ministerial formation

93

World Council of Churches
Education and Ecumenical Formation

April 2001

Prof. Elsa Tamez, Universidad Biblical Latinoamerica, San Jose, Costa Rica, April 2001.

This quartely journal aims to encourage sharing and cooperation among all who are working for the renewal of the churches through programmes of ministeral formation. All correspondence regarding MINISTERIAL FORMATION should be sent to the address below. Submission of relevant articles, reports and news is welcomed. Items in sthis journal do not necessarily reflect thze views of the WCC and its programme on Education and Ecumenical Formation (formerly Programme on Theological Education).

P.O. Box 2100, 150, route de Ferney, 1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland

MINISTERIAL FORMATION – APRIL 2001 - No. 93

HANS-SIGRIST PREIS: Elsa Tamez

MINISTERIAL FORMATION is produced four times a year by the staff of Ecumenical Theological Education, Cluster on Issues and Themes. Subscription: US$ 15 (or equivalent) for one year, although free copies are available for those persons or institutions, who, for whatever reason, cannot make a payment. Please note that in the interest of economy, receipts are not issued for payments made by cheque or bank draft unless specifically requested. Thank you for your understanding.

Cover photo: Prof. Elsa Tamez, Universidad Biblical Latinoamerica, San Jose, Costa Rica, April 2001.

LETTER FROM STAFF

Dear Friend and Colleague,

With this April issue of Ministerial Formation we invite our readers to celebrate the contributions of women in theological education and ministry.

A few years ago, Professor Elsa Tamez at the occasion of her installation as the President of Universidad Biblical Latinoamerica, UBL (Latin America Biblical University), San Jose, Costa Rica, shared the dream of collecting names of women who mean a great deal in our lives. Each name was to be matched with the contribution of one US dollar, to help raise One Million US dollars to build UBL at its new cite, Apartado 901-1000 San José. By December 2000, indeed UBL with the help of many willing hands, generous pockets and thankful spirits celebrated the completion of a beautiful campus. Words are not enough to describe this "beautiful and peaceful campus on a hill"! One would have to visit, interact with the welcoming community of professors, staff and students and even sleep in one of the rooms named after a name of a woman, who appears on the computer screen in the One Million Women House, to have a glimpse of the beauty and peace found at UBL. The members of ETE Working-Group had the opportunity of enjoying this beauty, 18-21 April 2001.

Prof. Tamez and her colleagues are always full of smiles when they tell the story of UBL. But as if this was not enough, while UBL was busy celebrating, news reached them announcing the award of Hans Sigrist Prize to Prof. Elsa Tamez by the University of Bern, Switzerland for her significant contribution to Contextual Biblical Hermeneutics. Tamez finished her term as President of UBL in March 2001 and with the help of the award she began an extended sabbatical through 2003. We wish to congratulate UBL for this great achievement and to Prof. Elsa Tamez for the part she played in making UBL what it is today and for her award. We pray that the time spent in sabbatical will bear more fruits in her research and writing career.

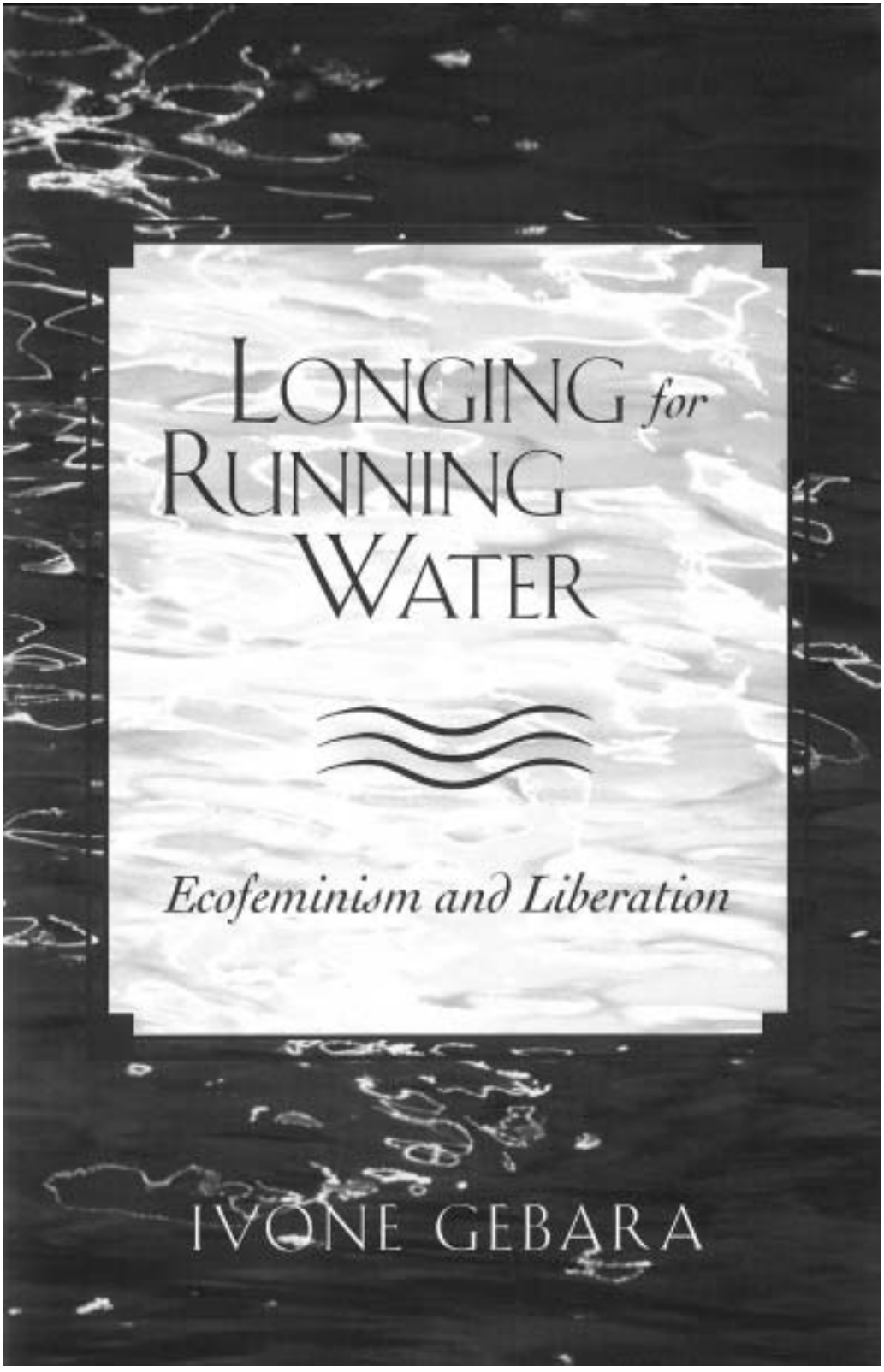
It is in this context that all the articles in this issue are by women theologians, focusing on theological education and ministry, the urgency for scholarship grants for women, theological network for women on violence against women and challenges of HIV/AIDS pandemic in Africa and in particular as it affects women's lives.

With this issue we also say good bye to Marijke Haworth, who was a youth intern (May 2000- April 2001) in Education and Ecumenical Formation Team, focusing on the fundraising of the Sarah Chakko Theological Endowment Fund. We wish Marijke God's blessings in her future endeavors. We are pleased to welcome Magali Roussel who will carry out administrative duties together with Françoise Faure.

STOP THE PRESS! In the course of going to the printer, ETE received the sad news of the sudden death of a great teacher, mentor and pioneer in theological education and religious scholarship in Kenya and Africa as a whole, Prof. Hannah Wangeci Kinoti. How else can we honor such a great sister, colleague and friend but to carry out her great legacy of empowering and mentoring young women in theological and religious education? How else but to celebrate her life and contributions despite the pain of losing her so suddenly?

Nyambura Njoroge Françoise Faure

Magali Roussel


LONGING for
RUNNING
WATER
Ecofeminism and Liberation
IVONE GEBARA

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Kelly Brown Douglas is Associate Professor of Theology at Howard University School of Divinity and is an Episcopal Priest, USA. She is the author of many articles and *The Black Christ* and *Sexuality and the Black Church: A Womanist Perspective*.

Musa W. Dube is Senior Lecturer in New Testament at the University of Botswana. She is the author of many articles and *Post-Colonial Feminist Hermeneutics* (Chalice Press, 2000) as well as editor and co-editor of several books.

J. Dorcas Gordon is the Principal of Knox College, Toronto and Associate Professor of Biblical Interpretation.

Marijke Haworth is a member of the United Church of Christ (USA) and was a Youth Intern with the WCC Education and Ecumenical Formation Team (May 2000-April 2001) promoting the fundraising of Sarah Chakko Theological Endowment Fund.

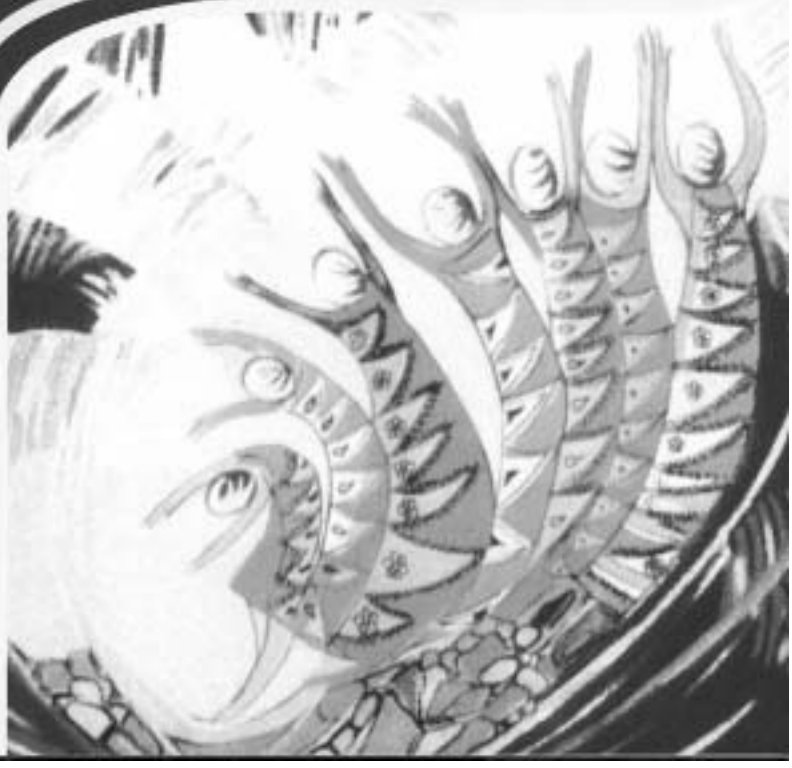
Esther M. Mombo is the Academic Dean and Lecturer in Church History at St. Paul's United Theological College, Limuru, Kenya.

Cheryl J. Sanders is Professor of Christian Ethics at the Howard University School of Divinity and Senior Pastor of the Third Street Church of God in Washington D.C. She is the author of several books, including *Empowerment Ethics for the Liberated People* (1995); *Saints in Exile: the Holiness-Pentecostal Experience in African American Religion and Culture* (1996); and *Ministry at the Margins* (1997).

INTRODUCTIONS IN FEMINIST THEOLOGY

Introducing Asian Feminist Theology

Kwok Pui-lan



AFROCENTRIC AND WOMANIST APPROACHES TO THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION[1]

Cheryl J. Sanders

Introduction

I will begin by lifting up some of the methodological concerns connected with the Afrocentric and womanist ideas as modes of validating knowledge, norms and experience, and then turn my attention to how these considerations illumine a path toward producing and/or enhancing Afrocentric and womanist pedagogies employed in theological education. Finally, I will consider some specific implications of the Afrocentric and womanist approaches for black theological education.

The Afrocentric idea is rooted in the worldview and collective experience of the people of Africa and the African Diaspora. Its central concern is to advance the position of African people in the world by affirming their identity and contributions, and by unmasking the biases and limits of Eurocentrism. Afrocentric scholarship seeks to: (1) celebrate the achievements of African people and cultures, (2) analyze critically the hegemony of the Eurocentric world view and ways of knowing that have served the interests of racial oppression, and especially as they have skewed the self-understanding of African American educators and leaders, and (3) construct an alternative framework for understanding and evaluating human experience. The ultimate end of the celebrative, critical and constructive dimensions of the Afrocentric impulse is, in the words of Afrocentrist Molefi Asante, to "move to harmony through rhythms that are the African path to transcendence."[2]

The womanist nomenclature has its origins in the thought of Alice Walker, who defined the term extensively in her 1983 collection of prose writings, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*.[3] In essence, womanist means black feminist. As early as 1985, black women scholars in religion began publishing books and articles that employed the womanist perspective as a point of departure for doing theology, biblical studies and ethics. These scholars include Jacqueline Grant, Delores Williams, Kelly Brown Douglas, Renita Weems, Katie Cannon and Toinette Eugene. The major sources for their work are the narratives, autobiographies, novels, poetry, prayers and other writings that convey black women's traditions, culture and history. The method developed to process these sources can also be summarized in terms of celebrative, critical and constructive intent, inclusive of (1) the celebration of black women's historical struggles and strengths; (2) the critique of various manifestations of black women's oppression in terms of race, sex and class; and (3) the construction of black women's distinctive theological and ethical claims toward the end of a liberative praxis.

The Afrocentric idea as fully developed in the writings of Asante, and the womanist idea as defined in much briefer form by Walker, seem to bear more similarities than differences as epistemological statements. The following excerpt from the book *The Afrocentric Idea* strongly echoes the self-affirming and self-assertive aspects of womanism as an ethos of struggle and commitment to human survival and wholeness, culturally and historically grounded in the resistant posture of the slave:

> A truly Afrocentric rhetoric must oppose the negation in Western culture; it is combative, antagonistic, and wholly committed to the propagation of a more humanistic vision of the world. Its foundation is necessarily the slave narrative. Its rhythms are harmonious, discordant only to those who have refused to accept either the truth of themselves or the possibility of other frames of reference.[4]

The self-affirmation and self-assertiveness of womanism and Afrocentrism ought not be regarded in individualistic terms, but rather should be understood as indicative of the self-finding expression in harmony with others. This understanding is conveyed by the notion of love in the womanist definition, and as the sudic ideal in Afrocentrism. By coining the term "womanist" Walker is exercising the authority "to name ourselves after our own fashion."[5] Similarly, Asante emphasizes "the presence of nommo in African discourse and in specific instances of resistance to the dominant ideology," defining nommo as the generative and productive power of the spoken word.[6] The ultimate aim or end of self-actualization in the strongly collective sense is envisioned by the womanist as survival and wholeness of entire people, and as harmony and transcendence by the Afrocentrist. Although Asante clearly rejects Christianity as a valid religious option for Afrocentric people, he refers repeatedly to the black church experience to illustrate Afrocentric values, spirituality, and culture. By contrast, Walker asserts that the womanist "loves the Spirit" without making reference to any specific religion. In both cases, black spirituality is acknowledged as a path to transcendence apart from any validation of black Christian identity.

The Witnessing Spirit, History and Transformation

The problem of the validation of knowledge, norms and experience within the African American context is a major concern for both womanist and Afrocentric scholars. I would propose a simple framework for analyzing the validation of womanist and/or Afrocentric claims based upon the concept of the "witness of the Spirit," a term drawn directly from the black church tradition, which I would augment to include two other criteria, the witness of history and the witness of transformation. By the witness of the Spirit I mean the collective "Amen" of assent, endorsement or approval, which is given by the people when a word or other personal expression is accepted as truth-bearing. The witness of the Spirit finds explicit expression in Asante's work as a criterion for the validation of Afrocentric discourse; "Harmony has been achieved when the audience says a collective "amen" to a discourse, either through vocal or symbolic acknowledgment."[7] If we understand the witness of the Spirit as a spiritual transaction or communication always mediated by persons in some form of community, including family, then the intergenerational dialogue between mothers and daughters that undergirds the womanist definition can be interpreted as expressive of the witness of the Spirit as well.

The witness of history, with specific reference to the collective stories and traditions of African American people, is a significant mode of validation for both Asante and Walker. The historic struggle of black women against slavery and oppression is an intrinsic and foundational element of the womanist idea. History emerges as the single most important criterion for validation of Afrocentric knowledge, as indicated in Asante's critique of African American Christianity and Islam:

> He or she (the Afrocentrist) studies every thought, action, behavior, and value, and if it cannot be found in our culture or in our history, it is dispensed with quickly. This is not done because we have something against someone else's culture; it is just not ours. We do not have too many complaints with the person who decides to accept someone else's culture, religion or ideology, be it Islam, Christianity, or Marxism, if it serves him better than his own. However, for us it is impossible to see how anything from outside ourselves can compare with what is in our history.[8]

The witness of transformation emerges as a major criterion for validation in both womanist and Afrocentric thought. Here the notion of transformation is not to be interpreted in reductionist terms, but rather as an appeal to the power of the paradigm in question to bring forth change when applied to people's individual and collective lives under conditions of oppression. Walker cites such terms as "capable" and "in charge" to indicate the constructive criterion of the womanist ideal. In her statement of the womanist's commitment

to survival and wholeness of entire people, and her portrayal of the womanist slave leading her people out of bondage, Walker illustrates some of the categories and norms this "witness of transformation" would uphold with reference to power and authority of black women to create change by offering overt resistance to oppression. Asante regards the vital connection between personal commitment to the Afrocentric idea and the task of collective renewal and reconstruction as a significant mode of validation. He exhorts Afrocentrists to:

> Isolate, define, and promote those values, symbols, and experiences which affirm you. Only through this type of affirmation can we really and truly find our renewal; this is why I speak of it as a reconstruction instead of a redefinition. Actually what we have to do is not difficult because the guidelines are clearly established in our past. We must continue to be excellent, provocative, organized, educated, and dependable [...]. Afrocentricity does not condone inefficiency in its name. Our history gives us enough examples to illustrate this point. Those who have truly acted from their own Afrocentric centers have always had admirable records of excellence and efficiency.[9]

To summarize this brief analysis of the validation process as it operates in Afrocentric and womanist thought in terms of the three-fold witness of Spirit, history, and transformation, it is clear that both paradigms offer distinct alternatives to traditional Eurocentric epistemologies. While neither paradigm would validate Eurocentric claims based upon the application of its own "witnessing" criteria, it seems evident that womanists might reject some expressions of Afrocentrism that are not centered upon the affirmation, assertiveness and actualization of women. By the same token, one would expect some Afrocentrists to dismiss the womanist concept, and devalue the history of African American female leadership, as having only marginal significance as witnesses to the spirit, history and transformative power of Afrocentrism.

Black Feminist Epistemology and Theological Education

Notwithstanding the apparent disparities and discrepancies inherent in paradigms centered exclusively in black women's experiences or in African American experiences without giving attention to gender distinctions, Black feminist theorist Patricia Hill Collins has attempted to construct a coherent black feminist epistemology by merging Afrocentrist and feminist perspectives. Her discussion of the validation of black feminist claims in a 1989 article entitled "The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought" invites application of the criteria of the witness of the Spirit, of history and of transformation as indicated in this brief quotation:

> First, Black feminist thought must be validated by ordinary African-American women who grow to womanhood "in a world where the saner you are, the madder you are made to appear." To be credible in the eyes of this group, scholars must be personal advocates for their material, be accountable for the consequences of their work, have lived or experienced their material in some fashion, and be willing to engage in dialogues about their findings with ordinary, everyday people."[10]

Moreover, she requires acceptance by the community of black women scholars and at least confrontation, if not also constructive dialogue, with Eurocentric masculinist academia. She further suggests that if the validation of black feminist ideas as true becomes possible for African-American women, African-American men, white men, white women, and other groups with distinctive standpoints, with each group using the epistemological approaches growing from its unique standpoint, then black feminists may have found a route to the elusive goal of generating so-called objective generalizations that can stand as universal truths.[11] In her discussion of the contours of an Afrocentric feminist epistemology, Patricia Hill Collins

cites four elements: (1) concrete experience as a criterion of meaning, (2) the use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims, (3) the ethic of caring, and (4) the ethic of personal accountability. Although all four elements find expression within the black church context, Collins uses the black church to further illustrate three components of the ethic of caring--the value placed on individual expressiveness, the appropriateness of emotions, and the capacity for empathy.[12] She arrives at a somewhat problematic conclusion regarding the ethic-of-care dimension of Afrocentric feminist epistemology:

> Although Black women may be denigrated within white-male-controlled academic institutions, other institutions, such as Black families and churches, which encourage the expression of Black female power, seem to do so by way of their support for an Afrocentric feminist epistemology.[13]

Because she fails to address the denigration of black women and the refutation of black female power in some black churches and families, Collins claims support for Afrocentric feminism in the very places where the rejection of these ideals is most noticeable. The difficulty inherent in the attempt to use this approach as a basis for denoting the convergence of Afrocentric and feminist values is grounded in the very important question of whether black churches and families can be generally described as Afrocentric, womanist, or neither of the above. However, even if Collins has erred by overstating the case for the black church and family as contexts for the emergence of Afrocentric feminist ideas, her epistemological analysis provides a useful point of departure for evaluation, in broad strokes, of the importance of Afrocentrist and womanist pedagogies for theological education. Indeed, her work may provide more specific indications for the task of training persons for ministry to churches, families and communities than the contributions of either Asante or Walker, given their apparent lack of specific interest in either Christianity or the black church.

The notion of concrete experience as a criterion of meaning, the use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims, the ethic of caring, and the ethic of personal accountability promise to give new direction and content to theological curricula that take seriously the need to prepare men and women for the task of administering healing and wholeness in the American society generally, and in the African American community in particular. We must not lose sight of the fact that many teachers and administrators in theological education today have yet to acknowledge the efforts undertaken by African American women and men to embrace Afrocentrism and/or womanism as paradigms for meaningful self-affirmation, self-assertion and self-actualization. Moreover, many remain unaware of the extent to which the dominant epistemologies do not evoke the witness of the Spirit in the experience of the students, the witness of history in relation to traditions they recognize and care about, nor the witness of transformation for persons seeking to be equipped for and engaged in the work of interpersonal enablement and social transformation. Students who are preparing themselves for advanced scholarship or pastoral leadership can benefit greatly from being taught "how to" employ concrete experience as a criterion for meaning, and "how to" use dialogue in assessing knowledge claims, especially in their biblical, historical and homiletical studies. The ethic of caring and the ethic of personal accountability should be central not only to the study of ethics and pastoral care, but should have a direct bearing upon how and why we do theology and religious education. It would be a mistake to view the pedagogical implications of the Afrocentric and/or womanist epistemologies as uniquely applicable to theological educating by and for African American people. While black theological institutions with significant numbers of female students should be held expressly responsible to give serious consideration to shaping their curricular offerings to reflect these concerns, predominantly white institutions may also find themselves revitalized by the process of intentionally seeking opportunities to enable the sharing of experiences and engagement in dialogue with African American women and men, in authentic contexts of mutual caring and accountability.

Afrocentric Challenges to Black Theological Education

The womanist idea has found a home among African American women who are engaged in theological study as teachers and students. In particular, the Howard University School of Divinity has been a leading forum for the development of womanist scholarship, beginning in 1985 with the institution of the Feminine in Religious Traditions Lecture Series, including the 1988 Consultation of Womanist Scholars in Religion, and continuing with a steady stream of articles by and about womanist theologians and pastors in the school's *Journal of Religious Thought* since 1986.[14]

In the final analysis, it may be that neither Afrocentric nor womanist approaches will find wide acceptance in the Christian churches in general, or in black churches. However, a key factor in determining such an outcome would be whether or not a critical mass of African American female students and theological faculty can embrace and integrate these two concepts on several levels: (1) as points of departure for doing scholarship and ministry consistently in an Afrocentric womanist frame of reference; (2) as sources of content and method in theological and ministry studies used in conjunction with or in place of traditional Western sources; (3) as organizing principles for doing ministry in the churches and community; (4) as foundations for cultural values and aesthetic norms applied to everyday life, e.g., diet, decor, clothing, hairstyles; (5) as perspectives for framing thought and action with regard to various life choices, including educational pursuits, career paths, marriage, family and sexual partnerships, management of human and material resources, i.e., how we earn, spend and invest our money, political activity, and community-building; (6) as centers of personal and social identity vital to our sense of call and response to ministry; and (7) as grounds for envisioning the future toward which we work and hope. It is the testimony of increasing numbers of African American women in theological education, that the witness of the Spirit, of history, and of transformation encourages worship, study, and work in an Afrocentric womanist context. The development of African American women's religious leadership in this light promises to better equip the churches to love black people to wholeness.

---

[1] This article was first published in *Living the Intersection: Womanism and Afrocentrism in Theology* ed. Cheryl J. Sanders, copyright 1995 Augsburg, reprinted here with permission.

[2] Molefi Asante, *The Afrocentric Idea* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), 195.

[3] Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983), xi-xii.

[4] Asante, *The Afrocentric Idea*, 170.

[5] Walker, 82.

[6] Asante, *The Afrocentric Idea*, 17.

[7] Asante, *The Afrocentric Idea*, 179.

[8] Molefi Kete Asante, *Afrocentricity* (Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 1988), 5-6.

[9] Asante, Afrocentricity, 41.

[10] Patricia Hill Collins, "The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought," *Signs* 14, 4 (Summer 1989):771.

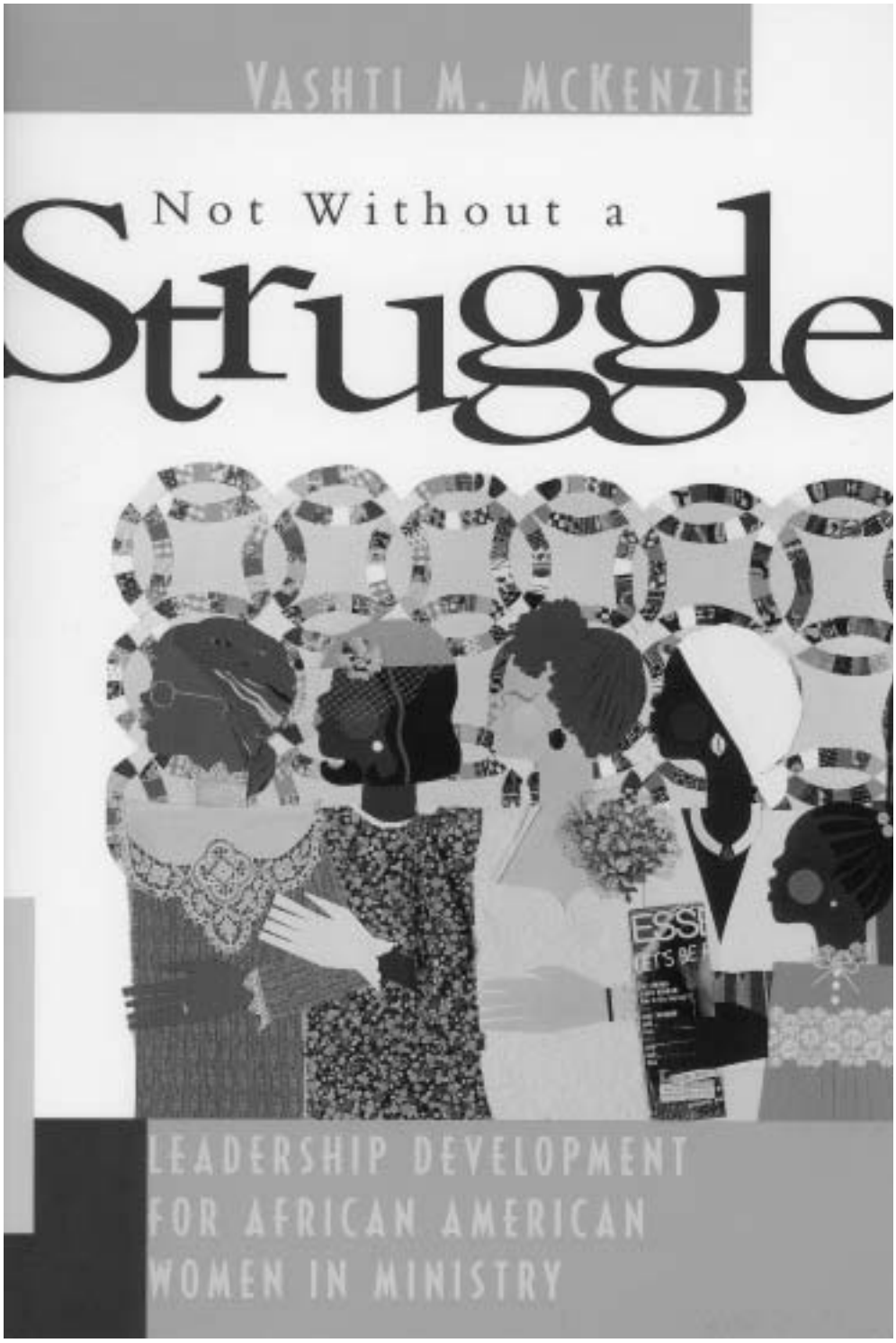
[11] Collins, 773.

[12] Collins, 767.

[13] Collins, 768.

[14] See the following issues of the *Journal of Religious Thought* for published lectures from the Feminine in Religious Traditions Lecture Series: (1) *JRT* 43, 1 (Spring-Summer 1986): Delores Causion Carpenter, "The Professionalization of the Ministry of Women," Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, "The Role of Women in the Sanctified Church," Cheryl J. Sanders, "The Woman as Preacher," and Delores S. Williams, "The Color of Feminism: Or Speaking the Black Woman's Tongue;" (2) *JRT* 44, 2 (Winter-Spring 1988): Evelyn Brooks, "Religion, Politics and Gender: The Leadership of Nannie Helen Burroughs," and Toinette Eugene, "Moral Values and Black Womanists;" (3) *JRT* 46, 1 (Summer-Fall 1989): Kelly D. Brown, "God Is as Christ Does: Toward a Womanist Theology," and

Harold Dean Trulear, "Reshaping Black Pastoral Theology: The Vision of Bishop Ida B. Robinson;" (4) *JRT* 49, 1 (Summer-Fall 1992): Clarence G. Newsome, "Mary McLeod Bethune and the Methodist Episcopal Church North: In But Out." See also *JRT* 45, 1 (Summer-Fall 1988): Jacqueline D. Carr-Hamilton, "Notes on the Black Womanist Dilemma;" and *JRT* 46, 2 (Winter-Spring 1989-1990).



TEACHING WOMANIST THEOLOGY[1]

Kelly Brown Douglas

Two years ago I anxiously prepared to teach, for the first time, womanist theology. Since my own theological training never provided me with an opportunity to do course work involving serious reflection on black women's experience, I was therefore excited to be able to offer students a chance to study theology that emerged from the lives and struggles of black women. Yet, when I sat down to develop the course, the gaps in my theological training conspired against me. I did not have a model for developing a course such as womanist theology. I did not know how to begin to teach students about black women's reality and theological concerns. I wrestled with how to structure the course so that it would do justice, in a fourteen-week semester, to the stories of those who had long been invisible in the theological academy.

The pedagogy I initially adopted had great potential for failure. It promised to kill any enthusiasm the students might have brought to the class. As I planned the course I relied on what I knew best and drew on the ways in which I myself had been taught. I opted for a lecture format, structure around particular theological themes. Students would read the assigned texts, and I would provide weekly lectures covering what I deemed the important issues. For instance, one week the students might read material focused around black women's understandings of God. I would then lecture on this same theme.

I had unwittingly designed "Womanist Theology" as a perfect example of "banking" education[2] . Banking education makes at least three assumptions. First, it assumes that students are empty vessels, banks ready to be filled. It does not value the student's experience or wisdom. Second, the banking system promotes one-directional communication. Only the teacher is considered capable of making deposits of knowledge. There is no appreciation for the possibility of teachers and students entering into dialogue as mutual learners. Finally, the banking model does not invite the students to interact with the course material. Critical examination of ideas and issues is not encouraged.

Fortunately, those who entered this course were not passive learners. They refused to be constrained by a fixed banking structure. They made clear that "what they should learn" was not going to be rigidly decided for them in advance. Each week they walked into the classroom discussing the reading material. Before I could start my lecture they were engaged in a lively conversation. They shared with each other what it meant finally to encounter the story of black women. Each student revealed the impact that this story had on her or his life. They were not passive receptacles of static facts but critical learners allowing themselves to be challenged by the reality of black women's struggles. This was confirmed when one black woman confessed. "I used to thing what happened to me was personal; now I see it is just a part of being black and female".

Within three class sessions, "Womanist Theology" was transformed from a banking format to one that was dialogical and interactive. In the process I was educated on how to teach such a course. I learned certain "musts" for teaching, about those who have been "marginalized" in church, society, and academy, especially to those who suffer from that same marginalization.

I recognized that the students had actually changed the course into one more compatible with the womanist concept. The term *womanist* has now become a symbol for black women's experience. It points to the unique richness and complexity of black women's lives as they continually struggle to maintain life and to make it better for themselves and their families. In religious scholarship *womanist*

signals an understanding of God, Christ, the Bible, and the church from the perspective of this particular struggle.

Although the meaning of the term now goes beyond Alice Walker's original definition of it, certain aspects of the definition are consistently highlighted by black female religious scholars[3] . These aspects seem also to suggest a womanist pedagogy.

Essentials of a Womanist Pedagogy

> Dialogical :"Mama, I'm walking to Canada and I'm taking you and a bunch of other slaves with me". "It wouldn't be the first time".

One of the attractive features of Alice Walker's definition is an intergenerational dialogue between a mother and daughter. A young girl tells her mother about her plan to gain freedom, and her mother then informs the girl that she would not be the first one to carry out such a plan. She provides her with an opportunity to learn from and become empowered by the freedom struggle of her foremothers. This dialogue suggests three essentials for womanist pedagogy: it must provide students with an opportunity to dialogue with black women's history, with "ordinary" black women, and with each other.

A course in womanist theology must provide students with an opportunity to encounter black women's history. This historical dialogue is especially important for black female students. It is through this dialogue that they can discover that their own experience of struggle is not simply personal, it is reflective of a wider historical experience. By becoming connected to their past, black female students can become empowered by the knowledge that they are not alone in their struggle for freedom. They are a part of a long history of black women trying to make do and do better. In general, through a historical dialogue, black female students can discern "when and where" they enter the story of black women struggling to nurture survival and freedom for themselves and their families.

The historical dialogue can also provide black female students with *role models*. They can learn from the stories of other black women. For instance, knowledge of black women's history provides them with an opportunity to encounter black women's "culture of resistance". This is a culture, which, according to Patricia Hill Collins, black women have crafted to help them resist the dehumanizing and oppressive situations, which they were forced to encounter[4] . This culture of resistance can serve as a guide to black female students as they negotiate their own reality of black womanhood.

Dialogue with black women's history is also imperative for students who are not black and female. It gives them a chance to discover their relationship to black women's history. They can discern and confront the "history of relationship" between them and black women. An understanding of this relational history is important if there is to be any solidarity in the struggle for freedom. Such solidarity can occur only when the history, which divides is honestly dealt with, and the history that connects is recognized.

As important as the historical dialogue is, an even more significant dialogue awaits. If womanist theology emerges from the experience of black women in struggle, then conversation with these women is critical. The thought, experiences and wisdom of these women must be the basis for womanist thought. Students of womanist theology, therefore, must be informed not simply by books but also by the ordinary women who are engaged in the day-to-day fight for survival and freedom. This means that a womanist theology class must go beyond the walls of the academy to the places where black women are actively resisting oppression of their families and community, that is, to the churches, community centers, and other local agencies and organizations.

Finally, in a womanist theology course students must dialogue with each other. An atmosphere and occasion must be provided for the students to talk to one another. To confront honestly their "history of relationships" they have to share how that history shapes who they are and how they now relate to each other.

> Diversity of Experience: "Mama, why are we brown, pink, and yellow, and our cousins are white, beige, and black?" Answer: "Well you know the colored race is just like a flower garden, with every color flower represented".

Throughout Walker's definition of the womanist concept there are various references to the diversity of the black community in general, and of black women in particular. A course compatible with the womanist concept should portray the richness and variety of black women's experience. For instance, the course should attempt to reflect black women's different economic situations, lifestyles, and ways of loving.

Exploring this diversity is beneficial for several reasons. First, it challenges the notion that all black women are alike. Such a narrow perception typically leads easily to stereotyping and allows one to avoid the varied challenges that emerge from a more comprehensive look at black women's lives.

Second, an introduction to the diversity of black women's experience prevents students from reading one black woman's story as if it were the whole story. It dispels any beliefs that if they have read one biography, narrative, or novel by a black woman then they have it all. To make students aware of the richness of black women's reality might motivate them to pursue further study of black women's history and culture.

Finally, exploration of black women's diverse experience provides an occasion for black female students to celebrate their own unique expressions of black womanhood. It may even help them to understand each other's uniqueness "as a dynamic human force which is enriching rather than threatening to (their own) defined self"[5] . This becomes particularly crucial to helping black women refrain from marginalizing each other because of difference. For instance, one of the most divisive and explosive issues in courses, which I have taught has been sexuality. Students have often been most strident in their antagonism toward gay and lesbian people. This is, in part, due to fear of and lack of respect for difference. It therefore becomes essential for students to confront their fears and biases by learning about and appreciating black women's rich differences. At the same time it becomes important for students to discover how their sense of "privilege" lends itself to the discrimination of others. This can also be done by exploring a womanist vision for freedom.

> An Analysis of Oppression: "Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female."

Walker's definition points to a womanist's vision for freedom. This envisions a world where all persons, men and women, are at least respected and treated equally. A course that takes seriously this womanist vision must engage an analysis of black women's oppression. It must help students to name the social, economic, political, religious, and cultural barriers to black people's freedom. It must also compel students to recognize their own points of privilege and how they are themselves complicit in black oppression. They must begin to name the ways in which they benefit from as well as perpetuate racist, sexist, classist, and heterosexist structures.

What Does All This Have to Do With Theology?

The major underlying assumption of womanist theology is that it, like all theology, is fundamentally shaped by the social and historical experience of the persons doing it. This means that to appreciate fully what womanist theologians say about the meaning of God, Christ, the Bible, and the church, students must attain a basic knowledge of black women's experience. Only after gaining some familiarity with what it means to be black and female can students critically reflect upon black women's theological concerns and affirmations.

How has my pedagogy change as a result of my first experience with teaching womanist theology? What am I doing two years later in my second attempt at teaching womanist theology? Most significantly, I have designed the course as a seminar. Practically, this means that the students are seated in a circle so that they can more easily talk to one another.

Second, during the introductory class session much of the time is spent with students telling each other "who they are" and why they have decided to take womanist theology. This is done to promote an atmosphere where students feel more comfortable entering into honest dialogue with each other. Third, discussion, not a lecture, is the central focus of the class. The students' critical responses and reactions to the reading shape the discussion. As the instructor, I attempt to facilitate their discussion and to sum up the salient issues raised by reading as well as by the students. Fourth and perhaps more importantly, field trips are planned so that the students can encounter and dialogue with black women outside of the academy who are actively engaged in moving the black community toward wholeness.

Remaining Challenges For Teaching Womanist Theology

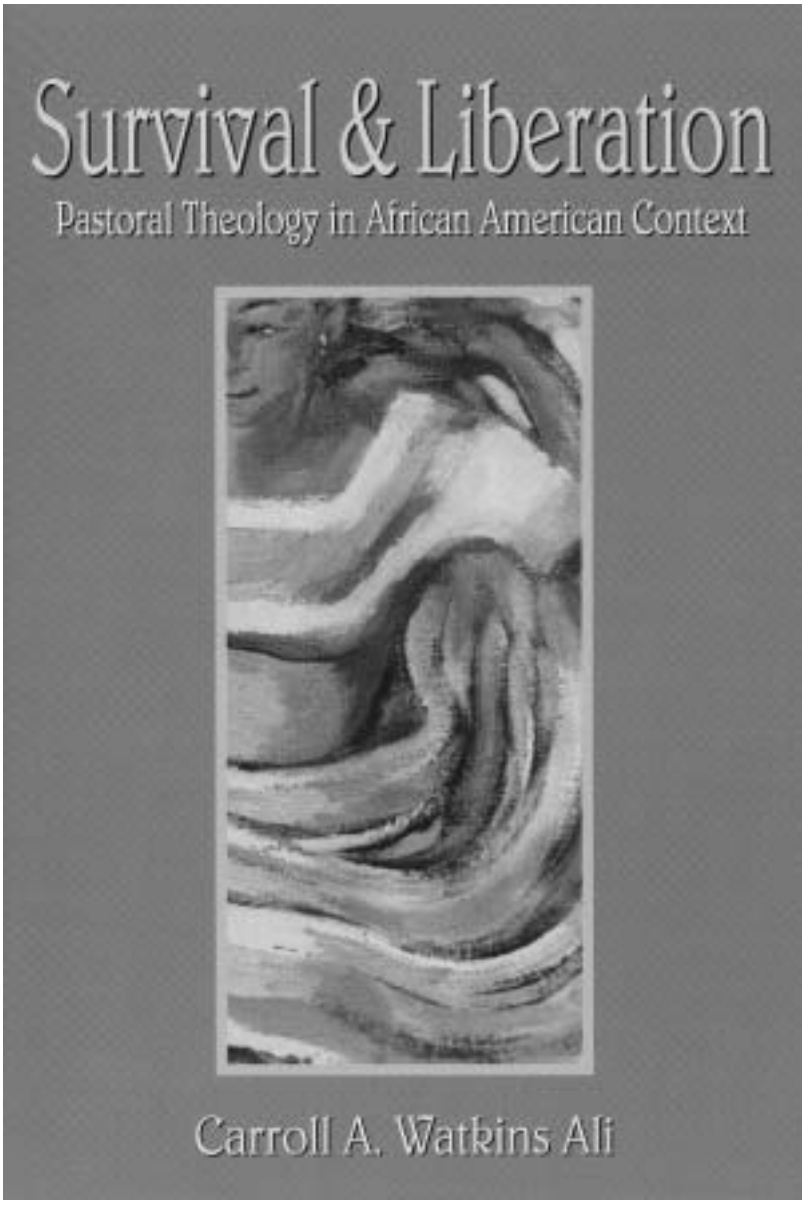
The discussion thus far has been restricted to teaching womanist theology in the academy. As has been implied in this discussion, however, it is inappropriate for womanist theology to be restricted to institutions of highter learning. It does not emerge from there. It emerges from the life, wisdom, and faith of black women struggling for the well-being of their families and themselves. What Patricia Hill Collins calls "Black women's everyday, taken-for-granted knowledge" must be the foundation out of which womanist thought emerges. That is why it is imperative for students of womanist theology to engage black women beyond academic institutions. As Collins goes on to explain, it is this "taken-for-granted knowledge" that womanist scholars should rearticulate in such a way that "empowers African-American women and stimulates resistance"[6] . Herein lies the challenge for the teaching of womanist theology.

Teaching womanist theology cannot be confined to colleges, universities, and seminaries. Womanist theologians must move beyond the academy. We must have this theology available to black church and community women. This is crucial for at least two reasons. First, if the wisdom, which is gained from black women in struggle, is to empower these very women, then it must be accessible to them. Second, womanist theology must be held accountable to black women in struggle. What womanist theology says about God, Christ, and the church must make sense, must ring true, to these women in the context of their daily struggles. The challenge therefore remains for womanist theologians to develop appropriate pedagogies for teaching church and community women. These pedagogies must not only be compatible with the womanist concept, but also grow out of the various contexts in which it is taught. The way in which it is taught in the seminary might not be appropriate for teaching church and community women. As I learned from my first experience of teaching womanist theology in the seminary, I expect to learn from church and community women as I move to make womanist theology more accessible to them.

I have no doubt that the more I teach womanist theology the more I will learn about how to teach it. I anticipate new challenges and new discoveries, even as I learn more about the womanist experience. Indeed, the most important and enduring essential for womanist pedagogy is flexibility. A womanist pedagogy must allow for change so as to embrace the complex and dynamic reality of black womanhood.

---

[1] This article was first published in *Living the Intersection: Womanism and Afrocentrism in Theology* ed. Cheryl J. Sanders, copyright 1995 Augsburg, reprinted here with permission.
[2] See Paulo Friere, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Seabury Press, 1970), especially chap.2.
[3] For Alice Walker's definition, see *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983), xi-xii.
[4] Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 1991).
[5] Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider* (New York: Crossing Press Feminist Series, 1984),45.
[6] Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 31ff.



WHAT IF? : TRANSFORMATION IN ECUMENICAL THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

J. Dorcas Gordon

An article about theological education in North America often begins by noting the changes that have taken place in the last thirty years. At my own institution, Knox College in Toronto, Canada, the overwhelming majority of the students in the late sixties were men in their twenties. Their vocation would normally be identified as a full-time, life long congregational ministry position within the Presbyterian Church in Canada (PCC). Most had a liberal arts background, were full-time students and studied, worshipped and lived in a residential setting. The teaching faculty was uniformly male, Caucasian and ordained. Today, students in this same institution represent a diversity of age, ethnicity, religious background and gender that continue to grow. Women now form a slight majority in the ministry stream. On the faculty women, while still a minority, are increasing in number and moving into the rank of senior colleagues. Although the faculty is still overwhelmingly Caucasian, Knox recently moved to hire a Korean woman as the Professor of Christian Education. An important step, but just a beginning, since within the context of the PCC, the Korean-Canadian community is the fastest growing ethnic group. In a way similar to other institutions throughout North America, this diversity "results in a pluralism of ideas, experiences, academic training and initiatives for both teacher and student. It was not like this in the past"[1]

These changes provide an exciting challenge for those who are educators, however they are only one aspect of the transformation that is taking place within theological education. The second, and equally dramatic, is the shifting nature of theological basics. Let me approach this from the perspective of the hermeneutical questions at the fore in my particular field, biblical interpretation.

In the Enlightenment model for understanding the world, the text was static and objective. If an interpreter could find the right method, the one that would allow him/her to become objective enough, then *the* truth of *the* text would become evident. In this view of reality, truth is out there and the knowledge of what is true flows from the top down, from experts who are qualified to know the truth to amateurs who are qualified only to receive the truth. Truth here is a set of propositions about objects.[2] As this model for understanding the world began to break down, the understanding of truth has shifted to an understanding of reality as being shaped by the tradition within which it participates. The "language in which we think, the culture in which we participate, the education both formal and informal that shapes our questions",[3] all influence the process of knowing and the understanding that results.

Within this changing frame of knowing and understanding, Biblical exegetes, concerned to probe the way in which meaning within texts is understood, identify the biblical writings as communication between author, text and reader. As an "author (sender) brings his/her world-view and understanding of reality to a text, allowing the text to mirror at least some elements of that world-view and reality, so the reader (receiver)[4] brings to the text her/his world-view and conception of reality." Texts are read and meaning assigned within the reader and author's complex and multidimensional world. So also the complex and multidimensional world of sender and receiver inform any attempt at communication. There is no neutral or value free reading of texts; all reading is particular or interested.[5]

This hermeneutical relationship between author-text-reader, speaks also, I believe, to the dynamic of the relationship between teacher-curiculum-student in theological education and more particularly in ministry

studies. While each aspect in itself is important, it is the dynamic of their interrelationship that challenges ecumenical education and ministry studies, recognizing that the creativity of their interrelationship is what is primary in living out theological education in an ecumenical, plural and global context. Just as reading a biblical text is never a value-free activity, but always interested, so too is the process of theological education. An educator writing about the relational nature of truth presents this distinction vividly:

> [W]hat good are abstract facts (truth) when people are starving, dying, loving and hating […]. Truth […] was like the proverbial fallen tree in the forest. The whole forest had fallen but we had not heard a thing. Truth, in this second view, is a holistic and personal relationship. Only when people's lives are affected is truth real, have we heard the tree. A good teacher, therefore, enables the students to link heart, mind, and action such that they both felt and did the truth.[6]

The words of Paulo Freire on education continue to ring true more than thirty years after they were first written:

> There is no such thing as a neutral educational process. Education *either* functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, *or* it becomes "the practice of freedom", the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of the world.[7]

This brief description of the changes in both the participants in theological education and the theological fundamentals preface in a key way my discussion of theological education/ministerial formation and women's theological voices and visions. For five years I was Director of the Doctor of Ministry Program for the Toronto School of Theology. An ecumenical program of advanced ministry studies, this educational experience actively recruited the diversity that only gradually and with some reluctance is recognized within basic ministry studies. The goal of the program is to bring together difference in denomination, theological perspective, experience, gender, ethnicity, ordered and lay ministry, sexual orientation, and in that diversity create a respectful learning community in which learning as formation, information, and transformation actually occurs.

At its best Doctor of Ministry (D. Min.) education parallels in its goals what has been valued in Women's Studies programs. It is praxis based, diversity is actively encouraged, and the boundaries between disciplines are fluid. An intentional spirituality and a context that is global are essential aspects of the learning that is sought. With this in mind, let me proceed to look at D.Min. education as a model that has the potential to transform ministry formation equipping all to respond with integrity to ministry in an ecumenical, global and plural context. It is also a model that for a number of reasons remains undeveloped.

D.Min. roots itself in an inductive model of education within which knowledge grows piecemeal as experience is enlarged, refined and deepened. Concreteness and context are essential. Parker Palmer, an educator speaks of truth as

> an eternal conversation about things that matter, conducted with passion and discipline […]. [It is] the passionate and disciplined process of inquiry and dialogue itself, as the dynamic conversation of a community that keeps testing old conclusions and coming into new ones.[8]

Where an educational model bases itself on an inductive model demanding concreteness and context, the power dynamics between various learners becomes increasingly fluid and transformation can be hoped for.

The challenge is to provide a *safe place* where a multiplicity of voices can converse concretely and specifically about ministry. Only in intense learning situations where students and teachers spend time together in an agenda that encourages storytelling, narrating one's educational, personal, ministry and spiritual experiences can this safe place emerge. It requires a myriad of opportunities for reflection where learners are challenged to ask questions over and over again from different perspectives. My experience attests that only tentatively and hesitantly even within a secure environment are questions about bias and truth and assumptive world-views raised. The radical questions often come where there is greatest pain. To speak openly of that pain is to find courage to go into the unknown. As the educator I must take care that such risk is honored and acknowledge that ambiguity and creative conflict that sometime disassemble my carefully constructed outcomes for the course are essential to this kind of learning process.

The program of ecumenical formation at the Bossey Ecumenical Institute at Céligny, Switzerland, seems to capture the intent of the D.Min. and could provide another model for the transformation of ministry studies. In a 1997 article, Jacques Nicole describes its intent in the following way:

> Ecumenical formation is an interconfessional and intercultural process of reconciliation and equipping the church for its ministries. It is interdisciplinary in that it brings together the experience of the participant, the various disciplines of biblical study, theology, church history, worship, social ethics and practical theology. Through shared encounter, participants practice self-critical discipline that allows for a moment of reception of both cognitive and spiritual insights. Ecumenical formation is always grounded in a contemporary issue(s) in church and society. It is experiential, in the integration of scholarship and praxis.[9]

The essence of this program is variously defined as 'controlled alienation", cognitive dissonance", "growth through sorrow." Nicole speaks of learning as a process of disconnection and connection, of unlearning in order to learn. In effect no one has the answer; all have equal parts to learn and to teach.[10] Ideally this means that no one's voice, whether that be male, western, middle-class, North American or a particular denomination can claim normative status.

A D.Min. model of education has the potential of transforming ministry studies so that women's words and visions are no longer marginalized in church and academy. Through it questions have been raised about curriculum, about the meaning of teacher and student, about the nature of truth. Its proponents have often been in the role of visionaries. It reminds me of the work of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and her hermeneutics of creative actualization or imagination, a hermeneutical move that recognizes that what we have not first imagined can never become our reality.

However, I emphasize the word potential, for as in many things the point of greatest strength is also the point of greatest vulnerability. First, Doctor of Ministry education remains somewhat marginalized within the North American educational system. As an advanced degree in ministry studies, it is often seen as much less than a Ph.D or Th.D. But even more than this, its educational essence that calls for plurality and diversity, dialogue and contextual truth is easily subverted. If truth is dialogical and contextual, and welcomes diversity and plurality then some voice will argue that no one truth is better than any other and, thus no-one needs to change or grow.

Where then does this leave me, a woman with responsibility for both teaching and administration in a denominational seminary in which ninety five per cent of the basic ministry studies graduates become ordained ministers in the Presbyterian Church in Canada, and in which our graduate students seek to

exercise leadership as teachers within seminary education. As Principal of this college, the challenge is even greater in that I give leadership and have significant responsibility for the education that takes place. Musa Dube's book tells me that I am one in a position "to dismantle androcentrism, sexism and patriarchy as well as imperialism.[11]" While she perhaps overestimates my power, there is a truism in her words that challenges me every day in my teaching and decision-making: how am I part of the problem; how am I part of the solution?

Because I was hired as Principal, I teach elective courses in my field of biblical interpretation. This affords me the luxury of choice in the courses that I teach, thus I regularly offer courses that have at their heart issues related to hegemony. Presently, I teach a course on anti-Judaism and the New Testament. Last term it was a course on the gospel of Luke and Jubilee using various methods of interpretation including feminism.

As a teacher I begin each course with an introduction to the emerging hermeneutics, attempting to provide a framework for a non-hierarchical model of engagement, a safe place where questions are more important than answers and where we "worry away' at the hard questions keeping in mind always our individual bias and the voices that are not present in our discussions. I work hard to understand and integrate the disparate elements within myself – those places of ongoing bias, my need for authority, the difference between my ideal self and my day-to-day self. My task as teacher, is to place as much of the theological wisdom (and foolishness) of the ages as I can before the students, not because I think this provides the answer to the present, but because I believe that within our interpretative traditions (not tradition) we find side by side voices of the center and voices of the margins, voices of hegemony and voices of protest and revolution. When these voices dialogue with the voices in the classroom our learning is free to discover what none of us knew ahead of time and to move beyond what we thought was the proper or only framework of the inquiry.

As a Principal who is an educator my understanding of leadership coheres with my approach to teaching, but what about right practice? How do I encourage a plurality of voices to be heard within the institution? What do I do to create a community of learning that values dialogue, respects diversity and has the courage to risk making difficult decisions?

The emerging hermeneutics in the field of bible emphasizes that everyone reads the biblical text from a particular perspective. There is no neutral reading, no neutral text. Every interpretation adopts a particular lens through which to view the text. In my role, I am in a unique position to help determine the lens through which our institution might view reality. Some days I experience great confidence that we are becoming a community of faith and learning that refutes arrogant claims to know God's truth, that in humility teaches righteousness and justice. On other days I am full of despair because it seems so complicated. These are usually days when I realize that I cannot afford to be collegial, vulnerable or committed to a plurality of voices.

When the modern feminist movement began it concerned itself almost exclusively with gender issues – with women's experiences of oppression. Before long a challenge was issued as to how limited this might be. As a middle class white woman's movement, could it claim to speak of the experiences of all women? An even more serious challenge identified the complicity of white women in the systems of oppression embodied in patriarchy. On the patriarchal pyramid women like myself occupied a privileged place in the midst of the oppressive structures of racism, classism and imperialism. Musa Dube is right, institutions have not fully yielded to women's demands. The struggle for justice and liberation is one that will continue in my lifetime and beyond. However, I think also as women we need to take care that we do

not become trapped by the very arrogance that we abhor. There will always be voices that we do not hear and that we continue to marginalize if we think we have the final answer to oppression.

Let me end with the following affirmations that sustain me in my day-to-day work for change (perhaps even transformation). I believe strongly that theological education is about justice. Learning must be about the knowing and living of healthy human relationships with others, whether they be family or strangers. It includes a commitment to the earth and the things of the earth. Thus to do theological education is to read gender studies, ethics, post-colonial and liberation studies. I believe that theological education is not simply what people study, but the activity within the learning community and part of that activity must be to make clear in our intellectual activity and our lives God's call to transformation. One educator has said that the central task of a creative, renewing process of education is the ability to ask: "what if?" He states:

> only living forces know how to imagine what things might be like, to believe that something else might be the case than is the case, to envisage different futures, to name new possibilities.[12]

I do not believe that theological education is about perfection. It is about faithfulness. Jubilee was never fully practiced; some, not all received Jesus' message of transformation. Justice has always been limited, and yet what if…?

---

[1] Nathan R. Kollar, "Doing It Together: Changing Pedagogies", *Teaching Theology & Religion 2* (1999), 154.
[2] Parker Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's L ife* (San Francisco: Jossy-Bass, 1998) 101.
[3] Sandra Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture* (New York: Harper/ San Francisco, 1991), 159.
[4] W. Randolph Tate, *Biblical Interpretation: An Integrated Approach* (Hendrickson: Peabody, rev.ed. 1997), 158.
[5] Much of this section précised from my article: "Living the Task: Advanced Ministry Studies", *Pacifica 11* (1998), 144-146.
[6] Kollar, 156-7.
[77] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970) 28. Cited in Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore, "Theological Education by Conversation: Particularity and Pluralism", *Theological Education 33* (1996) 32.
[8] Palmer, Courage, 104.
[9] John B. Lindner, "Ecumenical Formation: A Methodology for a Pluralistic Age", *Theological Education 34 Supplement* (1997), 10.
[10] Linda-Marie Delloff, "Embracing Estrangement", *Theological Education 34, Supplement* (1997), 15.
[11] Musa W. Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*. (Chalice Press, 2000).
[12] Terry A. Veling, " ' Practical Theology': A New Sensibility for Theological Education" *Pacifica 11* (1998), 209.

WOMEN, ECUMENICAL THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Marijke Haworth

In what way does ecumenical theological education of women contribute to the development of church and society? Women's ecumenical theological leadership training is essential for the renewal of church and society. In many communities women are valued as wives and mothers while their genuine contributions to family, church and societal transformation go unnoticed. They impact the next generation by teaching moral and ethical behavior, raising children in faithful households, prioritizing the needs of the family before their own, and providing the fundamental support for family survival. When women become appreciated for their spiritual and practical contributions to their families and faith community, their hope permeates their contributions to the rest of the community, inspiring others. They can become ecumenical leaders who can transform relationships in their families, churches and societies.

When development trends are determined by government and development agencies we need to reclaim the gospel and the jubilee. Society is uplifted when the message of the good news is heard in hope and love that we are all made in God's image and that we are loved and valued as children of God. Ecumenical leadership development considers the basic physical and spiritual needs of people at the grassroots level. This development departs from that done by money-making entities who control the means and the ends along with human and environmental resources, to address the injustices of society from theological and practical perspectives.

Sarah Chakko saw no separation between her love of God and her love for education and educating others. She knew that transformation comes from a heart shared and not kept to herself. She was deeply concerned about issues of violence in her society, as well as about women's role in church and society. At the first assembly of the World Council of Churches, she presented her paper, "The Christian Witness in the World" from the Indian and Asian woman's perspective. She said "to be realistic […] one has to base one's statement on a particular time and place. We do not bear witness in the abstract, but to a particular person at a particular time in history."[1] These words challenged the churches, since in the interfaith societies in Asia a divided church would not show fully the unity of God. For her making the word of God incarnate in society and men and women expressing the faith with their daily lives were of utmost importance.

Ofelia Ortega, President of Matanzas Theological Seminary in Cuba, stated in a recent interview that "For me you can never separate theology and development. These must form the center of Christian commitment to society." She continues, "pastors, including women pastors and leaders need to organize people to build better societies. Individuals and organizations concerned about development issues should understand that when there is a priority for women to have theological preparation, they will become leaders in community development, enabling and organizing others to participate fully in civic society." At the theological school, integrated issues of gender and theology in the curriculum help develop better relations in the whole society. "This issue," she said, "needs to be the central focus if the whole community is going to benefit."[2]

In the *Africa Recovery Briefing Paper on Women in Africa's Development*, Takyiwaa Manuh describes women as non-priorities in the majority of household budgets in the South. 78% of the work in Africa is done by women, who receive little benefit. The church's patriarchal ideology directly contributed to

undermine women's role and left them to their survival mechanisms instead of giving them room to come together in solidarity with one another. "Women's power and spheres of influence largely disappeared under the impact of colonialism and external religions, which upset existing economic and social complementarity between the sexes."[3] Since the early 1990's women in Africa have successfully organized cooperatives and micro-enterprises to reflect their concerns and work and to contribute to society. Ms. Soukayna Ba, a Senegalese woman, speaks: "If you want to develop Africa, you must develop the leadership of African women."[4] Nyambura Njoroge, a Kenyan theologian and global coordinator of Ecumenical Theological Education Programme of WCC, states that "theological education of women in Africa is an act of development. Women theologians have developed projects and are transforming their communities, nations and the world."[5]

During the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women, 1988-98, mixed teams visited churches and women to speak with them about their experiences and to report on them to the wider ecumenical community. In their report *Living Letters*, they shared their witness to those women leaders who were "Pillars of the Church". These women had endured burdens of violence, globalization, culture, church structures, silence, racism, and economic injustice. These women are active in lay movements and service leadership.[6] Cuthbert Omari in *In Search of A Round Table*, describes women's church leadership as progress to participate fully in the life and leadership of the church and its councils, raising women's social status, revolutionary with opponents, important enough to talk about, been seen in equal terms with male colleagues.[7] Women are linked by their stories. In continuing the tradition of telling stories as theology, their voices are vital for new developments in theological education and in society.

Poverty, trade, and debt limit resources for women in the global South, Central and Eastern Europe. Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP's) take resources from government services, such as education to re-service external debts. Women bear the burden when government spending is cut back. Women are denied access to higher education, since the priority for receiving education reverts to male children. Despite the pressures on them from family, church and society, young women continue to be called to pursue theological education in the South, in Central and Eastern Europe and in other parts of the world. The issue is not simply serving the church, but is also finding funds for their studies and support for their families. The lack of funding for education challenges churches to prioritize theological education for women. In the bulk of churches theological scholarships for men are not even a question. What is clear is that funds for women's theological education should be made available at an equal rate to funds for men.

Musimbi Kanyoro in "The Challenge of Feminist Theologies" emphasizes the importance of theological education in this process: "for us women of Africa, the study of theology – any theology at all – opens doors long closed to us […]. If we relate our study of culture to the scriptures and theology, we are empowered with new courage and language to speak to new life-styles which reflect the justice of God for all people." She adds that, "doing theology is searching for God in our villages. In choosing culture as a departure point we have the opportunity to start at home, in our bodies and hearts and in our various relations and settings."[8] She asserts that for women to fully live out their faith in the African context requires "the church in Africa to be a witness of God's liberation to women of Africa […] and to discover that the God of the Bible is a God who liberates all people to worship and live out the promise of "abundant life".[9] She points out that the credibility of the church's witness to society will be called into question, "unless we take into account the traumatic situation of millions of women and of the outcast of our societies […]. An experience of faith that holds itself aloof from people seeking to escape marginalization poses a serious risk for the future of the church and the church of the future.[10]

As a wider process towards ecumenical leadership development, women's theological education expands the church's understanding of its role within the wider society. In North America women have inspired new forms of service to bridge the gap between church and society. New ministries now encourage and give hope to AIDS victims, street kids, Wall Street stock brokers, the unemployed, impoverished single mothers with families, homeless, mentally ill, multiracial communities who are struggling to live out the gospel. They have moved non-governmental social action organizations to continue to keep the U.S. government accountable, have enabled ecumenical agencies to help churches, governmental and non-governmental organizations to be in communication and to work in coordination with one another.

Why is it important that women be included not only in the theological discourse, but also the societal discourse regarding these and many other issues? For women to have access to ecumenical theological education it is not just a matter of having access to leadership positions, nor a matter of being able to study theology, so much as it is a matter of being seen as a child of God and having voice and value within the community of faith and of society. This training is essential to bring the voice of praxis to theological institutions and to bring women's voices to the decision-making tables. To train women from the grassroots in their own context in theology is to bring the world of theology and practice together. When people are taken too far from their homes, they are then conditioned by a theology which does not necessarily lend itself to be preached and practiced with the congregations in the rural areas. Women can use what they know. Women encompass a large part of the work force, as well as are a major voice in the religious community when it comes to justice and peace issues. Despite facing the added burdens of food production, land rights, unemployment, women continue to transform the social order by living out theology.

Evelyn Appiah, executive secretary for Lay Training in the Education and Ecumenical Formation Team of the WCC, reflects on the new generation of ministry in Africa, maintaining that those who are intellectually trained will only serve a certain purpose, but those who are "trained in service to the community through agricultural or other skills will grasp the day to day life of the people and be able to minister to them more effectively." In Ghana, a new kind of ministerial formation needs to take place, so that theological students leave seminary with skills in managing water, building schools and roads. In some countries, local communities are sending farmers or shopkeepers to seminary, understanding that they will return and take up their position in the community, along with the preaching of the gospel and ministering to the people.[11]

In Cuba, Ofelia Ortega, reflects: "there is a need to help our people return to the land." Many micro-enterprise initiatives have come from women, who are especially concerned about issues related to growing food for their families, and to sustaining the life of the people and the land around them. Most of the leaders in the cooperative movement in Cuba, for example, are women. She continues, "the majority of students, including women, graduating from seminaries in Cuba, will work as ministers in rural areas where there is a need for land reform. At the theological seminary, the government gave us a farm for students to be trained in agriculture and gardening." She emphasizes that "today there is a strong progressive movement to transform society to become better. The eco-feminist concerns reflect the understanding that if we destroy the earth, we destroy ourselves. The women's movements for peace began many years ago and now, decades later, we have the 2001 declaration for a decade to overcome violence. Women are working to find new pedagogies of ministry: teaching, preaching, being involved in a culture of peace and struggling with violence in society. We need to give them hope so that they can be leaders both in their churches and in society."[12]

Sarah Chakko's life inspired women to live a more confident life, a life of self-giving, and to have a larger vision of responsibility to others. Her vision had no room for ambition or self-pity. "Don't ever expect the reward for service to be expressed in gratitude or appreciation by those among whom you work", she once said. "The reward lies in what service does to you, yourself - the richness, the sympathy, the humanness it brings you." In a presentation Sarah gave in Madras, she criticized a reference to the work of women as "supplementary benefit", responding, "Is this the function of women – to supplement men?" Sarah suggested that "God had created man and woman to complement each other, and that the aim of all good education is to foster the maximum development of individuals as persons."[13]

Society is transformed when all people with the potential to participate actively, can and do. To leave women silenced and unheard with their work undermined and discredited and their human dignity negated leaves the whole society vulnerable to exploitation. To provide funds for women's theological education uplifts society and encourages the transformation of society at all levels. The good news is that God values us. When our lives are transformed to minister, others are transformed to serve.

---

[1] Sarah Chakko, "The Christian Witness in The World". Public Meeting, August 26th 1948. Paper Presented at World Council of Churches' First Assembly, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 1948.
[2] Ofelia Ortega, Interview Reflecting on the Sarah Chakko Fund at World Council of Churches, Geneva, Switzerland, 2000.
[3] Takyiwaa Manuh, *Women in Africa's Development: Overcoming Obstacles, Pushing for Progress*. Africa Recovery Briefing Paper. United Nations Publication, New York. Number 11, April 1998, p. 4.
[4] Ibid, p. 2.
[5] Nyambura Njoroge, Conversation with global coordinator of Ecumenical Theological Education Programme in WCC, 2000.
[6] *Living Letters: A Report of Visits to the Churches during the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women*. Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997.
[7] Cuthbert Omari, "Women's Ordination: A Viewpoint from Tanzania." in Kanyoro, Musimbi, ed. *In Search of a Round Table: Gender Theology & Church Leadership*. Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997, p. 156-157.
[8] Musimbi Kanyoro, "The Challenge of Feminist Theologies", in Kanyoro, Musimbi, ed. *In Search of a Round Table: Gender Theology & Church Leadership*. Geneva: WCC Publications, 199 p. 177.
[9] Ibid, p. 180.
[10] Ibid, p. 181.
[11] Evelyn Appiah, Interview about Context of Women and Theology in the Development of Ghanan Society. WCC, 2000.
[12] Ofelia Ortega, Interview Reflecting on the Sarah Chakko Fund at World Council of Churches, Geneva, Switzerland 2000.
[13] M. Kurian, *Sarah Chakko: A Voice of Women in the Ecumenical Movement*. Christhava Sahithya Samithy Thiruvalla, Kerala, 1998, p. 107.

COME ASIDE AND REST AWHILE

Esther M. Mombo

"Come Aside and Rest Awhile" was the theme of the seminar for Women in Ministry in Kenya held at St. Paul's United Theological College, Limuru, Kenya, 30 July-15 August 2000[1] . The seminar brought together 65 women from all over the country representing the Anglican Church of Kenya, Presbyterian Church of East Africa, Methodist Church of Kenya, Reformed Church of East Africa, Five Quaker Yearly Meetings, Mennonite Church, Church of Peace in Africa and African Christian Churches and Schools. Some of these women are ordained and others are lay and holding positions of leadership in their churches.

The women came aside to rest and reflect upon the scriptures and the social economic issues that affect their daily work and life. It is during these reflections that one participant remarked:

> *Before I came to this seminar I was referred to as a Deaconess, a title I assumed was Biblical and for women, but after this seminar I am a deacon (Rose.)*
>
> *Amen! Shouted the participants.*

This was a transforming experience for Rose and for others who had similar things to say after attending the seminar. The overall aim of this seminar was to bring together women in leadership positions in their churches to reflect, share ideas and experiences of their life and ministry. Together with this, the women were made aware of developments in the areas of education, socio-economics and politics, which impact their pastoral and leadership roles. The seminar was conducted with the following objectives in mind:

- To analyse the situation of women in leadership positions and the challenges they face;
- To read and analyse the scriptures that are used to negate women in leadership;
- To reflect on the religio-cultural, social, economic and political challenges within the country that impact on their roles as women leaders;
- To seek ways of developing participatory leadership models in the church in various ministries;
- To work out plans of action and to agree on principles of networking.

To achieve these objectives, the seminar programme included plenary presentations, group-discussions, and sharing of experiences through storytelling. Presentations included: "Reading the Scriptures", "Women and the Law in Kenya", "Principles of Effective Writing", "Facts about HIV and AIDS Pandemic", "Stress Management", "Public Relations", "Women's Organisations" and "Violence against Women".

In this paper, I have chosen to share the opening address of the seminar by Beth Mugo[5] , and the topic on Reading the Scriptures. The two topics set the tone of the seminar and provided the participants new ways of looking at issues, hence the transforming experience for some of the participants.

Opening Address: Women in Ministry

Beth Mugo, the prime mover of Affirmative Action in Kenyan Parliament gave the opening address. Mugo asserted that the seminar had come at the right time when women throughout the world, Africa and in particular Kenya are engaged in a just fight against marginalization. Women, for historical and

cultural reasons, are systematically excluded from power and decision making positions. This exclusion is based on stereotypes and other cultural attitudes that are passed down through generations to ensure that women continue to serve a subservient role in society. Consequently, a critical look at the key players in social, religious, political and economic spheres reveals a yawning absence of women.

In the Kenyan cabinet, for example, has had only one woman cabinet minister since Independence in 1963. The current cabinet does not have a single woman minister, yet it is where policies are made for shaping the destiny of the country. There are only two permanent secretaries, yet the permanent secretaries are the chief implementers of policy. Out of 222 members of parliament in Kenya today, only nine are women, representing a paltry 4%. Only 4 of these are elected while various political parties according to their strength in Parliament nominate 5. Other sectors reveal shocking statistics and the church is no different.

This sad scenario is in spite of the fact that women in Kenya constitute 52% of the population. The result of these imbalances has been adoption of gender blind strategies for development. No nation can realise development when more than half of its population is not involved in planning for development. In this regard, there is an urgent need to change and reverse this trend if overall national development and growth are to be realised. Women must participate equally in planning at policy level, implementation and evaluation.

The perpetuation of retrogressive cultures and attitudes that demean the role of women should be discouraged so that women can play their role in national development. Mugo emphasized that women have demonstrated their leadership capabilities even in the Bible. She cited the examples of Judge Deborah and Queen Esther, Judges 4-5 and Book of Esther, respectively. Owing to Esther's wisdom and decisiveness, the whole nation was spared. Women are endowed with wisdom, determination, commitment and kindness.

The crusade for gender equity and equality has often been misconstrued to mean that women want to turn around and seize leadership so that they can oppress men. But what women are advocating for is recognition of women's capabilities and expertise. We are saying that women also have certain qualities that can help shape the quality of leadership in this country. Women want to be recognised as equal partners in social, political and economic development of this country.

Recently Mugo moved a motion in parliament on Affirmative Action in order to bring women to a position, from which they can be able to influence and push for gender justice and social service delivery policies. An Affirmative Action is a deliberate but temporary measure whose aim is to accelerate the participation of marginalized groups, which in this case are mainly women in our society.

The aim of Affirmative Action that Mugo together with other women leaders are advocating is aimed at increasing the number of women in parliament and local authorities by creating a critical mass of 30%. Such a mass of women will hopefully be able to influence debate in the national assembly in order to make the proceedings of the House more issue-focused, for overall national growth and development. It would also promote enactment of laws, which are people centred.

Affirmative Action is not a new concept only isolated to Kenya. It has been used in countries such as the United States of America, the great morality of the civil rights stemmed from the realisation and conviction that no nation can stand half free and half servile. The conscience of white America could not stand the paradox of touting the USA as a democracy in view of the massive violations of the human rights and dignity of African Americans and other minorities. This created need for legislative reforms aimed at

ending the historical discrimination against the African Americans and also adoption of Affirmative Action in all areas including employment in favour of African Americans and other minorities.

In Africa, the countries, which have adopted political Affirmative Action, have demonstrated that the concept is a prime mover towards economic development. Uganda and South Africa, for example, have made significant strides in increasing participation of women in the political arena due to explicit Affirmative Action interventions by the government. Statistics indicate that women constitute 18% and 27 % of the national assemblies of both Uganda and South Africa respectively. Both countries, emerging from turbulent historical backgrounds, have achieved faster economic growth by taking women on board in their development programmes and strategies, not only as implementers but also as planners, contributors and beneficiaries.

That being the case then, Kenya cannot continue to live in isolation. If the country is to play a bigger role in the region, and also ensure that it is not left behind, we have to lobby the government to adopt Affirmative Action..

Although the church has realised that women have a significant role to play in the church and the wider society, women are still confined to the lower strata of church service rather than key decision making positions. It is therefore important for the church to involve women even in their development plans so that they can demonstrate their expertise for the welfare of the church and society.

At times many churchwomen are discouraged from engaging in politics, describing it as a dirty game. Politics in itself is not dirty, Mugo insisted. On the contrary, politics is as dirty as we make it. For this reason, the church should take a leading role in encouraging members, particularly women to vie for seats in parliament, local authorities and also in district development committees so that together, women too can help in providing quality leadership in the country. After all, politics is the mover of all development as it is the centre of policy and decision-making.

We however need to adopt explicit Affirmative Action in politics first so that women's voices can influence policies to make them more sensitive to the special needs of women and family.

The historic Fourth United Nations Conference for Women, held in Beijing, Republic of China, 1995 created the impetus needed to make change. At this Conference, governments, non-government organisations and the civil society made several declarations to redress the saddening situation of all women around the world. This came to be referred to as the Beijing Platform for Action.

The Beijing Platform for Action identified twelve solid strategic objectives and economic empowerment of women was highlighted as a requisite for achieving the desired gender equality in social, economic and political fronts. Despite these commitments made by governments including Kenya, it is sad to note that five years down the line, the government has not yet enacted legislation that guarantees equal access to control and ownership of economic resources.

Therefore, when we advance economic empowerment of women, we are ultimately promoting national development because any income in the hands of women goes towards the support of the family, while having economically stable families provides the foundation for overall economic stability of our nation.

In order to address the challenge of poverty alleviation in the 21st century, we must look at the economic policies in place and critically address the impact of the structural adjustment policies on women. The

emphasis has tended to be on macro-economic as opposed to micro-economic policies, which is what affects the majority of women. We therefore need to develop more gender-sensitive economic policies, which focus on the needs of women so as to reduce the feminisation of poverty.

In an agricultural society like Kenya, there cannot be greater injustice than to be excluded from land ownership and control. It is plainly unforgivable that 52% of the population should own a mere 5% of land titles. This has adversely affected women's social, economic and political status. For example, for 43 lending institutions in rural areas, it is estimated that rural women borrowers represent no more than 10% of all loaners. In urban areas, women constitute a significant portion of Kenya's informal entrepreneurs, yet for a woman seeking to start a small business or enterprise, the lack of a title deed in her name means that she is denied credit by the formal institutions. We should therefore advocate for the establishment of a Woman's Development Bank to advance loans to women in the informal sector.

The church has to come up with strategies of advancing support for poor women to enable them to venture in to small-scale businesses. This would empower women and it would also reduce dependency and poverty in female-headed households. Another major obstacle to economic empowerment of women is the existence of discriminative laws in the labour market. In some instances, women are paid lower salaries than men who have the same qualifications, while promotion is in many cases given to men in total disregard of merit. Although the government received a report on the laws that are discriminating against women, the report is still awaiting implementation.

The very recognition that women constitute the largest segments of the disadvantaged and oppressed groups, suggests that involving them in decision-making and implementation in the socio-economic and political process is a basic, in fact urgent requirement. This seminar has come in handy for women to share views about the role of the church in empowering women.

The church like other institutions should provide women with opportunities to exercise their leadership roles by placing them in various committees in the church. This will not only make women visible but will also help in shaping public opinion on women. The women who have ventured in male-dominated sectors of church ministry and have even been ordained need to be congratulated and supported.

Reading the Scriptures.

The Bible is regarded as the authoritative and normative witness to divine revelation and provides Christianity with its dominant narratives, images and symbols. These are taken up in preaching, teaching, prayer, worship and doctrines and thus play an extraordinarily powerful part in shaping the religious consciousness of believers. During the seminar reading the scriptures took place at worship when different women preached from selected texts. On the second day of the seminar, the late Margaret Ouma[3] read from the Book of Esther. Ouma asserted that patriarchal decrees needs to be dismantled, just like the decree of King Ahuserus that was designed to wipe out the Jews.

The Genesis Creation Stories.

Because of the significance of the Bible for women in ministry, six sessions were devoted to reading and interpreting scriptures, especially the creation stories and portions of Pauline epistles that are used to subordinate women both in the home, the church and society at large.

Rev. Samuel Githuku[6] led the participants in analysing the traditional interpretation of the Genesis creation stories, which are used to put women in a position of inferiority and passivity. Issues such as woman were created as an after thought; woman's existence psychologically and in the social order is dependent on man and the woman is degraded to be a man's helper. The woman is directly held responsible for both sinning and seducing. Tradition of Genesis 2-3 denies the equality of sexes as the woman is seen as "Adam's rib" because she was (formed) created from Adam's rib i.e. there was no divine labour. Hence inferiority and subordination is assigned to the woman. The man naming the woman is misleading as having control similar to that man has over other animals. The oppressive interpretation is fully supported by Western, Jewish and African cultures.

Since most of the participants had been schooled in the traditional interpretation of the Genesis stories, the Bible Study was used to re-read the story and to look at interpretations that challenge traditional interpretation. Through reading and analysing the text and particular words the following analysis was arrived at.

Adam as a genetic term: Hence the command to till and keep the garden, and not to eat the fruit (3:17-19) are given to both man and woman. In both the creation stories (Genesis 1:1-2:4a) and (2:4b-25), male is equal to the female. The second creation story subordinates the woman. However the last may be first. The woman is not an after thought she is a culmination. Genesis 1 supports this, because man and woman were created last.

In Genesis 2-3, the Hebrew word '*Ezer*', which is applied to Eve, has been traditionally translated as ' helper' implying a position of inferiority and passivity. Yet the word '*Ezer*' is a relational term. It is a word denoting authority and even leadership; it is most often used of God to speak of God's relationship with Israel. (Ps.121:2, 124:8; 146:5, 33:20, 115:9-11, Exodus 18:4, Deut.33:7, 26, 29). Thus the word has more meaning of 'partner' than 'helper'.

In both the creation of man and woman God alone creates. Man has no part in making woman. He is no participant, nor spectator nor consultant. Like man the woman owes her life solely to the mystery of God. Both the man and the woman are made from raw materials: man from dust, woman from a rib. The Lord God shapes man from the dust and breaths into it to form man. The Lord God takes a rib and builds it into a woman. Both require divine labour. It is therefore wrong to call a woman Adam's rib'. There has often been a claim that the rib means inferiority or subordination in order to assign the man qualities over the woman, which is not in the text. What does the rib mean? The rib means solidarity and equality (Gen 2:23).

In Genesis 1 both male and female are referred to as *Adham*. – No exclusive male reference has appeared. When man is called *Ish* the woman is at the same time called *Isha*. Sexuality is simultaneous for woman and man. In Genesis 2:23 it is written, "she shall be called woman". This has traditionally been used to subordinate women but in re-reading the text we find the term *gara*, -to call. The verb or noun formulas we find in other texts where the word "name" is used (Genesis 5:17; 5:25, 26). Genesis 2:23 has the verb "call" but does not have the object "name".

In calling the animals by name, *Adham* establishes supremacy over them and fails to find a fit helper. In calling woman, *Adham* does not name her and does find in her a counter part. This argument is supported further by the fact that woman itself is not a name but a common noun. It is not a proper noun. *Adham* recognises sexuality by the word *Isha* and *Ish*. This recognition is not an act of naming to assert the power of male over female.

Genesis 3 has been used to blame the woman for the Fall. She is described as the seducer and temptress, a weaker sex because the snake approached her and not the man. We may not be able to know why the snake spoke to the woman we may just speculate that her imagination surpasses that of man. Some scholars have said it was due to a woman's weakness or sexual attraction, which later ruined the man and the woman.[5] However the contrast between the man and the woman fades in their acts of disobedience. Both knew knowledge, both heard and hid, both flew from God (3:8). When the man is asked why he ate, he fails to be responsible (3:12). He does not blame woman. He blames the deity. The Hebrew word *natan* (give) does not mean seduction. Traditions have made the woman the temptress, this is wrong. The woman accuses the snake for deception/seduction – *msh* – a different word from *ntn*.

Both the man and woman are condemned for their judgement. Tradition has misread this judgement as a prescription but it is a description. Genesis 3:16 as a result, stating to the woman that her husband shall rule over her.

This statement is not a license to male supremacy but rather a condemnation of it as subjugation and supremacy are perversions of creation. Sin does not only destroy the relationship between man and woman, but also between animals and human beings (3:15); mother and children (3:16); husbands and wives (3:16); people and the soil (3:17-18); humanity and its work (3:19). These judgements are culturally oriented: husband and work, childbearing and woman, wife and work (farming). Only grace can make man and woman have a new beginning.

Pauline Epistles

Professor Anne Jarvis[6] led the sessions on the Paul and women. In dealing with Paul and women, the first thing that must be admitted is that Paul has somewhat of a reputation on this topic. That is so because his words have been used to validate the most misogynist of attitudes. There are indeed some words of Paul, which are very much read as if he believed that women were inferior. But in passages such as Galatians 3:28 and Romans 16.1-6, Paul affirms the equality of women both in theory and practice. In the passage from Galatians we see the example of Paul's understanding of the significance of faith in Christ between men and women and in Romans 16, we find evidence of the manner in which he related to women within the Christian community. We have then in these two passages indications both of Paul's theory and his praxis regarding women. Not that Paul would necessarily have considered that he was ever concerned with the 'issue of women', women's issues were not high on Paul's agenda. Nevertheless we can see that Paul's believe in the overarching and radical salvation offered to all in Christ produced for him a fresh vision of the world and all that is in it – including women.

With regard to Galatians 3:28, there is a broad scholarly consensus that something very close to this verse was ready made when Paul put it into his letter. Many think that this was a very early statement that was used by the early Christians to describe what had happened to a believer in baptism. If this conjecture is right, it means that in the earliest Christian communities there was a teaching for new believers that in baptism they put on Christ, they entered into Christ and in so doing left behind all those distinctions and divisions which plagued the world without Christ.

One of the most interesting features of Galatians 3:28 is that it echoes Genesis 1:27. Early Christians explained their faith experience and understanding of salvation in terms of being restored to that state of grace before the Fall. Being a Christian meant being incorporated into a body in which religious, social and gender barriers and boundaries had lost their significance. Being baptised into Christ meant belonging to a community in which the only relevant definition for a person was that he or she had been granted to

be among the children of God. (Gal 3:6). The point that Paul makes in Gal 3:8 is that the significance of faith in Christ is that our primary identity now is Christ rather than any social, religious or gender distinctiveness.

But is Paul's claim here about the oneness of believers in Christ a claim that has meaning only in the light of God's ultimate plan for humanity? Is this merely a statement of spiritual truth that has no concrete connection to daily life? The difficulty of course is that while Paul explicitly deals with the issue of Jews and Gentiles he doesn't deal with the oppression of slaves or women directly. In this case Paul's words cannot be read as a challenge to social distinctions. Perhaps we should understand Paul's unfortunate silence as due not to his acceptance of slavery or social inequality for women but rather as due to the circumstances of his ministry.

Romans: 16:3-16.

Although a third of the list of list of people Paul greets are women traditionally, some of the feminine endings of name have been mistranslated as male names, thus obscuring the role of women in the early Christian movement. In Romans 16: 1-3, Paul introduces a woman named Phoebe to the Roman congregation. Paul describes Phoebe as 'our sister' who is a *diakonon* of the church of Cencherea, and as a *protatis* of many including of Paul himself. Paul requests the Roman congregation to receive her in the Lord as is worthy of the saints and to help her in whatever way she may have need.

The two words '*diakonon*' and '*prostates*' have traditionally been translated as 'deaconess' and 'helper'. These translations have resulted in an image of Phoebe as a figure of little significance to the early Christian mission. But how is the word '*diakonon*' used here? Paul uses the word *diakonon* for his closest co-worker, Timothy whom he calls 'our brother' and God's '*diakonos*' (I Thess. 3:2). Paul uses the term in I Cor 3:5; 2 Cor 3:6; 6:4; 11:15, 23 to refer to missionaries. The word '*diakonon*' then refers to a person who is a leader or representative. The word is in the masculine case when referring to Phoebe. This suggests that at the time there was no distinction between a male and female deacon, and therefore no difference in role according to gender.

There seems not to be a category of deaconess in the New Testament, which is used for women in some denominations. When was it invented and for what reasons? This is found in the 3rd and 4th century Christian literature where we find the feminine '*diakonisa*'. So when Paul introduces Phoebe to his readers as a '*diakonos*' of the church of Cencherea, he would almost certainly have expected them to assume that she was a leader of the church and one whom he had approved.

Phoebe is also referred to as *protatis*. This has typically been translated to mean 'helper' and interpreted to mean a kind and charitable churchwoman. However, in recent years it has been recognised that '*protatis*' was used to refer to an important person in the world in which this was written, usually a wealthy person, usually a patron of others.

The discussion on the title deacon did not end here as many of the participants wished to know more especially those who came from traditions that used the title. We put on a special session to look into the issue, facilitated by John A. Chesworth[7] . In this session the participants using a variety of translations examined the way the Greek word for deacon had been translated. The verses used were Acts 6:1, Romans 12:7, Romans 16:1, Philippians 1:1, I Tim 3:8. From these readings the most telling was the Romans 16:1 as most translators opt for deaconess, which could mean female deacon and therefore having equal status to a male deacon. However it is usually used to place the female in a subordinate

position. The word in the Greek can be either male or female – so it is difficult to agree with the reading deaconess – rather female deacon.

When the participants looked at the early church, relevant passages were quoted from the *Didascalia*[8] these made it clear that female deacons had a clear role in the service of the church. Also from the *Apostolic Constitutions*[9] , which again showed a role for women in the service of the church. Finally we looked at the *Liturgy in Ancient Jerusalem*.[10] All these sources demonstrated that female deacons did have a role in the early church. However it seems to be clear that this role was in helping with women in the church, for propriety's sake in Baptism and with the possessed.

This section concluded with the fact that after the end of the period of the Church Fathers, the role of women as servants in the church was clearly called deaconess and by the 11th Century AD the office of deaconess had disappeared. This can be seen as being due to the strong male stance of the Church Elders, without any clear biblical remit. However with the rise of the Monastic Orders some women achieved prominence. Hilda of Whitby was Abbess of a Joint Monastery and presided over the Synod of Whitby, which brought the Celtic and Roman Churches together in Britain in the 7th Century.

After the Reformation period we find some denominations reconstructing the Female Diaconate. The *Unitas Fratrum* (United Brethren) usually known as the Moravian Church was the first modern church to institute an order of deaconesses together with the proposed order of priestesses. That is a woman taking on these roles. During the 19th Century the Lutherans in Germany, Pastor Fliedner, and the Anglicans in Britain, Rev. Pennefather, had started Orders of deaconesses. These were Orders that allowed 19th Century, single women, largely upper and middle class, to have a role in the church[11] . The present situation in Kenya varies from one denomination to another. The order of deaconess is prominent in the Anglican Church although it is not uniquely Anglican.

I Corinthians 11 & 2 Timothy

These are the Pauline passages that are used in many occasions to push women further away from church leadership. Very often these passages are read out of context and interpreted to suit the culture of some societies. These passages are quoted to women who aspire high office in the ministry of the church. They are used against the ordination of women, or to determine the way women are supposed to dress.

In I Cor. 11, Paul seems to be reminding the people of something they have misunderstood from him. It has nothing to do with the way women dress in your context today or whether they should speak in public or not, it is not a passage about roles or about who can do what. In the passage both men and women pray and prophesy in the congregation. The passage is about what they should wear on their heads when they come to worship because it mattered a great deal. In Paul's culture respectable men and women dressed in certain ways just like us in our cultures, respectable women and men dress in certain ways. A respectable man according to Paul wore his hair short and a respectable woman wore her hair long. Paul is concerned that his congregation at Corinth look respectable. Men look like men and women look like men.

The congregation at Corinth may have misunderstood Paul's teaching of Galatians 3:28, thinking that in Christ they ceased to be men or women. Paul uses the second creation story when stressing his point about the distinctions between men and women. He wants Christian men and women to look like men and women, just like, would look like in the street.

In I Timothy 2 Paul deals with yet another issue of prayer. Again when this passage is looked at in context it is clear that Paul is not just getting at women because of whom they are in society but both men and women to be modest when they come to pray. Paul is not saying that the female gender should worship God through good deeds and the male gender through leadership.

As regards teaching we are aware that women were teachers in the early church, there is no doubt about this. Among the teachers Paul trusted were women like Priscilla. Given the precedence for women teachers it is no wonder that women were expected to be teachers. This can be argued that the instruction given here is specific to the situation of Ephesus. There was a particular problem to which this instruction was given that women should not teach. What we can gather is that one of the chief problems in the Ephesus congregation was that people who in the author's view had swerved from the true teaching were teaching false doctrine.

The aspect of learning is important to note. As in Ephesus women are included in the learning process. Unlike many groups in the Graceo-Roman world, this Christian group included women in the learning environment.

What we have in this letter is a prescription to a problem concerning women who were teaching. We do not have the diagnosis of the problem for which the prescription was given. His socio-cultural and his convictional framework would have formed the author's diagnosis of the problem. He likely saw women teachers as a social anomaly and, while he may have known about women teachers in the church (*èkklèsia*), he clearly felt free to deny women such a role – because it was socially acceptable to limit the activity of women. The part of his diagnosis, which was culturally formed, made him comfortable with denying women certain positions.

The convictional framework, which formed his diagnosis, was, on the other hand, not focused on gender hierarchy. An assumption about gender hierarchy was clearly something the author imbibed from his culture. But his convictional/theological framework concerned, as he says in I Tim 1:15, Christ Jesus who came into the world to save sinners; I Tim 2:4, God our Saviour who desires all to be saved; in I Tim 3:16, God who was manifested in the flesh, vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels.

This convictional framework does not in any way necessitate the social subordination of women. But it does require a certain type of community characterised by, as he says repeatedly, holding the faith and a good conscience. The author's repeated concern is whether or not the truth of the Pauline gospel is being maintained. It is this convictional framework, which shaped his diagnosis of the problem at Ephesus. He judged there to be a problem with the women teaching at Ephesus on the basis of whether or not they were holding onto the convictions about the faith.

In concert with his cultural assumptions about the appropriate roles for women this diagnosis meant that the author's prescription was: "Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or to *authentein* over men; she is to keep silent".

It has been suggested that the part of the diagnosis, which is culturally formed is irrelevant in much of the modern context: by and large we do not live in a culture that assumes the social subordination of women. The part of the diagnosis that is convictionally formed is valid only when we women (and men) do not understand the character and content of the Pauline gospel.

The sessions on "Reading the Scriptures" were not only a challenge to the participants but refreshing and affirming. At the end of the seminar we had testimonies on how re-reading the scriptures had been

of help to the participants and how they were going to use the knowledge to sensitise others. To capture the mood of the seminar, Doreen Gaitenga[12] summed up the sessions in the following poem with which, I wish to conclude this paper.

I Am A Woman in Suffering.

A woman, a woman not recognised
Not noticeable in society.
I am a woman created in God's image,
Before I was born he formed me in my mother's womb
I am fearfully and wonderfully made
He created me not inferior but equal.

Like a donkey in all aspects of life
Nobody involves me in decision-making.
Living in a patriarchal society is difficult:
Women are supposed to keep quiet.
Culture expects her to be submissive,
Regarding her as nothing but a woman.

Aspiring to be a leader is impossible;
Men have all the power of votes.
I'm only given tokens of small services,
A Sunday school teacher, she could do better
Though hardworking I'm not recognised;
Men are valued, they can do better.

I can't be heard because I'm a woman,
I can't be an administrator as a woman
A man is better especially in the church.
My fellow women also oppress me.
They are not to be blamed for this,
Culture influences them to look down upon me.

As a single lady I can't be myself.
I'm always told to impress men.
Who can marry you? They all say
This is because I speak my mind.
Refusing oppression is my policy in life,
Though forced to work hard to prove myself.

But do you know what they all say?
I work hard to impress male colleagues
I'm despised by men imprisoned and tortured;
Emotionally, physically and psychologically
Tell me why, why am I suffering?
The church gives no refuge to women.

There are many obstacles in women's life
In colleges, working places and social places.
I have no peace anywhere, but stress.
But did Jesus love women as his friends?
Yes Jesus loved them and helped them.
They were his witnesses in the world too.

The woman with the flow of blood was loved.
The Samaritan woman was loved at the well.
Mary was chosen as Jesus' mother.
This makes me feel loved and called.
For how long then should I weep?
I will rise up and claim my freedom.

Charity begins at home, so it is said.
I have managed in many areas of life.
Why, tell me why I may not manage in the church.
Why, why is it impossible to succeed?
If God died for me to redeem me,
Who can be against me as a woman?

---

[1] This seminar was sponsor by a group-training grant from the Scholarship Office in the Education and Ecumenical Formation Team of the World Council of Churches, Geneva, Switzerland.

[2]Beth Mugo is a Presbyterian laywoman and a Member of Parliament from the Social Democratic Party (S.D.P.) representing Dagoretti Constituency in Nairobi.

[3] The late Rev. Margaret Oumo died in January 2001 while serving as an Anglican Priest in Njoro Parish, Diocese of Nakuru. She was the first woman to be ordained in that Diocese and one of the few women priests in Kenya. She led a discussion paper on Women in Ministry.

[4]Rev. Sammy Githuku is Old Testament lecturer at St. Paul's United Theological College. He led discussion paper on 'Traditional Exegesis of Genesis 2 & 3' .

[5]For more discussion see McKenzie John "The Literary Characteristic of Genesis 2-3" *Theological Studies* vol.15 (1954).

[6] Professor Anne Jarvis visiting professor of New Testament, Wycliffe College, University of Toronto, Canada led discussion paper on 'Paul and Women'.

[7] John A. Chesworth is a lecturer of Islam at St. Paul's United Theological College. He led discussion paper on 'Deacon-Deaconess'.

[8] Brock, S. & Vasey, M. *The Liturgical Portions of the Didascalia* Grove Liturgical Study 29 Bramcote: Grove Books 1982 (22,23)

[9] Jardine Grisbrooke, W. *The Liturgical Portions of the Apostolic Constitutions* Alcuin/GROW Liturgical Study 13-14 Bramcote: Grove Books 1990 (74-76)

[10] Baldovin, J.F. *Liturgy in Ancient Jerusalem* Alcuin/GROW Liturgical Study 9 Bramcote: Grove Books 1989.

[11] Douglas, J.H. *Dictionary of Church History* 1978 Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 285,286, 676.

[12] Doreen Gaitenga, a Methodist ministerial student at St. Paul's United Theological College was a participant in the seminar.

PREACHING TO THE CONVERTED: UNSETTLING THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH! A Theological View: A Scriptural Injunction[1]

Musa W. Dube

> *Woe to you… hypocrites… for you have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice, mercy and faith.*
> Matt.23:23

The Difficult Task of Preaching to the Converted

In a church that I used to attend, there was a trained and full time pastor who was never given a pulpit to preach. Whenever the main pastor was away on some business, some other church elder was asked to preach instead of him. Upon inquiring about this anomaly, I was informed he is an evangelist. Whenever he stands up to preach, he preaches a hard-core message of repentance, even when he is preaching to the converted. It was said that he had a congregation of his own, but the congregation slowly fell apart for every Sunday he stood up and screamed a message of repentance to the committed believers of his church. He called them sinners and asked them to repent. Each time they would repent, but the following Sunday he would be back with the same message of repentance. When the congregation disintegrated, the church board decided that he is an evangelist, that is, a bearer of good news to the unbelievers.

This reminds me of my own experience when I was still a secondary school student and an active member of Student Christian Movement (SCM). One day, I met a zealous Christian girl in a Christian gathering. She asked me, "Have you received the Lord Jesus as your savior? Are you born again?" I said, " Yes." As if she did not hear me, she began to preach to me. She told me to repent, to accept Jesus as my savior, to be born again. You can imagine my response. Even to this day I can tell you what time it was, where I was sitting, what I was looking at and how I felt. I can tell you for sure that I was looking at the wall, trying to tell my undeterred preacher girl, "Shut up. Go and find non-believers and preach to them, if you really want to preach a message of repentance." And her sermon seemed to last so long. I wasembarrassed and insulted.

The lesson is clear here: preaching a message of repentance to the converted is a difficult task, or even not advised. The Christian church finds this message unsettling. Yet we must ask: why are believers so intolerant to the evangelists, the bearers of good news? Why don't we, the believers, hear the evangelists gladly? And why is the message of repentance so difficult for us the converted? We must ask ourselves, if the message of repentance is, perhaps, the most important message that we need to hear and we are all the time resisting, looking to the walls, running away for we think we are the converted?

I was reminded of these stories of my past on Wednesday morning at the gym. I was sitting on my bike and cycling hard to burn some calories as I prayed about the task ahead-- the "scriptural injunction" that Father Gary Thompson asked me to bring to you this morning. I asked the Lord, "What message must I give to this important HIV/AIDS consultation, whose theme is, "together we can make a difference?" Three images sprang to my mind: John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness; Jesus harsh Sermon in Matthew 23 and the image of my mother – a mother to thirteen children, whom I immediately linked with the wailing voice of Rachel.

Of course, I was alarmed, for I immediately remembered the pastor/evangelist who could not preach in a church and the girl who preached to me. I said to myself, '"but how can I deliver a message of repentance to the converted?" I certainly did not wish to stand before this congregation of holy women and men and speak in the words of John the Baptist saying to you, "Repent, you brood of vipers!" I could not imagine myself speaking to you in the words of Jesus in Matthew 23 and saying, 'shame to you, you hypocrites!"– when I know you spend many selfless hours of your lives laboring for God's reign of justice to be established on earth.

I was unsettled, for I certainly know better. I know that to preach a message of repentance to the converted is a risk, it's a non-starter, especially when you are seeking for unity/togetherness of Christian churches, for instead of bringing people together one risks to disintegrate the congregation of God's people. The converted immediately feel uncomfortable. They say to themselves, "Hello, What's up? We are believers. Tell us a message fitting for our faith, not a message of repentance.' The converted switch off. They feel insulted, judged and undermined. They begin to say, 'Do you undermine our salvation, our faith, our testimony? They begin to ask themselves if you one of those fundamentalist Christians who say, 'Unless you are born again, speak in tongues and go to the kind of my church you are not a believer.'

I certainly do not like it myself when someone preaches to me a message of repentance – I very well know how to look away to the walls. Yet here we are this morning, Johannesburg, Duneden Hotel. We have come down from the greatest cities of our countries: Lusaka, Luanda, and Blantyre. We have come from Geneva, Maputo, Maseru, Manzini. Yes, we have come all the way from Harare, Gaborone and Pretoria to consult each other on how we can *work together* to make a differenc – and the scriptural injunction I bring to you, I am afraid, is "Repent! Repent, for Rachel is weeping and wailing for her children. Rachel will not be consoled for her children are not more! I, therefore, invite you this morning to avoid the walls, to avoid the ceiling, to avoid the windows and the floors – which we tend to befriend whenever some zealous evangelist says to us, "turn or burn." I invite you to try to hear again the message of repentance as a message that is fitting for u – a message that should bring the church together than divide us in our fight against HIV/AIDS. Allow me, therefore, to elaborate, on what I saw in these three images, beginning, of course, with John the Baptist.

1st Image: John the Baptist is Calling, Repent!'

I saw and I heard John the Baptist, standing in the wilderness and screaming, "repent for the kingdom of heaven is near!" I saw many people coming out of Judea, repenting and getting baptized, confessing their sins. I saw Pharisees and Sadducees coming from Jerusalem to repent and to get Baptized confessing their sins. I heard John the Baptist saying to the Pharisees and Sadducees, "You brood of vipers, who warned you of the wrath to come? Bear fruit worth of repentance. Do not presume to say to yourselves, "We have Abraham and Sarah as our ancestors; for I tell you, out of these stones God is able to raise up children to them" (Matt 3:7-9)

I had plenty of time to appreciate what I saw in the story of John the Baptist. John was preaching to the Jews, a people who knew and lived according to the law of God. He was preaching, in short, to the converted. Yet I saw, "The people of Jerusalem and all Judea going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins" (Matt 3:3). I saw "many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for Baptism" (v.7). I very much appreciated the response of the Sadducees and the Pharisees.[2] These were the spiritual and political leaders of the Holy nation of God, Israel. The Sadducees were Priests, men of the collar, who administered the holy sacraments in the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem. The Pharisees, were committed men of God. They spent their time

learning the law, interpreting the law, teaching the law and taking care to keep the law. Pharisees spent minute moments of their lives agonizing with the question of '*What does the Lord require of us?*' Indeed, historical studies hold that when Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed in the Jewish-Roman war of 63-70 CE it was a national crisis for the Jews. The Pharisees managed to keep the faith of God's people together, for they had always practiced a spirituality that flowed into all aspects and moments of their lives – a spirituality that did not revolve around the Temple and Jerusalem. They managed to offer a viable solution of survival in a period of national crisis. With or without the temple and Jerusalem, the Pharisees were able to show their fellow Jews, that it is still possible to know and to keep what the Lord requires of them.

Yet we note that when John was proclaiming the message of repentance, these Jewish leaders heeded the call. They left Jerusalem, went down to the wilderness of Judea to listen, to confess their sins and to be baptized, like everyone else. We note that John is a little bit surprised and harsh on the Sadducees and the Pharisees. He looks at these spiritual and political leaders of nation and says to them, you "brood of vipers, who warned you of the wrath to come?" (Matt 3: 7). This question is indeed surprising for John himself was the proclaimer. Everyone who was coming and repenting and getting baptized was acknowledging their sinfulness despite the fact that they were the converted – a people of God.

I must say, however, that I had a good time appreciating John the Baptist's job. He was preaching to the converted and he did not fear anyone. He did not have the conflicts that I had. He did not mince his words before the powerful spiritual and national leaders. John the Baptist looked at these leaders in the eye, and said, "You brood of vipers, who warned you of the wrath to come? " It takes courage to speak like that to your superiors, your bosses, your Bishops and your priests. Another surprise in the story, is that whereas I said, the converted are very unfriendly to anyone who preaches a message of repentance to them, the story of John the Baptist presents a different picture. The story shows us that the converted do listen to the message of repentance. They do need to confess their sins and to get baptized.[3] The picture we get from John the Baptist is that the spiritual and political leaders are in fact the worst sinners – *they are a brood of vipers*. But if he spoke harshly to them, they did not protest.

Now I know this room is packed full of national and international spiritual leaders. What if I say to you, come down from Jerusalem, come down from the temple; come down to the wilderness, to Jordan – listen, confess your sins and be baptized? Would you be willing to see yourselves as brood of vipers? Would you be willing to hear the command that you need to bear "fruits that are worthy of repentance? What if I tell you: do not presume that you are the Christian church, do not count on your traditions; your various Christian ancestors; your Jerusalem cities – what if I tell you that "God can raise up children outside your churches? What if I look you in the eye and tell you, as Jesus said, "Prostitutes and tax-collectors will enter heaven before you?" (Matt 21:28). Would you repent? You must.

Some of us may be listening and thinking – "*hai mane*,(no) do not tell us anything about Pharisees and Sadducees. They were sinners and they needed to repent." A strongly negative image of Pharisees in the gospels has indeed misled many of us to overlook the historical fact; namely, that they were holy men who spent minute moments of their lives seeking the face of the Lord. Indeed, the negative portrait of Sadducees and Pharisee has greatly contributed to anti-Semitism. But a close reading of the gospels indicates that Jesus closely engaged with them, because the issues of the law and the keeping of the temple were in their hands. But I suppose, some listeners may still insist, saying, "Please, do not compare us with Pharisees and Sadducees. Those needed to repent and to be baptized.' To these, I am happy to say, "OK. But this is not where the story of John the Baptist ends. Allow me to take you further into what we must all see."

Jesus Repented and Confessed His Sins

As the story continues, we see Jesus also responding to the message of John the Baptist. The text tells us that, "Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be Baptized by him." (23:13). Now we must not forget that John the Baptist was preaching a message of repentance of sins and Jesus responded positively. Jesus whom we the Christians hold quite highly as the Son of God, as one without sin, heard the message of repentance and came seeking to undergo the Baptism of John.[4] Of course, this is not agreeable to many Christians, who would like to think of Jesus as holy, yet Jesus himself said, "why do you call me good, no-one is good but God" (Mark 10: 17).[5] In this story we note that John the Baptist himself was shocked by the response of Jesus. He began to back away. This was more than what he had bargained for. The text tells us that John could have prevented Jesus from undergoing the Baptism of sins as he protested saying, "*I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?*" [6] (v.14)

The move of Jesus is instructive. That is, if Jesus responded to the message of repentance, we are certainly not above our master (John 13:13-14). The response of Jesus tells us that he could hear and learn from people who were lower than him. It is, therefore, a good moment for us to reflect seriously as Christian leaders, as a people of faith; as the church: Do we regard ourselves as high up there, Holy? Or do we acknowledge we need a message of repentance? Do we hold that we know it all and people have to learn from us, they must get baptized by us – or do we believe there are moments that we must come down from the thrones of our power and learn from people who are lower than us? How does our self-understanding play itself in the age of HIV/AIDS? How does it inform our response and our impact?

The Church and Its Leadership Must Repent
From Theological Mediocrity

I suspect that we the Christian church and our leadership in this HIV/AIDS era are hindered to hear the message of salvation or even to preach the message of salvation, for we believe the world is sinful and we are Holy. We believe that we must preach the message of repentance and the world must repent. Consequently, we more often than not, claim that those who are infected and afflicted by HIV /AIDS are punished by God for their sins. Instead of fighting HIV/AIDS we mistakenly begin to fight the victims. Instead of doing away with the stigma associated with HIV/AIDS we add to it. This indicates that many of us are not ready to say – we all need to repent, Christians and non-Christians alike, for we are both failing to abstain, to be faithful. If the Christians are not failing how else do we, explain the fact that "churches are themselves living with HIV/AIDS" that our church "members fall ill, become incapacitated, die and are buried." The claim that HIV/AIDS is a punishment from God indicates that many of us have not yet come to terms with the fact that HIV/AIDS is violating the will and reign of God and it is not, and cannot be, sent by God.

The fact that some Christian leaders still say, "Those who are dying of HIV/AIDS are punished by God. They are paying for their immoral lives," reflects our theological immaturity. It is theological understanding that needs to change, for it does not explain the children who are born with HIV/AIDS infection. Neither does it sufficiently confront the problem of married women who are married to unfaithful partners. It cannot address the situation of those women and girls who are raped in their homes, on the roads, in the offices and in their churches. This theological understanding does not cater for the sex workers, who have to choose between dying of hunger and selling sex.[7] Neither does it address the question of loving mothers and the old women in the rural areas, the nurses who get infected in the process of caring for the sick. Is God punishing these groups of people, have they sinned?

A Theological Shift Is Needed in an HIV/AIDS Context

The fact that Jesus went around healing the sick, signifies that health is God's will for all people. If Jesus did not care to ask his patients, "how did you get your illness, but mainly cared that they were restored to full health, it seems to me that we need to shift our theological focus and concentrate on the healing of God's people without judgment. We need to operate from a theological standpoint that holds that health is a God given right to all people and the whole creation. HIV/AIDS is an illness an epidemic that violates God's creation and kingdom – it is not and cannot be sent by God.

One of the debates that seem to consume energies in the church and its leadership, and which, in my opinion, indicates an urgent need to shift our theological focus, is the condom debate. Many argue that condoms promote promiscuity. Other church leaders point and capitalize on the fact that condoms are not hundred percent safe – as if to abstain and to be faithful has proved to be 100% safe in the church or outside. If there are voices in the church leadership that advocate the use of condoms, as one of the viable preventative intervention strategies, there are way too few and most of the time they remain silent, perhaps, to facilitate unity amongst churches. It is, therefore, correct to say most of the time we are too tired to revisit the condom as church, for we fear it will divide us, it will not get us anyway.

The sensibilities surrounding the condom debate in the church are connected to what we regard as Christian sexual values of holiness. As church leaders we are afraid to talk about the condom, for if we do, we might be heard to be promoting sex outside marriage. We are also afraid to promote it among married couples, because if we do, we may be too close to tolerating unfaithfulness among married couples – we may be admitting that unfaithfulness happens amongst married couples. We thus insist that as church leaders, we preach abstinence for the unmarried and faithfulness for the married. Our fears though are ungrounded for they seem to imply that unfaithfulness did not happen prior to the condom and HIV/AIDS. Our fears blind us from the fact that unfaithfulness and lack of abstinence does happen today with the deadly HIV/AIDS epidemic. We have become hard hearted. We are without mercy. We have forgotten that Jesus said, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice," (Matt 9:13). Our fears and our insistence on abstain, be faithful or die with HIV/AIDS seem to dangerously equate the gospel Christ and Christian salvation with sexual purity. They seem to turn a blind eye to the fact that, we are only Christians because we are forgiven, not because we are perfect. They ignore that we are saved by faith not by our works. Moreover, our debates are, more often than not naïve, for they turn a blind eye to the structures at work that make abstaining, being faithful and condomising, *NOT as easy as ABC*! I would insist that as long as our relationships are based on gender, race and class inequalities, fighting HIV/AIDS is more than just abstaining, being faithful and condomising.

For example, when we turn to biblical literature we are presented with many examples of multiple partners among married God lovers. Jacob had both Rachel and Leah and was given their servants. These two sisters were their father's bargain in exploiting the labor of Jacob (Gen 29-30). King David coveted and married Bethsheba, the wife of Uriah. David virtually used his power to have her brought over; he had sex with her, killed her husband and eventually married her (2 Sam 11). Bethsheba views are hardly given, except when she sends a message to David saying, "I am pregnant." Though she is later embellished as the mother of the famous king Solomon, Bethsheba was victim of male violence. David used his power over a powerless woman. He raped her, killed her husband and then married her. Does faithfulness work for many powerless women such Bethsheba? Later, in his old age, David is furnished with Abishag a young Shunammite girl, who is brought to revitalize the king. Although the king fails to know her, she had been sought to come and lie in the bosom of old age (1:1-4). King Solomon had countless wives and concubines (1Kings 11). The Biblical text also gives us many other cases of sexual

abuse. Lot who was attacked by men is said to have offered his two virgin daughters to the city mob to protect his male visitors (Gen 19:4-10). Schechem raped Dinah (Gen 34) while Amnon, half-brother of Tamar, raped her within the house, (2 Sam 13). We also find many examples of women who, because of patriarchal structures that denied them access to property, had to seduce men to get material and social security. We have Tamar, the widow who had to dress like a prostitute to trick Judah (Gen 38), her father in law in order to get a son. We have Ruth who lay at the feet (private parts) of Boaz, leading him to make a decision to marry her, thus securing her own future and that of Naomi (Ruth 3-4).

Confronting Patriarchal Sins in The Fight Against HIV/AIDS

Much like the biblical world, our churches and our societies are still very much patriarchal. Our societies in Southern Africa still marginalize women from access to property and decision-making. Consequently, many women still need to dress like Tamar and to work as sex workers for life to go on. Many who are married or in relationships fear to insist on safe sex least their providing husbands/partners desert them and leave them without food or shelter. Further, male violence has even escalated in the HIV/AIDS era so much so that many girls, women and elderly women are raped both in the home and in the public. In such a set up, the formula of "be faithful" does not work for many married and unmarried women." The formula of abstain is defeated by our underlying social ways of distributing power unequally.

Indeed, our churches in Southern Africa are, more often than not, the guardians of patriarchal power and other unequal relationships. HIV/AIDS studies, however, show that a major factor in the spread of HIV/AIDS is the powerlessness of women: their incapacity to make decisions about their lives due to lack of material ownership and decision-making powers. (UNAIDS 2000:45-54) That is, as long as men and women are defined as unequal, the control of HIV/AIDS will prove to be a challenge. As long as we are living in families, churches and denominations that promote the inequality of men and women, then we are a significant part of the problem in curbing the spread of HIV/AIDS. This is a factor that calls the church and its leadership to repent from baptizing patriarchal relationship and to struggle with propounding a theology that affirms both men and women as made in God's image and equal before God (Gen. 1:27). Jesus has long since set precedence for us when, he disregarded patriarchal power and called into being a church that recognizes the equality of men and women (Mark 5:24-43; Matt 15:21-28 Luke 7:36-50; 10:38-42 & 18:1-8; John 4; 8:1-12; 12:1-8; 19-20; Acts 2:14-21). As Facing AIDS correctly tells us, "Wherever gender discrimination leaves women under-educated, under-skilled and unable to gain title to property or other vital resources, it also makes them more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS infection" (1997:16). Here lies the root of the spread of HIV/AIDS: one that we must undermine.

But perhaps it is too pretentious for me, and for all of us, to be citing ancient biblical studies, to indicate that as a church we are both patriarchal and part of the problem. Let us talk about a story that was making international headlines last week (March 16-21/01) and unsettling all of us out our pretences. This is a story of African Catholic Bishops abusing nuns – demanding sex for they are now afraid to seek sex from outside lest they contact HIV/AIDS. The story says some of these nuns are raped and when they get pregnant they are forced to abort. Those who do not abort are thrown out of the converts – rejected by the church and they are in turn rejected by their societies for breaking their religious vows. According to the report, the latter either became prostitutes or agree to be a second or third wife of some man in order to survive. Since this story is linked with the Bishops' HIV/AIDS induced fear to find prostitutes or women outside, this indicates a number of things. First, that abstinence was hardly observed long before HIV/AIDS broke out. Second, that the use of contraceptive has been common among these Roman Catholic Church leaders, who had to keep the pretence of celibacy and who insist on no use of contraceptives. Third, that abortion is used as means of birth control. These, we have been made to

believe, are taboos of the Roman Catholic Church![8] Yet, as the report reveals, nothing could be further from the truth. I must say that this story reminded me of Paul when he attacked Peter for refusing to eat with Gentiles by saying to him, "If you though a Jew live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like a Jew?" (Gal 2:14). If the African church leadership cannot abstain, if they cannot keep their ordination vows, if they use contraceptives why do they sentence millions of men and women in their churches and the society to death by HIV/AIDS by insisting on abstinence and faithfulness as the only method of curbing HIV/AIDS, while they themselves cannot keep to such ethical standards?

But perhaps the most important aspect of this story was that it clearly demonstrated to us that *prevention of HIV/AIDS is not as easy as abstain and be faithful*. Rather, it is also about dealing with cultural structures that empower male gender over the female gender in our families, churches and society. Let me quote from the report to illustrate how gender inequalities leave many vulnerable:

> Catholic clergy exploit their financial and spiritual authority to gain sexual favors from religious women, many of whom, in developing countries are culturally conditioned to be subservient to men. The reports say priest at times demand sex in exchange for favors, such as permission or certification to work in a given diocese […]. In a few instances, according to the documentation, priests have impregnated nuns and then encouraged them to have abortions. […] sisters are troubled by policies that require them to leave the congregation if they become pregnant, while the priest involved is able to continue his ministry.
> (*National Catholic Reporter*, 19/03/01, pages 1&11)

While I had my reservation about this report,[9] and while clergy sexual abuse is not limited to the Roman Catholic Church, this story demonstrates to us that nuns, who have chosen a life of abstinence, are by no means protected from HIV/AIDS infection. This is not because they do not abstain, but because they live and operate in churches and societies where power of leadership, decision-making and access to material resources are in the hands of male priests. Above all, the experience of nuns has graphically captured and highlighted the plight of every African woman in the patriarchal cultures of Southern African in the HIV/AIDS era. Simply put, the experience of nuns indicate that hardly any African woman is safe from HIV/AIDS whether that woman has chosen to abstain or to be faithful as long as a patriarchy prevails in church and society. One cannot over emphasize that perhaps this is one of our greatest test in our commitment to fighting HIV/AIDS as a church. Do we really want to uproot HIV/AIDS? If our answer is yes, then we must uproot patriarchy amongst us. We must develop and implement a theology of gender justice.

Let me return briefly to the condom debate. In my perspective our ferocious debates on the issue indicates both pretence and theological poverty, if not down right pettiness amongst our churches and its leadership. It sadly indicates that we have ceased to realize that life is sacred; that all life was created by God and remains sacred to God. The world belongs to God. It indicates that we have perhaps forgotten that we are stewards of God's creation. Our concern should be that anything that destroys life must be stopped, for it violates God's creation. Our respect for God should lead us to respect life of both the believers and unbelievers. Allow me here to think aloud in your presence and excuse me if you find me offensive –what I fail to understand is why should we object about a plastic cover (condom) over a penis, if that plastic bag can prevent a deadly disease? And it does not stop there. Why should we object if we know that such an infection is going to lead to untold suffering to the infected ; if it is going to involve the family into long suffering of nursing; if it is going to lead to depletion of their family funds, loss of work, low productivity and finally leave behind poor orphaned children. Get me right here, I am not advocating the use or not the use of a condom – rather, I am calling for a theological maturity in our

service to humanity and to God. My point, therefore, is not so much about the condom, it is not even about abstaining or faithfulness. *Rather, it is about respect for life as a respect for God, and as our acts of worship*. Our theological stand point should be that anything that violates God's' life must be stopped. It follows that our responsibility, therefore, is both to the believers and the unbelievers for all of them to remain alive and not infected.

Care-giving is Good But Not Enough

There is no doubt that as a church we pride ourselves for our care- giving roles. We visit the sick, we pray for them, we counsel them and their relatives; many times we take care of the sick – we wash them, we pray for them, we feed them and when they die we bury them. We are also there for the orphans, doing all that is within our power to help. But the problem with our excellent 'care programmes is that they lack an equally effective prevention programmes. This unbalanced approach makes the church and its leadership to be an institution that focuses on symptoms. We only come in to manage crisis, but we do not deal with the root problem. What is even more problematic with this care-oriented picture, is that it seriously puts doubts in our theology of respect for life, if at all it exists. If we really respect all life as sacred, if we really regard every human being, Christian or non-Christian, as made of God's image – shouldn't we demonstrate this theological stance by designing programmes that make us effective instruments in the prevention of HIV/AIDS as well?

Prophetic/Radical Church

Another theological problem that confronts us in the struggle against HIV/AIDS is that we have failed in our prophetic role. Most of the time we are not doing anything new at all. We are not doing anything radical in response to a human tragedy of HIV/AIDS. Instead, we are just doing what we have always been doing as a church; namely, to preach sexual abstinence, faithfulness and to give pastoral care to the needy, sick and widows. This is good, but unfortunately, I must tell you, it is not good enough. It is an integral part of our worship, but unfortunately it does not indicate that we have embarked on any new particular strategies to confront this emergency – the HIV/AIDS onslaught of human life, on God's creation. Our response remains bound to the traditions; to the boundaries of our ancient practices. The HIV/AIDS epidemic, unfortunately, requires more from us. It requires that we should deliver a new and prophetic message to our churches and society. It requires prophets who are willing to act, hear and see outside the comfort of tradition. It requires a radical prophet, who is not afraid to announce a radical programme of liberation (Luke 4:16-18). Jesus was not afraid to quote from the scriptures and to go on to repeal the tradition, but saying, "but I say to you (Matt 5:11-21). In short, we need that prophet who will say, I have not come to repeal all the good efforts that have been done to fight against HIV/AIDS, but to fulfill them. We need a prophet who is willing to say,

> You have heard, that you must *abstain*, but I say to you, *avoid all relationships that deny the human dignity of all people*, be they women, children, blacks ethnic minorities, indigenous people, people of different sexual orientations or illegal immigrants.
>
> You have heard that you must *be Faithful*, but I say to you, '*Be honest* to confront and do away with all the in built oppressive relationships of men and women in marriage, in church leadership and all other social relationships.
>
> You have heard that you must *condomise*, but I say to you *'confront' all factors that destroy human life and creation as acts of your worship*.

> You have heard that you must abstain and be faithful, but I say to you, *whenever you have sex condomise*.

Our theological quest in seeking to make a difference thus should involve continuous listening to the spirit and what it says to us and the willingness to deliver such messages to a church that seems stuck to tradition to a framework of the way we have always done things. In my opinion such a church betrays its Lord. If I try to ask myself what Jesus would say about our debates, I am sure Jesus would say, "Faithfulness and abstinence were made for people and not people for these practices." I am sure that if we ask Jesus about using or not using a condom, he would say that if your donkey has fallen in the pit on the Sabbath, you must pull it out. Don't let it die there; claiming that it is the Sabbath, for you will be violating life. Jesus will tell us that what pollutes a person is what comes out – not what goes in. In our fight against HIV/AIDS, we must develop a well-grounded theology of respect for life. Our prophetic theology must be grounded and propelled by a theology of respect for life. It must be based on the conviction that, 'God does not wish anyone to be infected by HIV/AIDS– regardless of whether that person was failing to abstain or to be faithful. We need, therefore, to continue saying, "abstain, be faithful, but whenever you have sex, condomise."

Scribes Disciplined For God's Kingdom

An important link on being a prophetic church and effective church in the struggle against HIV/AIDS is tied to being a learning church. A prophet, as all the Old Testament books indicate, was an individual who was socially connected and well informed. A prophet was an individual who was a social analyzer, one who delivered criticism on the prevailing oppressive social structures and called for new social order. In our efforts to become active prophets in the struggle against HIV/AIDS, we need to be theologically educated and to be active learners. We need to constantly scrutinize our theological frameworks of reference and to be fully informed about the latest best practices on HIV/AIDS as well as to be providers of HIV/AIDS best practices to the world. At this moment we should all measure our education level, by revisiting our theological frameworks; by revisiting our policies and the structures of our councils and churches. We need to ask ourselves if our staff members are HIV/AIDS sound? Do we have HIV/AIDS policy for our employees and for all our programmes? Have we trained our officers and project officers on mainstreaming HIV/AIDS in all their development projects? Have we trained our members on gender awareness, gender planning and gender mainstreaming in all the projects and programmes of our councils? If we have answered no to the above questions, then we need to start by holding workshops for our own education, for we cannot afford at this point to become blind guides.

The 2nd Image: Jesus is Saying "Woe to you, Hypocrites!"

I want now to turn to the second image that came to me. Remember, it was Wednesday morning and I was at the gym, cycling a bike and praying for the scriptural injunction to bring to you. The second image that was given to me was Jesus preaching to the crowds and to the disciples in Matthew 23. What is instructive here, is that Jesus who was addressing the crowds and his disciples focused of Pharisees and scribes. I heard Jesus saying, "the scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat therefore what ever they teach you follow it; but do not do as they do for they do not practice what they teach…" (23:2-3)

This chapter perhaps constitutes one of the harshest castigations of the Pharisees and scribes in the gospels. Nonetheless, do keep in mind that I said Pharisees were committed men of God. Jesus acknowledges them pointing out that they hold power – they sit on the seat of Moses. He acknowledges that what they teach is correct by instructing the disciples to keep their teaching. He faults the scribes

and Pharisees, however, for practice. They do not do what they say. Jesus has reached a point where he wants to underline that the crowds and his disciples cannot trust the leadership of Pharisees by showing their true colors. Hence in this whole chapter Jesus delivers a hammering sermon that begins almost every verse by saying, "shame to you, Pharisee and Scribes, hypocrites…" (vv 13, 16, 23, 25, 27, 29). The repetition here is a narrative device that serves rhetorical purposes. It seeks to persuade the listeners with no uncertain terms that they should not do what the Pharisees and scribes do. Jesus' harsh castigation of scribes and Pharisees indicate the serious responsibility attached to being spiritual leaders – be they preachers, interpreters, theologians or ordained clergy. The crux of Jesus' unhappiness with their leadership is in verse 23. Here Jesus said, "Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you tithe mint dill and cumin, and but you have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice, compassion and faith."

In this age of HIV/AIDS, we as the church leaders, are we sitting responsibly in our seats of power? Can both our teaching and practice be trusted or are we hypocrites? Is it, perhaps, time that some true prophetic follower of Jesus should tell your church members that "church leaders sit on the seat of Christ, but they do not do what they preach?" In short, can we be found to be trustworthy both with our teaching and our practice or shall we become subjects of shame and woes? The message I saw in this image of Jesus is that all of us who are entrusted with the task of interpreting should responsibly hold to our positions without, as Jesus tells us, neglecting, the weightier matters of the law; *namely, justice, compassion and faith*. These, I believe, should be an integral part of our theology in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

3rd Image: Rachel Is Wailing for Her Children

As I was cycling on my bike, trying to burn calories and praying for the message, the third image that was put to me was the image of my mother, a mother to thirteen children. I was for that moment confronted with my mother's fear of not knowing which child will be sick next, which one will be hospitalized next, which one will be dying next and how long she is going to be nursing and burying, and then again nursing and burying. Thirteen times, not counting the grandchildren. I tried to imagine how such a woman sleeps. How does sleep come to her eyes with such a heavy shadow of death hanging around her children? How does she eat? The Scripture that came to my mind to articulate her situation was the words of Prophet Jeremiah, (as quoted by Matthew) when he said,

> A voice was heard in Ramah,
> wailing and loud lamentation
> Rachel weeping for her children
> She refused to be consoled
> Because her children are no more (Matt 2:18)[10]

Last year, when two of my mother's siblings were in and out of the hospital, my mother made a confession. She said long time ago, when she had just got married (1948) and had to leave her maiden church and attend the Vapostoro, which was her mother-in-law's church, a prophet said to her: "I see a vision that you will have many children, they will all grow up and then they will all die." My mother told this story for the first time now – her Eldest child is now 54 while her youngest is 24. Obviously, she told this story in realization that this HIV/AIDS era may be the beginning of the fulfillment of an old prophetic word. I have wondered why she never ever told any of us this prophecy before. It could be that she dismissed this prophecy as an empty babbling. Yet the fact that she never forgot this half a century old prophecy suggests otherwise – she most probably did not wish to articulate such a word, for it almost amounts on putting a death curse on all her children. And yes, indeed, I have had a good time reflecting on this prophecy – I have asked myself, "so am I going to go down with the HIV/AIDS scourge? If so, when?

I am sure that each one of us who has heard this old prophecy has immediately feared that they are walking in the valley of death. But beyond my family, many of us who live in HIV/AIDS front zones harbor the same concern – we constantly ask ourselves this question and worry about the fate of our children. We in Southern Africa are plagued by the uncertain future; we are walking in the long valley of death.

But what about her – the old woman who fears for the death of thirteen children and now we can add the grandchildren too. And here I invite you to imagine the nightmares of many mothers, many parents, who fear for the death of their children. I invite you to hear the wailing voices, the loud lamentations of the mothers of Southern Africa weeping for her children. And like Rachel, they refuse to be consoled because their children are no more.

HIV/AIDS is Worse Than War

Commentators tell us that the image of a wailing Rachel was referring "to two significant defeats of Israel by imperial powers: the exile of people […] defeated in 722 by Assyria […] and defeated in 587 by Babylon […]. These events […] meant great suffering caused by imperial powers" (Carter, 2000:86). It was the wars that brought the mothers of Israel to wail and to lament loudly for their dead children. Yet if war caused this much wailing, we now know that "in sub-Saharan Africa HIV is now deadlier than war itself." Statistical evidence holds that, whereas "in 1998, 200 000 Africans died in war, more than 2 million died of AIDS." Does this enable you as church to hear the loud and wailing voices of my mother? Can you hear Mother Africa weeping for her children? Can you hear the sound of her tears? Do you understand why she refuses to be consoled?

I do not know what your answers to these questions are, but I say to you, "*Let those who have ears hear*." I say to you, let the church that is gathered here know that they cannot afford not to repent, for the kingdom of God is violated in your families, in your congregations, in your denominations and in your societies. I say to you, let the church that is gathered here, know and understand that they must repent from being judgmental to the sick, by saying those who contact HIV/AIDS are punished by God for their sins, hence fueling the stigma of those living or dying of HIV/AIDS. I say to you, let the church that is gathered here know, understand and repent from the patriarchal structures that are embedded in your families, in your churches and in your societies, which is sentencing millions of women and girls to death by HIV/AIDS. Yes, let the church that is gathered here, know and understand that every human breath is sacred to God; every human being is made of God's image – and that we, as a church, are in the business of respecting all creation. I repeat, Let the church that is gathered here repent, for you have neglected the weightier matters of justice, compassion and faith (Matt 23:23). Yes, let the church that is gathered here go back to their respective home countries to "bear fruit worthy of repentance," in the struggle against HIV/AIDS (Matt 3: 8).

Bibliography

- Buckenham, Karen ed. *Violence Against Women: A Resource Manual For the Church in South Africa*. Natal: PACSA, 1999.
- Carter, Warren. *Matthew and The Margins: A Sociopolitical and Religious Reading*. New York: Orbis Press, 2000.
- Dibeela, Moiseraele P. *What Does The Lord Require of Us?* Nottingham: United Reformed Church East Midland Synod, 2000.
- Dube, M.W., *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*. St Louis:Chalice Press, 2000.

- "Healing Where There is No Healing: Reading The Miracles in an HIV/AIDS Context," In *Essays in Honor of Daniel Patte*. Philadelphia: Trinity Press, 2001.
- Lerner, Natan., *Religion, Beliefs And International Human Rights*. New York: Orbis, 2000.
- Maluleke, T.S. "Towards a New Theological Education Curriculum for the Twenty-First Century in Africa: HIV/AIDS and the New Kairos." A paper presented at HIV/AIDS Curriculum for Theological Institutions in Eastern Africa and Southern Africa. Map International, Nairobi, 26-30June 2000.
- Allen Hon L. & Pamela Scharffer, "Reports of Abuse: AIDS Exacerbates Exploitation of Nuns." *National Catholic Reporter*, 19/03/01.
- Norwegian Church Aid, *The Global HIV/AIDS Epidemic: Understanding the Issues*. November, 2000.
- Newsom, Carol & Sharon Ringe, eds., *The Women's Bible*. Louisville: SPCK, 1992.
- Nyambura, Njoroge. *Kiama Kia Ngo*: *African Christian Feminist Ethic of Resistance and Transformation*. Accra: Ghana, Asempa Publishers in Collaboration with the Legon Theological Studies Series Project, 2000.
- Rakoczy, Susan ed. *Silent No Longer: The Church Responds to Sexual Violence*. Natal: Natal Witness Publishing Company, 2000.
- Roetzel, Calvin, *The World That Shaped the New Testament*. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985.
- Schussler Fiorenza, E & Mary Shawn Copeland, eds. *Violence Against Women. Concilium*. 1994/1. London: SCM Press. 1994.
- Theissen, Gerd., *Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977.
- UNAIDS, *Report On Global HIV/AIDS Epidemic*, June 2000.
- UNDP, *Botswana Human Development Report: Towards An AIDS-Free Generation*. Gaborone: UNDP, 2000.
- WCC, *Facing AIDS: The Challenge, The Churches' Response: A WCC Study Document*. Geneva: WCC Publications , 1997.
- WCC, "The Ecumenical HIV/AIDS Initiative" Southern African Regional Consultation, Johannesburg, March 26-28, 01.
- Welbourn, Alice ed. *Stepping Stones: A Training Package on HIV/AIDS Communication and Relationship Skills*. Herts:ACTIONAID, 1998 edt.
- West, Gerald & Musa W. Dube, *The Bible in Africa*. Leiden: Brill, 2000.

---

[1] This paper was presented at the Southern African Regional Consultation HIV/AIDS: Together We Can Make A Difference, Johannesburg, South Africa , 26-29 March 2001.

[2] For a detailed description of various Jewish groups see, Roetzel, Calvin J, *The World That Shaped the New Testament*. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985 and Gerd Theissen, *Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity*. Philadelphia: Fotress Press, 1977. They discuss such groups as Zealots, John the Baptist, Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, The Qumram communities and the Jesus Movement, as different interest group who tried to offer solution in the wake of political oppression and the national crisis of the destruction of the central Jewish symbols, the temple and Jerusalem in 63-70CE..

[3] Perhaps, the African Independent Churches have grasped an important theological point for they baptize their member several times, See I . Daniel, *The Quest for Belonging*, Gweru: Mambo Press, 1987.

[4] Another example of Jesus repenting is in the story of the Canaanite Woman, in Matt 15:21-28. Whereas Jesus was unwilling to embark on a mission to the gentiles, the Canaanite woman's word, it is argued, persuaded him otherwise.

[5] Indeed, the Matthean (19:16-30) parallel of this verse, indicates that the first century church was already uncomfortable with the Markan human portrait of Jesus. Hence in Matthew this statement is redacted to read, "Teacher, what good deed must I do…" In short , the adjective "good" no longer qualifies Jesus, hence the situation of Jesus denying that he is good is safely tucked away. Luke (18:18-30), however, maintains Mark's version..

[6] In fact, redactional analysis indicates that Matt 3 is already involved in a major apology for Jesus' act of undergoing a baptism of sins. Hence it is only in Matthew that we find an extended discussion of Jesus and John prior to his baptism, which is really an explanation of why he had to undergo a baptism of sins. In Luke 3:21,we find some similar maneuvering of the writer. Luke removes the Baptism of Jesus from the rest. He does not describe it, but reports it in one sentence, with John the Baptist removed from the scene. In Mark 1: 1-11, the first gospel to be

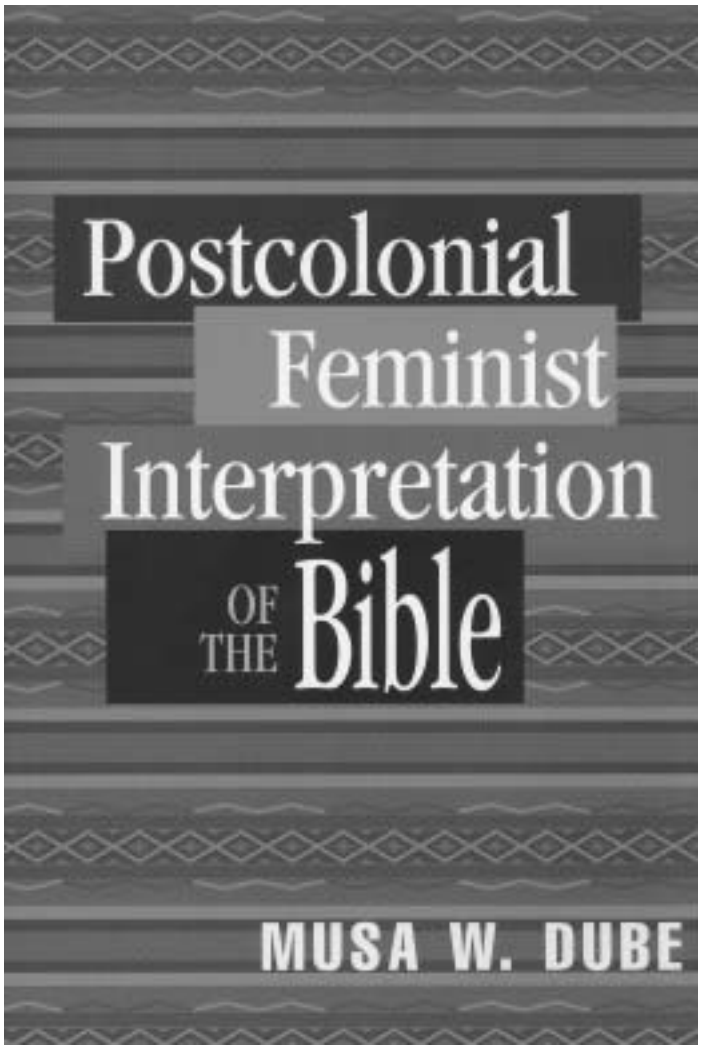
written, which was also used by Matthew and Luke to write their gospels, we do not have such explanations. Jesus simply goes to John the Baptist and undergoes his baptism, which was a baptism of sins.

[7] One Zambian widowed mother for example says, "How else do I feed my children except by having sex with men," NCA, *Global HIV/AIDS Epidemic: Understanding the Issues*., November 2000.

[8] Studies on clergy sexual abuse are certainly not limited to the Roman Catholic Church or the African continent. Recent studies indicate that it is a widespread problem that still needs to be investigated, see Marie M. Fortune, " Clergy Misconduct: Sexual Abuse in the Ministerial Relationship," pp.109-118 in *Concilium*, 1994/1.

[9] I found this story carrying colonial and racist tones. For example, while the abuse of nuns is said to occur in the USA, Italy and other developing countries, the focus is on Africa. There are no details provided on Italy and USA. Further, some of the descriptions evoked such colonial stereotypes about black sexuality, that one could not take it without some reservation or without agreeing to insult herself. For example, Reuters March 20, 01 report says, " In reference to Africa, her report said: "It is impossible (there) for a woman or an adolescent to refuse a man, especially an older man in particular a priest." As an African woman, I feel insulted by such major generalizations that are not only utter lies, but come to serve as a major stereotype. If you put this statement side by side with Cutrufelli, M. R. *Women of Africa: The Roots of Oppression*, who says, "either overtly or covertly prostitution is still the main if not the only source of work for African women," p.3. then it is evident that many of our Western sister saviors are working within racist and colonial frameworks of reference.

[10] Scholars hold that this quote is drawn from Jeremiah 31:15, from the Greek LXX, but Matthew does not follow the exact text of Jeremiah, See Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, p.86.



Network of Theological Research and Teaching

DECADE TO OVERCOME VIOLENCE 2001-2010
OVERCOMING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Introduction

One of the most urgent challenges to emerge from the Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women was expressed with courage and clarity by women from every corner of the globe. There is a global epidemic of physical, sexual, psychological, racial and cultural violence against women. It happens everywhere, including churches of all traditions and communions. There is also a growing body of research and evidence demonstrating religious collusion with and theological justification of gender and sexual violence against women and girls. The WCC 8th Assembly meeting in Harare acknowledged that violence against women is a sin and offence against God, and encouraged churches, networks and theologians to engage constructively in efforts to challenge and overcome such violence in all its manifestations – in church and society.

> *Violence against women is an ecclesiological question. It is a threat to the very being of the churches. It is not just a women's issue, but is an integral concern of both women and men, lay and clergy (Together with Courage: Women and Men Living Without Violence Against Women, WCC 1998 p.5)*

Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV)

The DOV offers a new and creative framework for those taking up the challenge 'to overcome the spirit, logic and practice of violence; to relinquish any theological justification of violence; and to affirm anew the spirituality of reconciliation and active non-violence' (*WCC Central Committee, a Framework for DOV*). Vital to this process and endeavour will be the continuation and development of critical and constructive engagement with Christian teaching and theologies in different contexts around the world. In the provision of theological education and formation for ministry and service, churches and institutions are called to 'deconstruct the often used theological explanations and justifications of violence; reconstruct a new theological response to be strongly affirmed by church leaders and preachers. (*Together with Courage, p.3*).

Theological Network on Violence Against Women

Prior to the 8th Assembly in 1998, a number of recommendations were made to the WCC and member churches for action in response to violence against women. These included:

- Develop a network of educational and theological institutions/resources with a focus on violence against women (*To ensure that persons in church leadership positions are aware and sensitive to gender issues, and that opportunities be provided in academic environments for developing constructive alternative theologies*)
- Call on member churches to request/require theological seminaries and colleges to include gender studies in their core curriculum and use gender perspectives to critique mainstream theological teaching. (*Together with Courage p.8*)

In November 1999, a small group of theologians from most regions (mainly women, but including men) met during a Consultation held in Colombo, Sri Lanka to develop theological themes for the DOV. In

keeping with the focus on overcoming violence against women as integral to the overall DOV programme, they had a preliminary discussion about the potential value and possible remit for a global theological network dedicated to research and teaching which could resource the struggle against gender and sexual violence. This group affirmed the desirability of establishing such a network, and encouraged the WCC to enable the launch and initial development.

In February 2000, the Women's Advisory Group and the Justice, Peace and Creation Advisory Group of the WCC endorsed the recommendation to set up a network of theologians working in institutions, and a grant was made available to appoint consultants to undertake the initial organisation of the network.

Now, at last we are ready to begin this exciting and important venture!

An Invitation to Join the Network

As we embark on this process, we invite your responses, suggestions and advice. There is no point in a 'network' that remains little more than a list of names on a database, but we do not want to add extra tasks and burdens onto the shoulders of people who are already busy, stretched and often stressed. Rather, we envisage a network of really meaningful expertise, sharing, solidarity and friendship: to challenge and change theological teaching and practice in significant ways; to support those who are so often isolated and marginalized in their institutions and churches; to add real value to the global community of theological engagement; to bring new vision, dignity and possibility to women whose lives are affected by male violence. Creating such a network will be an organic and dynamic process, nurtured by the enthusiasm, ideas, commitment and insights of people working in all kinds of places, situations and contexts. You are invited to contribute to this vision by:

providing some basic information about your own interests, research, teaching, experience and institution/ church (*to help us conduct a factual audit of the current situation – publications, courses, curricula, materials, expertise, resources*)
indicating how these are perceived, valued, supported or resisted – by your colleagues, institution, church authorities (*so that we can begin to evaluate the extent to which understanding and overcoming gender violence has been officially endorsed or recognised as an aspect of theological education and practical training in different situations*)
suggesting practical ways the network could develop, and potential activities/initiatives
passing this paper onto others you think should be involved (or who might have information and ideas to offer)
letting us know if you are willing to become a member of the network
suggesting a good name or title!
sending us examples of your work, teaching programmes etc. We hope to develop our base as a resource collection and centre of excellence dedicated to theological engagement with gender and sexual violence.
Please use the headings and questions on the accompanying paper if they help you to organise your response – but feel free to tell us your story in your own way. ***It would be good to hear from you as soon as possible, simply to acknowledge your interest in the network, and to let us know whether to expect further responses from you and/or your colleagues.*** Thank you for your time. (Please note no questions accompany this article, contact the consultants for more information.)

The Consultants

Lesley Orr Macdonald from Scotland was one of the women who attended the Colombo Consultation in 1999. She is a feminist theologian and historian, currently working as Associate Secretary with Action

of Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS). She has been actively involved in education, research, writing and advocacy to overcome violence against women for many years, and is a member of the ecumenical Iona Community. Lesley is connected to the Centre for Theology and Public Issues in the Faculty of Divinity at Edinburgh University, and co-ordinated an action-research project: *Out of the Shadows – Christianity and Violence Against Women in Scotland*. She has participated in many national and international consultations and projects (ecumenical, inter-faith and secular) on issues around gender and sexual violence, and is a member of the WCC Justice Peace and Creation Advisory Group.

Helen Hood will be working alongside Lesley on this Project. She has been involved in a wide range of issues of justice and peace over the last 20 years. Having worked in both formal and informal education, she recently returned to study and has just graduated BD (hons) from Edinburgh University, specialising in New Testament language, literature and theology. Brought up in the Anglican tradition, Helen is a keen ecumenist and currently works part-time as Ecumenical Officer for her own congregation. A feminist, married with two children, she is a member of the YWCA and is presently the Scottish Churches' representative on the Board of Christian Aid.

Our office and resource base is in Edinburgh, in a building also occupied by the Scottish Churches Open College, and named after Annie H Small (1862 – 1945) – a Scotswoman who pioneered innovative female education and ministry, and was deeply committed to building community, struggling for justice and the ecumenical vision. She is a worthy symbol of our own vision and purpose!

DOV – OVERCOMING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

ROOM 5, ANNIE SMALL HOUSE
18 INVERLEITH TERRACE
EDINBURGH EH3 5NS
SCOTLAND, UK
+44 131 332 0881 FAX +44 131 332 0804Ò
EMAIL: wcc.dov-women@ecosse.net

TRIBUTE TO A GREAT TEACHER, PIONEER, FRIEND AND MENTOR PROF. HANNAH WANGECI KINOTI 1 August 1941-30 April 2001

It is with great sadness we share the news of the sudden death of a pioneering African woman theologian and religious scholar Prof. Hannah Wangeci Kinoti, who died on 30th April 2001 after a short illness in Nairobi, Kenya.

Hannah Kinoti was educated at the Alliance Girls High School, Kikuyu, Kenya; Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda and the University of Nairobi, Kenya. From Makerere University she graduated with an honors degree in English and Religious Studies and a Diploma Education. Prof. Kinoti started her teaching career at Kenya High School, Nairobi, where she taught for six years. She proceeded to the University of Nairobi where she obtained a Ph. D. in Religious Studies while teaching in the same field. She rose through the academic ranks to become Associate Professor. She was a scholar who published many papers, books or book chapters on ethics, religion and social issues. Hannah Kinoti was a visiting lecturer at Regent College, Vancouver, Canada and at St Lawrence University, Kenya Campus. Hannah Kinoti was external examiner in several universities in East and Southern Africa. A fellowship at the Harvard University Medical School gave her the opportunity to pursue her keen interest in the relationship between health and religion. She was an active member of several theological bodies. Many members of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians remember her as a great teacher, pioneer, mother, friend and a mentor.

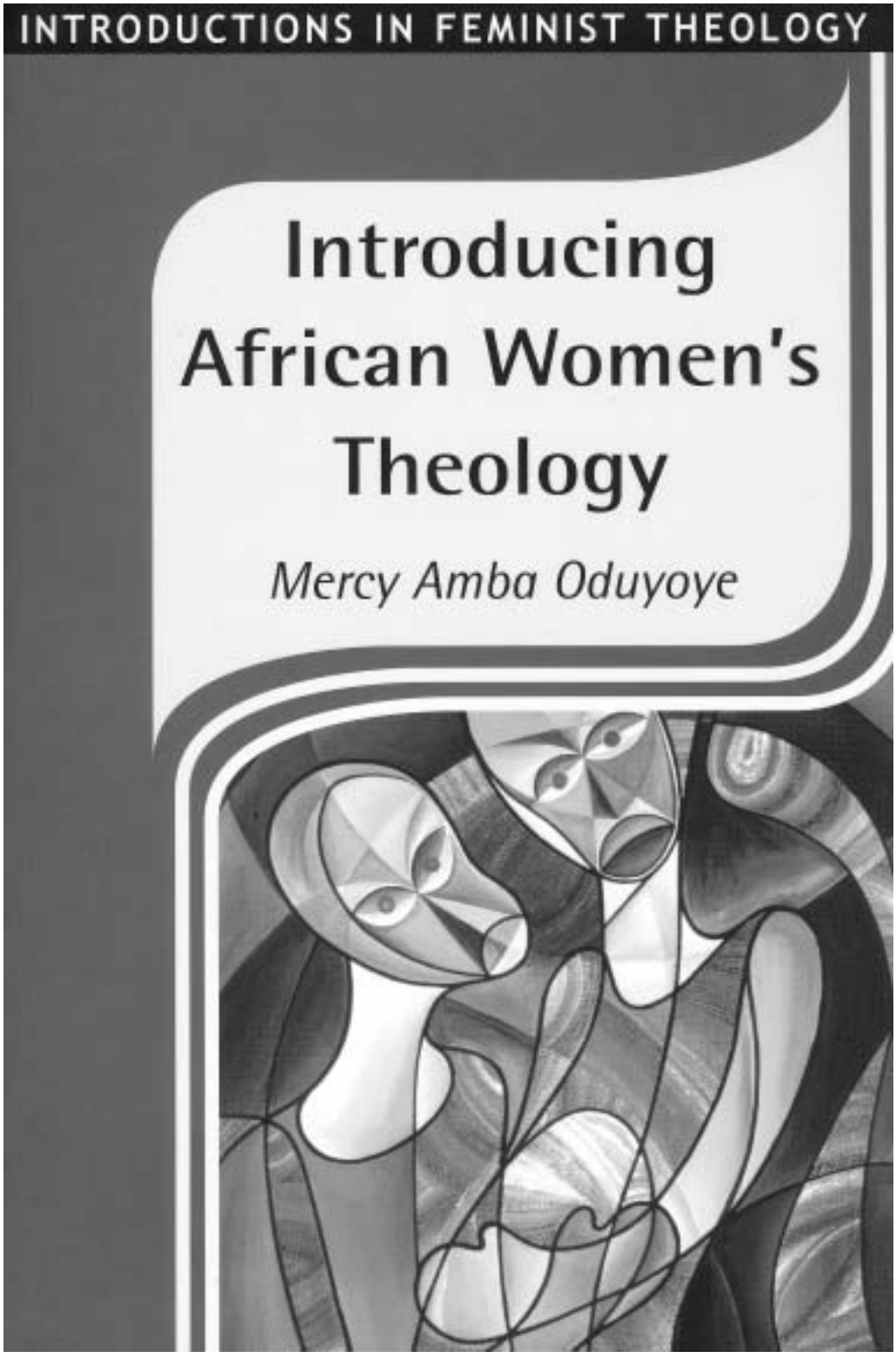
At the celebration of her life, Professor Hannah Wangeci Kinoti was described in these words:

> She was a woman of deep faith, warm and strong character, an outstanding leader and teacher, and a wonderful wife and mother. The centre of her life and work was Jesus Christ. Hannah Kinoti's gifts of leadership were recognized early from her school days. She served as a perfect, a leader in school and university Christian Unions, drama society and university student government. Later in life she served as Chairperson of the Department of Religious Studies, University of Nairobi, and an elected member of the University Senate and Council. Professor Kinoti served on the governing boards of many organizations, including CORAT Africa, Nairobi; St Paul's United Theological College, Limuru, Kenya and St. George's Secondary School, Nairobi. She was a Methodist lay preacher, Sunday School Superintendent and Conference Speaker.

Hannah Wangeci was married to Prof. George Kinoti (scientist) and they were blessed with five children: Karimi, Wanjiru, Kathambi, Kimathi, and Wangari; and grand daughter, Malika. To the family and all who interacted with her, she set a remarkable example of love and selfless service; generosity and hospitality; hard work and determination; humility and freedom from meaningless conventions.

Hannah Wangeci Kinoti:

> God… will not forget your work and love you have shown Him as you have helped His people (Hebrews 6:10)!


INTRODUCTIONS IN FEMINIST THEOLOGY
Introducing African Women's Theology
Mercy Amba Oduyoye

HANS-SIGRIST-PREIS

2000

ELSA TAMEZ

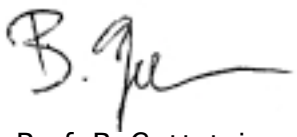
the biblical scholar
who, endowed with exegetical sensitivity
and analytical sharpness, lets biblical texts speaks
anew in a Latin-American context;

the theologian
who has contributed decisively
to the integration of feminist perspectives
into the theology of liberation;

the rector
of the Latin-American Biblical University
who leads with imagination and dedication
an institution of crucial importance for
the ecumenical dialogue in Latin America.

Bern, 2. Dezember 2000

Der Präsident des Stiftungsrates



Prof. B. Gottstein

Der Stiftungssekretär

Prof. P. Mürner