100 más grandes economías del mundo, 51 son corporaciones y 49 países¹. Las ventas corporativas por ejemplo de General Motors el año 2001 fue más grande que el Producto Interno Bruto (Gross Domestic Product) de Dinamarca; las ventas de Wall-Mart fueron más grandes que el PBI de Noruega y las de General Electric mayor que el PBI de Portugal.

Las ventas combinadas de las 200 corporaciones más grandes del mundo significaron 28 % de la actividad económica global el año 2000 y solamente emplean al 0,78 % de la fuerza de trabajo.

Y si seguimos vemos que las 500 corporaciones mayores del mundo manejaron el equivalente al 47% de producto mundial bruto (Gross Mundial Product) y solamente ofrecieron trabajo al 1.59% de toda la fuerza mundial de trabajo. No hablemos ya de la deuda mundial y de la prisión que esto significa para los países endeudados y sus poblaciones, pues Ustedes bien lo conocen.

Un Aterrizaje

Miles de gentes en todo el mundo están soñando en la construcción de otro mundo. El Amor, la Compasión y la Verdad tienen su concreción en estrategias y tácticas más cercanas al hacer. Requieren ciertamente del humor y de visión de futuro (esperanza o soñar futuro).

En México se empieza a concretar amplios frentes para soñar juntos, crear un nuevo proyecto de nación y dar las batallas contra el neoliberalismo y contra el imperialismo. Estos frentes en México están compuestos por sindicatos, agrupaciones campesinas, federaciones de pequeños productores, miembros de organizaciones civiles, y tienen un espacio de convergencia en la Promotora por la unidad Nacional Contra el Neoliberalismo.

En junio 2004 se encontrarán como congreso miembros representantes de esta promotora para establecer y definir sus estrategias y sus tácticas de acción para llevar a cabo el objetivo que la convoca². Este fenómeno empieza a cundir en muchas partes del mundo. En Brasil hace unos días se reunieron miembros de la gran organización Vía Campesina para fortalecer sus acciones y fijar sus posturas ante los organismos internacionales como la FAO y la ONU.

Hoy la acción coordinada, articulada en frentes de acción, manteniendo las autonomías de cada organización y grupo son las señas de las nuevas semillas hacia el futuro. Las cristianas y los cristianos están ahí siendo fermento de futuro.

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1 ANDERSON S. y CAVANAGH J., *Top 200, The Rise of Corporate Global Power*. Institute for Policy Studies, USA, 4 December 2000.

2 Cf. Anexo I

Pablo ROMO CEDANO: Réflexions Théologiques et Contexte

Actuel

Comment croire en Dieu après la guerre? Cet article fait une analyse d'ensemble de la période couvrant la pensée moderne jusqu'à la postmodernité. La perte du sens et le phénomène de la pluralité ont généré de façon simultanée, des options contradictoires et autodestructive. Le système néolibéral a établi le marché comme le nouveau dieu des nations, et ses règles sont des dogmes de vie. En face de cela, la quête pour le vrai Dieu reste. Le critère de base pour trouver la présence du Dieu authentique est l'amour et la vérité. La compassion pour les victimes est le cheminement herméneutique. Le témoignage dynamique et concret des chrétiens est le ferment et la semence du futur pour une société différente. Cela et réel et existe.

Pablo ROMO CEDANO: Theological Rationales and Actual

Context

How can we believe in God after war? The article overviews the period, which covers modern thought until postmodernism. The loss of sense and the phenomenon of plurality have generated simultaneous, contradictory and self-destructive options. The neoliberal system has set up the market as the new god of nations, and its rules are the dogmas of life. In the face of that, the search for the true God remains. The basic criteria to find the presence of the authentic God are love and truth. Compassion to victims is the hermeneutic path. The concrete and dynamic testimony of Christians is the ferment and seed of the future for a different society. It is real and it does exist.



Adam A. J. DEVILLE

On the Healing of Memories: An Analysis of the Concept in Papal Documents

Among the many new and often startling initiatives of the recently deceased Pope JOHN PAUL II, there is one phrase that, arguably more than any other, sums up so many of the hopes and goals of his pontificate: the “*healing and purification of memory*.” As the distinguished theologian Bruno FORTE has argued, “John Paul II’s ... own contribution to a ‘purification of memory’ ... [is] an undeniable novelty.”¹

This phrase, *healing and purification of memories*, occurs many times (and not without controversy²) in papal and magisterial documents of various types, but there has not yet been any systematic analysis of the way it has been used or a critical appraisal of that usage.

This phrase is a slogan in need of content, especially a psychological and practical-pastoral content. It is a plan of action, whose action is not plain in the plan; it is a concept with clear psychotherapeutic roots³ parachuted into another context—that of ecumenical relations—without the necessary adaptations or emendations.

This laudable concept and richly suggestive phrase, in other words, requires more thinking and elaboration so that it can function effectively in ecumenical relations and achieve the goal of reconciliation toward which it strains.

So, in the first part, we undertake a systematic and comprehensive search of the various major documents⁴ of this pontificate—some written by Pope JOHN PAUL II himself, others written by the various dicasteries of the Roman Curia⁵—to discover

1 FORTE Bruno, *The Church Confronts the Faults of the Past*. *Communio* 2000/27. 677.

2 GLENDON Mary Ann, *Conitron in the Age of Spin Control*. *First Things* 1997/77. 10–12.

3 GARZON Fernando – BURKETT Lori, *Healing of Memories: Models, Research, Future Directions*. *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 2002/21. 42–49.; LINN Matthew – LINN Dennis, *Healing of Memories*. New Jersey, 1974.; LINN Matthew et al., *Healing of Memories: Prayer and Confession*. New York, 1974.; SEAMAND David, *Healing of Memories*. Wheaton, 1985.; JONES L. Gregory, *Healing the Wounds of Memory: Theology and Psychology on Salvation and Sin*. In *Care for the Soul*. Downers Grove, 2001. 241–253.; JONES L. Gregory, *Healing the Wounds of Memory: The Dynamics of Remembering and Forgetting*. *Journal-of-Theology* 1999/103. 35–51. .

4 PALAZZINE Pietro (ed.), *Dictionary of Moral Theology*. Westminster, 1962.; MORRISEY Francis, *Papal and Curial Pronouncements: Their Canonical Significance in Light of the Code of Canon Law*. Ottawa, 1995.

5 *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches: Latin-English Edition*. Washington, 2001.

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the use, context, and apparent meaning of the (interchangeable) phrases “healing and purification of memories.”

This first and largest part is descriptive and documentary, demonstrating the history and various usages of this phrase as it has entered the lexicon of the Roman Catholic Church over the past quarter-century.

In the second, more critical and analytical part, we suggest the inadequacies of the way the phrase has been used so far in light of some of the relevant psychological literature on the “mechanics” and process of healing of memory.

In a short and integrating third part, we extrapolate from this individual-clinical setting to a wider ecclesial context, tying everything together with a few modest suggestions for practical and liturgical applications in an ecumenical setting, with special reference to Orthodox–Roman Catholic *rapprochement*—that dialogue which has had pride of place in JOHN PAUL’s ecumenical hopes.¹

I. Papal Documents Examined

Pope JOHN PAUL II has made frequent use of his trips around the world in the last quarter-century to ask forgiveness of many people as a necessary concomitant and precursor to the process of purifying and healing the memories of various people and ecclesial communities.²

According to the historian Albert MONTICONE, “In this request for forgiveness we have the ultimate key to the travels of John Paul II.”³ Toward the middle of the 1990s, the papal gaze was firmly fixed on what the Roman Catholic Church celebrated as the Great Jubilee of 2000.

So, the use of the phrase “purification and healing of memory” began to occur much more frequently in papal discourses in a variety of contexts and aimed at a wide array of people (fellow Roman Catholics, other Christians, and the world at large).

The very first instance of this phrase occurs in an ecumenical context and comes not long after JOHN PAUL became the bishop of Rome. According to Luigi ACCATTOLI, the “first formulation” of this phrase was given in an ecumenical gathering in Paris in May 1980.⁴

The phrase “healing and purification of memories” begins to appear with great regularity between 1994 and 2001 in prominent documents of the pope and Roman Curia. In ACCATTOLI’s words, “With the passing years, the concept of a ‘purification of memory’ has become a fundamental password in the pontificate of John Paul II.”⁵

The first major reflection on the process of asking forgiveness and purifying memories comes in *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, issued 10 November 1994. This document was intended as a roadmap toward the Great Jubilee of 2000.⁶

1 JOHN PAUL II, *Ut Unum Sint*. Rome, 1995.

2 ACCATTOLI Luigi, *When a Pope Asks Forgiveness: The Mea Culpas of John Paul II*. Boston, 1995.

3 *Ibid.*, xxiii.

4 “First and foremost, and in the dynamics of the movement toward unity, our personal and community memory must be *purified of the memory* of all the conflicts, injustice and hatred of the past. This purification is carried out through mutual forgiveness, from the depths of our hearts, which is the condition of the blossoming of real brotherly charity.” JOHN PAUL II, *Meeting with the Leaders of other Christian Communities*. Paris, 31 May 1980.

5 *Ibid.*

6 “The Holy Door of the Jubilee of the Year 2000 should be symbolically wider than those of previous Jubilees because humanity,

In early May 1995, the Pope issued *Orientalis Lumen*, a remarkable document on the Roman Catholic Church's relationship to the Orthodox churches. Curiously, it does not treat the topic of healing of memories, but does have an entire section entitled "Between Memory and Expectation," which insists that Christians "must show people the beauty of memory, the power that comes to us from the Spirit and makes us witnesses."¹

Three weeks later the Pope issued his encyclical *Ut Unum Sint*, a landmark document on Christian unity. Right at the outset, he calls for a "commitment to ecumenism ... based upon the conversion of hearts and upon prayer, which will also lead to the *necessary purification of past memories*."²

Later on, the pope notes that the 1965 lifting of Orthodox–Roman Catholic excommunications "removed from memory and from the midst of the Church" this painful episode through a "solemn act which was at once a healing of historical memories, a mutual forgiveness, and a firm commitment to strive for communion."³

With his eye now firmly fixed on the Jubilee, and determined to lead the Church through it, this phrase would often be on the pope's lips throughout the late '90s and especially through the millennial celebrations.⁴

In late 1996, in anticipation of the 30th World Day of Peace on 1 January 1997, JOHN PAUL would issue a fulsome message aimed at the global community on the role of forgiveness and reconciliation in the task of building a world of justice and peace. Rather than simply repeating the slogan this time, he amplifies the meaning somewhat.⁵

Such a liberty of forgiveness is "fraught with difficulties," but nonetheless "can be experienced even by a wounded heart, thanks to the healing power of love, which has its first source in God, Who is Love."⁶

By 1998, JOHN PAUL had put the Church into high gear in anticipation of the Jubilee of 2000. In the bull by which he set forth the program for the Jubilee, he gave pride of place to forgiveness and purification of memory.⁷

As he enumerated the traditional hallmarks of a jubilee year, he noted that there is "first of all, the sign of the *purification of memory*; this calls everyone to make an act of courage and humility in recognizing the wrongs done by those who have borne or bear the name of Christian."⁸

1999 would be, of course, the eve of the Great Jubilee and there was an enormous effort expended to prepare the Church. This is nowhere more evident than in the lengthy, very

upon reaching this goal, will leave behind not just a century but a millennium. It is fitting that the Church should make this passage with a clear awareness of what has happened to her during the last ten centuries. She cannot cross the threshold of the new millennium without *encouraging her children to purify themselves*, through repentance, of past errors and instances of infidelity, inconsistency, and slowness to act." TMA. 33.

1 OL. 8.

2 *Ut Unum Sint*. 2.

3 *Ut Unum Sint*. 52. TAFT Robert, *The Problem of 'Uniatism' and the 'Healing of Memories': Anamnesis, not Amnesia*. Logos: A Journal of Eastern Christian Studies, 2000–2001/41–42. 155–196.

4 "May the perspective of the forthcoming Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 bring about in everyone an attitude of humility, capable of effecting "the necessary purification of past memories" through prayer and conversion of heart, so as to help people to ask and give mutual forgiveness for the misunderstandings of centuries past." *Apostolic Letter for the 350th Anniversary of the Union of Uzhorod*. 18 April 1996. 5.

5 In order not to remain a "prisoner of the past," he insists that "individuals and peoples need a sort of 'healing of memories,' so that past evils will not come back again. This does not mean forgetting past events; it means re-examining them with a new attitude and learning precisely from the experience of suffering. ... The deadly cycle of revenge must be replaced by the new-found liberty of forgiveness." 8 December 1996.

6 *Ibid.*, 5.

7 *Incarnatio Mysteriorum. Bull of Indiction of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000*.

8 *Ibid.*, 11.

carefully prepared document, “Memory and Reconciliation: The Church and the Faults of the Past,” issued in December 1999 by the International Theological Commission.

This highly unusual document—it bears no printed papal permission for publication, it lacks a cardinalatial signature, and it has no dicasterial “home” within the Curia that would give it some standing as an authoritative document, being issued instead by the Commission, an extraneous body loosely attached to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith—was based on two years of work and study by the Commission.

They sought to provide a comprehensive treatment of the topics of memory and forgiveness, reconciliation and healing, and historicity and truthfulness, together with considerable sensitivity to the complex hermeneutic questions the entire process evoked.¹

Thus does the document review Scripture and Tradition before admitting that “in the entire history of the Church there are no precedents for requests for forgiveness by the Magisterium for past wrongs”² and that JOHN PAUL II’s appeal to the Church for this process of forgiveness and purification does “not find an exact parallel in the Bible.”³

Given these lacunæ in the tradition, then, the Commission was extremely conscious of the sheer newness of what was being proposed, proceeding therefore with great caution. Early in the document, the Commission sets basic parameters for the purification, one negative and one positive.

Positively, it notes that “every act of ‘purification of memory’ undertaken by believers ... is [for] the glorification of God,”⁴ while negatively it insists that the “purification of memory can never mean that the Church ceases to proclaim the revealed truth that has been entrusted to her.”⁵

With these general claims out of the way, the document becomes progressively more specific⁶: “the entire process of purification of memory ... needs to be lived by the Church’s daughters and sons not only with the rigor that takes account of the criteria and principles indicated above, but is also accompanied by a continual calling upon the help of the Holy Spirit.”⁷

This calling on the Holy Spirit for help in the purification of memories finally took on much fuller shape in the Great Jubilee of 2000. Notwithstanding controversy from within the Church (from those who thought such an act would undermine confidence in the Church’s authority) and from without, the Pope celebrated a “day of pardon” on the first Sunday of Lent, 12 March 2000.

Its central feature was a Eucharistic liturgy in the Vatican basilica during which a series of petitions for forgiveness from God for various sins committed by Roman Catholics throughout the ages was offered. This act was preceded by a lengthy rationale put out by the Office of Papal Liturgical Celebrations.⁸

1 In a very unusual and therefore striking move for Vatican documents—whose sources are almost always confined to Biblical, patristic, or other magisterial documents—the notes of the document confess an extensive indebtedness to two of the masters in the field of hermeneutics, Bernard LONERGAN (*Method in Theology*) and Hans-Georg GADAMER (*Truth and Method*).

2 *MR.* 1.1.

3 *MR.* 2.4.

4 *MR.* Introduction.

5 *MR.* 1.4.

6 “Purifying the memory means eliminating from personal and collective conscience all forms of resentment or violence left by the inheritance of the past, on the basis of a new and rigorous historical-theological judgment, which becomes the foundation for a renewed way of acting. ... The memory of division and opposition is purified and substituted by a reconciled memory, to which everyone in the Church is invited to be open and to become educated.” *MR.* 5.1.

7 *Ibid.*

8 “By placing the highpoint of the confession of sins within the context of the liturgy, Pope John Paul II wishes to demonstrate that

At the end of the liturgy, the Pope asked “that the purification of memory and the request for forgiveness be translated into a commitment of renewed fidelity to the Gospel on the part of the Church and of each of her members.”¹

Then the Pope preached and again—but only in passing—mentioned that a highpoint of the Jubilee “is what I described as the ‘purification of memory.’”² Later on he would suggest that the Church must be purified not only of the faults she has inflicted on others, but of the memory of those sins and persecution she has herself suffered.³

In the lead-up to the Jubilee, the focus was clearly on the members of the Roman Catholic Church repenting of their own sins, but once the Jubilee had come and gone, the focus again turned more outward, and in the following three years the use of the phrase “healing and purification of memory” was used exclusively in an ecumenical or global context.

The Pope issued an apostolic letter in May on the third centenary of the union of the Greek Catholic Church with the Church of Rome. The letter contained an entire section entitled “Revisiting the Past: The Purification of Memory,”⁴ but did not elaborate on how this should be done.

In January 2001, as the Great Jubilee was coming to a formal close, another letter was issued, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, with two short paragraphs reflecting again on the purification of memory. It sounded a note of nostalgia for the year that was now over and even suggested that the desired purification was over and done with, the mission accomplished.⁵

In May of the following year, Pope JOHN PAUL made one of his most controversial trips that nonetheless provided for a dramatic opportunity to ask forgiveness and seek to begin to purify memories.

He arrived in Athens, Greece, in early May after much protest, including some dramatic scenes of Orthodox clerics in the streets. The protests lasted up to the very moment the Pope set foot on Greek soil. And then he asked for forgiveness.⁶

This fulsome statement, as eloquent in diction as it was dramatic in delivery, had an immediately palpable effect on Greece and her Orthodox citizens, profoundly altering the entire tenor of the visit.

this act has its own inner meaning and aims at the purification of memory and at reconciliation between Christians and between the Church and humanity. Confessing the historical sins of Christians is not, however, aimed solely at the purification of memory: it is also meant to be an occasion for a change.” *First Sunday of Lent ‘Day of Pardon’ Presentation*. 12 March 2000. I.7.

1 Ibid., II.5.

2 *Homily of the Holy Father ‘Day of Pardon’*. 12 March 2000. 3.

3 “The Church today feels and has always felt obliged to purify her memory of those sad events from every feeling of rancour or revenge.” Ibid., 4.

4 *Apostolic Letter of the Holy Father John Paul II for the Third Centenary of the Union of the Greek Catholic Church of Romania with the Church of Rome*. 9f. 7 May 2000.

5 “How could we forget the moving *Liturgy of 12 March 2000* in Saint Peter’s Basilica, at which, looking upon our Crucified Lord, I asked forgiveness in the name of the Church for the sins of all her children? This “purification of memory” has strengthened our steps for the journey towards the future and has made us more humble and vigilant in our acceptance of the Gospel.” *NMI*. 6.

6 “Certainly, we are burdened by past and present controversies and by enduring misunderstandings. But in a spirit of mutual charity these can and must be overcome, for that is what the Lord asks of us. Clearly there is a need for a liberating process of *purification of memory*. For the occasions past and present, when sons and daughters of the Catholic Church have sinned by action or omission against their Orthodox sisters and brothers, may the Lord grant us the forgiveness we beg of the Lord. Some memories are especially painful, and some events of the distant past have left deep wounds in the minds and hearts of people to this day. I am thinking of the disastrous sack of the imperial city of Constantinople, which was for so long the bastion of Christianity in the East. It is tragic that the assailants, who had set out to secure free access for Christians to the Holy Land, turned against their own brothers in the faith. The fact that they were Latin Christians fills Catholics with deep regret. How can we fail to see here the *mysterium iniquitatis* at work in the human heart? To God alone belongs judgement, and therefore we entrust the heavy burden of the past to God’s endless mercy, imploring God to heal the wounds which still cause suffering to the spirit of the Greek people. Together we must work for this healing if the Europe now emerging is to be true to her identity, which is inseparable from the Christian humanism shared by East and West.” *Address of John Paul II to His Beatitude Christodoulos, Archbishop of Athens and Primate of Greece*. 4 May 2001.

The Pope, however, was not content to leave it there. Driving home the point later that very same day to the Roman Catholic bishops in Greece, he offered a more extended theological reflection on memory, calling it “too lofty and noble a sanctuary to be defiled by human sin.”

Recognizing that memory can be damaged by sin, the pope insisted that sin “cannot tear it asunder” and that whenever sin does strain the fabric, we must “spare no effort in making it possible for memory once again to illuminate the great things God has done for us” until at last “on high, memory gives way to fullness, and there are no more tears, nor death, because the former things have passed away.”¹

The task of asking and receiving healing for memories would continue throughout 2001, even finding applicability in a political context at the UN Durban conference on racism.²

Three weeks later in an ecumenical pilgrimage, Pope JOHN PAUL would introduce a unique note into this by now frequent refrain. While at an ecumenical service in the Cathedral of St. Gregory the Illuminator in Yerevan, Armenia, he would, for the first time, allude to the fact that the phrase in question was not uniquely his own.³

From the end of 2001 until late in 2003, the Pope would again turn to political questions. In a diplomatic address to the newly appointed ambassador of Turkey to the Holy See, JOHN PAUL again used this phrase.⁴

In the middle of 2003, on a second trip to Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Pope addressed himself not only to Roman Catholics in his opening address but also to “our sisters and brothers of the Serbian Orthodox Church and of the other Ecclesial Communities, and the followers of Islam and Judaism.”

He then went on to recognize the “long ordeal which you have endured, the burden of suffering which is daily a part of your lives,” but called the people not to despair or to seek revenge.⁵ The Pope again returned to this phrase in the autumn of 2003.⁶

On the 40th anniversary of the promulgation of the revolutionary conciliar decree, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, Pope JOHN PAUL, at Vespers, spoke in particular about “spiritual ecumenism” and emphasized that there “is no true ecumenism without inner conversion and the purification of memory, without holiness of life in conformity with the Gospel, and above all, without intense and assiduous prayer that echoes the prayer of Jesus.”⁷

1 *Address of John Paul II to the Catholic Bishops of Greece*, 4 May 2001.

2 “One cannot remain a prisoner of the past: individuals and peoples need a sort of ‘healing of memories.’” “Evidently there can be no such healing without a vigorous recognition of the truth of historical realities. The healing of memory requires that we honestly appraise our personal, community and national history and admit those less noble aspects which have contributed to the marginalization of today.” 3 September 2001.

3 “In his letter to the Byzantine Emperor, Nersès ŠNORHALI set out principles of ecumenical dialogue, which have lost none of their relevance. Among his many insights, he insists that “there is a need for the *healing of memories* in order to overcome past resentments and prejudices. ... The insights of the great Armenian Doctor are the fruit of remarkable pastoral wisdom, and I make them my own among you today.” *Homily of Pope John Paul II*, 26 September 2001.

4 “During the last millennium relations between Turkey and the Holy See were not always untroubled. Happily, the twentieth century saw fresh attempts to build a constructive relationship, based upon the trust and respect which at times require what I have called a *healing of memories*. The need for such healing is everywhere evident, for in so many parts of the world we see that wounds of past grievances continue to fester from generation to generation.” *Address of the Holy Father to the New Ambassador of Turkey to the Holy See*.

5 “If society is to take on a truly human face and everyone is to look to the future with confidence, it is necessary to rebuild humanity from within, healing wounds and achieving a genuine purification of memory through mutual forgiveness. The root of every good and, sadly, of every evil is in the depths of the heart (Mk 7,21–23). It is there that change must occur, making it possible to renew the fabric of society and to establish human relationships which favour cooperation between the vital forces present in the country.” *Address of the Holy Father at the Welcome Ceremony*, 22 June 2003, Banja Luka.

6 . See the news story *Peace Calls for Purification of Memory, John Paul II Says. Urges Historians to Adhere to Truth in Research*, Zenit, 31 October 2003.

7 *Homily of the Holy Father on the Occasion of the 40th Anniversary of the Promulgation of the Conciliar Decree “Unitatis Redintegratio.”*

At the end of the month, on the occasion of the second visit in six months of the Ecumenical Patriarch, Bartholomew I, to Rome, Pope JOHN PAUL referred to it as he handed over relics of Sts. Gregory Nazianzen and John Chrysostom.¹

II. A Critical Analysis

As we have seen, for nearly a quarter of a century Pope JOHN PAUL has called on Christians and others of good will to purify their memories of past sins they have committed or endured.

This phrase has been used in a variety of contexts around the world, addressed to Roman Catholics, to other Christians, and to the global community at large. For JOHN PAUL, the purification of memories was an inescapable step along the Church's path today.

It is necessary not only for the Church's internal integrity of mission, but also as a necessary component of ecumenical reconciliation. These repeated calls, both for forgiveness and purification, have sounded the right note.

We must not begrudge the considerable credit that is due to JOHN PAUL for such sensitivity to the signs of the times.² There are, however, two problems with his approach that need to be addressed in order for the laudable goal of Pope JOHN PAUL to be more fully and fruitfully realized in the years ahead.

First, it has remained largely an idea or a slogan without significant and demonstrable effect upon the vast majority of Roman Catholics—to say nothing of other Christians and, indeed, of everyone else in the world.

The papal phrase, in other words, has remained too academic and too insufficiently substantialized in the life of Christians around the world. It is an abstraction.³ Such a daily reawakening and healing has not happened yet.

Of course, the pope cannot be held responsible for the education of every single member of the nearly billion-strong Roman Catholic Church throughout the world. Notwithstanding his enormous and unprecedented evangelical efforts and widespread global travels, it is inevitable that the works of one person can only go so far.

It may well be that we simply need more time for these calls to sink in and bear fruit. Even if every single Roman Catholic and others in the world heard the phrase, the problem of its *enactment* remains.

The second criticism is that the requested purification of memories has not happened very much because it *cannot* happen in the way that it is presumably envisaged. The entire concept has been borrowed by the pope from the context of individual psychotherapeutic work and transplanted into the widest possible public arenas of intra-ecclesiastical, ecumenical, and even geopolitical relations.

In so doing, the phrase is made to bear burdens it was not meant to bear and quite

1 "In the transferral of such holy relics we find a blessed occasion to *purify our wounded memories* in order to strengthen our journey of reconciliation, to confirm that the faith of these Holy Doctors is the faith of the Churches of East and West." *Letter of John Paul II to the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, His Holiness Bartholomew I at the Ecumenical Celebration on the Occasion of the Transferral from Rome to Constantinople of the Relics of Sts. Gregory of Nazianzen and John Chrysostom.*

2 "The 'examination of conscience at the end of the millennium,' proposed by Pope John Paul II, is the mature fruit of his pontificate and his most dynamic heritage. It is of great cultural interest as well and, for that reason, ought to be well received by those outside the Church." ACCATTOLI, xvi.

3 "The collective purification of memory *has to descend to the level of a daily, pedagogical wisdom.* It must awaken in all of us the desire to revisit the history of our own life ... not to stir up bitterness and guilt but, at long last, to be healed of them under the merciful hand of God." SICARI Antonio Maria, *The Purification of Memory: The 'Narrow Gate' of the Jubilee.* Communio 2000/27. 642.

simply cannot bear. There need to be mechanisms in place to allow this healing to take place and yet there are not. This lack of structures and practical means for bringing about the healing of memories has recently been helpfully addressed by the international Mennonite-Catholic dialogue, to which we turn now.

I. The Roman Catholic–Mennonite Dialogue

In their recent statement, “Called Together to be Peacemakers,” we are given a plan of action that can help us move forward, a program that can help turn the concept of “healing of memories” into a concrete reality, moving it from the realm of academic-ecumenical abstraction to pastoral-psychological application.

This statement enumerates seven major, practical ways in which the healing of memories can take place. The first three we may call the “spiritual-psychological”; the next important practice we may call the “scholarly”; then the “liturgical”; then “common service” and finally the simply “human.”

The first three practices, necessarily first, involve spiritual renewal and psychological healing.¹ Having undertaken to live a spirit of repentance as the first step, the dialogue next recommends that we not allow our memories to concentrate exclusively on what we have done wrong or what continues to divide us, but on what we have in common.²

Moreover, our study and dialogue on what unites us should also allow us to consider how we may do history together³ in order to live our future together.⁴ Our study and healing must all take place in, and lead us toward, greater prayer in common.

Prayer has been recognized on all sides as the very soul of the ecumenical movement. For this reason, a further practical step recommended by the dialogue includes joint prayer and liturgical sharing.⁵

The dialogue also recommends very practical and concrete ways of allowing both communities to grow together,⁶ including “joint study and cooperative service ... peace and justice initiatives, some programs of faith formation among our respective members, and ‘get acquainted’ visits between Catholic and Mennonite communities, locally and more widely.”⁷

1 “The healing of memories involves several aspects. It requires a purification of memories so that both groups can share a picture of the past that is historically accurate. This calls for a spirit of repentance—a penitential spirit—on both sides for the harm that the conflicts have done to the body of Christ, to the proclamation of the Gospel, and to one another. Healing the memories of divided Christians also entails the recognition that, despite conflict, and though still separated, they continue to hold in common much of the Christian faith. In this sense they remain linked to one another. Moreover, a healing of memories involves the openness to move beyond the isolation of the past, and to consider concrete steps toward new relations.” *Called Together to Be Peacemakers*. §191.

2 “While recognizing that we hold basic convictions of faith in common, we have also identified significant differences that continue to divide us and thus require further dialogue. Nonetheless, and although we are not in full unity with one another, the substantial amount of the Apostolic faith which we realize today that we share, allows us as members of the Catholic and Mennonite delegations to see one another as sisters and brothers in Christ.” *Called Together to Be Peacemakers*. §210.

3 “The healing of memories requires ... facing those difficult events of the past that give rise to divergent interpretations of what happened and why. Past events and their circumstances need to be reconstructed as precisely as possible. We need to understand the mentalities, the conditions, and the living dynamics in which these events took place.” *Called Together to Be Peacemakers*. §192.

4 “Theological dialogue can contribute to healing of memories by assisting the dialogue partners to ascertain the degree to which they have continued to share the Christian faith despite centuries of separation.” *Ibid*. §207.

5 “Catholics and Mennonites are convinced that the first responsibility of a Christian is the praise of God and that all aspects of Christian life must be rooted in prayer. Therefore in the course of the five years of this dialogue, we started and ended each day with prayer together. Together we read and reflected on the Scriptures and sang hymns. Each year we worshipped in each other’s churches on Sunday in order to deepen mutual understanding.” *Called Together to Be Peacemakers*. §208.

6 “We believe that another fundamental part of the healing of memories is the call to foster new relationships. ... Can we not increase our efforts to create new relationships today, so that future generations may look back to the twenty-first century with positive memories of a time in which Mennonites and Catholics began increasingly to serve Christ together?” *Ibid*. §211.

7 *Ibid*. §214.

Conclusion

This essay has demonstrated two massive ecumenical debts: the first is owed to the late Pope JOHN PAUL II for placing so firmly and repeatedly on the ecumenical agenda the necessary work of the healing of memories.

The second is owed to the Roman Catholic–Mennonite Dialogue for taking the time to think through, and to come up with eminently practical ways of embodying, that initial papal call for the healing and purification of memories.

In Orthodox and Eastern Catholic Churches of the East Slavic tradition, it is common at services for the dead to sing “*Vichnya Pamjat*,” asking God that the deceased’s memory be eternal. There can surely be no better way to ensure that JOHN PAUL’s memory is indeed eternal than to persevere in the necessary work of healing our own memories of division and strife, and moving on to the full unity in the Body of Christ for which the late pope prayed and worked so hard. There is much work ahead of us, but with the help of the Spirit, we shall be sure to succeed.

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**Adam A. J. DEVILLE: La Guérison des Mémoires:
Une Analyse du Concept dans les Documents apaux à la Lumière de la
Psychothérapie Moderne des Récentes Déclarations Œcuméniques**

Cet article fait un résumé des différentes références à la «guérison ou purification des mémoires» qui a fonctionné comme un leitmotiv dans les rencontres et les écrits œcuméniques du défunt Pape Jean-Paul II. Il entreprend une analyse critique de ceux-ci et suggère que le concept est resté largement un slogan œcuménique ineffectif et n'a pas été mis en pratique de façon significative. L'auteur va plus loin et soutient que la façon avec laquelle le concept est évoqué dans les écrits papaux le rend incapable d'être mis en pratique sans dans des amendements significatifs. Ceci afin qu'un concept psychologique individualiste puisse être développé sur un plan ecclésiastique et concret par les communautés chrétiennes à travers le monde. Dans sa troisième et dernière partie, il suggère que de telles actions pratiques peuvent être entreprises suivant les suggestions du récent document du dialogue entre l'Église Catholique Romaine et les Mennonites au niveau international, sous le titre: «Appelés à être des Constructeurs de Paix ensemble».

**Adam A. J. DEVILLE: Sobre la Curación de las Memorias:
Un Análisis del Concepto en Documentos Papales a la Luz de la
Psicoterapia Moderna y las Recientes Declaraciones Ecuménicas**

El artículo resume en un solo lugar las variadas referencias a la “curación o purificación de las memorias” la cual funciona como un leitmotiv en los escritos ecuménicos y los encuentros del fallecido Papa Juan Pablo II. El artículo emprende un análisis crítico de ellos, y sugiere que este concepto de la curación de las memorias ha permanecido por largo tiempo como un slogan ecuménico ineficaz y no ha sido puesto en práctica significativamente. El artículo sugiere más adelante que la forma en que el concepto se invoca en escritos papales lo devuelve incapaz de ponerse en práctica sin una enmienda significativa para que lo que es por mucho un concepto psicológico individualista pueda practicarse concreta y eclesiásticamente por los fieles cristianos de todo el mundo. La tercera y parte concluyente del artículo sugiere que tal práctica concreta puede emprenderse siguiendo las propuestas del reciente documento del diálogo romano católico – menonita internacional “Llamados a Hacer la Paz Juntos”.

Cathy CHANG

How can a WCC Conference Create an Environment for Dialogue?

On May 9–16, 2005, I traveled to Athens, Greece, to attend the World Council of Churches (WCC) Conference on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME). This conference's theme was "Come, Holy Spirit, Heal and Reconcile! Called in Christ to be Reconciling and Healing Communities."

Creating an Environment for Dialogue

Our Presbyterian Church (USA) delegation also included Rev. Dr. Marian McCLURE, a commissioner with the Conference on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME); Bethany BORAK, Rev. Raafat GIRGIS, Rev. Unzu LEE, and Rev. Clint MCCOY.

In preparation for this conference, I met with Professor Darrell GUDER several days before the event. In our conversation, he asked me about my mission experience. I highlighted some of my short-term mission experience, mostly sponsored by parachurch organizations or denominations other than the PC(USA).

My experience as a young adult volunteer in Cairo, Egypt, in 2002 and 2003, was my first taste of "doing" mission in ecumenical partnership. I also told him about the opportunity to meet and dialogue with other "young missiologists" when I participated in a Young Missiologist Consultation in Rome, Italy, during January 2005.

An internal dialogue had already begun with me, as I was thinking about my diverse past mission experiences. On a grander scale, it seemed that this Conference on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) also wanted to create an environment of dialogue among Christians of various traditions.

My main question became, "How will the Conference on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) create an environment for such dialogue to occur?" Based on my insights and reflections about this consultation and conference, I will attempt to answer this question.

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Reality Check Among Missiologists

I partially answered this question as I thought about the Young Missiologist Consultation in Rome in 2005. This consultation was designed to invite young people to prepare for the Athens conference. We divided into different groups to discuss our ideas about pneumatology, the healing ministry in churches, reconciliation, and dialogue.

I joined the group that discussed *dialogue* in such forms as interdenominational and interreligious dialogue. Our group consisted of Greek Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox, Presbyterian, Reformed, Evangelical–Lutheran and Pentecostal participants. As much as I appreciated the experience within my small group, I was also struck by my other colleagues' comments.

During the introduction of our consultation, I remember Stephen, a Nigerian pastor, shared his concerns about what it means to be a “young missiologist.” He expressed that a typical thirty-year-old from a developing country might not be at the same place in her or his education as someone from the Western world. In effect, some students might not have this opportunity to participate because they did not meet specific age criteria.

Some colleagues also made pointed statements during the closing remarks of our consultation. These comments provided me with a good “reality check” on the challenges of ecumenism. Marcos, a pastor from Peru, talked about the difficulties of expressing himself in English and not feeling free to speak his mind in Spanish.

Peter, a U.S. seminarian, observed that there were five United States Presbyterian participants but none from Africa, which has by far the strongest Presbyterian and Reformed presence. Ulrike, a German woman now teaching in Peru, was frustrated by the demographics of our consultation: we were not representative enough of the remarkable shift of Christianity away from the North.

Ecumenical Fellowship

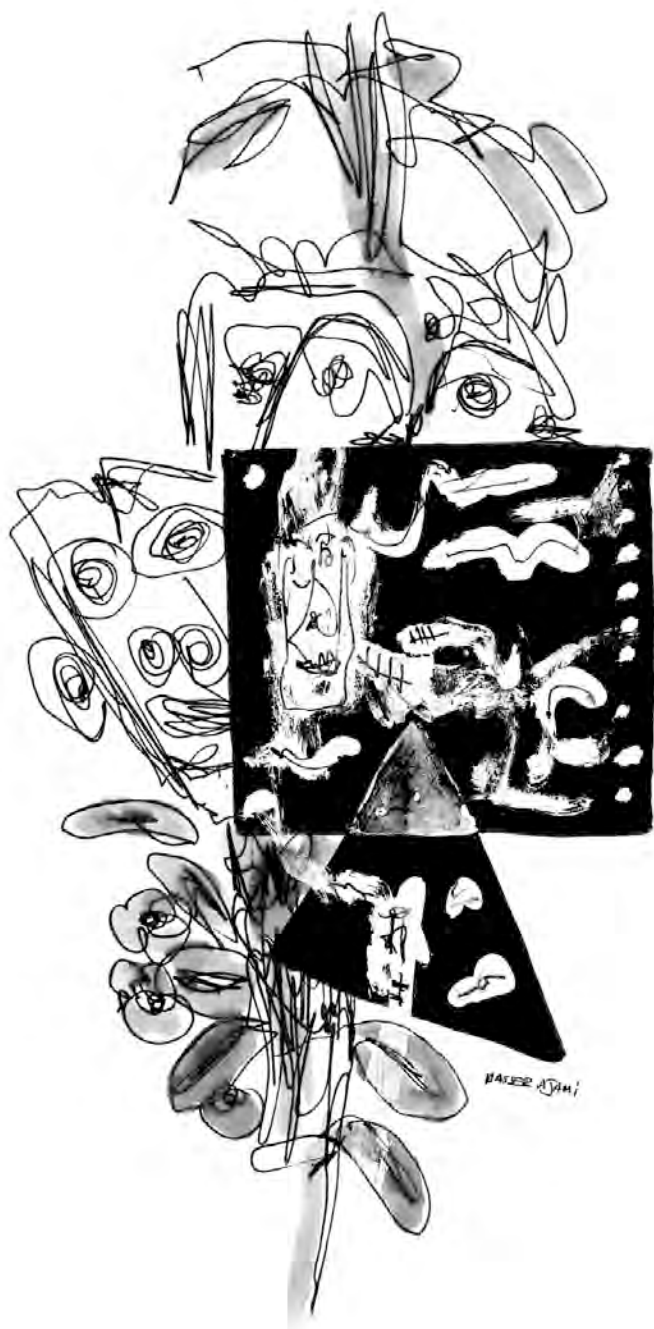
Attending this Young Missiologist Consultation in Rome had, in fact, prepared me for this Conference on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME). As much as I felt prepared, I sensed that I would experience and observe even greater joys, insights, and challenges of ecumenism in Athens.

Some of these greater joys came in the form of ecumenical fellowship. Each morning after breakfast and at the close of each day, I led a home group. In the morning, we read together through Bible passages in the *Lectio Divina* style.

When we studied Ezekiel 37, I remember the words of Tobias, my Swiss German colleague who is a prison chaplain in Hong Kong. He talked about how this passage reminded him of “baai shan.” This prison jargon or colloquial expression for prison visit means to worship one's ancestors. He further explained: “It is the feeling that that the prison visitor is going to visit somebody who is already in the grave, a dead body.”

Another form of fellowship came in the opportunity to worship together in song. Different participants at the conference took their turns in worship leadership, so I learned songs in other languages and other liturgies.

We learned Pentecostal praise songs and even a Greek Orthodox liturgical hymn



proclaiming *Christos Anesti* (Greek for “Christ is Risen”). In addition to reading Scripture and singing together, there was plenty of opportunity to learn through the plenary speakers and Synæxis (Greek for “gathering of people,” oftentimes used as they gather around a selected theme or issue) discussions.

Listening and Healing

Each day focused on a theme such as “Come, Holy Spirit, Heal and Reconcile!”; “Called in Christ to Be Healing and Reconciling Communities”; “Mission and Violence”; “Healing”; and “Reconciliation.”

At the conclusion of the conference, “listeners” presented their observations to all the conference participants. Interestingly enough, I also learned a lot from the listeners’ observations. Two of the listeners particularly caught my attention. Professor Nam-Soon KANG talked about the use of language as a means of power, especially when it is used in a Eurocentric and androcentric way.

Kwabena ASAMOAH-GYADU spoke directly about his African contextual reality, but also with a deep concern for the future of ecumenism. While discussing what it would be like to partake in Holy Communion across different Christian traditions, he exclaimed: “How can we eat secular food together and not take the Eucharist together?”

Challenges of Age and Representation

As much as I experienced the joys of ecumenical fellowship, there were also challenges and tensions at this conference. From the moment that I checked into the registration area, I knew something set me apart from the other conference participants. I was at least five years older than some of the stewards who had attended the Youth Conference before this conference. It also appeared that I was twenty years younger than the average age of a conference participant.

As I looked around at the other attendees, I saw many people who appeared to be more like my seminary professors or my denomination’s ecumenical and mission program administrators. In age I was closer to being youth delegate or steward. I longed for many more young adults who could consider themselves as *delegates* of a WCC member church or affiliated body.”

In our home group, I had hoped for more diversity, since initially our group consisted mostly of men from either North America or Western Europe. Eventually our group gained Janet, another woman from Canada, but we still were not representative at all of the conference participants.

Breakaway Protesters

Another source of tension came from outside of the confines of the retreat center. Since this conference was the first one to be hosted predominantly in an Orthodox context, I was interested to learn what kind of reaction that would cause. A few yards away from our worship tent, I saw and heard for myself what kind of reaction. After our conference kicked off, a “breakaway” faction of the Greek Orthodox church protested the conference.

Soon after we learned how to sing *Christos Anesti*, we participants also heard strains of the same liturgy at the protest. By the fourth day of our conference, our conference daily newspaper published the following statement: “The conference leadership entirely respects their right to hold different views, but also upholds the right of participants to peace and tolerance.”

It was interesting to observe the protest as well as the various reactions of conference participants. Some expressed the desire to worship together, while others ignored the protesters. Here we were at the conference, bringing together Christians of various traditions. I could not help but wonder what dialogue would look like if we had extended an invitation to dialogue with this “breakaway” faction.

Letter from Athens

One of the greater challenges became more apparent in the final plenary session of the conference. Designated writers presented a “Letter from Athens” that would be sent to the churches and respective bodies of the conference participants.

Unlike previous conferences, this letter of the designated writers replaced the statements of delegates from member churches of the WCC. After reading this letter, the conference participants volunteered their feedback about this letter.

During the whole week, the framework of this conference was conducive to listening to each other and dialoguing with one another. In the few hours remaining, we worked through some revisions of this letter. In a sense, we shifted gears from listening to one another, to ensuring that the letter sounded “just right.”

Factions formed between those who wished to work on something then and there, and those who wanted to defer the letter-writing to the CWME commissioners who were to meet for several days after this conference.

In the end, we deferred to the commissioners. As much as I appreciated the efforts of the designated excellent writers and commissioners to draft and revise our letter, I wished and sensed among other conference participants a need for a better framework in which to provide feedback for this letter.

For this unique learning opportunity to experience the joys and challenges of ecumenism, I am grateful for the opportunity to attend the World Council of Churches (WCC) Young Missiologist Consultation in Rome, Italy.

I am also thankful that I attended and participated in the Conference on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) in Athens, Greece. By allowing me to share some of my insights and observations, now I have written my own “Letter from Athens.”

Cathy CHANG: Comment est ce qu'une Conférence du COE peut elle Créer un Environnement pour le Dialogue?

Dans sa préparation pour sa première COE CME, l'auteur réfléchit sur son expérience dans une organisation dénominationnelle conservatrice, aussi bien que de son expérience issue du dialogue avec des collègues au cours de la consultation des jeunes Missiologues du COE. La question soulevée est: comment la CME créera un environnement pour le dialogue? En réponse à cette question, l'article peint quelques joies et défis de l'œcuménisme, comme perçu lors de la conférence missionnaire mondiale du COE tenu à Athènes, Grèce. Au delà des observations générales, quelques réactions et recommandations spécifiques sont formulées à propos de la conférence, et spécialement en réponse à les plénières de fin qui ont emmené l'auteur à questionner le cadre de travail dans lequel nous avons produit notre rapport final sous forme d'une lettre. D'autres critiques sont formulées au niveau de la participation des jeunes adultes, comme il apparaissait que la conférence était dirigée vers les professeurs et les administrateurs d'Eglises. Dans l'ensemble, cependant, l'auteur rapporte une expérience positive.

Cathy CHANG: ¿Cómo Puede una Conferencia CMI Crear un Ambiente para el Dialogo?

En la preparación para su primera CMI CWME, la autora reflexiona sobre sus experiencias la para-iglesia conservadora y las organizaciones sectarias, así como sobre su reciente experiencia de dialogo con colegas en una junta CMI missiologista. Se hace la pregunta: "¿Cómo puede el CWME crear un ambiente para el dialogo?" En respuesta a esta pregunta, el artículo muestra algunas alegrías y retos del ecumenismo, como percepción a través de la CMI CWME celebrada en Atenas, Grecia. Más allá de observaciones generales, se formulan algunas recomendaciones y reacciones específicas acerca de la conferencia, especialmente en respuesta a las sesiones plenarias finales, las cuales hicieron que la autora se cuestionara el marco en que hicimos el reporte final en forma de carta. Otra crítica a la participación de jóvenes adultos se eleva, cuando parece que la conferencia esa dirigida a profesores y administradores de iglesias. Sin embargo, por encima de todo, la autora refiere una experiencia positiva.

Lukas VISCHER

Human Rights and Sustainability: Two Conflicting Notions?

In 1998, the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was the occasion for some effusive oratory. One of the surviving “fathers” of the Declaration, Stéphane HESSEL, declared exultantly:

“The language of human rights is the language of the new century. [...] Today the general public is much more informed about how and where human rights are being violated in the world. And they feel responsible.”¹

The philosopher Norberto BOBBIO went even further, as he called “the increasing debate about human rights, which has finally extended to all the nations of the world, a signum prognosticum of the moral progress of humanity.”²

Notions in Conflict

Are such claims justified? Do human rights really point the way? Or has the time come to challenge the discourse on human rights, or at least the form it has taken today? To many people, even to ask the question seems like sacrilege, as for them the ideal of human rights is sacrosanct.

Yet the question cannot be avoided. Moreover, the Declaration of Human Rights is still only partially implemented and all kinds of tensions and contradictions have arisen in the process. There has been talk of an “unfinished revolution.”

At all events, yet more determined commitment to the realization of human rights is clearly needed. But the problem goes deeper. It is becoming increasingly apparent that the concept of human rights itself needs to be re-examined.

The question arises because of the environmental crisis. How do human rights and sustainability relate to one another? There has been a growing awareness that there are limits to human development on our planet.

More and more people have to live with the limited resources offered by nature. The quality of life of future generations is threatened. What does this imply for human rights? This is being heatedly debated.

1 HESSEL Stéphane, *Eine mächtige Lüge*. Die Zeit 1998/51. 18.

2 BOBBIO Norberto, *Die Verbesserung der Zukunft*. Die Zeit 1998/46. 18.

Some people believe that a new “generation” of human rights is called for and that the catalogue of rights should be extended to the natural world, expressly stating that all human beings have a right to a healthy environment. But is this a realistic proposition? Can the two concepts of human rights and sustainability be so easily combined?

The two concepts have different roots and serve different purposes. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is intended to create a social and political order guaranteeing the development of every individual human person and of humanity as a whole.

Starting with the rights of the individual, it sets out the basic prerequisites for a just social order. It is not immediately concerned with preserving the planet. The concept of sustainability has developed out of the disturbing awareness that human activity has sparked off an inexorable process of destruction.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is essentially more anthropocentric. The concept of sustainability sees the human being more in the wider perspective of God's creation. It seeks to define the conditions for human survival set within the realities of nature.

How can these two objectives be brought into line with one another? So far no satisfactory answer has been found to this question. What does the Church have to say about this contradiction? Though she has been involved in the human rights debate for many decades, she has to date said very little.

Even before it was officially founded, the World Council of Churches (WCC) played an important part in the drafting of the Universal Declaration, especially the terms of the article on freedom of thought, conscience and religion.¹

Since then the churches, including the Roman Catholic church (even if only from the Second Vatican Council) have been increasingly involved in the defence of human rights. The WCC represents its member churches at the United Nations, notably at the sessions of the Commission on Human Rights.

The concept of human rights is declared to be a criterion of its public statements. At the same time, the Church is engaged in efforts to strengthen environmental awareness. The WCC was represented both at the Conference on the Environment in Stockholm in 1972 and at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, and has since been following the negotiations relating to climate change and biodiversity.

But no systematic reflection on the relation between human rights and sustainability has yet taken place in the Church either. Here, too, human rights and ecological imperatives are, on the whole, dealt with by separate groups.

So closely does the Church identify with the current discourse on human rights that, even here, there is little scope for critical debate. A good example of this one-sidedness is the statement issued by the World Council of Churches at its Eighth Assembly in Harare in 1998, which is simply a long list of demands supposedly aimed at refining and concretely defining the content of the human rights declaration.

Everything conceivable is mentioned, from globalization or the death penalty to the rights of women and indigenous peoples. Even the rights of future generations receive a passing mention. But there is not a word about the fact that the need for sustainability places all these demands in a new perspective.²

1 NOLDE O. Frederick, *Freedom of Religion and Related Rights*. In *The Church and the International Order*. Genève, 1948. 143ff.

2 KESSLER Diane (ed.), *Together on the Way. Official Report of the Eighth Assembly of the World Council of Churches*. Genève, 1999. 195–206.



نابلس - ٢٠١٤

I. Human Rights: A Plea for a Radical Reordering of Society

The initiative which led to the formulation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights came within a few months of the founding of the United Nations. Work on a text began in 1947 and, on 10 December 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted. The Declaration clearly bears the marks of World War II.

The UN was founded to create the framework for a more peaceful world after all the devastation that had taken place. The Preamble expressly states that the Declaration has been drawn up because “disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of humankind.”

In the new order, “It is essential, if humankind is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law.”

The Declaration is borne up by the hope that it will provide the basis for a strong and durable international order. The more the nations are guided by its principles, the better they will be able to resist arbitrary power and avoid the establishment of dictatorships.

The more human rights are recognized as a common standard, the better will be the safeguards of justice and peace. General respect for human rights is the necessary precondition to allow humanity to develop its full potential.

The Declaration primarily looks at the individual human person, who is to be recognized and protected in her or his particularity: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood” (art.1) and “Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person” (Art.3).

The individual person, however, is also seen as a member of society and, as such, is required to use the faculties of reason and conscience with which she or he is endowed in the service of humanity. So the Declaration states that society is to be so ordered that everyone be guaranteed “the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for her or his dignity and the free development of her or his personality” (Art. 22).

That means the right to social security, to work, free choice of employment, equal pay for equal work, rest and leisure, food, clothing, housing and medical care, education, participation in the cultural life of the community, and so on.

The Declaration is concerned also with the establishment of a society based on solidarity and participation. Individuals are to have the chance to use their creativity, but at the same time everyone is to benefit from the fruits of progress. The Declaration links the heritage of the XVIIIth century Enlightenment with that of the XIXth century Labour Movement.

Its aim is “to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom” (Preamble). Article 28 sums it up: “Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized (Art. 28).”

II. Sustainability

In the late 1960s, a second imperative emerged alongside human rights: sustainability. It had become increasingly clear, especially to scientists, that the Earth's resources were limited and that human beings had to respect those limits.

New movements like Greenpeace and WWF sprang up. This period also saw the start of efforts to have conservation of the environment included in national legislations. On the international political scene, the new awareness was expressed by the Conference on the Environment in Stockholm in 1972, which expressly spoke of the dangers threatening humankind's environment. To safeguard the future, new paths to "development" would have to be found.

In the '80s the term "sustainable development" increasingly became the keyword in public discussion.¹ In 1992, the delegates of the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro set out important principles for environmental policy. Two conventions (on climate change and biodiversity) were signed and submitted to governments.

A detailed programme for the next century was agreed, but ten years later, at the Johannesburg summit it was clear that the nations were no longer prepared to advance on the road indicated by Rio.

The prospect of a binding 'Universal Declaration' on sustainability proved unrealistic. Committed groups patiently continued work on two new texts, an Earth Charter and a Covenant on Environment and Development.

1. The Conditions for Sustainability

A. Limits to Carrying Capacity

Sustainability can only be achieved if human beings recognize the limits that are set for them in exploiting the resources of the Planet Earth.

Human activities, especially economic production, must not exceed the boundaries set by the biosystem. Resources must not be exploited to such an extent that they cannot be renewed or replaced by other resources.

Nature must not be placed under such strain that it is changed and damaged beyond repair. It is vital that the limits to the carrying capacity of the environment be identified, fixed and respected. A good illustration of this approach is the Framework Convention on Climate Change, adopted by the United Nations Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992.

In view of the destruction that the change in climatic conditions will provoke, the Convention attempts to find a common solution. In order to reduce dangerous emissions of greenhouse gases, e.g. carbon dioxide (CO₂), countries agreed to a carefully devised plan.

A complicated international structure has been set up to implement the common project. Similar efforts are now also being made in other fields, e.g. to prevent the

1 The concept of sustainability had been used in Church circles since the mid-'70s. The WCC Assembly in Nairobi in 1975 called on the Church to work for a just, participatory and sustainable society. In contrast to the Brundtland Report, which accepts the need for economic development as more or less axiomatic, the Church documents at that time spoke of the need for a "sustainable society," not "sustainable development." PATON David (ed.), *Breaking Barriers, Nairobi 1975*. Genève, 1975. 127., 138., 299.

depletion of fish stocks through over-fishing, to safeguard water supplies, or to prevent the loss of cultivable land.¹ On a variety of fronts, limits and quotas are being identified and fixed.

B. Solidarity within this Framework

The realization that there are limits to the demands humanity can make on the natural environment places the obligation to mutual solidarity among the world's nations in a new light.

Not all countries participate to the same extent in the exploitation and destruction of the environment—the demands of the industrialized countries being far greater than those of the so-called developing countries.

Thus, it only makes sense to speak of economic and social human rights if the demands on the natural environment are realigned and adjusted. The willingness to engage in new forms of solidarity is essential, if the destruction of the environment is to be halted.

For the industrialized countries, this means facing the fact of their own life-endangering role in the community of nations. Here, too, the Convention on Climate Change is a good example, as it makes a clear distinction between industrialized and developing countries.

The Convention is an attempt to apportion responsibility to each country, the rich ones being expected to make the first move by limiting their CO₂ emissions. Real solidarity means that the industrialized countries must be prepared to make substantial cuts and sacrifices. Justice cannot be achieved by constant growth, but only by implementing the principle of solidarity.

The industrial nations' excessive claims on creation go far beyond what is due to them. By their lifestyle they in fact constantly violate the rights of less-advantaged peoples. The struggle to protect civil and political rights is essential but, if it is to make sense, it needs to be embedded in the wider context of the struggle for a just and sustainable society.

2. Greater Efficiency?

Or are there ways to reduce the demands on natural resources without having to give up anything? This argument is often defended, usually linked to the concept of sustainable development: if only the necessary measures are taken, economic growth will remain "sustainable," and new scientific achievements, new technologies, new forms of organization will make for a "friendlier" treatment of the environment possible.

But this argument soon proves illusory. Some dangers can be avoided or alleviated by new human techniques. Efficiency is imperative, but nothing entitles us to expect that the levels necessary for sustainability can be reached by this means alone; and far less that the present growth can be continued into the future.

Unless demands are reduced, there will be no way forward to the future, and unless the excessive demands of the industrialized countries are reduced, there can be no justice among the nations.

1 Tutzing Projekt "Ökologie der Zeit", *Böden als Lebensgrundlage erhalten: a Proposal for an Agreement on Sustainable Treatment of Soils (Soil Convention)*. München, 1998.; PETRELLA Riccardo, *Le Manifeste de l'Eau, Pour un Contrat Mondial*. Lausanne, 1999.

III. How Can Human Rights and Sustainability Be Reconciled?

It has been clear for some time now that human rights discourse needs to be corrected. From the Church, too, there have been reminders that the struggle for the implementation of human rights must include care of the environment.

It continues to be assumed that there is no contradiction between human rights and sustainability. The demand for sustainability is at odds with the spirit of the Human Rights Declaration, since it speaks of the human being and human community without reference to the world in which they are placed. Not a word is said about the indissoluble relationship between human beings and nature.

The environmental crisis has reminded us that the human being is not a creature isolated from the rest of creation, but a creature among creatures and obliged as such to fulfil her or his responsibilities in this overall setting.

The narrow anthropological focus of human rights discourse leads to blind spots and distortions. In light of the environmental crisis it has become increasingly obvious that there are limits to human development, and these limits have to be borne in mind when rights are formulated.

Rights are subject to limitation not only in the freedoms of others, but also in the realities of nature. The limits within which rights can be exercised are thus crucial in the debate. The principle of equality in the face of the impending danger of environmental destruction implies the need for self-restraint—indeed, even the right to demand self-restraint of others.

The Declaration of Human Rights sees the human being here and now. It emphasizes the fact of being born and living now, disregarding what went before and what will come after. Yet the fact is that human beings are part of the chain of generations; they have to preserve and hand on the heritage they have received. Their rights on this Earth are those of sojourners, and they are limited by the legitimate claims of future generations.

The Declaration of Human Rights claims universal validity. It outlines the ideal common standard to be achieved by all peoples and nations. In doing so it assumes that the task is basically the same for all peoples and nations; but the reality is that conditions vary from nation to nation.

Nations favoured by nature and by history carry a different responsibility for the community than do less-favoured nations. Weaker nations have a right to support, which includes for them the duty to contribute to the world-wide community. It is not enough simply to add the right to a healthy environment to the list of human rights. This is the simplistic path adopted by the WCC.

At the end of a long list of demands we read: “The full exercise of human rights requires a healthy environment. Nuclear and other toxic wastes, atmospheric pollution, climate change, massive deforestation, depletion of fish stocks and other forms of assault on God’s creation threaten the survival and well-being of individuals and societies and sacred lands. The Church must connect her work for human rights with her concerns for the environment.”¹

1 World Council of Churches, *Human Rights and the Churches: New Challenges*. Background Information of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs, 1998/1.

IV. The Witness of the Church

What are the implications of such a statement for the Church? Where does she stand in relation to human rights? To what extent can she make the cause of human rights her own? To what extent does she have to maintain a critical distance?

1. Proclamation of the Gospel and Human Rights

For a long time an attitude of scepticism, and even rejection, towards the idea of human rights prevailed in the Church. Today the Church strongly and clearly affirms human rights. Her involvement in efforts for the enforcement of rights is self-evident.

Affirming human rights cannot mean totally identifying with the current human rights discourse. The Church can affirm and defend human rights as long as they relate to values which are in harmony with her own preaching.

Freedom, equality and solidarity are values which reflect the message of the Gospel and which serve not only to build a sound social order, but to pave the way for what is ultimately the intention of the Gospel.

The Church's preaching starts with the assumption that human beings have an intrinsic dignity as God's creatures, which is not for them individually nor for any human instance to dispose of. Whoever they are and whatever they do, they are still "created in God's image." How could the Church possibly not agree with the Declaration of Human Rights when it affirms that the dignity of every human person is inviolable and must be protected against assaults by society or the state?

God's gift to human beings is not life alone, but also the grace that is bestowed on them. However much they may lose their dignity in rebelling against God, God does not let them go. Nothing, "neither height, nor depth," shall separate them from God and from their status as beings created in God's image.

Freedom is one of the central keywords in the Christian message. God sets people free. Human beings are led from the condition of slaves concealing themselves from God, to that of free human beings able to walk confidently in the world.

The Declaration of Human Rights attributes fundamental rights and freedoms to the human person. In light of the Church's preaching, it is in fact immediately clear that a person can only maintain and develop her or his worth if these rights are guaranteed and respected.

The space for every human being to develop her or his humanity must be defended, and this applies in particular to the protection of conscience. A society which suppresses this freedom loses the most intimate source of true humanity. But the Church has something more to say in its preaching. She knows that freedom is only true freedom when it is enjoyed within the relationship to God.

Jesus Christ sets us free from all the powers, but freedom is not to be confused with independence. Human beings find fulfilment in the love of God, love of other human beings, and of the creation around them.

"You were called to freedom. [...] Do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another" (Gal. 5,13). Because freedom and love are indissolubly linked, the human being is ultimately not dependent on the space provided by the rights and freedoms guaranteed by the Declaration of Human Rights in order to become truly human.

The Church's message proclaims equality. All human beings are taken seriously in their particular identity and with their particular gifts and weaknesses. The Church can therefore endorse the ethos of equality that runs through the Declaration of Human Rights.

Her image of community is marked by the knowledge that the quality of human relations is constantly under threat; and that community is always in danger of being undermined by the will for power.

Even where the principle of equality is theoretically affirmed, relations of domination can develop. The Church's attention has to go to those who are the victims of the power struggle, and she will be guided by the commanding vision of the Magnificat.

God Who "looks down with favour on the lowliness of God's servant" and Who "has shown great strength with God's arm; God has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. God has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly" (Luke 1,38–52).

Equality is not something to be formally claimed by each individual, but the responsibility of the community towards its "weakest and neediest members." The Church's preaching speaks of the participation of all in the community.

The Spirit is poured out on all: everyone shares in the gifts of the Spirit. The community thrives on the contribution of all her members with their specificity and their gifts. It is thus only natural that the Church should defend the rights of participation in the life of society.

Affirming participation implies affirming a democratic social order: a society will only remain viable if there is constant interplay among all its vital forces. Participation is a conscientious service to one's neighbour.

The common welfare depends on people who are prepared "to bear one another's burdens" (Gal. 5). Participation is not meant to serve the interests of a few, but to build up the body as a whole.

The Church's preaching also calls for community in the sphere of material goods. In the Church community the contrast between rich and poor does not exist. The image of the Church shown to us in the New Testament is one of a community that shares her worldly goods.

The Church must not only affirm economic and social rights, but also must call emphatically for their implementation. The rights and freedoms of the individual person can only become a reality if they are bound up with economic and social rights.

Social justice is a precondition, if every person is to be able to develop her or his full potential. As with the rights and freedoms of the individual, so every state and the community of states have a duty to stand up for social justice.

Solidarity among the states is essential for the sake of human rights. The Church's proclamation goes further than formulating economic and social rights, in that the demand for solidarity is radical. Property is placed radically in the service of the neighbour.

2. Critical Acceptance

These few short indications must suffice to show that the Church's relation to human rights cannot simply consist in endorsing them. The affinity with the values and perspectives opened up by the Declaration of Human Rights is obvious.

The Gospel compels the Church quite naturally to join in the struggle to establish human rights. She stands wholeheartedly and unreservedly behind this or that goal arising out of the existing formulations of human rights, and she will not hesitate to refer to them to justify a commitment. She will therefore work with conviction for the advancement of the existing consensus, but she will also question human rights discourse, for she knows it is obliged to maintain a critical distance.

Over-hasty identification with human rights undermines the critical potential of the Gospel. Again, the WCC's statement provides an example of the attempt to derive the Church's commitment to human rights from the Gospel without due consideration of the problems involved:

“As Christians, we are called to share in God's mission of justice, peace and respect for all Creation and to seek for all humanity the abundant life, which God intends. Within Scripture, through Tradition, and from the many ways in which the Spirit illumines our hearts today, we discern God's gift of dignity to each human person and their inherent rights to acceptance and participation within the community. From this flows the responsibility of the Church, the Body of Christ, to work for universal respect and implementation of human rights.”¹

3. Participating in the Current Debate in Light of the Gospel

The concept of “human rights” is not a fixed quantity with a firmly established meaning. Human rights are the subject of an intensive debate.

The Church has to feed her own understanding into the discussion. Of particular importance is how the different aspects of human rights are related and linked to one another. How far is the balance maintained between civil and political rights; between economic and social rights?

Is the whole emphasis placed *de facto* on civil and political rights? Or are efforts also being made for the implementation of economic and social rights? It is important for the Church not simply to participate in the struggle for human rights, but to avoid distortion of the discourse about human rights itself.

A critical debate on human rights is needed in the Church, because the danger of such distortions exists in her own midst. Human rights belong among the values “true, honourable, just, pure, pleasing, commendable” that Paul writes to the Philippians. He closes his list with the exhortation: “If there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about such things” (Phil. 4,8). How and why the Gospel can be implicated in the struggle for human community is something that constantly requires to be thought through afresh.

Critical distance is needed, because human rights discourse is subject to change. They have been formulated through several centuries and are the outcome of a complicated history. New perspectives have been added. The demand for the rights and freedoms of each individual person cannot be universally realized so long as the gap between rich and poor nations has not been overcome.

1 The phrasing was adopted without alteration by the assembly. *Assembly Report*.196.

The answer was the call for a Right to Development, a proposition that went far beyond the original intention of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and indeed began to explode the concept of “human rights,” for this further development met with almost insuperable opposition.

Human rights discourse forfeited considerable credibility as a result. Lastly, the demand for sustainability has now highlighted the need for a further redefinition of the relation between the Church’s witness and human rights discourse.

4. What Might This Mean Today?

The Church must defend the indivisible nature of human rights: civil and political rights cannot be separated from economic and social rights. The right to development must be defended and promoted as a legitimate extension of the meaning of human rights. Whether or not the term “right” can be retained, remains to be seen. But the concern must not be allowed to disappear.

The Church will work to have the demands for sustainability and human rights seen as a unity. She will work towards a synthesis. An Earth Charter that does not establish an explicit link to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights would be incomplete.

The Church’s hope for the future is not tied to human rights. Witness to the Reign of God is opposed by the “powers and principalities,” and it is by no means certain that the outcome of the struggle will be a gradual improvement.

The challenges may still not be fully acknowledged. Human rights practice is not an unequivocal “*signum prognosticum* of the ethical progress of the human race.” Rather, it is a sign of obfuscation and stagnation.

The revolution that was intended by the Declaration of Human Rights is thus not only incomplete, but possibly ‘incompletable.’ For the Church, the sustainability of the world is not ultimately in human hands.

The hiddenness of the future is no reason to withdraw from the struggle for human rights. The significance of that struggle is that, in this world of injustice and destruction, it is at any rate a *signum charitatis* and points to God’s coming world.

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Lukas VISCHER: Droits de l'Homme et Durabilité: Deux Notions en Conflits?

L'auteur examine la place de la Déclaration Universelle des Droits de l'Homme (DUDH) dans la crise écologique d'aujourd'hui. Le thème de la Déclaration sont les droits de chaque tre humain. Elle est fondamentalement anthropocentrique. La crise écologique rend nécessaire une nouvelle attitude. 'Durabilité' ne peut tre réalisée que par la reconnaissance que les ressources naturelles sont limitées. Il faut en diminuer l'exploitation et respecter les limites imposée á l'homme par la nature. La Déclaration est un instrument indispensable pour la promotion des droits civils et sociaux. Mais il faut qu'en m me temps notre responsabilité pour le don de la création soit soulignée. Les églises ne peuvent donc pas s'identifier avec une vision étroite des droits de l'homme. Elles sont appelées á défendre en m me temps les 'droits' de la nature.

Lukas VISCHER: Los Derechos Humanos y el Mantenimiento: ¿Dos Nociones Contradictorias?

El artículo examina el lugar del discurso de hoy sobre los derechos humanos ante la crisis ecológica ascendente y sus requisitos. La Declaración Universal de Derechos Humanos (DUDH) se preocupa por los derechos y demandas de cada ser humano. Es antropocéntrico. La crisis ecológica exige un nuevo conocimiento de los límites impuestos a la existencia humana. El mantenimiento sólo puede lograrse si la raza humana se ha preparado para respetar "balanzas" cuando explota los recursos naturales. La Declaración Universal es un instrumento indispensable para la promoción de derechos civiles y sociales, pero necesita ser equilibrado por un énfasis fuerte en el cuidado responsable del regalo de Dios de la creación. El testigo de la Iglesia no puede por consiguiente identificarse con un limitado discurso de los derechos humanos sin ser crítico. Ella se llama al mismo tiempo para defender los 'derechos' de la naturaleza.



Ignacio T. MONZALVO

Derechos Humanos, Globalización y Método Teológico Latinoamericano

Frente a los retos que se presentan de manera global en el sistema hegemónico neoliberal; se hace necesario articular una reflexión con los diversos movimientos de resistencia social. La teología de la liberación por su naturaleza misma liberadora es ya una teología política, económica y de los derechos humanos con el talante liberación.

En América latina la supremacía de la praxis como norma del método teológico vincula de manera natural a los diversos movimientos sociales de resistencia en el que millones de marginados (mujeres, niños, indígenas, campesinos.. etc.) se ven aplastados por un sistema que se alimenta de ellos pisoteando sus derechos humanos. Si bien, los diferentes escenarios y coyunturas tienen rasgos muy particulares en cada país latinoamericano, los retos de los derechos humanos también se han globalizado.

Teología de la Liberación

La expresión “teología de la liberación” (TL) en la actualidad tiene reconocimiento, esta no designa un determinado sistema de pensamiento en que existen contenidos delimitados o una estructura interna.

La TL alude a un movimiento teológico en el que la práctica pastoral no siempre tiene un papel determinante, la centralidad de la TL esta enfocada a la realización humana por medio de la liberación de quines son los afectados por el sistema, es decir: Los pobres.¹

Es necesario aclarar que TL no es sinónimo de teología latinoamericana. En la TL se incluye el universo(s) de pensamiento(s) teológico(s) de/en América Latina. El surgimiento de teologías africanas y asiáticas de la liberación son un indicador de que también se entienden a sí mismas como teologías de la liberación.

Lo cual no obedece necesariamente a los deseos de originalidad que pueda tener cada teólogo, sino también a una diversidad objetiva en las elaboraciones teológicas.

1 GUTIÉRREZ Gustavo, *Teología de la liberación: Perspectivas*. Salamanca, 1999.

Sin entrar en discusiones internas, aquí nos referiremos a la TL como un movimiento teológico de dimensiones mundiales y de estructura plural en el que su principal característica es la opción por el marginado y oprimido.

Hablar de TL en América Latina es hablar, actuar y pensar en la *opción por el pobre*. En el marco de la TL encontramos teólogos, intelectuales y científicos que han contribuido de manera significativa en la metodología de la TL.

Por ejemplo, Ignacio ELLACURÍA con su pensamiento teológico presenta una alternativa metodológica que parte de la verdad y tiene como destino final la liberación.¹ Es necesario considerar que resulta aventurado hablar de “el” método de “la” TL y acompañarlo del pensamiento ellacuriano.

Sin embargo, en cuanto a “método” se podría hablar de las ideas fundamentales que, en lugar de marcar las fronteras que definen la pertinencia al mismo y verlo como el lugar desde donde se hace teología considerando las especificidades de cada contexto, esto constituye un núcleo de intuiciones que inspiran la producción de teólogos diversos que, en diversas partes del mundo, tratan de responder a problemas que también son diversos.

Probablemente hay que decir que estas intuiciones ya las formuló Gustavo GUTIÉRREZ indicando que la TL parte de dos aportaciones fundamentales: la práctica, participación y conciencia social; y opción por el pobre. Ambas en la lógica de liberación.²

I. Práctica, Participación y Conciencia Social a Partir de la Realidad del Oprimido

San BASILIO señalaba que la acción es el principio del conocimiento, BLONDEL ha hecho de la acción el punto de partida de una apologética católica. La filosofía contemporánea, tanto en las corrientes analíticas como en las fenomenológicas, ha prestado una creciente atención a la acción³.

En Ignacio ELLACURÍA encontramos una peculiar idea de lo que es la teología y su relación con la práctica, esta idea se nutre de una tradición filosófica a la cual pertenecen pensadores como SóCRATES y Xavier ZUBIRI, para quienes la filosofía conjuga armoniosamente teoría y praxis.

Esto está íntimamente relacionado con el hecho de que el aporte de Ignacio ELLACURÍA a la teología latinoamericana no puede sacarse del contexto de la *teología de la liberación*, ya que, según él, toda reflexión teológica contiene dentro de sí un talante liberador, una *función liberadora*⁴.

Por otro lado, en orden a la construcción de una filosofía latinoamericana, lo anterior significa que hay una primariedad de lo *liberador* respecto de lo *latinoamericano*.⁵ Conviene subrayar que la teología cristiana se ha visto considerablemente afectada en su sistema de verdades filosóficas comúnmente aceptadas.

Al contrario, la crisis de la escolástica aristotélico-tomista ha abierto paso a una utilización ecléctica de tesis filosóficas muy diversas.⁶ Ello ha aportado un enriquecimiento importante en el tratamiento de muchos temas teológicos.

1 ELLACURÍA Ignacio, *Conversión de la Iglesia al Reino de Dios. Para anunciarlo y realizarlo en la historia*. Santander, 1984.

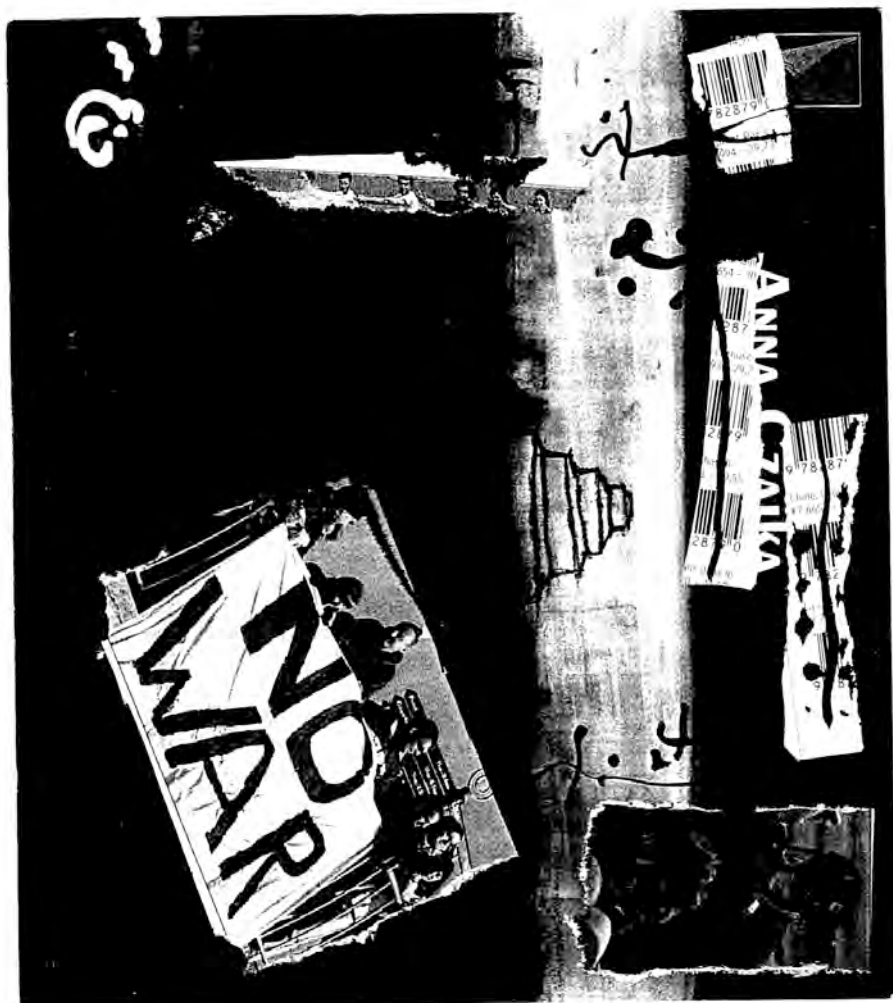
2 GUTIÉRREZ Gustavo, *En busca de los pobres de Jesucristo*. Salamanca, 1993.

3 DUSSEL Enrique, *Ética de la liberación en la edad de la globalización y de la exclusión*. Madrid, 2000.

4 ELLACURÍA Ignacio, *El compromiso político de la Filosofía en América Latina*. Bogotá, 1994.

5 ELLACURÍA Ignacio, *Teología política*. San Salvador, 1973.

6 ASSMANN Hugo, *Teología desde la praxis de la liberación*. Salamanca, 1976.



Piénsese solamente en la importancia que ha tenido el descubrimiento de la historicidad constitutiva del ser humano para nuestra comprensión actual de la revelación. La contrapartida de esta pluralidad en los recursos filosóficos es el sometimiento frecuente de los teólogos a las diversas modas filosóficas.

Por eso es importante que la teología se preocupe por la justificación rigurosa de la filosofía utilizada. Si la TL entiende que su punto de partida ha de situarse en la praxis, no le bastará con recurrir a una filosofía que de alguna manera coincide con ese interés.

Es menester, mostrar filosóficamente que ese punto de partida está verdaderamente justificado. Puede que ésta no sea una tarea propia del teólogo, pero sí es una tarea urgente para la teología.

En un mundo donde los lazos humanos se estrechan cada vez más, somos cada vez más conscientes, no sólo de la diversidad cultural del planeta, sino también de los grandes problemas sociales, económicos y ecológicos que afectan a la humanidad como un todo.

El punto de partida de la teología determina decisivamente la perspectiva utilizada para abordar teológicamente esos problemas. Si la teología arrancara, por ejemplo, de la pregunta por el sentido de la vida, el diálogo cultural entre las distintas cosmovisiones se situaría en el primer plano del interés, mientras que otros problemas humanos se relegarían a un segundo término, se excluirían del campo de la teología.

La elección adecuada del punto de partida de la teología puede determinar decisivamente la formulación del mensaje que el cristianismo quiere transmitir a una humanidad atravesada por enormes conflictos.

“La teología es eso: la reflexión, en niveles diversificados de elaboración, acerca de los dioses (y los demonios) en los cuales los seres humanos, de una u otra forma, creen, y con los que presumen tener diferentes grados de contacto con la historia.”¹

En la antigüedad, el cristianismo consideró que su anuncio concernía a todos los aspectos de la realidad humana, entendida entonces como naturaleza. Hoy nos enfrentamos a una enorme reducción de esas pretensiones originales.

Quienes han acusado a la TL de reduccionista, con frecuencia lo han hecho desde una previa y radical reducción del cristianismo a una cosmovisión que da sentido a la vida y de la que se derivan implicaciones éticas.²

Para la teología es urgente superar esta gran unilateralidad, que amenaza con convertir el cristianismo en un conjunto de palabras vacías y de tediosos deberes morales. El Reino de Dios, nos dice Pablo, no consiste en palabras, sino en un dinamismo (1Col. 4,20).

Es muy cierto que en la actualidad no podemos volver a pensar a la persona humana como naturaleza, pues ello significaría mutilarle aspectos esenciales, como son la historicidad efectiva (no sólo pensada) y la presencia operante de la gracia; sin embargo, la actividad puede ser el ámbito de acceso teológico, tanto a la persona humana integralmente considerada como a la acción de la gracia.

El cristianismo es un dinamismo suscitado por Cristo en la historia, y no una mera cosmovisión religiosa y moral del mundo. Naturalmente, la primacía de la práctica como punto de partida de la teología está cargada de relevancia ecuménica.

Los conflictos eclesiales en torno a la reforma protestante tienen en su trasfondo, junto con

1 ASSMANN Hugo, *Teología desde la praxis de la liberación*, Salamanca, 1976. 14.

2 DUSSEL Enrique, *Ética de la liberación en la edad de la globalización y de la exclusión*. Madrid, 2000.

otras muchas razones históricas, el enfrentamiento entre el naturalismo y el subjetivismo como concepciones de la persona humana y de la obra de la gracia sobre ella.

Si la teología pone su punto de partida en la acción, puede que ahí encuentre un ámbito para superar los conflictos entre fe y obras, mostrando que tanto la fe como la ley constituyen dimensiones inscritas en la acción humana.¹

“La tarea actual es preguntar por un ordenamiento que permita la vida de todos los seres humanos y de la naturaleza”.² Esto podría ser importante para el diálogo del cristianismo con otras religiones.

Desde la neoescolástica española hasta la teología actual de las religiones, se viene diciendo que las religiones se encuentran en la práctica de la justicia. Ahora bien, muchas veces estas afirmaciones han tendido a un cierto moralismo, del que no está exenta la TL.

Y el moralismo no es sólo un reduccionismo, sino una grave desviación de la experiencia religiosa, especialmente de la experiencia religiosa cristiana. Este problema se obviaría si se mostrara que la práctica de la justicia no es la mera consecuencia moral de una cosmovisión religiosa, sino el ámbito privilegiado para encontrar la gracia y la fe, también en las religiones no cristianas.

Todo esto exige serias reflexiones filosóficas y teológicas. La primacía de la práctica no puede significar una tiranía del inmediatismo pastoral. Los grandes problemas prácticos que el cristianismo tendrá que afrontar en el futuro próximo requieren un trabajo teórico riguroso, sin el que nunca se podrá responder adecuadamente a unos desafíos que son nuevos e inesperados.

Habría que preguntarse si el gran movimiento de renovación surgido en la Iglesia católica a partir del Concilio Vaticano II no se ha visto parcialmente truncado por el descuido de una suficiente formación intelectual.

Congregaciones religiosas enteras, antes caracterizadas por su alto nivel filosófico y teológico, se entregaron con generosidad y frenesí a las tareas apostólicas más inmediatas, descuidando toda reflexión sistemática y fundada sobre su praxis.

Ni lo urgente ni lo cómodo es necesariamente lo más importante ni lo más práctico. No debiera extrañarnos que muchos cristianos, al encontrarse sin iluminaciones teológicas serias ante los problemas que les ocupan, regresen a las fórmulas seguras de antaño.

Es conveniente mencionar que la problemática no se presenta en el planteamiento de formulas pasadas, sino en la descontextualización de estas formulas, es necesario considerar al ser humano concreto en una situación concreta, de manera que el proyecto de salvación pueda incorporarse a la dinámica de social.

Si bien Jesús tenía una opción preferencial por los pobres, la TL retoma esta afirmación con conciencia histórica, perspectiva de la realidad y mira al futuro bajo una lógica de salvación.

“No se trata de predicar la imprudencia y la irreflexión, sino estar convencidos de que el Espíritu nos llevará a la verdad completa (cf. Jn 16,13); su presencia está en el nuevo rostro de una Iglesia pobre, misionera y pascual que ha comenzado a tomar la comunidad cristiana latinoamericana. Sería una traición al Espíritu, un pecado contra él, perder lo conseguido en estos años ante cristianos y no cristianos de este continente.”³

1 TAMAYO-ACOSTA Juan José, *Para entender la Teología de la liberación*. Estella, 2000.

2 HINKELAMMERT Franz, *Crítica de la razón utópica*. San José, 2000. 310.

3 GUTIÉRREZ Gustavo, *Teología de la liberación: Perspectivas*. Salamanca, 1999. 52.

La condición del ser humano le permite tomar formulas pasadas y plantearlas como innovadoras en un contexto específico. Ignacio ELLACURÍA retoma la figura del Siervo sufriente de Yahvé y lo reflexiona a la luz del contexto del El Salvador y entonces pude desglosar un planteamiento en el que la opción por el pobre se da en la lógica del Siervo y la Iglesia sufriente de Yahvé y como instituciones encarnadoras de la misión de Jesús.

De esta manera es mediante la Iglesia de los pobres que la salvación se encuentra. La urgencia para los pobres no parece ser ni la crítica secular de la religiosidad tradicional ni la demostración de las consecuencias morales de la misma.

La teología debería más bien ayudar a articular un lenguaje de fe que partiera de los pobres y que conectara liberadoramente con su situación. Y para ello se necesita tanto la cercanía a esa situación como el trabajo intelectual riguroso.

Ahora bien, el pobre debe entenderse como punto de partida del quehacer teológico, pero no como laboratorio metodológico, es decir, con el pobre hay que solidarizarse hay que encarnarse, hay que hacerse pobre y no debe ser visto como un sujeto de estudio por el que hay que tener una inclinación intelectual.

II. Derechos Humanos en Contexto de Globalización

Por otra parte los derechos humanos se caracterizan por su ambigüedad. Deberían hacer avanzar la causa de los pobres entre los que destacan principalmente los pueblos indígenas. Pero defienden a los poderosos y no a los marginados.

El egoísmo y la institucionalización pueden invertir ideales y hacer que apoyen aquello contra lo que luchaban. Cincuenta años después, el mundo sigue necesitando los derechos humanos. Su futuro estriba en ver si podemos redimirlos y ponerlos al servicio de los marginados. Sólo así serán realmente universales.

También el discurso sobre ellos se lo están apropiando las fuerzas de la globalización. Éstas definen el significado y la finalidad de los derechos humanos. Las mismas fuerzas que violan los derechos de los pobres se presentan como sus protectoras.

1. Breves Análisis de los Antecedentes

La experiencia de la segunda guerra mundial condujo a la formulación contemporánea de los derechos humanos. La barbarie descubría la irracionalidad que engendra el pretexto de crear un orden de racionalidad perfecta.

La inspiración de la que procedían los derechos humanos era doble: por una parte, la proclamación de los derechos humanos de tradición liberal, centrada en reclamaciones de derechos civiles y políticos.

Y por otra, el correctivo introducido, por parte de las Naciones Unidas, de los derechos culturales y económicos. Nos encontramos, así, con un cierto hibridismo en la articulación de los derechos humanos, con dos tradiciones no plenamente integradas.

2. Hacia la Configuración de un Nuevo Espacio

Tanto en la tradición liberal como en la socialista, los derechos humanos tienen como principal punto de referencia el poder político. Se asocia la tradición liberal con las luchas para controlar la soberanía absoluta¹.

1 MARDONES José Ma., *Fe y Política*. Santander, 1993.

Los individuos gozan de derechos inalienables contra los que no puede prevalecer el Estado. En la tradición socialista el Estado es responsable de promover las necesidades básicas para una vida humana digna y reconocer los derechos culturales de los pueblos.

Hoy en día, el Estado ya no es el único que puede dañar los derechos humanos ni la única instancia responsable de la seguridad de los ciudadanos. El capitalismo multinacional, con su mercado global, penetra cualquier sector de la vida humana¹.

Ante él, las naciones son impotentes. Hoy por hoy los derechos humanos sirven para combatir las violaciones estatales. Pero el nuevo sistema económico internacional ha creado una crisis sin precedentes en materia de derechos humanos.

Se violan los derechos de los pobres a la alimentación, a los cuidados médicos básicos, a la educación primaria. Todavía no hay mecanismos adecuados para contrarrestar este absolutismo económico que exige una infinidad de sacrificios humanos².

Han entrado nuevos interlocutores en la arena de los derechos humanos. Las minorías étnicas, lingüísticas y culturales han introducido nuevos aspectos. Las acusaciones de la guerra fría han cedido el paso a una política de derechos humanos entre el norte y el sur.

Ha cambiado el enfoque sobre el discurso de los derechos humanos. Antes, éste se centraba en la universalidad de los derechos humanos, sus fundamentos, etc. Hoy los Estados y las fuerzas económicas construyen una teoría que justifica la violación de los derechos humanos.

3. Derechos Humanos y Mercado

Vivimos en un mundo administrado. La estructura y el funcionamiento del mercado constituyen la antítesis de los derechos humanos. El mercado funciona con leyes propias. Hay que eliminar las alteraciones.

La lucha por los derechos humanos representa una de estas alteraciones. Nadie puede servir honradamente al mercado y a los derechos humanos. Lo contrario de esto es hipocresía. A ello aluden las naciones del sur cuando las del norte se convierten en ardientes predicadores de los derechos humanos.

Los programas estructurales de ajuste pretenden mantener el sistema, a costa de los pobres y de sus derechos. Graves recortes en educación, abolición de ayudas para la alimentación, liquidación de la fuerza laboral son medidas diametralmente opuestas a la protección de los pobres.

Las *mujeres* e indígenas son los peor afectados por todo ello. La fuerza de la competencia es decisiva en la economía liberal. Los más aptos sobreviven y los demás perecen. Lo que se basa en la igualdad es contrario a la dinámica de esta economía.

La desigualdad es incluso necesaria para la seguridad y para que el capital multinacional obtenga beneficios. Pero la piedra angular de los derechos humanos es el principio de igualdad. Vemos las implicaciones de todo esto en los derechos de los pobres. Por ej., en algunos países sudasiáticos.

Cuando las fuerza del mercado penetran en sociedades donde el orden jerárquico de las castas es el principio organizador, entonces un sistema económico construido

1 HINKELAMMERT FRANZ, *Coordinación social del trabajo, mercado y reproducción de la vida humana*. San José, 2001.

2 HINKELAMMERT FRANZ, *Sacrificios Humanos y Sociedad Occidental*. San José, 1998.

sobre la desigualdad se encuentra con una sociedad donde lo natural es la jerarquía y la subordinación. La unión de estas dos desigualdades da lugar a las peores violaciones de los derechos humanos.

4. Las Armas del Mercado

Los derechos se convierten en derechos de los pobres y marginados cuando se defienden sus necesidades básicas. El cálculo del provecho por sí mismo nunca permitirá un compromiso con los derechos humanos.

Al mercado capitalista no le importa que millones de personas se vean obligadas a perder sus vidas. La práctica de los derechos humanos exige que el sujeto de las víctimas se sitúe en el centro de todo.

Pero la hegemonía del capitalismo financiero parte de la disolución del sujeto. La acumulación de capital no tiene nada que ver ni con la producción ni con el productor. El capital es fruto de la ficción y de la especulación.

Funcionando como un sistema autónomo y con su lógica interna, el capitalismo crea exclusión. La gente se vuelve gente sin rostro, lo cual hace más fácil la explotación. La economía neoliberal y el mercado se basan en un modelo particular de homogeneización¹.

Este modelo de desarrollo es un atroz violador de los derechos humanos. Los países del sur saben por experiencia cómo, en nombre del desarrollo, a los pobres se les priva incluso del mínimo de seguridad vital del que gozaban.

Los pueblos indígenas y las tribus desplazadas en nombre del desarrollo son ejemplo de la violencia ejercida por un modelo homogeneizante de desarrollo. El capital internacional les dirige una llamada tentadora para que entreguen sus bosques y recursos naturales, pero ¡ay de los ingenuos que se la creen!

La homogeneización niega cualquier otra forma de autodesarrollo humano, forzándolo todo según un modelo universal. “La perspectiva de la universalización es colonialista. Los otros modelos son ahistóricos y anacrónicos. Sólo hay una estructura de poder, una moral y una verdad legítimas. Las otras son inválidas.” (Rajni KOTHARI)

Este arrogante proyecto homogeneizador no puede conciliarse con un genuino interés por los derechos humanos. Existe una violencia inherente a este proyecto, abocada a crear víctimas. Lo peor es que este modelo de desarrollo excluye toda esperanza para el futuro.

5. El Mercado y el Espacio de lo Público o Estatal

La incompatibilidad del mercado y de los derechos humanos tiene sus consecuencias para el Estado. Todo Estado que promueve una economía neoliberal y quiere proteger los derechos humanos cae en una profunda contradicción que el mercado y el Estado intentan disimular con medidas estratégicas.

El Estado muestra una faz benigna a la presión de la gente que reclama sus derechos básicos, pero hace avanzar las fuerzas globalizadoras, entregándoles propiedades públicas, que se convierten en privadas.

Por su parte, el mercado se apropia del discurso sobre los derechos humanos para

1 CASTILLO José María, *El poder como imaginario religioso*. Madrid. 2003.

evitar toda confrontación con las presiones que vienen de abajo. Quiere auto-justificarse como promotor del desarrollo y para ello necesita de las fuerzas económicas de la globalización.

El capitalismo internacional y el mercado domestican al Estado para hacerlo incapaz de intervenir ante toda violación de derechos humanos que ellos han causado. A base de estrategias para manipular la disidencia, el Estado y el mercado entran en contradicción con los derechos humanos¹.

Es singularmente sorprendente que los derechos humanos se conviertan en medios al servicio de los poderosos en lugar de escudo de los pobres. Un ejemplo de ello lo ofrece el problema de la propiedad privada.

No puede ponerse en el mismo saco a los niños famélicos del Sudán y a la corporación Microsoft por el hecho de ser persona legal. Según el reciente informe de las Naciones Unidas sobre el desarrollo, “las 255 personas más ricas del mundo detentan un trillón de dólares, lo cual representa los ingresos totales del 47% de los pobres, que suman 2,5 billones”.²

El actual sistema económico ha hecho posible esta escandalosa acumulación de riqueza en el que grandes compañías se han convertido en propietarios de la propiedad mundial. La riqueza pasa de personas humanas pobres a no-personas, como son las compañías.

Y la misma protección a las pequeñas posesiones de los pobres se otorga a estos propietarios gigantes en nombre de los derechos humanos. Éstos, para los poderosos, sólo se reducen al derecho de la propiedad.

Los poderosos consideran que este derecho debería ser universal para poder poseer sin ningún obstáculo en todo lugar. Y así los derechos humanos se han convertido en derechos de las grandes empresas de negocios para controlar el mundo³.

El problema ya no se plantea como en tiempos de la guerra fría: una pelea entre la propiedad privada y la estatal. Se trata de algo que afecta a la vida de millones de pobres de globo. Esta situación es mucho más chocante si consideramos cómo se ha desarrollado este derecho en la historia.

En Grecia y Roma, la propiedad era una manera de ser consciente de la propia identidad, relacionada con una localidad particular. Se la veía en el contexto de la familia, como parte del deber de los padres hacia la prole.

“En el mundo clásico la “propiedad” hacía referencia a la situación del ciudadano y de su (de él, no de ella) familia y no tanto a la “riqueza”. Para ser miembro del cuerpo público era necesario un elemento geográfico.”⁴

Hoy, la posesión de la propiedad privada por compañías gigantes va más allá de las fronteras de la nación y nada tiene que ver con la identidad local o pública. Sólo tiene que ver con las ganancias.

No estaría incluso claro que los mismos defensores de la propiedad privada pudieran ser invocados para defender, en nombre de los derechos humanos, las fabulosas posesiones de las corporaciones privadas.

Para John LOCKE, por ej., la propiedad privada se halla íntimamente conectada con su

1 ETXEBERRIA Xabier, *Universalismo ético y derechos humanos*. Madrid, 2002.

2 UNESCO, *Reporte de actividades del 2º trimestre*. 2001.

3 ELLACURÍA Ignacio, *Derechos humanos en una sociedad dividida*. México, 1979.

4 O'KANE Stephen G., *Human Rights in Context of Liberation*. Heidelberg, 2003.

uso actual, sobre cuya base tiene lugar la apropiación. Sin embargo, en el caso de estas corporaciones se trata de maximizar la ganancia. Cuando hay escasez de recursos, la riqueza sin restricciones de las empresas multinacionales es una afrenta a los derechos básicos de los pobres¹.

¿Qué Buscamos?

Es necesario colocarnos frente a la problemática de ser humanos, del respeto a la condición humana, del ejercicio práctico de los derechos humanos. La liberación de nuestros pueblos indígenas sigue estando en el terreno de lo político, pero ahora ya tenemos la idea de que lo salvífico-cristiano no se desentiende de ninguna dimensión humana, tampoco de lo político, como tampoco de la espiritual, de la psicológica o de la corporal.

Por mucho tiempo hemos tenido a nuestros pueblos indígenas enteros sumergidos en el silencio y la marginación. Es tiempo de darles y ser partes de una experiencia teológica de salvación nacida en una liberación política.

Pero más allá de las condiciones de nuestras hermanas y hermanos indígenas es necesario poner nuestros ojos en las mayorías populares entendiéndolas como aquellas auténticas mayorías de la humanidad, es decir, la mayor parte de la humanidad que habita el planeta.

Es evidente, como hecho, que nunca hubo en la historia del mundo tantos seres humanos pobres y desposeídos en relación con tan pocos tan ricos y opresores. Resulta imperioso identificar nuestro quehacer teológico desde los Derechos Humanos en contexto de Globalización, se trata en definitiva, de la vida y de la muerte.

Se trata de hacer saber que Dios salva al ser humano de todo lo que le impide ser y existir como ser humano. No es suficiente que la Iglesia se dedique a quitar el pecado del mundo. La esencia del cristianismo y la razón principal de la salvación no consiste en la ausencia de pecado, sino en la plenitud de vida.

Se trata de que la Iglesia sea fiel a su misión, promueva la salvación integral del ser humano, salvación que en su integridad tiene una dimensión política por medio de la plenitud y respeto de los Derechos Humanos.

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Ignacio T. MONZALVO: Human Rights, Globalisation and Latin American Theological Methods

In academic spaces it is necessary to present new concerns and alternatives while we are doing theology. This means it is necessary to analyze, to affirm or to modify our theological methodology in order to answer to the new spaces which demand a theological voice. In this article we analyze and intertwine two phenomena that have great relevance in our historic moment: globalization and human rights. The first one has been analyzed in an extensive way by researchers of various institutes who are continually concerned with reflecting upon the devastating effects of the neoliberal system and with creating alternatives for the fullness of life. Second, human rights have been analyzed in smaller measure, but with abundant results and with reflections of great value. The purpose of this article is to reflect on Latin-American theological methods and on the relevance of human rights in the context of globalization as a theological task for our present age.

Ignacio T. MONZALVO: Droits humains, Mondialisation et Méthodes Théologiques Latino-américaine

Dans les espaces académiques, il est nécessaire de présenter les nouvelles préoccupations et alternatives pendant que l'on fait de la théologie. Ceci signifie que qu'il est nécessaire d'analyser, d'affirmer ou de modifier notre méthodologie théologique afin de répondre aux nouveaux espaces qui demandent un discours théologique. Dans cette article nous analysons et entremêlons deux phénomènes qui ont une grande pertinence dans notre moment historique actuel: la mondialisation et les droits humains. La première a été analysée de façon extensive par des chercheurs de divers instituts qui ont continuellement préoccupés par les réflexions sur les effets dévastateurs du système néolibéral, et par la création des alternatives pour une vie de plénitude. Le second, droits humains a été analysé dans une moindre mesure, mais avec des résultats abondants et avec des réflexions d'une grande valeur. Le propos de cet article est de réfléchir sur les méthodes théologiques latino-américaines et sur la pertinence des droits humains dans le contexte de la mondialisation, comme une tâche théologique de notre ère actuelle.

Moathludi MOGWERA

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV): Negating the Message of the Cross

After more than two decades of the existence of AIDS, humanity still has not been able to find the cure, which many endeavour so much to discover. Many are looking with hope that when the cure is found, humanity shall be saved from this devastating pandemic.

A Devastating Pandemic

This hope is informed by a commitment that through the modern scientific capacities humanity has acquired, a cure or vaccine shall be found soon. The picture is, however, gloomy at the moment.

According to José Esperza VACUNAS¹, for example, a long journey of more than fifteen years of scientific research has not matched up with the complexities that the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) brings.

The erroneous genetic identity of HIV thus challenges biomedical science to seek new ways and forms of research, and exposes an urgent need to explore new methods and paradigms of re-organising.

But a mere vaccine may not bring an end to human sufferings, as has already been evidenced by the inflicted pain, havoc caused and violent deaths of millions of people all around the globe.

This human suffering, which is mainly felt more and more among those whose socio-economic conditions are awful, continues to negate the scientific reality that HIV can live in a human body for almost two decades.

It can do so especially among those whose hurdles are universal access to not only antiretroviral therapy, but also adequate living conditions, with clean, running water and proper sanitation.

This miserable human experience requires a truly extraordinary response by the entire human community, with the students, youth and young adults playing a decisive and crucial role as well. Central to this response would be to administer justice.

The Essence of the Christian Faith

What distinguishes the message of the cross is essentially life in situations of death, a message that is central to the Christian faith. The presence of the fullness of life and life in abundance as guaranteed by God through Jesus Christ is essentially a victory over powers and principalities.

¹ VACUNAS José Esperza, *Vacunas: ¿Dónde estamos? ¿Adónde vamos? Desidamos* 2004/2.



This victory on powers and principalities will nullify, among other things, the causes and consequences of injustice against humanity. Life in abundance is the actual gift that is guaranteed for the whole of humanity through the person of Jesus Christ.

The essence of life represents the very essence of true Christian faith. The story of the young girl who was called to life by Jesus Christ is an important point of reference, as correctly captured by Musa Wenkosi DUBE¹.

She contests that the “*fullness of life should be declared in the HIV and AIDS and Global Economic Era,*” an era simply and nakedly characterised by the most horrendous and inhuman socio-economic policies.

The faith community therefore essentially derives identity and strength from the essence of the cross, denying death and its dominance and giving life. That life is guaranteed by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, after he suffered a humiliating death experience.

With HIV and also AIDS spreading so silently but equally swiftly all over the globe, for many people it seems that this very heart and core of the Christian faith is being greatly challenged by it.

HIV poses a critical question to the very essence and relevance of the Christian faith, forcing many to reflect on death in various ways. Some respond to HIV and AIDS in their total honesty by developing a message of dying in peace and accepting the victory of death over human body, spirit and soul.

An Internship Focusing on HIV and AIDS

My internship, which began in May 2003, hosted in both Cuba and Argentina, has been a journey that cannot be told without telling journeys of many other people from diverse historical, cultural and social contexts.

They are both known and unknown, some living with HIV and others not, some being simple, others simply coming from humble conditions, and a few others committed to a noble cause of restoring human dignity in its various forms.

The essence of this internship has been conceptualized as essentially focusing on HIV/AIDS and the critical response of the ecumenical movement. This excitingly rich journey focused on the clinical, medical and policy development issues as relating to HIV and AIDS.

But of importance also were the social, cultural and religious aspects, which added more valuable experiences. The success of this internship, as it relates to Cuba and Argentina in the main, was due to an important cultural insertion into the Cuban and later on the Argentinean settings, respectively, which was made possible by the learning of Spanish, an added treasure of this period.

My departure was later on reoriented around issues of life and not of death. An important victory was made when one identified with a cause on issues related to HIV, and yet not entirely medical.

The virus with its clinical characteristics was therefore not a key focus anymore, but the underlying social, economic, cultural and religious factors, as well as a prophetic contextual theology fit to faithfully respond to this situation.

1 DUBE Musa Wenkosi, *Talitha Cum! Calling the Girl-Child and Women to Life in the HIV/AIDS and Globalisation Era*. In DE-GIGLIO-BELLEMARE Mario – GARCÍA Gabriela Miranda, *Talitha Cum! The Grace of Solidarity in a Globalized World*. Genève, 2004.

This allowed me to refresh my walk of faith and identify with Jesus Christ, who defied all forms of traditions, norms and socially acceptable practices, and chose to identify with the needy, the marginalized and the ostracized.

The Greatest Challenge to Science

Coming back to Africa after spending just a little more than two years in a Latin American and Caribbean context, I realize that cultural shocks are essential in order for one to confront, not HIV, but rather my own cultural, religious and traditional setting.

It has also better enabled me to best respond to the challenges posed by HIV. These cultural shocks enabled me to deal openly with issues of human sexuality and to learn to accept others as they are and to meet them at their best as self-worthy beings.

I was even enabled to reflect on some taboo questions, such as sexual contact between men (who would not necessarily consider themselves gays, as it is perhaps viewed from a European point of view), a practice that has always been there, at least as far as it is accommodated by African languages and historic conditions.

But interesting enough was the similarities that exist between the two continents, at least so far as one observes and recalls. The same old questions identified as key to the propagation of HIV are the following.

First, the unfair female–male power relations; then issues of human sexuality, with particular focus on the naturalization of homosexual orientation subjected to heterosexual orientation.

Similarly, issues of human dignity and respect for human life without conditions; myths, taboos and prejudices giving birth to stigma and ostracizing of others for being different, deriving partly from Christian moral and ethical doctrines.

As a result of more than two decades of HIV and AIDS, many lessons have been learned, and many still are to be learned. But the most important lesson is probably that each and every human being is born unique without a replica, embedded with dignity and requiring equal treatment with total respect and equal opportunities.

This is revealed by the characteristics that HIV has in the human immune system, demonstrating the capacity it has to constantly mutate itself and therefore presenting each and every infected person as a unique case, requiring a different treatment.

This important lesson calls on all humanity to actively and effectively re-strategise and also to break with the traditionally used and applied methods, which only seek to maintain business as usual.

The Basic Call for the Church and WSCF

The World Council of Churches (WCC) in its complex journeys in search of faithful, open and honest responses to this pandemic engulfed within other epidemics, concluded in the following way.

“The issues related to HIV and AIDS are extremely complex. While HIV is a virus and AIDS is the medical consequence of viral infection, the related issues are far from being simply medical or clinical concerns.

“They affect, and are affected by cultural norms and practices, socio-economic conditions, development and gender issues, sexuality and many other factors.”¹

1 *Facing AIDS: The Challenge and the Churches' Response*. Genève, 1997.

De-commercialisation of HIV and AIDS

A multi-pronged, multi-sectored, concerted and creative global response by humanity is an urgent agenda aiming at stopping the further propagation of this particularly dangerous and lethal virus.

This requires, first and foremost, a wiping of illiteracy from the face of the Earth, especially in the countries of the South, including the so-called developing nations. This wiping out of illiteracy, however, should not only focus on reading and writing.

It should also seek to raise the level of consciousness of each and every one of us, such that we would deal with the scourge of social imbalances within human communities. This would not require, as prerequisite, permission from authorities.

On the other hand, it should be a task of each one to reverse and wipe out all forms of illiteracy. It is with clear conscience that one suggests that each one, including organised Student Christian Movements (SCMs), should take up the task.

For sure, it should not necessarily be one of the tasks left in the hands and on the writing desks of bureaucrats and governments, since this truly requires a radical and revolutionary intervention.

No words can explain properly the negative impact of commercialisation of HIV and AIDS on ordinary lives of many, whose majority is unknown, including their Christian and family names, origin and identity.

Only their miserable faces, weak and dying bodies, get captured in pictures and used to develop posters, websites and newsletters. These people are denied the very essence of their human dignity.

They have no one to defend, to represent and to protect them. They are subjected to the harshness of commercial intercourse, which benefits those who purport to be coming to their aid.

Human Sexuality and Reproductive Health

Faith-based movements are making groundbreaking and valuable work, when it relates to care giving, accompanying the infected and affected, and also making campaigns aimed at fighting stigma, discrimination and prejudice.

This work done at macro levels needs to be brought down to where human beings really live, such that the most important level would become the very basic social units and individuals affected and infected.

There is also an important and urgent need to open a deeper and more honest dialogue on issues that respond to a need to construct basic human communities that are inclusive and that are living in diversity.

It is time for Africa especially to also open this honest dialogue for the sake of a high percentage of human beings, however insignificant for many, whose continent of origin and whose true destiny is Africa.

We have observed with silence how the valuable lives of great persons were brought to naught simply because of their choice to declare who they really are, and how they actually choose—or alternatively are made to—live.

A greater challenge, however, faces adolescents and young people in the world, particularly in the countries of the South, since there is a significant and unfortunate

weight put by the biggest global AIDS programme funder, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), whose policies are deliberately limited to abstinence as the only viable strategy to halt the propagation of HIV, thus reducing HIV/AIDS challenge to a mere moral question and therefore defeating attempts to encourage a dialogue on issues of human sexuality and how they directly impact in the human struggle to defeat the spread of HIV.

So, USAID essentially aims to limit the creativity and necessary fair dialogue with adolescents and youth in an attempt to get them to live a more responsible life, conscious of their human sexuality.

As a result, many young people would simply get subjected to family planning programmes, when they are neither prepared nor interested in giving birth. This links especially with taboo subjects related to human sexuality and reproductive health, where for example in some cultures genital mutilation of young girls is non-negotiable act aimed at satisfying the dictates of the patriarchy, essentially denying the young girls their full right to control their sexual life.

Culture, Traditions and Social Contexts

HIV cuts across all historic boundaries, invoking coordinated cross-border and cross-continental responses. Currently there is an almost-effective communication across borders of most countries of the world.

On the other hand, however, this communication is unfortunately based on diplomacy, trade, military invasions and commercial purposes. This is a dialogue that is more institutional, and most often than not, denies ordinary people the beauty of cross-border experiences, locking others in local exposures.

Challenges that are put to us by HIV are, among other things, a need to re-look at our traditional boundaries and begin to build true bridges between and among ordinary peoples of different regions and different continents. This dialogue would essentially facilitate exchange of experiences and the strengthening of human responses to stop HIV spread and reverse the consequences thereof.

These few areas of focus can help us respond more faithfully to the challenge of restoring respect, dignity and acceptance of each and every individual human being in her or his very basic form of being, without reservations, prejudices and limitations.

We must be convinced that only humanity can save itself from its demise by consciously instilling new values that are not subjected to patriarchal ideology. Indeed, only humanity can save itself.

Suggested Reading

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Metodologica. Argentina, 2004.

DUBE Musa Wenkosi, *Talitha Cum! Calling the Girl-Child and Women to Life in the HIV/AIDS and Globalisation Era*. In DEGIGLIO-BELLEMARE Mario – GARCÍA Gabriela Miranda, *Talitha Cum! The Grace of Solidarity in a Globalized World*. Genève, 2004.

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Moathludi MOGWERA: Virus d'Immunodéficience Humaine (VIH): Le Message de le Croix Nié

Après des décennies de l'existence du SIDA, nous ne sommes toujours pas capables de trouver un traitement, même si de nombre de chercheurs s'efforce de le découvrir. Ce qui distingue le message de la Croix est la vie en situations de mort. Message qui est au centre de la foi chrétienne. Avec l'expansion silencieuse et rapide du VIH/SIDA, ce message central de la foi chrétienne semble être mis à défi. Le VIH nous oblige à réfléchir sur la mort; certains répondent a cela en développant un message qui promeut l'idée de mourir en paix et accepter la victoire de la mort sur le corps, l'esprit et l'âme humaine. Dans cette situation le virus avec ses caractéristiques clinique n'est plus le point de concentration, mais plutôt les facteurs sous-jacents et une théologie contextuelle adaptée pour y répondre de façon confiante. Cette lutte humaine requiert une éradication de l'illettrisme dans le Sud, mais cela devra aussi chercher à élever le niveau de conscience de façon à ce que nous puissions faire face avec le fléau des déséquilibres sociaux dans les communautés.

Moathludi MOGWERA: Virus de Immunodeficiencia Humano (VIH): Negar el Mensaje de la Cruz

Después de décadas de la existencia del SIDA, no hemos podido encontrar todavía una cura, aunque muchos se empeñan en descubrirla. Lo que distingue el mensaje de la cruz es la vida en las situaciones de muerte, un mensaje que es central a la fe cristiana. Con VIH extendiéndose tan silenciosa y rápidamente, parece que este mismo corazón de fe cristiana se reta grandemente por él. El VIH nos obliga a que reflexionar acerca de la muerte; algunos responden a él desarrollando un mensaje de morir en paz y aceptando la victoria de la muerte sobre del cuerpo humano, el espíritu y el alma. El virus con sus características clínicas ya no es el enfoque principal, sino los factores subyacentes y una teología contextual profética ajustada para responder fielmente a esta situación. Esta batalla humana requiere eliminar el analfabetismo en el sur, pero también debe buscar elevar niveles de conciencia para que podamos tratarnos con el azote de desequilibrios sociales dentro de las comunidades.

Claudine AHIANYO-KPONDZO

«Ne Crains Point, Demeure Debout!»

(Message Biblique pour la FUACE)

Chers sœurs et frères en Jésus-Christ, le message que je vous apporte aujourd'hui a pour thème: «Ne crains point, demeure debout!» C'est un thème que j'ai tiré de la lecture des trois textes susmentionnés.

Personnellement, je trouve que c'est une message ou une exhortation qui vient à point nommé, vu les problèmes qui nous assaillent tous en ce moment: problème d'argent, problème de santé, problème relationnel, problème socio-politique, problème de foi, problème d'identité, problème de religion, problème tout court.

De ces trois textes nous aurons à comprendre une dimension du thème et les autres dimensions nous viendront par notre soif d'étudier et de comprendre les textes.

Esaïe 59,16–21

Dans cette portion du texte, nous voyons Dieu face à la cruauté du monde: le crime, le mensonge, les œuvres iniques, le mal érigé en système de vie, l'injustice, les guerres, les souffrances et le gémissement de ses enfants.

Mais, dans ce tumulte, il n'y a eu personne pour intercéder pour les autres et le mal a continué. Alors, l'Eternel Dieu a pris ses responsabilités: il a attendu vainement et comme le dit le texte:

«Son bras lui est venu en aide; sa justice lui a servi d'appui et il l'a revêtu comme d'une cuirasse. Il a mis sur sa tête le casque du salut; il a pris la vengeance pour vêtement et il s'est couvert de la jalousie comme d'un manteau. Et il a rendu à chacun selon ses œuvres, peu importe la part de ceux qui se disent lui appartenir; il faut que justice soit rendue, il faut que justice soit faite.»

Au vu de cela, la question que chacun de nous doit se poser est: Quelles sont mes œuvres? Quelle est ma part dans le jugement qui sera rendu? Et à chacun de trouver sa réponse et de savoir quel chemin emprunter.

Ephésien 6,10–20

C'est un texte que nous connaissons tous et qui nous enseigne que nous sommes sur un terrain de combat. Dans notre marche vers la vie nouvelle, cette vie que nous obtenons en acceptant la nouvelle alliance, nous place sur un terrain de combat constant, un combat non pas contre la chair et le sang, mais un combat contre les dominations, les autorités, les princes de ce monde de ténèbres, les esprits méchants dans les lieux célestes.

Si nous avons à lutter contre les esprits, nous n'irons pas au combat avec des fusils, ni avec des machettes, ni avec des gourdins et que sais-je encore? Mais nous sortirons contre ces esprits avec des armes spirituelles, des armes de Dieu, des armes spéciales.

Voyons un peu la composition de ces armes: la Vérité; la Cuirasse de la Justice; l'Évangile de Paix; le Bouclier de la Foi; le Casque du Salut; l'Épée de l'Esprit. Certaines de ces armes s'identifient à certaines parties du corps humain ou sont comparés à des objets que nous utilisons tous les jours.

Ainsi la Vérité marche de pair avec les reins. *«Ayez à vos reins, la Vérité pour ceinture.»* Les reins bien ceints sont des reins en qui on peut avoir confiance. Même dans le monde visible, quand les boxeurs ou les lutteurs vont au combat, ils se ceignent les reins.

La Cuirasse de la Justice est comme une chemise dont on se revêt. L'Évangile de Paix, l'Évangile duquel nous tirons notre bien-être spirituel doit être toujours porté sur nous et mis à une place de choix: *les pieds*.

Contrairement aux considérations que nous leur donnons, les pieds sont les membres de nos corps qui nous portent et qui nous font avancer. Si nos pieds sont défaillants, eh bien, imaginez vous-mêmes notre état de santé.

En plus des pieds, il y a aussi des chaussures. Nous avons beau avoir de bons pieds, si les chaussures que nous utilisons ne sont pas à notre taille, nous n'irons pas loin non plus. Que celui qui a des oreilles, entende.

Ensuite, nous avons le Bouclier de la Foi qui se tient dans les mains, portés par les bras et prêts à parer à tous les mauvais coups; et ici dans le texte, le Bouclier de la Foi nous aide à éteindre tous les traits enflammés du diable.

Enfin, le Casque du Salut et l'épée de l'Esprit Qui est la Parole de Dieu. Le Casque se porte sur la tête pour éviter de prendre des mauvais coups venant d'en haut et ceux nous attendant au sol lors d'une chute.

L'épée de l'Esprit, c'est la Parole de Dieu. Dieu est Esprit et Sa Parole est insufflée par Lui-même. C'est cette épée que notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ a utilisée dans le désert face à Satan qui était venu le tenter.

Une autre question se pose encore à nous ici: sommes-nous habitués à ces armes spirituelles? La Vérité, la Justice, la Paix, la Foi, l'Esprit, le Salut? Font-elles partie de nos comportements et pensées quotidiens? A chacun encore de répondre.

Avant de parler du texte de Marc, je voudrais juste attirer notre attention à tous sur la similitude du verset 17a du texte d'Ésaïe et de celui d'Ephésien 6,14–17. Après cela, chacun ira chercher et comprendre.

Es 59,17a dit: *«L'Éternel se revêt de la justice comme d'une cuirasse et il met sur sa tête le Casque du Salut car il vient rendre justice»* faute d'intercesseur.

Eph 6,14–17 dit: *«Tenez donc ferme: ayez à vos reins la Vérité pour ceinture; revêtez*



la cuirasse de la Justice; mettez à vos pieds le zèle que donne l'Évangile de Paix; prenez par-dessus tout cela le Bouclier de la Foi, avec lequel vous pourrez éteindre tous les traits enflammés du malin. Prenez aussi le Casque du Salut, et l'épée de l'Esprit, qui est la Parole de Dieu.»

Si l'Éternel Lui-même, le Père Tout Puissant qui a magnifié la Parole au-dessus de son propre Nom se revêt de la Justice et porte le Casque du Salut avant de rendre Justice aux hommes qu'il a Lui-même créées et faits; pourquoi pas nous, simples créatures qui nous cherchons quotidiennement? Pourquoi ne faisons-nous pas usage de ces armes face à nos problèmes?

Marc 14,1–9; 14–20

Venons maintenant au texte de Marc. Marc 14,1–9; 14–20. Dans les versets 1 et 2, nous voyons que les principaux sacrificateurs avaient déjà planifiés dans leurs têtes que Jésus-Christ devait mourir et Il fallait chercher un moyen de l'arrêter sans que le peuple soit au courant.

Dans les versets 3–11, une femme que Jésus-Christ avait sauvée est entrée dans la maison où Jésus-Christ prenait son repas et a versé le contenu d'un flacon de parfum de grand prix sur la tête de Jésus-Christ et essuyé ses pieds avec ses cheveux.

Les sacrificateurs et tous ceux qui étaient présents ont boudé la femme, car, pour eux, c'était une grande perte. Ce geste de la femme et la réponse de Jésus-Christ ont donné au contraire, des idées à Judas Iscariot qui s'est immédiatement proposé de le livrer.

Dans les versets 12–20, le dernier repas de Jésus-Christ avec ses disciples. Tout est déjà planifié et Jésus-Christ devait célébrer ce repas avec ses disciples, mais à un endroit spécial que Lui-même connaissait déjà. Il a juste envoyé ses disciples en leur recommandant de suivre l'homme à la cruche et de lui poser la question qu'il fallait et ce fut fait.

Que nous Révèlent ces trois Textes?

Le thème central dégagé par ces trois textes, nous l'avons déjà mentionné, est: l'insurrection ou la guerre contre le mal. Or, pour lutter contre le mal, il faut nécessairement bannir la crainte et tenir ferme sur ces deux pieds; autrement dit: ne rien craindre et demeurer debout.

Pour ne rien craindre et demeurer debout, il faut bien se ceindre les reins, bien se protéger les pieds, s'assurer que sa tête est bien protégée et enfin, avoir à la main deux choses: le bouclier pour parer à tous les coups de l'ennemi et l'arme de combat.

Toutes ces armes, toutes ces dispositions, nous les avons à portée de main. Alors, pourquoi ne les utilisons-nous pas? Peut-être sommes-nous plutôt devenus des amis de ces ennemis qui se cachent derrière le groupe un tel ou le club un tel sans le savoir?

A chacun de réfléchir à la question. Au fait, que veut dire ne pas craindre et demeurer debout? *Craindre*, selon le micro Robert, veut dire: envisager quelque chose ou quelqu'un comme dangereux, nuisible et en avoir peur. Craindre est synonyme de redouter.

Ne pas craindre, c'est avoir une ferme assurance. Et comment avoir cette assurance? C'est avoir une arme en main; une arme plus redoutable que l'ennemi.

Demeurer debout, c'est tenir ferme et solidement sur ses deux pieds afin de résister à la destruction. Demeurer debout donc, c'est adopter une position d'action, une position dans laquelle on est prêt à agir et à agir efficacement.

Jésus-Christ, pendant tout ce temps savait exactement ce qui allait lui arriver et il savait surtout que ce soir même, il allait être arrêté et cloué à la croix. C'était un secret trop lourd à porter, une vérité trop claire à supporter.

Mais malgré tout cela, Jésus-Christ faisait confiance à Dieu son Père et attendait patiemment ce moment. Il n'avait pas peur, il ne craignait rien, il demeurait tout simplement debout. Et il continuait à travailler avec ses disciples et n'a jamais cessé d'accomplir des œuvres bonnes.

Levons nous et Bâissons la Maison du Seigneur, avec Courage et dans la Prière

Ma sœur, mon frère, comment rester calme, sans crainte et demeurer debout si je sais que dans une heure ou deux je vais mourir d'une mort atroce ou que l'un des membres de ma famille proche va mourir ou va avoir un grave accident?

Comment demeurer debout et sans crainte lorsque j'ai perdu mon emploi et que je vois ma famille se disloquer devant moi? Comment demeurer debout et sans crainte lorsque la personne que j'aime le plus au monde me trahi?

Comment demeurer debout et sans crainte lorsque le monde s'écroule sous mes pieds et que je n'ai plus d'appui? Comment demeurer debout et sans crainte lorsque je suis conscient que rien ne va plus au sein de notre organisation, au sein de notre communauté et dans notre monde?

Mais, est-ce le moment de baisser les bras, de fuir ou de nous cacher les yeux? Non et non; c'est plutôt le moment de nous mettre debout et de consacrer une partie de notre temps au Seigneur qui veut nous utiliser pour améliorer notre propre condition de vie.

C'est le moment de nous lever pour bâtir la maison du Seigneur et par ricochet, la nôtre. Et pour y arriver, nous devons nous mettre à l'étude de la Parole de Dieu d'où nous tirerons toutes nos forces et nos armes.

La Parole de Dieu qui nous apprend que la prière est une arme redoutable qui change les situations. «*Quand je marche dans la vallée de l'ombre de la mort, je ne crains aucun mal, car Tu es avec moi. Ta houlette et Ton bâton me rassurent.*» (Ps 23,4)

Devant des problèmes, des problèmes qui pour nous sont la traversée de la vallée de l'ombre de la mort, nous avons Quelqu'un Qui nous porte et Qui nous rassure. Mais nous, nous oublions très vite cet aspect et nous nous décourageons très facilement et au lieu d'avoir confiance en Dieu.

Nous essayons alors d'anticiper Son action, oubliant que Ses voies ne sont pas les nôtres et que Sa manière de voir les choses ne correspondent pas à la nôtre. Alors, nous essayons de devancer Dieu dans Ses plans et nous nous cassons la figure.

Osons Prendre Dieu au Mot

Avons-nous jamais cherché à connaître la raison cachée derrière la souffrance qui nous ronge aujourd'hui? Que fit le Roi Josaphat quand il était aux prises avec un ennemi

beaucoup plus puissant que ces troupes? Il pria, tout simplement Dieu en ces termes: «O notre Dieu, n'exerceras-Tu pas Tes jugements sur eux? Car nous sommes sans force devant cette multitude nombreuse qui s'avance contre nous et nous ne savons que faire. Mais nos yeux sont sur Toi, Oh Eternel.» (2Chroniques 20,12)

Josaphat savait que ni sa force ni celle de ses troupes ne lui étaient d'aucun secours; il savait qu'il n'avait pas toutes les réponses à tous les problèmes et il savait aussi que certaines besognes ne peuvent être accomplies que par Dieu et par Dieu seul.

Ma sœur, mon frère, ce n'est qu'en nous tournant vers Dieu dans notre faiblesse que sa puissance peut être libérée en nous et à travers nous pour accomplir Ses plans. Josaphat, devant cette multitude pouvait avoir peur et être découragé.

Et la suite logique de cette crainte pouvait être: «*mes amis, ces gens sont trop nombreux et puissants, fuyons et sauve qui peut*» et c'est exactement ce que nous nous faisons tous les jours. Mais Josaphat lui savait en qui il a cru et il a utilisé l'arme la plus redoutable que nous connaissons tous: *la Prière*. Et en disant cette prière, tout a changé.

Jésus-Christ Lui-même, à un certain moment de sa souffrance a crié: «*Oh Père, si Tu pouvais éloigner de moi cette coupe amère! Mais toutefois que Ta volonté soit faite.*» Aussitôt, Dieu a libéré sa puissance et Jésus-Christ a tenu ferme et est demeuré debout jusqu'à la fin et il a tout accompli pour nous.

Aujourd'hui cette grâce a surabondé sur nous. Et si Jésus-Christ, comme nous avait eu peur et a laissé tout tombé, que se passerait-il aujourd'hui? Personnellement, je n'ose pas l'imaginer. Ma sœur, mon frère, que nous reste: t-il donc à faire?

Soyons et Demeurons Fermes dans notre Marche avec Dieu

Mettons-nous debout et prions pour que nos problèmes trouvent une solution. «*Ne crains pas, demeure debout*» cette injonction en elle-même est une arme pour nous. Ma sœur, mon frère, préfères-tu quitter ton organisation et laisser ta place vide, parce qu'à ton avis les choses ne marchent pas comme tu le veux?

Vas-tu passer ta vie à parcourir toutes les organisations? Qui t'a garantie qu'ailleurs où les hommes se rassemblent tout est parfait? Sais-tu au moins où Jésus-Christ a besoin de tes talents?

Vas-tu continuer à faire des commentaires désobligeants sur ce que font les pasteurs, les prêtres, les femmes, les hommes, les jeunes, les enfants? Au lieu de prier le Père Tout Puissant pour leur vie?

Où est donc ta foi? Chers sœurs et frères en Jesus-Christ, prenons nos responsabilités pendant qu'il est encore temps et pendant que nous en avons encore la force. Demeurons debout et ne craignons rien, car, avec toutes les armes redoutables que nous avons à notre portée.

Dieu est Là et Prêt à nous utiliser pour redynamiser notre organisation, pour redynamiser notre communauté, pour remettre de l'équilibre au sein de nos familles, et pour reconstruire notre monde. Prenons la décision *maintenant*. Que nos cœurs soient bénis.

Claudine AHIANO-KPONDZO: Do not Fear, Stand Firm! (A Biblical Message for WSCF)

When God created us, God gave us free will, and we can choose good or evil. But in the bad comprehension of her or his strength, humankind used free will to develop evil to the detriment of good. The consequences are now huge and very difficult to manage. Everyone is in agreement that we should turn back to God, in order that God would come back to us. What shall we do, therefore? The three texts chosen will make a small contribution towards understanding God better, and help us to be true workers with God for the perfect realization of our planet.

Claudine AHIANO-KPONDZO: «Ne Crains Point, Demeure Debout!» (Message Biblique pour la FUACE)

Dieu en nous créant nous a donné le libre arbitre et nous permet de décider de beaucoup de choses autant sur le bien que sur le mal. Mais dans sa mauvaise compréhension de ce pouvoir, l'homme l'a utilisé pour développer le mal au détriment du bien. Les conséquences sont maintenant énormes et très difficiles à gérer. Tout le monde est d'accord pour revenir à Dieu afin que Dieu revienne à nous. Que faire donc? La petite contribution à travers trois textes choisis trace un certain nombre de pistes pouvant nous aider à prendre Dieu au mot et à être de véritables ouvriers avec lui pour le salut de notre planète.



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Maternal Images of God in Second and Third Isaiah

“A religion which seeks to convey the Teaching of God, who is above and beyond both sexes, cannot succeed in conveying that Teaching if it seeks to do so in a manner which implies that a positive-divine value is attached only to one of the two sexes.”¹

Feminist scholars are not the only people troubled by the predominantly male language describing God in the Hebrew Scriptures. Liturgists, nuns, pastors, and lay women alike seek to reconcile the Biblical images of God with their own experiences of the divine: God the Father and God the Mother.²

Motherhood of God

Recent years have seen a surge of literature concerning feminine and feminist themes in the Hebrew Scriptures, and the images that spark my interest are those of a feminine God. Indeed there are many, some of which describe God as mother.

The obvious starting points for this investigation are Second and Third Isaiah, because within that short corpus gynomorphic language abounds, concerning both Lady Zion and God Godself.

Women who are troubled by the overwhelming representation of God as male are not at a loss for a remedy; there is a gender-inclusive God within the Biblical texts. In fact, “one of the best-kept secrets of the Church is the fact that the Bible itself sometimes describes God in feminine terms.”³

While language for God in the Biblical texts is predominantly masculine, feminine images of God do exist and are more common than many would believe. Indeed, several abstract descriptions of the God of the Hebrew Bible are grammatically and spiritually feminine. For example, Spirit and Light are both grammatically feminine images that are used specifically to refer to the Deity.⁴ So also Lady Wisdom sometimes encompasses attributes of the Divine.⁵

The feminine God does not exist only in abstraction, however. Common in modern liturgies is the theme of God the parent, or more usually, father. Interestingly, God the parent is not as common in the Hebrew corpus as is suggested by modern liturgies.

1 GRUBER Mayer I., *The Motherhood of God in Second Isaiah*. *Révue Biblique* 1983/4. 359.

2 FOSTER Julia A., *The Motherhood of God: The Use of Hyl as God-Language in the Hebrew Scriptures*. In HOPFE Lewis M. (ed.), *Uncovering Ancient Stones: Essays in Memory of H. Neil Richardson*. Winona Lake, 1994. 93–94.

3 EMSWILER S. N., *The Ongoing Journey: Women and the Bible*. New York, 1977. 119.

4 SCHÜNGEL-STRAUMANN Helen, *The Feminine Face of God*. In HÄRING Hermann – METZ Johann Baptist (eds.), *The Many Faces of the Divine*. London, 1995. 93–94.

5 FOSTER 95–97.



In fact, God receives the appellation “father” eighteen times in the Hebrew canon, a surprisingly small number, considering the immensity of the corpus and the patriarchal structure of ancient society.

Knowing how rarely the Hebrew Bible refers to God as father, we turn to the idea of God as mother with little hope that such language exists. It is more difficult to count the number of times God is described maternally, particularly because the word “mother” is only once used to describe God (Isaiah 66,13).

That is not to say, however, that God does not do mother-like or womanly things or exhibit maternal behavior.¹ On the contrary, even some of the imagery referring to God as “father” describes behavior which characterizes the realm of ancient mothers.²

Thus, while a brief word search to produce the number of times God behaves as a mother is not possible, we do know that it is more frequent than we read in most Hebrew Bible translations, which tend to render feminine God language in the masculine.³

We find a surprising concentration of just such God language in the exilic and post-exilic Isaianic literature. In only 26 chapters, God is explicitly referred to as mother five times. In this study we will examine each passage, discussing how God’s role as mother functions within its specific passage and how it plays into the rhetoric of Second and Third Isaiah.⁴

Finally, we will briefly describe the implications of a maternal God for the community of faith and for individual believers. The relevant passages concerning the motherhood of God are Isaiah 42,13–17; 45,9–11; 46,3–4; 49,14–18; and 66,12–14.

Like a Woman in Labor (Isaiah 42,13–17)⁵

¹³ *YHWH like a mighty one will go forth, like a man of wars He will stir up zeal,*

He will raise a shout, indeed He will roar, against His enemies He will show Himself to be mighty.

¹⁴ *“I have kept silent from of old, I will be silent, I will restrain myself; Like a woman in labor I will groan, I will pant and I will gasp all together.*

¹⁵ *“I will lay waste mountains and hills, and all their vegetation I will dry up⁶;*

I will turn rivers into islands, and pools I will dry up.

¹⁶ *“And I will lead the blind in a road which they do not know, in paths they do not know I will guide them:*

1 Gen. 3,21 (seamstress); Num. 11,12 (nursing mother); Deut. 32,18 (mother giving birth); Hos. 11 (nursing mother); Jer. 31,15–22 (birthing mother); Ps. 22,9 (midwife).

2 In Ps. 103,13, God the father is said to possess motherly compassion, from the root *rhm*, which in the nominative means ‘womb.’

3 The King James Version, the New King James Version, the Jerusalem Bible, the Contemporary English version, and the Good News Bible. This list is compiled by surveying how the major translations of the Bible translate Deut. 32,18. “You were unmindful of the Rock that bore [or begot] you, you forgot the God Who gave you birth.” The translations here listed all distort the meaning of the second half of the verse in order to avoid the depiction of God as a woman giving birth, the undeniable meaning of a verb that is frequently translated, “the God who fathered you.”

4 This study is not meant to be a comprehensive review of scholarly literature on this topic, but rather it seeks to call a wider audience’s attention to maternal language for God in the Hebrew Bible.

5 All the translations in this paper are my own unless otherwise indicated.

6 I would rather translate this verb “wither,” expressing the death of the vegetation. To preserve continuity with the same verb in the following line, however, I translate it, “dry up,” which harmonizes both instances of the verb’s usage.

Before them, I will make the darkness into light and rough places into level ground;

These are the things; I have done them, and I have not abandoned them.

¹⁷*“They have turned backward, they will be utterly ashamed: they who trust in a graven image,*

They who say to a cast image, “you are our gods.””

Of interest is verse 14, in which God describes Godself in the first person as a woman in labor. Unquestionably the image is referring to a woman suffering the pain, fear and joy of bringing forth new life.

After describing Godself using a feminine participle, God continues to describe the effects of labor: groaning, panting, and gasping. This image of God as a new mother expresses the pain that She is willing to suffer in order to bear creation.

Indeed, this passage expresses God’s power over creation. God created it, through Her own toil, sweat, and laborious work, and God has the power to “lay waste mountains.” But the passage does not end with an image of destruction, for God promises to take good care of “the blind,” making the way of Her children easier.

Of the five texts in this study, this passage has triggered the most debate among scholars. Much of that debate concerns the form and how it relates to the verses surrounding it. Some scholars, including the editors of the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, define the literary unit of this passage as verses 14 through 17.¹

In this reading of the text, the image of God’s inactivity, described by silence, followed by the ear-splitting shrieks of God experiencing labor pains, functions as “an announcement of imminent divine activity.”²

Phyllis TRIBLE interprets this passage by explaining that out of this divine travail a new creation will come, which will follow the destruction of the old creation in verse 15.³ For the scholars who read verse 14 as the introduction to the following verses, God as a woman in labor is an image of creative power and triumph.

Others, though, group verse 14 with the preceding verse to show parallelism between the warrior-god imagery in verse 13 and the woman-in-labor imagery in verse 14. They argue that the woman-in-labor imagery displays the power and might of an active God Who is also a warrior rushing into battle.

This use of labor language in the Hebrew Bible typically describes anguish, rather than the miracle of new life,⁴ but it is clear, considering the parallelism with God as warrior, that this use of birth pangs does not intend to describe a God trembling with fear.⁵

Rather, this image is used to express the creative, or rather procreative, power of God, whether it is parallel to a warrior God who cries out when charging into battle, or

1 TRIBLE Phyllis, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*. Philadelphia, 1978. 64. Also, DARR Kathryn Pfisterer, *Like Warrior, like Woman: Destruction and Deliverance in Isaiah 42,10–17*. Catholic Biblical Quarterly 1987/4. 560–571. DARR takes a slightly different approach from TRIBLE in that she allows for both interpretive arguments by taking 10–17 as a unit, rather than breaking it somewhere in the middle as do many of her colleagues (DARR 562).

2 DARR, 563.

3 TRIBLE, 64.

4 DARR Kathryn Pfisterer, *Two Unifying Female Images in the Book of Isaiah*. In HOPFE 24.

5 VAN WIJK-BOS Johanna W. H., *Reimagining God: The Case for Scriptural Diversity*. Louisville, 1995. 51–55. Also GRUBER 351–359.

whether it introduces a power-over-creation motif. This verse emphasizes both God's creative and destructive power.

Another debate about this text regards the use of auditory language.¹ Verse 13 begins with the sounds of war: war cries, shouts, and perhaps a Shophar, which is implicit in the verb *ruʿ*. War cries followed by the intentional and disciplined silence of YHWH create stark contrast, which repeats when the silence gives way to the sounds of groaning like a woman in labor.

These contrasting sounds cause a surprise for the readers who do not hear what they expect to hear. Within each of these shifts we hear the “power and risk and energy” required for each of these situations: war shouts, silence, and childbirth.²

Indeed, while this image of God as a woman in labor is a surprise to the modern reader, as it probably is to the ancient hearer, it is an appropriate image that conveys not only the power and strength implicit in the Godhead, but also a paradox of vulnerability and strength as the mother of all shares in the “pain of creation.”³

Woe to the One Who Says to a Woman: ‘What Are You Bearing?’

(Isaiah 45,9–13)

⁹ *Woe to the one who contends with his maker,
to the earthenware vessel [who contends with] the vessels of the
Earth.⁴*

*Does clay say to its craftsman, “What are you making?”
or, “Your work is without hands in it?”⁵*

¹⁰ *Woe to the one who says to a father, “What are you begetting?”
or to a woman, “What are you bearing?”*

¹¹ *Thus says YHWH, the Holy One of Israel Who formed it:
“Do you ask me of the things to come;
about my sons and the work of my hands, do you command me?²*

¹² *“I have made the Earth, and humanity I have created upon it.
I, my hands have stretched out the heavens and all their hosts I have
commanded.*

¹³ *“I have aroused him in righteousness and all his ways I will make
straight;*

*He will build my city and my exiles he will send forth;
Not for price and not for reward,” says YHWH of Hosts.*

This passage falls in a peculiar spot within the text of Second Isaiah. It follows a long prophetic pronouncement about God's anointed messiah, Cyrus. Some have argued that this series of woes and rhetorical questions responds to Israel's unrecorded protest that God should use a foreigner as the anointed one of Israel.⁶

1 VAN WIJK-BOS, *Reimagining God*. 51–54.

2 *Ibid.*, 55.

3 *Ibid.*

4 The meaning of the Hebrew for verse 45,9ab is uncertain.

5 The meaning of the Hebrew for verse 45,9bb is also uncertain, but many translators, including the JPS, translate it, “Your work has no handles.”

6 HANSON Paul D., *Isaiah 40–66: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. Louisville, 1995. 105–107; WIJK-BOS, *Reimagining God*. 55–58.

Paul HANSON argues that this diatribe against those who would question the Creator is a response to Israel questioning God's chosen method of deliverance for the nation. HANSON is right in that this prophecy must respond to some complaint from Israel, but the text does not allow us to know what that complaint is.

The argumentation in this passage is clear, regardless of the impetus. Through a series of rhetorical questions in which the creation questions the Maker, God is likened to a potter, a father, and a woman who gives birth.¹ The unstated, yet obvious answer to the posed questions is "no," it is not right that the creation should question the Creator.

Another argument concerning this passage asserts that it is in accord with the other texts in Second and Third Isaiah in which God is declared to be the God of all nations and all peoples.² The Israelites, however, "are critical of God's relation to other creatures," sparking this polemical diatribe.³

This argument is tenuous at best, because the reference to Cyrus in verse 13 does not require that the "children" include all nations. The beginning of chapter 45 describes Cyrus as a special messiah for the nation of Israel alone. Indeed, this text is about the relationship between a child nation and a parent God.

The woes and rhetorical questions are designed to display the authority of God as potter, father, and mother. The text also condemns those who would have the impertinence and audacity to question that authority in their God, whatever their complaint.

It is significant that God embodies the authority of a craftsman, a father, and a mother, because so often in other texts, the authority of the mother is ignored.⁴ This text does not ignore the significance of the mother, but rather affirms it by showing that YHWH demands respect as mother as well as father.

You Have Been Sustained from My Womb (Isaiah 46,3–4)

³ *Listen to me, house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, who has been carried from my womb, who has been sustained from my womb.*

⁴ *And until old age, I am he, and until gray hair I will bear a heavy load, I have done and I will carry, and I will bear a heavy load and I will deliver.*⁵

In this text, YHWH describes God's care for Israel's well-being as that of a mother's care for her baby.⁶ God elaborates by using language of nurture, "until gray hair." Until the mother is no longer able, she will carry and care for her children, and so will YHWH.

Verse 4 uses language of bearing a heavy load or burden and delivering it, evoking

1 FOSTER (93–94.) addresses the problem that the parallelism between woman (not mother) and father seems awkward. She proposes as a possible explanation: using the word "mother would have called up an image too close to the mother-worship of the fertility cults." I concede this as a possibility, but I wonder if the odd parallelism is due to the fact that all adult women were mothers, and so the two terms were interchangeable and synonymous.

2 Isa. 56,1–8; 60,3.

3 Wijk-Bos 57.

4 GRUBER (351–353.) explains that biblical poetry employs what Wilfred G. E. WATSON calls *gender-matched synonymous parallelism*, a technique in which parallel items are juxtaposed in gendered pairs. He explains that most cases in which God is compared to a father fail to employ gender-matched parallelism (except Malachi 1,6). This Isaiah text, however, does use gender-matched parallelism.

5 This verb, *mlt*, appears here in the piel and means "to deliver" in the sense of saving a life; it also means to lay eggs. In the *hiphil*, this verb means "to give birth."

6 SWIDLER Leonard, *Biblical Affirmations of Woman*. Philadelphia, 1979. 33.

pregnancy.¹ From the very first stages of motherhood until old age has made childbearing impossible, this mother carries and sustains her child.

Susan ACKERMAN has suggested that verse 4, while still containing mothering imagery in the nursing of the infant, also implies the work of YHWH as midwife, who participates in the birthing process by protecting the lives of mother and infant.²

Of the five texts discussed in this study, only this one is not on the usual lists of feminine images for God in Second Isaiah. Indeed, Mayer I. GRUBER published an article on *The Motherhood of God in Second Isaiah* and listed the other four passages that are discussed in this paper, but not this one.³

I include this passage because, when body parts are mentioned with no possessive modifier, and when only one figure in the text can be the possible owner of those body parts, those body parts almost always belong to the aforementioned figure.⁴

Therefore my translation of the end of verse 3 reads, “my womb,” rather than “a womb,” or even “the womb.” In addition to this general rule, this text does contain a first person common singular possessive suffix, and while it is not attached to the nouns for womb, *rhm* and *btn*, it is joined to those nouns with a *maqqeph*, and thus cannot be separated from the noun.

In this text, God is referring to God’s Own womb, and the care of God’s children begins on the day of birth. This is significant, because the language supports this translation and because this interpretation of the text harmonizes with the other maternal images for God within Second Isaiah.

Can a Woman Forget Her Nursing Infant? (Isaiah 49,14–18)

¹⁴ *And Zion said “YHWH has abandoned me,” and “my Lord has forgotten me.”*

¹⁵ *Can a woman forget her nursing infant,
not having compassion⁵ for the son of her womb?
Even these may forget, but I will not forget you.*

¹⁶ *Thus, upon my palms I have engraved you, your walls are before me continually.*

¹⁷ *Your sons made haste, those who tore you down,
and those laid you waste will go forth from you.*

¹⁸ *Lift up your eyes all around and see,
all of them have been gathered, they have come to you,
as I am living, an oracle of YHWH, for all of them are like ornaments
you shall wear, and you shall bind them as a bride.*

This passage is another series of argumentative rhetorical questions in which God is defending Godself against the charge of abandonment. In this case, Zion complains that YHWH has abandoned and forgotten her.

God responds with a rhetorical question whose obvious and unstated answer is “no,”

1 JOHNSTON Ann, *A Prophetic Vision of an Alternative Community: A Reading of Isa. 40–55*. In HOPFE. 38.

2 ACKERMAN Susan, *Isaiah*. In NEWSOM Carol A. – RINGE Sharon H. (eds.), *Women’s Bible Commentary*. Louisville, 1998. 176.

3 GRUBER, 351.

4 Good examples of this are in Isa. 49.16: “upon my palms”; and Isa. 66.12: “upon my side.”

5 The Hebrew word here translated “not having compassion,” is from the root *rhm*, which means womb. God is frequently described as having *rhm* and, as Phyllis TRIBLE has argued, this kind of compassion is decidedly maternal. It should be recognized that this feminine characteristic is frequently attributed to God. TRIBLE, 31–40.

women do not forget their children. The particularity of a mother's care is emphasized, for the ancient mother provided care for all children until they were old enough to participate in the gendered tasks of adulthood, such as shepherding or cooking.

Children around the age of five or six began helping with menial tasks within the mother's sphere of daily chores, and by the age of thirteen they joined the adult labor force in which they worked primarily in same-gender groups.¹ Therefore all children, including boys, maintained a close relationship with their mothers until puberty,² whereas their relationship with their fathers was more distant.

When Second Isaiah compares God's care of Zion to that of a mother who is still nursing her children, we understand it as a powerful metaphor expressing YHWH's continual love and care for Her child.

In verse 15 and following, the speaker's continual use of the second person feminine singular pronoun, you, brings the mother and daughter into even closer relationship: this is a direct address of promise for a particular child, Zion.

A mother is expressing love for this one child whom she addresses intimately.³ But even then, our Isaianic poet recognizes that not all human women are good mothers, and that, though unlikely, conceivably one may forget her suckling child.

Avoiding attributing this possible negative to YHWH, the word of God continues, "even these may forget, but I will not forget you." The motherhood of God is perfect, because it is not subject to the shortcomings and failings of humanity.

In this passage, Second Isaiah's personification of Zion as a woman is also noteworthy. According to Mark E. BIDDLE, Zion is frequently personified using feminine language, and the kind of woman she becomes is diverse. She is pictured as a mother, a daughter, a virgin, a bride, a menstruating woman, a harlot, an adulteress, a widow, and a royal figure.⁴

John J. SCHMITT argues that Second Isaiah draws the images of God as mother from the images of Zion as mother. SCHMITT also argues that this personification of Zion as a woman is easily transferable to the Godhead, because the feminine language is already established with reference to the city of Jerusalem.⁵

Whether or not Isaiah draws on Zion as mother as his source for God as mother, God's motherhood is clearly a different kind of motherhood than that of Zion. God is the unfailing mother Who does not forget Her child, even when all other mothers forget. YHWH is the quintessential mother.

As a Man Whose Mother Comforts Him, so Shall I Comfort You (Isaiah 66,12–14)

¹² *For, thus says YHWH:*
"Here I am, stretching out to her like a river of well-being,
And like an overflowing stream, like a wealth of nations.

1 MEYERS Carol, *The Family in Early Israel*. In PERDUE Leo G. (ed.), *Families in Ancient Israel*. Louisville, 1997. 25–27.

2 See the Rebekah and Jacob stories in Gen 25 and 27.

3 VAN WIJK-BOS, 61–62.

4 BIDDLE Mark E., *The Figure of Lady Jerusalem: Identification, Deification and Personification of Cities in the Ancient Near East*. In YOUNGER K. L. et al. (eds.), *The Biblical Canon in Comparative Perspective*. Lewiston, 1991. 173.

5 SCHMITT John J., *The Motherhood of God and Zion as Mother*. *Révue Biblique* 1985/4. 569.

*And you shall suck upon my¹ side and you will be carried,
and upon my knees you will be dandled.*

¹³ *“As a man whose mother comforts him, so I will comfort you,
and in Jerusalem you will be comforted.*

¹⁴ *“And you will see and rejoice in your heart,
and your bones will grow up like grass,
And the hand of YHWH will be known by his servant
and his indignation by his enemies.”*

This passage contains two mothering images, both of which involve a mother comforting a distressed child. YHWH promises to nurse and carry Her child on Her side. What a comforting, yet alarming feeling it is to have a creature so thoroughly dependant upon its mother for life, for safety, and for sustenance.

And yet, this is not daunting to YHWH. YHWH will dandle, bounce, and play with Her little child on Her knees. YHWH will strap Her child to Her side using a piece of cloth or a basket so that the little one will be constantly with Her throughout the day, to be cared for in the midst of Her work.

In the next verse the child is grown, and “as a man whose mother comforts him,” so shall God comfort Israel. Even as an adult this person depends on his mother for comfort and cheer, and God does not abandon Her child when he reaches the age of adulthood, but rather continues to provide the same loving care that God gave the child in his youth.

By concluding the scroll of Isaiah with this image of God as the mother of an adult child, we learn that, in the end, Israel’s relationship to God is not that of a dependant infant, though sometimes the nation of Israel behaves that way; but rather it is a mature relationship between two adults who are each accountable to the other.

Why Here? Why Now?

These maternal images of God are very important for the rhetoric of Second and Third Isaiah. In Second Isaiah, we find a prophetic voice who is trying to give comfort to a distressed people, reassuring them that God has not abandoned them. To that end, the language is uniformly optimistic.

In Third Isaiah, the outlook is more grim. The exiles have returned home to Jerusalem, but rather than experiencing the positive restoration that Second Isaiah promises, they suffer hardship: famine, poverty and community discord.

The new prophetic voice must address the difficulties of the disappointed community. In the midst of both of these situations, each with different prophetic needs, gynomorphic language for God is widely used.

GRUBER suggests that the use of feminine language for God is an effort to include disillusioned and disenfranchised women more fully in the cult. The use of maternal language attempts to reconcile the cult with a population of worshippers who have left the religion of Israel:

1 Most people translate this verse, “carried upon *her* hip and bounced upon *her* knees,” meaning Zion’s hip and knees, but there is no suffix in the text to tell us about whose hip and knees we are talking. I have translated it with a first person possessive because, as I have argued above, the owner of unattributed body parts tends to be the most obvious person in the passage, unless otherwise specified. It therefore makes the most sense to translate the body parts as belonging to the speaker.

“Because of the insensitivity of his predecessors such as Jeremiah and Ezekiel who had intimated that, in the religion of Israel, maleness is a positive value with which divinity chooses to identify itself while femaleness is a negative value with which divinity refuses to identify itself.”¹

It is highly unlikely, however, that Second Isaiah, who utters some of the harshest words against idolatry in the Hebrew Bible, would be interested in making compromises. Further, SCHMITT argues that if this is the case, Second Isaiah has to have adapted this language from another cult. The adaptation and implicit acceptance of another cult are almost out of the question within the rhetoric of Second Isaiah.²

As GRUBER's explanation is not satisfactory, there must be some other explanation for this prophetic willingness to stray from traditional androcentric language for God. Susan ACKERMAN cites Leah BRONNER: “The loss of monarchy, Temple, and homeland led the sixth-century Isaianic authors to seek metaphors in the only social unit that still functioned, the family.”³

Thus, she argues that the positive feminine language for God has, at its roots, the need for stability, and the only place to find that stability is in the home. She explains that, during times of crisis and social turmoil, those who do not have power in the normal patriarchal structure rise in importance and power to fill the vacuum that is either creating or created by the crisis.

The positive feminine and maternal language for God, therefore, may have been a result of a temporary rise in the status of women. Alas, she finally notes that with the restoration of social order, a government, and the cult, the misogyny of the previous period returned,⁴ which is why Second and Third Isaiah are so unusual in their positive treatment of women.

I agree with ACKERMAN that a social impetus for the positive treatment of the female within these texts must exist, but I am unsure about her explanation. Her argument based on the stability of the home is compelling, but I doubt the Vth century BCE saw an improvement in the status of women.

On the contrary, the treatment of women in Ezra 10 and Nehemiah 10 indicates that women are degraded; Ezra's command of universal divorce and abandonment of the foreign wives cannot, in any light, be seen as a positive development.

Rather, while we cannot know what leads the authors of Second and Third Isaiah to employ maternal language for God, it may not have been the movements of great armies or the turmoil of whole communities that stimulated it.

Perhaps our prophets had especially good relationships with their own mothers or wives. Perhaps one of the writers who worked on these texts was a woman. Perhaps the role of God as mother was not so inconceivable for a people whose culture was structured around the family unit.

1 GRUBER, 358.

2 SCHMITT 557–559.

3 ACKERMAN 176.

4 *Ibid.* 176–177.

The Quintessential Mother

We have learned that God is not only father, but also mother. God bears children, nurses them, cares for and cradles them, plays with them, and finally allows them to grow, continuing to be ever-present. God is a comforting, loving mother Who watches over God's son Israel and daughter Zion.

God is willing to suffer for and with them, as She painfully brings life into a world that God created in the beginning. God has the strength to bear and to survive childbirth, and God will not abandon God's children when they reach adulthood.

God will grow old in watching over them and God will not fail to give them aid and comfort when it is needed. In the end, what we learn from these texts is that while God does fatherly things, God also does motherly things, and most importantly, God does Godly things. This God transcends the human constraints of gender normatives and is for all of creation a mother and a father.

These images of God as mother show that God does not limit Godself to the role of father, husband, warrior, or shepherd. Rather, God encompasses all possibilities of human experience. Because we come to know God only through our own experiences, we each know the God Who is particular to us.

God is mother and father, but God is also Lover and Friend, Caregiver and Judge. By reading these texts as they are written, using feminine language for God, we find Biblical evidence to validate many people's experiences of God, thus working to heal centuries of hurt caused by gender-exclusive institutions, language and translations.

The images of God as mother in Second and Third Isaiah, though they have always been there, have not always been read and heard. By proclaiming to the community of faith that there are Biblical references to God's femininity, we not only bring to light one of the Church's "best-kept secrets," but we also begin to understand that God is entirely beyond our comprehension and is most certainly beyond our gendered expectations.

Suggested Reading

BIDDLE Mark E., *The Figure of Lady Jerusalem: Identification, Deification and Personification of Cities in the Ancient Near East*. In YOUNGER K. L. et al. (eds.), *The Biblical Canon in Comparative Perspective*. Lewiston, 1991.

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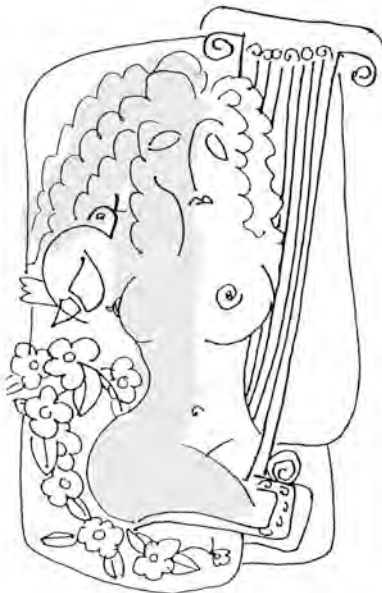
WIJK-BOS Johanna W. H. VAN, *Reimagining God: The Case for Scriptural Diversity*. Louisville, 1995.

Leslie G. Woods: Images Maternelles de Dieu dans le Second et le Troisième Chapitre d'Ésaïe

Durant de nombreuses années, les femmes et les hommes de foi ont lutté avec des images de Dieu exclusivement dominées par le langage masculin. Il y a, cependant, des documents dans le corpus hébraïques à partir desquels débute une discussion sur les caractéristiques féminines de Dieu. Cinq passages du second et troisième chapitre d'Ésaïe qui emploient un langage 'maternel' pour décrire Dieu, sont intéressants dans le cadre de cette étude. Ces passages ne sont pas bien connus des croyants modernes par ce que, fréquemment, il ont été mal traduits dans les Bibles, utilisant le langage masculin à la place des concepts féminins. Quand ils sont bien traduits et discutés ouvertement, nous découvrons que Dieu est aussi bien mère que père, mais plus important, Dieu est un Dieu qui transcende le genre et contrecarre la construction étroite de l'ambition humaine.

Leslie G. Woods: Las Imágenes Maternales de Dios en Isaías Segundo y Tercero

Por muchos años, mujeres y hombres de fe han luchado con las imágenes de Dios que dominan casi exclusivamente el idioma masculino. Hay, sin embargo, hay amplio material en el cuerpo hebreo de donde empezar una discusión sobre las características femeninas de Dios. De interés en este estudio son cinco pasajes en Isaías Segundo y Tercero que emplean el idioma maternal para describir Dios. Estos pasajes no se conocen bien entre los creyentes modernos porque, frecuentemente, han sido mal traducidos en las biblias, al usar el idioma masculino en el lugar de conceptos femeninos. Cuando se traduce adecuadamente y se discute abiertamente, sin embargo, descubrimos que Dios es madre así como padre, pero, más importante, Dios es un Dios que transcende género y lamina la construcción limitada de la expectativa humana.



Moumita BISWAS

Various Identities of Hagar

Hagar's story is one of the most tragic stories in the Bible. It is actually a story of multiple oppressions surviving when finding themselves as single mothers abandoned by their families of women, in terms of class, gender and race.

According to Phyllis TRIBLE, such stories of terror mean wrestling with the demons at night, without a compassionate God to save.¹ Though it is a story of stark horror, many scholars argue that this story reveals that God hears the cry of the poor and the oppressed.

Like Hagar in this postmodern world, many women from the South are victims of patriarchal violence precipitated in the form of domestic sexual and psychological violence, which increases in leaps and bounds due to poverty and racism. Many women like Hagar grapple to survive as a single mother abandoned by their family.

Ethical questions need to be raised regarding whether it is right to exploit the womb of a helpless woman to be a surrogate mother. Hagar's story can also be interpreted as a story of a slave woman's pride, which dared to defy violence with dauntless courage.

Hagar dared to challenge her mistress. It can also be interpreted as the story of a desperate, brave, rebellious, and at the same time helpless, woman's attempt to flee into the desert, hoping to seek freedom from bondage, slavery and exploitation.

In this paper an attempt will be made to reflect on the different identities of Hagar and also to highlight various issues like racism, sexual abuse and poverty, and their relevance in today's context.

The Egyptian Slave Woman, the Maid of Sarai

Hagar's story is introduced in Genesis 16. She is an Egyptian slave woman, the maid of Sarai, who was offered as a concubine to Abram by Sarai to atone for her barrenness and to produce an heir for Abram. According to Tikva Frymer KENSKY, in the Islamic tradition Hagar was not a slave woman, but a princess wed to Abram in a dynastic marriage. A Jewish Midrash also relates that Hagar was a princess in the house of the Pharaoh.²

Different people hold different views regarding how Hagar became a slave of Abram. According to Trevor Dennis Hagar was a part of a bride price that the Pharaoh gave to Abram to compensate the loss of his 'sister' Sarai. To justify his claim, DENNIS refers

1 TRIBLE Phyllis, *Texts of Terror: Literary Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives*. Philadelphia, 1985. 4.

2 KENSKY Tikva Frymer, *The Reading of the Woman in the Bible*. New York, 2002. 227.



WASIBRAGAM

to Genesis 12, where an Egyptian slave girl was mentioned (Genesis 12:16). DENNIS refers to Sharon JEANSONNE, who suggested that the term ‘slave girl’ in Genesis 16,1 is used in the same way as in 12,16.¹ She regrets, however, that there is nothing in the text supporting the notion of Hagar’s royal blood.²

The bitter ingredient in Hagar’s story is the humiliation she faces as a slave at the hands of her mistress. Hagar, being a slave, was supposed to be powerless to rebel against her rich mistress. Sarai must have felt terribly disturbed when the equation of power between her and the slave woman, a person of little status, was shifted.

Pregnancy elevated Hagar’s status in the eyes of her mistress. Thus Phyllis TRIBLE rightly points out that Hagar’s pregnancy enabled her to perceive Sarai in a new way. In her opinion, the hierarchy between the mistress and slave woman suddenly vanished.³ Hagar demanded equality between herself and her mistress. Besides, as the pregnant concubine of Abram, she threatened and challenged Sarai, who was wife, mistress and manager of Abram’s household. Hagar must have challenged her mistress’s authority.

Before things could get worse, Sarai, the mistress, had to do something to control the slave woman. She resorted to violence to curb Hagar and torment her. So cruel was Sarai’s treatment of Hagar—condoned by her husband as a legitimate means of controlling the slave that she fled to the desert in search of hope (Gen. 16:6).

Hagar’s story highlights the issue of racism. According to Beatrix SCHIELE, “Racism seems to be the primitive way of getting rid of competition, and behind it may lurk anxiety about what perhaps might be quite different creativity, different gifts of power.”⁴

Kowk PUI-LAN thinks that Hagar’s story can be significant to the African-American women in United States, because their ancestors had been enslaved as domestic servants and were exploited by wealthy and powerful owners.⁵ *Dalit* Indian women who worked hard can also identify themselves with Hagar because they are exploited by *Zamindars* (rich landowners) and high caste Brahmin masters.⁶

One of the Women in Abram’s Life

Hagar, an Egyptian slave and concubine, acts as a surrogate mother (Gen. 16:1–3). Nowhere in the Old Testament is Hagar referred to as the wife of Abram.⁷ However, she played a very crucial role in Abram’s life, being the mother of his firstborn. Various questions can be raised, such as, being the mother of Abram’s first child, did she receive any love, sympathy, and respect from her son’s father? Does Abram show any compassion to Hagar and tell her to protect herself? The answer is very clear. She did not receive love, kindness, and sympathy from anyone; rather, she was treated just as property, a vessel who nurtured Abram’s heir. If Abram was concerned with Hagar, he would not have sanctioned Sarai to treat her badly.

1 DENNIS Trevor, *Sarah Laughed: Women’s Voice in the Old Testament*. Nashville, 1994. 63.

2 *Ibid.*

3 TRIBLE, 5.

4 SCHIELE Beatrix, *Violence and Justice. Violence against Women*. London, 1994. 24.

5 PUI-LAN Kwok, *Racism and Ethnocentrism in Feminist Biblical Interpretation. Searching the Scripture: A Feminist Introduction*. New York, 1993. 105.

6 Indian society is divided into a hierarchical system of castes. It is one of the most oppressive systems on which Hindu society is based, existing for more than 5000 years. In such system, society is divided into four castes according to the color of skin. This is determined by the birth of a person and can never be changed. The Brahmins, or the priestly educated high caste, monopolize all benefits that society provides. The Kshyatrias, or the aristocratic caste, were mainly warriors and kings in the ancient times. The Vaishyas are the business caste. And the last one is the Shudras, or the agricultural caste. Outside these four castes are the outcasts or Dalits, who do all the menial jobs and are exploited by the higher-caste people. Dalit women are the worst victims of such violence. Many of them are forced into temple prostitution.

7 According to the Islamic tradition, she was another wife of Abram.

It is also necessary to comprehend Sarai's insecure feelings of anxiety about losing her husband's love. Thus she could not bear the pride of a blossoming pregnant woman (Gen. 16:4). According to Renita J. WEEMS, pregnancy would awaken the slave woman's self-worth, which was dormant before.¹ Her maid, by conceiving, could achieve what she could not do before. Sarai wanted to punish her husband's concubine. She treated Hagar so cruelly that she fled and took refuge in the desert (Gen. 16:6).

Hagar's story (one of the women in Abram's life) highlights the issue of how patriarchal culture is responsible for the oppression of women and the vulnerable, helpless and poor members of our society. It also draws our attention to the legitimization of sexual violence against women. It reveals to us how two women are caught in a booby trap of vehement hatred for each other, because of competition arising from the need of protecting their sons in an exploitative patriarchal system.

The story also raises the issue of domestic violence, which many women face in a patriarchal society. Hagar was a victim of domestic violence. Her master and his wife forced her into this critical situation. Domestic violence is the most dehumanizing form of violence that happens to a woman. According to Stella BALTAZAR, most women tolerate domestic violence silently. She thinks that only a few women can resist or protest against such injustice; if they do so, they will encounter serious consequences, such as being ostracized or faced with cruel treatment.²

This is very true to Hagar's experience. When she unable to tolerate her suffering, she dared to run away from her master's house. However, it was God who ordered her to go and face oppression (Gen. 16: 6).

God's command to Abraham is to obey Sarah and to banish Hagar and Ishmael, so that they will build a nation (Gen. 21,9–11), which reveals how the patriarchal authors of the Bible have bankrupted religion and God to justify their own selfish motives. It also highlights the issue of how religion can be misused by patriarchal society to curb the power and freedom of women.

According to Kwok PUI-LAN, Hagar's story for African women can be read from the context where polygamy still exists.³ For Anne NAISIMIYU-WASIKE, the stories of the polygamous marriages in the Hebrew Scripture are responsible for rivalries, jealousies, envies, favouritism, quarrels over inheritance, succession feuds, injustices and hatred. In her opinion, these realities are also the experiences of African polygamous families.⁴

Surrogate Mother

Sarai offered Hagar to be her husband's concubine in order to produce an heir. According to Kathryn PFISTERER DARR, though Sarai's proposal may be odious to us, it must be understood in its cultural context.

In her opinion, Sarai's act cannot be called a bold initiative, but rather a common legal practice in ancient Middle East.⁵ In order to strengthen her justification, she refers to the commentary of E. A. SPEISER, who cites a Nuzi (East of Tigris River) document revealing a similar situation:

1 WEEMS Renita J., *Just a Sister Away: A Womanist Vision of Women's Relationships in the Bible*. California, 1998. 5.

2 BALTAZAR Stella, *Domestic Violence in the Indian Perspective. Women Resisting Violence: Spirituality for Life*. New York, 1996. 57.

3 PUI-LAN, 106.

4 WASIKE Nasimiyu is quoted in *ibid*.

5 PFISTERER DARR Kathryn, *Far More Precious than Jewels: Perspectives on Biblical Women*. Louisville, 1985. 135.

“If Gilmininu has children, Shennima will not take another wife. However if Gilmininu doesn’t have children, Gilmininu will get for Shennima a woman from the Lulu country [ie. a slave girl] as a concubine. In that case, Gilmininu herself shall have authority over the offspring.”¹

In fact, Rachel also persuaded her husband Jacob to enter into conjugal relations with her maid Bilha (Genesis 30:1–24). This way of using the wombs of slaves and other women to be surrogate mothers is indeed a tragic example of the exploitation of a woman’s body by the patriarchal society.

Dynamic analogical questions would be painful for Hagar and Sarai—questions such as, can a woman be used by her master to atone for the barrenness of his mistress? Or, what woman would willingly become a surrogate mother if she knew that she won’t have the right to bring up her child?

Hagar’s precious womb was exploited to be a vessel to bear an heir for her master. Bearing his child and being a surrogate mother did not elevate her position in any way or make her equal to her mistress. This reveals that patriarchal society reduces women to be merely instruments of bearing male heirs to carry on the lineage.

Though Sarai attributes all the blame to her husband in torturing Hagar, we still have to agree that Sarai also deserves a certain amount of sympathy. If we analyze from a woman’s perspective, the question can be raised, which woman would share her husband with another woman unless she was compelled to do so?

According to Danna Nolan FEWELL and David M. GUNN, one of the most obvious structural features of the Biblical patriarchal family is the location of women within the roles of motherhood or child bearers. The point is that this role is regarded as the primary, if not the only, legitimate place for women; it is the place where women get social identity and approval.²

Moreover, Hagar, the surrogate mother, was threatened by her insecure mistress’s jealousy. After Hagar had become pregnant, the only thing that that Sarai could do was to send away Hagar. Thus she used her power to oppress Hagar. It not only revealed the pain of Hagar, but also the trauma to Sarai, who had to face the roles of patriarchal society. Hagar and Sarai’s story is the first story in the Bible, which reflects a power conflict between two women. Elizabeth HUWILER thus rightly says:

“The concerns of patriarchy in a male-oriented society turn women against each other to urge members of groups labelled ‘other’ to use their limited power against each other instead of against the system which uses both of them. However the tyranny of the system must not be used to excuse Sarah (and those of us who identify with Sarah) in the oppression of those who have less power and fewer options.”³

It enables us to analyze the complex dynamics of why two exploited women are both oppressed by patriarchal society, instead of sharing each other’s pain and becoming good friends.

Hagar’s story raises the issue of the exploitation of the poor, helpless woman’s body as a mere vessel to produce male heirs. Hagar’s story is of importance to the postmodern world of science, biotechnology and genetic technology, which is still creating surrogate mothers.

1 SPEISER E. A. is quoted *ibid*.

2 FEWELL Danna N. – GUNN David M., *Gender Power and Promise: The Subject of the Bible’s First Story*. Nashville, 1993. 68.

3 HUWILER Elizabeth, *Biblical Women: Mirrors, Models and Metaphors*. Cleveland, 1993. 26.

This is a common phenomenon in India and some other countries of the world, where poor women sell their wombs in order to support their family's living. Modern science and technology are beneficial to the rich but have increased exploitation of the poor.

Hence an ethical question can be raised: "Is it right to view a woman's womb as an object?" Moreover, the phenomenon of the surrogate mother can also be used to throw some light on the obscured fact of how much emphasis is given to the patriarchal notion that the fulfilment of a married woman lies in procreating offspring.

A Refugee

Hagar was compelled to flee to the desert because she was unable to bear the torture of her mistress when she was pregnant. For her, the lonely, desolate desert was better than her master and mistress's tent. Hagar preferred the dangerous desert to Sarai's revenge. However, did she find freedom? No, she did not. She was found by God's angel, who called her the 'slave of Sarai' and ordered her to go back to her mistress's tent (Gen. 16,8). Trevor DENNIS points out:

"God's command to Hagar is one of the darkest moments in all Scripture. ... Here, at least it seems to be in favour of the status quo on the side of the oppressor, a defender of interests of the Sarais of this world against its all too vulnerable Hagars."¹

Gerhard VON RAD, in his book *Genesis*, thinks that YHWH will not condone the breaking of regulations.² According to Megan MCKENNA, Hagar is like many women who are refugees, immigrants and illegal aliens, who are persecuted and hunted down.³

Hagar's story reminds me of refugees' misery and agony in today's context. There are thousands of refugees all over the world suffering the same fate as Hagar—who are hunted and persecuted by stronger powers.

For example, every year in Bangladesh, thousands of refugees enter India illegally to escape the bondage of poverty. On their way in search for a better life, they are hunted by pimps and become victims of sexual abuse or maidservants working in rich people's houses.

In Mexico, thousands of women and children are unable to bear the pangs of misery and poverty and try to cross the desert in Arizona, entering the USA to live. Many of them can't cross the desert successfully and are sucked into the jaw of death. Others are hunted by the border patrol police and then sent back home. Only few people are able to enter the USA illegally, but they are soon exploited by multinational corporations (MNC) and used as daily labourers, getting paid minimum wage.

Foreigner

According to Savina J. TEUBAL, the preservation of blood ties was very crucial among the matriarchs such as Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah. To justify her point, TEUBAL cites the example of Rebecca, who marries a member of her descent group even though she has to leave her homeland to do so.

1 DENNIS, 67.

2 VON RAD Gerhard is quoted in PFISTERER DARR.

3 MCKEENA Magan, *Not Counting Women and Children: Neglected Stories from the Bible*. New York, 1994. 181.

Teubal claims that Rebecca wasn't satisfied with Esau because he married a native of Canaan. She insisted that Jacob should choose a wife from among her brother's daughters.¹ This reveals that foreigners were despised by the patriarchs. Even later in Israelite society, seduction by a foreigner or marriage to a foreigner, which might lead to the production of life of another ethnic or national group, had a negative value in society.²

Indeed, Sarai used Hagar, her Egyptian handmaiden, to bear a child for her husband. It was a common custom in Mesopotamia. We can also imagine that Hagar's status is merely that of a foreigner and a slave woman in a Hebrew household. Her struggle was a struggle for survival, constant compromise and adjustment. She must have been always treated as an alien (with a different culture and traditions), who was looked down upon, mocked and despised in her master's household.

Katheryn PFISTERER DARR has further revealed to us that as a foreigner, Hagar was also the victim of the legal practice in ancient Middle Eastern Law, which was put into practice in Sarai's homeland. In her opinion, the laws mentioned in the Hammurabi Code said that if a slave woman was her master's concubine who attempted to strive for equal status as his wife, she would be severely penalized.³

The reason that Sarai banished Ishmael is not explicitly mentioned in the Bible. But we can speculate that one of the reasons why Sarah banished Ishmael and Hagar is because Sarah did not want the foreigner's son to inherit Abraham's property.

Maybe she feared that Abraham would love his eldest son more. However, TEUBAL enlightens us with another new thought. According to her, Sarah might have felt that Ishmael, the son of a foreign slave, might have been 'mocking' Isaac.

In her opinion, the mocking action might have a religious connotation linked with religious ethics. There was no reason for Sarah to banish Ishmael if she wanted merely to disinherit him from the material wealth. She claims Esau could be easily disinherited. Rather, TEUBAL thinks that Sarah did not want Isaac to be influenced culturally by Ishmael. Thus she banished Hagar and her son.

In TEUBAL's opinion, maybe it was unacceptable for a priestess to tolerate the rite of circumcision conducted on her son Isaac—which was a Mesopotamian, not an Egyptian, custom—and it was being enforced as a new rule of conduct.⁴

As a foreigner, Hagar and her struggle to survive in Hebrew culture can be used to focus on the issue of cultural violence and domination. According to Letty M. RUSSELL, culture is a tool of domination, a social reinforcement of dominant models of behaviour and social structures.⁵ In my opinion, Hagar definitely was a victim of cultural oppression perpetuated by her mistress and her husband.

According to Kwok PUI-LAN, an Asian theologian, the removal of Hagar's own cultural identity and the imposition of the new one throws light on the condition of people suffering from slavery. She thinks that it also reflects the suffering and trauma of the two thirds of the people in the world who lived for centuries under the threats of colonial and neo-colonial powers.⁶

1 TEUBAL Savina J., *Sarah and Hagar: Matriarchs and Missionaries. Feminist Companion to Genesis*. Sheffield, 1973. 236.

2 NEWSOM C. is quoted in BECHTEL Lyn M., *Feminist Companion to the Bible*. London, 1997. 111.

3 PFISTERER DARR, 135.

4 TEUBAL, 236.

5 RUSSELL Letty M., *Spirituality, Struggle and Cultural Violence. Women Resisting Violence: Spirituality of Life*. New York, 1994. 21–22.

6 PUI-LAN, 106.

For example, in Pakistan, India, and many countries in the South, the multinational and transnational corporations play a crucial role in pressuring the government to make policies and laws which are beneficial to them but harmful to the poor and common people. Such laws and policies are very exploitative.

The conflict between Sarai and Hagar may also let us understand the ethnic problem. In fact, the Palestinian problem has its roots in the separation of two brothers. One is Isaac, the son of Sarai the Hebrew (Israeli descendants), and the other is Ishmael, the son of Hagar (Islamic descendants).

The Woman Who Heard God's Messenger Ordering Her to Go Back and Be a Slave

According to Genesis 16, when Hagar ran away to escape the torture of her mistress, she was met by God's angel on the road to Shur (Gen. 16:6–8). The angel asked her where she was going. When she told the angel she was running away from her mistress, the angel ordered her to go back to her mistress. God's angel also blessed her and promised her she would have many descendants (Gen. 16:9–11). The angel told her that she would give birth to a son who should be named Ishmael, which means "God heard the cry of the distressed." (Gen. 16:11).

Certain important theological questions can be raised. Why, when God heard Hagar's cry (Gen. 16:11), did he tell her to go back to suffer exploitation? Was that a proper way to treat a runaway slave?

KENSKY tries to give an answer to these questions. According to her, the angel is acting according to Middle Eastern laws (the laws which were followed before the Civil War), in which slave owners have the obligation to require a person who found a runaway slave to return to her or his owner.¹

The Biblical laws are different and require one to help the runaway slave to escape and not go back to the owner (Deut. 23,16–17). She claims that though Hagar's story took place long before Deuteronomy, the angel's action must shock an Israelite reader.²This issue raises certain theological dilemmas, especially when we see it in feminist perspective. Questions can be again raised: Why does this woman worship a patriarchal God who is so oppressive and exploitative?

According to Elisabeth SCHÜSSLER-FIORENZA, the Bible becomes a weapon when it becomes a miraculous divine book. It not only communicates God's world, but it is also believed to *be* God's world, emphasizing the absolute authority of Bible.³

ELIZABETH SCHÜSSLER-FIORENZA rightly states that those texts which do not explicitly condemn such violence cannot claim God's authority. They must be read as a memory of suffering in order to open up the perspective of hope for liberation as a dangerous recollection.⁴

Irmgard FISCHER told us that there are other Biblical texts also attempting to

1 FRYMER KENSKY, 230.

2 Ibid.

3 SCHÜSSLER-FIORENZA Elisabeth, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*. New York, 1983. 25.

4 SCHÜSSLER-FIORENZA Elisabeth is quoted by FISHER Irmgard, *Go and Suffer Oppression, Said God's Messenger to Hagar*. In SCHÜSSLER-FIORENZA Elisabeth – COPELAND Mary Shawn, *Violence against Women*. London, 1994. 76.

legitimate the harassment of women by divine authority (Number 5:11–31). She draws our attention to the fact that some laws legitimate violence against women.

She points out that it is evident that such violence in the divine law and divine verdict is commanded by and for males.¹ Thus we need to re-read and reinterpret the Scripture by using hermeneutical tools to discern which Biblical texts reflect the meaning of a loving, kind, almighty and true God.

Single Parent and Ishmael's Mother

God blessed Hagar with a son, Ishmael. Ishmael in Hebrew means 'God listens. God promised Hagar that he would make a nation out of the descendants of Ishmael. Ishmael lived in the desert and became a skilled archer.

Hagar can be labelled 'the Desert Matriarch'; she started her own community. Hagar was a single parent. She was responsible for her son's well-being and growth. The final note in the story reminds us that Ishmael's future is shaped by Hagar's understanding.

Hagar was also responsible for choosing a wife for Ishmael from her own people (Gen. 21:21). Abraham, her son's biological father, merely named Ishmael but deserted his mother and played no role in his upbringing. (Gen. 16:15).

If we contextualize Hagar's story as the single parent of Ishmael, it highlights the issue of single mothers disposed of by their husbands, consigned to raise their children the tough way. After being banished, Hagar and her son were wandering in the hot, parched desert. They felt hungry, thirsty, tired and shattered.

Her desperate, pathetic agony was revealed when her son was facing death in the desert. She left him under a bush, sitting away two hundred meters, crying to God because she could not bear to see her son die (Gen. 21: 15–16). It reflects many single mothers' struggles and obstacles when they have the same fate as Hagar.

The Liberated Woman

Indeed, Hagar's story is a tragic story of persecution, oppression and humiliation; however, it is also to be interpreted as a story of the liberation of a slave woman. Hagar's banishment indeed highlights injustice; however, the silver lining in the cloud was that she and her son were not sold.

She was no longer the slave woman, the property of her master, but a liberated and proud woman who raised her son alone. She is indeed a courageous woman who shook the status quo of her mistress and challenged the power which exploited her.

Hagar can be regarded as a very special woman in the Bible. According to DARR, she is the only woman in the Bible receiving the promise of innumerable descendants and the only individual in the Bible who dared to name God, "EL *Roi*" (which in Hebrew means "the God of Seeing").²

In Samuel TERRIEN's opinion, Hagar is a theologian; her naming unites the divine and the human encounters.³ She is the first person in the Scripture that the divine messenger visits. According to Jo Ann HACKETT: "This is the only case in Genesis,

1 Ibid., 79.

2 PFISTERER DARR, 146.

3 TERRIEN Samuel is quoted by TRIBLE, 4.

where the typical J-writer¹ promise is given to a woman, rather than a patriarch, so we sit up and take notice”² (Gen. 16:10).

According to Elsa TAMEZ, many Latin American women see important parallels in Hagar’s story because they have the same suffering. In her opinion, it is true that Hagar’s story reveals poverty caused by slavery and the struggle of a single woman who was abandoned by her husband and powerful people trying to erase Hagar from historical memory.

However, the important thing to TAMEZ is that God has instilled hope in her.³ TAMEZ also interprets God as hearing the cry of the oppressed slave woman to reveal how God hears the cry of the victims of injustice.⁴ This notion can give hope and instil strength in many women who are trying to break free from the shackles of bondage and exploitation in the world today.

TEUBAL also enlightens us with another thought: “Hagar’s story is not just a record of social change in a cultural system; it is a revaluation of social values, the ordering of a philosophy of life. The significance of her life is that Hagar was able to obtain social and spiritual freedom.”⁵

Hagar is brave enough to face life boldly in the midst of immense suffering. Her faith and her spiritual power must encourage many women who are suffering the same thing. TEUBAL rightly claims: “Above all, her close relationship with divinity and inspiration to forge her own community must not be forgotten.”⁶

The Weaver of the Tapestry of Liberation

Hagar can be regarded as the weaver of the tapestry of liberation. Hagar weaves the tapestry of liberation with three basic fibres. These three fibres are the ones of risk, struggle and hope, which all played a crucial role in Hagar’s emancipation from bondage and humiliation.

1. Risking one’s Life

In fact, life itself is a risk. To people who are suffering from oppression, exploitation and poverty and whose fears are not blanketed by a false sense of materialistic security, risk is not a matter of choice.

Everyone has to take chances and risk their life if they want get liberation. Hagar dared to flee into the wilderness and search for a better option for her life. It is true that the episode of Hagar’s attempt to escape can be justified on the grounds that she could not tolerate the torture perpetuated by her mistress, and hence she fled. However, if we think deeply, this episode also reveals to us that a slave woman is brave to risk her life in searching for freedom.

Stella BALTAZAR has pointed out that violence often pushes women to a corner of impasse; they think they have no way to escape. In her opinion, therefore, women couldn’t develop retaliatory measures.

1 The book of Genesis in the Bible is based on two sources: the Priestly source and the Jahvist source

2 *Ibid.*, 139.

3 PUI-LAN, 105.

4 PFISTERER DARR, 135.

5 TEUBAL, 249.

6 *Ibid.*, 250.

This is the reason why many women tolerate violence silently. They feel there is no other way. There are very few who dare to fight back.¹ Hagar is one of them. The courage to risk one's life is one of the essential ingredients necessary to achieve liberation.

2. Hope

Hope is the "safety valve" which enables human beings to survive. Johan DEGENNAR, an Afrikaner and a radical critic of apartheid, said that hope is a creative expectation. According to him:

"Hope is a kind of attitude, which enables us not to become encapsulated within a particular state of affairs, which by claiming finality into our lives, condemns us in action. Hope encounters this enslavement by nature of its being a creative expectation of a future in which justice prevails and which precisely through the disposition of hope, one commits oneself to bringing about."²

God gave hope to Hagar when she was crying, because as a mother she could not bear to see her only son dying due to exhaustion, hunger and thirst. God's promise to her to make a nation out of the descendants of her son bubbled in her dying spirit as a ray of hope, which inspired her to action in quenching the thirst of her son to revive his strength.

It is hope that God is with the oppressed in the midst of suffering that enables the oppressed to struggle and survive as they seek liberation. The hope, which makes Hagar survive in the desert, is one of the important aspects of women's struggle for liberation.

3. Struggles for Justice

Hagar's story is also a story of the struggle for justice. Being a slave and a woman, she had to struggle against racism, sexual abuse, humiliation and domestic violence. Being poor, betrayed and disposed, she had to suffer the pangs of hunger and thirst.

She even had to save her son from the jaws of death. She faced various obstacles; however, her dauntless courage enabled her to fight in bad situation. This story reveals that during the journey of life, seeking emancipation is not easy.

Struggle is an important component. It is interwoven with the concept of liberation. Therefore, the liberation from bondage is actually the alchemy of struggle, hope and risk. Hagar's story bears testimony to this fact.

Women in the South and other oppressed people who are struggling to achieve freedom from bondage and exploitation in today's context can use the three fibres that Hagar used to weave her tapestry of liberation.

The Hagar's of the South in the postmodern era are victims of violence. Through their faith, however, God's love gives them power for perseverance and enables them to weave the tapestry of liberation. Their struggle for justice is a product of the alchemy of risk, hope and struggle.

¹ BALTHAZAR, 57.

² DEGENAAR Johan, *Book of Hope*. Cape Town, 1991. 4.

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Moumita BISWAS: Les Diverses Identités d'Hagar

L'histoire d'Hagar, l'une des plus tragiques dans la Bible, décrit les multiples oppressions en termes de classe, de genre et de race, dont sont victimes les femmes, mères célibataires, abandonnées par leurs familles. Bien qu'étant une histoire d'une horreur absolue, elle révèle que Dieu entend les cris des pauvres et des opprimées. Aussi maintenant, beaucoup de femmes dans le Sud sont victimes des violences patriarcales sous forme d'abus sexuel et psychologique domestique qui s'accroît avec la pauvreté et le racisme. L'histoire d'Hagar révèle comment elle a souffert non seulement comme la concubine d'Abraham, mais comme une esclave Egyptienne, femme, étrangère et réfugiée. Plus que juste son sein était exploité alors qu'elle était obligée d'être une mère porteuse et qu'elle souffrait du traumatisme d'être une mère célibataire chassée par sa maîtresse. L'histoire d'Hagar, cependant, peut aussi être interprétée comme une histoire du courage d'une femme esclave, de défier la violence. Les composantes de la tapisserie de la libération sont persévérance, pouvoir de lutter pour la justice, espoir et courage de défier la violence en risquant sa propre vie.

Moumita BISWAS: Las Variadas Identidades de Hagar

La historia de Hagar, una de las historias más trágicas en la Biblia, es sobre las opresiones múltiples en lo que se refiere a clase, género y raza, de mujeres que sobreviven cuando se encuentran a sí mismas como madres solteras abandonaron por sus familias. Aunque es una historia de horror severo, revela que Dios oye el lamento de los pobres y los oprimidos. También ahora, muchas mujeres del Sur son víctimas de la violencia patriarcal precipitada en el abuso sexual domestico y psicológico, que aumenta debido a la pobreza y racismo. La historia de Hagar revela cómo ella no sólo sufrió como la concubina de Abraham, pero como una mujer egipcia esclava, una extranjera, una refugiada. Más que sólo su útero fue explotado al ser compelido para ser una madre substituta y sufrió el trauma de ser una madre soltera ahuyentada por su amo. La historia de Hagar, sin embargo, también puede interpretarse como una historia del valor de una mujer esclava para desafiar la violencia. Los componentes del tapiz de liberación son la perseverancia, poder para luchar por la justicia, esperanza y valor para desafiar la violencia arriesgando su propia vida.

Humanity, Solidarity, Morality and Partnership: Gender Issues in the Concentric Tradition of the Ecumenical Movement

The context of gender issues in the ecumenical movement is surrounded by many concentric circles. It is human rights that are the common basis for all people of goodwill: nations are united in their firm belief and acceptance that humanity is one, organic, coherent and mutually interdependent. From this notion flows the need for using power to serve the aims of solidarity and building community.

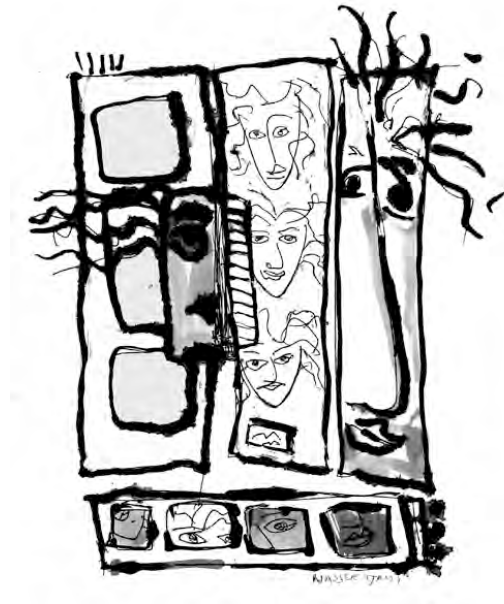
Our community or koinonia is the overall dimension of our moral or ethical behaviour. Therefore, the inner life of the Holy Trinity should serve as a model for our human communities as well, where we can grow in partnership and unity.

I. Human Rights (and United Nations)

The broadest context in which we need to understand the place of gender issues in the ecumenical movement is, first of all, the dimension of human rights. They in their history have three generations.

Their first generation contains the bourgeois freedoms of property. After these, in the second generation we find labour and social security. And finally, in the third phase, there are development and the rights of future generations.

The participation and influence of the ecumenical movement on the development of the human rights is evident when looking, for example, at the case of O. Frederick NOLDE, who was the first director of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA). He was the one who drafted the United Nations' (UN) Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948.



UDHR was followed by the international covenant on civil and political rights in 1966, and the international covenant on economic, social and cultural rights, also in the same year. Their main content entails the core values of inviolability, of freedom (liberty), of equality, of participation, of responsibilities and most of all, the value of human dignity.

Also later on, the initiatives of the UN went hand in hand with those of the ecumenical movement. One remarkable example, Annie JAGGE, later president of the World Council of Churches (WCC), was the president for more than ten years (1962–1972) of the commission on the status of women, as well as a drafter of the declaration on the elimination of discrimination against women.

The main projects of the UN on human rights issues were the following: the UN declared an international year (1975) and a whole decade for women (1975–1985) and organised world conferences on women (in Nairobi in 1985; and in Beijing in 1995).

After the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) declared a world emergency for children in 1974, and held an international year of the child in 1979, and of the family in 1994, the strategies for confronting domestic violence (1993) and the convention on the rights of the child were finally born in 1999.

The world population conference (in Bucharest in 1974) and the population and development conference (in Cairo in 1994) invoked an ecumenical answer in 1996 on the churches, population and development in Cairo and beyond.

A UN Earth Summit on environment, ecology and development (in Rio de Janeiro in 1992) was followed by another UN conference on human rights in Wien in 1993. The Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) convoked a UN special general assembly on HIV/AIDS in 2001.

These initiatives all have their parallels in the ecumenical movement. Because of their strong interconnectedness, it remained impossible to separate the development of the United Nations initiatives on human rights issues from those endeavours of the ecumenical movement.

II. Power and Solidarity

Human rights are the great dimension in which we must try to understand the important emphases of the ecumenical movement throughout her history on question of power and of solidarity.

According to theological anthropology (the thinking about human beings in light of the existence of God) or the anthropology, God is a coincidence of opposites (*coincidentia oppositorum*), reconciled in a perfect unity.

Parallel, the characteristics of a person are incommunicability, substantiality, intellectuality and corporeality (including sexuality), but also sociality, relationality and dialogueability. The movement of persons toward each other in love is the very mode of God's existence.

The famous WCC humanum studies (1968–1975), led by David JENKINS, concentrated on the anguish of human beings, the praise of God and the repentance of the Church. These studies researched humanisation, hominisation, the Christology of incarnation, and contextualisation (in Berlin in 1974).

Their findings continued in the endeavour for a just, participatory and sustainable society (JPSS, from 1975 until 1983) and then in the process of justice, peace and the integrity of creation (JPIC, from 1983 until 1991).

This later one was a world convocation and conciliar process of mutual commitment and covenant, aiming to translate the values of the Reign of God into achievable social goals and so-called middle axioms.

The middle axioms are the concepts of Joseph H. OLDHAM, to intermediate between the ultimate basis of Christian action in community (the law of love), and the unguided intuition of the individual conscience.

The basic assumption of these conciliar processes was that God is at the same time our Creator, our Liberator and our Sustainer. The creation is purposeful; it is contingent, yet distinct.

Creation is in its very essence good, it is made out of nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*) and it reflects a divine commitment (*providenta et creatio continua*). The realm of nature is, at the same time, a theatre of grace.

Human mastery, human solidarity and human stewardship have to be fulfilled under God's Lordship in accountability for the holistic reintegration of God's creation (as it was emphasized in a conference in Seoul in 1990).

The Church and Society conference on Christians in the technical and social revolutions of our time was held in Genève in 1966. Janet LACEY (1903–1988) was the president of this conference, dealing with the impacts of secularization, aiming towards a permanent and just revolution.

A misuse of power calls for accounting the ecumenical consequences of oppression and domination, and education for liberation from all totalitarian systems and systematic evils.

The ecumenical movement, especially the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF), played a significant role in equipping entire generations to respond to Nazism, but they basically failed to do so in connection with Communism.

Liberty and freedom are also theological values, because Jesus Christ Himself frees and unites us¹. Especially Latin American liberation theology emphasized salvation and redemption for the fullness of life in Church base communities (CBC) and in a basic preferential option for the poor, which is now a common belief of all Christians.

Power finds its place in a free and responsible society based on the structure of responsible life, lived concretely for the neighbour, in community and solidarity. In this respect, the nearer we come to reality, the nearer we come to God.

III. Ethics and Morality of Life

This leads us to ethics and morality, which are the touchstones of ecumenicity. In many instances it is true that doctrine divides, but service unites. Morality and ethics have an eschatological and an ecclesiological significance as well (as it was rightly emphasized in a conference in Bossey in 1951 and in a Faith and Order Document titled *Ecclesiology and Ethics*).

It is so, since the Church partly grows and finds her unity in and through moral struggle against moral heresies. The involvement in the koinonia-generating struggles of humanity is also a moral responsibility for all of us. Unity is a quite precious gift, which therefore requires our costly response.

Nowadays, science, and its application, technology, are both increasingly globalised, so the connection between faith, science and the future of *bio-ethics* gradually gained more and more importance. This was the topic of a conference in the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in 1979.

Consultations were held on health care and the *medical* missions in the two-thirds world in Tübingen in 1964; and on the role of the Church in healing, also in Tübingen, in 1968.

These important meetings led to the formation of the Christian Medical Commission (CMC) in 1968. One of their most important decisions was when they rejected abortion as a means of population control in Zürich in the year 1973.

In the first European regional consultation of this Christian Medical Commission (CMC) in Budapest (Hungary) in 1978, their topic was health, healing and their connection to human wholeness.

Birth control, family planning and responsible parenthood are also closely connected to life and death questions, as well as the ethical and social issues in genetic engineering and the ownership of life forms, which were dealt with in a conference in the Netherlands in 1981.

Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (*AIDS*) is caused by the human immunodeficiency virus (*HIV*). This pandemic was first diagnosed in the United States of America (USA) in 1981. The groundbreaking—but very expensive—highly active anti-retroviral therapy (*HAART*) was invented in 1996.

¹ This was the slogan and official motto of the World Council of Churches (WCC) General Assembly (GA) in Nairobi in 1975

The Church in this respect really must be a healing community, with pastoral care, social ministry and education for prevention. A World Council of Churches (WCC) platform in 1995 examined women's health and the challenge of HIV/AIDS.

It was followed by two important WCC studies (in 1996 and in 1997) facing the questions posed by AIDS, on the challenge and impact of HIV/AIDS and the churches' response. Since the pandemic affects those already marginalized, an unconditional acceptance of people living with AIDS is needed by all members of a community.

The ecumenical coalition on third world tourism (ECTWT) urged an end to child prostitution in Asian tourism in their meeting in Chiang Mai in 1990. The result was that the movement to end child prostitution, child pornography and trafficking in children for sexual purposes was formed, meeting in Stockholm in 1996, and then in Yokohama in 2001.

A pastoral and educational brochure in 1991 addressed the issue of *sexual harassment* (the term was coined in the United States of America in 1975), when Christian solidarity is broken.

Similarly, the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF) Europe Region called for respecting human dignity and integrity in their sexual harassment guidelines, published in Budapest (Hungary) in 2005.

Concerning *abortion* or feticide, the question is whether we should develop more compassion with the mother, or with the foetus or embryo. Sadly enough, in our age many societies lay much more emphasis on the (usually non-life-and-death) concerns of the mother, than of their victimised unborn offspring.

If we go deep into the question, it becomes clear that abortion has all the characteristics to be on the agenda of liberation movements and theologies. First, a hegemonic power (the adults and their adult society) declares some specimens of the species of *Homo sapiens sapiens* (those under the age of zero) as non-humans or sub-humans.

Then, the dominant power systematically oppresses them and declares their elimination as non-homicidal. This group of specimens is then marginalized, silenced and denied of all their (basic or non-basic) rights.

A test case for the pro-choice wing of the feminist movement is the gender-based selective abortion practice now spreading in Asia, where significantly more female foetus die than male.

As an ecumenical response, remaining consequent to our basic principles, we should declare that human life and physical integrity should be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception until natural death. The protection of human life in all its forms is the Archimedean point of all responsibly moral behaviour.

IV. Women's Movements

These are the dimensions where we find the place of the gender concern, and in this, the emerging women's movement. The first women's movement was concerned with improving the position of women in society, with the emancipation of women, with their economic independence and issues of job and work.

The second women's movement (which is mainly identical with what is known as *feminism*), beginning in the 1960s, concentrated upon the replacement of the patriarchal order, on the dichotomy of woman (nature) and man (intellect), on psychological independence, and on various female guiding principles.

The precursors of *feminist theology* are Elizabeth Cady STANTON, compiling the so-called women's Bible, and Matilda Joslyn GAGE, writing on the relationship of women, Church and state.

The key figures of the feminist movement, however, became Mary DALY, Rosemary Radford RUEETHER and Judith PLASKOW, of course among others. Feminist theology is a method of doing theology, entailing a creative re-visioning of what it is to be the Church.

It creates networks of shared experience, knowledge and community, by recovering female images of the Divine. There has been a significant shift from cooperation to social and economic justice and the liberation struggle.

A full access and participation is needed in leadership, ordination, inclusive language, the re-reading of Bible and Tradition, and equal opportunities in all fields of life (including Church life).

One of the more recent branches of theology is the *womanist theology*, which is exercised and done for example by the women's commission of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT).

Another important forum in this area is the circle of concerned African women theologians (CCAWT), established in Accra in 1989. They focused on transforming power (in their meeting in Nairobi in 1996) and on challenging religion, culture and social practices concerning sex, stigmatisation and HIV/AIDS (in Addis Ababa in 2002).

The World Student Christian Federation (WSCF, 1895) and the World Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA, 1894) have been fertile training grounds for women leaders, such as Ruth ROUSE, or Suzanne DE DIÉTRICH, the mother of the Biblical renewal.

After the establishment of the World Council of Churches in Amsterdam in 1948, the main interest was primarily focused on the life and work of women inside the Church. A questionnaire was prepared for this General Assembly by Twila MCCREA CAVERT, and the answers on the service and status of women in the Church were published by Kathleen BLISS in 1952.

Sarah CHAKKO became the chair of the respective commission (later department, and, finally, sub-unit) dealing with women in the Church between 1950 and 1951, and after that she served as one of the presidents of WCC between 1951 and 1954.

In the previous position as chair of the commission, she was followed by Rena Karefa SMART (1966–1967), Brigalia Hlophe BAM (1967–1980), Bärbel VON WARTENBERG (1980–1988) and Anna Karin HAMMAR (1988–1998).

In the later position, as chair of WCC, she was also followed by others: famous female World Council of Churches (WCC) presidents were Annie JIAGGE and Cynthia Clark WEDEL between 1975 and 1983; and Marga BÜHRIG, Nita BARROW and Lois Miriam WILSON between 1983 and 1991.

For many¹, the *Virgin Mary*, the Theotokos (God-bearer, and Mother of God) serves as a powerful role model in the faith struggles of everyday life. As we can also see in *Magnificat*, the song of Mary, she is the new woman herself, filled and full with grace and faith.

1 For example for Dorothy DAY (1897–1980), among many other women and men.

She is the suffering servant of God, an example of humility, prayer and faith. She is a model in the matter of faith, charity and perfect union with Jesus Christ. But at the same time she expresses the prophetic spirituality of liberation, a new order of justice and peace, a new creation, too.

She is a chief representative of the powerless people and a powerful model for all human behaviour. She sets in motion a whole spiritual revolution, as a pointer to a total change of heart and mind.

V. Partnership and Unity

The women's movement calls for the cooperation of women and men in all spheres of life, concluding in partnership and unity. The longest-ever initiative in ecumenical history was conducted on the unity of the Church and the unity of humankind, between 1971 and 1991. It was a Faith and Order (F&O) study on the eschatological promise of the coming Reign of God.

The basic assumption was that the Church is a sacrament, a mystery and a prophetic sign of intimate union with God and of the unity of humankind. In their method of intercontextualisation, the contexts reciprocally provide the interpretative framework for each other.

They researched unity in today's world (1978), the unity of the Church and the renewal of human community (Lima, 1982), Jesus Christ as the life of the world (Vancouver, 1983), and God's purpose to restore all things into unity in Christ.

The glory of God is humanity fully alive, as IRENÆUS teaches us. The aim of all of us is *theosis* or divinisation, our human existence made similar to God's in Jesus Christ. Against the politics of death, therefore, we should build the culture of life and unity, reconciliation and healing.

Women and men, too, should be totally free to live out the charismas and gifts which God has given them and to respond to their calling to share fully in the life and witness of the Church.

Women's and men's equal and profound participation, therefore, is not simply a matter of social justice, but also of profound theological integrity, pioneered by the ecumenical movement as well.

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NAGYPÁL Szabolcs: Humanity, Solidarity, Morality and Partnership: Gender Issues in the Concentric Tradition of the Ecumenical Movement

Participation, theological vision and insight, hope and faith all use an inclusive language, which depicts women and men as both equally normative, of equal worth, and having complementary and essential contributions to make to the community. We should blend female and male spiritual insights, because wholeness and unity is a precious gift which requires our costly response. All should be free to live out the gifts which God has given and to share fully in the life and witness of the Church. In a free and responsible society based on the structure of responsible life, we live concretely for the neighbour. The movement of persons towards each other in love and dialogue is the very mode of God's existence; the involvement in the koinonia-generating struggles of humanity, therefore, is a moral responsibility. Human life and physical integrity should be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception until natural death. That is how we are accountable for the holistic reintegration of God's creation.

NAGYPÁL Szabolcs: L'Humanité, la Solidarité, la Moralité et le Partenariat: Les Thèmes de Sexe dans la Tradition Concentrique du Mouvement Œcuménique

Participation, vision et compréhension théologique, espoir et foi tous utilisent un langage inclusif, qui représente les femmes et les hommes comme étant égaux sur le plan normatif, à valeur égale, et ayant des contributions complémentaires et essentielles à faire dans la communauté. Nous devons mêler les compréhensions spirituelles femelle et male, parce que la globalité et l'unité sont un don qui requiert une réponse coûteuse. Tous devraient être libre de vivre les dons que Dieu a offert et partager pleinement dans la vie et le témoignage de l'Eglise. Dans une société libre et responsable basée sur une structure de vie responsable, nous vivons concrètement pour l'autre. Le mouvement des personnes les uns vers les autres dans l'amour et le dialogue est le mode d'existence de Dieu, l'engagement dans les luttes de l'humanité, et ainsi une responsabilité morale. La vie humaine et l'intégrité physique devraient être respectées et protégées absolument, de la conception à la mort naturelle. C'est de cette manière que nous sommes redevable de la réintégration holistique de la création de Dieu.

Bertrand TIETCHEU

Being Women and Men in Africa Today: Approaching Gender Roles in Changing African Societies

The debate on the issue of gender is always tense and critical in Africa. Most of the time men reject any debate on it and adopt a defensive stance, as they think it is a means for women to attack and overtake them—so gender relates to power-seeking and the need for societal control.

Further, they do not want to lose their long-established historical privilege of being the ‘chief’ of the family and the ‘commander’ of women. They use for their defence the Biblical texts alleging that God has created woman inferior to man and placed her beside him as servant; that God has appointed man as the chief.

Other men suspect the gender issue is a means for Western society to re-colonize Africa by infusing there the Western way of life. And so for this category of men, gender is an instrumental tool aimed at destroying African cultures. Some go so far as to relate gender to homosexuality.

Anyway, this is what I have become used to listening during numerous workshops I have been attending where the issue is broached. By so doing, they allegedly brandish African traditions, which have definitely instituted man as superior and protector of woman and organized the different roles in the society.

The first rationale for rejecting gender discussion relates to *power*. This is true. Gender effectively deals with the question of power in the society. It engages the whole societal body, questioning how power is shared, the leadership, and the different roles of societal components. More precisely, it encompasses how women and men are organized and how they interact in society, including the family, the Church, politics, the economy, and so on.

But the false element in this rationale is the allegation that women contest power with men in order to edge them out. This is false, because gender deals with power insofar as the quest for justice in societal structure is concerned.

So talking about gender in Africa means seeking to know if the social structure we have built gives possibilities for women and men to enjoy and live their potential entirely, to express the best of themselves with regard to the talents each one is gifted with—and if this is not the case, we must change it.



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This perspective entails the assumption that the roles in society, the leadership and the different societal functions and responsibilities, are not given by nature but by the social system, which can change in space and time.

Being women and men does not refer too much to biological nature; it is more of a ‘social construct.’¹ It is more a ‘subjective’ matter and not an ‘objective’ one. We mean by subjective matter the fact that being women and men in society depends on our feelings, our minds, and our beliefs and values; and all these are shaped by a type of education and training—formal and informal, familial and social, and to the greatest extent, religious.

And this education affects the way we act and think, the way we read, interpret and understand even the Bible—and also the way we envision God. Therefore, it can be submitted to critique and modification, depending on our will, on the level of evolution of our minds, and our intelligence.

The second defensive rationale is to consider gender as a Western matter and an attempt to *westernize* Africa. It is true that the concept of gender was developed early in the Western societies. But that is only because the first battle for the liberation of women began there. So the gender approach is only a step in the evolution of this process. It is rooted in the previous feminist struggle.

But gender is not just a Western matter. It is a global issue, engaging the whole humanity. It can vary depending on political, cultural, economic and religious contexts. It is still being constructed, and it challenges every society and culture. Even Western societies are still challenged by it.

In this paper, we will attempt to explore a new model of relationship between women and men in Africa today, taking into consideration the global societal changes that we are facing now within the context of globalization, with its political, cultural, economic and technological impact.

We will highlight the crises of our society as signs for an urgent need to review and renew our social structures, the different ways of being women and men in the family, community, Church and society as a whole.

We will be touching issues such as sexuality, HIV/AIDS, leadership, economic justice and injustice. Finally, we will plead for a reconciled and harmonized relationship between women and men in society.

I. Ongoing Changes and New Social Patterns in Africa

For more than a decade now, African societies, as all humanity, are undergoing profound changes. Now, every change is a striking process, for it confronts two contradictory forces: the conservative, stuck on an ancient system; and the progressive, attempting to draw the whole society towards a new age; therefore, it is always a situation of crisis.

So, describing African societies as ‘societies in crisis’ means considering these societies as being engaged in a global process of change. This change comes from inside the society by the emerging new generations, and from outside by the confluence of diverse foreign socio-cultural, ideological and religious movements, quickened by today’s open and globalized world.

So when we talk about the crisis, we do not refer to a fixed state but to a transitional step. That means a society in crisis is a society in transition. How does this change affect

1 I DUBE Musa (ed.), *HIV/AIDS and Curriculum, Methods of Integrating HIV/AIDS in Theological Programmes*. Genève, 2003.

the social pattern? That is what we are going to see in this chapter. We will then highlight the impact of the change in politics, economy, culture and social organization.

1. Political and Economic Transition

Since 1990 Africa has followed the global movement known as the 'East Wind,' characterized by the falling apart of the Berlin wall and the splitting up of the Eastern Bloc, represented by the former communist Soviet Union, with emerging claims for freedom and democracy.

From that moment on, most of the African countries began to undergo the difficult and remarkable process of the democratization of their institutions. New political parties were authorized to exist and could compete with the ruling monopolistic one in democratic polls.

Multiple newsletters with more and more critical analyses of societal issues were created; the social movement arose and issues such as human rights violations, violence against women and good governance could be addressed publicly. Women's groups and movements emerged and raised their voices progressively in different political fora and decision-making areas of the society.

At the pan-African level new institutions were set up: the *African Union* (AU) is the new instrumental body that will address African issues in the world arena and cope with challenges such as conflict resolution, war prevention and peacekeeping, democracy and good governance, as well as developmental issues facing the continent.

Today we are there, but we cannot yet affirm that all has been achieved. A lot remains to be done. Some parts of the continent are still groaning in civil wars and political conflicts cause sorrows and mourning among populations, mostly women and children. Constitutional 'hijacking,' consisting of some leaders abusing the Constitution in order to stay in power eternally is prevailing in some countries.

At the economic level, Africa has undergone through an economic liberalization with the emergence of the private sector since 1990. Most parts of the economic sector were privatized, as well as the major state companies.

All these changes occurred under the guideline of a framework policy of the *Structural Adjustment Program* (SAP) set up by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the other Breton Woods Institutions.

Economic globalization as a global trend is challenging the economy of the continent, which is still trailing behind as the poorest economy. In response to it, the leaders of Africa set up the *New Partnership for African Development* (NEPAD) as a framework of policies to be implemented in order to help the continent integrate into the world economy and boost its development.

The *Millennial Development Goals* (MDG) launched by the United Nations (UN), with a special focus on Africa, is another instrumental mechanism of the international community to halve the extreme poverty prevailing and assuage the impact of HIV/AIDS and other deadly diseases, to list only two goals.

At the national level instruments do exist. Many governments developed strategic documents for poverty reduction, along with the adoption of the MDG document, in a comprehensive development policy.

But Wahu KAARA, the ecumenical coordinator of the MDG, raised a concern during

the last UN gathering in New York: “Africa no longer wants warm words, but action that will meet and exceed the MDGs by 2015.”¹

Albeit these instruments and mechanisms, the reality on the field is steadily worsening. Poverty is still spreading and threatening people at the community level. Here again, women and young people are suffering the most.

The external debt is ravaging the economy with serious damages to the social sector, especially education and health. Too much is still to be done. Above good and warm words, relevant actions have to be taken at local, national, regional and global level to stem this fundamental menace jeopardizing the future of the continent.

2. New Social and Cultural Trends

The globalization process in which humanity is engaged is reshaping the social arena in Africa today, with the emergence of new social values and cultural trends. We used to talk about globalization only in terms of economic and financial matters, and yet, there is a socio-cultural dimension of it as well.

This change occurs with a lot of tensions, drawing Africans into a crisis of identity. They are facing a change of identity. Identity is embedded in culture. If culture is something changing, identity is changing too.

So in the context of global cultural change that we are facing today, it is quite normal that identity is in crisis, in the way we have defined crisis as a transition state. New patterns are arising much more from the younger generations. One can observe it in their way of acting and thinking, in their ways of dressing, walking, eating, talking, loving and so on.

Family, as the first social institution, is also affected by this change. A sign of it is the fact that many couples get divorced today. The emergent phenomenon of a single-parent family, particularly among young women, is also another sign of the times.

Today many young people, especially young women, no longer accept the prevailing traditional family system. Thus, there is an urgent need to rethink the concept of family and review the roles and function of its different members.

The social transformation in Africa is quickened by the startling evolution in the world of information and communication technologies. The internet, mobile telephones, mass media including global television, radio and newspaper—all these new global communication tools are reshaping minds, transforming social relations and organizations, and developing new attitudes and skills.

Through it a new culture is emerging, the *cyber culture*,² carried by a *cyber generation* in a *cyber society*. In this *cyber society* we have *cyber marriage* and *cyber friendship*, very common today among young people and even among the elders.

It interconnects people irregardless of boundaries, races, cultures, religions, gender, and so on. It unifies people inside a worldwide web. In the cyber society, whoever can express her- or him self in any way she or he wants shows whatever things she or he wants to show.

Cyber society is thus a free and open society which displays and highlights the inner world of humanity, including both whatever can be considered ‘good’ or ‘evil.’ Nothing

1 2 See AACC Newsletter: *The African Christian Pulse*, 2005/18.

2 3 The concept of cyber culture has been developed by the famous Canadian philosopher Pierre LEVY, who has devoted his professional life in studying the impact of digital revolution on the cultures.

is hidden anymore, everything is disclosed, because everyone knows how to use it. One can find there any type of information, knowledge, friends, partners, goods and commodities. One can sell, buy, advertise, sensitize, mobilize, train and communicate.

The impact of the cyber society in Africa is considerable and significant, especially on the younger generations. The stances toward this new phenomenon vary. There are those who are a bit reactionary to it. This group considers cyber society as a new menace against Africa in terms of cultural deterioration and moral depravation; and charge that it gives too much freedom to young people, who are considered today as disrespectful towards elders and completely disoriented.

Another group of people are more receptive to it, and they find it as a new chance to grab for Africa¹ in this new millennium. We Africans have to study it critically and come up with relevant and progressive orientations for the whole society.

This is also the task of the churches and the ecumenical community in Africa, the theologians, missiologists and Christians at any levels. The technological revolution is inevitable, and its impact on people and culture as well. The only thing to do is to deal proactively and constructively with it.

3. HIV/AIDS and Global Poverty

Too much has been said and written about HIV/AIDS and global poverty; and Africa is today counted as the part of the world where these prevail most desperately. They have scarred the whole social body, and reality is irrevocably marked by these two scourges.

The poverty in Africa is a scandal and a shame for humanity. It is the result of structural discrepancies. Thus poverty is created by an unjust system, both internal and global.

At the global level, a possible list of causes of poverty in Africa might include: the burden of international indebtedness; the unfair trade system which does not allow African products to compete in the Western market due to subsidies those government provide to their producers, mostly in agriculture; the absence of transparency and democracy in the international financial system (decision-making in the IMF and World Bank, especially); and the menace of transnational corporations (TNT) to the national economy.

At the national (internal) level, one counts corruption, wars and conflicts, the lack of good governance, and the structural adjustment policies (SAP) which have considerably damaged the health and education systems.

The impact of poverty on society in Africa is visible and has multiple facets: unemployment of young people, increasing unemployment, the development of slums around the big cities, development of the informal sector, ecological devastation, 'streetism'.²

HIV/AIDS, on the other hand, is ravaging the population. The link with poverty is close and intimate. Poverty nurtures HIV/AIDS and vice versa. The reports and figures show that countries such as South Africa and Botswana have recorded negative population growth due to HIV/AIDS.

In so doing it reduces life expectancy, damages the education system (by killing teachers and lecturers), results in a loss of humanpower and consequently drags down production. It also destroys families and spoils the relations among stakeholders in society.

1 4 BONJAWO Jacques, *Internet: une chance pour l'Afrique*. Paris, 2002.

2 5 By 'streetism,' we mean a comprehensive system describing the phenomenon of people living on the street, including street children, homeless, graduates on the street without jobs, and so on.

Poverty and the HIV/AIDS question our society. They question our social practices, our culture, and our relation to one another, our humanity and our spirituality. They represent a spiritual and ethical challenge for the whole of humanity.

II. Gender Perspectives: For a New Approach to Gender Roles

We have seen how African societies are facing gradual changes affecting the life of the people, the political and socio-cultural institutions such as the state, the communities, the family, and so on.

We saw the context of this change, which is the globalization process; and its major driving force, which is the technological revolution via the development of information technology (IT), linking and connecting humanity in a worldwide web.

We had a look at how this revolution affects our society with the emergence of new social patterns, reconfiguring the political, economic, social and even religious landscape, transforming the minds of people. This context is also characterized by poverty and HIV/AIDS as global phenomena.

Having arrived at this junction, what can we learn from it as far as gender roles are concerned? Gender is related to how women and men share power in the society, how their roles and functions are defined and exerted in politics and the economy.

Being women and men is not primarily biological, but rather cultural and educational. Thus in this transitional context described above, it becomes apparent that there is an urgent need to rethink the relationship between women and men in our society. What does it mean today to be women and men?

1. Deconstruction

“Gender is not natural, is not divine, has to do with relationship between women and men, and can be reconstructed (...) by the society for since it is culturally constructed it can be socially deconstructed.”¹

The first step to move forward in building the new approaches of gender roles is deconstructing what has been constructed so far.

By deconstructing we mean that there is a need to dissect the social system prevailing now and to analyze its functions and dysfunctions, its internal dynamics, to highlight its failures and discrepancies. Deconstructing also means challenging and critically questioning our myths, our social ideologies, which gendered women and men. That is demythologizing and demystifying.

A. The Myth of the Strong Man

A myth is a set of ideas and values that generally describe and explain in a certain way our realm. It also has a foundational and educational function. It plays a crucial role in the foundation of a community and in shaping the mind of its members. Every society has its own myths. To engage in a change in a community, it is recommended to challenge its myths, as well.

Challenging the myth of the ‘strong man’ means attacking all the ideas and social stories that describe and promote the image of man as someone strong, fearless, courageous, invulnerable, a great thinker and intellectually bright. All these are myths; but because

they are imaginary constructions, which have shaped minds and behaviours, they infuse the educational system in such a way that men are trained like to be like that in society.

But the today's realms tell and show us its opposite. There are many calamities attacking our world today and rendering men vulnerable (HIV/AIDS, for example). Facing them, men of course also show signs of weakness and fear.

B. Man as Protector and Provider

Men are also promoted as the protectors and providers for their families. They are those protecting the family, the society, and sparing them from threats and external menaces. They are those providing the resources (money) for subsistence.

The economic crisis in Africa today challenges this notion, for we have men losing their jobs and subsequently they cannot afford this responsibility anymore. They are not really what the myth tells us. It is a delusion, and we have to adjust our minds. In the meantime, their function as head of the family is also challenged.

2. Reconstruction

After deconstructing and analyzing the system critically, we need now to reconstruct a new social system giving the findings and results of the previous process. This means building new paradigms for a new society, where women and men will be reconciled.

A. Women and Men in Partnership

The new paradigm we need to develop and nurture regarding the relationship of women and men is the one of partnership. The system of partnership recognizes the worth of each component and wants to build an equal and equitable relationship.

In terms of gender roles, that will mean considering women and men as equal partners in society, acting together, conjugating and uniting their forces and resources to build an equitable society.

B. Collective Intelligence and Collective Leadership

We owe the expression 'collective intelligence' to the Canadian philosopher Pierre LEVY. Collective intelligence defines intelligence and intellectual activity as a collective process. It is not a one-person show. It gives space for and values any ideas and inputs; it makes room for discussion, debate and participation.

Likewise, collective leadership approaches leadership as a collective matter. That means it recognizes each person as a leader, capable of contributing to the development of the whole society.

The values here are inclusiveness, flexibility, openness, dynamism, collaboration, interdependence and consensus. The approach gives worth to group work, and decisions are made by consensus.

We shall never overcome the challenges of our society today if we continue to view leadership as a single thing, if we do not address and approach it collectively, which means mobilizing all the living forces of the community.

Applying that to the relationship of women and men will mean recognizing women and men both as leaders in their different capacities in society—building a social system

where the leadership, including economic, political, religious and spiritual, is no longer the affair of men only.

African societies have failed by degrading the important role and function of female energy in history and in humanity. This energy, this force, has to be re-aroused in our society. It is the task of the new generation.

Suggested Reading

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Bertrand TIETCHEU: Etre Femme et Homme en Afrique aujourd'hui: Nouvelles Approches des Rapports Femmes–Hommes dans les Sociétés Africaines en Mutations

Cette article essaie d'explorer les nouveaux modèles des relations entre les femmes et les hommes en Afrique compte tenu des mutations sociales actuelles dans un contexte de mondialisation avec ses implications politiques, économiques, culturelles et technologiques. Etre femme et homme en société est une construction culturelle et éducationnelle. Il peut donc être déconstruit. Les sociétés africaines sont de nos jours engagées dans des changements radicaux et profonds tant politiques, économiques, sociales que culturelles. Ils questionnent notre humanité, notre façon d'être femme et homme. Le VIH/SIDA, la pauvreté et leur effets, éprouvent notre système traditionnel de socialisation de la femme et de l'homme. Il devient urgent de le repenser et de reconstruire des paradigmes sociaux nouveaux.

Bertrand TIETCHEU: Ser Mujeres y Hombres en África hoy: Los Próximos Papeles del Género en las Sociedades Africanas Cambiantes

Este artículo intenta explorar los nuevos modelos de relación entre las mujeres y hombres en África hoy, teniendo en la cuenta los cambios sociales que estamos enfrentando ahora en el contexto de globalización, con su impacto político, cultural, económico y tecnológico. Ser mujer y hombre en la sociedad es una estructura cultural y educativa. Puede ser destruida y puede reconstruirse con los nuevos modelos sociales y paradigmas. Hoy, las sociedades africanas están llevando a cabo cambios políticos, económicos, sociales y culturales profundos y radicales, desafiando nuestras vidas y nuestra capacidad de ser mujeres. El VIH/SIDA y la pobreza global con todo sus efectos visibles y sutiles están probando nuestro sistema tradicional que ha prevalecido hasta ahora, con respecto a la manera en que se plantea el género de las mujeres y los hombres en la sociedad. Hay una necesidad de repasar y reconstruir críticamente los nuevos paradigmas de sociedad.

Serge TANKEU KEUSSEU

Genre et Pouvoir dans le Contexte Africain

La réflexion que nous entreprenons au travers de nos réalités africaines se veut porteuse de sens profond dans la façon dont nous enfants d'Afrique devons apprendre du passé pour mieux comprendre les exigences actuelles et relever les défis de notre temps.

Les questions sur les conditions des femmes africaines ont surgi ces dernières décennies et ont présenté les réalités complexes d'une société longtemps considérée comme modèle de tranquillité et de paisibilité familiale.

Aussi, cette réflexion est consacrée aux possibilités dont disposent les femmes et les hommes de l'Afrique pour transformer nos sociétés dans leur structure, leur institution, leur fonctionnement, leurs mentalités et leurs visions du pouvoir en rapport avec le genre féminin et le genre masculin.

I. Afrique et Pouvoir: Regard Passé et Présent

L'histoire de la société africaine tout comme celle des femmes d'Afrique est une histoire en mutation. C'est – à - dire celle à partir du quelle nous avons existé, existons et surtout celle à partir de laquelle nous devons passer d'une situation d'impuissance profonde à l'acquisition du pouvoir de changer l'ordre des choses, ce, en rapport avec notre foi chrétienne. L'Afrique a besoin de toutes ses filles et fils pour se bâtir.

Elle doit au fil des événements politique, culturelle, socioéconomique et christologique lire et assumer son passé, son présent et apporter au regard de cette lecture une réponse actualisée et contextuelle pour son avenir dans le concert des nations. Partant des situations réelles de nos décennies de patriarcat; il sera question de savoir où allons-nous concrètement en tant que société dans notre relation avec l'Évangile.

Au regard des événements passés et actuels dans l'Afrique profonde; il se dégage une situation de profonds malaises qui meurtris nos structures étatiques et confessionnelles. Regard qui a donné et présenté l'Afrique comme un continent malade de tous les maux dont celui du Pouvoir.

Tout donne à croire que la barbarie s'est imposée en Afrique au cours des décennies passées, à travers «Une économie politique fondée sur la gestion de la violence par des pouvoirs qui tuent, dépouillent, accaparent et monopolisent l'accès aux conditions d'existence». Nous examinerons les structures du pouvoir avant l'arrivée de l'Évangile en Afrique avec ses acteurs et au contact de l'Afrique avec l'Évangile.

1. Enfants d'Afrique: le Patriarcat

De nombreux récits, témoignent de ce que l'Afrique est le berceau de l'humanité. Avant l'arrivée des religions du livre en Afrique, il existait des religions traditionnelles africaines. Elles avaient leurs rites, leurs mythes, leurs initiations.

Ce qu'il faut par ailleurs souligner dans un tel contexte était la discrimination que subissaient les femmes dans ces sociétés. Elles ne suivaient pas les mêmes rites d'initiations que les hommes; car les rites des hommes les formaient pour la virilité, la domination et les prédisposaient à l'exercice de la force: c'était alors la puissance du Patriarcat.

Littéralement défini comme le règne du père, le patriarcat est un type familial caractérisé par la prépondérance du père sur tous les autres membres de la tribu. Pratiquement, il signifie l'inégale institutionnalisation sexuelle impliquant l'éradication sociale systématique des femmes des sphères publiques par des arrangements légaux, politiques et économiques en faveur des hommes.

Vu comme tel, il constitue un réservoir de violences permanentes contre les femmes; dans la mesure où il soutient et justifie la prédominance des hommes, réalise une concentration des pouvoirs et des privilèges entre les mains des hommes.

Un tel système ne peut conduire « Qu'à la domination et à l'assujettissement des femmes et engendre une inégalité sociale entre les sexes »¹. Pour mieux comprendre cette disparité des pouvoirs, des privilèges et du prestige qui a enraciné et perpétué le patriarcat dans notre société africaine; nous approfondirons notre diagnostic sur cinq aspects forts de ce système.

A. Le Problème de la Dot

En Afrique, la dot est un cadre fort et indissoluble des liens d'unités scellés par les deux familles. La dot est donc un ensemble de biens remis par le futur marié ou sa famille à la famille de sa future femme.

De tout temps, elle avait valeur d'un symbole d'alliance, il apparaît aujourd'hui que l'aspect économique, et même commercial a pris le pas sur sa signification originelle et a entraîné des conséquences énormes.

On assiste à un véritable marchandage, car tout se discute entre les deux familles, dont le seul but est de tirer le plus de profit par les uns. Sans pour autant s'inquiéter de savoir si après avoir déboursé tant pour avoir une femme, il restera quelque chose au mari.

Quelque fois, la surenchère détruit la flamme vivante de l'amour entre les principaux concernés au détriment d'un mariage polygame "âgé" mais "riche". Et la jeune femme que l'on a contrainte à ce mariage d'argent cherche, au dehors, des amis de son âge pour des relations plus «normales».

B. La Polygamie

Elle nous intéresse en ce sens qu'elle est une structure qui maintient le règne de l'homme sur la femme en l'aliénant biologiquement, économiquement et même psychologiquement pour reprendre les propos de Julienne Irène TONJE.

a. Aliénation biologique. Nos sociétés africaines traditionnelles, ont défini l'importance de l'homme au nombre d'enfant qu'il possède. Un seul homme peut ainsi avoir plus

1 TONJE Julienne Irène, *Femmes africaines pouvoir de transformer le monde*. Yaoundé 2002, p 23.

d'une dizaine de femmes, et dont l'unique soucis est guidé par la préoccupation d'avoir beaucoup d'enfants. Ceci entraîne une chosification de la femme qui ne vivra que dans la perspective de la maternité.

b. Aliénation économique. Parce que depuis les temps comme aujourd'hui; les économies de nos sociétés sont fondées sur l'agriculture; la main d'œuvre que possède un polygame au travers de ses femmes est source de richesse. Transformant ainsi celles-ci en outil de travail.

c. Aliénation psychologique. Les désirs inconscient et conscient de nos vies justifient encore la polygamie comme volonté de rompre avec la monotonie. En ayant plusieurs femmes sous son toit; il est très bien pour lui de se faire admirer comme grand seigneur; ceci avec des conséquences graves pour les co-épouses qui s'entredéchirent en cherchant chacune à s'approprier le plus d'amour du mari.

C. L'Excision

Les rituels d'africains ont mis l'homme mâle au centre des intérêts au point de lui attribuer à lui seul le droit perpétuel de plaisir. L'excision à mon sens s'inscrit dans cette perspective, car comme pratique rituelle consistant à couper soit une partie du clitoris, soit le clitoris et une partie des petites lèvres chez la jeune fille. Elle encourage une sexualité limité pour la femme au détriment d'une plus grande liberté pour l'homme.

C'est une pratique de domination et de régulation inhérente à un système de violence sociale. A mon sens, elle sert de camouflage à des pratiques destructrices et oppressives qui perpétuent et inhibent la volonté de libération des femmes et de la société africaine tout entière.

D. L'Infibulation

Il s'agit de la création d'une obstruction vulvaire partielle permanente laissant subsister un petit orifice résiduel habituellement postérieur, permettant l'issue de l'urine et du flux menstruel. Obtenu par juxtaposition des petites et grandes lèvres dont les bords préalablement avivés sont réunies par la ligne médiane dans le but d'en faciliter l'accolement.

Justifiant cette pratique pour certaines veuves et surtout les femmes dont les maris passent le plus de leur temps loin de leur femme, ce rite a été et est pratiqué chez les femmes dans le soucis d'éviter les conjonctions extérieures au ménage, comme si elles ne mesuraient les exigences et les impératifs d'une fidélité en ce moment de crise profonde et de maladies dont le VIH/SIDA.

E. Le Veuvage

Il s'agit d'une pratique qui imposait et continue d'imposer à la femme au décès de son mari un certain nombre de coutumes et rites qui témoigneraient de son innocence dans la mort de celui-ci.

S'il est vrai que de tout temps il avait pour but de mieux cerner les réalités quelques fois complexes des couples, il n'en demeure que comme la dot, il est devenu au fil du temps un moyen d'oppression de la femme et de dépossession de celle-ci des biens de son défunt mari. Biens dont elle a aussi apporté sa part de contributions tant sur les plans pratique que théorique.

Cette réalité encore forte de nos sociétés où la mort d'un tel n'est jamais naturelle, maintient nos mères, sœurs et femmes dans une sorte d'aliénation biologique et psychique qui les meurtri une fois de plus après le décès de leur bien aimé et contribue ainsi à la fragiliser pour mieux la posséder comme propriété familiale au cas où elle souhaiterait «goûter» aux biens de son défunt mari ou pire l'exproprier au cas où elle essaierai de résister.

Vu sous un tel angle uniquement, le diagnostic de nos réalités africaines en rapport avec le pouvoir serait incomplet. L'Eglise africaine a-telle compris le pouvoir comme service?

2. Eglises Africaines et Pouvoir

Les Eglises d'Afrique comme lieu d'expression de vie, de foi et surtout d'espérance dans l'engagement pour la mission et le témoignage évangélique participent à mon sens au plan de Dieu pour la libération de l'Humanité entière. Mais alors au regard des réalités passées et actuelles, pouvons nous dire qu'il a été ainsi.

France QUÉRÉ écrivait: «Notre Eglise a professé haut et fort et parfois prophétiquement la liberté, la valeur du droit, le respect de la personne, mais elle n'a pu s'empêcher d'être sexiste, par habitude, par calcul ou simplement par difficulté à ne pas être»¹.

Par rapport à cette pensée, je suis convaincu au regard de mon expérience que l'Eglise n'a pas été et n'est pas seulement sexiste, mais pire. Elle a surtout adopté des structures du pouvoir à l'instar des sociétés féodales et patriarcales.

Conscient de ce que le patriarcat, n'a pas commencé avec le christianisme; Ce dernier a étalé son incapacité à vaincre ce système, car très tôt il a été intercepté par les mâles et mis au service du patriarcat.

Comme tous les autres systèmes de domination, elles ont en commun cette caractéristique de considérer l'autre non pas comme une personne responsable et libre, mais plutôt comme une chose, un objet qu'on utilise pour la satisfaction de ses plaisirs et désirs personnel.

Et je suis de commun accord avec Louise TAPPA lorsqu'elle déclare que: «le Christianisme a renforcé le patriarcat»². Expliquant sa pensée, l'auteur déclarait: le christianisme a renforcé le patriarcat en nous projetant l'image d'un Dieu entièrement «mâle», c'est à dire un Dieu patriarche: roi des armées, juge, puissant, très jaloux et possessif.

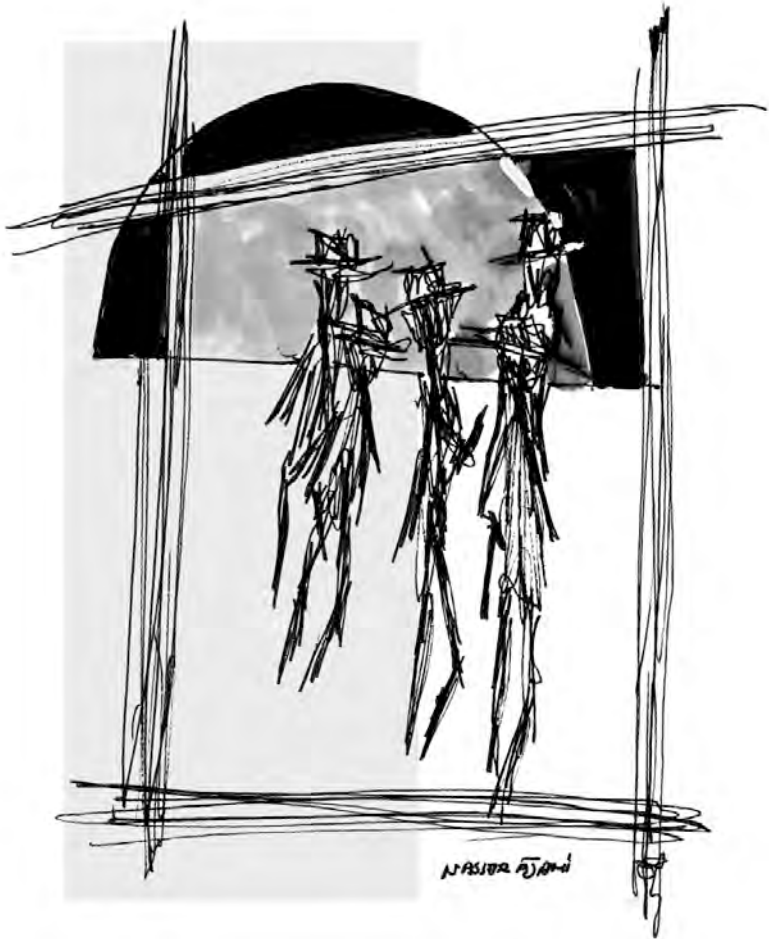
Il n'a aucun des soi-disant traits féminins tels que la douceur, la tendresse, la sensibilité; bref il nous donne l'idée d'un Dieu «macho». Ce Dieu qui n'a rien de miséricorde et de justice comme le Dieu de Jésus-Christ qui selon les témoins de l'Évangile, est amour.

Plus loin, explique t'elle, il a renforcé le patriarcat en sacralisant les manifestations du péché au profit du pouvoir. Le fait que Abraham et Sarah abusent de Hagar est perçu comme étant la volonté de Dieu.

Que Abraham père de notre foi, livre sa femme à des étrangers puissants pour se détourner de la mort et s'enrichir ne lui est pas tenu rigueur. En renforçant la structure patriarcale tant à l'époque des premiers chrétiens qu'aujourd'hui, le christianisme maintient les pauvres, les faibles au bas de l'échelle et anéantis au fil du temps leurs

1 QUÉRÉ France, *L'Eglise devant la libération des femmes*. Cahiers de l'Association des Pasteurs de France 1983/6. 23.

2 JÉSUS et les femmes. *Rapport du séminaire du Département Féminin (DEF) du Mouvement des Etudiants Protestants du Cameroun (MEPC)*. Bangangté, 2004.



vœux d'espérance et d'égalité totale; qui nous pousse à dire que l'Église est un marchand de Dieu.

Au vue de notre analyse sur le pouvoir dans nos églises, il est question maintenant de faire une lecture concise des composantes sociales de notre environnement comme lieu d'aliénation, avec toutes ses conséquences.

3. L'Environnement Africain dans sa Compréhension du Pouvoir

Nous entendons ici par environnement tous les acteurs et actrices qui de manière directes ou indirectes influencent l'éducation et renforcent de manière consciente ou inconsciente le culte du pouvoir au masculin. Trois grands cadres qui moulent l'individu focaliseront notre attention.

A. Les Masses Médias

Aujourd'hui plus par le passé, les médias sont un moyen de socialisation très puissant. Au regard des programmes de télévision et cinéma, au regard de l'actualité de la presse écrite se dégage, les caractéristiques d'une communication sensuelle et violente.

Pire avec la publicité de boissons gazeuse comme alcoolique, des cigarettes, de belles voitures, qui présentent nos mères, sœurs, femmes dans un statut d'objet ou en posture de soumission. Que dire de la pornographie qui montre autant la chosification et la dégradation physique de la femme et de l'homme.

Bref, nos sociétés se trouvent plongées dans une culture de dévalorisation des genres qui entraînent les phénomènes de violences abominables partant du harcèlement au tourisme sexuel en passant par les viols et la pédophilie.

B. L'École

S'il est vrai qu'au regard de tout ce qui est dit plus haut, beaucoup de regard convergence vers le lieu de formation à l'action citoyenne assumée et au bonheur partagé. Il n'en demeure pas moins que les réalités académiques et surtout scolaires contribuent de manière naïve mais très profonde à la conception d'une société de pouvoir masculin.

Le parcours des manuels scolaires ne manque pas de présenter un contenu sexiste et plein de discrimination non seulement dans leur contenu mais aussi dans leurs illustrations. De plus, bien que certaines soient égales et parfois meilleures que les garçons, on assiste au découpage complet des orientations et de conclure très vite que certaines filières ou matières sont appropriées aux filles. Et ce que l'on met à l'esprit des enfants à l'école conditionne fortement leur vision du monde.

C. La Famille

S'il est un autre cadre qui moule les enfants et leur permet de rêver des projets de sociétés fiable et juste quand l'environnement externe veut nous faire croire le contraire: c'est la famille.

Pris comme telle, elle serait une alternative solide et un début de réponse prometteuse de la jeunesse face aux macabres extérieurs, mais alors; force est de constater qu'elle constitue de plus en plus une racine de la violence.

Reconnaissant personnellement l'influence vitale de ce que nous apprenons à

l'âge précoce et de nos premières relations affectives importantes. Il m'apparaît plus qu'urgent qu'à partir de la famille; nos mères, sœurs et femmes ne soient plus conditionnées à penser que le mariage et la maternité constituent ce qui leur donne de la dignité et du respect.

Car c'est dans nos familles que les notions de sexualité, de droits, de respects mutuels et surtout d'égalité, doivent être enseignées. Le système patriarcal a pu se perpétuer à cause de son emprise sur l'institution familiale: Véritable creuset et moule de reproduction des mentalités.

4. Femme: L'Obstacle Majeur de la Libération

La femme, en elle-même constitue une racine profonde de la violence, de la soumission et de l'aliénation contre elle. En intériorisant cette situation de fait et en l'acceptant comme phénomène naturel et normal, elle confirme son souci de n'être que l'inférieure de l'homme. Pour mieux comprendre état des choses, deux témoignages nous y aiderons.

A. Les Femmes: Les Mimiques des Accords et la Réalité des Couloirs

L'histoire pathétique, vécu et raconté par Hélène YINDA dans une église en Afrique de l'Ouest alors envoyée par le Conseil Œcuménique des Eglises (COE) pour rencontrer les responsables des mouvements de femmes afin d'évaluer leur travail et de mesurer l'impact de leur position dans l'église; témoigne de la volonté de soumission de femmes africaines. Elle raconte:

«Pendant les deux heures qu'a duré la rencontre, seul le président de l'église a répondu à nos questions. Les femmes écoutaient, acquiesçaient, soutenaient le chef avec de mimiques qui disaient leur plein accord avec ce que nous entendions. Poursuit-elle; c'est seulement dans les couloirs qu'elles ont pu parler de leurs problèmes réels, de la manière dont elles se sentaient à l'étroit dans l'église et de l'espoir de pouvoir se desserrer pour qu'elles participent pleinement à la direction, à l'administration et à la gestion de la communauté conclurent-elles.»¹

À la question de savoir pourquoi elles n'ont pas parlé en présence du chef de l'église, la réponse tomba comme un couperet: «Cela ne se fait pas. En Afrique, on ne parle pas quand le chef parle.»

Au regard de ce témoignage; l'église est vue comme Eglise-Chefferie, cela témoigne à mon sens la non compréhension par certaines femmes de l'exigences de mission au sein et en dehors de leur communauté et par conséquence participent de leur volonté de soumission.

B. La Femme contre la Femme

L'histoire extraite de l'interview de Madeleine TCHIKAYA à Poro KONE confirme ce culte de l'infériorité et de la soumission. Elle raconte: « *Le plus grave c'est que nos sœurs, nos mères (...) du village n'ont pas compris qu'il fallait sortir de cet état de chose. Elles le trouvent tout naturel. Les femmes trouvent souvent naturel de se voir reléguées au dernier plan, de se voir sous-estimées et incomprise. (...) Mais nous autres*

1 YINDA Hélène – KĀ MANA, *Pour la nouvelle théologie des femmes africaines*. Douala, 2001. 35

qui avons eu la chance d'aller à l'école, la chance de recevoir une instruction qui nous a ouvert les yeux, nous nous devons de les aider à en sortir de cette erreur»¹. Question de Madeleine TCHIKAYA: «Où rencontrez-vous le plus grand obstacle: chez les femmes ou chez les hommes? »

Réponse de Poro KONE: «*Je vais répondre franchement: chez les femmes. Beaucoup n'ont pas compris et lorsque je discute avec certaines africaines, on me prend pour une folle et l'on me dit: ta mère n'aurait jamais dit une chose pareille.*»

II. Evangile et Pouvoir: Construire l'Avenir

Face à la réalité très déformée de la compréhension du projet de mission et de témoignage qui incarne et dévalorise les différences biologiques. Un nouveau travail se dégage à l'horizon.

Travail dont l'impact sur la vie des femmes et hommes d'Afrique doit se mesurer à l'aune de leur capacité à vivre le christianisme comme pratique éthique et sociale qui répondent leurs problèmes cruciaux de vie.

Notamment la misère, l'impuissance, le désespoir, l'effondrement des valeurs sociales et énergies créatrices dans la crise que traverse l'Afrique depuis la traite des noirs jusqu'au néocolonialisme actuel.

Pour mieux cerner la portée de notre engagement, comme fille et fils d'Afrique face aux exigences d'éthique et d'expressions africaines vivantes en Jésus-Christ; nous devons être capable d'affronter les défis du présent et de l'avenir.

Ces défis sont ceux de l'affirmation de notre liberté, la conquête de nos droits fondamentaux et le respect de celle de nos mères, sœurs et femmes. S'il est vrai que ça et là, cette lutte a déjà commencé; il est important de comprendre qu'elle continue.

Parce qu'au vu de ce qui est, nous dirons que ce qui a été entrepris est: « Une goûte d'eau dans l'océan d'actions à accomplir»². Cette lutte exige des efforts dans tous les domaines: vie spirituelle, éthique, sociale, économique, des changements culturelles et la libération politique.

Conscient de l'avenir à construire; nous sommes convaincu que le christianisme africain est appelé à s'investir de manière radicale pour la conscientisation de tous les africains et africaines en vue de leur libération et de leur rôle décisif dans l'invention du futur. A ce niveau, je formule les actions à mener sous forme de trois stratégies majeures.

1. Former, Eduquer, Conscientiser

Parce que les communautés chrétiennes sont des lieux de mission et d'évangélisation; elles devront être les premières actrices et des forces les plus vigoureuses à s'engager dans la lutte contre la discrimination et les dominations.

Dans un continent en crise où la parole de Dieu est presque toujours tournée vers l'au-delà et orientée en fonction des aspirations personnels du pasteur(e); il est urgent de lancer des campagnes collectives destinées à conscientiser les chrétiennes et chrétiens sur les questions de dignité, d'égalité, de respect comme champ de travail et de lutte pour la foi chrétienne.

Parce qu'une compréhension claire et publiquement assumée de la Bible dans ses

1 Cercles des théologues africaines engagées, *Femmes africaines: le pouvoir de transformer le monde*. Yaoundé, 2002. 30.

2 YINDA Hélène – KĀ MANA, *Pour la nouvelle théologie des femmes africaines*. Douala, 2001.

exigences de promotion de la personne et des sociétés est aujourd'hui un impératif essentiel en Afrique.

Cela doit engager les chrétiens et surtout les chrétiennes d'Afrique à développer une vision d'eux mêmes qui soit capable de les valoriser et de faire de leurs communautés les premiers lieux de prise de conscience du problème d'injustice et d'inégalité.

En faisant de la lutte contre les dominations et les inégalités un élément phare de l'action évangélistique dans le continent aujourd'hui, nous considérons comme orientations majeures:

a. L'étude et la lecture de la Bible dans ses enjeux et ses exigences en rapport avec les dominations sous toutes ses formes. Ceci dans tous les lieux (catéchisme, enseignements religieux, prédications dominicales, rencontre de maison, communautés bases, campagnes d'évangélisations et démarches de proximités).

b. Pour les programmes de formations locale, nationale et internationale impulser une véritable culture de la représentativité des genres dans la formation et l'animation.

A travers ces orientations, il s'agit, en mon sens de former et d'éduquer les Chrétiennes et Chrétiens à la dimension concrète de leur mission pour leur développement complet et celui de leur communauté.

Ainsi donc, encourager, soutenir et porter les initiatives qui vont dans le sens de la promotion de l'égalité des sexes dans la formation, l'éducation et la conscientisation des personnes et des communautés.

C'est aujourd'hui l'axe majeur autour duquel devra se structurer l'action des enfants d'Afrique et des organismes qui ont à cœur la promotion de la justice, de l'humain et l'épanouissement des sociétés africaines.

2. S'organiser, S'engager, Transformer

Pour notre part, il est aujourd'hui révolu le temps où les discours revendicatifs étaient les seules manières pour les femmes de se faire entendre. Elles doivent entreprendre des actions concrètes, à travers des associations et mouvements suffisamment puissants pour pouvoir imposer «la féminité créative»¹, comme volonté et comme présence sociale pour ainsi dire comme Hélène YINDA.

En mon sens, cela voudrait tout simplement dire que les femmes d'Afrique doivent s'organiser au niveau local, national, régional et mondial pour apporter et partager leurs espérances de vie en Jésus-Christ et leurs compréhensions de la mission.

Les groupes de Cercles de Jeunes Filles Chrétiennes (CEJEFIC) des Aumôneries Protestantes Universitaires réunis au sein du Département Féminin (DEF) du Mouvement des Etudiants Protestants du Cameroun (MEPC) constituent en mon avis un exemple d'organisation et d'engagement social au niveau de leur aumônerie à travers leur activité spécifique mais aussi au niveau national à travers leurs rencontres de réflexions et d'actions missionnaires.

De même, la FUACE (*Fédération Universelle d'Associations Chrétiennes d'Etudiants*, 1895) à travers sa Commission d'Etudiantes «Female Student Commission» nous a témoigné ce formidable goût de l'organisation et d'engagement durant sa 33^e Assemblée Générale².

1 *Pour une mission chrétienne complète en Afrique à travers la théologie des femmes africaines. Rapport du séminaire du Département Féminin (DEF) du Mouvement des Etudiants Protestants du Cameroun (MEPC)*. Dschang, 2003.

2 La 33^e Assemblée Générale de la FUACE dont le thème «Thalita Koum, réveille toi pour la vie en abondance», s'est tenu du 5 au

3. Proposer, Innover, Réussir

Pour mieux comprendre les exigences de ces trois verbes caractéristiques de l'engagement et de la libération, je vous fait part de cette scène spectaculaire au quelle moi et mes frères avons vécu comme une manifestation de la capacité des femmes à prendre corps avec les réalités et le contexte.

«En effet, après avoir été surpris quelques jours au par avant par cette aptitude de concertations et de réflexions pour l'assemblée, je vu stupéfait par une nouvelle réalité qui bouscula mon orgueil masculin et m'interrogeât sur ma vision de la mission comme valeur de partage et de collaboration franche, ouverte et impérative.»

Pourquoi toutes ces questions? Parce que: au jour de la présentation par le comité de sélection des candidats aptes aux différents postes à pouvoir de la FUACE, ne figurait aucune femme.

Parmi les propositions du comité de sélection il n'y avait pas de femmes; ou du moins pas de femmes suffisamment outillées pour les nouvelles exigences de mission de la famille FUACE.

Le spectacle fut à la hauteur de son organisation, lorsqu'une fois la présentation faite, toutes les femmes dans la salle nous encerclaient. Reconnaisant leur tord de n'avoir pas pu parmi toutes celles présentées obtenues une sélection de candidates ne serais ce qu'au poste de vice président.

Elles interpellèrent nos consciences de coordonnateurs nationaux ou Présidents sur notre travail au sein de nos «communautés à la base»¹. Ayant l'impression que c'était la seule réalité qu'elles nous dévoilaient, nous fûmes tous surpris lorsqu'elles nous proposèrent un moratoire de trois à quatre mois pour faire parvenir des candidatures femmes assez outillées pour combler la paire de Vices Présidents.

Cette force de proposition, d'innovation et de réussite que cette scène a mis à nue; témoigne de l'ampleur des mobilisations féminines et devrait interpellier les Eglises et communautés d'Afrique et leurs leaders sur les potentiels d'actions et d'engagements constructifs dont nos mères, sœurs et femmes sont porteuses.

Cette réalité visible de la vie de FUACE devraient interpellier nos institutions Locale, Nationale, Régionale et Internationale sur la capacité de construction des projets qui vont dans le sens d'une attention complète aux femmes et aux hommes pour qui l'évangélisation doit avoir un impact public aussi important que la conversation individuelle.

Ce n'est qu'à travers Jésus-Christ que cette dynamique de sens et de valeurs nos permettra de vivre le projet de société et de communauté que l'Afrique devra offrir comme voie de salut à l'humanité en quête d'avenir. Ainsi, la globalisation de l'humain et la mondialisation de l'Amour, seront les vrais lieux de la ressemblance de l'Homme avec Dieu.

15 août 2004 à Chiang Mai en Thaïlande.

1 Les communautés à la base de la FUACE sont constituées des Mouvements d'Etudiants Chrétiens (MEC).

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Serge TANKEU KEUSSEU: Gender and Power in the African Context

The present reflection is meaningful when we think about the current and ancient realities related to the conditions of women in Africa. Because it points out the living conditions of our mothers, sisters, and women, it can be said to be at the heart of their major hope questions, and can be viewed as their contribution to the reconstruction of our societies, which are longing after a fruitful faith and missionary action. It also deeply illustrates the existing changes at the heart of faith communities in Africa, thus calling out to leaders and men to take into consideration the capabilities that those women have for the construction of a more human and even more ambitious Africa.

Serge TANKEU KEUSSEU: El Género y Pobreza en el Contexto Africano

La reflexión presente es significativa cuando pensamos en las realidades actuales y antiguas relacionadas con las condiciones de las mujeres en África. Porque señala las condiciones de vida de nuestras madres, hermanas y mujeres, puede decirse que está en el centro de sus preguntas de esperanza más importantes, y puede verse como su contribución a la reconstrucción de nuestras sociedades que anhelan una fe fructífera y la acción misionera. También ilustra profundamente los cambios existentes en el centro de comunidades de fe en África, convocando así a los líderes y hombres a tener en cuenta las capacidades que esas mujeres tienen para la construcción de una África más humana y aun más ambiciosa.

Ashit N. CHANDARIA

Women's Empowerment Through Group Economic and Educative Activities

The following examples emphasize the strength of women's educational programmes with group-initiated social and economic activities, to reshape their lives and the communities around them.

It proves that when women get a chance to come to forefront of community life, the hidden potential of this more-than-half of the population is better utilized and as a result, the entire community benefits from it.

Four Examples

Two women drop the idea of female feticide after attending a training-cum-educative classes organized by a non-governmental organisation (NGO), Shri Vikas Trust in Rajkot, Gujarat, India.

A woman starts earning Rs. 5000 (110 USD approximately) a month after getting preliminary training in sewing.

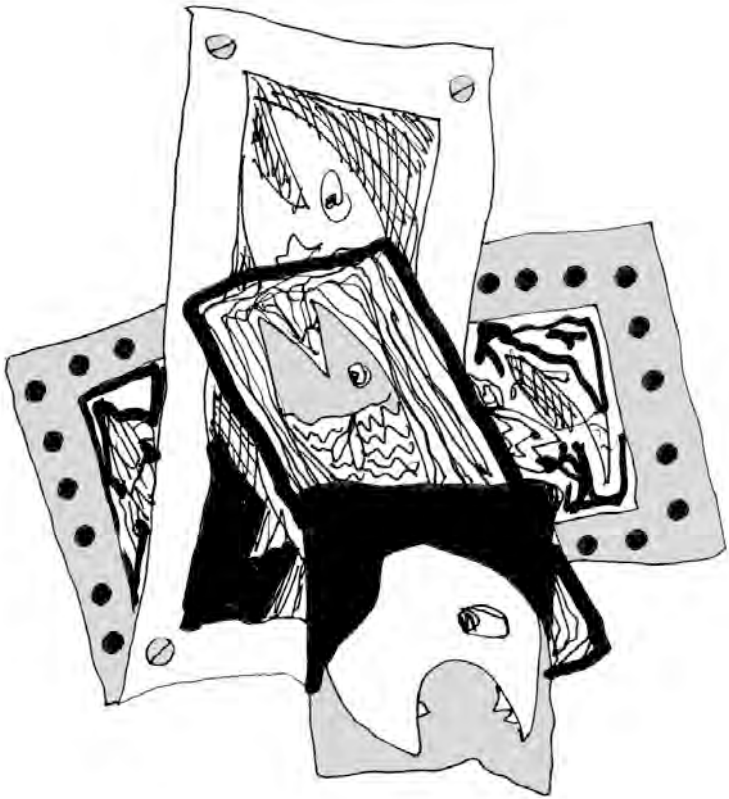
Women of a village in the Okhamandal region of Gujarat organize themselves into groups to fight local problems and also to get a better road constructed. The groups of women were formed and trained by an NGO in Okha.

Women from Gariya Village in Gujarat, who had never been allowed to go out of their houses, started going out to nearby towns to engage in trade activities after forming groups and undergoing training provided by another NGO, Mahila Vikas Sewa Mandal.

Women's Education

Women's education is an ongoing process of learning and empowerment that transcends the mere quest to become literate. Education can provide a basic knowledge of fundamental rights available to women, and how to deploy these rights in order to curb exploitation with regard to social evils.

Women's contribution to the GDP (Gross Domestic Product) of their respective countries through various sectors is also a significant determinant of any given nation's



NASIRI AJAMI

social progress. Women contribute to economic activities, for example, in the following ways:

Trade, business and service activities; household maintenance; care for children, sick, elderly and disabled in their own households; community services and help to other households; social and cultural activities; personal care and self-maintenance.¹

Such contributions can be enhanced by providing education and training. There are large numbers of women in India, as in many underdeveloped countries and developing countries, who have either never gone to school or discontinued after a very short time.

Skill Based Education (SBE)

Such undereducated women actually need a skill-based education (SBE), and not just primary education, that will help them to perform in special sectors—for example in handicrafts and ceramics.

Hand-woven textiles and handicrafts are immensely popular in international markets. If these women mobilize to work for this sector, they can gain economic independence; and education will provide them the basic platform for this.

Thus, looking at the strategic role played by women on various fronts—social, economic, cultural and political—women's education inevitably requires that it be given due emphasis.

Many governmental organizations and institutions are active in the field of women's education. But NGOs too play a very important role in many parts of the world in the development and empowerment of women.

In fact, in many cases these NGOs are far better equipped and skilled to carry out work in areas which governmental bodies have not yet reached or are not able to do proper work. In order to understand activities related to women's education, it is vital to study the contributions made by various NGOs in this field and how they met with success.

Gujarat Earthquake

Through field visits across Gujarat in India, the author had the opportunity to study 18 NGOs which were working for women's empowerment through education-cum-self employment training under the government of Gujarat's programme, intended to restore the livelihood of women in places affected by the 2001 earthquake there.

Some of these NGOs had been working very efficiently and had filled with fervent hope and vigour many women and men in the earthquake-devastated areas. All the NGOs were working independently from each other but were required to follow certain basic guidelines issued by the government of Gujarat and the donor agencies.

This article is about those NGOs, which carried out very good work for the women (and also men) beneficiaries in adverse conditions with a very limited budget. The method followed by these NGOs can be followed by any NGOs, or even governmental organisations, across the world in the implementation of any grass roots-level development programme.

The author observed that even when the NGOs have good intentions and programmes, most of them faced such problems as resistance from men in villages. Other problems

1 RAJESH Bhatia, *Measuring Gender Disparity Using Time Use Statistics*. Economist and Political Weekly, August 17, 2002.

included the initial reluctance of women to join the programme; and after that, the quality of the education, the lack of sustained motivation, time constraints, orthodox cultural and social norms and stereotypical views on the role of women.

But some NGOs came out with novel ideas and strategies to get past such problems. Following are some strategies adopted by these NGOs for women's empowerment through group economic and educative activities.

Focal Points

The NGOs started working with one, two or three people in the rural areas, and got them involved in some of the NGOs' running projects. Gradually, that person or those people became aware that the NGOs were doing good work and they asked the NGOs to start similar programmes in their own villages and regions as well.

So the NGOs got a starting point, which could also be called a *focal point*. The interaction with the focal person or people gave the NGOs vital inputs regarding the implementation of the programme.

These inputs included the type of activities that a certain section of the village would be capable or incapable of doing, or which exact time is suitable, proper and apt to start the programme, and so on.

Activities

In almost all villages that the author visited, there were more than three castes. Women of a certain caste were only able to do animal husbandry work, while some were experts in handicrafts or embroidery.

Consequently, the NGOs had to be very careful in selecting the beneficiaries, as well as the activities for which it was going to give training to the beneficiaries. Having more and more local people working for the NGOs induced other women (and men) of the village or even of the region likewise to join the programme.

The NGOs trained women especially in the following activities: sewing, animal husbandry, handicraft making, toy making, retail trade, and other similar ones. Initially, most people did not perceive any value in the education or training; they could see no reason why it should be necessary. The villagers were so naive that they never thought such training or education could be helpful to them in improving their lives.

Education Through Economy

So, it was very necessary that people could see concrete rewards from the programme. But economic gains alone were not enough to significantly improve the women's condition, so *economic activity was kept at the core of the programme, around which education was wrapped*.

Successfully merging education with several kinds of economic activities and group building helped to attract more and more women to join the programme and continue to stay with it.

Once the women started to attend the training classes regularly, educative lectures replaced training sessions occasionally, and then the lectures were made every day after the training sessions, for one hour or so.

So the education part 'crept' into the programme, as the NGOs felt that if the educative classes were started full-scale from the beginning itself, many women would not have ever joined, thinking that education was not at all important for them.

The subjects for the educative classes were decided beforehand with the objective of making the women aware of their rights and duties, and also using groups as their main collective decision-making power.

So the NGOs ensured that along with substantial economic independence, the participating women also were enlightened about their rights, as well as about their duties. It was from many such education classes that more and more women became aware of the follies of aborting girl-children and dropped the idea of aborting their own girl-child.

Initial Phases

Since religion is usually the centre of most social gatherings in the villages, some NGOs used religious activities like *bhajans* as platforms for their first meetings. If the villages had two or three major communities, the NGO preferred to have separate groups, in order to avoid any type of conflict between the two groups.

In their second meeting, in order to implant the idea of developing and utilizing their handicrafts and other skills, a longer demonstration of the gains earned by women of other villages was given.

Some NGOs simply did public gatherings at the centre of the village and asked women to join the programme. At the beginning of the programme, the NGOs explained that the women would be given training in some or the other activities in which the women already had some basic skills.

For example, those who had many generations of expertise in embroidery were to be given training in making merchandise for themselves that would be acceptable to clients of several international markets.

Those, who were good, let us say, at animal husbandry, were given loans to buy cows or buffalo or other proper animals, and they were given training to sell milk quickly and earn more money.

The NGOs said it was highly advisable to have women workers and instructions in the initial phase. Having women workers also helped the NGOs get over the reluctance of other women in the village to join the programme.

Feedback and Results

Seeing that the women were really learning something worthwhile, something that would help to raise the income of their family, men's resistance against the programme, too, diminished gradually.

In fact, in some villages those men who were initially opposed to such training-cum-education programmes are now even asking the NGO to start similar programmes for the men of the villages. Some of the NGOs were highly successful in making the women of villages better understand the concept of collective savings and even of banking activities.

They helped the women form co-operative groups under which all the women saved a fixed amount of money every week. The money was deposited in a fund; the fund was then used to advance any loan to needy co-operative member at a nominal rate.

Rotating the Trade Cycle

The Gujarat government and the donor agencies wanted to restore the livelihood of the women; thus the work of the NGOs did not end with the formal end of training. Once the women started making goods and also selling them, they were taught to buy new raw materials from the proceeds of the sale and were advised to use profits only for personal use or family use.

So, they were groomed to be self-reliant in carrying the trade; thus when one cycle of raw material-to-finished goods was over and finished goods sold away, the women need not go back to the NGOs to ask for more aid or help.

They had learned to plough the money back into business, and then to continue rotating the trade cycle, while using the profits earned in each cycle for their family or for their personal expenses.

Handover Period

Thus women continued to become empowered. The NGOs had a mechanism (by way of regular visits by the NGO workers to the beneficiaries) for checking if the women were continuing the economic activities or not. Also, in some cases problems at domestic and/or village level that they were facing were discovered and sorted out.

The day-to-day working of the group of women was then handed over to a group leader, who was pragmatic, interactive and open to communicate with other group leaders at intra- and inter-village levels, at regular intervals, so that they could gain from each other's experiences.

Thus, when the group leaders slowly became capable enough to take care of the whole group, the NGOs gradually withdrew themselves from the day-to-day work. The NGOs were careful enough to give particular skills to limited number of women in each village, so as to avoid a situation where every other woman in the village made handicrafts or stitching clothes and cannibalized each others' customers.

Though most of the women in the various villages were trained to sell their own merchandise, some NGOs also displayed the goods made by their beneficiaries at various trade fairs across India. Thus they gave more exposure to the work done by the beneficiaries. The benefits of such good strategy and work were seen clearly while I interacted with the women beneficiaries of these NGOs.

Fascinating Achievements

Some of the great successes of this programme have already been mentioned at the beginning of the article. But it would be worthwhile to mention some more such fascinating achievements.

A woman who was partly handicapped was dependent on her old father and mother for support. She was considering committing suicide, but after coming into this programme she stopped thinking of ending her life.

Furthermore, she started earning well enough to support both her mother and her father. She was given training by the NGO called the Shri Vikas Trust of Rajkot.

Another woman had five children and she had also lost her husband. She was considering giving away her children to an orphanage because she was not able to support all five of them.

But after she got training in making and selling handicrafts, she started earning enough to support her children, and she was also happy that her children were with her and not in an orphanage.

In one area of Okhamandal, there were more than a dozen different castes, and not all of them always looked each other in the eye. But then an NGO started its programme and other programmes in that place.

The result was that the women and men of that particular place understood the power of being united and intercaste conflicts gradually started to decline. These women then joined hands to further demand better infrastructure from the politicians who came asking for votes during election times.

Women of another community were treated very badly by their own husbands. As these women had no other source of livelihood available, they had to live with such violent husbands. But after acquiring skills in making and selling bead handicrafts, they started to earn livings on their own. Consequently, they formed a group and themselves fought the violent nature of their husbands.

Eventually the violence against women declined, and the women are now happy with their economic and collective power. Thus the women beneficiaries of these NGOs and the NGOs themselves showed that given good opportunity and proper skills, women can contribute equally to the society and nation as compared to men.

It can also be seen here that grassroots development is possible, when people at the grassroots level are properly motivated and educated. When they get education, skills and opportunity, they can bring about a change in the way society works and end discrimination against women and against the whole of humanity.

Cannot this success be replicated elsewhere in the world? In fact, everywhere in the world? Shouldn't the collective and educative powers be used to eradicate problems like HIV/AIDS, poverty, and so on?

Cannot such programmes be replicated to bring employment to local levels, and not just in big cities and metropolises? Seeing these examples, our answer to these questions should always be a clear *Yes*.

Suggested Reading

Women at Wheel. Humanscape, July 2003.

Women for Trees. Humanscape, December 2001.

Ashit N. CHANDARIA: Responsabilisation des Femmes à Travers des Activités Économiques et Éducatives

Généralement, dans plusieurs régions du monde ne sont pas dotées de chances et opportunités égales, notamment dans les domaines tels que l'éducation et le développement des capacités, qui pourrait les rendre autosuffisant. Donc, elles n'ont jamais la chance de prendre le devant et produire un changement dans leurs propres vies et dans la société de façon générale. Ayant reçu une formation, éducation et motivation appropriée, les femmes ne deviendront pas seulement économiquement indépendantes, mais elles pourront aussi produire des changements dans la société. Cet article va prouver cela en observant les progrès faits par dix-huit organisations non gouvernementales (ONG) à Gujarat en Inde. Des femmes ont commencé à avoir un revenu par elle-même, ont été éduquées, ont appris à propos de leurs droits et aussi ont appris à exercer des pouvoirs dans les co-opératives en formant des groupes entre elles. Dans beaucoup de cas, les femmes ont enregistré une baisse des violences domestiques et une croissance du respect à leur égard, de l'espoir et de la confiance en elle-même.

Ashit N. CHANDARIA: El Fortalecimiento de Mujeres a Través del Grupo Económico y Actividades Educativas

Generalmente en muchas partes del mundo no se dan mujeres iguales oportunidades, sobre todo en las áreas como la educación y la creación de habilidades que pudieran hacerlas autosuficientes. Así ellas nunca tienen la oportunidad de avanzar y provocar un cambio en sus propias vidas y en la sociedad. Pero dado el entrenamiento apropiado, educación y motivación, las mujeres no sólo pueden hacerse económicamente independientes, sino también provocar el cambio social. El artículo sigue para demostrar esto a través de la observación del progreso hecho por los beneficiarios de dieciocho organizaciones no-gubernamentales (NGOs) en Gujarat, India. Las mujeres empezaron ganando ellas mismas, se educaron, aprendieron sobre sus derechos y también aprendieron la influencia de los poderes de cooperación formando grupos entre ellas. En muchos casos, las mujeres que se informó disminuyeron la violencia doméstica y aumentaron el respeto, la esperanza y la confianza.



Challenges to Overcome Violence Against Women

“A Delhi University female student was shoved into a car by three unidentified men when she was returning late in the evening with her friend from a road side dhaba (restaurant). She was then gang-raped by the miscreants for four hours inside the moving car and then thrown out on the road where she was abducted. Incidentally, the dhaba was just one hundred meters from the local police station.”¹ The much-applauded Delhi Police has yet to nab the culprits, even after four months.

Every Fifteen Seconds a Woman is Raped

One out of four women in the world is a victim of sexual abuse. One out of six girl children is a victim of incest. An estimated two million young girls undergo genital mutilation practices every year.

An estimated sixty million females ‘disappear’ due to female infanticide and sex-selective abortions. Seventy-five percent of the people who die of starvation are women. Two thirds of the illiterates in the world are women (whether in the Southern or Northern hemisphere).

Sixty-five percent of the total work in the world today is done by women, yet only fifteen percent of salaries are paid to women. Ninety-eight percent of all structures of power (political, economic and social) in the world are controlled by men.²

Around four hundred cases of rape are reported in one year (365 days) in Delhi, the capital of India. The number of unreported cases could be much higher. Incidentally, in the neighbouring state of Haryana, only one out of sixty-nine cases of rape is reported. These statistics are so drastic that Delhi has earned a tag of the “rape capital of India.”

Whether in India or elsewhere in the world, this is the reality and experience of women. Gender-based violence is a universal reality and it is widespread. Women face many forms of violence on a daily basis.

The official statistics of reported crimes against women do not fully reflect the reality, as thousands of cases go unreported or ignored.

In the following essay, we would like to raise certain issues around violence against women in order to identify the challenges for us as a student community to move towards a violence-free society.

1 *Times of India*. New Delhi Edition.

2 Concept Paper for the Women’s Programme of WSCF IRO, on *Violence against Women: Challenging Gender Roles and Power Relations between Women and Men*. 24–31 July 2005, Manila, Philippines.



Violence Against Women: A Growing Crisis in South Asia

An Oxfam Report exposes the sad state of women in South Asia:

In *Pakistan*, eighty percent of women experience violence within their homes. Despite the fact that many incidents of 'honour killing' are not reported, in 2002, more than 450 Pakistani women or girls were killed by relatives in so-called 'honour killings,' and at least as many were raped.

Every six hours, somewhere in *India*, a young married woman is burned alive, beaten to death, or driven to commit suicide. It is estimated that more than 15,000 women suffer from dowry-related violence every year. In a nation-wide survey in India, nearly fifty percent of women reported at least one incident of physical or psychological violence in their lifetime.

Forty-seven percent of *Bangladeshi* women experience some physical violence at the hands of their intimate partners. If psychological violence were included, the figure would be much higher. Every week, more than ten women in Bangladesh suffer from an acid attack that leaves them brutally disfigured and often blind and disabled. A study in Bangladesh shows that 32 percent of women working outside their homes experience disruption of their work due to incidents of domestic violence.

According to the chairperson of the National Committee on Women, violence against women is on the increase in *Sri Lanka*. Sample surveys reveal that 60 percent of women suffer domestic violence in Sri Lanka.

There is no accurate figure of the scale of sex-trafficking of women and girls from *Nepal*. Despite published figures suggesting that between five and seven thousand Nepali women and girls are trafficked for sex work each year, and that two hundred thousand Nepali women and girls are working in the sex industry in India (Human Rights Watch, 1995), the actual magnitude of women and girls who are trafficked from Nepal is unknown.

In *Afghanistan*, there is a significant incidence of rape, forced marriage, abductions, and assaults. Women are also attacked and imprisoned by armed groups without due process, for not complying with their Taliban-style edicts on dress and behaviour. Statistics are scarce, but in 2003, an Amnesty International Report indicated a high incidence of such violence.¹

Challenges Ahead: Manifestation of Patriarchy

I am sure that most readers would agree that we still live in a predominantly patriarchal world. Most of the half of humanity are treated as inferior to men and hence are not disposed to a life in dignity.

Women too have been conditioned by the system to accept their given subordinate status in exchange for protection and privilege. Their subordinate status exposes them to various forms of discrimination, disregard, insult, control, exploitation and oppression or violence within the family, at the work place and in all spheres of their daily life.

Patriarchal influence is seen in all areas of life, namely, family, religion, education, work, culture, media, political forums and the legal system.² In fact, in most cultures the patriarchy endows men with higher status with the legitimacy to subjugate women.

Furthermore, patriarchal cultures have sanctioned men to control property and

1 *Towards Ending Violence Against Women in South Asia*. Oxfam Briefing Paper, 2004.

2 JEYARAJ Nirmala, *Understanding Gender Issues: A Move towards Gender Equality*. In *Women and Society*. Madurai, 2001.

economic resources and to pass on the same from one man to another or from father to son. Unfortunately this customary practice has prevented women from inheriting property and assets.

On account of this, in many societies daughters are considered as liabilities. Consequently, girls and women are discriminated against right through all the stages of their life, from the womb to the tomb.

Their very right to birth and existence in this world is denied. In India, China and many other places, sons are preferred over daughters. It is so much so that the Chinese are now finding it extremely difficult to find girls from the same community or country for marriage.

The reason for this is that the single child policy has encouraged them to opt for a son only. It is unfortunate that many of us, either consciously or unconsciously, have inherited the patriarchal values and mindset.

Gender Discrimination: A Human Rights Issue

Today gender-based violence is recognized as a major issue on the international human rights agenda after the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women was adopted by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly (GA) in 1979.

Though we have observed 25th November, 2005, as the day for Elimination of Violence Against Women, the discrimination and violence continues unabated for half the world's population. Women experience a wide range of violations.

In our society, women are discriminated against in the areas of education, employment, inheritance of property, freedom of expression and movement, and decision-making power in private and public life.

The growing number of sexual assaults on women corroborates the point. Moreover, massive trafficking in women and girls for sexual exploitation is one of the worst forms of human rights abuse.

Trafficking of women and girl children is rapidly increasing in Asian countries. It is reported that two million are trafficked across borders annually and every day in Asia alone, one million are abused.¹

Gender Discrimination: A Development Issue

According to the World Bank (WB) Report in 2005, "Gender inequality tends to slow economic growth and make the rise from poverty more difficult. The reasons for this link are not hard to understand.

"Half of the world's population is female, hence, the extent to which women and girls benefit from development policies and programs has a major impact on countries' overall development success.

"Research shows that women and girls tend to work harder than men, are more likely to invest their earnings in their children, are major producers as well as consumers, and shoulder critical, life-sustaining responsibilities without which men and boys could not survive, much less enjoy high levels of productivity."²

1 "Churches Say No to Violence Against Women." Lutheran World Federation (LWF), Department for Mission and Development, Women in Church and Society, Genève, 2002.

2 World Bank (WB) Development Report. 2005.

Development policies and patterns of many countries are patriarchal in their basic approach. Policymakers are insensitive to the needs and development of women, who constitute more than fifty percent of a given country's population.

Unfortunately, on account of the preferential option for male children, the gender ratio is fast changing in many societies. The male-dominated political sphere in most of the Asian countries has left little or no space for the active participation of women.

The much-debated Women's Reservation Bill (a third of the seats in the Parliament) pending in the Indian Parliament for a long time, resurfaces every year on the International Day of Women. Thanks to the Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRI) and local self-governance, in India women have achieved the one-third reservations. But even that privilege has not been adequately fulfilled.

Playing God: The Missing Women

God has created women and men equally and it is by nature that their numbers are more or less same. Foetal sex determination tests, however, through the use of ultrasound machines have become widespread and have resulted in abortions of female fetuses, particularly in the countries of India and China.

It is shocking to know from the National Family Health Surveys in India that more than one hundred thousand sex-selective abortions have been performed annually in India in recent years.¹

The decline in the female:male ratio was sharpest in the decade of 1991–2001. There has been a drop from 945 to 927 girls for every thousand boys. This exposes the relationship between social development and sex ratio.

In 2002, only 48.4% of the populations of India and China are female in comparison with 50.1% in Western Europe. An estimated sixty million females are thus missing, mainly from the Asian countries.

Based on these comparative figures, the Nobel laureate Amartya SEN holds India responsible for thirty-two million missing women. He says: "These women ought to have been present in India if our sex-ratio were on par with the world, but some inhuman conspiracy of 'race fixing' is gradually eliminating India's females."²

Puneet BEDI, a foetal medicine expert from India, rightly points out that "ultrasound machine has become a weapon of mass destruction." For sure, today the mother's womb has become a battlefield for the girl-child.

Eliminating females just because they are females before or after birth is the ultimate manifestation of gender violence and discrimination, abuse of human rights and infringement on values of equality, justice, dignity and quality of life for all.

Countries like Bangladesh, which ranks very low on the Human Development Index (HDI), are doing much better than countries like India or Pakistan, who comparatively have a higher HDI-status, according to the Human Development Report in 2005.

Women's Bodies as Weapons During War and Conflict

In war and conflict situations, though almost one hundred percent of the combatants are male, it is also the women, who indirectly face the brunt. Women and girls are raped. Women are threatened, humiliated and finally abused to terrorise the community.

Thousands of women and girls have been raped and sexually abused and abducted as

1 KRISHNAKUMAR Asha, *Doomed in the Womb?* In *The Hindu*. 14th December 2003.

2 MERCHANT Rehamt, *Our Missing Women*. In *The Hindu*. 15th July 2002.

sex slaves in the Darfur region of Western Sudan. In East Timor, it has been estimated that at least one thousand women were raped during the post-referendum conflict of 1999.

We are all aware of the plight of the Comfort Women during World War II. Japanese troops used more than 200,000 women as sex slaves, mostly from Korea, Indonesia and other countries, and these came to be known as Comfort Women.

Patricia HYNES, a professor of environmental health at the Boston University School of Public Health) has mentioned in her article on “War and Women” that “governments on all sides of war have initiated, accommodated, and tolerated military brothels under the ægis of ‘rest and recreation’ for their soldiers, with the private admission that a regulated system of brothels will contain male sexual aggression, limit sexually transmitted diseases in the military, and boost soldiers’ morale for war.”

Governments are least concerned about the safety of women during wars and conflicts. It is of course a great shame for all of us that some governments allow sexual violence as a weapon.

Holistic Approach for Gender Justice

Our mission is the vision of the Reign of God on this Earth. As a student community, we need to play a prophetic role to protest against oppressive patriarchal systems and values of our society, which legitimise unequal power relations between women and men.

As women and men, we need to pursue gender justice. Women are involved in the struggle of women’s liberation, which is an ongoing process. But it becomes futile if men do not join hands in this noble cause.

It is very important to develop a strong awareness among the public in general and political leaders in particular. As long as there is no political will for women’s emancipation and empowerment, gender justice cannot be achieved in the public sphere.

We are living in this lopsided world, where women are treated too many times as inferior human beings. The role of students and of youth in this regard is of an utmost importance for the world.

The student community in the long run goes on to become the policy-makers of the future. If the student community is not provided an atmosphere of inclusiveness in universities, schools and in their families, they will not be leaders and citizens with gender sensitivity. In addition to this, school curricula need to be changed, as more often than not, these promote gender stereotypes.

Breaking the Culture of Silence

There have been plenty of books and essays written on violence against women in order to make people aware of the gross violation of the personhood of women in our times.

In addition to this, the ongoing struggles of women’s movements for the emancipation of women have been striving to break the “culture of silence” that pervades our society on issues of justice and equality for women.

In spite of all these attempts, we must continue to address the issue of violence against women seriously and concertedly. We need to tell the stories again and again until and unless the world recognises that violence against women is indeed a crime.

Repatterning Our Minds

The objective of this reflection is not to draw a battle line between women and men. But, this is an appeal to introspection for women and men who form the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF); to identify within ourselves, our societies, and our churches, the presence and traces of gender discrimination.

More often than not, it has always been women who have done this. The WSCF initiative towards overcoming violence against women through different activities needs to be seen as a very positive effort.

At this point of time, we need to renew our faith affirmation as women and men are created in God's image and both are equally important as co-creators of God's good creation. Tolerating violence, therefore, is a callous disrespect of God's creation.

The values affirming life are justice, peace, sisterhood and brotherhood, love, dignity, equality and living in harmony with nature. A challenging task that lies ahead for all of us is to repattern our minds and restructure our relationships in order that we move towards a society that is guided by the values of justice, peace, equality and dignity for all.

Sunita SUNA: Vaincre la Violence contre les Femmes: les Défis

La violence orchestrée sur la base des rapports genre est une réalité universelle et est répandue, bien que rampant dans les pays d'Asie du Sud. Les femmes font face à plusieurs formes de violence journalièrement, qui sont physique, psychologique, émotionnelle et sociologique. Les statistiques officielles des cas rapportés de crimes contre les femmes ne reflète pas complètement la réalité comme des milliers de cas restent non rapportés parce que les femmes victimes se sentent inconfortables de se présenter en public même après être exposée à la violence. Dans la plupart des cas elles sont tenues pour responsables des violences infligées sur elles. L'insensibilité, une gouvernance dominée par les hommes et le manque de volonté politique pour la responsabilisation des femmes, les modèles de développement asymétriques, les sanctions religieuses contre les femmes et la marchandisation des femmes sont des défis devant nous. Une volonté politique sur la sensibilisation au genre, l'émancipation des femmes à travers d'important changement des politiques et de la législation en faveur des femmes et un effort concerté des gouvernement et de la société civile, incluant les communautés estudiantines constituent la feuille de route pour vaincre les violence contre les femmes et établir une juste des genres.

Sunita SUNA: Los Desafíos para Superar Violencia contra las Mujeres

La Violencia de género es una realidad universal y está extendida, aunque es desenfrenada en los países sudasiáticos. Las mujeres enfrentan muchas formas de violencia diariamente, incluyendo física, psicológica, emocional y sociológica. Las estadísticas oficiales de crímenes contra las mujeres no reflejan la realidad totalmente como que hay miles de casos que no se informan, porque las mujeres no se sienten cómodas al hacerlo publico aun después de ser expuestas a la violencia, porque la mayoría de las veces se considera a las mujeres y su carácter como responsables de la violencia infligida a ellas. El mindset insensible, la gobernación dominada por el varón y la falta de deseo político para el fortalecimiento de mujeres, el modelo de desarrollo desequilibrado, la sanción religiosa contra las mujeres y los commodification de mujeres es un desafío que tenemos por delante. Un deseo político en la sensibilización del género, la emancipación de mujeres a través de la legislaciones importantes y los cambios políticos en favor de las mujeres y un esfuerzo convenido del gobierno y la sociedad civil, incluso la comunidad de estudiantes es el mapa del camino a superar la violencia contra las mujeres y para establecer la justicia del género.

Carla KHIJOYAN

Un Regard sur la Violence contre la Femme au Moyen Orient

Aucune circonstance atténuante, aucune raison compréhensible, aucun prétexte possible! Le monde moderne dans lequel nous vivons reste aussi barbare, aussi violent, aussi agressif que celui dans lequel naquirent nos ancêtres.

La terre, qui avec le temps a changé de masques, garde toujours le même visage, celui de l'intolérance, de l'injustice, de l'indifférence. Oui! Notre société est encore primitive, notre communauté rudimentaire, notre pensée inculte!

Un Regard Sévère

«Critique sévère» vous diriez, «fâcheuse conjoncture» je vous dis! Des milliers de femmes rendent leur dernier soupir chaque année, des milliers de voix crient leur affliction chaque jour, des milliers d'âmes prient leur délivrance chaque instant. Femmes battues, brûlées, étranglées, répudiées, poignardées, défigurées, délabrées; femmes d'Orient.

La violence contre la femme au Moyen Orient est marquée par la multiplicité des formes qu'elle prend ainsi que par l'atrocité qui l'alourdit. Au moment où l'Allemagne choisit un visage féminin pour diriger le pays, nous combattons ici pour un droit de vivre.

Il suffit de tourner les pages d'un journal. Là, une jeune fille assassinée par son père pour avoir été soupçonnée d'une relation amoureuse; là-bas, une enfant tuée par son frère après avoir été violée. Un peu plus loin, une mariée étranglée par son époux la nuit de noces, elle n'était pas vierge! Oui, il faut bien «laver le linge sale» de la famille, il faut effacer la honte. Il faut commettre les pires férocités et ceci au nom de l'honneur, au nom de l'humanité!

Nous essayerons dans ce qui suit de développer la forme la plus courante et la plus particulière de violence au Moyen Orient, à savoir *les crimes d'honneur*, ainsi que d'exposer quelques raisons qui seraient à l'origine de ces manifestations malades dans notre région et qui concourent à les maintenir.

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Un Crime d'Honneur ou un Honneur Criminel?

On place sous le titre de crimes d'honneur, dans la justice orientale, tout crime commis contre une personne accusée d'avoir porté atteinte aux lois sociales et familiales. Il suffit d'être soupçonné d'une situation moralement illicite¹ pour être la proie légitime de la guillotine.

Société ou jungle, qu'importe! Ici, les règles sont pareilles. Tous les regards sont écrasés par l'image de l'homme de la famille. C'est lui qui détient le droit de vie ou de mort sur les membres féminines.

Le sentiment d'appartenance sociale dans ce cas dépasse de loin celui de l'identité humaine, il le dénonce, le renie, le déchire. C'est lui le criminel! Que dis-je? C'est lui le sauveur!

Au Moyen Orient, l'honneur de la famille a toujours été lié au sexe féminin. Le passé, la renommée, l'avenir, le nom même de la lignée se trouvent concentrés en un point obscur, aveugle, fragile du corps féminin. Une fois le silence brisé, il devient indispensable d'effacer cette page et de faire taire sa voix à jamais.

«Familles, je vous Hais!» (André GIDE)

25 Juin 2005. Le Caire. Le soir. Deux silhouettes noires, un juge, un crime, une âme errante ; celle de Souad. Hier, elle était encore là, savourant sa vie médiocre de jeune égyptienne. À l'âge de 21 ans, Souad était secrétaire dans un petit cabinet d'ingénieur.

Cela faisait quelques jours qu'elle rentrait tard à la maison. Un surplus de travail la retenait au cabinet. Inquiet, son frère était insatisfait de la situation. Un soir, il la guettait de loin, quand il l'aperçut en voiture avec un jeune homme.

Il avait donc raison! Souad entretenait une relation secrète avec ce type. La rage lui piqua les nerfs. L'honneur de la famille est souillé. La mère fut informée des circonstances et la décision fut prise. Il faut tuer la petite sœur. On ne tarda point pour l'exécution. Souad rentrée, son frère l'attaqua, la poignarda jusqu'au dernier soupir. Et la mère? Elle regardait la scène avec des yeux vitrés, vides, sereins. Des yeux qui bravaient le regard du diable.

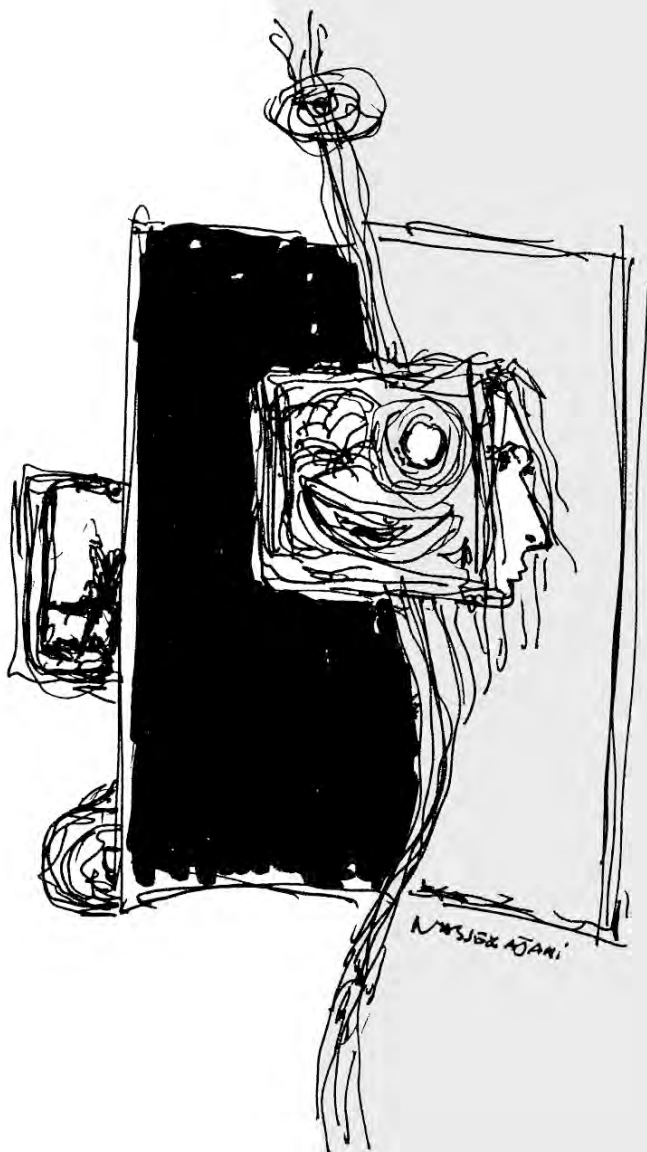
Enquête: l'examen médical prouve que Souad était encore vierge. Elle n'a point eu de relations sexuelles. L'homme qui l'accompagnait était un collègue.

Verdict: le tribunal condamne le frère à deux ans de prison pour avoir commis un crime. La mère sera enfermée pendant une année d'avoir été complice. Que peut-on dire? Ils avaient le droit de sauver leur honneur. Et encore, si Souad s'était avérée être déviergée, ils auraient reçu chacun six mois de prison uniquement. Oui! La discrimination chez nous est écrite dans la loi qui encourage ces pratiques atroces.

Violence Déchaîne-toi, Rien ne te Prescrit!

Pour vous donner un autre exemple de l'indulgence de la justice orientale, un article déclare libre un homme qui a violé une femme s'il accepte de la demander en mariage. Non seulement la pauvre aurait subi la férocité de ses instincts, mais elle aurait aussi à vivre avec son agresseur et à partager son lit toute sa vie durant.

1 Il s'agit surtout des relations sexuelles, volontaires ou forcées, en dehors du mariage.



Condamnée à un éternel cauchemar, elle n'aura pas d'autres issues. Elle sera répudiée par la société d'avoir subi ce mal. Elle pourra être accusée d'avoir séduit l'homme et de l'avoir incité à la violer. Elle risquera d'être assassinée par un membre masculin de sa famille pour avoir porté atteinte à son honneur.

Le plus souvent, on charge le mâle le plus jeune de la famille pour accomplir cette tâche. La loi condamne à une prison de six mois toute personne âgée de moins de dix-huit ans ayant commis un crime d'honneur. Le jeune criminel sera couronné Héros par la famille et la société.

Qui est donc coupable? L'homme, oui. La femme aussi, puisqu'elle ne se révolte point. La mère? Bien sûr, puisqu'elle contribue à perpétuer ces coutumes éculées depuis l'aube des temps. La société? C'est si peu le dire.

Autres Formes de Violence

Quelle soit physique, psychique ou morale, la violence laisse des traces indélébiles sur les âmes meurtries des femmes. Des rêves écrasés, des ailes brisés, des dignités terrassées. Telles sont les conséquences de l'abus du pouvoir masculin.

Sur le plan physique, le viol occupe la première place. Il est suivi de la violence physique par le partenaire, l'harcèlement sexuel dans le cadre du travail et enfin la prostitution forcée. Nombreuses sont les femmes livrées à la prostitution par leurs époux, pères ou autres membres de la famille. Nombreuses sont aussi les jeunes filles qui, à la recherche d'un travail promis, quittent leurs pays et se retrouvent dans des lupanars, privées de leurs papiers, de leurs identités et de leur liberté.

Le mariage forcé, la privation de l'éducation, l'excision (du clitoris de la femme), et tant d'autres pratiques sont omniprésents dans la société. Sans oublier la barbarie exercée pendant les guerres et les atrocités dans les prisons. Il suffit de lire les rapports d'*Amnesty International* sur la situation des détenues en Turquie: torture inhumaine et férocité bestiale.

Quelle est l'origine de cette violence soulignée contre la femme au Moyen Orient? D'où vient la supériorité dont réjouit l'homme. Les raisons en sont multiples. Il s'agit surtout d'une influence d'ordre religieuse, culturelle et sociale.

La Religion

La religion est un facteur essentiel dans la structure de la société. Quelle image donne-t-elle de la femme? Quel rôle lui dicte-t-elle? La question qui se pose d'emblée est: De quelle religion parlons-nous?

Notre région est la terre sainte des trois religions monothéistes. L'Eglise chrétienne, la Mosquée musulmane et le Temple juif se dressent dans nos rues formant un spectacle magnifique de dialogue culturel. C'est l'Histoire qui parle ici en trois langues.

Foyer de multiples groupes ethniques, le Moyen Orient ne pourrait échapper à leurs influences. La coexistence de ses peuples a nécessité un échange interreligieux riche en formes et en couleurs. Différents dits sur la femme, différents exemples cités, pourtant, l'image matricielle reste une.

L'Islam et le Coran

Commençons d'abord par la religion dominante dans la région: l'Islam. La Shariaa musulmane accorde à l'homme des droits naturels sur la femme. L'homme est supérieur à la femme, c'est le Prophète qui le dit: «*Les hommes sont supérieurs aux femmes à cause des qualités par lesquelles Dieu a élevé ceux-là au dessus de celles-ci.*»¹

La femme est une possession du mâle dont il peut disposer comme bon lui semble, tant en ce qui concerne l'épouse «*Les femmes sont votre champ. Cultivez-le de la manière que vous l'entendrez.*»² que les filles «*Ne donnez point vos filles aux idolâtres tant qu'ils n'auront pas cru.*»³

Le Coran donne aux hommes le droit d'avoir quatre épouses, la polygamie est officiellement acceptée: «*Si vous craignez d'être injustes envers les orphelins, n'épousez que peu de femmes, deux, trois ou quatre parmi celles qui vous auront plu.*»⁴

Pendant la même possibilité n'est pas accordée à la femme qui, elle, doit rester fidèle à son unique mari. La femme n'a pas le droit à la jouissance sexuelle, ce qui explique le phénomène d'excision qui compte chaque année plusieurs victimes.

L'inégalité entre homme et femme est plus encore soulignée dans d'autres circonstances. Une femme n'est pas capable de témoigner au tribunal. Si sa présence est indispensable, deux femmes doivent témoigner en équivalence à un seul homme à condition que le second témoin soit du sexe mâle:

«*Appelez deux témoins choisis parmi vous; si vous ne trouvez pas deux hommes, appelez-en un seul et deux femmes parmi les personnes habiles à témoigner; afin que, si l'une oublie, l'autre puisse rappeler le fait.*»⁵ Il est de même pour l'héritage «*Dieu vous commande, dans le partage de vos biens entre vos enfants, de donner au fils mâle la portion de deux filles.*»⁶

Le Judaïsme et la Genèse

La deuxième religion avec laquelle nous sommes en contact est celle juive. Malgré le conflit politique qui dure depuis très longtemps et qui semble être éternel, deux cultures voisines ne peuvent pas exister sans aucune interférence. Quel statut occupe la femme dans le judaïsme?

«*Sois béni, Seigneur notre Dieu, Roi de l'Univers, qui ne m'as pas fait femme.*» Voici une des prières que tout bon juif doit prononcer chaque matin, prière qui résume tout et qui rend tout commentaire inutile.

Être femme c'est aussi grave que d'être esclave. C'est la loi divine qui donne à l'homme une place supérieure et privilégiée par rapport à la femme. Cette dernière n'a même pas le droit de participer à certaines cérémonies religieuses. Sa vie se limite à servir l'homme de la famille et à se soumettre à lui.

Il suffit d'ouvrir les premières pages de la Genèse pour découvrir une image négative de la femme qui, séductrice, fut condamnée par Dieu à enfanter dans la souffrance et à obéir perpétuellement à son mari: «*Le Seigneur dit ensuite à la femme: Je rendrai tes grossesses pénibles, tu souffriras pour mettre au monde tes enfants. Tu te sentiras attirée par ton mari, mais il dominera sur toi.*»⁷

1 Le Coran IV, 38.

2 Le Coran II, 223.

3 Le Coran II, 220.

4 Le Coran IV, 3.

5 Le Coran II, 228.

6 Le Coran IV, 12.

7 La Genèse 3,16.

Le Christianisme et le Nouveau Testament

Une hiérarchie est instaurée de même dans certains passages du Nouveau Testament. Ainsi par exemple, dans les Épîtres aux Corinthiens St. Paul affirme: «*Le Christ est le chef de tout homme, l'homme est le chef de la femme, et Dieu le chef du Christ.*»¹

L'adultère féminin est condamné mais rien n'est dit sur un comportement similaire de la part du mari². Même situation pour le veuvage où aucune exigence n'est assénée au veuf alors que la veuve est destinée à l'adoration de Dieu³.

St. Paul réduit les droits de la femme dans certaines circonstances, aussi prescrit-il: «*Que les femmes se taisent pendant les assemblées; il ne leur est pas permis d'y parler, elle doivent obtempérer comme le veut la loi. Si elles souhaitent une explication sur quelque point particulier, qu'elles interrogent leur mari chez elles, car il n'est pas convenable à une femme de parler dans une assemblée.*»⁴

L'emploi du subjonctif est à signaler dans la première proposition. La tonalité prescriptive est plus encore explicite dans cet extrait des Épîtres à Timothée: «*Je ne permets pas à la femme d'enseigner, ni de faire la loi à l'homme, qu'elle se tienne tranquille. C'est Adam en effet qui fut formé le premier, Eve ensuite.*»⁵

Cependant, il ne faut pas ignorer le contexte historique de l'écriture de ces textes⁶. Nous savons que toute interprétation uniquement littérale d'un texte sacré limite son envergure et appauvrit son message. De là, nous constatons l'importance de l'éducation et son influence sur la société.

La Culture et l'Éducation

La société orientale est essentiellement patriarcale. Le pouvoir dont réjouissent les hommes est ici dans l'ordre normal de la structure familiale. La violence contre la femme est une manifestation et un renforcement de ce pouvoir. Excision, mariage forcé, privation de l'éducation: ce ne sont que des pratiques traditionnellement acceptées.

La personne active qui exerce la violence est principalement l'homme. Cependant il ne faut pas ignorer la place de la femme qui assume la violence et continue à éduquer ses enfants sur des principes de discrimination. Dans certains villages en Egypte, on continue à enterrer les nouveaux-nés de sexe féminin considérant leur existence inutile, et ceci se fait souvent avec l'approbation de la mère.

Par ailleurs, l'ignorance fait de sorte que les jeunes filles ne réalisent pas leurs droits. Ainsi par exemple, une fille violée par un proche se culpabilise et n'ose pas dénoncer l'inceste, d'autant plus que la société la condamne.

C'est à nous, jeunes, d'agir dans ce domaine. Une mobilisation est indispensable pour la restructuration de nos sociétés et ceci à travers un plan éducatif. Conférences, cours, séminaires, pourquoi pas intégration du sujet de la Violence contre la Femme dans le curriculum des écoles. Il faut surtout pénétrer dans les régions où l'éducation reste élective et non obligatoire.

1 1ère Epître aux Corinthiens 11,3.

2 Épîtres aux Romains 7,3.

3 1ère Epître à Timothée 5,5-7.

4 1ère Epître aux Corinthiens 14,34-35.

5 1ère Epître à Timothée 2,12-14.

6 Cette remarque n'est pas applicable au Coran vu que ce dernier est un texte dicté par Dieu au Prophète, donc son écriture reste indépendante du contexte socio-historique de l'époque.

La Pauvreté

Ce n'est pas un hasard si la majorité des crimes d'honneur, de viols ou d'autres formes de violence sont plus fréquents dans les villages que dans les villes. La pauvreté est un élément accentuant la violence qui est plus criante dans les régions pauvres. La situation économique dégradée s'exprime en actes agressifs de la part des hommes, qui, incapables de changer leur situation, trouvent ailleurs des domaines où ils exercent leur virilité.

N'ayant point d'autres ressources de vie, les femmes restent soumises aux hommes. Ces derniers détiennent le pouvoir pécuniaire et par conséquent se considèrent comme les possesseurs des créatures féminines vivant sous leur soutien.

La pauvreté est de même un obstacle pour l'éducation. C'est un cercle vicieux où tous les éléments s'enchaînent et se déclenchent perpétuant la violence.

«Instruire c'est Construire» (Victor Hugo)

Notre étude n'est pas du tout exhaustive mais elle se veut un regard qui nous pousse à prendre conscience de la situation actuelle de notre société. Un regard qui voit ce que nous regardons souvent sans l'apercevoir. Un regard qui va au-delà de l'image pour la convertir. Un regard qui brise notre indifférence et en génère une révolte.

Le Christ nous a révélé la vraie image de la femme à travers sa vie. Elle est Mère (Jn 2), Secouriste (Jn 4), Consciente et Capable de choisir (Jn 8), Messagère (Jn 20). L'erreur réside dans notre interprétation et notre lecture sélective des textes sacrés.

Il est dit dans la Bible que les femmes doivent obéir à leurs maris puisque «*L'homme est la tête de la femme, comme le Christ est la tête de l'Eglise.*»¹ mais il est aussi dit aux maris «*Aimez vos femmes tel que le Christ a aimé l'Eglise et lui a sacrifié sa vie.*»²

Quelle autre preuve d'amour que le sacrifice du soi? Le message est clair et ne se prête pas à une controverse. L'analogie établie entre la femme et l'Eglise la libère de toutes formes de servitude et de dépréciation et permet son élévation au rang le plus noble. La féminité est une auréole offerte à la femme par le Christ. Une auréole que les pratiques sociales lui ont arrachée.

L'Eglise est consciente de plus en plus du pouvoir des jeunes et de leur capacité de transformer le monde. Tel l'affirme la neuvième assemblée du Conseil Œcuménique des Eglises (CCEÉ) dont la devise est «*Dieu, dans ta grâce, transforme le Monde.*» «*Nous devons travailler non seulement pour les jeunes mais aussi ensemble avec les jeunes.*» certifie Sa Sainteté Aram I, le Catholicos de la Cilicie.

Il est temps donc que nous tenions en main notre avenir et que nous, jeunes hommes et femmes, rendions à l'humanité l'image originelle que Dieu lui a donnée. «*Homme et femme il les créa, à son image il les créa.*» (La Genèse 1,27.)

Carla KHJOYAN: A Look at Violence against Women in the Middle East

The topic of violence against women in the Middle East is still to be developed on multiple aspects. In examining the structures of the Eastern society, we find that the origin of the undervaluation of women lies in religion as well as socio-cultural elements. What are these elements and what image of women do we find in Islam, Judaism and Christianity? We will proceed with a short study taking a look at the different sides of the daily violence against women in the Middle East.

1 Épîtres aux Ephésiens 5,23.

2 Épîtres aux Ephésiens 5,25.

A Dangerous Journey: The Impact of Violence on One Woman's Life

For forty years, violence was Gerry's¹ constant companion. She did not suffer occasional trauma; instead she regularly endured physical, emotional and mental abuse, sometimes daily. This paper explores Gerry's life of violence.

It addresses the impact of trauma and discusses her ways of coping with abuse. Moreover, it describes her search for meaning and a new identity. Essentially, it provides a snapshot, a pen portrait of the culture of violence.

Naturally, the text has limitations. In recounting one woman's experiences, it is personal, subjective, and open to bias. The author's own prejudices and misinterpretations add further distortions.

Theory of Violence

Before we look at Gerry's story, it is first necessary to review the theory of violence—to address the question: Why are humans violent? Xavier BICHAT wrote: "Life is the struggle against death."²

While Sigmund FREUD described violence as a "life and death impulse," he further alleged that violence is a characteristic of life, a permanent feature of human nature.³ Accordingly, René GIRARD described violence as an "indestructible force, a natural life-force, which can be repressed but never destroyed. ... It is a force which will always seek and find an object."

GIRARD also identified the contradictory nature of humanity's violence: "It may be invested in a rival and lead to a brawl with her or him, but it may also unite two rivals if together they invest it in an expiatory victim."⁴

Still, the question remains unanswered: Why are humans violent? Jesus Christ identified the seeds of violence that exist in the hearts of all people (Matthew 5), whilst Carl Gustav JUNG alleged that this aggressiveness was concealed in a human's "shadow side."⁵

1 To maintain anonymity, I have used pseudonyms throughout the text. In addition, place names have also been altered. The information in this paper was obtained during two interviews with Gerry on June 15 and 16, 2005. The first interview was tape recorded; the second was transcribed during a phone conversation. Hopefully this paper provides an accurate representation of Gerry's words, her experiences and her values and beliefs.

2 TOURNIER Paul, *The Violence Within*. San Fransisco, 1978. 8.

3 FREUD Sigmund, *Civilisation and its Discontents* (tr. RIVIERE J.) Vol. XXI. London – New York, 1961. 114.

4 TOURNIER, 67–68.

5 *Ibid.*, 41.



Perhaps from these theories we can conclude that a human is simply a “sinful and violent being.”¹ With this insight in mind, let us now look at Gerry’s personal story of violence.

Lost Childhood

“Everything can be taken from a person, but one thing: the last of human freedoms—to choose one’s attitude in any given circumstances, to choose one’s own way.”²

Gerry was born in Toronto, in the year 1944. Although the war in Europe was coming to an end, Gerry’s life was a constant battle for survival. Gerry never knew her mother, because she was abandoned at birth.

Throughout her early years she was passed like an unwanted parcel from one relative to another, from aunt to aunt, and then back to her father. As she bounced from Pembroke to Oshawa and back to Waterloo, there was no stability, no consistency.

Meanwhile, in addition to the abandonment and rejection, Gerry also suffered physical, emotional and sexual abuse at the hands of her father. Perhaps mercifully, her father died when she was six years old, and she was transferred to the reluctant care of an aunt.

Sadly, this home proved to be another toxic setting. Gerry quickly realized that she was neither wanted nor loved; after all, her aunt and her three cousins constantly reminded her, “You are no good. You are just like your mum. You are just another mouth to feed.”

It is no surprise that Gerry confided, “I never had a childhood. I never played.” For the next five years, the mental and emotional abuse continued at the hands of her

1 Ibid., 48.

2 FRANKL Victor E., *Man’s Search for Meaning*. London, 1987. 85.

relatives. Then one morning in the year 1955 she was taken into the nearby town of Pembroke.

Surprisingly, her aunt announced that she was taking her shopping for new clothes and school supplies. Gerry was delighted. Normally, she had to be content with cast-offs from her cousins.

Sadly, this promise was a cruel lie. The Romans were the inventors of formal law: *Summum ius – summa iniuria*. Ironically, the most perfect law may constitute the worst injustice.

Instead of shopping, Gerry was taken to the courthouse, where the judge pronounced her “incorrigible,” labelled her a delinquent and sentenced her into the care of a remand home, the Humber Training School near Toronto.

Shell-shocked and terrified, she was taken away to a nearby holding cell. Twenty-four hours later she was driven to the borstal. Already in the taxi en route, her male escort attempted to rape her.

She managed to elude him, but later when she tried to tell of her treatment, she discovered that she had no voice. No one believed her; she was now vulnerable and powerless. Her confession merely led to further harassment.

Indeed, the only person who displayed any concern for her was the doctor who examined her upon admission. Surprised that she was only eleven years old, he asked: “What are you doing here at your age?”

Gerry could not answer him. Confused and bewildered, she was taken into an isolation cell. Here any delusion of reprieve, any hope that things would be well, evaporated. Her incarceration and her education had begun.

Humber Training School

Doctor HACKER writes: “Prisons, especially those that are camouflaged under the name of borstals, are training centers for crime.”¹ Certainly, Gerry’s own experience upholds this view: “Everything I knew I learned in there. I did not know anything about crime before I went in, but when I came out, I knew everything. They taught me how to lie, how to cheat and how to steal.”

Humber was a harsh place to grow up. As Gerry admitted, “You had to be a total survivor or you died. I became very tough. For me, it was my way or the highway.” The abuse was constant.

Physically, there were slaps, pokes and even jabs with pencils. Gerry still has a piece of lead embedded in her shoulder, a painful reminder of one reprimand. Emotionally and mentally, the girls endured a steady flow of verbal abuse, undermining and degrading remarks, lies and more lies.

Then there was the sexual abuse. Several of the guards were lesbian. These women often forced the girls to comply with sexual favours. In addition, the school employed a Mr. GOODWIN, a gardener and odd-job man.

Regularly, he would entice one of the girls into a small hut on the property, where he would molest and rape her. Gerry suffered at his hands on more than one occasion. Over time, Gerry learnt the language and ways of Humber School.

Like her colleagues, she developed coping skills. At times, her emotions and feelings

1 TOURNIER, 61.

were blunted. A protective shell formed around her. She became apathetic, no longer caring.

In contrast, at other times, she responded violently to the abuse. Often it was not the physical pain she endured, but rather the injustice and the sheer unreasonableness of it that caused her to react in self-defence.

Thankfully, there were occasional acts of kindness, small lights flickering in the darkness. These spontaneous gestures of human decency came from both sides of the fence, from both residents and guards.

Cooper House

Later, at age 14, Gerry was transferred to Cooper House. A residence for older girls, this home provided increased isolation and security for its inmates. These were further years to be survived, time to “get through” the best way she could.

During her institutionalization, Gerry lost her old identity. This loss can be attributed to a number of factors: breakdown in relationships, poor education, lack of support and violence. In the six years of her incarceration, Gerry received no visitors.

Tragically, the only times her aunt or cousins came to see her, she was in isolation and was not allowed any company. Not surprisingly, her former relationships disintegrated during her time inside.

Gerry also described the very poor education offered at both Humber School and at Cooper House: “No one teaches you anything. You have no skills. You are out of touch with everything.”

Accordingly, there was minimal spiritual support. There were no priests or ministers connected with the homes. The guards officiated at the Sunday services, and consequently these were considered a “meaningless joke.”

In speaking of the violence at both schools, Gerry commented: “Violence begets violence.” These words mimic the sentiment expressed by Dr. HACKER: “Violence is as contagious as the plague.”¹

He suggests that humans threaten violence in order to win respect. Furthermore, he asserts: “Everywhere and always, the strong has triumphed over the weak; the law of the jungle is the fundamental law of life.”²

Ironically, the violence of the guards generated only hatred and disrespect among the girls. Moreover, deprived of the right to retaliate, *lex talionis* (Lev 24,20), the girls’ thirst for violence escalated.

Gerry herself hated many of the guards; she detested one in particular. Mrs. JOHNSTON was cruel and vindictive. She picked on Gerry constantly. She had it in for her, perhaps because Gerry never conformed to the rules.

One day, Gerry snapped. She crossed the Rubicon and set in motion a chain of events. She planned and organized a “hit” on Mrs. JOHNSTON. During the evening shift Gerry, together with a group of other girls, ambushed the guard.

They hustled her into a room, cut off the long black braids she wore, stuffed sanitary pads in her mouth, tied her up and locked her in a closet. The following morning, Mrs. JOHNSTON was found and released, and Gerry was thrown back into the “hole”.

1 Ibid., 14.

2 Ibid., 32.

Once again she was the ritual sacrifice, the one punished to restore unity and peace. Identified as the scapegoat, she was “banished to the desert”, taking with her all the sin of the community (Lev 16,10).

She offered no reprisal whatsoever. Interestingly, in hindsight Gerry felt no remorse for her actions. Perhaps she repressed her guilt, projecting all her feelings onto someone else.

Alternately, she may have believed that hers was a “just violence.” Comparable to Jesus Christ’s clearing the temple courtyard (Mark 11,15), she viewed her own attempt to resist wrongdoing with aggression as reasonable. In rebelling against an unjust power, her hostility was legitimate.¹

The Hole

“The worst prison would be a closed heart”—Pope JOHN PAUL II.

Residents of the school who either misbehaved or broke the rules were punished and sentenced to time in the “hole.” The hole was a small and windowless cell. The door was barred, and the floor was bare save for a mattress in one corner.

Meals were pushed under the door on a tray. There was no contact with either residents or guards. It was a quiet and lonely existence, with nothing to do unless the captive shouted loudly enough to be rewarded with a book.

Obstinate and out-spoken, Gerry spent many periods in the “hole”—sometimes days, sometimes weeks. Primarily she coped by escaping from reality; she retreated and regressed into her dreams.

Interestingly, Gerry’s escapism now allows her to understand her son Ian. Ian has schizophrenia. With her ability to dissociate, to put herself into a new reality, she has insight into his world. She can understand his illness:

“I lived outside myself. I put myself in a situation far, far away. Nowadays, they would call it visualization. But I would just sit and think to myself. I would think that my mum and dad were coming to get me. I would imagine that I was having piano lessons and that I was in school. I created a whole new identity for myself. I had animals, a nice house, and lots of money.”

Unfortunately, Gerry had to return to reality. She had to leave her dreams and face the truth of her actual daily life. The hole confined the girls, preventing them from discharging the unavoidable rage and violence contained within them.

Inevitably, the period of isolation caused them to turn their violence inwards, redirecting their aggression towards themselves. Sadly, the girls who saw no sense to their lives lost the desire to fight.

No longer were they able to endure the hopelessness of a “provisional existence,” as Thomas MANN expressed it, without a time frame and without aim or purpose. Suicide was the only solution available to them.²

Accordingly, Gerry confided: “Some people could not take it! Some of the girls killed themselves, they could not tough it!” In contrast, Gerry was able to hold onto the belief that somehow, someday, things would get better.

Stubbornly, she knew she would survive. She rose above her despair and loneliness by looking to the future. Perhaps, unknowingly, she escaped the existential void by realizing truth. Instead of expecting things from life, she recognized that life expected

1 Ibid., 60.

2 FRANKL, 16.

things from her. In spite of the deprivations of the hole, Gerry's spiritual life constantly deepened.

Indeed, because of her stark surroundings, she retreated into a firm inner freedom. Certainly while in isolation, Gerry was permanently and acutely aware of God's presence:

"I am sitting there by myself, and I know that someone was there looking after me. Sometimes I would close my eyes, and I would have this warm sensation going through my whole body. I would have a vision of a dove."

Liberation and New Life

Upon her release from Cooper House, Gerry had much to learn. In particular, she had to adjust to her new freedom. During her time in the borstal, she had undergone a depersonalization.

She no longer knew how to live in the real world. Normal social mores were a mystery to her, and she had lost contact with many of her former acquaintances. To a certain extent, she had even lost her ability to enjoy herself.

By now everything was tainted with mistrust and full with fear. In retrospect, Gerry now realizes how violence had stolen her youth. Basically, it had taken more than thirty long years from her life:

"It changed my life. It ruined me. When I got out of prison, I did not know how to live. I did not know anyone. It was horrible. I gravitated towards like-minded people. They were the wrong people, but I did not know any better. I was 17 years old. I became involved with these people because they cared. They were the only ones who gave me any love."

Sadly, this was an empty and dangerous love. Not knowing anyone, Gerry moved to Orillia at the invitation of a friend from Cooper House. "She introduced me to all her friends. They were all crooks, but I did not know that. One day when I opened a closet door and a body fell out, I knew then. I was not involved in the killing," she argued, "but I did see it."

Mercifully, although Gerry was a part of the crime culture, she somehow avoided being trapped in the "revolving door" of further convictions and imprisonment. Then, at 19 years of age, Gerry married her first husband, Frank.

She acknowledged the marriage was not for love; it was merely an escape. Frank was an angry, abusive and violent man. He beat Gerry frequently. When pregnant with her second child, Frank beat Gerry so badly that she fell down the stairs.

Tragically, Ian was born mentally disabled, and he later developed schizophrenia. Faced with life-threatening violence within her marriage, Gerry sought solace and direction from the Church.

She approached her local priest for support. Disregarding her cry for help, ignoring her admission of the verbal abuse and violent beatings, he counselled her to remain in the marriage, cautioning her to remember that this was her duty as a wife and mother.

Thankfully, Gerry realized that his ideas were outdated, misguided and dangerous. She recognized that he represented a "toxic religion," a religion that led to control and shame.¹ At this point, she lost faith in the priest and to a certain extent, in the Church. She left her husband and moved South to Napanee.

1 MORROW William S., *Toxic Religion and the Daughters of Job*. *Studies in Religion* 1998/27. 276.

It was here at forty-five years of age that she met and married her second husband, Don. Thankfully, he proved to be her knight in shining armour, a friend and helpmate, someone who would help her to establish a new identity.

Not surprisingly, Gerry emerged from the schools bitter and angry. She raged at the injustice of her treatment. She was furious at people's indifference to her plight. No one understood what had happened. No one appreciated what she had gone through. No one even cared. Gerry fumed at her continued suffering:

"You come out with a terrible, terrible bitterness against society and against people. You think: 'They are going to pay!'" Yet, no one in the family was willing to talk. No one would answer my questions. When my aunt died in 1979, she called me to her bedside and asked me for forgiveness. I did what I had to. Well, I could not refuse a dying woman!"

The path to forgiveness has not been an easy one for Gerry. Having lived through an extended period of violence, having been hurt by so many people, her journey was long and tortuous.

As C. S. LEWIS pointed out: "It is easy to forgive a single great injury, but to forgive the incessant provocations of daily life, that is a difficult task that requires humility and soul searching prayer."¹

Fortunately, since living with Don, she has learnt to let much of the bitterness go. Inevitably, traces of anger and resentment remain. Vestiges of the past linger; she is resistant to promises and she remains fiercely cynical of the power of wealth, saying: "If you have money, you can get away with anything."

Gerry's theology is clearly one of protest. Yet, unlike Job, she had no complaint against God. Having suffered violent abuse at the hands of authority figures, powerful individuals, Gerry believed people were the enemy.

She did not feel that God had betrayed or abandoned her. Indeed, she was firmly resolved that had God not been in control of her life "things would have been a lot worse." With this in mind, she clung to the hope that God could and eventually would enable her to recover and rebuild her life.

During the long years of abuse, she learnt the cry of lament.² She poured out her distress to God, sharing her feelings of abandonment, isolation, pain, rejection and worthlessness.

Like the Psalmist, she screamed for divine vengeance and justice, crying out for vindication and healing (Psalm 35). Her recovery and healing is ongoing. Slowly, she is regaining her self-respect.

Nevertheless, Gerry remains haunted by her past. She confides: "Once you have a record, you always have a record. You are always guilty. There is no such thing as the past, because it is the past that makes you what you are today. Your past is your present. It is still with me."

In particular, Gerry lives in fear and absolute distrust of the police. In the past, she has heard officers give false evidence in the witness box. She is troubled by their authority, power and their lies:

"I learnt at a very early age to hate cops, and I still do today. They ruin people's lives." Recently, during a visit to the local mall, her fears were realized. Gerry became involved in an altercation with another customer.

1 LEWIS C. S., *Forgiving and Excusing, Restoring Justice: A Christian Perspective*. Kingston, 2001. 26.

2 ANDERSON Bernhard W., *Understanding the Old Testament*. Prentice Hall, 1986. 551.

The store manager summoned the police. When the officer arrived, he ran a check on the two women. Upon discovering Gerry's record, he immediately charged her with assault, even though she was innocent. In addition, Gerry's criminal record has hindered her career opportunities. Despite her recent successes, she struggles with regrets:

"There are many things I wanted to do in my life, but I could not because I had a criminal record. I would have liked to help people who were wrongly convicted. My uncle was a crown attorney. He said I would have made a good lawyer. But because of my education, I missed out.

"I have always felt inferior. Over the years, those thoughts boil and fester. I wanted to make a difference in my life. I wanted to make a difference in the lives of people around me. I wanted to be remembered for the good I had done. Yet, I know I have to realize that there are things that I have done. Maybe I have touched someone's life and that has saved them. Sometimes we do things, but we never hear what happens."

Perhaps her thoughts echo her questioning of life's purpose. They also illustrate her efforts to discover her responsibilities in life, her attempts to fulfill the tasks it has laid before her.¹

The Teachings of Violence

"If there is any kindness that I can show, any good that I can do for any fellow human being, let me do it now, and do not deter or neglect it, as I shall not pass this way again"—William PENN.

Violence has shaped and moulded Gerry over the years. It has influenced every part of her life—her thoughts, emotions and beliefs. Initially, it determined the choices she made, the people she befriended.

Gradually, however, through daily prayer and reading, she sought to follow God's guidance. Now, in times of crisis, she endeavours to live by principles of truth and non-violence, not by aggressive self-defence.

Violence has proved a wise teacher. Ironically, it has taught her compassion and kindness. It has replaced her "heart of stone" with one of flesh (Ezekiel 36,26). Even today in her work as a DJ, she is drawn to those in need; she is compelled to befriend and help the underdog:

"It has taught me to have compassion on the down-trodden and unfortunate. I listen to these people. For a long time I was also a kind of Robin Hood. I used to steal stuff from shops, and then I would give all the stuff away to people who could not afford it."

Conversely, Gerry still wrestles with her inability to love her own children. This was a hidden cost of her time at Humber School. "I had never been given any love, so I did not know how to give it. I did not know how to love the children. Certainly Gord, my eldest son, has many problems. He is bitter and angry."

The violence she encountered has also provided Gerry with impressive survival skills: "It has taught me to look after myself. I am a survivor. I have no fear." Certainly, Gerry is afraid of no one, except God.

She is not reluctant to speak her mind. Indeed, she admits that she is sometimes bold and brutally honest: "I say things as they are. I will not play games; it causes too much

1 FRANKL, 77.

damage. I always tell the truth.” Perhaps, her honesty is a reaction to evil. For when you have seen evil, when you have seen its devastating power, you want no part of it.

Living with violence also taught her to live by her senses. Like an animal, she became sensitive to sounds, feelings and movements. She learnt to listen to her own gut responses; she learnt to read people. Now she is careful with everyone, even friends: “I will never give my power away again.”

Finally, Gerry reported how violence prompted and strengthened her faith journey. “Those who go through trauma at a young age are led down that path much quicker.” Organized religion has been of some help to her, but her personal faith and spirituality were and continue to be her lifeline.

Faith has enabled Gerry to cope with and make sense of her suffering. For instance, when she looks back at her father’s death, she surmises: “My dad died young. God knew I could not take any more. It could have been much worse: I could have got pregnant with my father’s child.” Today, Gerry’s faith is strong and vibrant; she continues to delve into the mystery.

Suggested Reading

ANDERSON Bernhard W., *Understanding the Old Testament*. Prentice Hall, 1986.

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FRANKL Victor E., *Man’s Search for Meaning*. London, 1987.

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LEWIS C. S., *Forgiving and Excusing. Restoring Justice: A Christian Perspective*. Kingston, 2001.

MANN Thomas, *Magic Mountain* (tr. LOWE-PORTER H. T.). New York, 1958.

MORROW William S., *Toxic Religion and the Daughters of Job*. Studies in Religion 1998/27.

TOURNIER Paul, *The Violence Within*. San Francisco, 1978.

Gillian McLEAN: Un Voyage Dangereux: L’impact de la Violence sur la Vie d’une Femme

En décrivant les expériences d’une femme, cet article offre une perspective unique à propos de la violence. En se référant à la documentation, l’article présente l’affrontement de Gerry face à l’agression qu’elle a subie au cours de sa vie. Le dossier explore sa réaction à l’hostilité et examine la manière qu’elle y a fait face, d’abord au cours de son enfance et de son adolescence et par la suite, à l’âge adulte. Le portrait révèle la sagesse que Gerry a acquise à travers la violence et amène à découvrir la foi avec laquelle elle a lutté tout au long de son aventure. Cela met également l’accent sur sa bataille pour la survie et révèle sa recherche continue pour le sens et le but de sa vie.

Gillian McLEAN: Un Viaje Peligroso: El Impacto de Violencia en la Vida de una Mujer

Al describir las experiencias de una mujer, este escrito ofrece visiones únicas de la cultura de violencia. Con referencia a la literatura, el artículo retrata el encuentro de Gerry con la agresión a lo largo de su vida. Explora su reacción a la hostilidad y examina sus métodos de coping, primero durante su niñez y adolescencia y después en sus años adultos. La viñeta revela la sabiduría que Gerry aprendió a través de violencia e identifica la fe con que ella luchó a lo largo de su vida. También documenta su lucha por la supervivencia y revela su continua búsqueda de significado.

Día Mundial de Oración por los Estudiantes (DMOE) 2005

In Memoriam de las Víctimas del Tsunami en el Sureste Asiático

(Dan GONZÁLEZ, Mexico, Latin America y Caribbea)

Liturg/o: En nombre de Dios nuestro Padre Creador, Jesucristo nuestro Hermano Solidario, y del Espíritu Santo, nuestra Madre Consoladora. *Amén.*

I. Alabanza al Padre

1. Letanía Oración de Perdón de Pecados

L: Imploramos Padre Tu perdón porque hemos sido necias/os.

T: Padre, Te pedimos perdón.

L: Imploramos Tu perdón por nuestros pecados de acción y de omisión.

T: Padre, Te pedimos perdón.

L: Imploramos Tu perdón porque nuestras obras no han sido justas y misericordiosas como lo eres Tú.

T: Padre, Te pedimos perdón.

L: Imploramos Tu perdón porque no hemos aprendido a amar al prójimo como a nosotras/os mismas/os.

T: Padre, Te pedimos perdón.

L: Imploramos Tu perdón porque no hemos sufrido con el que sufre y llorado con el que llora.

T: Padre, Te pedimos perdón.

L: Imploramos Tu perdón porque no hemos amado y cuidado la Creación, sino que la hemos devastado, y al hacerle violencia nos la hemos a hecho nosotras/os mismas/os.

T: Padre, Te pedimos perdón.

L: Imploramos Tu perdón porque aún hay mucha necesidad en Asia y no hemos sabido como ser luz en medio de esas tinieblas.

T: Padre, Te pedimos perdón.

L: Imploramos Tu perdón, Padre Bueno, porque no sabemos pedir perdón. Y sólo Tú eres fiel y justo para perdonar nuestros pecados.

T: Te adoramos Padre Bueno. *Amén.*

2. Seguridad del Perdón

L: "Al percibir Jehová olor grato, dijo en su corazón: No volveré a maldecir la Tierra por causa del hombre, ni volveré a destruir todo ser viviente, como he hecho. Mientras la Tierra permanezca no cesarán la sementera y la siega, el frío y el calor, el verano y el invierno, el día y la noche". (Gen 8,21–22)

T: "Líbrame de homicidios, oh Dios, Dios de mi salvación; cantaré mi lengua tu justicia. Señor, abre mis labios y publicará mi boca Tu alabanza, porque no quieres sacrificio, que yo lo daría; no quieres holocausto. Los sacrificios de Dios son el espíritu quebrantado; al corazón contrito y humillado no despreciarás Tú, oh Dios." (Sal. 51,14–17)

II. Alabanza al Hijo

1. Oración de Intercesión

L: "Cuando hubo tomado el libro, los cuatro seres vivientes y los veinticuatro ancianos se postraron delante del Cordero. Todos tenían arpas y copas de oro llenas de incienso, que son las oraciones de los santos. Y cantaban un cántico nuevo, diciendo: Digno eres de tomar el libro y de abrir sus sellos, porque Tú fuiste inmolado, y con Tu sangre nos has redimido para Dios, de todo linaje, lengua, pueblo y nación." (Ap. 5,8–9)

T: Jesús de Nazaret, Hermano nuestro, Tú que conoces el dolor de las/os que sufren. Tú que llevas la cruz de las/os crucificadas/os: Acompaña el sufrimiento de las/os que en Asia se quedaron sin compañía. A las/os madres y padres que se quedaron sin hijas/os, a las/os hijas/os que se quedaron sin madres y padres; a las/os campesinos que se quedaron sin tierra, a la tierra que quedó sin campesinas/os; a las/os pescadoras/es que quedaron sin posibilidad de echarse a la mar, a la mar que se tragó a las/os pescadoras/es; a las personas que se quedaron lejos de sus naciones, a las naciones que se quedaron esperando de vuelta a sus personas.

L: Jesucristo, escucha el clamor nuestro pues te pedimos por las/os niñas/os que quedaron sin hogar, por los hogares que quedaron sin niñas/os; por los estudiantes que quedaron sin escuela, por las escuelas que se quedaron sin algún/a estudiante. En fin, Te rogamos por la Creación toda que gime a una con nosotros, pero que a una espera la manifestación de las/os hijas/os de Dios. *Amén.*

L: "Y oí una voz que me decía desde el cielo: Escribe: Bienaventurados de aquí en adelante los muertos que mueren en el Señor. Sí, dice el Espíritu, descansarán de sus trabajos, porque sus obras con ellos siguen." (Ap. 14,13)

2. Credo Hispano by Justo GONZÁLEZ

L: Creemos en Dios Padre todopoderoso,
T: Creador de los Cielos y de la Tierra, Creador de los pueblos y las culturas, Creador de los idiomas y de las razas.

L: Creemos en Jesucristo, su Hijo, nuestro Señor,
T: Dios hecho carne en un ser humano para todos los humanos, Dios hecho carne en un momento para todas las edades, Dios hecho carne en una cultura para todas las culturas, Dios hecho carne en amor y gracia para toda a Creación.

L: Creemos en el Espíritu Santo,
T: Por quien Dios encarnado en Jesucristo, Se hace presente en nuestro pueblo y nuestra cultura, Por quien el Dios creador de todo lo que existe, Nos da poder para ser nuevas criaturas, Quien con sus infinitos dones, nos hace un solo pueblo, El cuerpo de Jesucristo.

L: Creemos en la Iglesia,
T: Que es universal porque es señal del reino venidero, Que es más fiel mientras más viste de colores, Donde todos los colores pintan un mismo paisaje, Donde todos los idiomas cantan una misma alabanza.

L: Creemos en el Reino venidero, día de la gran fiesta,

T: Cuando todos los colores de la Creación, Se unirán en un arco iris de armonía, Cuando todos los pueblos de la Tierra, Se unirán en un banquete de alegría, Cuando todas las lenguas del universo, Se unirán en un coro de alabanza.

L: Y porque creemos, nos comprometemos,
T: A creer por los que no creen, A amar por los que no aman, A soñar por los que no sueñan, Hasta que lo que esperamos se torne realidad. Amén.



III. Alabanza al Espíritu Santo

1. Oración de Compromiso

L: Espíritu Santo, consoladora Madre nuestra, recógenos bajo el hueco tibio de Tus alas. Queremos sentirnos rejuvenecer, levántanos del polvo y la desolación, aumenta nuestra fe y ayúdanos a andar por el Mundo con esperanza viva. Danos el gozo de celebrar el saber que no estamos solas/os, permítenos la oportunidad de resarcir los daños que le hemos causado a nuestra hermana Creación para que no vuelva a manifestarnos su dolor con más dolor. Déjanos soñar que podemos participar en la reconstrucción de un nuevo Cielo y una nueva Tierra. *Amén.*

2. Oraciones Finales

L: Dios nuestro Padre Creador, Jesucristo nuestro Hermano Solidario, y Espíritu Santo, nuestra Madre Consoladora, acepta estas muestras de solidaridad para nuestros hermanas y hermanos afectados por el tsunami. A los fallecidos, dales la paz; a los vivos, dales esperanza y fuerza. A nosotros, danos compasión y la resolución de trabajar por Tu justicia y por la paz para todo el Mundo.

L: Oramos por Tu bendición, Señor, a los estudiantes del Mundo entero; por que usen sus estudios, su mente, su corazón y su voluntad para el bien común. *Amén.*

L: Oramos por Tu bendición al trabajo de los Movimientos Estudiantiles Cristianos en las escuelas, los institutos y las universidades en éste y en todos los países, para que puedan ser testigos de Tu Evangelio. *Amén.*

L: Oramos por Tu bendición a la Federación Universal de Movimientos Estudiantiles Cristianos, a sus oficiales, amigos y estudiantes, para que pueda ser un mensajero de paz, esperanza, justicia y unidad para la Iglesia y para el Mundo. *Amén.*

3. Envío y Bendición

L: "Vayamos en Paz y sirvamos con Gozo y que: Jehová Te bendiga y Te guarde. Jehová haga resplandecer su rostro sobre Ti y tenga de Ti misericordia; Jehová alce sobre Ti su rostro y ponga en Ti paz." Num. 6,24-26)

T: "Dios tenga misericordia de nosotros y nos bendiga; haga resplandecer su rostro sobre nosotros; para que sea conocido en la Tierra Tu camino, en todas las naciones Tu salvación. ¡Alábenle, Dios, los pueblos, todos los pueblos Te alaben!" (Sal 67,1-3)

Journée Mondiale de Prière pour les Étudiants (JMPE) 2005

En Mémoire des Victimes du Tsunami en Asie du Sud-Est (Dan GONZÁLEZ, Mexico)

Liturgie: Au nom de Dieu notre Créateur, de Jésus-Christ notre Frère dans la Solidarité et de l'Esprit Saint, notre Mère Consolatrice. *Amen.*

I. Louange à Dieu le Père

1. Litanie de Prière du Pardon des Péchés

L: Père, nous implorons Ton pardon car nous avons été imprudents.

A: Père, nous Te demandons pardon.

L: Nous implorons Ton pardon pour ce que nous avons fait et pour ce que nous n'avons pas pu faire.

A: Père, nous Te demandons pardon.

L: Nous implorons Ton pardon car nos œuvres n'ont pas été justes et miséricordieuses comme Tu l'es.

A: Père, nous Te demandons pardon.

L: Nous implorons Ton pardon car nous n'avons pas aimé notre prochain comme nous-mêmes.

A: Père, nous Te demandons pardon.

L: Nous implorons Ton pardon car nous n'avons pas partagé les souffrances de ceux qui souffrent et les lamentations de ceux qui pleurent.

A: Père, nous Te demandons pardon.

L: Nous implorons Ton pardon car nous n'avons pas aimé et pris soin de la Création, mais nous l'avons détruite et en lui faisant violence, nous nous infligeons à nous-mêmes cette violence.

A: Père, nous Te demandons pardon.

L: Nous implorons Ton pardon car il y a encore beaucoup de besoins en Asie et nous ne savons pas comment être lumière au milieu de telles ténèbres.

A: Père, nous Te demandons pardon.

L: Nous implorons Ton pardon, bon Père, car nous ne savons pas demander pardon. Et Toi seul es fidèle et juste pour pardonner nos péchés.

A: Nous T'adorons, bon Père. Amen.

2. Assurance du Pardon

L: "L'Éternel sentit une odeur agréable, et l'Éternel dit en Son cœur: Je ne maudirai plus la Terre, à cause de l'homme, parce que les pensées du cœur de l'homme sont mauvaises dès sa

jeunesse; et je ne frapperai plus tout ce qui est vivant comme je l'ai fait. Tant que la Terre durera, semailles et moissons, froid et chaleur, été et hiver, jour et nuit jamais ne cesseront." (Gen 8,21–22)

A: "Ô Dieu, Dieu de mon salut! Délivre-moi du sang versé, et ma langue célébrera Ta miséricorde. Seigneur! Ouvre mes lèvres, et ma bouche publiera Ta louange. Si Tu eusses voulu des sacrifices, je T'en aurais offert, mais Tu ne prends point plaisir aux holocaustes. Les sacrifices qui sont agréables à Dieu, c'est un esprit brisé: Ô Dieu! Tu ne dédaignes pas un cœur brisé et contrit." (Psaum 51,14–17)

II. Louange à Dieu Le Fils

1. Prière d'Intercession

L: "Quand il eut pris le livre, les quatre êtres vivants et les vingt-quatre vieillards se prosternèrent devant l'Agneau, tenant chacun une harpe et des coupes d'or remplies de parfums, qui sont les prières des saints. Et ils chantaient un cantique nouveau, en disant: Tu es digne de prendre le livre, et d'en ouvrir les sceaux car Tu as été immolé; et Tu as racheté pour Dieu par Ton sang des hommes de toute tribu, de toute langue, de tout peuple, et de toute nation." (Ap. 5,8–9)

A: Jésus de Nazareth, notre frère, Toi qui connais la douleur de ceux qui souffrent. Toi qui portes la croix des crucifiées (-és): soutiens dans la souffrance toutes les personnes qui sont restées sans compagnie en Asie. A tous les parents qui n'ont plus ni filles, ni fils; à tous les enfants qui n'ont plus ni mères, ni pères; à tous les paysans qui n'ont plus de terre; à la terre qui n'a plus de paysans; à tous les pécheurs qui n'ont plus la possibilité d'aller à la mer; à la mer qui a englouti les pécheurs; à toutes les personnes qui sont restées loin de leurs nations, aux nations qui sont dans l'attente du retour de toutes ces personnes.

L: Jésus-Christ, écoute notre clameur et nous Te prions pour les enfants qui n'ont plus de foyer, pour tous les foyers qui sont sans enfants; pour les étudiantes (-s) qui n'ont plus d'école, pour les écoles sans étudiants. Enfin, nous Te prions pour la Création qui gémit à l'unisson avec nous dans

l'attente de la manifestation des enfants de Dieu.
Amen.

L: "Et j'entendis du Ciel une voix qui disait: Écris: Heureux dès à présent les morts qui meurent dans le Seigneur! Oui, dit l'Esprit, afin qu'ils se reposent de leurs travaux, car leurs oeuvres les suivent." (Ap. 14,13)

2. Credo Hispanique de Justo GONZÁLEZ

L: Nous croyons en Dieu, Père Tout-Puissant,
A: Créateur du Ciel et de la Terre, Créateur de tous les peuples et de toutes les cultures, Créateur de toutes les langues et de toutes les races.

L: Nous croyons en Jésus-Christ, son Fils, notre Seigneur,

A: Dieu s'est fait chair en un être humain pour tous les humains, Dieu s'est fait chair en un moment pour les personnes de tout âge, Dieu s'est fait chair dans une culture pour toutes les cultures, Dieu s'est fait chair en amour et grâce pour toute la Création.

L: Nous croyons en l'Esprit Saint,

A: Par qui Dieu s'est incarné en Jésus-Christ, Qui est présent dans notre peuple et notre culture, Par qui Dieu créa tout ce qui existe, Donne-nous le pouvoir d'être de nouvelles créatures, Qui de par ses dons infinis fait de nous un seul peuple, Le corps de Jésus-Christ.

L: Nous croyons en l'Eglise,

A: Qui est universelle car elle est le signe du Règne à venir, Qui est plus fidèle et plus visible en couleurs, Où toutes les couleurs peignent un même paysage, Où toutes les langues chantent une même louange.

L: Nous croyons au Règne à venir, jour de la grande fête,

A: Quand toutes les couleurs de la Création, Se réuniront en un arc-en-ciel d'harmonie, Quand tous les peuples de la Terre, Se réuniront à un banquet de joie, Quand toutes les langues de l'Univers, Se réuniront en un chœur de louange.

L: Et parce que nous croyons, nous nous engageons,

A: A croire pour ceux qui ne croient pas, A aimer pour ceux qui n'aiment pas, A rêver pour ceux qui ne rêvent pas, Jusqu'à ce que ce que nous attendons devienne réalité. *Amen.*

III. Louange à Dieu Le Saint-Esprit

1. Prière d'Engagement

L: Esprit Saint, notre Consolatrice maternelle, nous nous rassemblons sous le creux de Tes douces ailes. Nous aimerions nous sentir rajeuni, sortir de la poussière et de la désolation; augmente notre foi et aide-nous à témoigner d'une vive espérance dans le Monde. Donne-nous la joie de célébrer le fait que nous ne sommes pas seules (-s), donne-nous l'opportunité de réparer les dommages que nous avons causés à la Création afin qu'elle ne nous manifeste plus sa douleur avec encore plus de douleur. Aides-nous à rêver que nous pouvons participer à la reconstruction d'un nouveau Ciel et d'une nouvelle Terre. *Amen.*

2. Prières Finales

L: Dieu, notre Créateur, Jésus-Christ, notre frère dans la solidarité et l'Esprit-Saint, notre Mère consolatrice, acceptes ces offrandes de solidarité pour nos sœurs et frères affectés par le tsunami. Accorde le repos aux personnes décédées, espérance et force aux vivants. Donne-nous la compassion et la détermination de travailler pour la Justice et la Paix pour tous les peuples. *Amen.*

L: Dieu, nous implorons Tes bénédictions sur les étudiants dans le Monde entier afin qu'elles/ils mettent à profit leurs études, leur esprit et leur cœur et leur volonté au service du bien commun. *Amen.*

L: Nous implorons Tes bénédictions sur le travail des Mouvements Chrétiens d'Etudiants dans les écoles, les collèges et les universités, ici et dans tous les pays afin qu'ils témoignent de Ton Evangile. *Amen.*

L: Nous implorons Tes bénédictions sur la Fédération Universelle des Associations Chrétiennes des Etudiants, le présidium, le personnel, les seniors friends et les étudiants; puissent-ils être un messager de paix, d'espérance, de justice et d'unité pour l'Eglise et le Monde. *Amen.*

3. Bénédiction

L: "Que l'Éternel te bénisse, et qu'il te garde! Que l'Éternel fasse luire Sa face sur toi, et qu'il t'accorde Sa grâce! Que l'Éternel tourne Sa face vers toi, et qu'il te donne la paix!" (Nom. 6,24-26)

A: "Que Dieu ait pitié de nous et qu'il nous bénisse, Qu'il fasse luire sur nous Sa face, Afin que l'on connaisse sur la Terre Ta voie, Et parmi toutes les nations Ton salut! Les peuples Te louent, ô Dieu! Tous les peuples Te louent." (Psaum 67,13)

Universal Day of Prayer for Students (UDPS) 2005

In Memoriam of the Victims of the Tsunami in South East Asia

(Dan GONZÁLEZ, Mexico, Latin America and Caribbean Region)

Leader: In the name of God our Creator, Jesus Christ our Brother in solidarity, and the Holy Spirit our comforting Mother. *Amen.*

I. Song of Praise to God the Creator

1. Litany for the Forgiveness of Sins

L: We implore Your forgiveness Father, for we have behaved foolishly.

A: Father, we ask for Your forgiveness.

L: We implore Your forgiveness for what we have done and for what we have not done.

A: Father, we ask for Your forgiveness.

L: We implore Your forgiveness since our actions have not been just and merciful as You are just and merciful.

A: Father, we ask for Your forgiveness.

L: We implore Your forgiveness, because we have not learnt to love our neighbour as we love ourselves.

A: Father, we ask for Your forgiveness.

L: We implore Your forgiveness, for we have not suffered with those who suffer and have not cried with those who cry.

A: Father, we ask for your forgiveness.

L: We implore Your forgiveness, for we have not loved and taken care of Creation, but we have devastated it, and in doing violence to it we have done violence to ourselves.

A: Father, we ask for Your forgiveness.

L: We implore Your forgiveness for there is much need following the tsunami in Asia and we have not been light in the midst of darkness.

A: Father, we ask for Your forgiveness.

L: We implore Your forgiveness, Good Father, for we have not been able to ask for forgiveness. Only You are faithful and just and able to forgive our sins.

A: We adore You, Good Father. Amen.

2. Assurance of Forgiveness

L: "And when God smelled the sweet odour, God said in God's heart: I will never again curse the ground because of humankind; nor will I ever

again destroy every living creature as I have done. As long as the Earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night shall not cease." (Genesis 8, 21–22)

A: "Deliver me from bloodshed, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of Your deliverance. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare Your praise. For You have no delight in sacrifice; if I were to give a burnt offering, You would not be pleased. The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, You will not despise. Amen." (Psalm 51,14–17)

II. Song of Praise to God the Son

1. Prayers of Intercession

L: "When he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. They sang a new song: You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation." (Revelation 5,8–9)

A: Jesus of Nazareth, our Brother, You know the pain of those who are suffering. You carry the cross of the crucified, You accompany the suffering of those who were left desolate in Asia: all mothers and fathers left without daughters and sons, daughters and sons left without mothers and fathers, peasants left without land, land left without peasants, fisherfolk left without the possibility to return to the sea, a sea that swallowed the fisherfolk, people left far from their countries, countries that were left expecting the return of their people.

L: Jesus Christ, listen to our cry, for we cry to You for the children left without homes, homes left without children, students left without schools, schools left without students. We pray to You for all Creation that cries with us and expects a sign from the daughters and sons of God. Amen.

L: "And I heard a voice from heaven saying: Write

this: Blessed are the dead who from now die in the Lord. 'Yes', says the Spirit, 'they will rest from their labours, for their works follow them.' (Revelation 14,13)

**2. Hispanic Creed
(by Justo GONZÁLEZ)**

L: We believe in God, the Father Almighty,
A: Creator of Heaven and Earth, Creator of peoples and cultures, Creator of languages and races.
L: We believe in Jesus Christ, God's Son, our Lord,
A: God made flesh in a human being for all human beings, God made flesh in a moment for all ages, God made flesh in a culture for all cultures, God made flesh in love and grace for all creation.
L: We believe in the Holy Spirit,
A: Through which God incarnated in Jesus Christ is present in our people and in our culture, for which God the Creator of all that exists empowers us to be new creatures, Who with infinite gifts makes us one people, the body of Jesus Christ.
L: We believe in the Church,
A: Universal as a sign of the coming Reign, more faithful as more colourful she appears, where all colours paint one landscape, where all languages sing one praise.
L: We believe in the coming Reign, joyful day,
A: Where all the colours of Creation will be united in a rainbow of harmony, when all the peoples on Earth will be united in a banquet of joy, when all languages in the Universe will be united in a choir of praise.
L: And because we believe, we commit ourselves,
A: To believe for those who do not believe, to love for those who do not love, to dream for those who do not dream, until what we expect becomes a reality. Amen.



**III. Song of Praise
to God the Holy Spirit**

1. Prayer of Commitment

L: Holy Spirit, our comforting Mother, gather us under the warmth of Your wings. We long to experience new life. Raise us from dust and desolation, strengthen our faith and help us walk in the world with a lively hope. Give us the joy to celebrate knowing that we are not alone, let us repair the damage we have done to our sister Creation so she may not demonstrate her pain with more pain. Help us dream and work for a new Heaven and a new Earth. *Amen.*

2. Concluding Prayer

L: God our Creator, Jesus Christ our Brother in solidarity, and Holy Spirit our comforting Mother, accept these offerings of solidarity for our sisters and brothers affected by the tsunami. To the dead give rest, to the living give hope and strength. To us give compassion and the resolution to work for Your justice and peace for all people. *Amen.*
L: We pray for Your blessings, God, on students throughout the world; that they may use their studies, their minds, their hearts and wills for the common good. *Amen.*
L: We pray for Your blessings on the work of ecumenical Student Christian Movements in schools, colleges and universities in this and every country, that they may witness to your gospel. *Amen.*
L: We pray for Your blessings on the World Student Christian Federation; its officers, staff, senior friends and students; may she be a messenger of peace, hope, justice and unity for the Church and for the world. *Amen.*

3. Blessing

L: The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make the Lord's face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up the Lord's countenance upon you, and give you peace. (Numbers 6,24-26)
A: May God be gracious to us and bless us and make God's face to shine upon us; that God's way may be known upon Earth, God's saving power among all nations. Let the peoples praise You, O God; let all the peoples praise You. Amen. (Psalm 67,1-3)